Falling Between the Cracks:
Dora Wilcox and the Neglected Tasman Writing World

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The poet Dora Wilcox (1873–1953) lived and worked in a world of colonial and Australasian literary networks that created and encouraged her multiple affiliations. As a New Zealander who moved to Australia, however, the influence of mid-century cultural nationalism did not allow her to retain a place in literary history because of her movement between New Zealand, Australia and Britain, her poetic genre and her gender. This paper examines contemporary evaluations of Wilcox to reconstruct the workings of the Tasman writing world within which she operated. The false divisions between writers who stayed and writers who left, and women's and men's writing, have led to an inaccurate picture of the opportunities available to writers outside the literary academy. Wilcox's legacy was affected by the decline of trans-Tasman literary networks that shut out writers not wholly engrossed with the task of contributing to 'national literature.' The extra obstacles that women writers already faced were increased due to the masculinist takeover of national literary establishments in New Zealand and Australia. Wilcox still languishes in obscurity despite a number of recent reassessments of early twentieth century Australasian literature on its own terms.

Mary Theodora Wilcox, known as 'Dora,' was a poet, playwright, critic and patron of literature who spent the last thirty years of her life living at Manly, Sydney, involved in many artistic and literary pursuits. Although she was well known and acclaimed as a poet, particularly in the early decades of the twentieth century, she appears in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (*ADB*) only in a sub-section of the entry relating to her husband, William Moore. Wilcox was born and raised in Christchurch, New Zealand, and her first two books of verse, *Verses from Maoriland* (1905) and *Rata and Mistletoe* (1911), largely focus on her country of birth. Despite being equally prominent in New Zealand, however, she does not feature in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* at all. Her popularity and prominence in the early twentieth century is not reflected in other literary criticism, history and compendia compiled since the middle of the century either—the *Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English* contains half a sentence about Wilcox but plenty about a number of other 'minor' poets (Sturm 408). Nor did Wilcox retain a place in the history of Australian letters. She is not mentioned in either the *Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature* (2000) or the *Oxford History of Australian Literature* (1981).

The height of Wilcox's renown came before her marriage to William Moore, who was her second husband. She was born in 1873 into a wealthy family descended from prominent early Christchurch settlers and educated privately and at Canterbury College, before spending three years teaching in Armidale, New South Wales (*ADB*; *Auckland Star* 30 Apr 1938, 5). She had been publishing work in periodicals, including the Sydney *Bulletin*, since the age of twelve, and, according to an 'old friend' and obituary writer, made the move to Australia in about 1891 'to seek her literary fortune' (Hooper 64). She spent the next two decades in Europe, initially touring with her mother. While overseas she published two books of verse with George Allen (all the while publishing many poems and articles in the British periodical press) and married Jean Paul Hamelius, Professor of English at Liège University. After Professor Hamelius's death in 1922—which was somewhat convenient because the marriage 'was not a happy one'—she

returned to Australia (Hooper 64). She had by that time met the Melbourne writer and art critic William Moore. They were married in 1923 and set up home in Sydney. She continued to publish verse, many articles of historical and literary interest and several plays which were produced and won prizes.

Wilcox was well known to both Australian and New Zealand reading audiences in the first decades of the twentieth century. A newspaper article in 1911 described her as a poet whose 'reputation as one of the foremost of New Zealand's versifiers has long been established, and some of her best work is widely known and noted' (*NZ Herald*, 9 Dec 1911, 4). In the same year the Adelaide *Register* proclaimed: 'Anything from this pen must be received with attention, for the sake of the piece of blank verse it once produced—one of the dozen finest things in Australian poesy—describing a Londoner's recollections of New Zealand' (Adelaide *Register*, 4 Nov 1911, 4). Dora Wilcox was a minor celebrity in Australasia judging by the interest shown in her by the press. By the 1930s she was one of only 50 Australian women (as compared to 1,500 men) to appear in *Who's Who in Australia* (Johns; *Sunday Times*, 16 Dec 1928, 28). Newspapers reported with great interest on her return from Europe in 1923: she was described as a 'noted Australian poetess' and a 'Lady of Letters' (Melbourne *Farmers' Advocate*, 8 Feb 1923, 10; Christchurch *Press*, 22 Feb 1923, 2). Her poem 'Australia in Luce' was selected to commemorate the opening of Parliament at Canberra in 1927, and 'Anzac Day' was set to music by Alfred Hill and often included in official commemorations. She was widely known in Australian literary and art circles and was often invited to speak at events in Sydney.

This raises the question: why has Dora Wilcox been reduced to a footnote of literary history in Australia and almost entirely forgotten in New Zealand? A detailed examination of contemporary responses to literary works can reveal much about local, colonial and national mindsets. The assessments that appeared in newspapers reflected the reviewers' own preoccupations and assumptions about literary merit, but directly influenced the overall reputation, success and legacy of writers (including whether they were noticed at all). By viewing these responses as historical sources in themselves, a systematic examination of newspaper material relating to Dora Wilcox present in online repositories *Trove* and *Papers Past* shows that Wilcox and her contemporaries existed in an interlinked world of trans-Tasman and trans-colonial connections which extended the reach and publishing opportunities of Australasian writers. Whether or not Wilcox meets current subjective and transitive criteria of poetic 'quality,' she had a place in the literary world which was affected by the decline of trans-Tasman literary networks, shutting out writers not wholly engrossed with the task of contributing to 'national literature.' The extra obstacles that women writers already faced were increased due to the masculinist takeover of national literary establishments in New Zealand and Australia.

The most obvious explanation for Wilcox's dwindling recognition is that she wrote the kind of poetry that had fallen out of favour by the mid-1930s in Australasia. In the late 1930s a new generation of writers and critics came to control the literary establishment in New Zealand, led by the cultural nationalist Allen Curnow. For this group, an anthology by the name of *Kowhai Gold* compiled by Quentin Pope in 1930 came to symbolise everything that they disliked about New Zealand writing so far. New Zealand, they claimed, had not found its authentic literary voice, as the writing produced thus far had only amounted to cringe-worthy adaptations of British Victorian and Georgian modes of expression with twee insertions of 'local colour.' Curnow asserted that the use of 'quasi-dead' language to make 'meaningless noises,' which described 'the language of most New Zealand poets' up until 1935, was not the way forward for New Zealand poetry (1935). On the title page of *Kowhai Gold* appears an extract from

Wilcox's poem 'In London' which contrasts the waning of the English summer to New Zealand where it is spring and the Kowhai 'hastes to wrap herself / All in a mantle wrought of living gold' (Pope iv). Although it has been claimed that Wilcox's poem led to the title (Hilliard 'Island Stories' 56), another poem in the volume, 'Akaroa' by Mona Tracy, invokes similar imagery in the line 'when jonquil mocks the kowhai's gold' (Pope 64). Wilcox may not have single-handedly inspired the title of the anthology, but she was certainly a purveyor of this brand of poetic imagery. She was presented as a member of the 'Maoriland' school of writers who tried to assert colonial difference through local variations and appropriated Indigenous imagery (see Stafford and Williams).

Wilcox's fall from favour is not limited to the New Zealand literary establishment as she was involved in broader literary networks. Although most of her verse was about New Zealand or its contrasts, she was well known in Australia even before she went to live there. Nettie Palmer wrote in 1927 (at which point Wilcox was 54 years old and had lived a total of seven years in Australia) that 'her connection with Australia has been continuous and close' and '[h]er first verse, she admits, was published in the Sydney "Bulletin". Her poems have always been gleaned for Australian anthologies' (Brisbane *Courier* 28 May 1927, 23). Responses to Wilcox reflect an earlier time of fluid trans-Tasman identities when people were not so tortured by whether or not writers or their works could be defined as 'New Zealand' or 'Australian'—in fact, a distinction was not always made (particularly from the Australian side: New Zealanders were more likely to insist on accurate terminology, however). The editors of the first issue of *All About Books for Australian and New Zealand Readers* in 1928 saw no need to justify or explain their decision to be Australasian in scope as this approach was still common. The periodical aimed to give 'information rather than criticism' and provide assistance to readers trying to sift 'the grains of wheat out of so much chaff' (14 Dec 1928, 1).

In the early part of the twentieth century, New Zealand and eastern Australian writers lived in a 'Tasman writing world' where borders were porous and writers saw the whole area as their publishing domain (Bones, 'Tasman Writing World'). Trans-Tasman personal and publishing relationships were easily maintained—early on, the New Zealand colony's reliance on maritime transport and communication meant that 'the quickest means of communicating were often via Sydney' as sea routes between Auckland and Sydney and Christchurch and Sydney could be travelled more frequently and reliably than the route from Auckland to Christchurch (Loveridge 73). The dominance of sea transport continued well into the twentieth century in Australia as rail links 'remained colonial rather than national in conception' (Lee 49). Nettie Palmer and certain other Australian editors and publishers had an interest in the literature being produced by 'Maoriland' which included the works of poets like Jessie Mackay and Eileen Duggan who never visited Australia. A.G. Stephens, editor of the *Bulletin*'s 'Red Page,' was keen to encourage writers throughout Australasia, and kept a scrapbook following the work of a number of writers in New Zealand, including Wilcox. His attention could be rather patronising—he referred in one article to the 'mob of Maoriland girls,' aged 17–25, whose 'favourite composition time' for their 'healthy and regular secretion[s]' is after church, 'literature . . . being necessarily another matter altogether' (1903). Wilcox, along with Mackay and Mary Colborne-Veel, were three who Stephens deemed to have risen slightly above this standard. Nonetheless, the *Bulletin* and other such publications were of great importance to writers in New Zealand at a time when local literary infrastructure was underdeveloped.

This atmosphere of openness and cross-pollination was not to last: towards the middle of the century, an increasing focus on the development of national canons on either side of the Tasman meant that writers with multiple allegiances were sidelined or their achievements only partially

recognised. Terry Sturm blames this development for the lack of recognition received by novelist Edith Lyttleton for her work:

> As an expatriate she became the victim of a narrowly nationalistic, geographically defined notion of New Zealand literature, with the result that much of her 'non-New Zealand' fiction was ignored. A.G. Bagnall's *New Zealand National Bibliography*, for example, confined itself to listing her four 'New Zealand' books, omitting the rest because they were felt to fall into the category of 'the work of the remote "expatriates" both living and writing abroad on other than New Zealand problems and themes.' (Sturm, *An Unsettled Spirit* 5)

Brigid Magner has written of trans-Tasman writers who were forced to perform 'various impostures' and 'elaborate subterfuges' to counter the effects of living between two literary traditions (Magner 174). One of these was New Zealander Douglas Stewart. Stewart was the editor of the *Bulletin*'s 'Red Page' from 1940 to 1961 and during this time he continued to seek out the work of New Zealanders 'with whom he had sympathy' (Magner 175). He was working against the grain by this time, however, and came up against the New Zealand literary establishment. Stewart complained about the 'villains of his native land' and the 'Christchurch gang' who had been ignoring him and fellow Tasman in-betweener Eve Langley because of their Australian ties (1940).

At some point Australian and New Zealand literature turned inwards. This does not mean that writers stopped having trans-Tasman connections, but the main players in the literary world were less interested in external influences as they continued their search for the 'local' and 'authentic.' New Zealand's cultural nationalists of the 1930s onwards deliberately ignored the Australian dimension of New Zealand's literary scene or were not even aware of it. The new generation, like A.R.D. Fairburn, often had a 'blind spot on Australian literature' (Duggan 1930) and were frequently unaware of the close literary links that connected the two countries for so long, as well as the debt owed to their Australian nationalist predecessors. This continued, as Pat Lawlor observed in 1966 when he said that the general literary knowledge of the university men and women dealing with New Zealand literature was 'painfully restricted. They know little of N.Z. literature beyond the Sargeson-Curnow clique. They know little of writers like [Hector Bolitho] or even of Douglas Stewart in Australia who have won celebrity' (n.p.) They were also actively dismissive—according to Chris Hilliard, trans-Tasman connections were 'edited out' of the influential volume *Letters and Art in New Zealand* (the first full treatment of New Zealand's literary history) despite their omission being pointed out to its author, Eric McCormick (Hilliard, *Bookmen's Dominion* 102).

It is hard to say exactly when the Australian interest in New Zealand writing reduced, since the cultural nationalist viewpoint has obscured these transnational connections. Not enough analysis has been applied to the subject to give a clear answer as to why it declined: in 1985 Terry Sturm wrote that 'there is no established discourse about Australian-New Zealand literary relations in the literary historiography or criticism of either country . . . let alone any theoretical effort to account for such relations, or for their absence' (Sturm, 'Neglected Middle Distance' 30). Economic as well as cultural nationalism played a part: in the 1930s discussions began about protections for local publishing and printing which damaged the cross-pollination enabled by publishing relationships that spanned the Tasman. According to Jason Ensor, George Ferguson of Australian publishing firm Angus & Robertson 'found the attitude of New Zealand booksellers towards Australian titles "extremely favourable" but uniformly "hampered by the import licensing system" which was steadily reducing the quota of books they were allowed to

sell to New Zealand' (Ensor 58). As internal transport and communication facilities improved, national mind-sets replaced Australasian and colonial ones. Trans-Tasman connections may have relied on interest from editors to keep them active. People like Pat Lawlor, who actively sought out writers 'here and abroad' to include in publications like *The New Zealand Artists' Annual* (*Auckland Star*, 27 Oct 1928, 2), ceased to be influential as time went on and fewer editors were interested in being involved in an Australasian or colonial writing movement.

The waning of early colonial connectedness might seem a logical consequence of the rise of a national sense of identity. While Australian national mythology allows for a flowering of nationalist sentiment in the 1890s, the work of finding a true 'New Zealand voice' was not even begun, according to the cultural nationalists, until the late 1930s. But it was not as simple as that, as assertions of national distinctions between colonies did exist from the very start of British settlement, alongside competing or complementary local, regional, colonial and imperial identities. Although far from all-encompassing, these ideas had an effect. Loveridge writes of the development of a feeling of national difference, predicated as others have noted on the self-definition of 'New Zealanders' in opposition to their most obvious point of comparison, 'Australians.' Where Australians prided themselves on throwing off the shackles of Empire and tradition, New Zealanders took pride in retaining closer cultural links to Britain and not descending to the crude vulgarity of their neighbours. The differences in temperament were explained by a number of things: the climate, convict ancestry or lack of it and the influence of Scottish as opposed to Irish immigrants (Loveridge 78). This did not supersede Imperial ties, however, as feelings of 'difference' reinforced competition to be the colonial exemplar. These distinctions were not necessarily based on any convincing historical reality but they were believed and used by people on either side of the oceanic divide.

It was the particular *sort* of literary nationalism that became prominent in the 1930s which obstructed the recognition of writers who worked outside of such paradigms. Allen Curnow and his associates were concerned with solving the 'problem' of authentically expressing the essence of the country in language that did not rely on convention. This led to an emphasis on 'writing' the landscape; as Charles Brasch wrote in 1945, poets needed to learn how to 'lie with the gaunt hills like a lover' (149) in order to properly depict them uniquely and accurately. In Australia, too, the potential of rural themes and the landscape to provide distinctiveness was asserted. Vance Palmer wrote in 1930: 'We have a beautiful landscape, with a character all of its own, and a people who have character, too; but the life of our cities is provincial and colourless' (*All About Books* 19 April 1930, 86). Many Australian writers of the 1930s, particularly those published in popular periodicals, looked back to the bush-balladry of the 1890s as their model for 'an individual Australian character' (*All About Books* 19 April 1930, 87) while New Zealand cultural nationalists emphasised similar aspects of the pioneering, masculine rural ethos epitomised in John Mulgan's novel *Man Alone* and the short stories of Frank Sargeson. Many writers were not especially concerned with these things, but the literary gatekeepers of this new generation were preoccupied with the project of constructing 'national' literature in this way.

This brand of nationalism was inimical to supra-national ties or dual affiliations. Criticism in both countries has often relied on a dichotomy between 'stayers' and 'leavers' as well as those concerned with 'national' projects and those who pursued a universal, cosmopolitan aesthetic. People who left the country or even published overseas were seen as occupying the second category—as having 'thrown up the sponge,' to quote an article from 1930 bemoaning the fact that all New Zealand women writers had to leave in order to be successful (*All About Books* 17 June 1930, 164). The fact that New Zealand and Australian writers were often obliged to seek

overseas publication for their work, and that they sometimes went overseas themselves, was seen as detrimental for each country's writing. The cultural nationalists believed that writing for a non-national audience rendered the work inauthentic. Henry Lawson famously complained about having to adhere to the foreign standards of the 'Paternoster Row machine' (24). Curnow wrote in 1937 that the purpose of 'New Zealand literature' was writing for a national audience, and that poetry written for an English audience was not New Zealand poetry. The worst thing, the 'larger evil,' was to try and do both (1937, 17).

Most people existed somewhere between these opposing categories (Bones, *Expatriate Myth*), however. Like Dora Wilcox, many had life experiences encompassing more than one place, and in fact had strong connections to several places. Colonial mobility was not unusual, although Curnow himself did not leave New Zealand until 1949 at the age of 38. Leaving the country did not necessarily mean you were 'throwing up the sponge' and choosing to reject your country of origin. Wilcox maintained strong links to New Zealand—she wrote for New Zealand publications and about New Zealand writers in her capacity as committee member of many literary organisations, including being Vice President of the New Zealand Women's Writers and Artists Society from Sydney. Her many columns which appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in the 1920s, '30s and '40s cover a wide range of topics drawn from her life in London, Belgium, Christchurch and Sydney. She existed within a world of colonial literary connectedness and addressed a pan-colonial audience that enjoyed her particular take on the places she had experienced. Writing in the early twentieth century, for New Zealanders particularly, was by necessity an international affair because local literary infrastructure was underdeveloped. This was much less of a source of concern than for later generations preoccupied with where people 'belonged.'

The idea of a definable, single version of national 'character' has been under attack for a long while. From the 1960s and '70s onwards, cultural nationalists came up against multitudes of perspectives not represented by their narrow vision, such as those of women, Indigenous people and other non-Anglo-Irish Australasians. Some recent works, particularly *Maoriland* by Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, have worked to resurrect otherwise maligned parts of early-twentieth-century literary history on their own terms. Others have queried the usefulness of the category of 'nation' at all and acknowledged the international origins of many so-called 'national' symbols. Emphasising a contrast between Australian and New Zealand temperaments, for example, overestimates the influence of convicts and their descendants on a more numerous free settler population and 'ignores the substantial flows of people across the Tasman. Many of the first Europeans in New Zealand were ex-Australian convicts and between 1858 and 1915 Australia served as a gateway for migration to New Zealand' (Loveridge 81).

As David Carter has argued, deconstructing nationalism to the extent of denying its existence is unhelpful. Even if based on spurious information, the 'idea of the nation and its institutions have a massive effect in organising culture in Australia' (Carter 137). Certain symbols of Australia and New Zealand dominated nationalist models for a number of decades. Despite the influence of transnational approaches, it is still easy to find examples of literary criticism with a primary focus on the subject-writer's contribution to a national literature, even if the definition of this has expanded. This legacy may explain why literary communities in New Zealand and Australia continue to show little interest in each other at the present time (Wevers 78). As 'authenticity' and location were important for mid-century nationalist models, writers' perceived national allegiances or proximity to the subject matter influenced the response to their work. Terry Sturm notes the ways in which the work of trans-Tasman authors has only been partially considered:

> The New Zealand traces in Douglas Stewart's work, for example—not only in the subject matter and themes of plays like *The Golden Lover* and *Fire on the Snow* and poems like 'Rutherford,' but also in the style of his approach to Australian landscape—have remained unexplored, as have the perspectives on Australia carefully built into New Zealand novels like Robin Hyde's *The Godwits Fly*. (Sturm, 'Neglected Middle Distance' 41)

Despite being an exemplar of popular early-twentieth-century poetic expression, Dora Wilcox has not been the subject of any restorative literary history. She hardly features in *Maoriland*: she is mentioned once in the context of Jessie Mackay's correspondence with A.G. Stephens in Australia. She barely rates inclusion in Patrick Evans's *Penguin History of New Zealand Literature* which comprehensively deconstructs the cultural nationalist paradigm (1990). The *Oxford History of New Zealand Literature* gives attention to a number of other poets with more dubious claims to the title in the interest of inclusivity—Wilcox receives half a sentence, as already mentioned. The few recent notes that do acknowledge Dora Wilcox display the most interest in her contributions to national literature. She appears in both the New Zealand and Australian *Oxford Companion*s to literature. The New Zealand *Companion* details her accomplishments but declines to say much about her last book, *Seven Poems* (1924), because it 'draws largely on her Australian experience,' The Australian version's entry is shorter, giving similar information while adding that 'only the last collection contains poems drawn from her Australian experience,' implying that the earlier ones are less worthy of consideration. Her obituary, which appeared in *Southerly* magazine in 1954, is somewhat deprecating of her literary achievements, saying 'truly her most important work was in helping her husband in his Story of Australian Art'—William Moore's chief achievement, published by Angus & Robertson in 1934 (Hooper 65). This is in line with retrospective assessments of her work which are restricted to her contributions to the 'national' projects of Australia and New Zealand.

Wilcox's 'expatriate' status in Australia is not the only reason for her near absence from literary history. She already faced disadvantage when it came to her literary legacy because she was a woman. Although she and other women poets were celebrated as writers at the time, responses to them often carried an underlying assumption that they were not likely to be worthy of long-lasting recognition. It was believed (and no doubt still is) that women wrote differently from men; were attracted to different subject matters and forms, and went about writing in a different way. Even the most encouraging of editors could still be patronising in their approach (as in the earlier example of A.G. Stephens writing about 'Maoriland girls'). The writer of 'Contemporary Poets: The Feminine Touch,' which appeared in the *Age* in 1941, claimed that in Australia 'women have consistently taken a prominent place in art—although they have not so far eclipsed men' and went on to describe 'feminine poetry':

> A feminine eye sees beauty in small, homely things. Children and animals awake their maternal sympathies, their innate color sense and taste make them natural designers. For this reason, the poetry of women will have something which that of men will never have.
>
> In Dora Wilcox and Dorothea Mackellar, perhaps our two best contemporary women poets after Mary Gilmore, we find this characteristic expressed in a peculiarly marked lyrical strain, an outstanding characteristic of all Australian poetry of the early part of this century, and indeed, of feminine poetry generally. (*Age* 21 June 1941, 3)

In a debate about 'the feminisation of literature' at a 1933 meeting of the Fellowship of Australian writers, Kenneth Wilkinson expressed his opinion about women's suitability as playwrights: 'Women cannot stand outside their emotions in writing as men can; they are apt to get carried away or ramble on for a while. It is this that spoils them for the writing of the play' (*All About Books* 14 Oct 1933, 169–70).

As Joanna Russ points out in *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, even when women had overcome all other hindrances to writing that they faced disproportionately to men (familial obligations, lack of personal capital, the stigma attached to working women, and so on), they still encountered a 'climate of expectations' that prejudged their work before it had even been read (Russ 10). Women writers encountered assumptions about their writing based on the fact that they were women. Sarah Mills has noted that the primary distinction between the travel writing of men and that created by women is not so much one of content, but of reception: 'the way that women's writing is judged and processed' (Mills 30). As reception was influenced by a reviewer's assumptions about a writer's authority on the subject based on their background and proximity to the subject, so responses were also influenced by knowledge (or lack of knowledge) about gender.

Certain patterns are observable in reactions to Dora Wilcox's poetry: her work was often described in a way that was not overtly negative but served to diminish her real literary worth. A recurring word used in reviews and other articles was 'dainty,' without serious consideration of other aspects:

> The poetic inspiration is not very strong but this singer can give dainty sketches in verse descriptive of scenes she had looked upon, and she also has the power of moving her reader to sympathy with her somewhat plaintive touches of imagination. (*Australasian*, 18 November 1911, 44)

When she returned to the antipodes, the Melbourne *Farmers Advocate* described her as the 'noted Australian poetess,' continuing: 'There are many poetry readers who will recall her dainty description of Australian bush life' (8 Feb 1923, 10). One particularly patronising review of *Verses from Maoriland* contained the lines 'To "review" is too ponderous a process for what is merely the lyric utterance of "the eternal feminine." To criticise? Why, who would break a butterfly on the wheel?' (Otago *Witness*, 16 Aug 1905, 88). The implication is that poetry written by women was all very well but not worthy of serious attention.

The biographical details of poet, novelist, playwright and critic Arthur H. Adams are very similar to Wilcox's—he was born in New Zealand, went to London after visiting Australia briefly and then lived in Australia for the rest of his life. He published a book called *Maoriland and Other Verses* in 1899 containing poetry in a similar, lyrical style to Wilcox's. The word 'dainty' was often used to describe his work as well, but those responding to it were more willing to accept him as a serious contender in the literary world. Delicacy and daintiness were only part of what he had to offer the world of poetry and were seen as part of a well-rounded artistic character. Described as 'strongly virile' in one review (Adelaide *Observer*, 5 April 1913, 2), Adams was

> a true poet, young, perchance, and a trifle headstrong, but all the same, with all the youthful enthusiasm and fire that is necessary to make his work grip the reader and thrill him with its earnestness. More than that, even when he is not trying to

> give the world the message he has for it, he has a dainty, delicate touch wherein he evidences his sensuous nature and his artistic trait . . . Lovers of true poetry may be sure of a mental feast of rare daintiness within the covers of "Maoriland and Other Verses"' (Brisbane *Courier*, 14 Oct 1899, 4).

There is nothing particularly 'dainty' about Wilcox's work when compared to Adams's. One of the poems described using this word is 'On the Biograph,' in which the tone and subject matter seems almost coarse, certainly rustic. The extract begins: 'There were the old men squatting / By the whares at the pa,' and ends with 'The smell of sheep in my nostrils / The bleat of sheep in my ears' (1911). When Adams turned to sentimental subjects however, as in his many love poems, his work was described as that of 'a sympathetic recorder, standing aloof and observant . . . his poetic vision is keen, and his mind sensitive' (*Maitland Daily Mercury*, 17 Oct 1899, 2).

A true comparison requires the reviewer to be unaware of the gender of the writer, or unable to have made telling assumptions about it. This was not possible in Dora Wilcox's case, and other explanations for the different reactions, such as reviewers seeing more intellectual weight in Adams' work, cannot be ruled out. This effect can be demonstrated, however, in cases where the author's gender was ambiguous or concealed, as in the case of another 'in-between' writer, Edith Lyttleton. Lyttleton wrote under the pseudonym 'G.B. Lancaster' and unless informed otherwise, reviewers generally assumed she was a man. Lyttleton wrote in a genre—the rural yarn and colonial adventure story—that was traditionally viewed as a male domain, which probably fuelled these assumptions. There is a notable difference in tone between those reviews where the reviewer was unaware of her true identity, and those who were better informed. In reviews of her early books, *Spur to Smite* and *Sons o' Men*, about rough, working life in New Zealand and Australia, words such as 'virile,' 'forcible,' 'strong' and 'masterful' recurred again and again. She was more likely to be criticised for 'authenticity' if known to be a woman, and there were expressions of incredulity that such material could have been written by a woman, especially one who looked like Lyttleton (e.g. *Sydney Mail* 16 June 1909, 20). Reviewers who were aware that she was a woman expressed surprise at her accurate depictions of rural life and praised her imaginative powers. Lyttleton's biographer attests that her accuracy came from her upbringing, that she had 'remarkably acute powers of observation, took an absorbing interest in the technical details of station work, and was an extremely acute listener to stories' (Sturm, *Unsettled Spirit* 57).

What had always been an extra barrier for women writers was exacerbated further for Australians and New Zealanders in the middle of the century when literary nationalists decided that the kind of literary expression that was deemed necessary to truly 'write' Australia and New Zealand was the language and subject matter of the rural 'bloke.' In New Zealand the cultural nationalist model was narrowly focused on a masculine definition of the quintessential New Zealander (Jensen). Women writers were largely disenfranchised, and disappeared from the forefront of the writing community although they continued to produce around half of all books of fiction and verse published at least until 1940 (Bones, 'Dual Exile'). Their marginalisation was encouraged by the misogynistic (or at least belittling) attitudes of the cultural nationalists themselves. A.R.D. Fairburn described women writers of the 1920s and 30s derisively as the 'menstrual school' of poetry (1934). This criticism extended to the newspaper editors who encouraged many of these writers and had a more democratic approach to literary endeavour. As the literary establishment narrowed, however, it became centred around universities and less accessible to people outside of high-brow circles, particularly if they were women. Ursula Bethell's poetry addressed the difficulty of writing about New

Zealand and she was accepted as a forerunner by Allen Curnow. Even so, D'Arcy Cresswell praised her book of verse, *Time and Place*, but was critical that she sometimes attempted 'too much intellectually,' as 'it is the men who must matter in the long run, of course' (Elder 14). In Australia, too, women writers suffered at the hands of a literary establishment with a 'mainstream . . . radical nationalist view of literature which was trying to find a unifying cultural principle in a national identity formed in the bush' (Modjeska 298), and 'relegated [women] to the back shelves of Australian literature' (299).

For women this was a problem not just because they might have wanted to write about something else. They were not deemed capable of writing in this manner, and even if they did they faced harsh scrutiny and scepticism. Readers' reports for the Macmillan publishing house reveal different standards for male and female authors: a Miles Franklin manuscript was rejected because of 'unnecessary coarseness of language which comes with especially bad grace from a girl who is apparently not long out of her teens' (Trainor 318). Franklin tried to conceal her gender identity on publication of *My Brilliant Career* (1901) but was disappointed to find that her 'identity as a woman writer made judgements about its literary merit and nationalism awkward in Australia; as it was at the turn of the twentieth century' (Lamond). This did not improve as time progressed. Unrealistic dichotomies between women's and men's writing led to female fiction writers being 'denigrated as "Anglo-Australian," "lady novelists" whose cosmopolitan romances were considered derivative, commercial, frivolous and irrelevant to the new national literary tradition' (Lamond), and this was regardless of what they actually wrote.

Feminist literary historians have restored the reputations of many women writers who were sidelined by cultural nationalists. Works like Drusilla Modjeska's *Exiles at Home* and Michelle Leggott's 'Opening the Archive' describe some of the many and varied contributions made to literature and art by women, and their treatment at the hands of masculinist literary traditions. Leggott writes of a 'lost matrix of women poets,' naming in particular Eileen Duggan, Jessie Mackay and Robin Hyde and describing their difficult relationship with Allen Curnow and associates ('Archive'). Modjeska describes the complex networks and spheres of influence of many Australian women writers, but Dora Wilcox is, again, only mentioned in passing. It is not clear why Wilcox's life and work has not been deemed interesting enough to be reinstated in any way, but it seems likely that being in-between literary traditions had something to do with it. She also did not rail against being sidelined as Eileen Duggan and others did (Leggott), but after the death of William Moore in 1938 she seems to have lost interest in accolades or recognition, and perhaps was not aware of or interested in what the new guard in New Zealand thought of her work. A diary entry from October 1938 mentioned that a poem, 'London Streets,' was to be published in a new anthology, and she wrote: 'how pleased I should have been *once*' [my emphasis]. That same day she went an English Association Committee meeting in Sydney which 'seemed dead' and to a PEN (Poets, Essayists, Novelists) dinner which was 'rather dead too, but it's probably myself that feels that way' (20 Oct 1938).

None of the obstacles faced by women and expatriates stopped Dora Wilcox from writing, at least until the last decade of her life. But as the criteria for inclusion in national canons became more prescriptive, people with other concerns or affiliations were erased or obscured from literary history, and their legacies affected. This began when the question of which country writers 'belonged to' became paramount. Edith Lyttleton was described in 1945 as 'somewhat difficult to localise.' Tasmania had 'best claims on her' but in New Zealand she was claimed as 'one of that Dominion's most eminent novelists' (Mackay *Daily Mercury*, 21 April 1945, 2). According to another writer, the critics were 'never too sure' about who Arthur H. Adams 'belonged' to, as he represented 'a problem in literary international law' (Mackay *Daily*

Mercury, 21 March 1936, 6). Even now, writers' value can be measured in these terms and, aside from a lucky few such as Edith Lyttleton who have been rescued by rigorous biographers, their admission into literary history might depend on their contributions to a national canon, with extra barriers for women who might not have been properly appreciated at the time. The unrealistic divisions between writers who stayed and writers who left, and women's and men's writing, have led to an inaccurate picture of the opportunities available to writers outside the literary academy. The world inhabited by Dora Wilcox was one of colonial and trans-Tasman mobility and literary collaboration, and her departure in 1891 did not sever her ties to New Zealand writing. Reassessments of early twentieth century literature have largely shown interest in particular aspects of genre, political concerns or the development of national literatures rather than writers' whole lives, which may explain why Wilcox still languishes in obscurity.

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