

Jörg-Dieter Riemenschneider

Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Poetry: A Cultural and an Evocritical Reading

*Kimihia te kahurangi; ki te piko tōu matenga, ki te maunga teitei.
If you bow your head let it be only to a great mountain. (Grace
36)*

More than a century after the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* research from an evolutionary perspective on understanding human beings has made inroads into many fields of study, including psychology, ethology, the arts and literature. In this discipline, evolutionary literary criticism or evocriticism (Boyd 388) has emerged as a research programme geared towards deepening "our understanding and appreciation of literature" based on the assumption

that a biocultural approach to literature requires that we take seriously that evolution has powerfully shaped not just our bodies but also our minds and behaviour". (210)

This is not to indicate that evocriticism side-lines or even replaces nonevolutionary scholarship (390); on the contrary, by complementing historical and cultural analyses of literary works it will create the basis for comparative cultural studies.

Evocriticism increasingly practised over the last two decades (Boyd 417; Carroll 2010), has concentrated on problems of theory, of narration, narrative and fiction, and to some degree also on drama: fields of enquiry examined in detail in Brian Boyd's ground-breaking book *On the Origin of Stories* (2009), a comprehensive study subtitled *Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction*. However, here as elsewhere evocriticism has not yet researched into the genre of poetry, and in particular landscape poetry: an

astounding lacuna since studies on nature and the origin of art, resp. the environment and aesthetics have been undertaken.¹³

This paper will analyse Aotearoa New Zealand landscape poetry from both a cultural and an evolutionary psychological angle, to contribute to the field of evocritical analyses of literature and to demonstrate that the biocultural approach will enrich our understanding of landscape poetry and will contribute to comparative culture studies.

Poems on Land and Landscape Poetry

Landscape poetry, or the poetic rendering of our familiar and unfamiliar surroundings, reflects the human relationship with the environment. It is an aesthetic formation of experience based on mental perceptions of the world: of a place visited, a location lived in temporarily or chosen as permanent habitat. Aotearoa New Zealand landscape offers a particularly rich temporal-spatial corpus of texts due to the multifarious scenery of the islands as experienced and responded to poetically in very differing ways. Derived from the ethno-cultural variety of the country's main immigrant and settler groups – Polynesians and Europeans as well as, more recently, Pacific Islanders and Asians – landscape poetry embraces a wide spectrum of poetic voices that explore the involvement and often enchantment of human beings' relationship to their natural surroundings.

The poet, performance artist and literary critic David Eggleton has pointed out that there exist at least three attitudes to the environment in Aotearoa New Zealand: *manawhenua*, or the

¹³ Ellen Dissanayake, *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995 [reprint]); Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Knopf, 1995); John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, "Does beauty build adapted minds? Toward an evolutionary theory of aesthetics, fiction and the arts", *Substance* 30, 1-2 (2001), 6-27; Glen Love, *Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology and the Environment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003); Dennis Dutton, *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure and Evolution* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009).

relationship of Maori people to their land; a Pakeha definition of land as commodity and a place to be exploited; and land seen as wilderness, a view shared by Maori and Pakeha. *Manawhenua* is

that sense of belonging that connects people and land. The landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand is our cultural centre of gravity, our leading literary theme, our dominant metaphor ... [T]he land is our waka, our location beacon, a site of layered history. (Eggleton 7)

Yet he adds that

'New Zealand' is [also] a site of competing versions, a site of struggle: aesthetic consideration clashes with commercial consideration; conservation clashes with exploitation; methods of ownership are disputed [...]; heritage versus progress. (Eggleton 7)

It would certainly be appropriate at this point to analyse poems on land from the social-cultural perspective of Eggleton's view, which had to take into account the writers' differing ethnic backgrounds – as much as it would be worth our while to focus on the country's ecology and its future. This also raises the question as to whether these poetic texts are classifiable along clearly marked ethno-cultural boundary lines, or whether processes of globalisation have not already effected a blurring of such distinctions. Nevertheless, I am interested in pursuing a very different analytical approach. Based on assumptions in evolutionary psychology that human relationship to nature is engendered by our species' environmental adaptations, occasioned by its encounters with landscapes, Richerson and Boyd hold that

[when] the environment confronts generation after generation of individuals with the same range of adaptive problems, selection will favor special-purpose cognitive modules that focus on particular environmental cues and then map these cues onto a menu of adaptive behaviors. (Richerson and Boyd 44)

Gordon H. Orians and Judith H. Heerwagen's enquiry into "environmental aesthetics from an evolutionary and ecological perspective" (Barkow, Cosmides, Tooby 551) relates directly to

such “special-purpose cognitive modules” with their consequent “menu of adaptive behaviors” that is part of our species’ genetic make-up. They point out that our

emotional responses ... are such powerful motivators of behaviour ... [that] they could not have evolved unless the behaviour they evoked contributed positively ... to survival and reproductive success. (Orians and Heerwagen 556)

Habitat selection probably involved emotional responses to key features of the environment (556) with positive responses to ‘good’ or beautiful landscapes and negative ones to those that did not appear to offer safeguards for survival and reproduction. As Stephen Kaplan explains in detail, savannah-like habitats evoked positive responses in *homo sapiens* because they offered unimpeded views and thus easy orientation and movement and protection by trees – against predators and the sun. Accordingly, habitat selection theory postulates that such a preferred habitat affected our responses and became part of our genetic make-up, or in Richerson and Boyd’s words, “a special-purpose cognitive module” (Richerson and Boyd 44).

Even after the ‘Neolithic Revolution’ around 10,000 years ago, with the transformation setting in from nomadic to sedentary life, these evolved responses have remained basically unchanged. The study of human responses to landscape then means studying the evolution of aesthetic tastes. Landscapes, whether natural or artificial – parks and rural landscapes –, but also urbanscapes and even architectural designs evoke pleasant or unpleasant emotional responses due to our genetic heritage, and the natural symbolism of particular features – hills, mountain summits, trees, open spaces, water, beach, the sea – have been used by artists, painters, photographers and poets to evoke and perhaps even manipulate our emotive responses, but have in any case been serving their functional purpose without artists always having been aware of them. Meanings of landscape features may be positive, negative or, as perhaps in most cases, of a mixed nature,

for example if the environment contains an element of mystery like a path possibly leading towards a destination behind a hill.

Nonetheless, studies “of environmental preferences” remain hypothetical and require more research, but have led Jerome H. Barkow and others to declare, “it already appears that our aesthetic preferences [here] are governed by a coherent and sophisticated set of organizing principles” (Barkow, Cosmides, Tooby 553). Similarly, Orians and Heerwagen’s theoretical presentation ends with the proviso that they are not suggesting “that an evolutionary-adaptive approach to environmental aesthetics is the only way to proceed”, but that it could enrich our studies “from a variety of perspectives and in a wide range of topics” (Orians and Heerwagen 575). It is precisely this suggestion I would like to take up that permits considerations of their assumptions that if attention to the stimuli from the environment “is a cross-cultural universal, as it seems likely, many of these ecological signals have been transformed, over time, into cultural events and artefacts that are used to manipulate aesthetic experience” (571).

Manawhenua–Commodification–Wilderness: Poems on Land

Before analysing a number of selected landscape poems¹⁴ from the evolutionary-biological perspective, I shall first discuss them from Eggleton’s view (Eggleton 7) on Aotearoa New Zealand’s several attitudes towards land–and landscape–described as *manawhenua*, the exploitation or commodification of land, and its vision as wilderness or primeval land that is to be protected and preserved.

¹⁴ The poems by Richard Reeve, Allen Curnow, Peter Bland, Roma Potiki and Anna Jackson are reprinted in *Wildes Licht: Gedichte englisch / deutsch aus Aotearoa Neuseeland*, ed. & trsl. Dieter Riemenschneider (Christchurch and Kronberg im Taunus, 2010), 44, 76, 92, 146 and 148 respectively. Robert Sullivan’s “Waka 99” is from Robert Sullivan, *Star Waka* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999), 109; and “Poem for the Unknown Tourist” from David Eggleton, *Rhyming Planet* (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2001), 10.

Roma Potiki's "Papatūānuku" and Robert Sullivan's "Waka 99" celebrate *manawhenua* whereas David Eggleton's "Poem for the Unknown Tourist" and Anna Jackson's "From Farming" thematize the New Zealand settlers' appropriation of land for their own use but also for commercial purposes. Land's image as wilderness is addressed in Richard Reeve's "Central Otago" and Allen Curnow's "You Will Know When You Get There", whereas Peter Bland's "Beginnings" has as its central theme an English settler's quest for his identity vis-à-vis his landownership.

Papatūānuku (1992)

I am Papatūānuku
giving completely I hold strength in its upright
form–
my base maps the pattern of mottled life,
rain and rivers.

When the rest is gone
you will know me–

you who press on my skin
tread the body you do not recognise.
With my face made of bones
my stomach eternally stretching I need no definition

I am Papatūānuku, the land.

The poem speaks of the land, *te whenua*, in a stylistic manner that reminds us of *pepeha*, formulaic expressions or tribal sayings. The Female Earth, "I am Papatūānuku", addresses the people "who tread the body" they do not recognise. Either her own people, Maori, have become alienated or newcomers have never possessed any knowledge of Papatūānuku. Earth, asserting her strength and everlasting existence – "I need no definition/I am Papatūānuku, the land" – is made to dehistoricise the *whenua tangata*, or land-people relationship: a political attitude frequently

encountered in Maori writing of their confrontational 'renaissance' period during the 1970s and 1980s.

By contrast, Robert Sullivan's "Waka 99" (1999) articulates a very different view of land and landscape:

If waka could be resurrected / they wouldn't just come out /
from museum doors smashing / glass cases revolving and sliding
/doors on their exit

they wouldn't just come out / of mountains as if liquidified /
from a frozen state / the resurrection wouldn't just / come
about this way

the South Island turned to wood / waiting for the giant crew /
of Maui and his brothers / bailers and anchors turned back /
to what they were when they were strewn

about the country by Kupe / and his relations / the
resurrection would happen / in the blood of the men and
women / the boys and girls

who are blood relations / of the crews whose veins /
touch the veins who touched the veins /
who touched the veins

who touched the veins / of the men and women from the time
of Kupe and before. / The resurrection will come /
out of their blood.

Focusing on *waka*, which is not just a canoe or, traditionally, the mythologically transformed South Island, it becomes a metaphor for both, *whenua* and *tangata* with the former taking second place. It is not the land but the people's strength and their action binding together generations of "blood relations", the *whakapapa* that will bring about their resurrection and along with it that of the land. The poem thematizes guardianship, *kaitiakitanga*. It is the people's interaction with their environment that safeguards their lives, their culture and, implicitly, the land's resources. Though it contains a subtle note of scepticism, the poem rejects the ontological stance on land and landscape promoted by "Papatūānuku" and instead shifts agency to *te tangata*.

This is a scenario that is also invoked in David Eggleton's satirical "Poem for the Unknown Tourist" (2001),¹⁵ but inverted in the sense that people's agency has led them to commodify nature and landscape: "As unleaded islands make backcountry overtures, / our hills reverberate to the sound of gallows / built for the end of the golden wether", are lines drawing the tourist's attention to building cranes that destroy the landscape and thereby deny the claim of preserving its pristine character of "unleaded islands", while the pun on "wether" – a castrated ram – and "weather" undermines the meaning of the well-known Pakeha phrase of the "end of the golden weather",¹⁶ as if the country had ever experienced such halcyon days! Further, the invitation to

[t]ake our camping grounds as you find them, / the pastoral exposition renovated as novelty toy / cowsheds cut out of corrugated tin, corkscrewing slides and water cannon / paintball war games and lasertronics

underlines the process of commodifying landscape as an amusement and money-making device, while in "our creeks leak from reservoirs of dammed emotion / our dreams are landfill in a well-known ocean", human feelings and dreams have been con/perverted into 'useful' landscapes such as reservoirs, dams and landfills. Indeed:

As the old Pacific hand, tattooed and weatherbeaten,
rows you ashore, ... [the unknown tourist will experience]
the pre-dawn hush ... broken by chainsaw roar,
as you hold yourself back from the zeal of the land.

Among Pakeha poems, Anna Jackson's "From Farming" (2001) expresses a similar awareness of the commodification of the environment but considers it part and parcel of the evolutionary development of *homo sapiens* from his life-stage as hunter-gatherer to that of agriculturalist:

¹⁵ The poem is too long to be quoted here in full.

¹⁶ The reference is to Bruce Mason's play *The End of the Golden Weather* (1960).

There is no going back / from farming proper. / Such depletion of
resources / around a community / is the end of hunter-gathering,
/ the beginning / of everything / we cannot / now live without.
/Even art / is argued to be concomitant / with the establishment /
of farming, though I think / it must depend / on what you say is
art. / At any rate, / there is no going back. / But perhaps / there
is going forward / elsewhere / than to the conclusion / we are
arriving at.

Though the poem does not specify what is meant by “everything”, it certainly suggests the historical transformation from subsistence to cash-crop farming. Nevertheless we are not tied-down biologically but possess the capacity of “going forward elsewhere”. Such carefully articulated hope for *homo sapiens*’ attitudinal change towards nature and landscape recalls Richard Dawkins’ belief in man’s potency to defy “the selfish memes of our indoctrination” in spite of our having been built “as gene machines and cultured as meme machines” (Dawkins 201).

Another land poem is the wilderness poem, relating back to a perception of landscape more prevalent in 19th century writing and pictorial art that often romanticised nature by endowing a landscape or single features with symbolic meanings that gesture towards the mysterious, the sublime and the awe-inspiring. Contemporary landscape poetry does not contain many examples of this nature, yet Richard Reeve’s “Central Otago” (2001), which is too long to be quoted here, encourages a response of wonder and awe towards a New Zealand landscape that has attracted much attention for its wide-open spaces, its seemingly untouched state shaped and ruled by the forces of wind and rain, sun and heat since the beginning of time:

Like bits of splintered moon, boulders pierce the lean body of the
table land- / proud, refractory, yielding bitterly to the wind
months hoarded / inside the rock. Voices and smells, the dust of
my early mind, / are lifted in the wind that buffets our car ...

The sky flutes among cliffs and pinnacles, gouging itself on a /
veiled edge of schist-its moan eddying through the raw stomach
of the ravine / down the flues of memory.

It is an environment so powerful, so overwhelming and at the same time uncontrollable that even people's features have adapted to and become part of it:

The shop-attendant's face has slouched, his nose a parody of the hills / that roll down the valley. His voice crackles on the stones in the river, / breath fossilised in piles of silt. But the words are inaudible: / already the pebbles are gnashing at our feet.

As Geoff Park (53-67) has argued, notions of wilderness promulgated at the time of Cook's voyages were brought to New Zealand, a land *apparently* [my emphasis] not settled and cultivated, with stretches untouched by man. Such "wild landscapes" (58) expressed the European quest at the time for grand primeval scenes as much as the conviction that the 'discovery' of this uninhabited land superseded the original inhabitants' right of possessing it. Their concept of customary tenure was disregarded and replaced by the notion of *terra nullius*.

While settlers appropriated vast stretches in the second half of the nineteenth century and converted fourteen percent of the land covered by trees in the 1880s (Abbott 155-160), a variation of the wilderness poem focuses on preserving it, a policy responding to public concerns on the destruction of forested areas and introduced by the New Zealand government towards the end of this period. Wilderness preservation would prevent 'primitive' life becoming extinct (Park 59): a Pakeha conception that contrasted strangely with the process that "Maori [were...] detached from the whenua, and their intimate, customary attachments to it [had] collapsed" (62). In addition, land taken in the 1890s from unsurveyed blocks or formerly held by Maori became the foundation for today's National Parks (Abbott 156). Subsequently, Park argues, two Pakeha ideas of landscape emerged: Where 'we' live, "indigenous life [has] almost entirely [been] removed", whereas where 'we' are not allowed to live, the landscape is still indigenous as though without us—"Our *terra nullius*, no less," (Park 65), as Reeve's poem affirms. The proportion of protected

environment is larger in New Zealand—28% of the whole land area—than almost anywhere else in the world: vast tracts of National Parks, the various ‘Ranges’ and islands—and Pakeha poems thematizing, even celebrating wilderness, without necessarily excluding moments of anxiety or awe.

Allan Curnow’s “You Will Know When You Get There” (1982), ‘cerebral’ and searching in its environmental iconography, attempts to find out whatever is ‘out there’—at or even under the sea, on land or in the sky: a groping search in a mood of bravura:

Nobody comes up from the sea as late as this / in the day and the season, and nobody else goes down / the last kilometre, wet-metalled where / a shower passed shredding the light which keeps / pouring out of its tank in the sky, through summits / trees, vapours thickening and thinning. Too / credibly by half celestial, the dammed / reservoir up there keeps emptying while the light lasts / over the seas, where it ‘gathers the gold against / it’. The light is bits of crushed rock randomly / glinting underfoot, wetted by the short / shower, and down you go and so in its way does / the sun which gets there first. Boys, two of them, / turn campfirelit faces, a hesitancy to speak / is a hesitancy of the earth rolling back and away / behind the man going down to the sea with a bag / to pick mussels, having an arrangement with the tide, / the ocean to be shallowed three point seven metres, / one hour’s light to be left and there’s the excrescent / moon sponging off the last of it. A door / slams, a heavy wave, a door, the sea-floor shudders. / Down you go alone, so late, into the surge-black fissure.

Eventually, “the man going down” remains uncertain as to the meaning of the land and the sea surrounding him, which he conceives of as elusive, mysterious and eventually hazardous.

Finally, in Peter Bland’s “Beginnings” (1987), “Guthrie-Smith in New Zealand 1885” questions both, Jackson’s “[t]here is no going back / from farming proper” and Reeve and Curnow’s bridging – if not yoking – wilderness with people’s non-agency. Guthrie-Smith initially confirms man’s duty to appropriate land and his responsibility to create for himself an acceptable habitat. Yet at the same time the speaker, a famous agriculturalist of the late

19th and early 20th century, also wonders about his identity as he finds himself caught in several roles: as settler and sheep farmer who contributes to the progress of the country:

Who am I? What am I doing here / alone with 3000 sheep? I'm / turning the bones into grass. Later/ I'll turn grass back into sheep. / I buy only the old and lame. / They eat anything–bush, bracken, gorse. / Dead, they melt into one green fleece.

Further, he takes up the double role of obedient Christian and 'Darwinian' scientist:

Who am I? I know the Lord's my shepherd / as I am theirs–
But this / is the 19th century; Darwin / is God's First Mate. I must keep / my own log, full of facts if not love.

And finally he is the name-giver who through this very act appropriates the land as his habitat and defines his identity:

Who am I? I am the one sheep / that must not get lost. So / I name names–rocks, flowers, fish: / knowing this place I learn to know myself. I survive.

The thrice repeated question "Who am I?" suggests Guthrie-Smith's uncertainty about his place, irresoluteness even which the stubborn self-affirmation in his final words cannot completely conceal:

I survive. The land becomes
my meat and tallow. I light my own lamps.
I hold back the dark with the blood of my lambs.

To conclude this section, two provisos need to be added. First, in spite of 'the wilderness', the protected areas of Parks and Reservations, there is little hope that the environment in Aotearoa New Zealand will be saved; and although the Resource Management Act–RMA of 1994 introduced restrictive measures pertaining to protecting the environment, economic growth has not been decoupled from environmental impact. Between 1990 and 2004 the country's population grew by 21%, but industrial production by 54% and agricultural production by 48%, energy

consumption by 42%, CO emission by 49%, and household waste by 48%: figures which led Rod Oram (D2) to the conclusion that successive New Zealand governments, both National and Labour, had failed, and that there was little hope for an adequate environmental policy in the future.

My second reservation relates to the often invoked, especially by Maori, spiritual *whenua tangata* relationship to *whenua*—of the people of the land to their land—and the danger of claiming the validity of a concept that is counteracted in practice. As Howe remarked:

All human communities, even the earliest and smallest, have always profoundly altered the flora and fauna of the planet ... and New Zealand was no exception, though its size and relatively small population meant that the effects were less visible by the time of European contact. (179-180)

It has been estimated that Polynesian migrants having had to adapt to their new surroundings destroyed about 40% of the original forest, hunted twenty species of birds to extinction and wiped out a population of 160,000 moa within 60 to 120 years of first human settlement. Far from blaming them, Howe concludes that "Maori experience simply mirrors the more general history of humankind's struggle for survival" (181).

Habitat Selection and Landscape Poetry

To move on from these differing ideas of 'land' poetically rendered in half a dozen examples by Maori and Pakeha writers, the focus will now be on landscape. Preceding Orians' and Heerwagen's enquiry into "environmental aesthetics from an evolutionary and ecological perspective" (Orians and Heerwagen 551), the British geographer Jay Appleton posited that the power of attraction of our natural habitat, the savannah, persists (Appleton 1990:15) and that accordingly, landscape preference is not solely based on culture but on a perception of the environment rooted in derivatives of mechanisms of survival behaviour (16). The phenomenon of landscape preference, he says, is based on our

genetic make-up, as humans look at landscape in ways that reflect our environmental adaptation. As to how we understand landscape, Appleton defines, “[l]andscape [...as] the environment visually perceived” (15), to which I would add that linguistically these visual signs are nouns signifying ‘things’ like hills, mountains, trees, bushes and flowers, streams, fire, clouds, light and shade. They constitute the iconographic vocabulary to which we address the question of what they are ‘doing to us’, which “in turn can be expressed by appropriate verbs” (26).

The answer is twofold: emotionally, these features please us as beautiful, attractive, or they displease us as ugly and unattractive; but they can also evoke a mix of pleasure, attraction, wonder and anxiety. Cognitively, they inform us, telling us to stay on by offering us security and shelter and thus means of survival; or they push us to move on because we do not feel secure and sheltered but must find promising and protective locations elsewhere. Besides, “the environment visually perceived” may also make us curious or wonder what it has to offer and subsequently cause human beings to explore them—or refrain from doing so. Appleton, returning to his earlier study of 1975, relates this scale of emotive responses to two basic signals landscape features send out, or as he suggests, “functional rather than morphological categories”, which he calls *prospect* and *refuge*, while a third category, *hazard*, “encompass[es] all those sources of danger which it might be necessary to avoid by whatever means” (Appleton 1990: 25). Prospect, he explains further,

is to do with perceiving, with obtaining information, particularly visual information; refuge with hiding, sheltering or seeking protection. The concept of hazard implies the proximity of something which threatens or disturbs our equilibrium (24).

If we subscribe to these categories as influencing if not determining our reaction to landscape and subsequently also our responses to its artistic–visual and verbal–representation, we are participating in and attempting to overcome the discourse nature versus nurture since we would answer the question in the

affirmative that works of art can be understood “with the knowledge of the biologically evolved epigenetic rules that guided them” (Wilson 213); that they “touch upon what was universally endowed by human evolution” (219). This, I suggest, is of prime importance for a rethinking of the parameters of cultural studies, because if a “web of natural symbolism [...] underlies ‘cultural symbolism’” (Appleton 16), comparative studies, for example of landscape poetry from different cultural backgrounds based on hypotheses of evolutionary psychology, such as discussed by Orians, Heerwagen and Appleton, would reveal similarities of human understanding and cognition underlying historically and culturally evolved differences. The evolutionary psychological approach would impact on if not question the dominant perception of the cultural determination of cultures (Howe 81).

Let me now look at Aotearoa New Zealand landscape poems from the perspective of “natural symbolism” (Appleton 16) but with a proviso. Visual representations – Appleton talks mainly about these though he also cites poems – and verbal representations of our environment are analogous. The verbal mode, however, because of its immediate appeal to our cognition, *might* evoke a more complex range of emotive responses due to the power language exerts on us compared with form, colour and composition that make up visual landscape representations: a point that alerts us perhaps to question Appleton’s evolutionary psychological approach.

Landscape Poetry: An Evolutionary-Biological Reading

In Roma Potiki’s, Peter Bland’s and Richard Reeve’s poems, a first-person speaker projects her/his landscape description onto her/his readers and, whether consciously or not and by having adopted one or the other stance, evokes certain thoughts and feelings. Unequivocally, Potiki’s verbs chosen for Papatūānuku makes Earth assert her eternal existence: “I *am* [...] I *hold* strength [...] my base *maps* [...] my stomach eternally *stretching* / I *need* no definition / I *am* Papatūānuku, the land”. These words indicate the prospect of an unchangeable land which by implication offers

human beings a refuge and a habitat even if they might not always realize it: "When the rest is gone / you will know me- / you who press on my skin / tread the body you do not recognise". It is not quite obvious who or what "the rest" is–natural features like "the pattern of mottled / life, / rain and rivers"–or earlier generations of Maori? But the statement that "you will know me" suggests the addressees' eventual acceptance of Papatūānuku's everlasting existence as their habitat.

Bland's speaker Guthrie-Smith describes his natural surroundings as assertively as Potiki's speaker, since his repeated question directed at himself, "Who am I?", prompts him to define himself through his habitat. His land is composed of domesticated animals–"3000 sheep"–, cultivated grassland and a huge, enclosed property with water: "I own 10,000 acres and one dark lake"; further, a terrain named and thus appropriated by him from a topological, botanical and zoological angle – rocks, flowers, fish – and even 'Darwinian-ly' (!):

Who am I? I know the Lord's my shepherd / as I am theirs–
But this / is the 19th century; Darwin is God's First Mate. I
Must keep / my own log, full of facts if not love.

This prospect of landscape features, partly original and partly of his own making, represent his refuge where he is able to survive: "The land becomes / my meat and tallow." Landscape here is visualized as subservient to its master after its potential has been realised as suitable and safe for survival. Yet, Guthrie-Smith's almost boastful self-identification contains a grain of uncertainty about the safety of his refuge when he promises himself that "I am the one sheep / that must not get lost", and hints at the fact that the land is not yet his "meat and tallow" but "becomes" it. In its last resort then the landscape evokes moments of uncertainty–though not yet hazard– which the speaker's grandiloquent words and his reference to the model role of Darwin as "God's First Mate" cannot quite push aside.

By comparison, Reeve's unnamed first-person speaker recedes into and is almost swallowed up by the landscape features he visualizes retrospectively as having settled in "the dust of my early mind" and in "the flues of my memory": "images of a journey that happened years ago". The deeply ingrained prospect of an uninhabited but sublime landscape is recalled: "boulders pierce the lean body of the tableland"; "[t]he sky flutes among cliffs and pinnacles, gouging itself on a / veiled edge of schist – its moan eddying through the raw stomach of the ravine"; and "new skin peels of the landscape – and time is shed from each blotched, protean form". Such a prospect appears hazardous but it had obviously also evoked the spectator-speaker's awe at the time, an emotive response heightened by the landscape's power to affect human beings even physically: "The shop attendant's face has slouched, his nose a parody of the hills / that roll down the valley". The visitor's equanimity is only restored after "[o]ur driver / holds out a box of apricots. The van hurtles through reams of farmland". Central Otago is seen as a hazardous place and thus a landscape people travel through.

In a sense this can also be said of the location near the sea in Allen Curnow's "You Will Know When You Get There". Initially it is presented as a place where "[n]obody comes up from the sea as late as this / in the day and the season, and nobody else goes down / the last steep kilometre", but where later on "this man go[es] down to the sea with a bag / to pick mussels, having made an arrangement with the tide". The image of "[t]he last steep kilometre" is expanded to draw (in) observations on natural phenomena: "the light ... / keeps pouring out of its tank in the sky"; "the light lasts over the sea"; and "[t]he light is bits of crushed rock", that eventually shift and focus on human beings: "Boys, two of them / turn campfirelit faces", and "this man going down to the sea". Again, the poet's eyes now turn to nature: "one hour's light to be left and there is the excrescent / moon sponging off the last of it. A door / slams, a heavy wave, a door, the sea-floor shudders". Whereas the poem's first part is rounded off with the comment: "a hesitancy to speak / is a hesitancy of the earth

rolling back and away”, its second part ends on “[d]own you go alone, into the surge-black fissure”. The land/seascape drawn by Curnow envelops his personae, the boys and the man, without letting them become aware of their surroundings, let alone to respond to them, an environment which the poet paints as an ambiguous blending of beauty (light), indifference (earth) and awe (wave). The prospect of his landscape is not of a habitable place, but one when visited causing a feeling of aloneness—or existential homelessness. Neither land nor sea offers a safe habitat.¹⁷

Such a disturbing view of landscape is not presented in Robert Sullivan’s “Waka 99”. The speaker views – and possibly identifies – the topography of the South Island with its mountains and bush as “a frozen state” of the anthropo-morphised features of Maori mythological figures and events:

the South Island turned to wood / waiting for the giant crew / of
Maui and his brothers / bailors and anchors turned back / to what
they were when they were strewn / about the country by Kupe /
and his relations.

However, at the most this landscape only triggers the idea of a very different view of the people’s resurrection:

[a] resurrection [that] would happen / in the blood of the men
and women / the boys and girls / who are blood relations / of the
crews whose veins / touch the veins ... of the men and the women
from the time / of Kupe and before.

The landscape of the South Island, perceived in traditional Maori cultural terms, has to be resurrected by the poet’s generation, “in the blood of the men and women”, through their agency; an action that would lead towards reshaping Maui and his crew’s erstwhile habitat in a manner the poem does not spell out but suggests as a liveable habitat for Maori people now and in the future. As with “Papatūānuku”, “Waka 99” imagines landscape as

¹⁷ I suggest that such a philosophical stance is anchored in Curnow’s cultural make-up. Does his response not indicate a continuing feeling of strangeness in this land that we also come across in other of his poems such as “House and Land” or “The Bells of St. Babel’s”?

a potentially safe habitat once Maori have made it again their own, and in a very different fashion from the Pakeha way David Eggleton's "Poem for the Unknown Tourist" reveals and castigates.

Cast in the form of a tourism prospectus or a public letter, it opens with "Greetings!" and closes with "may we remain ever green, ever thine, Aotearoa". The poem evolves as a satirical dismantling of the prospect of a landscape promoted as beautiful, unspoilt, unpolluted and "ever green"; in short, as a grand place for survival. Yet only a few natural features– "antipodean geysers", "unleaded islands making backcountry overtures"– are not meant satirically while an overwhelming number of references exposes the transformation of the country's natural environment into cultural props of sorts: "land of pods of Family Fun Runners"; "hills reverberate to the sound of gallows ... reverberate to whitebait in the surf"; "may the bungee-jumper yodel breakfast / over the Remarkables"; or "the pre-dawn hush is broken by chainsaw roar". These de-naturalized features are complemented by urbanscape transformations of the environment: "camping grounds"; "the pastoral exposition renovated as novelty toy"; "knock[ing] back noble rot in vineyard after vineyard"; or "kiwifruit the size of a baby". Such subversion undercuts prospects of the landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand as a beautiful "evergreen" habitat and is prompted by the poet's despair and frustration at the exploitation of his country's natural environment. A spontaneous encounter with nature foiled by its commodification appears no longer possible.

It is a way of looking at landscape Anna Jackson does not agree with. Although her poem "From Farming" does not deny that landscape has remained unaffected by human appropriation, and though realistic in its censure of the "depletion of resources" resulting from the "establishment of farming", cognisance is also taken that the prospect of landscape offering a means of survival has been part of the evolution of homo sapiens.

Conclusion

The reading of just half a dozen Aotearoa New Zealand landscape poems from an evolutionary psychological perspective shows that poets represent landscape in order to elicit their readers' responses to features which they themselves consider particularly meaningful, features that may be perceived as beautiful or ugly, sublime, hazardous, or indifferently. In whichever way, these emotive reactions relate to a landscape's "underlying web of natural symbolism which links the objects we perceive with their ... messages" (Appleton 22) of prospect and/or refuge and/or hazard. The poets respond to landscapes on the basis of the human species' genetically evolved adaptations to habitat selection. Nonetheless, her/his genotypically determined responses are intimately conjoined with the phenotypical features rooted and preserved in her/his cultural background where the power of memes, of handed-down units "of cultural evolution" (Blackmore 31), becomes evident. As Potiki's meme of *manawhenua*, Eggleton's of land commodification or Reeve's of wilderness illustrate, memes assert themselves as strong replicators. However, they may be contested as we have seen in Sullivan's poem where such a landscape meme is implicitly rejected. Such questioning of their power here as well as in Eggleton's poem strongly suggests that genotypically our responses to landscape do cross cultural boundary lines and that cultural symbolism remains grounded in the natural symbolism of landscape features that evoke our genetically evolved mechanisms for survival.

Methodologically, the study of landscape poetry from the basis of *homo sapiens'* biological make-up offers the opportunity for cross-cultural studies to understand cultural features "with the knowledge of the biologically evolved epigenetic rules that guided them" (Wilson 213): an insight into what biology, and more generally, the natural sciences, could contribute to our understanding of art. Though, as Wilson has remarked, such scholarly procedure is as yet little taken note of in the humanities, there is substantial evidence that "evocriticism" (Boyd 390) has

been pursued in recent years;¹⁸ an evolutionary approach that does not “seek to subvert commonsensical readings ... and scholarship of a nonevolutionary kind”, but that will certainly call into question “that reality is only culturally constructed” (Boyd 390). The present study of Aotearoa New Zealand landscape poems has precisely followed this double approach, thereby gaining insight into both, the cultural and the natural construction of what is meant by landscape.

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¹⁸ Apart from Brian Boyd’s comprehensive bibliography in his ‘evocritical’ study of story-telling, *On the Origin of Stories* (2009), Joseph Carroll’s essay “Three Scenarios for Literary Darwinism” (2010) contains further references (65-67) to such studies.

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