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# A Pacific Sojourn: Anna Kavan and the New Zealand Connection, 1941–2

*Abstract:* This article examines Anna Kavan's sojourn in New Zealand from February 1941 to November 1942 in the company of the pacifist playwright Ian Hamilton. Living in the most remote of the ex-British colonies reinforced Kavan's ontological sense of homelessness and wish to disidentify from British society, yet the colony's anglophone orientation offered familiarity within the strange and alien. The geography, landscapes and communities of its Pacific islands encouraged a reshaping of her imaginative engagement with otherness. Referring to Kavan's recently published diary, 'Five Months Further or What I Remember ab[ou]t New Zealand', the essay argues that the New Zealand 'experience' encouraged her use of tropes of the Gothic and uncanny as she grappled with issues of distance, homelessness and disjunctive reality. The discussion focuses on the alternative/parallel world that New Zealand represents in stories published in *I Am Lazarus* (1945). It identifies experimental techniques associated with Gothic fiction by which Kavan registers the overlapping dualisms of war-torn London and idyllic rural New Zealand, and represents memory through framing devices and defamiliarizing rhetorical tropes as a distancing activity interrupting the present moment: dream sequences, irruptions into and splittings of reality, space and time reversals, doublings of self/other, disjunctive non sequiturs and ghostly mirror imaging.

*Keywords:* New Zealand, Ian Hamilton, Pacific nostalgia, Anna Kavan, Charles Fuller, otherness, *I Am Lazarus*

## *Journeys and Destinations*

A series of turbulent events in Anna Kavan's life led to the journeys that would culminate in her brief stay in New Zealand from February 1941 to

November 1942: the sudden collapse of her marriage to her second husband Stuart Edmonds in 1938 followed by a breakdown, a suicide attempt and institutionalization in a sanatorium in Switzerland. Then, stepping across the boundaries between life and art, she metamorphosed from Helen Ferguson/Edmonds, names from her first marriage to Donald Ferguson and then her second to Edmonds, into a slender platinum blonde with the nom de plume of Anna Kavan. Kavan had already achieved a modest literary reputation as Helen Ferguson,<sup>1</sup> author of six semi-autobiographical novels published between 1927 and 1939, and this name came from a fictional character in her second work, the autobiographical *Let Me Alone* (1930), who reappears in *A Stranger Still* (1935) (Booth 2012: 31).<sup>2</sup> Adopting an alias was a survival strategy (Sturm 2009: 17) following severe depression, suicide attempts and prolonged psychiatric treatment, all of which had annulled her sense of self. It enabled her to distance herself from her previous life and literary persona, and make a new start. More than just a change of name, becoming Anna Kavan entailed the construction of a new identity—one which is imagined in terms of a defiant assertion of female independence by the character of *A Stranger Still*: ‘She stood there in absolute honesty looking into herself. She was suddenly, objectively, aware of the girl Anna Kavan, an individual human being, alive in the world, alone, without support, without obligations, capable of intelligent thought, and responsible for her destiny’ (Kavan 1995: 55).

Kavan was encouraged to embark on her peripatetic travels at this troubled stage of her life, when her mental health was still precarious, by Ian Hamilton, whose sister Margery had become involved with Stuart Edmonds after he and Kavan separated. An urbane, cosmopolitan upper-middle-class Englishman who had been living in Hawkes Bay for five years, Hamilton, a pacifist, had enjoyed success in New Zealand with a three-act play called *Falls the Shadow* (1939), which anticipated the advent of the Second World War. He had returned to England to promote it (Sturm 2009: 18). After meeting Kavan, he suggested she join him on his journey back to New Zealand via New York in 1939, and, against the advice of her psychiatrist, she accepted.

The couple visited Norway and Sweden for some weeks, then spent six months at La Jolla, on the Pacific coast of California (as described in her journals, the source of her semi-autobiographical memoir *My Soul in China* [1975]). Here, Kavan embarked on a turbulent affair with a wealthy American architect, Charles Fuller (the subject of several unpublished autobiographical stories in ‘The Cactus Sign’), with whom she apparently fell in love at first sight. Hamilton had already decided to return to his commitments in New Zealand, and Kavan, who had been passed off as Hamilton’s sister, now proceeded with Fuller on the SS *Jagerfonstein*, he

1 This assessment is based on the sales of her novels and her own perception of her lack of literary success.

2 Born Helen Emily Woods in 1901 in Cannes, Kavan was educated at boarding schools in the United States and Europe. Her parents remained remote from her, and her father committed suicide when she was 14 (Reed 2006: 15–17).

en route to China on a journalistic assignment, she bound for South Africa to visit her mother, Helen Tevis, and her second husband. However, due to the closure of the sea routes to commercial shipping with the outbreak of war, they were redirected to Singapore, where they seized the opportunity to sail to Indonesia. Psychologically vulnerable, Kavan attempted suicide in Kuta Beach in Bali, where they lived for a while, and again in New York, to where she travelled with Fuller on his invitation, from Jakarta, on the SS *Sommelsdijk*. The reality was that Fuller was engaged, about to marry for the second time, and had three children by his first wife. Nevertheless, he felt some responsibility for Kavan, who was still emotionally delicate and needed protection and security (Reed 2006: 58; Sturm 2009: 33–4). The romance sustained by their binge drinking fell asunder when Fuller resumed his New York life, leaving Kavan to herself. Realizing that she had become overdependent on Fuller, and seeking a refuge as her 60-day transit visa to the United States was about to expire, she wrote to Hamilton, by now separated from his wife, asking to join him in New Zealand, but not expecting any sexual relationship (Sturm 2009: 42). She sailed from Los Angeles on the *Mariposa* and arrived in Auckland on 21 February 1941.

These sudden changes in direction and precipitate, desperate decisions illustrate the volatility of Kavan's emotional domestic life at a time when she was trying to kick her heroin habit by turning to alcohol, and her marked dependency on male support and need for shelter and protection. Such instability was increased by unpredictable disruptions to travel arrangements caused by the outbreak of war. All plans to cross the world became hazardous and complicated, as she found subsequently, while the patriotic demands of war shortened her New Zealand sojourn. She returned to England prematurely in the belief that Hamilton was about to be imprisoned as a conscientious objector (Sturm 2009: 52). Travelling on the troopship SS *Trojan Star*, as the only woman passenger with 11 Royal New Zealand Air Force pilots (57), her journey was dangerous in the extreme. Soon after, when she wanted to reverse that decision and go back to New Zealand, she was prevented by the bureaucracy of wartime administration.

### ***'Reluctant Campers': New Zealand as a Temporary Home***

Her newly assumed identity as the alluring, enigmatic Anna Kavan, contrasting strikingly to her previous bourgeois, conventional one as Helen Ferguson/Edmonds, and the emotional turmoil of her affair with Fuller would have little prepared Kavan for her arrival in the quiet backwater

of New Zealand's North Island. Her perceptions of New Zealand were of a narrowly provincial society—that is, all that she, as a cosmopolitan traveller, was not. This at least is how she presents her views in 'New Zealand: An Answer to a Query', an article published in *Horizon* in 1943, just after she returned to England, in which she denounces the country: 'It's null, it's dull, it's tepid, it's mediocre; the downunder of the spirit' (Sturm 2009: 156). Informing this negative critique were her feelings of displacement and dislocation, as she saw herself then as a traveller, an accidental visitor or sojourner. In identifying herself as a temporary visitor intending to return to England, she also acknowledged her homelessness in a darker sense—as lacking any sense of belonging. Describing herself as a 'wanderer' (81), she broods on what she calls 'the refugee outlook' that comes from having no place in the world rather than the security of being 'at home' and having 'a right to be there' (115). In this way, Kavan's ontological sense of homelessness, her gravitation to borderline conditions and states of unreality, suggests that her nomadic lifestyle and arrival in a strange land amounted to some kind of re-enactment of the processes of distancing, alienation and dislocation that she had already experienced psychologically during her breakdown following the abrupt end of her second marriage.

States of mental stress and acute anxiety are the subject of the stories in *Asylum Piece* (1940), the experimental prose fiction written during and after her institutionalization in Switzerland in 1938. *Asylum Piece*, her first publication under the name of Anna Kavan, with its anonymizing of place and country—the characters are known only by their initials (Reed 2006: 49)—and echoes of Kafka, was a break from the more conventional literary forms of her earlier work. The originality of the pared-back poetic style of the first-person narratives of people hospitalized for mental disorders was acclaimed as an imaginative achievement by Desmond MacCarthy and Edwin Muir (Reed 2006: 49, 50), and by New Zealand's leading short story writer Frank Sargeson as 'really outstanding' (Sturm 2009: 57). In a creative sense, then, Kavan's comment in her *Horizon* article that New Zealanders were located 'among the appalling impersonal perils and strangeness of the universe, living in temporary shacks, as reluctant campers too far from home' (Sturm 2009: 260) recognizes remoteness and a preoccupation with the unfamiliar as a condition of the mind, just as much as a state of existence or place of habitation. Kavan was an outsider in every sense of the word, as Sara Wasson points out: 'by choice (a restless world traveller), by birth (never feeling at home in her ostensible homeland), and by medical category (a registered heroine addict for over thirty years)' (Wasson 2010: 60); the metaphors of the provisional and precarious that she introduces in speaking

of New Zealanders as ‘reluctant campers’ might just as well apply to the estranging inner world of her psyche.

Questions of identity—‘Who am I?’—are, for the traveller or migrant, inevitably entangled with those of place—‘What is this place and how does it affect me?’ (Quayson 2013: 148). Travel to and relocation at the furthest ends of the earth did more than reinforce Kavan’s alienation from Britain and the defiant flouting of social convention that underpinned her deliberate engagement with otherness, evident in her self-transformation from Helen Ferguson/Edmonds to Anna Kavan. It also involved an encounter with unknown spaces and places—a rich source of Gothic sensations of the uncanny. As the stories in *Asylum Piece* indicate, Kavan decisively rejected identification with any nation state or social order, and constructed herself as a restless, wandering subject, condemned to a kind of permanent exile. Yet New Zealand of the early 1940s, with its wild, powerfully naturalistic landscape, its anglophone-settler provincialism and emerging cultural nationalism, represented a radical contrast to much that was familiar from her upper-class, metropolitan, European upbringing, while also offering recognizable features of ‘home’ such as language, cultural values and social structures. Such a familiar yet strange dualism brought her close to the dialectical function of the Gothic, which defamiliarizes the conventional ‘to open horizons beyond social patterns, rational decisions and institutionally approved emotions’ (Sedgwick 1986, quoted in Rudd 2010: 3). The country’s settings and landscapes gave a material form to psychological displacement with the Gothic ‘doubling and splitting of schizophrenic subjectivities’ (Rudd 2010: 3) that defines the institutionalized characters in *Asylum Piece*.

Although New Zealand is never named in her fiction, the images of light, sky and sea that appear in Kavan’s subsequent work owe much to her perceptions of its southern location. Her impressions of the sounds of its native birdlife, its fermenting, brittle geothermic crust, and the sight of its prehistoric lonely landscapes are recorded in her *Horizon* article. The discordant images—of bleakness versus luxuriant proliferating vegetation, of ancient, timeless hills versus contemporary settlement, of ice and light, snow and sun, shore and sea—were a bedrock for later fictions:

Always the desolation, always the splendour, always the loneliness, always the opposition, always the ancient trees, the birds which inhabit no other country, the volcanic mountains, the mud bubbling and chuckling. And always, everywhere, strangeness ... And then the beaches: with the lovely inexpressible melancholy of long sands, utterly desolate between dunes and the greengage waves slowly unfurling ... absolutely nothing but solitude, like a place that hasn’t been found yet, and

perhaps never will be found. Strange lonely dream scene. (Sturm 2009: 255–6)

The post-apocalyptic settings of *Ice* (1967) and *Eagles' Nest* (1957) have indeed been traced to Antarctica, the South Island fjords and glaciers, and the bleak volcanic landscape of the central North Island (Reed 2006: 70; Sturm 2009: 244).

Kavan's recently discovered diary, 'Five Months Further or What I Remember ab[ou]t New Zealand',<sup>3</sup> covering her last three months in the country and the two months on the troopship travelling back to England, reveals that her initial unease about living in such a retreat, and her pervasive sense of its strangeness, gave way to enthusiasm: this is manifested in her curiosity about the activities of local residents at Tor Bay or Waitahanui, the small settlement on Auckland's North Shore where she lived with Hamilton (some appear in stories in *I Am Lazarus* [1945]). Hamilton provided Kavan with a safe haven, a temporary home both psychically and physically, as she indirectly acknowledges in her fiction and the diary, stating that 'the remote antipodean island', 'the safe underside of the world', represented a secure space, which she rejected when it became 'familiar' (Kavan 2013: 41, 123). He introduced her to the intellectual, literary and artistic circles of Auckland society, to writers such as Frank Sargeson and Denis Glover, the exiled poet Karl Wolfskhel, Greville Texador (the European refugee writer to whom Kavan is often compared), the photographer Clifton Firth, and the lawyer Frank Haigh and his wife Honey (Sturm 2009: 46–7).

Hamilton and Kavan lived in a house in Tor Bay which he had refurbished using a model of fashionable domestic architecture developed by his friend, the Auckland architect Vernon Brown. As Jennifer Sturm points out, its location was uniquely suited to Kavan's self-imaging: the house looked out onto the Pacific Ocean, which, during the six months with Hamilton in La Jolla, had become for her a 'natural symbol of the extremes of her personality and psychology', for 'the ocean's tides ebbed and flowed in seeming sympathy with her mood swings' (Sturm 2009: 20). Here she could write surrounded by the elements:

The house perched on a promontory, almost at the extreme physical limit of the outermost settled district of the East Coast Bays. Just as the Pacific Ocean came to represent for Kavan a physical manifestation of her mental state, the topography of 50 Rock Isle Road reflected the outlandish and peripheral nature of her life. Barely connected to the mainland, the greywacke promontory is prone to crumbling and

3 Recently edited by Jennifer Sturm (2009) including Kavan's *Horizon* article reprinted as an appendix.

slippage, held together only by the strong roots of pohutukawa trees and the cohesive North Shore clay. (45)

Living in this refitted modern mansion in Tor Bay in a period of relative harmony, benefiting from the decorous attention of Hamilton as her custodian—Kavan referred to him as ‘my brother’—released her from the fraught tension of the war and the traumas of her earlier love affair. As a character in one of the stories in *I Am Lazarus* states: ‘After all the dreadful anxiety I had been through, I felt I could never absorb enough of the peace, the beauty, the solitude’ (Kavan 2013: 109).

On her return to England in early 1943, the war-torn, semi-demolished urban landscape of Blitz-torn London, the frequent air attacks and the sub-standard living conditions appalled Kavan. With her new identity as the independent Anna Kavan, which she had developed on the other side of the world, she now had to reconnect with the society she had left. Lonely and even more isolated than before, and now lacking the attentive ministrations of Hamilton, she had to find a means of becoming financially independent and making a living, for which she was singularly ill-equipped. Stories written soon after her return suggest that she came to look on her time in the Antipodes as one of idyllic retreat, but she had to dispel such memories and feelings of nostalgia in order to reacclurate to life in England. She began to delve more deeply into recently excavated psychological spaces in order to reorient herself in time and place, and exploit the dialectical relationship between being ‘here’ and not ‘there’, between this place and that place.

Writing on the diasporic imaginary, Ato Quayson points out that ‘breaches in the commonplace, an *unheimlich*’ or unhomeliness of place, are produced by the ‘fraught dynamic of the links between homeland and hostland’ that are enacted in ‘*the mind of the beholder*’ (Quayson 2013: 148; original emphasis). These eruptions are intensified in Kavan’s writing because the identity of home and host nations is now inextricably entangled. The suppression of emotions about, and memories of, the far-flung, different world of her Pacific interlude, one where she had come to feel ‘at home’, underpins the Gothic dualism that appears in several stories in *I Am Lazarus*. What is ‘unsaid’ and ‘unseen’ (Rudd 2010: 5), now forbidden memories of an alternative buried world, bursts through, undercutting and contradicting present-day reality.

### ***I Am Lazarus: The New Zealand Connection***

Published in 1945, *I Am Lazarus* was Kavan’s first book after returning to London. It consists of stories based on her work in 1943 with psychological



casualties of war in Mill Hill Emergency Hospital, a military neurosis hospital (Walker 2013). The entire collection is linked by the theme of the traumatization of its protagonists. As Sturm points out, at least 6 of the 15 stories were probably written when Kavan was in New Zealand (Sturm 2009: 238).<sup>4</sup> Nine stories altogether contain references to the experience of living as a stranger on the other side of the world and returning even more estranged still, often expressed in a New Zealand-based lexicon (241). The anthology illustrates Kavan's subjective exploration of this double dislocation through introducing binary oppositions into the spatio-temporal configurations of her narratives.

#### Gothic London: The 1940s

Kavan's disorientation at finding herself back in a barely recognizable war-torn London (testified in letters she wrote to Hamilton throughout the 1940s after her return) is represented in the title *I Am Lazarus*, with its hints of the Lazarus myth and the return from the grave.<sup>5</sup> An autobiographical dimension can be inferred from multiple representations of memory as arbitrary and confusing, suggesting that Kavan was using techniques of narrative disruption to work through her sense of loss and nostalgia into a vision of Gothic 'duplicity' in which submerged places are glimpsed and 'half-told' narratives perceived (Newman 1995: 82). In several stories, London experiences are reframed through reference to an alternative world, represented as a mentally disordering sphere that disrupts the present moment. In 'Glorious Boys', set at a party in London, when the narrator unexpectedly meets Ken, an officer she knew 'from another country' (Kavan 2013: 42), there occurs what Foucault would call a hetero-chronic moment in the form of a 'temporal twist' (Foucault 1984, quoted in Wasson 2010: 78), making this location a heterotopia—that is, a place where conventions, norms and laws are suspended.<sup>6</sup> There is a sudden split in reality as the 'other' country intrudes onto and merges with 'this' one:

A carnation pinned to a dress with the coloured badge of a regiment came between, and behind this the known and utterly unlikely face *from another country* suddenly sprang out at her in the room like a pistol pointed over the noise and smoke and the atmosphere of a party and for a second *she felt cold and confused with the countries running wildly together. ... But that was another country* and why was it *here* now? When it came at night or when she was by herself that was all right. But *coming* sudden and inopportune it confused her as now, she standing glass in hand at a party talking to Ken with his unnatural eyes and he

4 In the Ian Hamilton Papers held in the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington are drafts of three stories later published in *I Am Lazarus*, and Sturm points out that New Zealand references and diction appear in three other stories (238–41).

5 The title may be taken from T. S. Eliot's poem 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915), as was the title of Ian Hamilton's memoir, *Till Human Voices Wake Us* (1953), about being a detainee in which the phrase 'I am Lazarus' describes his re-entry into New Zealand society. I am grateful to Victoria Walker for this information (Walker 2012).

6 Wasson reads this and other stories in *I Am Lazarus* with reference to Foucault's concept of a heterotopia (Wasson 2010: 53).

looking entirely too natural in the damned uniform. (Kavan 2013: 42–4; my emphasis)

Kavan intensifies the impact of ‘otherness’ and strangeness in their collision with the real as the subjective impressions of this wartime location, dominated by aural cacophony (voices at a party, falling shells, air-raid sirens, bombs exploding), are interrupted by remembered images of tranquillity and peace. The narrator images as a mental painting a place of happiness that resembles the house at Tor Bay; it contrasts to the chaos of the present, but there is no reconciliation between these disparate moments and conflicting sensations:

Sometimes *the picture* was there at night and sometimes it came when she was alone and she could understand that; but now in the noise of the party it came so much stronger and clearer than it should and there was the low house at the end of the point with water on three sides and there were the big trees with cormorants in them, and she had been happier there with Frank than with other men she had been around with but she had left it as she left every place; and *there it was clear in the picture*, only it startled her now. (43; my emphasis)

In another story, ‘Who Has Desired the Sea’, the disorientation caused by memory’s intrusion on the present is associated with the mental illness catalysed by war—the psychological damage caused by post-traumatic stress disorder. The war veteran, Lennie, who has survived the bombing of his troopship by a German Focke-Wulf (25), feels, like Sylvia Plath’s heroine in *The Bell Jar*, that he is living in a glass cell. Confined in the Neurosis Centre, one of the collection’s many institutions that show London to be a wartime ‘carceral heterotopia’ (Wasson 2010: 59), his anxiety is increased by the sound of the sea near the Centre. The sea reminds him of the horrifying moment of impact, followed by his traumatized, desperate search for a young man who was blown up in the bombing; but it also brings back idyllic memories of sailing and swimming in New Zealand. These are represented so as to emphasize the distance between locations and between the present and past, while slippage between the pronouns ‘he’ and ‘you’ suggests areas of overlap between the character and narrator.

A deictic analysis, which locates what is talked about in relation to the speaker’s point of view, offers insight into Kavan’s technique. The focalizer is the protagonist Lennie, who images the young man he still seeks in his hospital bed, in the misguided belief he will find him, by providing locative (here/there, this/that) and temporal (now/then) information. Kavan uses the experiential form of deixis in which reference is a way ‘of selecting an

object from the represented environment in order to draw someone's attention to it' (Werth 1995: 64). In Lennie's memory, the young man who still haunts him stands on the beach, like a painting, as though in real life:

*Now in the distance* he saw the beach at Mairangi and the young man was standing there very tanned in his bathing slippers and that was the small scar on his cheek that he had got from the oyster shell on the rock swimming under water when he was eight years old. *That was one of the things he was seeing*, with, in the background Cape Promise and all the islands, the Sugar Loaf and the Noises, the little one where the penguins went, and the one which was an extinct volcano. It was the strong *southern* sun that made the wattle burn like a fire all along the creek. In Mairangi at Christmas time the sun was so strong that it hurt your eyes for the first few seconds when you came out of the bach in the morning and ran down to the beach to swim. *That was the place* where they dragged the boat over the warm sand, shells sharply warm on the foot soles, and where they had *those* great fishing trips out to the Barrier, the water as smooth and solid to look at as kauri gum and as blue as sapphires, and he remembered the clean splashless opening of the water as you dived into it like a knife. (Kavan 2013: 24–5; my emphasis)

Here, the utterance is encoded in the 'spatio-temporal context and subjective experience' of Lennie/the narrator (Green 2008: 127), as he recalls a time and place far from his present location. In the opening phrase, the adverbials 'now' and 'in the distance' introduce the shift that comes from this process of recall. This is reinforced by the deictic demonstratives 'that' and 'those', while the word 'southern' points to the writer's (i.e. Kavan's) present northern location. Lennie's focalizing gaze is established in the reporting clause 'he was seeing'. Yet in naming for the second time the bay 'Mairangi' (near Tor Bay where Kavan and Hamilton lived), the narrator overlaps with the character Lennie (represented in the third person), adopting his point of view with the anonymous pronoun 'you'. The intensification of voice and memory in recalling a fishing trip to the Great Barrier Reef (which Kavan and Hamilton may, in fact, have made) shows a local lexicon with place names like 'Mairangi', 'the Sugar Loaf' and 'the Noises', and words like 'bach'. There is also a different visual aesthetic from her earlier work—one that exploits the panoramic by opening up a vista that links the sea journey to a sense of freedom, so deliberately contrasting with Lennie's present-day confinement in the Neurosis Centre.

This memory of a utopian moment in the story precedes Lennie's recollection of the trauma of being bombed. After glimpsing in the mirror a ghostly reflection of the young man he searches for, haunted, he returns

to the cliffs above the ‘wrong sea’ (Kavan 2013: 27) and ‘the cold, tumultuous restless water beneath’ (31). His earlier memory is now reincarnated as a vision of the future. The story ends with what seems a homecoming, as the direction of travel is now reversed and the fishing boat returns to Mairangi Bay by moonlight:

Then he looked over the sea and there were islands it seemed, and *then* a great migration of birds thickened the air and he was in a rushing of wings, the wings beat so dark and fast round him he felt dizzy like falling and the moon disappeared. And *then* it was clear again, brilliant moonlight, and *there*, ahead, bright as day, were all the small islands, Cape Promise, and the Bay of Mairangi, wide, still, unbelievably peaceful the full moon. And *then* he did know where he was *going*. (31; my emphasis)

Linguistically, ‘this’ is usually the centre of the deictic field (because it has the closest proximity to the encoder of the utterance). But there is no ‘this’ or ‘present moment’ in the conclusion to offset Lennie’s location in the past, and this emphasizes his distance from life itself. The spatio-temporal deictics—‘then’, ‘there’ and ‘going’ (rather than ‘now’, ‘here’ or ‘coming’)—hint at his wish to end his life, as his struggle to understand his loss ends in despair.

### ***Imaging Reality: Framing and Pictures***

The stories in *I Am Lazarus* have an unstated subtext, which is the issue of how to retain and preserve memory against the ravages of time, with the added hint that, in time, all lived experience might seem to be no more than a construction, a figment of memory or the imagination. The two worlds collide then reconfigure as ‘this’ one overwhelms and insidiously buries that ‘other’ one in ways that are both menacing and disorientating. Such treacherous changes are thematized in two stories towards the end of the collection: ‘Benjo’, one of the three stories drafted in New Zealand, whose setting is probably Auckland’s North Shore, and ‘Now I Know Where My Place Is’, which deals with the enigma of place. The collection concludes with the story ‘Our City’, whose narrator accepts her complete defamiliarization and disorientation due to the strangeness of her surroundings, projecting the growing sense of foreboding seen as characteristic of Kavan’s novels (Crees 2006).

Imagery of paintings and other visual images with frames, such as photographs, dominate Kavan’s memories and recollections of New Zealand, and she isolates them, seemingly valuing intactness as a way of preventing

memory loss; but in these stories, she also questions the capacity of memory to preserve these moments of lived experience. In 'Benjo', the Gothic strain reappears in the focus on the 'unseen' and 'unsaid', and despair about the ability of language to communicate and the story to be told (Newman 1995: 70); the narrator has difficulty in communicating what 'my life over there' was about, given that there were 'gaps and inconsistencies' and the 'whole thing was incomplete and blurred' (Kavan 2013: 108). The Wildean terminology of life, art and transience conveys that although the memories, imaged as a picture, have been kept under wraps to prevent the images and colours from ageing, there is now ghosting. The bright figures gleam amidst increasingly spectral representation as 'the memories themselves seem to be evaporating', rendering even the present moment indistinct:

The memories themselves seemed to be fading. The curtain which used to cover the picture has been removed; but now the colours of the paints are starting to fade. Every day the canvas becomes more indistinct, a ghostly landscape, with a few figures, such as Benjo's, appearing here and there, still touched with the bizarre gleam of their original brightness. (108)

This suggests underlying speculation about how all reality is no more than a form of representation when objects or experiences are converted into the media of language, memory or art. In Peter Schwenger's summary: 'All our knowledge of the object is only knowledge of its modes of representation—or rather of our modes of representation, the ways in which we set forth the object to the understanding, of which language is one' (Schwenger 2006: 22–3)—that is, as soon as the thing is mentioned, it disappears, displaced by our representation of it.

Kavan's preoccupation with the evanescent nature of the real, how fading memory makes it disappear and elude rediscovery, underlies other stories in *I Am Lazarus* which are not apparently about New Zealand but reveal a condition of existential dislocation. In 'Now I Know Where My Place Is', all reality is questioned, as the narrator searches for the place that—from snippets of information—she thinks might hold the key to her character. The slipperiness of memory and the treachery of appearances are hinted at in the transitions between waking and dream landscapes. Hearing from chance acquaintances about a southern hotel that she may have visited as a child, the narrator questions her memory when it is intercepted by the imagination emerging from the uncanny 'plasma' of dream:

Was it really the same place that they were talking about? The place that for so many years lingered like a half memory on the horizons of my

consciousness? How often ... did the tenuous picture appear before me in that vague twilight between sleeping and waking! How well my imagination was acquainted with the peculiar tower ... How intimately I seem to have experienced those balconies ... All these things I had been accustomed to accept as part of the queer dream-plasma which flows along like a sub-life. (Kavan 2013: 119–20)

From asking whether it is ‘the same place’, she then questions whether the medium of her ‘tenuous picture’, perhaps one seen ‘in an album of photographs at my old home’, is no more than an illusion and ‘the blue-tinted photograph, round which constellations seem to be wheeling, no more than a shadow in an old dream?’ (121). These comments recall Roland Barthes’s definition of photography as ‘a new form of hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time: a temporal hallucination’ (Barthes 1981: 115). In ‘The Picture’, when the narrator finds that the picture she has taken to be framed has been replaced by the wrong one, the perceptual experience is further undermined and distilled into art, reflecting the confusions of contemporary life. The truth-value of images as representations of memory is even more radically disturbed because of the Gothic tropes used: the taunting picture framer with his rat-like teeth and venomous leer. This story’s mood of loss, betrayal and barely suppressed horror might be read as the culmination of Kavan’s grappling with memories ‘framed’ as pictures that are subject to the ravages of time and the malevolent intentions of unknown others, or the forces of fate, that withdraw them.

### ***New Zealand: ‘A Denied Utopia’***

In reconsidering questions such as what kind of traveller Kavan saw herself as being and how she understood her southern sojourn, it is worth turning to her letters to Ian Hamilton, written after she returned to England. Sturm identifies in them a ‘thread of pacific nostalgia’ (Sturm 2009: 247), suggesting that her arrival in London led to feelings of displacement and provisionality complicated by a new longing: a thwarted wish to return to New Zealand. This state might be interpreted in terms of a ‘homing desire’—a wish for homeliness or a state of being at home (Brah 1996: 16, 180). So, New Zealand perhaps came to represent for Kavan a symbolic elsewhere, a place with which she had a long-distance and virtual relationship, one that enabled her to engage remotely with those who belonged and to perceive her time there as one of happiness (Ang 2001: 89). Yet the Gothic features of her art undermine such reassuring concepts as home and belonging when the confusion and disorientations of her protagonists

and narrators concerning their whereabouts intensify. As Sturm points out with reference to ‘Who Has Desired the Sea’, Lennie’s New Zealand is unreal, ‘a denied utopia’ (Sturm 2009: 243). New Zealand as a temporary home may have come to be treasured as an idealized landscape and blissful interlude, but Kavan soon recognized that it was irrecoverable. In time, she eradicated its specificity, her feelings of enjoyment and nostalgia; her apotheosis of denial can be found represented in the symbolic frozen white landscape that is the subject of her final work—the surreal science fiction novel *Ice*.

The New Zealand sojourn comprised a hinge period in Kavan’s life between her domestic married phase as Helen Ferguson/Edmonds and her unconventional life as the independent, avant-garde writer Anna Kavan, modelled after her character in *A Stranger Still*. On her return, she redeployed her psychological alienation from her own country into a Gothicized representation of strangeness through the destabilizing of familiar constructions of time and place. Managing and controlling her New Zealand experience enabled her to exercise her imagination at a distance, engaging with the vagaries of memory to juxtapose disparate worlds. The possibility remains that Kavan would not have probed these recessive spaces so deeply had she not experienced so vividly and intensely a contrasting landscape and society which acted as ‘other’ to the European ones she was familiar with. This created a new tension, which she explored in her subsequent work as she recognized over time the impossibility of sustaining any meaningful connection between such vastly different places.

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