

**Inscribed to Herself:
The Poetry of Beth and Zoila**

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Critical Introduction

The *Colonist*, will be devoted to the special spread of Science, Literature, the Arts, Agriculture and Commerce; it will be the strenuous advocate of Civil and Religious Liberty, and the uncompromising defender of the People's Political Rights.

(‘Prospectus’, *Colonist* 23 Oct 1857).

Thus began the inaugural issue of Nelson's rebellious new rival newspaper in October 1857. The same paper bore witness to an unconventional flowering of poetry in 1860 by two women under the pseudonyms Beth and Zoila. The majority of the original poetry published in that year was contributed by them, with a particular concentration of their works occurring from January through to August. Often, they were published together in the same issue, their poems seemingly in dialogue with each other and exploring similar themes. Was the newspaper's ‘devotion’ to Literature the reason that so much of their work was published? Is the side by side publishing of Beth and Zoila an exposure of two female poets who were friends and living in the Nelson region? This anthology is a compilation of ten works from these two mysterious figures, mostly focusing on their poems which were published together. Beth and Zoila's poetry and its flourishing in the short time period of 1860-1861, provides us with a small scale window onto female friendship, newspaper publishing and colonial womanhood within a New Zealand context.

While finding out who the women behind ‘Beth’ and ‘Zoila’ were has been beyond the scope of my current research, it could be inferred that their publication together indicates a friendship between the two writers. Prior to 1860, their poems are published a total of seven times in the *Colonist*, but never side by side. In 1858 and 1859 Beth is also published six times in the *Nelson Examiner*, but is never published in that paper again after her poems start to appear in the *Colonist*. In 1860, Beth and Zoila have a combined

total of twenty one poems published in the newspaper, a staggering amount because no other named poets are published more than once or twice in that year. Eight of the poems are ones that are published alongside of each other, a number which is frequent enough to warrant examination. The first time a bi-publication occurs is on the 10th Feb 1860, with the poems 'Sheep Bells' by Beth and 'Song of the English Exile' by Zoila. The last instance of this is on the 8th June 1860 with the publication of 'A Soft and Sunny Dream was Mine' by Beth and 'Letters of the Dead' by Zoila. In fact, this is the last time Beth is ever to be published in the *Colonist*. So, either the *Colonist* had an inundation of poems by both writers, and the editor chose to group them periodically; or poems with a similar theme were sent in by each of the poets at the same time. Even if they didn't know each other personally, they would likely have been keeping up with the other's publication. However, much of their poetry of 1860 seems to be intensely concentrated on the death of children and strongly suggests a common trauma. Their individual poems before that year do not display the same obsession with a dead child. It could be imagined that something that occurred that year inspired them both to focus on that theme.

The difficulty involved in identifying who Beth and Zoila might have been is testament to the invisibility of women's lives. Much can be identified about the six men who started the *Colonist* for example, but relatively little seems discoverable about the lives of women in the area, at least through the newspapers that Beth and Zoila called home. The flourishing of their poetry in the year of 1860 is then a unique public window into women's lives, and one that is told through their own, albeit veiled, perspective. However, while the poems can provide indications of the concerns of women in 1860 Nelson, a comparison with lifewriting of the period is crucial. To really understand women's lives and the roles of friendship, it is essential to look to the diaries and letters that made up women's social-textual world. When women's lifewriting is ignored, we miss much of the ordinary and everyday (Marcus 33). Francis Porter and Charlotte MacDonald's book *My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates* is an invaluable look into women's lives in nineteenth century New Zealand through the exposition of their letters and diaries. Letter writing would have been undoubtedly important to Beth and Zoila, whoever they were, as it would have enabled them to keep connections left behind in Britain. Zoila's poem 'Letters of the Dead' published on 8th June 1860, speaks of the kept letters of loved ones, who have passed away:

On them my tears were falling;
These letters of the dead,
As memory back was calling
The lov'd ones that had fled.

Martha Adams, writing from Nelson in 1851 spoke of the joy of receiving letters from an England she still thought of as home:

Oh! the unknown pleasure of getting English letters! None but the wanderers from home can feel it! When the news spreads that a sail is in the distance, a ship is coming down the bay, everyone is alive, each household contrives some one to go to town and to the post for letters...and then the question oozes out, 'What news from home?' (Yes, home still), 'How are they getting on in the old country?'

(Quoted in Porter and Macdonald 88).

While the regional histories and newspapers of Nelson are useful in constructing a picture of Beth and Zoila, the women's letter writing from the time or area is yet more instructive.

If we were to posit that Beth and Zoila might have been friends, there are some instructive examples of friendships between female writers in the Victorian era which we could look to. The most famous examples occur in Britain, and it is from these that we can imagine what a partnership between Beth and Zoila may have looked like. In her book, *Female Friendships and Communities*, Pauline Nestor speaks of Elizabeth Gaskell as a female writer who saw herself as part of a small community of female writers. She was known to have sent new work to other women writers for advice on her writing and was prepared to offer help to other aspiring authors when asked (29). It is not hard to imagine that in a burgeoning New Zealand settlement, two female poets may have also seen themselves as part of a tiny community. Is it possible that they became friends after noticing each other being published, hoping for some kind of literary connection? It is also unlikely that they would feel any strong sense of competition, since they appear to have been published a reasonably equal number of times. The instances of bi-publication signal that there was no animosity between them, and was possibly even communion.

One of the most well-known examples of friendships between female writers, is that of Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell. The friendship between the two women appeared to be mutually important and beneficial. Gaskell offered Brontë continual support and comfort, while the friendship was also valuable to her career as a writer (Nestor 31). In a moving example from her *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Gaskell speaks of how touched she was when Brontë delayed her publishing of *Villette* so that Gaskell's *Ruth* could be given publishing precedence. The letter Brontë sends to Gaskell is an example of warm feeling between fellow women writers and an unwillingness to let comparisons be destructive to friendships:

I dare say, arrange as we may, we shall not be able to wholly prevent comparisons; it is in the nature of some critics to be invidious, but we need not care: we can set them at defiance; they

shall not make us foes, they shall not mingle with our mutual feelings one taint of jealousy:
there is my hand on that, I know you will give clasp for clasp.
(Gaskell 277).

It is possible that Beth and Zoila would have experienced comparisons of their work as well. The two women are published so often in the same newspaper that people would have likely voiced their opinion on whom they thought to be the stronger writer. However, as it has been noted, their willingness to be published side by side gestures to the “mutual feelings” which Charlotte Brontë speaks of in her letter.

As Nestor points out, the existence of female friendship was a matter which was often up for public debate as “women’s fickleness and jealousy had long been targets for the satirist” (7). However, as her book goes on to demonstrate, friendships between women were a key part of their lives. The shift towards marriage being conceptualised as a type of friendship, as opposed to mere patriarchal service, meant that female friendships began to be seen as a kind of training ground for married life (Marcus 26). The realm of friendship between women could be seen as one of freedom not afforded to women in male-dominated areas of social life. Friendships between women both supported the patriarchal structure and created something separate from it;

Female friendship reinforced gender roles and consolidated class status, but it also provided women with socially permissible opportunities to engage in behaviour commonly seen as the monopoly of men: competition, active choice, appreciation of female beauty, and struggles with religious belief. As friends, women could comport themselves in ways forbidden with men, without compromising the respectability so prized by the middle class.
(Marcus 26).

Friendship then, afforded women freedoms separate from those normally allotted to them. Of course, female writers were published in the 19th century but writing and publishing were still very much a male-dominated sphere. Friendships would have sanctioned women’s discussion about their writing, and created a space for competition, comparison and advice, as was the case with the activity within the community of women who were in contact with Elizabeth Gaskell. The need for pseudonyms (although they were common for men *and* women) meant that Beth and Zoila desired to remain anonymous. If discussion of their writing could not occur in a public sphere, it may have then occurred privately. Sharon Marcus discusses the concept of the “play of the system” in her book *Between Women*. Borrowing from Barthes, she sees Victorian gender roles as “the complexity of systems in which constraint was inseparable from liberty, action and recreation, from a degree of give built into social rules, offering those who lived by them flexibility, if not utter freedom” (27). For her, women's lives are separate domains that exist side-by-side with men’s, creating freedom within those

domains but not outside of them. Some of Beth and Zoila's most interesting poems occur after they start publishing concurrently, indicating that this connection might have enabled their work to flourish and evolve with the support of one another.

It may also be worth examining why *The Colonist* was so well placed to be the publisher of Beth and Zoila's poetic output. *The Colonist* was established specifically to position itself as a challenge to the *Nelson Examiner*, the newspaper which had published Beth a number of times. According to Guy Schofield in his *Newspapers in New Zealand*, it was a common misconception that the paper was "property of the New Zealand Company." It gave little space in its columns to any grievances of local settlers (156). The inaugural issue makes it clear that the six men who started the paper, wanted to provide an alternative voice:

Is it not time that an engine so mighty for good or for evil as the Press, should no longer be under the entire control of any single firm, or of any single party, but be placed within reach of all, and be made available for the exposure of every abuse and the promulgation of every salutary truth?
(‘I Hope I Don’t Intrude’, *Colonist* 23 Oct 1857).

The Colonist, then, took its start in a spirit of defiance against a dominant, single narrative. It is fitting that it would be the newspaper that would so keenly publish two women throughout 1860.

The newspaper's political and literary scene was in stark contrast to rival newspaper the *Nelson Examiner's*. Alfred Domett, one of its key players, was very clearly on the side of property owners in the region and much less of a radical than the players who started the *Colonist*. He had both political and literary ties to Nelson, serving on the Provincial Council from 1857-1863, and also serving as editor of the *Nelson Examiner* for a brief time in 1857. He was himself a poet, often making contributions to the *Nelson Examiner*, and working steadily on his epic work *Ranolf and Amohia* (Graham).

The first poem of this anthology, ‘Song of the English Exile’ is written by Zoila and published on the 10th February 1860. This poem appears alongside Beth's ‘Sheep Bells’, the first instance of their double-publication. Both poems express a wistful yearning for a past and a home left behind. ‘Song of the English Exile’ indicates a lack of choice in the journey;

When the sybil told me I should cross the sea;
When laugh'd I, mocking the prophetic saying,
Ere the dark waves sever'd my home from me.

The use of the words “Sybil” and “prophetic” indicate a fated journey beyond the speaker’s control. While the phrase “dark waves sever’d” signals a violent kind of separation. The phrase may not have been Zoila’s reality, but it mirrors the experience of many women who made the journey over to the colony, who had “little choice but to accompany their husbands” (Porter and MacDonald 55). Whether the choice was agreeable or not, once there, New Zealand was not thought of as ‘home’ for many women. This is reflected in the previously quoted letter from Martha Adams and also in this one from Margaret Herring in 1861; “There is something most cheering in the knowledge that dear ones in England are thinking of and praying for us; that the wide rolling sea is no real barrier to the meeting of hearts” (Quoted in Porter and Macdonald 97). Her words echo Zoila’s “warm true hearts” in ‘Song of the English Exile’. Yet, are more hopeful in their expression, “the wide rolling sea is no real barrier” from loved ones. Zoila’s poem is more despairing, the speaker feels a more complete severing from home, a separation even letters can’t bridge. Beth’s ‘Sheep Bells’ appearing in the same issue, is more nostalgic and less dark than Zoila’s treatment of the same theme. Appearing as the first of the two, it has the same hint of melancholic severance with the past as Zoila’s piece, especially with the phrase “for ever gone”:

Sheep bells, sheep bells,
Ye have stories all your own,
Of the thistle tempest-nurst,
Of the heath flower newly burst:
Of the time for ever gone.

The two pieces are so complementary in tone and theme that they seem almost designed to be so, which is a thread that connects throughout Beth and Zoila’s double publications.

The next time Beth and Zoila’s work appears together, on the 2nd March 1860, the *Colonist* publishes ‘Katy’ by Zoila and ‘Where Go the Stars Dearest Mother’ by Beth. The common thread in each poem *seems* to be the death of a daughter, although this is somewhat ambiguous. The two works seem to indicate collaboration even more explicitly than before. The trajectory of the poems themselves is similar, as well as subject matter. Each poem starts as if the speaker is communicating with a daughter that is still alive but the last stanzas seem to reveal that they are not:

Ah! Angel Katy ever,
As now may thy heart be
As fresh and fond and constant,
God’s blessing rest with thee!
(‘Katy’, Zoila)

Thou still may'st be living and lovely,
Though mystically gone from earth's sight;
Enshrined in the bright rays of heaven,
Like the beautiful stars of the night.
(‘Where go the Stars’, Beth)

It is unclear if the child death is a real occurrence or an imagined one. It is within the realm of possibility that if one of their daughters died then the other may have also wanted to write about it, sharing that moment of mourning with a friend. We may also posit that they were related, and the death may have been a shared family tragedy. If Beth and Zoila were mother and daughter, sisters, or sisters in law, it is even more likely that this grief would be a shared one. In any case, the communion of the two poems suggests some kind of bond between the two women, even if it is only a literary one. Child deaths were a common occurrence in the 19th century and found their way into many poems. Beth and Zoila may have been simply inspired by a common trope. Interestingly, the death of children was very much a part of the founding history of their adopted Nelson. The first emigrant boat arrived in 1842 in a state of profound loss; “The officers of the Company had taken every care they thought, to keep the promise made to husbands and fathers, of safe conveyance to them of their wives and families...When the ship arrived there was a sad tale to tell. Sixty-five children had died on the voyage” (Broad 18).

The way the dead child is framed in these two poems by Beth and Zoila fits the manner in which this subject tended to be dealt with by Victorian poets. Laurence Lerner, in his book *Angels and Absences*, identifies the common theme of poems about this profound loss to be consolation (40). He identifies the often recurring ‘strategies of consolation’ to be both explicitly and implicitly Christian in nature: “They all urge the parents not to weep because the dead child is now an angel...has left behind a happy memory...and will through its death have a beneficial effect upon the survivors” (42). The trope is played out in both of these poems by Beth and Zoila. Zoila refers to an ‘Angel Katy’ while Beth speaks of the child as being “enshrined in the bright rays of heaven”. The idea of a happy memory left behind can also be seen in the poems. The beginning of each poem renders the spirit of each daughter with a liveliness. In Zoila’s ‘Katy’ the speaker can hear her daughter’s “singing laugh” and “tiny footfall”. While in Beth’s ‘Where Go the Stars Dearest Mother’, she explains the nature of stars to an absent daughter;

The stars are still waking, my daughter,
Still living as pure and as fair,
As when like to clusters of dew-drops,
They shone through the calm evening air.

The theme of the mystical dead child is something which will continue to crop up in the poetry of Beth and Zoila. Beth's poem 'The Absent Daughter' appears little over a week after 'Where Go the Stars Dearest Mother'" on the 9th March 1860. The pervasiveness of the theme suggests that the death of a daughter is something that she may have experienced. The poem seems to contain less of the 'strategies of consolation' which Lerner discusses in his text. The piece seems to reject the overtly Christian sense of comfort of thinking of a dead child as an angel in heaven. It is instead compellingly personal. The speaker's comfort and consolation come from the memory she herself keeps. The presence of the dead daughter does not come in angelic form but is a "burden" kept inside:

And yet art thou not with me everywhere,
Forever biding in my yearning heart,
For oh, the burden of each thought, each care,
My bosom knows, beloved one, thou art.

The comparative rawness of the poem, in contrast with contrived tropes of religious consolation, suggest maybe Beth did actually experience this loss. The comfort of religion can be hard to cling to in the face of a lost child gone too soon. Sarah Greenwood, writing to her mother on the death of her child in Motueka in 1864 expresses the sentiment eloquently:

The idea of death has never been a frightful thought to me, either personally or for those near and dear to me where I felt persuaded by their acceptance and salvation by their God and Saviour. Still you who have experienced it can best understand the agony of tender regret and yearning love when all hope of a dear child's restoration is entirely crushed by death.

(Quoted in Porter and Macdonald 461).

Beth's poem expresses a near hopelessness and desperation completely unlike the poems written to comfort parents. In the following lines we can keenly feel a sense of injustice:

For oh, my daughter, 'neath the measured sky,
There is no voice so echoeth back to mine,
There is no light like to thy gentle eye,
There is no face so beautiful as thine.
I have no tear that is not shed for thee,
I have no sigh to thee that is not given,

When the sun sinks into the western sea,
And when the day looks from the orient heaven.

When looking at other women being published in the *Colonist* at the same time as Beth and Zoila, it is clear their poetry seems to be engaging with much darker themes. A celebrated contemporary from Britain, Eliza Cook is published in its pages twice in the period of 1860-1861. These poems include ‘Honesty’, published on the 31 July 1860 and ‘A Song for the New Year’ published on the 4 June 1861. The thematic concerns of the poems seem trite compared to those of Beth and Zoila, especially Beth. Eliza Cook was likely to be a poet that the editor of the *Colonist* admired, but his local poets seem to have been producing far more compelling work. Beth and Zoila though, could just have easily been writing from Britain much of the time. Local themes rarely appear in their poems and the only time New Zealand is mentioned by either of them is in Beth’s ‘The Emigrants’ published on the 23 September 1859 (see Textual Notes). In fact, they are so fixated on Britain and British models of poetry that huge events in the Nelson region never seem to infiltrate their poetic consciousness at all. War is occurring in Taranaki in the period of 1860-1861 and women and children are making their way to Nelson to stay with families in the region, yet we never see so much as a hint of this in their poetic output. This is indicative of not just what was of focus to Beth and Zoila, but of what the *Colonist* was most concerning itself with. While the *Nelson Examiner* was publishing poetic content referencing the Taranaki conflict, the *Colonist* kept its poetry publication literary, as opposed to overly political.

Zoila’s ‘The Poet Child’ is a somewhat lighter take on the recurring dead child motif. Appearing in the *Colonist* on the 13th March 1860, it describes the special qualities of a “poet child” and his “brief stay on earth”. The dead child in the poem is a martyred figure who is set up as different from the other children. The poem gives the impression that he was too wise for this world and therefore had to die (“happy was the early death”, “their sainted Poet Child”). Again, we encounter a ‘strategy of consolation’. However, I would also argue that the poem reflects the public debate and attitudes to children born in the new colony. Colonial children were perceived as having a “roughness” not present in those raised back home. According to Porter and Macdonald, “Attitudes to these children in many ways mirrored the range of reactions Europeans had to life in the colony: some applauding the freedoms of a society unencumbered by entrenched institutions; others regretting the absence of sufficient social and cultural sophistication within which to cultivate the next generation” (381). The figure of the “poet child” then becomes a symbolic martyr for “sophistication” in the colony. He doesn’t participate in the games of other “unencumbered” children:

The sports they lov’d, he never shar’d;
But sat from them apart;
While musings that they knew not of
Made music in his heart;

His death becomes then a symbolic homecoming:

Fainter the beatings of that pure heart,
Yearning for home so long,
And happy was the early death
Of the fair child of song.

That being said, some felt the freedom children experienced in the colonies as a positive change. Hannah Stephenson Smith wrote in New Plymouth in early 1850, “What a glorious place this is for children; they wander about in the woods and sun. I, who am rather of an anxious nature, know they can go into no danger” (Quoted in Porter and Macdonald 392).

Of course, with greater freedoms came greater risks. There were few bridges and many rivers, and most journeys would have been made by water. *The Colonist* contained many stories of drowning in the period. Some at home and some abroad, some children and some adults. On 22 January 1858, the newspaper published a particularly grizzly piece about a young mother who killed herself and her two children by drowning. The testimony is cold and to the point, with the witness stating: “I saw no marks of struggling on the ground near the water-hole. Neither I nor any of my family heard any shrieking of children yesterday morning or the night before. The arms of the children were cold when I took them out of the water-hole” (‘Fearful Tragedy at Preston’, *Colonist* 22 Jan 1858). It is possible Beth would have read the story, or at least heard about it, and her poem ‘Ella’ contains much of the same tragic eeriness. Published on the 30 March 1860, the poem tells of a “ruined” young woman who also kills herself by drowning;

Poor one, pale and drooping with shame and with sin,
She wept by the verge of the wood,
Cold, cold did the waves of the stream roll, and deep;
But she laid her down ‘neath them to sleep
All alone where the ruined mill stood.

Ella was published alongside Zoila’s own take on the drowning theme, ‘‘Twas’ the Wave that Took Thee: On the Death of a Child by Drowning’. This time the drowning is not voluntary, but accidental. The poem has that element of consolation familiar to child death poetry, the assertion that the child is now in a better place; “It came that thou shouldst wake/To brighter spheres upon the morrow!”. Yet, the poem is also tinged with a quiet desolation:

And those that lov'd thee, sad moments keep,
While through the still, the solemn midnight's gloom
The surges of the wild and mighty deep
Chant a weird requiem o'er thy low, lone tomb.

The death of a child is an emotional event, but the violence of drowning gives it even more poetic weight. Elizabeth Holman, reminiscing about her daughter's death in 1864 wrote:

My daughter Ellen then about 16 years of age, a great favourite with everyone in the place...came running into my room saying Mamma I am just going over to the Brees to have a dip with them. I won't be long...Alas I never saw her again. She was drowned...The shock deprived me of my senses for days and for some time they thought I would not recover (Quoted in Porter and Macdonald 767).

Zoila herself may not have experienced the "death of a child by drowning" but she would have likely been aware of children who succumbed to such tragedy through newspaper stories, and possibly even through stories from acquaintances. Drowning was clearly an element of public imagination that she would have been able to tap into in her poetic output.

The final time Beth appears in *The Colonist* is with the wistful 'A Soft and Sunny Dream was Mine' which appears alongside Zoila's 'Letters of the Dead' on 8 June 1860. The poem takes the recurring theme of mothers, daughters and death but turns it on its head somewhat. It is not a dead daughter which the poem addresses, but a dead mother. Intriguingly, it takes up one of the consolation techniques used in dead child poetry, the use of the angel:

Yet 'twas not thou, my mother sweet,
That blessed my dreaming sight---
But an angel from heaven stooped
And kissed me in the night.

The poem also expresses some of that longing for home we see in her earlier work 'Sheep Bells'. It conveys a nostalgic yearn for childhood and the presence of a mother, much like the previously discussed letters to loved ones in England from women living in New Zealand.

The world before me glittering lay,
All warmth and sunshine then;

A fair and happy child I dwelt
In that fair home again.

Why then, does Beth stop being published in the *Colonist* after ‘A Soft and Sunny Dream Was Mine’? New poems began appearing from her in the *Otago Witness* in August 1860. We know it is the same Beth as she publishes ‘Song of the Reapers’ in the newspaper in March, a poem which was also published in *The Colonist*. It is possible that Beth relocates to Otago, leaving Zoila behind in Nelson, or that she merely starts to send her work there instead. Her Otago poems leave behind some of the dark themes of the 1860 *Colonist* pieces, suggesting things were calmer for her by this time, or that the editors likely had more interest in lighter pieces. Another possibility is that the papers become so preoccupied with the wars being fought between Pakeha and Maori that poetry gets put on the backburner in the *Colonist* altogether. While this is true in a larger sense, the poetry doesn’t really decrease in frequency until 1861 and Zoila continues to be sparsely published after that time. In any case, something occurs that makes Beth move on to the *Otago Witness*. The flourishing of her poetry, to the extent that I have discovered, seems largely contained by the window of 1860-1861 and what happens to her after this I have not been able to discover.

Zoila’s last poem for *The Colonist*, and her last known poem ever, is the poignant ‘False Friends’. It is published on the 5th November 1861, over a year after Beth’s last appearance in *The Colonist*. In fact, it is the only poem by her that appears in 1861 at all. It was one of few original poems published that year in the *Colonist* and it is fitting that Beth’s last poem to be published in that newspaper explores the theme of friendship. The poem contrasts the friends which are only there for good times (“summer friends”) with “faithful friends”. It’s hard to imagine that Zoila would not be including Beth in her list of true friends (if they did indeed know one another). Beth’s presence, real or imagined, is felt in the last stanza of the poem and this collection:

But there are some who well deserve the name,
Who still cling to us when the false are gone,
Who love through sunshine and through cloud the same;
And will not forsake us when the storm comes on:
These are our true, true friends, our faithful friends.

Anthology of Beth and Zoila's Poems

A Note on the Text

All of the poems presented in this anthology have been sourced from the National Library of New Zealand's *Papers Past* website. The typesetting has been followed reasonably closely from the originals, although in some cases the poems have been broken up into stanzas, or fully broken up into stanzas, to ease the flow of reading. A few obvious errors have also been silently corrected. In some cases errors have been left in if an alternative was not obvious. Any odd punctuation has been modernised, e.g. spaces between words and semi-colons. Readers may refer to the textual notes, which come after the anthology, for detailed comment on editorial decisions.

SONG OF THE ENGLISH EXILE.

Where are the friends I once lov'd so dearly,
The faces kind that once upon me smil'd;
The warm true hearts that lov'd me so sincerely,
And the sweet voices that my ear beguil'd?
Here? They are far from here.

Where the old homestead thro' the elm trees gleaming,
The blue lake gushing forth its endless song;
The sunlight on its rippling bosom streaming,
The white swans sailing there the whole day long.
Here? They are far from here.

Where the dear church with its green ivy clinging,
On its old grey turret, and its walls around;
The cheerful bells their music measure ringing,
The porch whose wild rose trail'd upon the ground.
Here? They are far from here.

Where the white gate that open'd on the meadow,
Where clover blossom'd, and the tall grass wav'd;
The bow'r beneath the walnut tree's broad shadow,
The lonely grot with varied sea-shells pav'd.
Here? They are far from here.

Where the green lane where the summer bees were straying,
When the sybil told me I should cross the sea;
When laugh'd I, mocking the prophetic saying,
Ere the dark waves sever'd my fair home from me.
Here? It is far from here.

Where the sweet fancies that one time came thronging,
With changless happiness to my breast;
Oh! That my heart would cease its weary longing,
Break in its struggling with its own mirest.
Here? That alone is here!

ZOILA.
10 February 1860.

SHEEP BELLS

Sheep bells, sheep bells,
What is it ye tell to me,
 Ringing by some lonely brook,
 Climbing in some sunny nook,
Where sweet grass and flowerets be

Sheep bells, sheep bells,
Ye have stories all your own,
 Of the thistle tempest-nurst,
 Of the heath flower newly burst;
Of the time for ever gone.

Sheep bells, sheep bells,
Only music that I knew,
 When the whole world unto me,
 Was the brightly-spreading sea;
Bounded by its mountain blue.

Sheep bells, sheep bells,
I shall hear you ne'er again,
 With life but one summer day,
 With lip tuned to laughter aye;
With glad spirit as 'twas then.

Sheep bells, sheep bells,
Hearts that once were warm grow cold,
 Fortune turns and brows look strange,
 But ye ne'er have known a change;
Still are yours the times of old.

Sheep bells, sheep bells,
Of my holiest love's ye breathe,
 Faces fair as summer's bloom,
 White cot where the queenly broom,
Hung around her golden wreath.

Sheep bells, sheep bells,
Wherefore do ye cause me tears,
 Ah, your music seems to bear,
 My mother's hymn, my father's prayer.
All lov'd things of other years.

BETH.

10 February 1860.

KATY.
INSCRIBED TO HERSELF.

Ah! Katy, all affection,
Lovely, loving, lov'd;
Such wealth of warm heart-beauty,
How can it all be prov'd?

Thy singing laugh, I hear it,
And yet I hear it not---
It comes to me in fancy,
And can never be forgot

Thy little hands are clasping,
To lisp thy evening pray'r;
I see thy soft eyes lifted,
And yet I am not there.

I hear thy tiny footfall,
How distant, yet how near,
And to my side thou'rt springing,
And yet thou art not here.

I clasp my arms around thee,
Thy lips mine own have met;
Those caressing words "I love you,"
I listen to them yet.

I see thee calmly resting,
In a sweet and peaceful sleep;
And pray that God in heaven
A watch o'er thee may keep.

Oh! Katy. I could love thee,
Yes, were MY heart as stone;
Thy woman's heart would shame it,
Into a softer tone.

Ah! Angel Katy ever,
As now may thy heart be
As fresh and fond and constant,
God's blessing rest with thee!

ZOILA.
2 March 1860.

WHERE GO THE STARS DEAREST MOTHER

Where go the stars, dearest mother,
 When passed hath the darkness away,
When the skirts of the orient heavens,
 Are barred with the gold of the day.

All through the morn I have waited,
 All through the noonday so bright;
But they come not again, though I call them,
 The beautiful stars of the night.

Have they gone and for aye, sweetest mother,
 Did they die at the dawning of day?
Or have they but left us to slumber,
 In their chambers of blue far away?

The stars are still waking, my daughter,
 Still living as pure and as fair,
As when like to clusters of dew-drops,
 They shone through the calm evening air.

But the day hath arisen in glory,
 And under her pinions of light.
Hath folded them all and hid them,
 Those angel-eyed watchers of night.

My daughter, thus yearneth my spirit,
 My daughter, oh, thus doth it pray:
That when from the scenes of this world,
 Thou pass'd has for ever away,

Thou still may'st be living and lovely,
 Though mystically gone from earth's sight;
Enshrined in the bright rays of heaven,
 Like the beautiful stars of the night.

BETH.

2 March 1860.

THE POET CHILD

He grew not as the others grew,
 In perfect health, and strong;
But seem'd as something lent to them,
 To tarry not for long:
The sports they lov'd, he never shar'd;
 But sat from them apart;
Whilst musings that they knew not of
 Made music in his heart;
And thoughts that never dwelt with them,
 And fancies strange and wild
Were thronging in the brain of him,
 The silent Poet Child.

A rare and magic melody
 Was playing in his soul;
And hourly in its sweetness grew,
 And reck'd not of control;
And sounds were floating on his ear
 They never could have heard;
And winds grew softer as they fell
 And his heart-harp chords stirr'd;
And time stole on, and still he liv'd,
 The gentle and the mild,
And none yet knew the lonely one,
 The gifted Poet Child.

But changing years soon told their tale
 The bright, tho' sinking eye,
The flushing cheek and failing pulse
 Warn'd them that he must die.
Fainter the beatings of that pure heart,
 Yearning for home so long,
And happy was the early death
 Of the fair child of song.
And only when he died they knew
 In records which beguil'd
The time of his brief stay on earth,
 Their sainted Poet Child.

ZOILA.

13 March 1860.

THE ABSENT DAUGHTER

My daughter, thou art with me everywhere,
For ever present in thy mother's heart,
The burden of each thought, each wish, each prayer,
My daughter, oh my daughter, still thou art.

All things that are of thee doth memory keep,
The soft warm lip to mine so often pressed,
The tones that called me from the morning sleep,
The fond goodnight when came the hour of rest.

For oh, my daughter, 'neath the measured sky,
There is no voice so echoeth back to mine,
There is no light like to thy gentle eye,
There is no face so beautiful as thine.

I have no tear that is not shed for thee,
I have no sigh to thee that is not given,
When the sun sinks into the western sea,
And when the day looks from the orient heaven.

Come with thy young life fresh upon thy cheek,
Come in the dawning of thy stainless youth,
Thy fair smooth brow so quiet and meek,
That telleth all thy purity and truth.

And yet art thou not with me everywhere,
Forever biding in my yearning heart,
For oh, the burden of each thought, each care,
My bosom knows, beloved one, thou art.

BETH.

9 March 1860.

ELLA

I mind me the vale where the bramble and briar
 Grew wild where the ruined mill stood,
And the stream that had nursed it in happier hours,
Still tossed to the sunshine its crystalline showers,
And sang with the birds in the wood

And well, too, I mind unto that lonely spot
 Naught could tempt our young footsteps to stray,
Nor wild flower, nor red fruit, though fragrant and fair,
For we deemed that the spirit of Ella roamed there
 In the moonlight so silvery grey.

Young Ella, the star of her widowed sire's home,
 Sweet Ella, the pure and the good;
No rosebud that smiled in the summer's warm flush
Was so fair and so gay as she stood in the blush
 And the pride of her first womanhood.

But the chill winter came, and his mantle of snows
 O'er the glory of autumn he threw,
The leaves of the rosebud lay scattered and dead,
The mirth from the white brow of Ella had fled,
 And the light from her dark eye of blue.

Poor one, pale and drooping with shame and with sin,
 She wept by the verge of the wood,
Cold, cold did the waves of the stream roll, and deep;
But she laid her down 'neath them to sleep
 All alone where the ruined mill stood.

BETH.

30 March 1860.

**'T WAS THE WAVE THAT TOOK THEE!
ON THE DEATH OF A CHILD BY DROWNING.**

Yes! 'twas the wily darkly-rolling wave
 That snatched thy yielding form and bore thee on.
A willing eager arm was stretched to save---
 It failed to grasp thee---sinking thou wast gone.
Death's spirit came to check the laugh that rose
 Upon thy lip---the eye so full of mirth---
The beaming eye, in the shadows dark to close;
 To win thee from the fair and joyous earth.
 The charm of life to break
 Ere it had told thee aught of sorrow;
 It came that thou shouldst wake
 To brighter spheres upon the morrow!

And those that lov'd thee, sad moments keep,
 While through the still, the solemn midnight gloom
The surges of the wild and mighty deep
 Chant a weird requiem o'er thy low, lone tomb.
The stamp of truth was on thy fair white brow,
 And music fill'd the voice in every tone,
And love and kindness--- ah! where art thou now?
 Where death hath left thee---in far realms unknown.
 The spell of life to break
 Ere it had taught thee aught of sorrow;
 It came that thou shouldst wake
 To brighter spheres upon the morrow!

ZOILA.
30 March 1860.

A SOFT AND SUNNY DREAM WAS MINE

A soft and sunny dream was mine
 In midnight's silence deep,
My gentle mother thou did'st come
 And sooth me in my sleep.

Beside thee did I lingering stand,
 And on thy faithful breast
Once more my weary brow was laid
 In safety sweet to rest.

I heard thy fond-remembered voice
 In its low cadence speak,
I felt thy hand upon my hair,
 Thy breathing on my cheek.

Not yet had time grown sad with me,
 Still gay was he and young,
Nor yet around by bounding steps
 The thorns of life had sprung.

The world before me glittering lay,
 All warmth and sunshine then;
A fair and happy child I dwelt
 In that dear home again.

Yet 'twas not thou, my mother sweet,
 That blessed my dreaming sight---
But an angel that from heaven stooped
 And kissed me in the night.

BETH.

8 June 1860.

FALSE FRIENDS.

OH! There are some who call themselves our friends,
 So readily forget us when a change
Comes o'er our fortunes, and misfortune sends
 Its evils to contend with,---then how strange
 Become these false, false friends, these summer friends!

The bright sun shines on many festive brows
 Of gay companionship, of gladsome mirth;
And many mingle with us and with ours,---
 Friends for the time---the truest friends on earth
 Are they? Ah, no, they are but summer friends!

Then dark clouds lower,---awhile the crisis pends,
 And suddenly how strange and cold they grow.
Yet darker still the cloud---their friendship ends,
 This with the sunshine;---are they here? Ah no!
 They're gone these summer friends, these false false friends.

The storm breaks us o'er us; then the very few
 Who first had doubted, linger'd by us yet,
Desert us openly,---they prove not true,
 Stand not the test of change, and soon forget:
 E'en as the rest of all our summer friends!

But there are some who well deserve the name,
 Who still cling to us when the false friends are gone,
Who love through sunshine and through cloud the same;
 And will not forsake us when the storm comes on:
 These our true, true friends, our faithful friends.

ZOILA.

5 November 1861.

Textual Notes

Zoila, 'Song of the English Exile', *Colonist*, 10 February 1860, Page 3.

Beth, 'Sheep Bells', *Colonist*, 10 February 1860, Page 3.

The line "My mother's hymn, my father's prayer" is reminiscent of a line from one of Beth's earlier poems in the *Colonist*, 'The Orphan's Lament for Home'; "I miss the father that did fondly bless me, / I miss the morning hymn, the evening prayer". 'Sheep Bells', then, may be a reworking or attempted improvement on that earlier piece.

Zoila, 'Katy', *Colonist*, 2 March 1860, Page 4.

Editorial note: The stanzas in the original publication had been squashed together, in this anthology they have been broken apart into quatrains.

Beth, 'Where Go the Stars Dearest Mother', *Colonist*, 2 March 1860, Page 4.

Editorial note: In the original publication, the first stanza is indented further right than the others. The stanzas have been aligned in this anthology as the original indent served no obvious purpose and may have been a printing mistake.

The line "Thou pass'd has for ever away" doesn't seem to make sense and may have been a mistake in printing.

Beth, 'The Absent Daughter', *Colonist*, 9 March 1860, Page 4.

The poem appears a little over a week since Beth's 'Where go the Stars Dearest Mother' which also suggested a dead daughter. She repeats the phrase "orient heaven" in each poem.

Zoila, 'The Poet Child', *Colonist*, 13 March 1860, Page 4.

Editorial note: In the original publication, the first two stanzas had been joined together. This anthology has separated them.

Beth, 'Ella', *Colonist*, 30 March 1860, Page 3.

Editorial note: In its original publication, the fourth line read "Still tossed to the sunshine its crystalines howers". This has been changed to "crystalline showers" as it seemed to be an obvious printing error.

Zoila, 'Twas the Wave that Took Thee!', *Colonist*, 30 March 1860, Page 3.

Beth, 'A Soft and Sunny Dream was Mine', *Colonist*, 8 June 1860, Page 4.

The poem is reminiscent of one published in the *Otago Witness* on the 29th June, 1861 entitled 'To My Mother'. The poem is not signed so may not be by Beth, but it does seem very similar in style and content. Both poems address the passing of time and end on a religious note. Beth does not directly mention God in many of her other poems in the *Colonist* which indicates it may not be her, but someone writing in a similar vein. However, her *Nelson Examiner* poems were often religious and she may have returned to this in Otago.

Zoila, 'False Friends', *Colonist*, 5 November 1861, Page 4.

This is the only poem published by Zoila in 1861 and is the only poem from 1861 in the collection.

General Notes:

Beth has a total of 25 known poems published across the *Colonist*, *Nelson Examiner* and *Otago Witness*.

Zoila has a total of 14 known poems published and they are exclusively published in the *Colonist*.

In the years 1858 and 1859 Beth is published in the *Nelson Examiner*. They appear very different in theme and style to a lot of her *Colonist* pieces, and suggest either her style went through an evolution, or that the *Nelson Examiner* was interested in publishing different types of poems. There seems to be more reference to religion in these poems than in her later works. These poems all occur before her first publication in the *Colonist* and they include:

- **Willie', 24 April 1858.**
- **'The Sunshine', 1 May 1858.**
- **'Goody Brown', 20 November 1858.**
- **'Lines for the Season', 1 January 1859.**
- **'To My Brother's Portrait', 5 March 1859.**

The poem was written in March and was published on the fifth of that month, suggesting she was probably on good terms with the editor in order to get something published so soon after being written. The relationship must have changed as she moved on to exclusively publish in *The Colonist* soon after this poem.

- **'The Emigrant on First Seeing Land', 16 March 1859.**

There are seven publications of Beth and Zoila in the *Colonist* prior to 1860. None of them are co-publications. These include:

- **'Sing on!', Zoila, 10 November 1857**
- **'The Warrior', Zoila, 14 January 1859**
- **'The Emigrants', Beth, 23 September 1859**

A poem in which Beth references New Zealand specifically as *home*. The only poem by either poet which can be identified as local.

- **'Cecile', Zoila, 25 October 1859**

Includes a quote from Fanny Fern, an American writer from the 1850s-1870s.

- **'Twenty Years Agone', Beth, 28 October 1859**
- **'Stitch, Stitch, Stitch.', Beth, 25 November 1859**

- **‘The Orphan’s Lament for Home’, Beth, 30 December 1859**

Poems by Beth and Zoila in 1860 which are not published in this anthology include:

- **‘The Brook and the Book’, Beth, 10 January 1860.**
- **‘Song of the Reapers’, Beth, 24 January 1860.**
- **‘On the Thrashing Floor’, Beth, 27 January 1860.**
- **‘I Would I were the Summer Wind’, 17 February 1860.**
- **‘Come Back!’, Zoila, 6 March 1860.**
- **‘Why are the Church Bells Ringing?’, Zoila, 3 April 1860.**
- **‘To My Empty Purse’, Beth, 24 April 1860.**
- **‘Life’s Episodes’, Beth, 11 May 1860.**
- **‘Letters of the Dead’, Zoila, 8 June 1860.**
- **‘Midnight Tears’, Zoila, 8 June 1860.**
- **‘The Counsel of the Bell’, Zoila, 4 September 1860.**

Beth also has four poems published in the *Otago Witness* in the year of 1860. One of them, ‘Song of the Reapers’ is also published in *The Colonist* in 1860. All of Beth’s *Otago Witness* poems (apart from ‘Song of the Reapers’) are published after her last publication in *The Colonist*. Her *Otago Witness* poems include:

- **‘Song of the Reapers’, 10 March 1860.**
- **‘John Frost’, 11 August 1860.**
- **‘The Leaves of the Forest’, 25 August 1860.**
- **‘Lines for Music’, 10 November 1860.**

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- “Prospectus.” *The Colonist* (23 October 1857): 1. *Papers Past*. [Web](#). 5 October 2015.

Note: all references for the poems are included in the textual notes.

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