

# Whatever Happened to Poor Mr Yate?

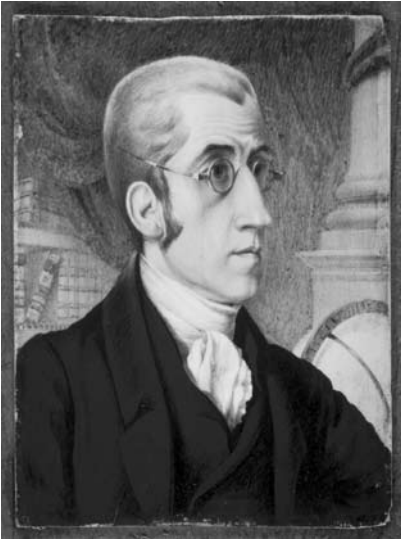
## AN EXERCISE IN VOYEURISM

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FROM THE BEGINNING there were those who were prepared to state openly that the missionary William Yate was the victim of a conspiracy 'black as hell'.<sup>1</sup> Since then, the ambiguities surrounding Yate's dismissal in 1837 from the Church Missionary Society have continued to capture the imagination of some of New Zealand's major writers and recently provoked some spurious sword play in the pages of *Landfall*.<sup>2</sup> The absence of decisive material in the CMS archives, combined with the problem that Yate, like Oscar Wilde, was accused of a crime considered hardly best suited for drawing-room conversation, contributed to the continuing uncertainty about the whole matter. It was complicated by the fact that Yate himself waged a long and unsuccessful campaign in England to have the allegations against him formally investigated. The CMS refused to reopen his case, thereby adding to a rapidly swelling list of sympathizers with Yate. His friends believed him innocent and even those with no preconceived views thought that he had been unjustly deprived of an inquiry to which he was entitled. Moreover, he had been cast as yet another victim of Samuel Marsden's inflexible vindictiveness: 'I had no doubt of his guilt from the first moment I was informed of his Conduct — and no one could Change my mind'.<sup>3</sup>

Because of the allegations, Yate found himself in an intolerable position: he was not faced with any legal charges, but was for many years prohibited by the Bishop of London from practising in a permanent capacity as a clergyman.<sup>4</sup> It was not until 1846, under powerful patronage, that he was able to take up employment as a chaplain to an abandoned chapel for seamen in Dover. The injustice of his treatment seemed to be reinforced, when 30 years after his death, the published reminiscences of a missionary child, George Clarke, brought his name out from the veil of silence under which it had been hidden by his brethren. Clarke described an emotional re-encounter in 1848 with his former friend. Whatever the charges or whatever Yate's faults may have been, he said, they could 'not quench my personal love and loyalty'. After this accidental meeting, when they had recalled for hours familiar scenes and old faces, Yate, he was told, had paced his room the night long, preoccupied with the past. Clarke visited him several times and when Yate died, he said, he was 'greatly respected by the people of Dover for his consistent and benevolent character'.<sup>5</sup>

What was William Yate? Was he a man, perhaps like Thomas Kendall, who learnt that a sense of sin is not always discerned where he had been taught to expect to find it? It is this belief which attracted Frank Sargeson and formed the basis of his 'Imaginary Conversation' between Yate and Samuel Butler.<sup>6</sup> Was Yate overwhelmed by the realization that the bonds of shame were not



This portrait of William Yate was most probably painted during the period when Yate visited England and published his *Account of New Zealand*, that is, between November 1834 and February 1836.

Portrait of Reverend William Yate painted by C.J.M. Whichelo (d.1865), watercolour on ivory, 12.5 x 9.5 cm, nla.pic-an11197585, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

intrinsic to the expression of love in Maori society? Did he find men capable of living free from the sense of sin which was so pervasive in his mores? He once confessed, in 1829, that these people were without the ‘burden of iniquity’, ‘a weight more tremendous than I can describe’, yet one of which they seemed ‘unconscious’.<sup>7</sup> Did he fall because he was exposed to the fearful test of another society unburdened by the Calvinist belief in the immediacy of temptation and the actuality of guilt?

Among Yate’s own papers there are a few indications of his emotional responses to the New Zealanders. From the beginning he was aware of their physical beauty. He wrote, some ten days after his arrival in the country, ‘There is something remarkably interesting in the manners and appearance of the New Zealanders’. Among them were men who, when they spoke, used actions ‘graceful in the extreme’.<sup>8</sup> His journals contain a number of descriptions of the men, old and young, their voices, their manners, their strong facial structures. The powerful Bay of Islands’ chief, Titore, he watched conducting a welcome ceremony ‘peculiarly melancholly but at the same time peculiarly attractive’; as he sang ‘he walked with a slow and solemn pace along the brow of the little hill when suddenly coming to a conclusion he addressed the strangers and in a very pleasing manner continued to speak to them for more than an hour. His action was perfectly natural and consequently very graceful — his voice was low but beautifully modulated and his language copious and flowery . . . it certainly was the most romantic scene I ever witnessed.’<sup>9</sup> He was far from alone in such responses. George Vason in Tonga wrote directly of the ‘alluring’ beauty and the ‘voluptuous attractions’ of the people among whom he worked. These continual ‘powerful attractions’ to which Vason, also a single man, was exposed finally betrayed him into a complete conversion to the Tongan way of life.<sup>10</sup>

Yate was always much more cautious. Even on the eve of his departure, all he was prepared to say was, ‘I never found a native at a loss to express any of the passions — feelings — sensations. Any thing connected with sorrow

joy — good — evil'.<sup>11</sup> The problem was that not only was he exposed to a society that did not count as sin that which was 'exceeding sinful', but that the people were unashamedly articulate about these 'sinful' facts of life. The Maori use of imagery opened up dimensions of association and experience beyond the poverty of mind of the Evangelicals. The missionaries were in an invidious position. Their life's commitment was based on an essentially emotional experience, for they were the twice-born, yet their faith demanded the canalizing of their emotions into an almost obsessive love-relationship with God. At the same time, by taking their religious emphasis from the doctrine of Christ's atonement, rather than his incarnation, they were also acutely conscious of the prevalence of evil in man. As missionaries, they were exposed to those who had not curbed the language of feeling, or of ribaldry; to men who could cry without inhibition and who could use sexual metaphors as an ordinary part of language, rather than as the hidden and secret vocabulary of another life. Yate's relationship with his pupils was one charged with emotionalism, but an emotionalism derived from religious preoccupations. It is clear that the primary basis of his teaching was to awaken the neophytes to the omnipotence of sin. As he urged, 'There is no seeking after Christ till the fetters of sin and satan gall *the Spirit*.'<sup>12</sup> Every child was born in sin and, he believed, revealed the inherent sinfulness of its nature by the perverseness of its actions immediately it began to think and act.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, Maori pupils in the 'experimental Religion'<sup>14</sup> had first to recognize the 'enemy within', the evil heart that doted on pleasure and strove ceaselessly to 'subdue the soul' before they could come near to Christ.<sup>15</sup> Only religious love, *agape*, could purify the heart and overcome the torment of ceaseless temptation.<sup>16</sup> The problem was that the concept of sin was self-created and self-obsessing. The sinner magnifies the depravity around him and can even bring himself to desire that of which he is ashamed.

Among Yate's papers there is a unique body of letters written to him from young Maori converts; all expose the concentration of his teachings on sin. They also reveal the particular attachment of his pupils for him. These letters, more than Yate's own writings, reveal the dilemma of the missionary vulnerable to sensuality. Yate transferred to his pupils the idea of the need first to awaken to the perils of the unregenerate soul and the carnal energies of man. He instigated among them the practice of writing zealous letters to himself and to others of the missionaries,<sup>17</sup> and later published a selection of them,<sup>18</sup> all of which are emotionally very highly charged. To him they were letters exceedingly 'beautiful': 'They have made my heart very glad.'<sup>19</sup> Pirikotaha wrote in his 'book' for Yate, 'I am only evil — I am altogether sin. Sin is in my head — and sin is in my heart . . . I am stubborn to do evil; I am deaf to good'.<sup>20</sup> Wariki cried, 'My heart is all rock, all rock, and no good thing will grow upon it. The lizard and the snail run over the rocks, and all evil runs over my heart.'<sup>21</sup> In Yate's absence, his pupils wrote: 'To the man whose name is Yate, and who comes to teach us here. Here am I, sitting in the verandah of my house at Ohaiawai, thinking within me, that I shall not see your face again, nor hear the sound of your horse's feet . . . Hurry, Mr. Yate — hurry there . . . and be altogether in a hurry to come back again.'<sup>22</sup> 'We have love in our hearts for you; we have love in our words'.<sup>23</sup>

What appalled the New Zealand missionaries was the discovery that with many of these young men, Yate had experienced sexual intimacies.<sup>24</sup> One of the letters, for example, was written by a young man Piripi or Philip Tohi, a redeemed slave and stable boy, who lived with Richard Davis and his wife. Subsequently he provided the missionaries with one of the sworn affidavits that they sent to New South Wales. Piripi's letter reveals the pupil's awakening to the innate presence of evil, a knowledge that is necessary before grace will come.

Sir, Mr Yate, My parents have long been dead. My heart is broken. I find I am an orphan and though Mr Davis has been my Father, and Mother Davis has been my Mother this year and that year, a great many years I am looking for another Father and that Father must be God. How will you not say — Piripi you are a dirty thoughtless boy? Yes I am but I have no clothes for my wife to wash. But what are clothes! they have nothing to do with the heart. Did you not tell us last prayer day that it is what comes out of a mans heart that makes him evil not what garments he is clothed with. With me there is nothing but evil inside and outside, but though evil is great it is not so great as the love of God. There is one thing that is knocking me down that is sin but the love of God raises me up again. I have long thought about being baptized. I have thought I who know so much ought to say so to Mr Yate and ask him if he thinks my letting into the church will make me know more or make me love Jesus the Saviour more than I now do? —

Sit in peace Mr Yate  
From me from your Son  
Piripi

To Mr Yate  
living at the Waimate.<sup>25</sup>

Piripi was to swear before the missionaries Richard Davis, William Williams and George Clarke that he had practised mutual masturbation (*ka titoitoi maua*) with Yate.<sup>26</sup> The other three affidavits are of the same content, Samuel Kohe adding that Yate had told him that before marriage all Europeans acted thus. In the deposition given by Pehi, he stated that, as well as masturbation, Yate had practised oral sex upon him, placing his penis in Pehi's mouth (*peni in ore imposito*), for which pleasure he paid a pound of tobacco.<sup>27</sup> The missionaries learnt that these practices of Yate's, together with the habit bordering on prostitution, of paying for them with gifts, had been a common occurrence with a number of young men. James Busby, citing their enquiries, talked of 60 or more — but added, hesitantly, that being rather deaf and apt to mishear numbers, he must surely be incorrect.<sup>28</sup> But he may not have been, as, according to William Williams' reckoning sent to Marsden in November 1836, 'no less than 50 Natives . . . have been with him, and I doubt not but there are not fewer than 100'.<sup>29</sup> The missionaries, who had originally rejected earlier gossip in circulation about Yate since at least 1832,<sup>30</sup> came to the reluctant conclusion, after their investigations in 1836, that he had been 'habitually' guilty 'to an awful extent' of the crime, alluded to in Romans 1:27, of lusting after men; a body of evidence had come forward so circumstantial and so uniformly consistent, they said, as to leave no room for a shadow of a doubt'.<sup>31</sup> The dilemma was this, however: there was no evidence that Yate had practised sodomy, that is (*pace* Frank Sargeson) 'connexion per anum'.<sup>32</sup> William Williams specifically

stated that ‘This was not so’, or as Busby put it, with his usual infelicity, ‘There is one remarkable point which you ought to be made acquainted with . . . the unhappy man . . . was not rising to the full extent of the Crime which human laws have made penal, or which called down in times of old the divine wrath — It is this — that it did not take place *per anum* but it would appear merely by the instrumentality of the thighs’.<sup>33</sup> The case was immensely distressing to the missionaries for, as William Williams testified, the young men involved were credible witnesses, being ‘of good character’, who ‘were seduced into this vice in the days of their ignorance’.<sup>34</sup> Many of them were now baptized members of the new church. Richard Davis was, however, realistic enough to recognize that such acts were not unknown in Maori society; indeed the missionaries made such a song and dance about the issue that, as one Maori put it, they thought something much more terrible must be being alluded to when St Paul’s epistle to the Romans was cited to them as dreadful warning.<sup>35</sup> The missionaries were consumed with primeval fears. William Williams wrote that when they discovered the numbers of young men involved they became aware indeed that the wrath of God had been upon them. ‘There has been much sickness among the Natives for some years past, and we wondered at the cause. I believe that numbers have been cut off on this very account, and that not less from 200 to 400 persons have perished in the plague.’<sup>36</sup> In an attempt to avoid continuing divine retribution, the missionaries held a solemn day of fast, consigned to fire all Yate’s property, and shot his horse.

The ambiguities about Yate have stemmed from the fact that no legal case against him was possible. It was decided, after examinations of the four affidavits sent from New Zealand, together with the circumstantial testimonies on his behaviour on the return voyage to New Zealand in 1836, that no charges could be proven according to law.<sup>37</sup> This was the difficulty in which the Church Missionary Society found itself, while Yate became insistent that an investigation of the allegations levelled against him should be held.

The scandal originally broke in New South Wales when, in June 1836, he was ‘warned’ of gossip concerning his constant association and ‘marked intimacy’ with Edwin Denison, the third mate of the vessel on which he was returning with his sister, after a visit to England — warned, it may be added, by one of the gossips themselves.<sup>38</sup> This relationship with Denison<sup>39</sup> was to survive through the enormously difficult period, not only of the accusations in Australia, but also the years of abortive effort in England to be reinstated by the CMS, years marked by constant stress: ‘I am almost driven to madness with continually thinking and writing upon it. The whole is involved in such mystery that I know not which way to turn.’<sup>40</sup> Yate’s relationship with Denison seems not unlike that with the young Maori, in that there seems to be the same element of paternalism embodied in it. Indeed Yate gave two letters, written to him by Denison, to the Bishop of Australia as evidence of the innocence of the relationship. ‘My dearest Friend, my *Father*’, wrote Denison:

For never did I feel so acutely a separation from my friend before, and feel confident I shall never again . . . I shall often look at my directions, and apply them closely, setting the shadow before me now I am deprived of the much loved voice of the substance, and

fancy it speaking to me . . . . God bless you and enable you to triumph over the malice of your enemies, which are mine also, be they who they may. My dear friend

I remain without hesitation, your unalterably affectionate Son

E. H. Denison

. . . . Tomorrow being Sunday I shall be indulging melancholy again. For once I shall know where you are and what about.

Two days later he continued:

Friend of my bosom,

My dear Father, Once more I indulge myself with a few moments of melancholy pleasure, imagining myself sitting by your side whilst lying on the sofa preparing your Manuscript before the afternoon service as you used to do in days that are past — happy days for poor Ned. But alas they are flown, and now all around appears gloomy & desolate . . . . I have nothing more to add at present other than to beg you will remember me to your very kind Sister, and accept the same unfeigned love & esteem of

Your ever unchangeably affectionate

Edwin.<sup>41</sup>

Yate himself, a poet of dubious stature, had earlier written his farewell to Denison, in expectation of their separation. The poem is couched in language of erotic piety:

. . . Hath death the power  
To rend our kindred souls in twain?  
Never! for from this very hour  
The contract's sealed and death is slain.

We live. — For ever shall we live  
Death died when Christ the Saviour rose  
The grave has now no more thorns to give  
'Tis now a bed of sweet repose.

A bed where you and I shall sleep  
Locked in the arms of mutual love  
Nor ought shall e'er our slumbers break  
Till waked by thunders from above.

Then on each others wings we'll fly  
To heaven that pure that bless'd abode  
Mount to the throne — the throne on high  
And hear the welcomes of our God . . . .<sup>42</sup>

Although the Evangelicals sometimes used the two words *agape* and *eros* in their attempts to teach and define love, the connection between religious and sexual passion can be far closer than they would admit. The holy kiss of the early Agapae love feasts soon became associated with scandal; eroticism can not only be fostered under the cloak of religious emotion but can be an intrinsic part of that enthusiasm. The two selves of the Evangelical, the sinner and the believer, are at constant war: the believer is shackled by his sensuality and is released only in submission, often after recurring periods of storm and stress, to grace. Even the linguistic parallels are suggestive of ejaculation. And, as

George Vason recognized, once the young man trained in piety begins to listen to the voice of temptation, he may accept it even as evidence of the power of Satan, and so will 'go on forwardly in the way of his heart' and 'commit all iniquity with greediness'.<sup>43</sup> Justification even follows, for God loves man *as* a sinner. Yet throughout Yate's writing there is no overt hint of antinomianism; he consistently denied the constructs that had been placed upon his friendships and insisted, rather, that Denison, like the others, was a young man in whose heart 'a work of grace' was visible.

Yate's association with Denison, and also apparently with another of the crew of the *Prince Regent*, improbably called Dick Deck,<sup>44</sup> was the cause of his suspension as a cleric by the Bishop of Australia on 13 August 1836. On the 14th Broughton wrote to Yate to urge him to meet his accusers '*face to face*' and defend himself; to this end he had begun the necessary steps to form a consistorial court as the 'proper tribunal' for such an inquiry.<sup>45</sup> The following day Yate informed Broughton that he would take passage on a ship due to sail for England within the week, thereby, it would appear, avoiding the investigation. But there are two difficulties in making such an assumption. The first is an ambiguity in the sequence of events on 14 and 15 August. Yate argued that it was Broughton who changed his mind and, through his Registrar, informed Yate that he should return to England for the investigation under the aegis of the Church Missionary Society. Yate said that he was given four hours in which to decide and insisted that he had agreed to leave solely on the supposition that the *Prince Regent* had already sailed for England with his original accusers aboard.<sup>46</sup> In the Registrar's letter it is stated only that all the relevant documents would be transferred to the CMS, 'in order that they may adopt such proceedings as they may think proper'.<sup>47</sup> This letter, written on the 15th, gives no indication whether it was the cause or consequence of Yate's intended departure. However, as soon as he learnt that the *Prince Regent* had not, in fact, left Australia, Yate cancelled his passage and, thereby, forfeited the passage money allowed him, in considerable confusion, by the local CMS committee. He now demanded an investigation, in order to clear his name.<sup>48</sup> At no time, he insisted, did he avoid an inquiry. Yet the basis of his dismissal from the CMS, in February 1837, was that as he had refused to 'have the truth' of the reports investigated in New South Wales, he had thereby rejected 'the only and sufficient means of removing the imputations upon his character'.<sup>49</sup> This is the second problem, which fed the letters of protest from CMS members against its 'unenglish' behaviour of continuing to refuse the 'full and unbiased' inquiry which he demanded.<sup>50</sup> It was argued that, whatever the issue, Yate had been dismissed on the fallacious grounds that he had avoided an inquiry.<sup>51</sup> Despite this criticism, the CMS refused to reopen the case. In actuality, Yate remained in Australia and an investigation was held. Upon the return of the *Prince Regent* to Sydney on 9 September Yate requested that the inquiry should commence and, after some delay, it took place on 27 and 29–30 September. Witnesses gave circumstantial evidence of Yate's behaviour on the outward voyage of the ship and, subsequently, in Sydney and instanced hand-clasping, giggling, unseemly tickling, and a preference to sleep together at night.<sup>52</sup> It became clear that the Church had no definite legal case to pursue and consequently the inquiry did

not proceed 'to an issue'.<sup>53</sup> Richard Taylor, Yate's fellow passenger and major accuser, commented at the end of the inquiry that Yate had been shown to be 'guilty of the grossest indecency of character in short of everything but perhaps actual crime'.<sup>54</sup> If he had seen the affidavits from New Zealand, which did not arrive in time for this inquiry, his remark would have undoubtedly been justified. As it was, Yate's suspension was confirmed on 3 November.

Was Yate's subsequent pursuance of his own vindication done simply in the knowledge that he could not be legally charged with sodomy? His published circulars and pamphlets are eloquent in his own defence and bitterly critical of those who 'conspired' against him. He was even able to print signed retractions from two of his original accusers, the first mate of the *Prince Regent*, and the Wesleyan missionary William White, who had been one of the sources of the earlier gossip about him.<sup>55</sup> He also apparently believed that a consistorial court would be assembled in New South Wales and remained in the colony throughout October, paying the expenses of his witnesses in expectation of a formal trial. But on 3 November, Broughton informed him that he had no powers to form such a court, while on the same date he confirmed and extended his suspension.<sup>56</sup> To clear his name, Yate now had to accuse himself, for none would bring the case to trial! He protested bitterly to the CMS — 'Oh shame on Botany Bay Justice'<sup>57</sup> — and returned to England to persuade the Society to institute the investigation. He also argued that he had the support of the New South Wales Colonial Secretary in this decision.<sup>58</sup> But Alexander McLeay was well aware that no legal charges could be proved against Yate; indeed, as Yate took passage on the *Ulysses* in December, it was decided by the colonial government not to proceed any further on the basis of the new evidence and affidavits which had now arrived from New Zealand, themselves also insufficient for a legal case.<sup>59</sup>

The final element in this saga that has, in the past, increased the ambiguities of Yate's case, is the problem of the inadequacy of the documentation in the Church Missionary Society Archives. A number of letters from members of the Society make it plain that, in their eyes, the papers made available for perusal by committee members were not in themselves decisive.<sup>60</sup> To this situation has been added the dilemma that no separate Yate file seemed to exist when the New Zealand material was microfilmed in 1959, although the correspondence indicates that there had been one. One file of transcripts has now been disinterred from its former burial place — among the Society's African papers. This selection of letters consists, however, only of the material forwarded by Broughton in August 1836, with some supplementary letters received in England between February and June 1837.<sup>61</sup> It contains, therefore, neither the evidence from the Bishop's informal inquiry nor the New Zealand material, which, due to an oversight by Samuel Marsden, was not forwarded until November 1837. Consequently, in this file, apart from the very circumstantial material first gathered in Australia, some letters from Yate and his sister written during October in expectation of a second inquiry, there are only five additional letters, two of which are from New Zealand missionaries and three from Samuel Marsden. The New Zealand letters do, however, point out the legal dilemma, one being the covering note to the depositions.<sup>62</sup> The



rest of the documentation sent on from New South Wales a year later does not seem to have survived in the CMS Archives, although material sent at this time was received and entered into the Confidential Despatches Book, which has apparently disappeared.<sup>63</sup> The originals remain, however, among the New South Wales Colonial Secretary's correspondence. The Confidential Despatches Book was at one time available for perusal by committee members but, significantly, to no one else. Consequently, when the Committee of the St James' Workhouse, to whom Yate applied for the position of chaplain in 1843, came to the conclusion that he was 'wholly guiltless of the Charges which have been alleged against him', they had been denied access to the CMS documentation.<sup>64</sup> The CMS, probably protecting itself against a libel suit, succeeded in adding to the widespread doubt as to the integrity of its own procedures.

So much for the dilemma surrounding William Yate. It is time to restore him to such intrinsic significance that he may still possess: author of the earliest missionary account of New Zealand and one that was not written from the retrospective viewpoint of old age. The book drew strong criticism from his fellow settlers, which could be expected once the scandal broke. However, a long review, written for the 'sole use' of the Committee of the CMS, seems to have been begun before the missionaries had become convinced of Yate's misconduct: it is interrupted by this news.<sup>65</sup> This document is a detailed criticism of factual errors and exaggerations in the text and in the illustrations. Above all the missionaries resented what they considered to be an assertion of self throughout the volume. George Clarke, the father of Yate's supporter, snorted angrily that the Reverend William Yate had 'culled the labours of his noiseless brethren the Catechists, & with considerable clamour has invited the public to see what he has done'.<sup>66</sup> The settlers were always jealously concerned with their reputations and relative accomplishments and such comments come as no surprise. Of greater interest is their objection that much of Yate's 'new information' was also 'altogether new and marvellous to those who have had more opportunity than the Author ever had of knowing the habits, character, &c. of the New Zealanders'.<sup>67</sup> 'Personal observation!', they huffed sarcastically, and noted that Yate had made up the story that the young prophet of the Papahurihia movement had been taught ventriloquism by a European captain. In a similar vein, they protested about the elaborate illustration of a hakari feast stage, whose 'conical centre' and regularity of structure bore no relationship to the 'rude stages "erected for a New Zealand Feast"'.<sup>68</sup> Certainly Yate's flights of fancy seem to have been provoked by competition with other authors in the pages of the *Missionary Register*, for his feast stage was offered as a counterpart to a brethren's 'Temple of the Juggernaut'.<sup>69</sup> Most bitter of the missionary criticisms was their charge that Yate had given all credit to the labours of the Maori in constructing the new 'civilization' in formerly heathen New Zealand, while those of the missionaries were kept unjustly in the background. If Yate 'exalted' the 'Native character', then these exaltations were specifically intended for his English audience, with an implicit purpose of raising money for Yate's own church for the Maori. In 1835 he had launched an independent campaign to collect money for Te Waimate church and, despite

a prohibition from the CMS, had continued with the collection. All donations sent in to the CMS were to be labeled clearly '*Mr Yates Church*'.<sup>70</sup> Yate, in insisting that the subscriptions could not be terminated, reminded the CMS that although the building would obviously become its property, it 'has however been understood by all the contributors that the church is to be erected for me'.<sup>71</sup> Arrogance and a sense of his own rightness pervade Yate's letters to the Society in this as in other issues. William Williams believed that Yate had deliberately misled both the CMS and the public over the Waimate station; in reality, he argued, the number of inhabitants in the area had proved to be small.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, by 1837 the station was in decline and the missionaries in New Zealand had been shown to be correct when they insisted that Yate, who had participated relatively little in its construction, had seriously exaggerated its future role. The settlers also resented the fact that Yate had turned his unofficial and unapproved visit to England during 1834 and 1835 into that of an official emissary, even achieving the dizzy heights of an audience at Brighton with William IV. For Yate had sailed in spite of a prohibition from the parent committee and without endorsement from the local committee.<sup>73</sup> Not that there had been any secret about his departure, which was ostensibly a visit to fetch his sister, Sarah. Indeed, the settlers sent some of their children in his care.<sup>74</sup> But to his brethren his behaviour in England smacked too evidently of vanity; the very act of publication without their knowledge was at best premature and at worst 'calculated to do . . . mischief'.<sup>75</sup> Misrepresentations and overstatements abounded save, they added caustically, where the prose had been taken from others, such as the account of the settlement of Paihia, which they considered to be 'plain, honest, and faithful'.<sup>76</sup>

Undoubtedly the missionaries carped on detail, for Yate wrote in order to persuade and even his journals reveal his fondness for dramatic colouring. But his rhetoric had the danger of being self-persuading and gave the undue authority to his statements to which his brethren objected.<sup>77</sup> The most heinous crime of all, to their eyes, was his unwarranted exaltation of the 'Native character' and to us this problem, in view of his ultimate disgrace, is the one finally that matters: does it suggest that he responded more honestly than they? I do not think so. For they objected also to his exaggerations and even inventions of Maori vices, such as the notion of forcibly feeding small children with pebbles, as emblems of the values of hardness to which they were to aspire,<sup>78</sup> as well as Maori virtues in industriousness. Yate's eulogies and descriptions are quite orthodox theologically; it was merely that they were not accurate. If the missionaries complained that he gave Maori undue credit for their labours (and had left out those of his brethren), he could still rationalize his descriptions theologically. As he once told a group of 'plain ornery' idle Maori, the reason why so much work could be done by 'natives' when living with 'white people', and not by 'natives living in the bush', was that the 'white people used their hands' while the 'natives only their mouth'.<sup>79</sup> Such views border on racialism rather than exaltation of skill. And they are still within the mainstream of Evangelical thought: for the equality of the heathen is only potential, not actual, and will be realized solely by his acceptance of the European civilization and its religion. Only then is the inferior man placed within reach of his usefulness

and his salvation. Yate, also, took upon himself the role of patron to his 'native boys', for he held strong views about divinely bestowed rank and relative stations in life. It becomes extremely difficult to assess whether he responded substantially to Maori society and its people. His book does hint at a division of sensibilities, but it only hints at it and in a manner that was commonplace to most missionaries. For, as a man he could recognize that the people possessed skills, intelligence and qualities of physical beauty; as a missionary he saw them as cruel, licentious, and lacking in human affection. As I have noted elsewhere,<sup>80</sup> to an extent such contradictions existed objectively in Maori society and he can be seen also as reacting to the two faces of the culture. Only occasionally does he give a little more away when, for example, he remembers that he was told that in New Zealand love is visible, it is 'all outside'; it is in a man's eyes, it is in his mouth.<sup>81</sup> He called this hypocrisy and talked of divine love and evil hearts to his pupils; they might have tried to teach him how not to be ashamed of his desires.

In the end, Yate remains an enigmatic figure. The intense emotionalism which characterized the Evangelicals and constituted the basis of their faith was closer to the surface in Yate than in many of his brethren.<sup>82</sup> He seems to have lacked the physical stamina for endurance in the field and became easily bored with the realities of their life. A rather impulsive creature, with a 'volatile playful spirit', as Richard Davis put it,<sup>83</sup> he was given to overstatement and excitability. In his letters, he reveals the characteristic self-righteousness of the Evangelicals. His conviction in his own innocence seems never to have wavered through the long drawn-out controversy over Denison, although bouts of ill-health, apparently induced by despair, were noticeably recurrent. But in the problem which primarily concerns us, the degree to which he responded personally, and against his religious convictions, to empathies within Maori society, he still remains obscure. Nor, with the evidence available, can we do more than speculate on how he reconciled his protestations of innocence with the sexual relationships he undoubtedly pursued with 'his boys', pupils in Christ. If we can finally end the whole sad tale of William Yate, it is to say that he was not the victim of a false scandal and colonial gossip-mongering. If it is still true that, as he observed, when dealing with the arbiter of missionary fortunes, the Reverend Samuel Marsden, 'to be accused was always to be found guilty',<sup>84</sup> it should also be said that Yate's tragedy lies, not so much in his persecution, as a man who was technically innocent yet morally guilty, but in the torment of mind he must have undergone in reconciling his desires with his Christian morality.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

This article has drawn upon three new sources of information. The first proved of little importance, apart from its substantiation of other material. This document is what appears to be unofficial notes taken at the Bishop's investigation in Sydney in September 1836 and is to be found among the papers of William Colenso. (See notes 44 and 52.) The second is the collection of documents held among the papers of the New South Wales Colonial Secretary. These include the four depositions from New Zealand, which were referred to by Eric Ramsden

in 1936,<sup>85</sup> but apparently not actually seen by him. Ramsden's account of Yate's fall from grace is based on the New South Wales sources, but is ill-organized and inadequately documented; it serves to confuse rather than to elucidate. The documents are mostly grouped together in the file, Colonial Secretary, Letters Received, 1837, 4/2357.1. (See note 26.) The third source is the volume containing a series of transcribed letters, held by the Church Missionary Society in London. This volume consists of confidential correspondence, derived from various mission fields. It carries, somewhat confusingly, a spine title, 'Foreign Despatches No. 70', pasted on to the original binding. Although it is a volume containing confidential material, it does not appear to be one of the missing Confidential Despatch Books, for it seems to have its original binding intact and yet carries no such identification. Nor does it contain all the confidential despatches for the years it covers, 1832–1840. For this reason, the volume has been catalogued in the General Mission Book series, that is, transcripts of inward despatches from several different mission fields. (I am indebted to Miss Rosemary Keen, CMS archivist, for elucidation of these points; see notes 29 and 61.)

In addition to these sources, there are several major collections of Yate's papers which have never previously been fully examined. These consist of his original letters for the period 1827–1834 and his original Journal, 1828–1834, as well as sundry reports, all held by the Church Missionary Society in London and on microfilm in the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. (See notes 7 and 8.) As well as these, the Turnbull Library holds the manuscript of a second Journal, 1833–1845, and a collection of original letters on microfilm, covering the years 1808–1840. (See notes 11 and 17.) It is possible, of course, that still further material may come to light.

## NOTES

Originally published in the *New Zealand Journal of History* 9, 2 (1975), pp.111–25.

1 W. Mann, *Six Years' Residence in the Australian Provinces, ending in 1839 . . . with An Account of New Zealand*, London, 1839, p.350. Mann had met Yate in London in 1839 and was furnished by him with material to support his case.

2 Frank Sargeson, review of facsimile (1970) edition of William Yate's *An Account of New Zealand, Landfall*, 99 (September 1971), pp.299–304; Judith Binney, correspondence, *Landfall*, 100 (December 1971), pp.473–4; E.H. McCormick, M.G. Hitchings, correspondence, *Landfall*, 101 (March 1972), pp.98–99. See also Kendrick Smithyman's comments in his review, *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, LXXXII (December 1973), pp.434–7.

3 Marsden to New Zealand missionaries, 19 December 1836, Marsden Papers, II, p.123, A1993, Mitchell Library, Public Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

4 For details of Yate's pursuit of his rights, see Judith Binney, Introduction, William Yate, *An Account of New Zealand*, 1835, facsimile edition, Shannon, 1970, pp.xvi–xx.

5 George Clarke, *Notes on Early Life in New Zealand*, Hobart, 1903, pp.20–21.

6 'An Imaginary Conversation', *Landfall*, 80 (December 1966), pp.349–57.

7 Yate to CMS Secretaries, 14 April 1829, Letters, 1827–1834, CN/099a, CMS Archives, microfilm, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL), Wellington.

8 29, 30 January 1828, Journal, 1828–1834, CN/099b, CMS Archives, microfilm, ATL.

9 6 September 1828, *ibid.*

10 *An Authentic Narrative of Four Years' Residence at Tongataboo*, London, 1810, pp.110–11, 114.

11 6 June 1834, William Yate, Journal and Diary, 1833–1845, ms, ATL.

12 Yate to CMS, 14 April 1829, CN/099a.

13 William Yate, *To the Parishioners of St. James' Church Sydney*, Sydney, 11 July 1836, p.11.

14 *Account*, p.260.

15 *To the Parishioners*, p.5.

16 *ibid.*, pp.6–7.

17 'Review of an "Account of New Zealand &c."'', New Zealand missionaries, 10 October 1836, p.6. William Yate, Correspondence, 1808–1840, microfilm, ATL.

18 *Account*, pp.250–81, and also published separately with one omitted, as *Letters to the Rev. William Yate, from Natives of New Zealand; Converted to Christianity*, G.B[ennet], London, 1836. There are also other manuscript letters extant: the booklet, 'A literal translation of letters from Natives of New Zealand desirous of being admitted as Candidates for Baptism', 24 May 1831, Yate Correspondence, contains some unpublished letters as well as some of the published; similarly, Maori Letters to William Yate, Maori Letters and Manuscripts, uncatalogued K.A. Webster Collection, mss, ATL; also 'Letters from Candidates for Baptism and the Lords Supper', CN/099a.

19 Yate to CMS, 20 June 1835, Yate Correspondence.

20 *Account*, p.257.

21 *ibid.*, p.268.

22 Hongi, James and Robert, to Yate, *Account*, pp.266, 269. Edward Parry Hongi was a constant companion of Yate's and twice accompanied him to New South Wales. He was baptized by Yate in November 1831 and died in October 1836, just before the missionaries began their detailed investigations of Yate's conduct. See, *Account*, p.xv and note.

23 Hongi to Yate, *ibid.*, p.267.

24 'Review', p.6.

25 Letter II, Maori Letters to Yate.

26 Deposition of Philip Tohi, [15 November 1836], Enclosure in NSW Crown Solicitor to NSW Colonial Secretary, 12 December 1836, 36/10481 in 4/2357.1, Colonial Secretary, Letters Received, 1837, Archives Office, New South Wales, Sydney.

27 Deposition of Pehi, [15 November 1836], *ibid.*

28 Busby to NSW Colonial Secretary, 15 November 1836, 36/9924 in 4/2357.1, Archives Office.

29 William Williams to Marsden, 16 November 1836, General Mission Book, 1832–1840, C/GM2, p.74, CMS Archives, London. (Hereafter cited as C/GM2.)

30 See Yate's fending off from Captain William Brind in a letter to the CMS, 1 June 1832, Yate Correspondence.

31 George Clarke to CMS, 28 September 1836, C/GM2, p.76.

- 32 William Williams to Marsden, 16 November 1836, C/GM2, p.74.
- 33 Busby to NSW Colonial Secretary, 15 November 1836, 36/9924.
- 34 William Williams to Marsden, 16 November 1836, C/GM2, p.74.
- 35 Richard Davis, 4 October 1836, Journal, Mission Books, New Zealand, CN/M9, p.559, CMS Archives, microfilm, ATL.
- 36 William Williams to Marsden, 16 November 1836, C/GM2, p.74.
- 37 NSW Colonial Secretary to James Busby, 24 November 1836, 4/3524, Colonial Secretary Outward Correspondence, 1836, NSW Archives microfilm, Reel 9, National Archives, Wellington: NSW Crown Solicitor to NSW Colonial Secretary, 12 December 1836, 36/10481.
- 38 Rev. Richard Taylor to Yate, 27 June 1836, C/GM2, p.56.
- 39 See, *Account*, pp.xvi–xix, but note correction of Denison’s Christian name. For a period after Yate’s return to England, he, his sister, Sarah, and Denison lived together. In 1843 Denison and Yate were still in touch and Denison had become well known to Yate’s family in Bridgnorth, Shropshire. After 1843, Yate’s diary peters out and there are no personal references in the remaining two years it covers.
- 40 19–24 February 1837, Journal and Diary. So bitter were his feelings that, for a period, he refused to enter an Anglican church.
- 41 C/GM2, pp.60–62.
- 42 18 May–5 June 1836, Journal and Diary.
- 43 *An Authentic Narrative*, p.133.
- 44 Richard Taylor to CMS, 18 August 1836, C/GM2, p.65; Notes taken from statements of passengers and seamen on the *Prince Regent*. n.d., pp.3–4, William Colenso Papers, I, 1836–1899, A236, Mitchell Library. These notes probably derive from the informal inquiry held by the Bishop of Australia in Sydney in September 1836, but they are not the official minutes.
- 45 Broughton to Yate, 14 August 1836, C/GM2, p.63.
- 46 This pertinent fact is not mentioned in Yate’s letter to Broughton, 15 August 1836, C/GM2, p.64, but is stressed, for example, in Yate’s published version of the events, *A Letter to the Committee of the Church Missionary Society*, Poole and Bournemouth, 1843, pp.11–12. He argued that it was the Bishop’s Registrar who first recommended that he sail for England, whereas Samuel Marsden, writing three days after the event, said that Yate had declined an investigation and hence it had been decided to forward the documentation to the CMS. Marsden to CMS, 18 August 1836, Marsden Papers, II, pp.120–21.
- 47 Transcript in Rev. Octavius Piers to CMS, 11 November 1839, Yate Correspondence. Broughton sent the documentation of August 1836, on the basis of which the CMS dissolved their connexion with Yate in February 1837. This documentation is transcribed into C/GM2, pp.50–66.
- 48 *Letter*, p.12.
- 49 Resolution of dismissal, 24 February 1837, Committee Minutes, MC/XV, p.597, CMS Archives, microfilm, ATL.
- 50 For example, Rev. Robert Shuttler to CMS, 7 January 1839, Yate Correspondence.
- 51 For example, Rev. Octavius Piers to CMS, 25 November 1839, *ibid*.
- 52 Some tangled notes of evidence against Yate, which seem to derive from witnesses’ statements at this inquiry, remain among William Colenso’s papers. They are written in two or more different hands. See note 44. Yate argued that he had been prevented from giving evidence himself at this inquiry and from bringing forth his own witnesses. He argued that the preliminary inquiry was used to see whether there was sufficient ground for a consistorial court to be summonsed and that Broughton had subsequently promised him a further formal hearing at which he could defend himself. (*Letter*, pp.13–14; Yate to CMS, 22 October 1836, C/GM2, p.71.) But Broughton, writing to the CMS in 1838, in response to one of Yate’s printed circulars, insisted ‘most positively’ that ‘there never was any difficulty of a technical nature . . . so far as I am aware . . . which could have interfered with his entering upon the defence of his character’. Broughton to CMS, 29 November 1838, Bishops’ Correspondence, CN/03, CMS Archives, microfilm, ATL.
- 53 14/16 May 1837, CMS Committee Minutes, MC/XVI, p.108.
- 54 30 September 1836, Journal, I, typescript, ATL.
- 55 *Letter*, p.18; Circular letter printed May 1838, Yate Correspondence.
- 56 *Letter*, pp.14–15; Marsden to CMS, 28 December [1836], C/GM2, p.73. In May 1837, the CMS confirmed their original resolution of dismissal, taking into cognizance the inquiry which had been entered into ‘at his own instance’, which, although not proceeding to an outcome, did not give them any reason to alter their original position or to enter into an investigation ‘of the merits of the question at issue’. 14/16 May 1837, CMS Committee Minutes, MC/XVI, pp.108–109.

- 57 Yate to CMS, 22 October 1836, C/GM2, p.71.
- 58 Mann, p.349, citing note from Alexander McLeay to Yate.
- 59 NSW Colonial Secretary to James Busby, 24 November 1836, 4/3524; NSW Crown Solicitor (after a second viewing of the documents) to NSW Colonial Secretary, 12 December 1836, 36/10481.
- 60 See, in particular, Rev. J.C. Parr to CMS, 14 June 1839, CH/071 and Rev. W.F. Cobb to CMS, 1 November 1838, CH/069, Home letters, Inward, CMS Archives, microfilm, ATL. The Home Letter Books. Inward and Outward, particularly for 1833 and 1839, contain much correspondence protesting about Yate's situation and the case was still being referred to as late as 1859.
- 61 C/GM2, pp.50–76.
- 62 William Williams to Marsden, 16 November 1836, C/GM2, pp.73–4.
- 63 All the secretaries of the CMS kept Confidential Despatches Books, that is, transcripts of confidential inward correspondence, but none for this period have survived. The CMS Committee Minutes indicate that the material concerning Yate was entered up as it arrived during 1837 and 1838 and also that this documentation, far more copious than that transcribed into C/GM2, would be available for the confidential perusal by members of the committee.
- 64 Committee report of the Board of Governors and Directors of the Poor, 31 May 1843, Minutes, St James' Workhouse, City of Westminster Public Archives, London.
- 65 'Review', p.5. Also the protest in the Minutes of the Committee of New Zealand missionaries, Northern District, 30 August 1836, CN/M9, p.475, which antedated the investigations, but not the gossip coming from Sydney. But note that William Williams' annotated copy of the *Account*, which provided a partial basis for the 'Review', does indicate that he knew of Yate's transgressions. On p.168, where Yate deals with the failings of past missionaries, he scribbled 'there is no one has brought so much dishonour on the holy cause of Christ in this land as the wretched author of this book'. Copy in Hocken Library, Dunedin.
- 66 Clarke to CMS, 10 September 1836, CN/M9, p. 494.
- 67 'Review', p.2.
- 68 *ibid.*, pp.1–2.
- 69 Yate's description of a hakari stage, 18 March 1831, published in the *Missionary Register*, London, 1832, p.156.
- 70 Rev. Francis Close to CMS, 15 December 1835, Yate Correspondence.
- 71 Yate to CMS, 30 June 1835, Yate Correspondence.
- 72 William Williams to CMS, 10 September 1836, CN/M9, p.493.
- 73 Richard Davis to CMS, 10 June 1836, CN/M9, p.496; Yate to CMS, 16 May 1834, CN/099a.
- 74 Edward Williams, Henry Kemp, and Samuel Clarke. Marianne Williams wrote quite openly that as Yate had always appeared 'to take great interest in Edward', it seemed to 'be very desirable to send him under such protection'. 1 January 1834, Journal, Williams Family Papers, C, typescripts, Auckland Public Library,
- 75 'Review', p.6.
- 76 William Williams, annotation to p.176 in the Hocken copy of the *Account*.
- 77 See Smithyman's review, p.434.
- 78 'Review', p.5; see *Account*, p.84.
- 79 3 May 1831, Journal, CN/099b.
- 80 *Account*, p.xii.
- 81 *ibid.*, p.102.
- 82 G.W. Shroff, 'George Clarke and the New Zealand Mission, 1824–1850', unpublished MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1967, p.198.
- 83 26 September 1836, Journal, CN/M9, p.558.
- 84 Yate, 16–31 August 1836, Journal and Diary.
- 85 *Marsden and the Missions: Prelude to Waitangi*, Sydney, 1936, p.39.