Vision beyond Visual Perception

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The editors wish to express grateful thanks to Margaret Edgcumbe for kind permission to quote from the poetry of Kendrick Smithyman in Chapter 2.

ABBREVIATIONS

1 = first person
3 = third person
1TR = one-argument transitive verb
ACC = accusative
ANA = anaphoric
AP = antipassive
ART = article
ASP = aspect
CAUS = causative
COM = comitative
COMPL = complementiser
COREF = coreferential
DAT = dative
DEF = definite marker
DP = demonstrative pronoun
DP.AUD.NVIS = demonstrative pronoun audible non-visible
EVID = evidential
EXP = experiencer
F = feminine
GEN = genitive
GOAL = goal
IMP = imperative
IMPFV = imperfective
INS = instrumental
IPFV = imperfective
INAN = inanimate
INST = instrument
LOC = locative
M = masculine
MOD = modifier
N = neuter
NEG = negative
NF = non-finite
NOM = nominative
O = object

OBJ = object
OBL = oblique
REF = reflexive
PASS = passive
PL = plural
POSS = possessive
PP = prepositional phrase
PRED = predicate
PROG = progressive
PRF = perfect
PRFV = perfective
PRS = present tense
PRT = participle
PST = past tense
REFL = reflexive
REL = relative
REP = reported
Q = question (-formative)
SG = singular
TEMP = temporal
TOP = topic
TR = transitive

CHAPTER ONE

DIFFERENT VIEWS ON VISION

JUNICHI TOYOTA AND IAN RICHARDS

Introduction

Vision plays an essential part in any living creature's world. Vision is related to the eyes, and almost all creatures have organs that can be considered as a receptor of vision. A well-known exception for this is troglobites which live their entire lives in the dark parts of a cave, and they normally lack eyes, but have a vestige that used to react to light. Evolutionary biologists such as Dawkins (1997) and Parker (2004) discuss the evolution of eyes, and argue that primitive, unicellular organisms, such as the sea tickle (*Noctiluca scintillans*), all started to receive a sensation of light, and eyes started with this function. From this point on, different creatures evolved their eyes according to their needs, and some retained a primitive version of 'eyes', while others have developed a highly intricate system, and the high-resolution vision found in human beings, with the ability to distinguish shapes, distance and colours of objects, is merely one version of vision. Dawkins assumes that there are at least 40 to 60 different evolutionary paths (Dawkins 1997: 127), but there is one underlying function, i.e. the receiving of light.

In human culture and cognition, however, the functions of eyes are not restricted only to the reception of light. Eyes or vision can be used in various ways, and various metaphorical extensions can suggest that an eye can be an indicator of the future in many languages, to the extent that it becomes a grammatical marker (cf. Heine and Kuteva 2002: 128-130). This is so because eyes are placed on the front side of our body, and if the future is considered to lie in front of us, eyes are often associated with this temporal concept and used as a sign to refer to futurity.

Vision in this sense can reflect upon our culture and social history, and this volume provides an interdisciplinary view on some aspects of vision in human culture.

Linguistics, anthropology and perception so far

Expressions relating to perception have attracted much attention from interdisciplinary researchers working on languages. Notable studies are Viberg (1984) and Evans and Wilkinson (2000), who report a case of languages in Australia and Papua New Guinea where a verb of hearing plays a major role. Viberg (1984: 136) presents a hierarchical order of perception, as represented in Figure 1. This hierarchy shows that vision is the prime perception in humans. This can be shown in the metaphorical extension of various perceptions, and the vision-based metaphor is perhaps most commonly found. For instance, earlier verbs of vision developed into verbs of knowledge in Indo-European languages through metaphorisation, i.e. a Proto-Indo-European verb **weyd* 'see' became the English *wise* or *wit* or Irish *fíos* 'knowledge'. Similarly, the development of the Proto-Germanic *wáit* 'I know' originates from the same Proto-Indo-European verb, but its perfective sense 'I have completed seeing' was not shifted to the past tense 'I saw/have seen', but rather to 'I know'. One may not be aware that the verb 'know' is related to vision in modern languages, e.g. the German *wissen* 'know', but instances like these show the dominance of vision in human cognition. This vision-centred perception is schematically represented in Figure 2, which suggests the applicability of vision to other perceptions.

Sight > Hearing > Touch > Smell / Taste

Figure 1. Hierarchical order of perception

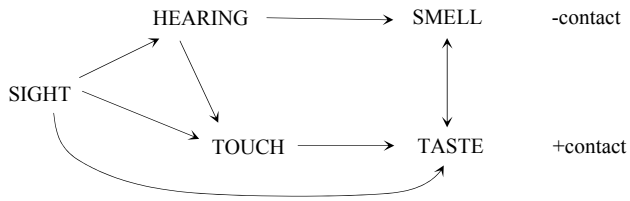

Figure 2. Semantic extensions in perceptual modalities (Viberg 1984: 147)

However, there are other languages in the world, i.e. Australian and Papuan languages as well as the Bantu languages spoken in East Africa, where a verb of hearing plays a major role and it is used as a base for a

metaphorical extension referring to cognition, e.g. 'I hear your point' meaning 'I understand your point'. For instance, an Australian language Pitjantjatjara has a verb *kulini* 'hear', as in (1a), and it is highly polysemous. Among various senses, this verb can be used as a verb of cognition, as exemplified in (1b). This is not what is expected in, for instance, Indo-European languages, and what is unique in these languages is that verbs of hearing seem to be the prime source for semantic extensions. Evans and Wilkinson (2000) revise Figure 2 as Figure 3. In Figure 3, it is clear that the verb of hearing plays a central role, and the dotted line here shows a dubious case and this extension is dependent on how one interprets data and thus they leave it open for interpretation.

Pitjantjatjara (Australian, Evans and Wilkinson 2000: 563, 564)

(1) a. *Ngayulu* *anangu-ngku* *wangkanytjala* *kulinu*
I people-ERG talk.NOMZR.LOC hear.PST
'I hear people talking.'

b. *Mutuka/ compyter* *ngayulu* *putu* *kulini*
car computer I in.van understand.PRS
'I don't understand cars/computers.'

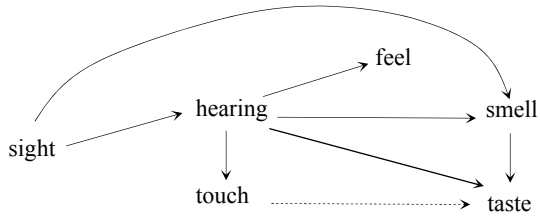

Figure 3. Semantic extensions across perceptual modalities in Australian languages (Evans and Wilkinson 2000: 560)

The diversity here may puzzle some, but one possible interpretation is found in cultural difference. Sasha Aikhenvald (p.c.) suggests that those languages that put emphasis on the verb of hearing are spoken in a culture where religiously-gifted people (i.e. shamans, spiritual healers, etc.) have a special power and a social role in their local society. They are said to be able to see 'everything', including ancestral spirits. Thus, the verb of vision is reserved to these gifted people and the common people have resorted to the second most prominent perception, i.e. hearing, and this is how the verb of hearing became prominent in languages in specific parts of the world.

A similar interesting case related to local religious beliefs is found in East Africa, where an olfactory verb can be a base for semantic extension. Thanassoula (2013) reports the case of Lussesse, a Bantu language spoken on the Ssesse Island in Lake Victoria. This language also has a highly polysemous verb of hearing *-húlirà*, similar to Australian and Papuan languages. This suggests a close link between the use of perception verbs and local religions. What is peculiar in East Africa is that people believe that ancestors communicate through smell according to a local religion in the region, and only religiously-gifted people can interpret smells. In this culture, smell gains a special status among different perceptions, unlike anywhere else in the world. As Figure 4 shows, *-núuka* 'smell good' can be extended to cognition, and this use is only found among religious people, and common people use the verb of hearing for various extensions including cognition. The use of an olfactory verb as a base for semantic extension is typologically rare, but the case in East Africa reinforces a link between religious influence and use of perception verbs as suggested by Aikhenvald.

Figure 4. Lussesse (Bantu) perception (Thanassoula 2013: 255)

As shown here, previous research on perception is normally in relation to psychology/cognition or anthropology. Perception is indeed a

multidimensional topic, but purely linguistic analysis dealing with internal structures of perception has rarely been done, except for a description of structures in reference grammars. In what follows, internal linguistic structures denoting perception will be analysed, stemming from an analysis of a system in Serbian.

Literary studies and reflection on culture

It can be argued that a major part of the Modern movement in western culture is the recognition of the slippery relationship between perception and its representation, whether in speech or in art. Visual perception has been a factor in this almost from the beginning, such as when the painter Claude Monet surprised the public in 1874 with his painting 'Impression, Sunrise', a painting that did not attempt to offer up a perfect copy of what the eye might see, but rather gave an indication of what the mind might register as significant in the data passed to it by the perceiving eye. A little later the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure was explaining that language is at best an arbitrary collection of signs agreed on by a community, and the poet Wallace Stevens was showing in 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird' that art could behold but never contain reality, since a fourteenth way of looking at a blackbird would always exist.

Perception has a strong element of cultural construction, since the brain must organize what it senses, particularly its visual information, and this is then mediated through language. Modern art and letters have always been acutely conscious of this fact, and a perfect example of what happens when the process breaks down is supplied by Jean-Paul Sartre in his classic existentialist novel, *Nausea*, as the hero, Roquentin, perceives the black root of a chestnut tree in a park without the shaping benefit of the labels supplied by language.

> I was thinking without words, *about* things, *with* things […] That black there, against my foot, didn't look like black, but rather the confused effort to imagine black by somebody who had never seen black and who wouldn't have known how to stop, who would have imagined an ambiguous creature beyond the colours. It resembled a colour but also…a bruise or again a secretion, a yolk—and something else, a smell for example, it melted into a smell of wet earth, of warm, moist wood, into a black smell spread like varnish over that sinewy wood, into a taste of sweet, pulped fibre. (Sartre 1938: 185-7)

Significantly, Sartre begins with a visual image in his efforts to break down the reader's (and his hero's) certainties of perception, since it is our visual sense which is dominant, and of which we feel the surest.

The idea of having never seen the colour black may seem strange to us at first—although it has been demonstrated that different cultures have widely different terms for their perceptions of the colour spectrum—but the issue of perceiving, labelling and understanding has been highlighted in western culture by the voyages of exploration that followed Christopher Columbus's discovery of the Americas in the late fifteenth century. Explorers, and then settlers, had to come to terms with new environments for which their language and art forms could not easily account: these forms were then forced to adapt. This adaption process has led directly to what is now termed Post-Colonial literature and art, and the case of New Zealand literature is featured in this volume as an example.

But problems of adaption can be a two-way process, and just as new environments can cause difficulties with perception and representation, so too the relationship between old-world and new-world cultures can create difficulties of perception for those who have been raised in new-world cultures. The Caribbean writer V.S. Naipaul focuses on this peculiarity in his essay 'Jasmine'. He writes of how, having grown up in Trinidad, he was familiar as a schoolboy with the works of British literature long before he had any concrete experience, visual or otherwise, of what he was reading. This fact tended to turn the English language into a kind of game in which words existed without referents, and occasionally vice-versa, a game where his old-world cultural heritage could interfere even with his perceptions of his own environment.

> A little over three years ago I was in British Guiana. […] Suddenly the tropical daylight was gone, and from the garden came the scent of a flower. I knew the flower from my childhood; yet I had never found out its name. I asked now.
>
> 'We call it jasmine.'
>
> Jasmine! So I had known it all those years! To me it had been a word in a book, a word to play with, something removed from the dull vegetation I knew. […] Jasmine. Jasmine. But the word and the flower had been separate in my mind for too long. They did not come together. (Naipaul 1972: 30-1)

As shown here, cultural issues will always complicate perception of any kind as the brain tries to distinguish and order its information, but perhaps these issues will always affect visual perception most of all, since it is our surest source of contact with our world. Certainly it is one of the roles of

the creative artist to defamiliarize the world for us and make us see with fresh eyes what is before us, and also to remind us of the extraordinary degree of subjectivity with which we all perceive our common environment.

Topics covered in this volume

This volume consists of three parts, i.e. socio-cultural studies, cognitive-semiotic studies, anthropological and linguistic studies. The first part, socio-cultural studies, contains two papers. The first paper by Richards discusses the struggles of earlier writers in New Zealand with landscape, known as the South Island Myth, and presents how vision played a role in establishing a base in a formerly Philistine New Zealand for its future literature. The second paper by Shchepetunina analyses the meanings of vision in various mythological stories, particularly African, Ancient Greek and Ancient Japanese myths. A particular focus is made on the forbidden gaze which may lead to creation in some cases.

The second part focuses on cognitive-semiotic aspects of vision. Toyota contributes two papers here: one is about languages without an overtly expressed grammatical subject, known as null-subject languages, and how internal vision can aid the grammar to augment a subject referent. His other paper deals with exceptional cases of sound symbolism focusing on a Cushitic language, Somali, arguing that what is referred to by sound symbolism may not be restricted to actual size, but includes a size perceived in one's vision in relation to distance. Vinogradova analyses pictograms, including the modern emoji characters and ancient Chinese characters, paying attention to the position of components and its influence on meanings, and the modification of meanings, as well as the interpretation of movements in a static representation.

The third part, anthropological and linguistic studies, contains two papers dealing with linguistic aspects of vision. Stuwe-Thanasoula presents current research on perception, especially vision, in African languages, comparing various languages in different language families and regions in Africa. Toyota and Kovačević work on a case study of perception in Serbian, presenting how linguistically creative Serbian as well as other Slavic languages can be when it comes to expressions of perception, including vision.

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PART ONE:

SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDIES

CHAPTER TWO

NEW ZEALAND'S SOUTH ISLAND MYTH: THE EVOLUTION OF A LITERARY IDEA

IAN RICHARDS

Abstract. On their arrival in New Zealand from Europe, the first settlers felt a profound sense of alienation from their adopted environment and a resulting sense of unease about their place within it. This view coalesced into an idea known as the 'South Island Myth', a view that the landscape remained coldly indifferent and even hostile to European settlement. This indifference could thus often be damaging to the settlers, blighting their physical and mental lives. The South Island Myth then permeated early New Zealand writing, especially the country's poetry, and still later transformed itself into a more provincial complaint by writers about the difficulties of pursuing the arts and culture in a largely Philistine land. Finally with the nation's development the South Island Myth began to recede from the local literary scene, but it was then playfully revived by Post-Modernist writers as an idea that could be exploited in poems of wit. Examples from the works of Edward Tregear, Charles Brasch, Kendrick Smithyman, and Bill Manhire are used to illustrate this thesis.

Introduction

In 1961 the Polish writer Stanislaw Lem published *Solaris*, a science-fiction novel about the discovery by humans of sentient life on a distant planet. The planet is studied, and scientists soon find to their amazement that it is the entire planet itself which is alive and not simply some creatures inhabiting the surface. Attempts are then made to observe and understand this phenomenon, and several chapters in the book detail catalogues of scientific data concerning the oceans which seem to cover the planet, though none of this information offers any insight into the deeper workings of the living organism. The ocean, which at first is imagined to be a source of the planet's life, turns out to be only something else which resembles an ocean. Eventually a space station is built around

the planet that scientists can visit, and in an attempt to communicate with this baffling life form X-rays are fired into its surface. This action results in a series of bizarre appearances on the space station of people created by the planet from the scientists' own minds, soon revealing a lot about the scientists themselves but failing to reveal anything about the planet's consciousness, much less any way of communicating with it. At the end of the novel the scientists are no nearer understanding or communicating with the exotic planetary form of life which they have found than they were at the beginning.

It is possible to read *Solaris* as a contemporary updating of the many European voyages of discovery in the centuries between Christopher Columbus and James Cook. European explorers, and then settlers, arrived in lands so alien as to baffle them, and any indigenous inhabitants, to the extent that these people were regarded as anything other than a hindrance, were often viewed simply as extensions or reflections of the Europeans themselves. Bafflement and a limited viewpoint became the natural responses in an alien world. The scientists in *Solaris* can understand the living planet only in terms of its not being like themselves, and the same was true for European explorers. During exploration and even after settlement, the landscape—the primary node of contact with the new environment, a something else which only spuriously resembled things at home—could offer no easy point of entry. Sometimes a crisis of perception followed and became a source of anxiety.

For New Zealanders this anxiety, an intense desire to understand and feel at home in a foreign landscape that they had chosen to inhabit, or even more alarmingly a still-pristine landscape they had been born and raised in, permeated through settler life and art from near the very beginning, and continued to be a common theme among local writers for most of the first half of the twentieth century. Edward Tregear's 'Te Whetu Plains' is a case in point. It was published in a collection in 1919, though possibly it was written as early as 1872. The poem therefore often appears near the start of anthologies of New Zealand literature since, as Tregear's biographer, K.R. Howe, has noted, 'Te Whetu Plains' 'has often been seen as encapsulating a more general state of mind—that of an immigrant's alienation in the strange landscape of a new country' (Howe 1987: 55). In the poem Tregear regards Te Whetu Plains at night, an empty place in a densely forested area—a place notable above all for being dark and silent—as a kind of early isolation tank. He makes the place stand for an image, redolent with nineteenth-century religious doubt, of the horror in any possible life that might exist after death. If the newly scientific view of the creation of the world is correct and any afterlife does not involve a

conventional Christian heaven, Tregear reasons, then the afterlife would be somewhere permanently removed from all the sights, sounds, and sensations of home. It does not matter to Tregear that the plains are in 'moonlit darkness'; he cannot see anything familiar in the outlines of the 'giant terraces' below him. Despite the plentiful bird sounds to be heard during the New Zealand daytime, at night the antipodean plains are silent, without birdsong and with no noise from a 'far-off' stream, but Tregear can express this only with a kind of colonial negative capability, as lacking English and Romantic-literary sounds:

> 'tis a songless land
> That hears no music of the nightingale,
> No sound of waters falling lone and grand
> Through sighing forest to the lower vale,
> No whisper in the grass, so wan and grey, and pale.
> (Wedde & McQueen 1985: 97)

Unlike most birds, nightingales sing after dusk, and moreover, they were a common Romantic-era trope for the nature-inspired poet, so that Tregear's 'songless land' suggests a cultural as well as a geographic failure. Tregear may even have in mind John Keats's Romantic reverie in his famous 'Ode to a Nightingale' as an implicit contrast, where the sound of a nightingale's song, allied to 'the wings of Poesy', puts the poet into a blissful reverie, a state which he then compares to the ecstasy of being in heaven after death. But this New Zealand landscape offers only a 'ghastly peace' of silence, a nothingness for an alienated consciousness totally deprived of any familiar comforts. Unlike Keats's cosy garden with its English nightingale singing in the twilight, the exotic Te Whetu Plains fail as a site for any ecstatic release from the self in nature. Furthermore, once Tregear feels deprived by science of the spiritual comforts of Christianity, this landscape no longer allows him the worship of nature as a substitute for religion.

The 1930s and 1940s

The uneasy relationship to the landscape expressed by Tregear, in which the environment is viewed wholly in terms of non-recognition and negatives, so that its birds are not nightingales and its rivers not well-known streams, coalesced in the later work of several New Zealand-born writers, most of them based in the South Island, into an attitude, a local myth, which was then available for poetry. It was arguably the first authentic literary idea that evolved directly from Pakeha (meaning New

Zealand European) responses to the new landscape.[1] The New Zealand environment was soon seen as familiar—since it was the only landscape available for direct experience—but one still unwelcoming and indifferent to its new inhabitants, unlike the British landscapes of the settlers' origins. The land was presented as beautiful but coldly indifferent to settlement. It was seen as unwelcoming in its rugged contrast to Europe. Sometimes it was viewed as downright hostile, the sort of place in which people's development was stunted and damaged. This unwelcoming quality in the local landscape appeared to a greater or lesser extent in the work of New Zealand poets as otherwise diverse as D'Arcy Cresswell, Ursula Bethell, Charles Brasch, Denis Glover, and Allen Curnow, and it became known loosely as the 'South Island Myth'. The critic Lawrence Jones's excellent account of the growth of this idea and of the literary movements which developed in the early 1930s and 40s details how the South Island Myth grew into fruition as an 'anti-myth' to the rosy-tinted view that 'New Zealand was "God's own country", a pastoral paradise and a Just City, based on an ideal English model, being perfected through an historical process of triumphant progress' (Jones 2003: 173). The South Island Myth was nicely epitomised by Allen Curnow's 1941 poem 'House and Land' with its Auden-influenced, proletarian-style rhymes describing a New Zealand 'spirit of exile'. Its much-quoted closing lines are:

> Awareness of what great gloom
> Stands in a land of settlers
> With never a soul at home. (Wedde & McQueen 1985: 198)

The South Island Myth was also described at length, and often in mystical terms, in the essays of M.H. Holcroft, and perhaps reached its high-water mark when Holcroft's book *The Deepening Stream* won the essay prize in the 1940 New Zealand Centennial Literary Competition. The idea received possibly its most plaintive, Romantic articulation in Charles Brasch's poems, notably 'The Silent Land', where 'The plains are nameless and the cities cry out for meaning', and where the problem with the landscape is explicitly diagnosed as a lack of satisfactory history:

> Man must lie with the gaunt hills like a lover,
> Earning their intimacy in the calm sigh
> Of a century of quiet and assiduity (Curnow 1945: 133)

[1] The word 'Pakeha' is a Maori word, commonly used by all New Zealanders, for non-indigenous New Zealand people.

It is worth noting that the South Island Myth was, above all, a Pakeha notion of the land. The Polynesian Maori, the indigenous inhabitants of New Zealand, featured in this view of the land scarcely at all, a fact that seems incredible today. But at the time the prevailing colonial view was that the Maori were a dying race, a tragic group of Romantically dusky forebears being swept away by more advanced Pakeha arrivals. Furthermore, those Maori who might survive this replacement process would do so by becoming thoroughly assimilated into Pakeha ways, so that any remnants of indigenous familiarity they might have with the landscape would become, at the very least, irrelevant and quaint. It was a convenient view, if you were Pakeha, and perhaps it was no coincidence that the South Island Myth flourished in the South Island, where picture postcard scenery was plentiful and the Maori population was low. But excluding Maori from any consideration of the relationship between Pakeha and the new land also masked a subtler and perhaps darker factor. On the whole, the alienation of Pakeha from their new environment was seen in the culture of the South Island Myth as a failure on the part of the environment itself, and not so much a failure by Pakeha settlers. The Maori, with their own indigenous culture already adapted to their homeland, could figure in such a relationship only as a reproach to Pakeha failure or, at best, as an encouragement, a pointer towards future adaptation by Pakeha and the possibility of success. But neither of these would foster the notion of Pakeha as more advanced, civilising arrivals. While the new scenery was being observed with anxiety, suspicion, or disgust, Maori were best left out of the picture.

The 1950s and 1960s

Critical accounts of the South Island Myth usually end in the 1930s or 40s, but the idea itself seems to have hung on and to have been adapted in the work of later writers. By the 1950s and 60s the prevailing anxiety with the landscape had transformed itself somewhat among the literati into a kind of urban hauteur directed towards a rural country: it had become the complaint of the sensitive artist, an inheritor of European sophistications, about living in a provincial land which did not much value the arts. This anxiety no longer indicated solidarity with Pakeha living in the harsh wilds of a daunting country, but rather it had become an unease about living and creating art in a hostile land of all-too-happy Philistines, a land where practical activities counted and where poetry and culture did not. A good example of this view, and certainly an example of a poem directed at the

urban cognoscenti, is Kendrick Smithyman's 'Colville', which was written in 1968.

Born in 1922, half a generation after Brasch and Curnow, and having grown up in Northland and Auckland instead of in the south, Kendrick Smithyman saw the South Island Myth and its conventions for writing about the New Zealand landscape from some critical distance, both in terms of time and geography. Early on, together with fellow aspiring poets Keith Sinclair and Robert Chapman, he even formed the 'Mud Flats School' in specific opposition to the dewy-eyed mysticism of South-Island-Myth-inspired writing. The School did not last, but from the outset Smithyman clearly intended to write poetry that was tougher and smarter than the work of his predecessors, and which would be more of a direct response to the New Zealand landscape than a mere complaint of what the landscape was not. In Smithyman's papers 'Colville' is recorded as having being written on 11 January 1968, so that the poem may have resulted from a summer holiday visit, and Smithyman in fact had a son who lived for a time on a commune in the region (Smithyman 1989: 75). Colville is a small town in the North Island, located near the top of the Coromandel peninsula, with its lone general store regarded as a last stop for provisions and petrol. The area is well known for fishing, and today Colville has an alternative-lifestyle, cosmopolitan atmosphere that it did not have at the time Smithyman had in mind when he wrote of it. For this reason Smithyman at one stage titled the poem 'Colville 1964', to place it in the context of the recent past, although the date was dropped from the title in his *Selected Poems* and in later works.[2] In its entirety the poem reads:

That sort of place where you stop
long enough to fill the tank, buy plums,
  perhaps, and an icecream thing on a stick
while somebody local comes
  in, leans on the counter, takes a good look
    but does not like what he sees of you,

intangible as menace,
a monotone with a name, as place
  it is an aspect of human spirit
(by which shaped), mean, wind-worn. Face
  outwards, over the saltings: with what merit
    the bay, wise as contrition, shallow

[2] Smithyman confirmed all this in a private letter to me written on 17 May, 1994.

as their hold on small repute,
good for dragging nets which men are doing
  through channels, disproportioned in the blaze
of hot afternoon's down-going
  to a far, fire-hard tide's rise
    upon the vague where time is distance?

It could be plainly simple
pleasure, but these have another tone
  or quality, something aboriginal,
reductive as soil itself—bone
  must get close here, final
    yet unrefined at all. They endure.

A school, a War Memorial
Hall, the store, neighbourhood of salt
  and hills. The road goes through to somewhere else.
Not a geologic fault
  line only scars textures of experience.
    Defined, plotted; which maps do not speak. (Smithyman 1989: 75)

The poem begins in a dismissive tone, describing the town of Colville as typical of 'That sort of place' where you do not stop long except for petrol, local products like plums, and an ice-cream snack. The poet employs an impersonal 'you' in speaking which appears to be the product of his train of thought as events unfold, but which also usefully includes the reader. The visiting poet's shopping activities involve entering the general store and thus, inevitably, being sized up by 'somebody local', a person who comes in and 'does not like what he sees of you'. This local is presented as typical, an inarticulate 'monotone with a name', someone hard to read but nevertheless vaguely threatening and therefore 'intangible as menace'. The visiting poet concludes that Colville as a place reflects, and is shaped by, 'an aspect of human spirit' which is 'mean, wind-worn'. The local environment has damaged the local people.

Turning away from the counter in the store, the poet faces out towards the view 'over the saltings', the narrow bay of coastal water visible nearby, while he also takes in a broader view of the place as a whole. He asks himself what 'merit' the bay might have. His answer appears in two gnomic phrases: 'wise as contrition, shallow/ as their hold on small repute'. These two lines might be construed as the bay being: 'wise in the form of showing some sort of contrition or sorrow for its own sins' and 'shallow in its waters in the same shallow way as the locals have any small claim to a good reputation'; yet ultimately the extreme compression of the phrases

aims to yield the poet's fleeting impressions rather than his carefully formulated thoughts. After these moments of largely abstract speculation the poet's mind directs itself further outwards again to take in more concrete details. He notes the bay's utility—it may be a handy spot for fishing with nets—and he observes some men doing just this, 'dragging nets' in the late afternoon heat against the indistinct horizon. Where, the poet seems to be wondering, does a merely human settlement, someplace provisional like Colville, really fit into all of this natural vastness and eternity?

In the next stanza the poet then goes on to reconsider his previous views.

> It could be plainly simple
> pleasure, but these have another tone
> or quality, something aboriginal,
> reductive as soil itself—bone
> must get close here, final
> yet unrefined at all. They endure. (Smithyman 1989: 75)

He begins by thinking that the men dragging nets might be doing so for 'plainly simple/ pleasure', like holidaymakers, but decides instead that their activities 'have another tone/ or quality, something aboriginal'. They are working in the manner of people who have become, at least in part, indigenous to their environment, and so their fishing is as 'reductive', or simple and unembellished, as the 'soil' or land which they live on. The poet now suddenly muses in more general terms, admonishing himself and perhaps the reader, that 'bone/ must get close here'. Just as the beginning of the stanza played with the expression 'plain and simple', rendering it as 'plainly simple', so too here the poet plays cleverly with the expression 'close to the bone'. His cleverness may be a small, linguistic act of avoidance of the full implications of his thoughts: it is certainly a bit close to the bone, or true to the point of discomfort, for the poet to acknowledge that this, the act of dragging nets in a shallow bay, is what it is to be local, adapted, and like a native, rather than displaying the urban sophistication which the poet evidenced at the start of the poem and which he has maintained until this point. Practical work is how you get your living bones close to the soil. It is the 'final' state in the process of adaptation to the new environment, and yet it is not refined at all. Culture, in the refined European sense of the word, is not anywhere involved in this process. 'They endure', the poet concludes of the local men going about their fishing, with the weighty implication unspoken that the poet and his big-city ways, which are merely imported from overseas, will not endure. The

poet's consideration of the bay, 'wise as contrition, shallow/ as their hold on small repute', which was both unfocused and over-compressed, suddenly might apply just as well to the poet himself.

Before leaving, the poet has a last look at Colville, taking it in at a glance. What he sees are buildings related to the simple necessities and rituals of a settlement, 'A school, a War Memorial/ Hall, the store'. After that there are only the nearby hills. The poet announces that 'The road goes through to somewhere else', a line that could have been lifted out of almost any poem expounding the South Island Myth, except that in this case the poet's departure suggests a revived self-importance which is also perhaps tinged with a sense of relief at his escape. He begins the second half of his final stanza with the observation that the place he has visited is not a 'geologic fault/ line', or some kind of mistake in the landscape, (though like most of New Zealand, Colville probably lies along earthquake fault lines, and the place does perhaps form a fault line, a pressure point, in the poet's thinking, albeit one which he is keen to deny). Colville is just a place which makes 'scars' of habitation, the poet decides, as the locals' experience accumulates of and in this new land. In the last line of the poem, as the town recedes into the distance for the departing poet and becomes no more than a reference on his map, Smithyman uses the ambiguities available in the language of map-reading to note that Colville can be 'Defined' and 'plotted' on a map, but the town is defining itself and plotting its own story in a way which maps, the products of urbanized and sophisticated methodologies, cannot explain: 'Defined, plotted; which maps do not speak.'

Other notable poets writing in a similar vein in the 1950s and 60s are Peter Bland, Louis Johnson, and even James K. Baxter. Johnson and Baxter both use images lifted from the landscape to diagnose the privations that they see as specific to Philistine New Zealand life. Johnson's 1952 poem 'Magpies and Pines' employs magpies as threatening birds which have been known to disrupt people's well-fed morning reveries and 'drop through mists of bacon-fat/ with a gleaming eye, to the road where a child stood screaming'. Johnson also employs 'the secretive trees' in the 'dark park', which have to be resorted to by lovers for stolen kisses or any other sexual activity, to help the poet indict the puritan repressiveness which blights the lives of New Zealand's sensitive young (Wedde & McQueen 1985: 312). Magpies and pine trees are both introduced species which seem to have displaced what was in the past the simply natural and pleasurable. As a result, in such a degraded world sex becomes a complicated and subversive act which finds 'small truth/ in the broken silence'. Similarly Baxter's famous sequence 'Pig Island Letters',

published in 1966, uses its opening stanzas to describe an impoverished landscape, 'an old house shaded with macrocarpas', from which the poet diagnoses a land suffering from a lack of human love and affection (Wedde & McQueen 1985: 337-8). Baxter claims he is able to diagnose this suffering accurately because the same lack of love in the land has affected himself and become 'my malady'. He suggests that a sense of alienation is something innate which he shares with his fellow New Zealanders, so that he 'will lie some day with their dead.'

Thus it might almost be possible to graph the responses of the first New Zealand writers to their new homeland, where the vertical axis is an ascending sense of alienation and the horizontal access is the passage of time away from first contact. The resulting graph would probably appear as something like a power-law (or Pareto) graph, plunging steeply from high up on the vertical axis into a tight turn and then drifting on in a low, drawn-out trajectory. At the beginning of the graph's time axis early writers, like Tregear (anticipating the scientists in *Solaris* at first contact), would see their environment wholly in terms of non-recognition and negatives, that its birds were not nightingales, its rivers not well-known streams and so on, so that their sense of alienation would rate extremely high. This sense would diminish with the writers' greater familiarity with the environment, exhibiting itself in poems like Allen Curnow's 1941 'House and Land', where the landscape is more familiar but seen as still unwelcoming. At last it would descend further into poems which present the New Zealand landscape rather more as somewhere readers would recognise and feel at home in, but which is still hostile to the arts and to the activities of artists who would like to transform or influence the local scene. It would ultimately be impossible to put meaningful labels on these two axes of the graph, but poems might be placed in an approximate fashion on the graph's curve by considering the texts in relation to each other, and the poems might be expected to appear along the horizontal time axis more or less in the chronological order of their publication.

Beyond the 1960s

As New Zealand continued to develop and diversify, the essentially provincial complaints of local writers concerning Philistinism began in themselves to seem old-fashioned, and the last remnants of the South Island Myth largely disappeared from the country's literature. This was not entirely an end to the matter, however. Once the South Island Myth had degenerated into little more than an old-fashioned attitude, it became a trope which revisionist poets could then take advantage of. By the 1980s