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The Post-Colonial Noble Savage: A Study of Witi
Ihimaera's Fiction

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

The University of Auckland

2012

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the appropriation and reworking of the western literary myth of the Noble Eco-Savage in the fiction of Māori writer Witi Ihimaera. The study of the functions of the adaptation of European myths in Māori writing is relatively unexplored terrain and the reworking of the myth of the Noble Eco-Savage in New Zealand indigenous fiction has attracted little critical attention.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part, entitled “The Colonial Noble Savage”, identifies western literary and ethnographic texts that contain representations of indigenous peoples as Noble Eco-Savages. The second part, entitled “The Post-colonial Noble Savage”, analyses the different literary responses to, uses of and rewritings of this western myth, as well as the particular stereotypes to which Ihimaera chooses to write back. It asks whether his work is merely a writing back in the sense of seeking to unmask naturalised stereotypes of indigenous peoples or whether it uses the myth of the Noble Savage as an agent of transformation. The thesis argues that Ihimaera’s Noble Savage is a Post-colonial Noble Savage, in the sense that it represents the reaction of an indigenous writer to the colonial Noble Savage, thus to the discourse of colonisation in general. Ihimaera’s Noble Savage interacts with the traditional colonial discourse by attempting to subvert it, rewriting the character of the Noble Savage from an indigenous perspective.

This study offers a different perspective for analysing Māori fiction, which challenges the conventional culture-centred approach and suggests instead a text-centred reading—an interpretative strategy that uncovers previously ignored aspects of Ihimaera’s fiction and does justice to its complexity. In revealing the presence of

western cultural references and literary traditions in Ihimaera's fiction, the thesis does not aim to undermine the uniqueness of Māori literature. Rather, it suggests that these cross-cultural encounters and literary borrowings have produced rich and complex new outcomes.

TO MY PARENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Undertaking this PhD has been a truly life-changing experience for me and it would not have been possible without the support and guidance that I have received. Although the list of individuals I wish to thank extends beyond the limits of this format, I would like to express my particular appreciation for the dedication and support of the following people.

First and foremost, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the enthusiastic supervision of Professor Raylene Ramsay, who has been really like a third parent to me and not just a supervisor. She was very brave to take me on as her student and she has always been eager to help me through the toughest challenges during my time at the University of Auckland. Without her guidance and constant feedback, this PhD would not have been achievable. Professor Ramsay has contributed enormously to this doctorate, in terms of intellectual input as well as support and encouragement. Even though her teaching load is considerable and her research and editorial responsibilities manifold, she has always given generously of her time and insights, and not a word of mine has appeared in this thesis that she has not read and reflected and commented on. Not only was she readily available to me, as she so generously is for all of her students, but she always read and responded to the drafts of each chapter of my work more quickly than I could have hoped. I feel deeply grateful and privileged to have been her student.

I am also deeply indebted to Emeritus Professor Witi Ihimaera for his teachings, his encouragement, his investment of time and energy throughout the duration of this project and, most importantly, for his *aroha* and support in my endeavours.

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my co-supervisor, Professor Marinella Rocca Longo, who has inspired this research project since the beginning and lived every single minute of it. Without her, I would not have had the courage to embark on this journey in the first place. I fell in love for the first time with Witi Ihimaera's fiction many years ago, thanks to her Italian translations. I would like to express my gratitude to her for all she taught me when I was an MA student in comparative literature at the University of Rome, for her guidance, her enthusiasm and for inspiring and encouraging me to pursue an academic career.

My deepest gratitude to Associate Professor Mike Hanne for being the first one to believe in me and in this research project, for all he taught me during his comparative literature course and for his assistance while I was applying for my PhD at the University of Auckland.

For their moral support and encouragement expressed at various occasions, I warmly thank Professor Christine Arkininstall and Dr Ruth Diver. I would like to thank Dr Daniela Cavallaro, Associate Professor Bernadette Luciano and Dr Franco Manai for having welcomed me so warmly, for their regular expressions of best wishes and inquiries into the progress I was or was not making (or for simply listening to my rants about the latter) and for helping me to settle down into a completely new environment. Non dimenticherò mai tutto quello che avete fatto per me.

I have been fortunate to meet many people more than willing to take an active interest in my work or to provide practical help in such various ways as reading and commenting on draft versions of chapters, disagreeing with me on fundamental issues, inspiring me with a fresh perspective and passing on references that might be of interest to me. For all this, I thank Dr Selina Tusitala Marsh, who greatly broadened my knowledge and understanding of Pacific literature, Professor Mark Williams, Dr

Melissa Kennedy, Professor Peter Tremewan, Professor Susan Ingram, Professor Lee Wallace and Dr Susan Carter.

To be awarded a University of Auckland International Doctoral Scholarship was a real honour and I would like to express my gratitude for the financial support I received from the Scholarships Office of the University of Auckland throughout this project.

Finally, I am forever indebted to my parents for their love, understanding, endless patience and encouragement when it was most required, and for having made home far more than just a place to set out from.

This whole thesis could not have looked like it does without the careful proofreading and editing of Ellen McRae.

Last, but of course not least, never enough thanks go to one who doesn't want to be named, but he knows who he is and so do I...

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PART I: THE COLONIAL NOBLE SAVAGE

INTRODUCTION

The principal objective of this research project is to analyse the appropriation and reworking of the western literary myth of the Noble Eco-Savage¹ in the fiction of Māori writer Witi Ihimaera. The function of the adaptation of European myths in Māori writing is relatively unexplored terrain² and the reworking of the well-known myth of the Noble Eco-Savage in New Zealand indigenous fiction has attracted little critical attention until now³. My research project seeks to address this lacuna. Furthermore, although a considerable body of critical work on Pacific literature now exists, providing valuable insights into understanding the representations of indigenous people in western literary works, this project is the first to be fully dedicated to analysing the nature, and the political and cultural effects, of the writing back by Pacific people to western theories of the Noble Savage.

The influence of western cultural references and literary traditions in Witi Ihimaera's fiction has been well demonstrated by English studies scholar Melissa Kennedy in *Striding Both Worlds: Witi Ihimaera and New Zealand's Literary Traditions*. Kennedy argues that Ihimaera's works are "heavily indebted to artistic traditions handed down to the English canon" (M. Kennedy XIV). According to

¹ The terms Noble Savage and Eco-Savage have been capitalised as they appear in Ellingson and Whelan's texts. I use the term Noble Savage in this thesis when I refer, in general, to the stereotyped representation of indigenous people in western literary and ethnographic works. In Chapter 3, I use the more specific term Eco-Savage, as it appears in Whelan's text, for referring, in particular, to the representation of natives as 'champions of conservation', living in a perfect symbiosis with the natural environment. The most extended explorations of these issues are offered in: Ellingson, Ter. *The Myth of the Noble Savage*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001; Whelan, Robert. *Wild in Woods. The Myth of the Noble Eco-Savage*. London: Institute of Economic Affairs, Environment Unit, 1999.

² See Kennedy, Melissa. *Striding Both Worlds: Witi Ihimaera and New Zealand Literary Traditions*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011; Fox, Alistair. "The Symbolic Function of the Operatic Allusions in Witi Ihimaera's *The Dream Swimmer*". *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 42.1 (May 2006):4-17; Della Valle, Paola. "Il Risorgimento Māori: l'appropriazione del melodrama italiano in *The Matriarch* di Witi Ihimaera". *Quaderni del '900* 7 (2007): 89-106.

³ See Ramsay, Raylene, ed. *Cultural Crossings. Negotiating Identities in Francophone and Anglophone Pacific Literatures*. Brussels: Peter Lang, 2010. Print.

Kennedy, the writing style of this professor of English contains echoes of Anglo-Saxon bardic poetry, English Romantic lyricism, and American pop and film culture. Similarly, Alistair Fox and Paola Della Valle's works on the symbolic function of the operatic allusions in Witi Ihimaera's *The Matriarch* and *The Dream Swimmer* analyse the appropriation of operas by Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi to articulate "the political and cultural dilemma of Māori as a subjugated race seeking liberation" (Fox *The Symbolic* 4). In its approaches, this study of Ihimaera's fiction stands alongside the works of Kennedy, Della Valle and Fox on the appropriation and reworking of European cultural references, focusing in particular on the multiple ways in which Ihimaera employs the literary myth of the Noble Eco-Savage in his writing.

This research project is divided into two parts. The first part, entitled "The Colonial Noble Savage", identifies western literary and ethnographic texts containing representations of indigenous peoples as Noble Eco-Savages. The second part, entitled "The Post-colonial Noble Savage", researches the different occurrences of literary response to, uses of, or rewriting of this western myth and the particular stereotypes to which Ihimaera chooses to write back. It asks whether his work is merely writing back in the sense of seeking to unmask naturalised stereotypes of indigenous peoples or whether it uses the myth of the Noble Savage as an agent of transformation. The thesis argues that Ihimaera's Noble Savage is a Post-colonial Noble Savage, in the sense that it represents the reaction of an indigenous writer to the colonial Noble Savage, thus to the discourse of colonisation in general. Ihimaera's Post-colonial Noble Savage interacts with the traditional colonial discourse by attempting to subvert it, rewriting the character of the Noble Savage from an indigenous perspective.

The first section of the thesis thus contains a comprehensive 're-view' and analysis of the central themes and contexts of the literature of the Noble Savage, less to

critique previous contributions than to set the stage for a close examination of texts written from the ‘other’ side. Using Ihimaera’s fiction as a case study, this research aims to deepen our understanding of the complexity of the effects of European-Māori cultural contact through an analysis of the borrowing, appropriation, adaptation and recasting of elements of this myth in the figure of a Noble Eco-Savage.

The principal goal of the research project, then, is to examine Witi Ihimaera’s fiction in the light of the theories of the Noble Eco-Savage proposed by French philosophers and novelists of the eighteenth century, as these have become frames for conceiving Māori-European difference by Europeans. Furthermore, they have been reappropriated and used by Māori themselves to recover, restore and promote the values of the Māori world. To what extent are Eurocentric perspectives unsettled, not only by contact with, but also by their reframing within, Māori perspectives? One initial premise is that the myth of the Noble Eco-Savage has served as a sort of western kaleidoscope through which indigenous peoples’ identity has been viewed and defined. In this context, Ihimaera’s fiction represents an attempt by a New Zealand indigenous writer to confront western perceptions by challenging the stereotypes that have been used to define his work .

Through an overview and historical analysis of the representations of the Noble Eco-Savage in European literary texts, from the classical period to the Enlightenment, particularly as these predetermine or represent actual cross-cultural encounters on the beaches of Aotearoa New Zealand, this study will also contribute to an understanding of the present transformations of this pervasive literary figure, positioning Ihimaera’s fiction as the most significant Māori literary rewriting of this western myth. However, as Bill Ashcroft claims, reading an indigenous text similarly requires a form of deconstruction—a “deconstructive reading” (*Post-colonial* 192)—because we have to

pay attention to the profound effects of colonisation on current literary production. Indeed, a study of the particularity of the history of the two worlds in colonial New Zealand is a prerequisite for any understanding of indigenous literature.

The thesis will be framed theoretically by perspectives deriving from post-colonial studies, as this field attempts to rethink history from the point of view of the colonised. In particular, I will engage with strands of post-colonial theory, as elaborated by Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back*, concerned with the concept of 'appropriation'. As Ashcroft argues, "it is through an appropriation of the power invested in writing" that indigenous authors can make their texts "the source of literary and cultural redefinition" (Ashcroft and Griffiths 78). The present study aims to demonstrate how the appropriation and reworking of the western myth of the Noble Eco-Savage in Ihimaera's fiction becomes a source of literary and cultural redefinition.

The thesis is structured as five chapters. The first chapter, which reviews the literature on the Noble Eco-Savage, also serves to set out the hypotheses that inform the following chapters. Representations of the Noble Eco-Savage in different western literatures (French and English, in particular), will be analysed from a comparative perspective before they are later compared and contrasted with their adaptations in Ihimaera's fiction. However, since representations of the Noble Eco-Savage in European literary and ethnographic texts, from the classical period to our time, appear to be almost infinitely expandable, it has been necessary to focus predominantly on textual references to images of indigenous peoples, both positive and negative.

To trace in detail the source and function of every Noble Eco-Savage character in European literary texts would require a thesis in itself. The purpose of the literature review is less to provide a complete history of the representations of the Noble Eco-Savage than to construct a corpus of the European representations of the Noble Eco-

Savage, over time, and in a number of contexts, including imagined and real encounters with the Other that this figure may have directly or indirectly inspired. This corpus also includes readings or understandings of the representations that constitute it. Does Ihimaera's work simply mirror these texts, and their readings, and borrow from, or reflect, the European Other? Or is the inspiration of a very different kind?

Much of the critical literature on the Noble Eco-Savage focuses on Native American peoples, while Ihimaera's fiction almost exclusively (sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly) reflects on the cross-cultural encounter between Māori and Pakeha and its outcomes. However, the views represented in literary and ethnographic texts containing positive or negative depictions of indigenous groups, in particular, American Indians, constitute the terrain that produces Ihimaera's response.

The subsequent chapters will provide some answers to questions surrounding Ihimaera's particular selection among the figures of the Savage and his use of the figure as a sounding board to measure similarities (universals) and differences between coloniser and colonised—between a European site of writing and a particular indigenous, Pacific place of writing. Chapters Two to Five thus contain the core of my thesis, in their analysis of Ihimaera's literary response to aspects of the western myth of the Noble Eco-Savage. A number of texts by Witi Ihimaera will be examined for their engagement with certain notions carried by this figure, including Arcadian primitivism, the exotic and the concept of the Eco-Savage. The second chapter, for example, provides a close reading of "The Other Side of the Fence", *The Trowenna Sea* and *The Parihaka Woman* in the light of theories of the Noble/Ignoble Savage, as a critique of stereotyped representations of indigenous peoples in western literary and ethnographic works.

The third chapter analyses the appropriation and reworking of the trope of the Eco-Savage in a selection of works by Ihimaera. This chapter will investigate echoes of the idea of the Eco-Savage, most particularly in the short stories “The Seahorse and the Reef” and “The Halcyon Summer”, in the long story “One More Night” and in the novels *Sky Dancer* and *The Whale Rider*. The short stories depict Māori characters who fish only what they need, carefully avoiding overexploiting natural resources. The novels symbolise the deep spiritual interconnection between man and the natural world, as illustrated by *The Whale Rider*’s central scenes of the saving of a pod of beached whales. The short stories “Wiwi” and “Dustbins”, the children’s picture book *The Little Kowhai Tree* and the novel *Bulibasha* will also be read within a similar ecocritical frame.

Chapter Four focuses on the critical association of the literary myth of the Noble Savage with racism and prejudices. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse how the character of the Noble Savage in Ihimaera’s two gay novels *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (1996) and *The Uncle’s Story* (2000) is used by the author to decolonise Pacific sexuality, in particular, in relation to homosexuality. At the same time, in both novels, Ihimaera uses the figure of the Noble Savage for writing back to the colonial stereotype of the exotic Pacific native that can be found in Gauguin’s paintings, as well as to the assumptions that have been made about the sexual conduct of Pacific people by western ethnographic, literary and artistic works about the South Seas. The chapter also argues that, in both novels, Ihimaera disrupts not only the mainstream discourse on Māori masculinity, representing the Māori character of the Noble Savage as hypermasculine and, at the same time, effeminate and homosexual, but also western narratives of the South Seas. Indeed, by including attractive Pacific indigenous male characters as the object of desire in *Nights* and in *The Uncle’s Story*, Ihimaera is both reclaiming Māori

male images for New Zealand fiction and overturning a long tradition of western narratives containing representations of unattractive Polynesian male characters. The chapter argues that in this way the character of the Noble Savage is an agent of change, re-establishing indigenous male figures of Oceania as attractive, positive protagonists of literary works and movies.

The fifth and last chapter of the thesis is dedicated to the contemporary Italian reception and translations of Witi Ihimaera's fiction. It considers the ways in which Ihimaera's work has been translated, published and reviewed in Italy from the 1970s to the present. The chapter gives, for the first time, a comprehensive account of the impact of Ihimaera's fiction in Italy, from the early and highly influential translations by Marinella Rocca Longo, professor of English language and translation studies at the University of Rome, to the more recent post-colonial readings of Ihimaera's and Patricia Grace's fiction by Paola Della Valle. However, the concern of the chapter is not with who is producing work on Ihimaera, but rather, it is interested in the reception of Ihimaera's work in Italian contexts, particularly the readings of his images of the Noble Eco-Savage.

The analysis of critical reception is then extended to an examination of the interpretations by Italian film reviewers and audiences of Caro's internationally successful movie *Whale Rider*, based on Ihimaera's 1987 novel *The Whale Rider*, again highlighting the readings of Ihimaera's writing back to the Noble Savage myth. Using both the text of *The Whale Rider* and its film version (released in Italy as *La ragazza delle balene*), the second part of the chapter aims to show the many different ways in which the film has been perceived and interpreted by Italian film reviewers, examining the continuities and discontinuities with the reception of the film by international film reviewers. This section also examines the extent to which Italian film reviewers situate

the impact of *La ragazza delle balene* in its depiction of an ‘exotic’ New Zealand and of a Māori community as exemplary of the western literary myth of the Noble Eco-Savage. The significance of the topic of the protection of the environment permeating the movie, which appealed to the viewing public and contributed most particularly to the success of *Whale Rider* in Italy and in the United States, is also analysed.

The Appendix of the thesis contains an interview with Ihimaera himself about the influence of western culture/models on Māori literature and the functions of the appropriation and reworking of the European myth of the Noble Eco-Savage in his fiction. Ihimaera argues that the Noble Savage is only one of the many tropes through which Māori people have been seen, in terms of the European gaze on the Other, and that it is the most benign of all such frameworks. According to Ihimaera, the myth of the Noble Savage is not an image that demonises Māori people; rather it affirms them, but within the Rousseauian and the Age of Enlightenment theories. Ihimaera makes the point that, in his fiction, he has tried to overturn these particular frameworks, inverting the representation and providing an insider gaze from a Māori perspective.

This thesis offers a different perspective for analysing Māori fiction, one that challenges the conventional culture-centred approach and suggests instead a text-centred reading—an interpretative strategy that uncovers aspects of Ihimaera’s fiction previously ignored and seeks to do justice to its complexity. In revealing the presence of western cultural references and literary traditions in Ihimaera’s fiction, the aim is not to undermine the uniqueness of Māori literature, but rather to suggest that these cross-cultural encounters and literary borrowings have produced rich and complex new outcomes.

To avoid what Italian post-colonial scholar Paola Della Valle calls “the trap of unconsciously Eurocentric criticism” (*From Silence* VII), the approach used for

analysing Witi Ihimaera's fiction has been that of an "indigenised reading", that is to say, "the outsider's attempt to read with an understanding of the indigenous perspective" (Knudsen 3). As far as this research project is concerned, the main aim of speaking from the position of a cultural outsider is not to define Māori literature, but rather to try to understand it from a particular locality and position.

The subject of this thesis emerged from my MA studies in comparative literature at the University of Rome, when I fell in love for the first time with Witi Ihimaera's fiction during Professor Rocca Longo's course on Māori literature. My outsider perspective and my European cultural background pose the question of whether, with no roots in Māori culture, I have the depth of understanding, or the cultural sensitivity required to examine and mediate an alternative knowledge system. Although my approach in analysing Witi Ihimaera's fiction is one of honour and great respect, I would like to apologise in advance for any misinterpretations and for partial or limited understandings of Māori cultural concepts that might be found in this thesis.

CHAPTER ONE:
FROM THE NOBLE BARBARIAN TO THE NOBLE ANTIPODEAN:
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FIGURE OF THE NOBLE/IGNOBLE SAVAGE IN
EUROPEAN TEXTS, FROM THE CLASSICAL PERIOD TO THE PRESENT

1.1 The Noble Barbarian: The Noble Savage in Greek and Roman literature

Much has been written about the Noble Savage and its South Seas counterpart, the Noble Antipodean, a western literary myth that has been re-elaborated and rewritten many times by philosophers and novelists. The term 'savage' became widely referenced in ethnographic works during the age of explorations, in the fifteenth century when, for the first time, Europeans came into contact with the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Having seen and admired these versions of what was considered to be a primitive Arcadia, certain writers of that time, nostalgic for a simple way of life that was in contact with nature and no longer available in western society, glorified this apparently natural life in their works. However, as Italian anthropologist Giuseppe Cocchiara argues, the Noble Savage "was not discovered by Europeans during the explorations of the 'New World', in the fifteenth century, but it is a concept which was invented long before" (5). In fact, this ideal of a happy state of humankind, a sort of Paradise Lost, was promoted initially by the philosophy of the ancients and in biblical texts and then by ethnography.

The idealisation of the 'nature-peoples' and the praise of primitive epochs of civilisation were, indeed, favourite themes in Greek and Roman literature⁴. One finds examples of life lived according to nature in the Homeric poems (with their references to the 'blameless Ethiopians') and in the idyllic descriptions made by Vergil in the

⁴ See Fairchild, Hoxie Neale. *The Noble Savage. A Study in Romantic Naturalism*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1961. Print.

Bucolics. An idealisation of the virtues of ‘barbarians’ can be found in Julius Caesar’s *Gallic Wars* and in the treatise *Germany*, written by the Roman historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus. This ethnographic study of the culture of the ancestors of modern Central Europe is based on a comparison between the virtues of the Germans and the moral decadence of corrupt Roman society. In this sense, we could say that the Noble Barbarian was the predecessor of the Noble Savage.

However, Tacitus’s ethnographical treatise is not completely original. One of his most important predecessors is the naturalist and historian Pliny the Elder, who wrote a *History of the German Wars* between 62 and 66 AD. This book contains a description of all the various Roman wars against the Germanic tribes and is probably the principal authority for *Germany*. Other similar studies of culture and people unknown to the ‘civilised’ ancient world are *The Histories*, written by the Greek historian Herodotus in 440 BC, which contains descriptions of Egypt and Scythia (ancient Iran), and Sallust’s *Jugurthine War* (112 BC), an analysis of the Numidians (the inhabitants of present-day Algeria). Later, the theme of the Noble Savage was the focus of the writings of Hesiod, a Greek oral poet whose *Works and Days* lay out a creation story symbolically associated with metals, from the Golden Age to the Iron Age. According to Hesiod, the Golden Age was a mythical first stage in which mankind lived happy and peacefully, free from evils and pains. This legend can be read as one of the first depictions of the contrast between ‘savage man’ and ‘civilised man’. Hesiod’s account of natural existence is compared with other descriptions in Graeco-Roman literature; the similarity is difficult to miss. Throughout all these works, in fact, we find a clear intent to problematise the author’s own ‘civilised’ civilisation by contrasting it with the ‘uncivilised’ and to consider this example of ‘uncivilised’ society as originary and ideal.

1.2 Representations of the Figure of the Noble/Ignoble Savage in French Literary and Ethnographic Texts from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century

The character of the Noble Savage is a leitmotif in French literary and ethnographic texts of the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. The first Noble Savage literary work to appear following the explorations of the New World was produced by the French explorer Jean De Léry, who published *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil, autrement dite Amérique* (History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil, Otherwise Called America), in 1568. De Léry's book celebrates a Brazilian tribe, the Tupinamba, and their simple way of life, arguing that they live better and longer than French people do because

they do not in any way drink of those murky, pestilential springs, from which flow so many streams of mistrust, avarice, litigation, and squabbles, of envy and ambition, which eat away our bones, suck out our marrow, waste our bodies, and consume our spirits—in short, poison us and kill us off before our due time—nothing of all that torments them, much less dominates or obsesses them (57).

De Léry alternates positive and negative descriptions of the Tupinamba, so that in some parts of *Histoire* he refers to them as “good people” (27), “courteous officers” (28) having “natural fellow-feeling” (168), demonstrating “a fine ambassadorial civility” (28) and offering to French people “their magnificent hospitality” (28), while in others he defines them as “poor savages” (1x) and “barbarian nations” (125) living without religion. De Léry emphasises, in particular, the practice of another Brazilian tribe, the

Margaia, of eating the bodies of their enemies; here, he appears to represent Ignoble Savages rather than Noble Savages. In many passages of *Histoire*, he tells about the French explorers' fear of "being slain and cut to pieces, and serving as a meal for them" (26). Similarly, according to De Léry, "devilish Ouetaca" (29), another Brazilian tribe, are "like dogs and wolves, eat flesh raw" (29) and they are considered to be "among the most barbarous, cruel and dreaded nations that can be found in all the West Indies and the land of Brazil" (29).

Although De Léry seems to describe quintessentially Ignoble Savages, a careful analysis of his book reveals how he justifies the ferocity of the Brazilian tribes, arguing that French usurers, "sucking blood and marrow, and eating everyone alive—widows, orphans, and other poor people" (132), are much more cruel than Native Americans, who eat the bodies of their enemies after having killed them. Moreover, De Léry points out that the French should not condemn the anthropophagy of Brazilian tribes, because they themselves perpetrated horrible acts in 1572 during the wars of religion in Lyon, where, "in ways more barbarous than those of the savages" (132), the fat of butchered human bodies was publicly sold to the highest bidder and parts of these bodies were eaten by the murderers. In light of this, De Léry suggests that the French should no longer abhor the cruelty of Brazilian tribes who, at least, "attack only enemy nations, while the ones over here have plunged into the blood of their kinsmen, neighbours and compatriots" (133).

Before the publication of *Histoire* by Jean de Léry, Captain Gonneville's 1505 report had already described the Golden Age of Native Americans, representing, in particular, the Brazilian tribes as "simple people asking only to lead their lives joyfully with little work, living from hunting and fishing and what their land provides, and from roots and vegetables they plant" (qtd. in Jennings 215). Gonneville's report was first

publicised by the Abbé Jean Paulmier in an unpublished 1654 proposal to establish a Catholic mission in the New World and recently it has been regarded as the earliest French account of the indigenous people of Brazil. The authenticity of Gonville's text has been questioned and French studies scholar William Jennings argues that it is significantly different from other accounts of early modern European voyages, in particular for its "lack of wonder" (226).

After De Léry's *Histoire*, another crucial representation of the Noble Savage in a sixteenth-century French text appeared in Renaissance writer Michel Eyquem de Montaigne's *Essais* (1580), in which the so-called savage is described as much happier than the civilised man and morally superior to him because he lives in contact with nature and in a supposedly egalitarian society in which private property does not exist. The sixteenth-century writer was an acute reader of the writings on indigenous peoples and observer of the effects of 'otherness'. His respect for them is evident throughout his work and considerable admiration is devoted to their culture: "I finde (as farre as I have beene informed) there is nothing in that nation, that is either barbarous or savage, unlesse men call that barbarisme which is not common to them" (37). The *Essais* were one of the first attempts to demonstrate 'civilised savagery':

They are even savage, as we call those fruits wilde, which nature of her selfe, and of her ordinarie progresse hath produced: whereas indeed, they are those which our selves have altered by our artificiall devices, and diverted from their common order, we should rather terme savage. In those are the true and most profitable vertues, and naturall properties most lively and vigorous, which in these we have bastardized, applying them to the pleasure of our corrupted taste. (39)

Here savage nobleness is compared with civilised corruption and the natural compared favourably with the constructed or artificial. In the *Essais*, Montaigne also affirmed the superiority of savagery over civilisation, a theme that became a leitmotif of the historiography of the colonisation of the Americas and, later, of the Romantic movement.

In *The Rhetoric of Empire*, David Spurr identifies the basic rhetorical features of the colonial discourse, analysing the ways in which it has been deployed, both in the modern period of European colonialism (1870-1960), as well as in the more recent period of decolonisation. Spurr argues that the subtext of the idealisation of the ‘savage’ in Montaigne’s work lies in the French author’s “ironic commentary on the political and social institutions of sixteenth-century France” (126). According to Spurr, the tradition of idealising indigenous peoples goes back to the early stages of European imperial expansion and is “invariably produced by a rhetorical situation in which the writer takes an ethical position in regard to his or her own culture” (125).

A subsequent early French work in which we find the Noble Savage paradigm is *Mémoires de l’Amérique Septentrionale* (New Voyages to North America), written by French soldier and writer Louis-Armand de Lom d’Arce, Baron de Lahontan, in 1703. His three-volume work narrates his experience in the French colony in Canada and shows appreciation for the indigenous peoples of North America, defined as “wise and reasonable People” (12). In Lahontan’s work we again find the theory that the cause of all evils in contemporary European societies is the introduction of private property and that indigenous people live more happily than French and other Europeans because they have not introduced it into their society; thus, they had no need for laws or judges:

For in saying only that I am of the same temper with the Savages, they give me without delign, the Character of the honest Man in the World. 'Tis an uncontested truth, that the Nations which are not debauch'd by the Neighbourhood of the Europeans, are strangers to the Measures of Meum and Tuum, and to all Laws, Judges, and Priests (11).

Lahontan wishes for a return to the 'state of nature', in which private property and corruption did not exist, and he expresses the desire to become a member of the Iroquois tribe himself, arguing that their culture is much better than the French culture:

I envy the state of a poor Savage, who tramples upon Laws, and pays Homage to no Scepter. I wish I could spend the rest of my life in his Hutt, and so be no longer expos'd to the chagrin of bending the knee to a set of Men, that sacrifice the publick good to their private interest, and are born to plague honest Men (15).

Lahontan criticises the negative descriptions of Native Americans by Recollect (a French reform branch of the Franciscans) missionaries, who represented them as stupid people, incapable of rational thinking, maintaining that it was useless to waste time trying to teach them the Bible. According to Lahontan, Jesuit missionaries, in contrast, were less superficial and more objective and showed a deeper knowledge of the indigenous peoples of America, arguing that they were happy and wise people and that they learned Christianity very easily.

The third volume of Lahontan's work contains a satiric dialogue, entitled *Dialogues curieux entre l'auteur et un sauvage de bon sens qui a voyagé* (1703), in

which the author uses the character of Adario, a member of the Huron (a Canadian tribe) to criticise contemporary French society (in this sense, Adario is a precursor of the Persian character in *Lettres Persanes* by Montesquieu). Adario compares and contrasts the two cultures, arguing that Huron customs are in many respects better than French customs. According to Lahontan's character, French people are not free, they have a miserable life, they are all servants obeying one master (the King) and they kill, rob, and fight for money. For this reason, Lahontan argues, the real savages are the French and not the Canadian indigenous people. It would seem that, somewhat paradoxically, the encounters with the North American Other gave rise to figures that shaped Enlightenment critique of eighteenth-century European societies and provided tools for Europe to reflect on itself.

In contrast with De Léry, Montaigne and Lahontan's positive depictions of indigenous people, an example of the representations of Native Americans as Ignoble Savages in a French seventeenth-century text can be found in French explorer Samuel de Champlain's ethnographic work *Des sauvages, ou Voyage de Samuel Champlain de Brouage, fait en la France Nouvelle* (1604), which contains descriptions of indigenous tribes in Canada: "This is why I believe they have no law among them, nor know what it is to worship and pray to God, and that most of them live like brute beasts; and I think they would speedily be brought to be good Christians, if their country were colonized, which most of them would like" (qtd. in Biggar 117). As Ellingson points out, "the negative comparisons and bestial similes of Champlain's narrative bear no affinity to concepts of the nobility of the savage" (49), but the emphasis that some works of travel-ethnographic literature put on the negative aspects of the indigenous way of life should be read through the lens of the prospective European settlers' aim to justify colonisation

as well as their wish to see indigenous peoples responding positively to efforts to convert them to Christianity.

The same negative perspective on Native Americans is present in the works of an eighteenth-century French author, Pierre François-Xavier de Charlevoix, who joined a Jesuit mission in Canada and, after his return to France, wrote the *Histoire et description generale de la Nouvelle France* (History and General Description of New France) in 1744, and published a collection of letters, the *Journal d'un voyage fait par ordre du roi dans l'Amérique septentrionale* (Journal of a Voyage to North-America) in 1720. However, although both works were written by the same author, they reflect antithetical perceptions of Indians in Canada. In the *Journal*, Charlevoix seems to confirm the attribution of nobility to Native Americans on a number of occasions: “This nation is however one of the noblest in all Canada” (47); “His mien, the tone of his voice, and the manner of his delivery, though without any gestures or inflections of the body, appeared to me extremely noble and calculated to persuade, and what he said must have been very eloquent (10); “the noblest matron of the tribe” (24); “Most of them have really a nobleness of soul and a constancy of mind, at which we rarely arrive, with all the assistance of philosophy and religion” (83). When Charlevoix wrote the *History*, 20 years later, his criticism of the Indians’ way of life was in stark contrast to the praise and idealisation in his earlier work.

The two apparently contradictory myths could thus be present not only in the same period, but also in the work of a single writer or observer. Like the later Charlevoix, French army general François-Jean de Beauvoir, Marquis de Chastellux, who, in his *Travels in North-America, in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782*, represented an Iroquois family as poor, hideous and stupid.

Around the same period, another French writer, Constantin François de Chasseboeuf, de Boisgirais, Comte de Volney, in *Tableau du climat et du sol des États-Unis d'Amérique* (A View of the Soil and Climate of the United States of America) (1803) described the indigenous peoples of America in similarly negative terms: “There was no Arabian hospitality among them: that all was anarchy and disorder. . . . They dwell separately, in mistrust, jealousy, and eternal animosity. With them, what they want they have a right to, and what they have strength enough to seize is their own.” (354–355)

To this critique of lawlessness and immorality, Volney later adds an association between Native Americans and children, arguing that both love independence and are indulged in an idle life with no restraints. Volney’s position on savages should also be read through the lens of the rationalistic method of analysis and debate used by Enlightenment scholars, but in this case by those among them who disagreed strongly with the concept of the Noble Savage, denouncing the European thinkers who desired a regression to the state of nature, and arguing that civilisation is the real Golden Age of humankind. Thus, Volney is criticising Rousseau’s attribution of corruption to civilisation and his opinion on the evils of private property, drawing the conclusion that, on the contrary, “if civilised communities have vicious and depraved members, they are . . . merely vestiges and remnants of that barbarous condition from which all nations arose ” (388). Volney espouses the ideology of civilisation as progress from a childlike and violent state, again in opposition to the ideas of Rousseau.

According to Ellingson, Volney’s works introduce a topic that was to become widespread in the ethnographic literature of the early nineteenth century, that is to say, the negative parallel between savages and the common people of Europe, both representing a “threat to property ownership and established privilege” (114). This

equivalence between savages and the common man of Europe resulted in negative representations of lower-class peoples, such as the resurrection of beast-man images depicted by Charles Le Brun in the seventeenth century by Camille Flammarion in *Le monde avant la création de l'homme* (1886).

One of the reasons for the widespread association of the lower-classes with images of bestiality could be the rise of working-class revolts in Europe during the nineteenth century and, consequently, the aristocracy's fear of losing their established privileges. Following their encounters with the savages, the European imagination conceived a new enemy, more dangerous than the previous one, because this time the threat was not external but internal to their society.

Although Rousseau's authorship of the term Noble Savage is unfounded and an English playwright was the first to use the words together, it has been confirmed that the juxtaposition of the terms *noble* and *savage* was first made by a French author. The last section of a chapter in French lawyer and ethnographer Marc Lescarbot's *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* (Nova Francia: A Description of Arcadia), published in 1609, is titled: "The Savages are truly Noble". Nonetheless, Lescarbot, who joined the French colonial enterprise in the Bay of Fundy, identifying early on the principle of 'reciprocity' that governed social interactions, described Canadian indigenous peoples in a nuanced way:

For the savages have that noble quality, that they give liberally, casting at the feet of him whom they will honour the present that they give him. But it is with hope to receive some reciprocal kindness, which is a kind of contract, which we call, without name: "I give thee, to the end thou shouldest give me". And that is done throughout all the world. (100–101)

Living among Mi'kmaq Indians, Lescarbot nonetheless admired what he identified as their uncorrupted society and, well before Rousseau, contrasted primitive goodness and generosity with the selfish European ways of living. However, Ellingson argues that Lescarbot's ethnographic work had a "propagandistic focus" (16) and should be analysed in the light of the need to meet the French settlers' expectations for reassurance in relation to the 'domesticability' of Canadian indigenous peoples.

In the following century, Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu emerged as the first major French Enlightenment theorist of the myth of the Noble Savage. His seminal study *De l'esprit des lois* (1748), set out to demonstrate that indigenous peoples represent a model of peaceful humanity living in harmony with nature. The book's corresponding analysis of the causes of corrupt governments greatly influenced liberal political ideas in Europe. Montesquieu argued that men living in the 'state of nature' were shy and humble, they considered themselves all equal, they were not fighting each other and there was no need for laws because "peace would be the first law of nature" (4).

Montesquieu shares the theory of English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, according to which this peaceful state of nature ended with the rise of modern societies, when men no longer considered themselves equal and, therefore, some of them tried to subjugate the others: "Hobbes attributes to mankind before the establishment of society, what can happen but in consequence of this establishment, which furnishes them with motives for hostile attacks and self-defence" (4). In this sense, the "state of war" (5) began when the "state of nature" (5) was replaced by the "state of society" (5): "As soon as mankind enter into a state of society they lose the sense of their weakness; equality ceases, and then commences the state of war" (5).

In examining the origins and purposes of representations of the Noble Savage in literary texts during the Enlightenment beyond a simple survey, a good point of departure is the consideration of the association of the myth with the ideals of an egalitarian society, which were widespread in eighteenth-century Europe. The perceived moral qualities of the Noble Savage and his uncorrupted, egalitarian society, apparently lacking private property and religion, were of course emblematic of the Enlightenment movement itself, and its critique of absolutist and Church power, and hereditary social hierarchies. The ideal society it sought was figured by the Noble Savage in the works of its writers and philosophers.

However, appreciation for the so-called state of nature was not a reflection of the thinking of most Enlightenment philosophers, who, on the contrary, promoted socio-cultural progress, considering savagery the lowest stage of humankind. Such is the case with Giambattista Vico's *Principi di scienza nuova (New Science)* of 1725, in which the Italian philosopher elaborated a theory on the three evolutionary stages of humankind, in advancing towards civilisation: savagery, based on hunting; barbarism, based on agriculture and breeding; and civilisation, based on commerce. Vico's three-stage theory of progress echoes Hesiod's creation story, from the Golden Age to the Iron Age, but here the negative association of the state of nature with the lowest stage of humanity clearly reflects the Enlightenment proponents' general view of socio-economic progress. Consequently, Vico strongly criticised the paradigm of savage nobility, arguing that there was no innocence and gentleness in indigenous societies:

We may conclude from all this how empty has been the conceit of the learned concerning the innocence of the golden age observed in the first gentile nations. In fact, it was a fanaticism of superstition which kept the

first men of the gentiles, savage, proud, and most cruel as they were, in some sort of restraint by main terror of a divinity they had imagined. (178)

Rousseau could have borrowed the three-stage theory contained in his *Discourse on Inequality* (1755) from Vico; however, another possible precursor is Montesquieu, who, in *Spirit of Laws* (1748), reconstructed the evolutionary progress of humankind from the state of nature to civilisation.

The myth of savage nobility was nonetheless widespread during the eighteenth century and was used by writers associated with the Romantic movement to demonstrate the corruption of European values by substituting an exemplary way of life that was in contact with nature (the term 'savage' in its etymological sense means *man of the forest*). In particular, the cult of the Noble Savage became associated with the French philosopher and novelist Jean-Jacques Rousseau. However, a careful interpretation of Rousseau's works shows an almost complete lack of reference to this term and an opinion of indigenous peoples that is far from being solely positive.

First, in his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1754), Rousseau questioned the existence of a 'state of nature' in the history of humankind, arguing, nevertheless, that it is important to be aware of this theory in order to understand our present age:

For it is no light enterprise to separate that which is original from that which is artificial in man's present nature, and attain a solid knowledge of a state which no longer exists, which perhaps never existed, and which will probably never exist, yet of which it is necessary to have sound ideas if we are to judge our present state satisfactorily (*Discourse upon the Origin* 68).

Despite the absence of the term Noble Savage in Rousseau's works, his association with this myth could well derive from the use he made of descriptions of the savage way of life in order to criticise aspects of civilised French society he saw as corrupted. Moreover, although Rousseau did not attribute nobility to indigenous peoples, the reason that a savage did not possess good moral qualities, for the philosopher, was merely that he was unaware of the distinction between good and bad, this distinction being itself an invention of civilisation.

Rousseau argues that the desire to go back to a supposed Golden Age of humankind, promoted by philosophers and novelists in different ages, was caused by discontent over the rise of inequalities in current societies. According to Rousseau, a return to this state of nature in which private property did not exist and humans lived happy and free, was not only impossible but was also something they should not wish to do: "What then? Must we destroy societies, annihilate *meum* and [*tuum*] and return to live in the forests with the [Wolves and] bears?" (*Discourse On Inequality* 153). His text points out that some indigenous peoples (such as Native Americans) defined as savages by Europeans were not real savages, as they were already far from the so-called state of nature. Rousseau's conclusion was that theorists could not reconstruct the state of nature of humankind because the native peoples known to eighteenth-century Europe simply did not provide any clear evidence of its existence.

Accordingly, any alternative to civilisation was only hypothetical, a projected representation of a fictitious primordial state imagined by philosophers and novelists. Similarly, Rousseau criticised judgements made about the character of native peoples by some ethnographers, maintaining that "the entire world is covered with peoples of whom we know only the names, and yet we amuse ourselves judging the human race!"

(*Discourse on Inequality* 160). If we read this quotation in the light of the later widespread diffusion of the myth of the Noble Savage, we could argue that not only was Rousseau not the promoter of this constructed category, but he also strongly disagreed with the stereotyped images used to describe indigenous peoples by European writers and philosophers.

According to David Spurr, for Rousseau, as for Montaigne, “savage man is less a real and living presence than an abstract ideal whose purpose lies in his symbolic value for the social and political configurations of eighteenth-century Europe” (126). Spurr points out that Rousseau explicitly proposes his conception of the primitive not as historical truth, but as a ‘construct’ upon which to found contemporary ideals, an hypothetical society based on the freedom of equality of human beings.

Another key figure in the establishment of the myth of the Noble Savage in French literature during the Enlightenment was Voltaire. In his *Essai sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations et sur les principaux faits de l’histoire depuis Charlemagne jusqu’à Louis XIII* (1756), Voltaire shares De Léry’s theory that indigenous people lived longer and more healthy lives than Europeans because they did not move out of the “state of pure nature” (8). Other similarities with De Léry’s book can be found in Voltaire’s expressed admiration for Native American and African peoples, considered in many ways to be superior to the French in their freedom and self-sufficiency:

We must say, first and foremost, that the peoples of Canada and South Africa that it has pleased us to call savages, are infinitely superior to our own. The Huron, the Algonquin, the Illinois, the Kaffirs, the Hottentot, possess the art of fabricating everything they need for themselves, and such an art is not possessed by our countryfolk. The peoples of America and of

Africa are free, and our savages don't have even the idea of freedom. The so-called savages of America are sovereigns who receive ambassadors from our colonies transplanted in their territory by avarice and folly. They know honour, of which our European savages have never heard. They have a country, they love it, they defend it. (23, vol. I)⁵

Voltaire's *Essai*, reversing the use of the term 'savage' to designate Europeans, contains a strong early critique of colonisation which, according to him, has been "funeste pour ses habitants" (II: 330). He condemns the atrocities of which Native Americans have been victims, in particular, the fact that they were enslaved by the Spanish and treated as "bêtes de somme" (II: 361) and their forced conversion to Christianity. However, although Voltaire expresses his appreciation for Native Americans and uses their exemplary way of life as a critique of the evils of eighteenth-century French society, it should also be noted that he did not wish for a return to that *état de nature* from which humankind supposedly degenerated into an *état de société*. Voltaire argues, instead, that human beings were not born for living "in the same manners as bears" (I: 25),⁶ following their instincts and wandering in the woods. Moreover, if he is often cited as a leading proponent of the myth of the Noble Savage, some parts of his *Essai* contain negative descriptions of Brazilians and Canadians, depicted here as Ignoble Savages who live in a "state of barbarous stupidity" (II: 343).⁷ Voltaire reinforces European fetishisation of cannibalism: their supposed habit of eating

⁵ Il faut convenir surtout que les peuples du Canada et les Cafres, qu'il nous a plu d'appeler sauvages, sont infiniment supérieurs aux nôtres. Le Huron, l'Algonquin, l'Illinois, le Cafre, le Hottentot, ont l'art de fabriquer eux-mêmes tout ce dont ils ont besoin, et cet art manque à nos rustres. Les peuplades d'Amérique et d'Afrique sont libres, et nos sauvages n'ont pas même d'idée de la liberté. Les prétendus sauvages d'Amérique sont des souverains qui reçoivent des ambassadeurs de nos colonies transplantées auprès de leur territoire par l'avarice et par la légèreté. Ils connaissent l'honneur, dont jamais nos sauvages d'Europe n'ont entendu parler. Ils ont une patrie, ils l'aiment, ils la défendent. (Translations from French into English are mine.)

⁶ à la manière des ours

⁷ stupidité barbare

human flesh is defined as “a horrible custom” (II: 345),⁸ “a monstrous way of behaving” (II: 345).⁹

Even the *Encyclopédie*'s editor in chief, Denis Diderot, who has often been considered one of the most important eighteenth-century French promoters of the myth of the Noble Savage, does not make use of the term Noble Savage when referring to the Tahitians in his *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1772). According to English studies scholar Gordon Sayre, “Diderot, one can be sure, had no sympathy for the chimera of primitivism and had no intention of lingering on the virtues of the noble savage” (125).

However, Diderot's work does echo the myth of the Golden Age, especially in his description of Tahitians as happy and innocent children of nature living in a society in which there is no private property and men follow only the laws of nature:

We are innocent and content, and you can only spoil that happiness. We follow the pure instincts of nature, and you have tried to erase its impression from our hearts. Here, everything belongs to everyone, and you have preached I can't tell what distinction between 'yours' and 'mine'. . . . Leave us to our ways; they are wiser and more decent than yours. (Diderot 42–43)

Diderot's romantic child of nature also recalls Lescarbot's dialectic, his comparison of savage virtues with European vices. Whether the ways of the Tahitians were better or worse than European ways, the purpose of Diderot's work was not to provide an answer to the question of noble or ignoble human origins, but rather to

⁸ une horrible coutume

⁹ un usage monstrueux

question the supposed advantages, the ‘superiority’ of European civilisation within a critique of his own society.

Another example of the attitude of Enlightenment philosophers towards indigenous peoples is provided by Louis de Jaucourt’s article “Sauvages” in the *Encyclopédie*, a project in which Rousseau himself collaborated. In this definition of savages, we find no rhetoric of nobility, but rather an emphasis on the lack of laws and religion in diametrical opposition to civilised societies and the now usual negative association of indigenous peoples with cannibalism:

SAVAGES, n.m.plur. (*Mod. Hist.*) barbaric peoples who live without laws, without government, without religion, & who have no fixed habitation. This word comes from the Italian *salvagio*, derived from [Latin] *salvaticus*, *selvaticus* & *silvaticus*, which signifies the same thing as *silvestris*, rustic or having to do with the woods and the forests, because the *savages* ordinarily live in forests. A great part of America is populated with *savages*, the majority of them ferocious, & who nourish themselves with human flesh. See ANTHROPOPHAGES. (29)

With the flowering of Romanticism, after Rousseau, the other French writer who became particularly associated with the literary myth of the Noble Savage was François-Auguste-René Chateaubriand. In his ‘Indian’ novel *Atala* (1801), the Romantic constructs a further series of antitheses between western and Native American cultures, in which pathos, the noble heart and the grandeur of nature again work to establish indigenous societies as an example of positive values. Ellingson argues that Chateaubriand’s novel *Atala* mixes different genres; for this reason it can be included

not only in literary fiction but also in travel ethnography, as well as autobiography (Chactas and Atala flee into exile as Chateaubriand himself did) and religious propaganda (Atala prefers committing suicide to breaking her Christian vow of virginity).

Researching the Marist archive of the *Lettres reçues d'Océanie* (2009), William Jennings has demonstrated the influence of Chateaubriand's texts in the descriptions contained in the letters of the Marist missionaries in New Zealand of the Māori tribes they encountered in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Chateaubriand's Romantic account of Native Americans may have influenced these Marist brothers, but its authenticity was questioned by many scholars. Richard Switzer, the translator of Chateaubriand's *Voyage en Amérique* (1827), remarks in his introduction to the novel: "To look upon Chateaubriand as a source for authentic information about the America of 1791 would be folly" (*Travels* XI). Later on, he argues that Chateaubriand, a novelist, used more imagination than scientific observation in his descriptions of the indigenous peoples of America. In portraying the Muskogee (a hostile tribe that took Chactas, the Natchez hero in *Atala*, prisoner) as joyous, simple, talking harmoniously, singing fresh melodies and having an open manner, Chateaubriand is clearly influenced by previous literary depictions of Noble Savage characters.

However, although the French novelist has consistently been associated with the literary myth, his opinion on men living in the so-called state of nature was far from completely positive. In fact, in the preface to the first edition of *Atala*, Chateaubriand comments: "Moreover, I am not at all, like M. Rousseau, an enthusiast for the Savages; and . . . I do not at all believe that *pure nature* is the most beautiful thing in the world. I have always found it extremely ugly, when I have had occasion to observe it." (*Atala* 8)

The attribution of the label Noble Savage to Chateaubriand's character Chactas is also somewhat problematic. A careful reading of his description shows us an American Indian who also speaks European languages being half-savage and half-civilised. Similarly, Atala, who is supposed to be the daughter of a Muskogee-Seminole chief, is discovered at the end of the novel to have a Spanish father and, when she dies, Chateaubriand describes her as having white cheeks and long tresses. Overall, both characters in *Atala* seem more European than Indian; for this reason, Chateaubriand's novel might be included in the Noble Savage literary fiction genre, most particularly for its idyllic descriptions of natural beauty and sublimity, which demonstrate the influence of Romantic ideals on European writers of the nineteenth century.

In *The French Jesuits and the Idea of the Noble Savage*, American historian George R. Healy argues that French Jesuit missionaries' accounts contributed enormously to the widespread diffusion of the character of the Noble Savage through their positive descriptions of Canadian indigenous people. Healy concludes that, even if Jesuit literature, as a whole, did not ennoble American Indians and most of the missionaries' accounts considered "pagan Indian life a thoroughly miserable existence" (145), a number of significant exceptions exist.

In comparing, for example, the account of the Illinois made by Father Louis Hennepin, a Recollect missionary, with the account of a Jesuit missionary, Father Claude Dablon, we find major differences in the evaluation of Native Americans. Hennepin argues that "the *Illinois*, as most of the Savages of America, being brutish, wild, and stupid, and their Manners being so opposite to the Morals of the Gospel, their Conversion is to be despair'd of, till Time and Commerce with the *Europeans* has remov'd their natural Fierceness and Ignorance, and thereby made 'em more apt to be sensible of the Charms of Christianity" (qtd. in Healy 168–169).

In contrast, Dablon describes the chief of the Illinois

as gentle and winning as is possible to see; and, although he is regarded as a great warrior, he has a mildness of expression that delights all beholders. The inner nature does not belie the external appearance, for he is of a tender and affectionate disposition. . . . And what we say of the chief may be said of all the rest of this nation, in whom we have noted the same disposition, together with a docility which has no savor of the barbarian.” (qtd. in *The Jesuit Relations* 211–213)

According to Healy, the inclination of some seventeenth-century Jesuits to seek evidence of savage nobility and virtue led to the *philosophes*' employment of these very sources to advance their anti-Catholic arguments. Healy notes that French Jesuits were encouraged to find good qualities in American Indians by the promotion of the idea of a state of pure nature by the early Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina in the sixteenth century and further refined by later generations of Jesuits, who argued that man was born at once exempt from original sin, deprived of supernatural life and subject to death and all other miseries of life. Healy points out that Jesuits, in describing American Indians, were influenced by the philosophy of their education, which seeks in men of whatever belief and degree of civilization the goodness of which they were presumed capable. In this sense, Jesuits were predisposed to discovering some evidence of this supposed natural goodness in Native Americans.

An example of a French Jesuit account that contains representations of both noble and ignoble savages can be found in *Moeurs des sauvages américains, comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps* (1724) by Joseph-François Lafitau, a Jesuit

priest who spent five years in a Christian mission in Canada. Lafitau aimed to demonstrate that Jesuit missionaries who described, in their accounts, the indigenous people of America as having no law, no religion and being more similar to beasts than to human beings did not have a deep knowledge of Native American culture. Lafitau maintained that, not only did they have a religion, but that an analysis of the veneration of gods by indigenous people of America reveals similarities with the religion of ancient cultures, to the extent that, he argues, people from ancient Greece can be considered the Native Americans' ancestors. In some parts of *Moeurs*, Lafitau defines the indigenous people of America as extraordinary, good people, offering a charitable hospitality to strangers. Echoes of the literary myth of the Noble Savage can be found in many passages of his work, in which Lafitau exalts their good qualities.

Although Lafitau recognises that indigenous societies have their own religion and social systems, he does not wish for a return to the so-called *état de nature*, as is evident in the preface to *Moeurs*, in which, while addressing the Duc d'Orléans, he argues that studying the Native Americans' way of life made him also realise how they have barbarous customs in comparison with the civilised way of living of French people. Europe, here, is again the frame of reference.

Similarly to De Léry's *Histoire*, Lafitau's *Moeurs* alternates positive and negative descriptions of Native Americans, so that, in other passages, he seems to contradict himself, arguing that they are cruel savages. Moreover, Lafitau maintains that the fact that Native Americans keep living in a barbarous way even if they have been in contact with civilised societies proves their indolence.

Ironically, at the beginning of his *Moeurs*, Lafitau criticises the Jesuit missionaries' definition of indigenous people of America as *barbares*, a conclusion drawn from their apparent lack of religion, and he also maintains that some of his fellow

Jesuits are responsible for the widespread diffusion of a negative perception of Native Americans. However, later in his text, Lafitau himself justifies the colonisation of America, arguing that the indigenous people lived in the dark and needed to be enlightened by Christianity—a view, as we have seen, shared by Lescarbot in his *Nova Francia*.

Here the representation of Native Americans as Ignoble ‘dark’ Savages is strategically used for demonstrating the importance of Christian missions ‘bringing the light’ in America:

It was only towards the end of the fifteenth century that these immense regions were discovered by one of those events that seem to be born of chance, but that God has reserved in the treasures of his Providence and that was like the happy moment marked by the grace of the Redeemer, of bringing the light of Faith to the numberless multitude of Nations that the Demon held in slavery, who were buried in the darkness of error, in the shadows of death & plunged into all the horrors that a brutal ferocity and all the false paths of idolatry must produce (Lafitau 26).¹⁰

1.3 Representations of the Figure of the Noble/Ignoble Savage in English Texts

¹⁰ Ce ne fut que vers la fin du quinzième siècle, que ces Régions immenses furent découvertes par un de ces événements qui semblent naître du hazard, mais que Dieu a réservé dans les trésors de sa Providence, & qui fut comme le moment heureux marqué par la grace du Redempteur, pour éclairer des lumières de la Foy cette multitude innombrable de Nations que le Démon tenoit sous son esclavage, qui étoient enfevelies dans les ténèbres de l’erreur, dans les ombres de la mort, & plongées dans toutes les horreurs que doivent produire une brutale férocité, & tous les égarements de l’Idolatrie.

The myth of the Noble Savage has also had a recurrent presence well beyond French literature. The concept does not belong exclusively to any one of the European literatures; however, the various ways in which the reference to this literary myth has been translated into other languages raises a number of issues. The original French term *bon sauvage* is translated into Spanish as *buen salvaje*, into Italian as *buon selvaggio* and into German as *gute wilde*, all expressions that attribute goodness to indigenous characters (*bon, buen, buono* and *gute* mean *good*). English authors, on the other hand, use the term ‘Noble Savage’, substituting *goodness* with *nobility*, thus exalting a somewhat different moral quality.

One of the reasons for the assertion of the nobility of indigenous characters in English literary novels might have been the projection of a feudal conception of nobility (such as bravery, faithfulness to his liege or to a woman, or kindness), drawn from medieval European cultural models. In descriptions of natives as a mirror image of Europeans, nobility would lie, for example, in their practices of hunting (despite the fact that in Europe hunting was reserved for the nobility, whereas in indigenous societies it was a means of subsistence), in the possession of land, weapons and clothes made of animal fur.

The authorship of the Noble Savage, as we noted, is usually attributed erroneously to the eighteenth-century French writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Although anthropologist Ter Ellingson argues that “Rousseau’s invention of the Noble Savage myth is itself a myth” (4) and other scholars have rejected his authorship of it, the real source of the myth has not been precisely identified. However, it has been established that the first writer who used the term Noble Savage in a literary text was the English poet John Dryden in his seventeenth-century play *The Conquest of Granada by Spaniards* (1672), in which Almanzor, the hero, replying to the king, says: “I am as free

as Nature first made man, Ere the base laws of Servitude began, When wild in woods the Noble Savage ran” (qtd. in Montague 34).

Here the freedom of the Noble Savage who runs wild in the woods contrasts with the servitude of the civilised man who is chained by the laws of modern society. Dryden’s play itself is about nobility, and his Moor hero, Almanzor, is representative of spiritual nobility, in the sense of a personal virtue of moral goodness rather than nobility from hereditary descent. However, although Dryden’s choice of a Moor character as an example of noble virtue seems to suggest that nobility can be found more in indigenous than in European characters, it should be kept in mind that, at the end of the play, Almanzor is revealed to be the son of a Spanish princess.

A source for Dryden’s play could be the work of the Spanish Dominican priest Bartolomé de Las Casas, who, in the sixteenth century, became the father of anti-imperialism and human rights in Latin America, founding a community for the defence of the rights of native peoples. His *Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1552) constitutes a crusade against Spanish colonists’ genocide of indigenous peoples in South America.

After Dryden’s mention of the Noble Savage, this term disappeared from English literary works for almost two hundred years, then was resurrected and transformed into its negative version in 1859, in another period of intense colonisation, by John Crawfurd, a colonial diplomat and president of the Ethnological Society of London. Crawfurd expressed his racist views in the ethnographic work *History of the Indian Archipelago* (1820), asserting the superiority of Europeans over other ‘races’. In particular, in commenting on Alfred Russell Wallace’s paper “On the Progress of Civilisation in Northern Celebes”, presented at the British Association in 1865, the

diplomat affirmed the white leader's justification of colonisation in New Zealand and discrimination towards Māori peoples:

As to the Maories of New Zealand, they were a very different race. . . . We had done a great deal for these Maories, and had treated them on terms of equality. We had civilised them from their abominable savagery, and made Christians of them, and some, though they had plenty of land, would not let us have any of it; but if they resisted a superior race, they must be taught that they must give way, and he did not care, if they resisted us, what became of them. (334)

Returning to the case of Dryden, Ellingson argues that the writer uses noble characters in his plays "in order to please his noble audience" (40). Consequently, the savage depicted in his fiction must be noble because the reader will also belong to a high social class. References to nobility in the sense of belonging to a hereditary social class can be found also in the work of seventeenth-century French ethnographer Gabriel Sagard. In his *Le grand voyage du pays des Hurons* (1632), he classifies indigenous peoples in this way: "I consider the Hurons and other Sedentary peoples as the Nobility, the Algonquin Nations as the Bourgeois, and the other Savages nearer us, such as the Montagnais and Canadians, as the villagers and poor people of the country" (342). Here, again, the term nobility is used to refer to social class status rather than to moral quality. However, this association of militaristic virtues (courage, heroism, etc.) with indigenous peoples seems to be quite far from the pure and gentle Noble Savage, living in contact with nature, depicted in Romantic literary texts. Each writer draws on the Savage for his own distinctive (European) purposes.

One of the first representations in English literature of the negative version of the figure of the Noble Savage—the Ignoble Savage—can be found in the character of Caliban in Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest* (1610). As Cuban literary critic Roberto Fernández Retamar notes, Caliban is transformed into a “symbol of resistance against colonial encroachments” (8–9). A number of post-colonial fictions and critics will write back to this figure. Read through the lens of the English colonial project, Caliban represents the indigenous victim of European colonial exploitation: he is “the colonial subject” (Franssen 24), trying to resist the oppression of the coloniser, symbolised by Prospero, “the torch-bearer of civilization” (24).

Caliban is a Caribbean native attempting to recover his island from its usurper, Prospero, a victim of usurpation. He had inherited the sovereignty over his native island from his mother, Sycorax, a native of Algiers, but Prospero has taken it from him. However, Prospero himself is in turn a victim of usurpation because his brother took away his legitimate power over Milan.

In the Shakespeare text, Caliban is described as a “salvage [savage] deformed slave” (Shakespeare VIII), “a freckled whelp, hag-born—not honour’d with a human shape” (16) and he does not suggest much nobility. All the characters in the play refer to him in negative terms. None of them shows admiration for him. Some even argue that he does not have the characteristics of a human being and they wonder whether he is a man or an animal. Miranda calls Caliban an “Abhorred slave, / Which any print of goodness wilt not take, / Being capable of all ill!” (Shakespeare 19); Stephano argues he is a “monster of the isle with four legs” (43) or a tortoise. For Prospero, Caliban is “a devil, a born devil, on whose nature / Nurture can never stick” (73) and he calls him disgusting dirt: “Filth as thou art” (19). Trinculo sees him as a fish: “What have we here,

a man? or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish: He smells like a fish; a very ancient and fish-like smell.” (42)

The fact that each of the characters in *The Tempest* sees Caliban in a different way seems to confirm Greenblatt’s theory that Renaissance Europeans turned the other, in this case Native Americans, into a kind of screen on which they projected their fears of the threatening Other, “their darkest and yet most compelling fantasies” (Greenblatt *Marvelous* 567).

Caliban’s description certainly does not suggest much nobility. He is represented as a “savage” (Shakespeare 20), belonging to a “vild race” (20); his habitat is a cave and he has an animal-like appearance. His ignobility could also be confirmed by the etymology of his name. English studies scholar Peter Hulme has argued that the name of Caliban is an anagram of the term “cannibal” (83–84). However, there is no scene in *The Tempest* in which Caliban exhibits cannibalistic tendencies. History and English scholars Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan suggest that the name of the native character in Shakespeare’s play could derive etymologically from the Arabic *Kalebôn*, which means ‘dirty dog’, or it could also derive from the term *Kaliban*, which is used in Gypsy language for ‘black’ (26).

Ecocritical scholar Robert Whelan points out that Shakespeare uses the term *salvage* (the original spelling of *savage*) in the cast list of *The Tempest* for conveying the idea of an abhorred person. The term derives from the Latin *silva* (wood). In the Middle Ages, woods and forests were frightening and dangerous places in comparison to the civilised court life of the cities. In this sense, Caliban shares similarities with “the Wild Man of medieval mythology, those strange, hairy creatures who turn up on misericords in medieval churches to frighten people with the prospect of life unregulated by religion” (9). The source of the Wild Man can be traced back to *Historia*

Naturalis (77BC) by Pliny and *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* (Collection of Curiosities) by Solinus, in which human beings are classified according to physical abnormalities.

The descriptions of Caliban's external appearance seem to suggest that he is a deformed human being; he is more similar to an animal than to a man. Being a *salvage*, thus coming from the woods, Caliban represents the uncivilised: he is quintessentially a brute, an Ignoble Savage. Vaughan and Vaughan have interpreted the character of Caliban according to Darwin's theory, arguing that Shakespeare's native character is the missing link, "somewhere between brute animal and human being" (110). Caliban thus represents an earlier stage in the ascent of humankind from the state of nature to civilisation, supporting "the nineteenth-century belief in humanity's continuing progress and ability to improve itself" (Vaughan and Vaughan 113).

If the character of Caliban in *The Tempest* is quintessentially an Ignoble Savage, an example of the figure of the Noble Savage in English literature can be found in Aphra Behn's heroic tragedy *Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave* (1678), the story of a noble African king encountered as a slave in the English Caribbean colonies. As in Shakespeare's play, here too some of the characters speak in racial terms, using the words 'black' and 'Negroes' to refer to African people.

Behn's tragedy echoes De Léry's and Lahontan's works: it praises the innocent life of Native Americans, seen as representative of an ideal golden age of humankind:

And these People represented to me an absolute *Idea* of the first State of Innocence, before Man knew how to sin: And 'tis most evident and plain, that simple Nature is the most harmless, inoffensive and virtuous Mistress . . . they have a Native Justice, which knows no Fraud; and they

understand no vice, or Cunning, but when they are taught by the *White Men*.

(Behn 40)

In *Oroonoko*, Behn subverts the perspective, so that a native character describes British people as Ignoble Savages, “below the Wildest Salvages” (Behn 86) and belonging to “a degenerate Race, who have no one Humane Vertue left, to distinguish ’em from the vilest Creatures” (86). Behn “revives the critical and satiric function of the ‘Noble Savage’” (144), using the character of a West African prince as a literary device for criticising European culture and Christian religion. However, in this case, the main purpose is to critique the inhuman treatment of African people in English Caribbean colonies, and *Oroonoko* became part of the propaganda for the anti-slavery movement.

The character of Friday in Daniel Defoe’s 1719 novel *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, probably the best-known Noble Savage in English literature, has also given rise to critique and counter-version. Robinson Crusoe is the story of a young Englishman (whose real name is Robinson Kreutznaer) who was shipwrecked in a storm, in 1659, near an island off the northeast coast of South America. He lived for 28 years, encountering captives and cannibals, before being rescued and coming back to England.

Robinson Crusoe was part of a trilogy and it was followed, in the same year, by the sequel, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, and in 1720, by *Serious Reflections during the life and Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. Defoe’s source was *A Cruising Voyage Round the World* (1712) by Captain Woodes Rogers, which reported the story of Alexander Selkirk, a Scottish sailor marooned from September 1704 to January 1709 on Juan Fernandez Island in the Pacific, west of Chile.

Another possible source, according to New Zealand scholar David Fausett, is *The Mighty Kingdom of Krinke Kesmes*, a Dutch novel, which appeared 11 years earlier (Fausett *The Strange* VIII).

The success of Defoe's novel led to many imitations (the term *Robinsonades* is commonly used to refer to novels based on such experiences) and castaway novels became widespread during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, one of which was *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812) by Swiss pastor Johann David Wyss. J. M. Coetzee wrote a *Robinson Crusoe* counter-version, *Foe*, in 1986. Similarly, Kenneth Gardner's novel *Rich Man Coffin* (2002) is a retelling of Defoe's story through an indigenous perspective. Gardner inverts the point of view, depicting Robinson (in this case an Afro-American slave who escapes on a whaling vessel and becomes chief of a cannibal Māori tribe) as an indigenous character instead of an English one. The 2000 film *Cast Away*, in which Tom Hanks plays the role of a modern Crusoe (a FedEx employee stranded on an island for many years) clearly took its inspiration from Defoe's novel.

Irish novelist James Joyce argued that the character of Crusoe is "the true prototype of the British colonist" (24) and that Friday, the native prisoner Crusoe rescues from cannibals, is "the symbol of the subject races" (24). Colonial attitudes in Crusoe are evident: he refers to himself as the king of the island (which, at some point in the novel, is called "colony"), arguing that the whole country is his own property, that he has "an undoubted Right of Dominion" (Crusoe 188) and that his people are "perfectly subjected" (188). Crusoe teaches Friday to call him "Master" and instructs his servant "in the knowledge of the true God" (Defoe 169), converting him to Christianity. In this sense, Defoe's novel shares similarities with De Léry's *Histoire*, especially in the underestimation of indigenous people's beliefs and in the presupposition of the superiority of Christianity over the worship of other gods. Defoe

thus casts Crusoe as the civilised European and Friday as the savage in need of enlightenment.

Defoe's novel contains more representations of Ignoble Savages than of Noble Savages, and in many passages of *Robinson Crusoe*, as in De Léry's *Histoire*, a European character fears being killed and eaten by natives, who are described as savages who "have no other Guide than that of their own abominable Passions" (Defoe 133), people more ferocious "than the Lions and Tigers of Africa" (Defoe 98).

The character of Friday appears to be a quintessential Noble Savage. Crusoe refers to his servant as a "poor Creature", a "comely handsome Fellow" (Defoe 160), having a "humble thankful Disposition" (Defoe 161). However, Crusoe's initial appreciation of the positive qualities of his servant is later counterbalanced by the fact that Friday is "still a hankering Stomach after some of the Flesh" (162), thus being "a Cannibal in his Nature" (162).

Defoe's novel raises the issue of the slave trade (Crusoe is on an African slave trade venture when he is cast away) and the author seems to have a contradictory attitude in dealing with it. According to English studies scholar Michael Seidel, in *Colonel Jack*, Defoe did sense the inhumanity of the practice of the slave system, but he did not condemn it; instead, he argued that the increase of labour requirements in the colonies made the slave trade necessary. In *Robinson Crusoe*, the protagonist "appears to undergo some kind of penance for the moral vacuum of past actions" (Seidel 107), in particular, regarding the sale of the young African boy, Xury, who had so much affection for him. However, Crusoe is not sorry for having sold a human being, but rather for having sold him for less than the price of his boat, and therefore "wrong here is an economic wrong not a moral one" (Seidel 107).

Nor does Defoe moralise excessively regarding the practice of cannibalism. At first, Crusoe defines it as “brutish and inhumane” (Defoe 134) and a horrid and dreadful custom, and he plans to kill the indigenous people landing on his island because they ate the body of the captives taken in war. Then he realises he has no right to condemn this practice, arguing that only God can judge if these people are committing a crime or not. Crusoe also points out that Europeans have no right to condemn the natives’ rite of cannibalism, considering the atrocities perpetrated against Native Americans by the Spanish during the colonisation of the New World. As we have seen in Section 1.2, this theory is shared by French explorer Jean De Léry in his *Histoire*, in which he argues that the French should not condemn the anthropophagy of Brazilian tribes, because of the horrible acts they themselves perpetrated against their own Huguenot compatriots.

Although the characters of Oroonoko and Friday can be defined as examples of the figure of the Noble Savage of the late eighteenth century, the utopian view of people living in a state of innocence gave way to a more negative depiction of indigenous peoples in the following period. As the colonisation of America, Africa and the Pacific Islands started in earnest, Europe drew a certain benefit from the reconstruction of the earlier positive images of indigenous peoples, recasting the latter as predominantly uncivilised cannibals and bloodthirsty godless warriors, and thereby justifying its own civilising interventions. The depiction of this ignoble savage or dark savage indirectly served the interests of European settlers, and the earlier explorers widely employed the stereotype of the ‘sons of Satan’ for the colonised in their accounts of the New World.

The idealisation of indigenous peoples by a few writers was thus counterbalanced by others, who depicted Ignoble Savage characters in their fiction, emphasising the cannibalism, cruelty, violence, nakedness and lack of law that earlier centuries had also touched upon. The construction of this parallel myth of the Ignoble

Savage (the Noble Savage generally relabelled), emphasised the dark side of indigenous peoples, and led to descriptions of them as man-eaters, anthropophagi and cannibals. Moreover, the godlessness (in its Christian meaning) of Native Americans observed by Europeans was used by missionaries to justify conversion. In this respect, we need also to bear in mind that some works of travel-ethnographic literature respond to the desire of prospective European settlers to see indigenous peoples as responding positively to colonisation. This desire gave rise to descriptions of natives welcoming colonisers or being easily converted to Christianity because they had no God.

An example of nineteenth-century bestialising of the savage is provided by naturalist Charles Darwin, whose *Journal of Researches into the Geology and Natural History of the Various Countries Visited by H.M.S. Beagle, under the Command of Captain Fitzroy, R.N., From 1832 to 1836* (1839) contains a description of his first cross-cultural encounter with the indigenous peoples of Tierra del Fuego in South America, in 1833:

It was without exception the most curious and interesting spectacle I had ever beheld. I could not have believed how wide was the difference, between savage and civilized man. It is greater than between a wild and domesticated animal, in as much as in man there is a greater power of improvement. . . . The party altogether closely resembled the devils which come on the stage in such plays as *Der Freischutz*. (228)

Once again, we find the representation of natives “in terms of European demonic-mythological imagery” (Ellingson 140), in which there is nothing of the rhetoric of nobility and of the fictional representations of indigenous peoples living in a mythical Golden Age. Darwin’s comparison of savages with animals could be read in

the light of his evolutionary theory connecting humans and ourang-otangs; however, his negative depiction of the Fuegians is comparable to the racist images of bestiality depicted by Egyptologist George Gliddon and Doctor Josiah Nott, all of them used as scientific evidence supporting the European belief in white superiority.

Darwin's work does carry echoes of the Noble Savage fictional characters. There is evidence of this in his admiration of the athletic Tahitians, described as tall, vigorous and broad shouldered. Commenting on their tattoos, Darwin does not consider them a characteristic of savagery but rather a graceful and elegant ornament. However, his positive representation of Tahitians should be seen as merely an occasional favourable comment, and not representative of his overall opinion of indigenous peoples. Later, in fact, he used the term savage when referring to the Māoris, who, according to him, were not progressing towards civilisation:

Looking at the New Zealander, one naturally compares him with the Tahitian; both belonging to the same family of mankind. The comparison, however, tells heavily against the New Zealander. He may, perhaps, be superior in energy, but in every other respect his character is of a much lower order. One glance at their respective expressions brings conviction to the mind that one is a savage, the other a civilized man (384).

1.4 The Noble Antipodean: The South Seas Counterpart of the Noble Savage

From the age of exploration to the nineteenth century, the predominant living examples of the myth of the Noble Savage were the Native Americans. After the explorations of the Pacific in the late eighteenth century, their South Seas counterparts

took over the role of avatar of the Noble Savage, but as the Noble Antipodean. In his “Savages Noble and Ignoble: The Preconceptions of Early European Voyagers in Polynesia”, Ian Christopher Campbell points out that Europeans associated indigenous people of many parts of the world with the idea of the Noble Savage, so it was probably inevitable that the most remote peoples of all, the antipodean Pacific Islanders, should have their turn (45). Campbell argues that European explorers brought with them to the Pacific what he calls an “invisible baggage” (47): their preconceptions and/or misconceptions about indigenous people. However, Campbell also points out that, as far as the Pacific context is concerned, the early reputation of the Polynesians of friendliness and hospitality has contributed a great deal to the widespread diffusion of the myth of the Noble Savage in the South Seas.

It could be argued that the trope of the Noble/Ignoble Savage commonly bifurcated between Polynesia and Melanesia. As Keown argues (*Postcolonial* 1), from a geographical point of view, Polynesia comprises a vast area extending from Hawai’i in the north, to New Zealand in the south-west and Easter Island in the east. The distinction between Polynesian and Melanesian people was introduced by French navigator Jules-Sebastien-César Dumont d’urville, in 1832. According to this division, Polynesians (and Micronesians) were described as “racially, morally and politically superior” (Douglas 65), thus representative of the Noble Savage stereotype, whereas Melanesians were ‘much closer to a barbaric state than the Polynesians and the Micronesians” (d’Urville 169), they were represented in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in European literature as the prototype of the Ignoble Savage.

The idea of the Antipodes as an earthly paradise has persisted in the European imagination since ancient times. The origin of the myth of the Antipodes (‘opposite footed’, from the Greek *anti*, ‘opposite’ and *pous*, ‘foot’) can be traced back to the work

of Ptolemy, who presumed that an unknown land mass (Terra Australis Incognita) existed in the southern part of the earth, to counterbalance the planet's northern part. In Dante's cosmogony, Mount Purgatory is located in the midst of an ocean at the antipodes of Jerusalem, thus referring to the South Pacific Islands. In *The New Atlantis*, Francis Bacon positions the fabled island of Bensalem in the Pacific (whereas Plato's *Atlantis* and More's *Utopia* were in the Atlantic Ocean). According to New Zealand writer Martin Edmond, Marco Polo's accounts of his travels "seemed to confirm that the other side of the globe was a place of wonder" (36). Speculations about a fabled southern land appeared to be confirmed, in the late eighteenth century, by European explorers in the Pacific, who believed they had found a veritable golden age, where people lived in contact with nature, far from the evils of contemporary industrial societies. In *Representing the South Pacific. Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin*, Rod Edmond examines how the South Pacific was represented by explorers, writers and artists between 1767 and 1914 and he argues that the Pacific "was, and in a debased sense remains, a place of dreams" (6). Similarly, Vanessa Smith, in *Literary Culture and the Pacific. Nineteenth-century Textual Encounters*, examining a range of nineteenth-century European accounts from the Pacific, depicting Polynesian responses to imported metropolitan culture, in particular its technologies of writing and print, points out that "the Pacific figured as an idealised adventure playground, realm of noble savages and cannibals, of shipwrecks and castaways" (13). As New Zealand historian Kerry Howe argues, knowledge about the Pacific "largely derives from a complex range of Western ideas and assumptions" (2), thus the Pacific has not only been politically colonised by the west, it has also been "intellectually occupied and conceptually shaped by the West" (2).

The invention of a fabled people followed the invention of a fabled land. The antipodes of Europe were thought to be an upside-down world whose inhabitants had monstrous bodily forms. They used a huge foot as a sunshade and had two heads or a head sunk into their chest. In the eighteenth-century European view, Pacific people were “an archetypal Other, the first in Western literature” (Fausett *Images* 1). Spatial distance played a key role in the widespread diffusion of ethnic stereotypes about the Pacific. From the time the islands of the Pacific gradually began to be charted, the region assumed a mythological aspect that fired the imagination of many writers, who depicted the indigenous people as Noble Savages.

The incarnation of the Noble Savage in the South Seas was represented, in particular, by the Tahitians. When European explorers encountered the natives of Tahiti, in 1760, their peaceful and happy life “seemed to prove that this [the myth of the Noble Savage] was no myth or that the myth had been proved true” (Lansdown 18). Representations of the Noble Antipodean can be found, among others, in the accounts of French explorer Antoine de Bougainville, who, in his *Voyage autour du monde par la frégate du roi La Boudeuse et la flûte l'Étoile* (1771), bestowed the name New Cythera on Tahiti, after the legendary island of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Bougainville's accounts provided evidence to support Rousseau's philosophy of primitivism, “revealing as it did the Tahitians' apparently idyllic way of life in a beautiful natural environment, a veritable Arcadia” (qtd. in Lay 33). Bougainville's enchantment with Tahitian life is clearly displayed in passages such as the following: “I thought I was transported into the Garden of Eden . . . everywhere we found hospitality, ease, innocent joy, and every appearance of happiness amongst them” (Bougainville 228–229).

Representations of Tahitian people as Noble Savages can also be found in the accounts of Philibert Commerson, a botanist on Bougainville's voyage to Tahiti, in which he argues that Tahiti "is the one spot on the earth's surface which is inhabited by men without vices, prejudices, wants or dissensions. Born under the loveliest skies, they are supported by the fruits of a soil so fertile that cultivation is scarcely required" (qtd. in Ross 118). According to historian Anne Salmond, Commerson's description of the Tahitian way of life "was infused with an intoxicated euphoria that far surpassed Rousseau's accounts of 'savage life'" (361).

In some passages of his *Observations Made During a Voyage Round the World* (1778), Johann Reinhold Forster, a naturalist on Cook's second voyage, also praised Tahitians for "their delicacy of manners, true courtesy and politeness; their cheerful and open behaviour; their goodness of heart, and hospitality" (Forster 294). French explorer Jules Sébastian César Dumont d'Urville, in *The New Zealanders: A Story of Austral Lands* (1825), extended this to describe the Māori people as Noble Savages living "close to nature" (31), having "gentle and innocent occupations" (31), being "a nation which is unaccustomed to the fury and ravages of war" (31).

The accounts of European explorers in the Pacific inspired many writers, such as French naval officer and author Pierre Loti (the nom de plume of Louis Marie-Julien Viand) who, in his novel *The Marriage of Loti* (1880), described Tahitians as "dreamy natives" (30), "silent groups, indolent and idle, at the foot of great trees, who seem to live only through the spirit of contemplation" (30). Similarly, English poet Rupert Brooke, in a letter to his friend Edward Marsh, maintains that the Pacific is a "heaven on earth, the ideal life, little work, dancing and singing and eating, naked people of incredible loveliness, perfect manners, and immense kindness, a divine tropic climate, and intoxicating beauty of scenery" (qtd. in Lay 204). English writer Samuel Butler

spent four years in New Zealand, a stay that inspired his utopian fantasy novel *Erewhon, or, Over the Range* (1872) (Erewhon is an anagram of nowhere). The Erewhonians (a fictitious representation of the South Island's inhabitants) are described as Noble Savages having "the most magnificent presence" (52), their expression being "courteous and benign" (52).

In contrast, American writer James Michener, in his novel *Return to Paradise* (1951), criticises the representation of the Pacific people as Noble Savages and addresses the issue of European stereotypes of the Pacific:

Much romantic nonsense has been written about the atolls. Even the word lagoon has been debased far below its true currency. On the motus the beautiful girls have been ridiculed; the patient native men have been burlesqued. A thousand wastrels have befouled the islands; a hundred sentimentalists have defamed them. (qtd. in Lay 247)

Although the accounts of some European explorers in the Pacific seemed to prove the existence of the Noble Savage in the South Seas, the figure of the good, innocent native was once again counterbalanced by a contrasting character, the Ignoble Savage, a cruel, ferocious individual who practised anthropophagy. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, both poles of thought (the Noble Savage and the Ignoble Savage) became widespread in Europe—two opposite attitudes by Europeans towards the Pacific people, one of attraction and one of repulsion, once again co-existing.

American writer Herman Melville is one of the best-known representatives of this new trend of casting Pacific indigenous people in less appealing roles and of regarding the myth of the Noble Savage as a contradiction in terms. In the novel *Typee*:

A Peep at Polynesian Life (1846), based on his experience as a captive on Nuku Hiva, in the Marquesas islands, Melville emphasises the Pacific people's 'dark side' even in the title of the novel: *Typee* refers to a valley, Tai Pi Vai, which in the Marquesan dialect means 'a lover of human flesh', and Melville thus refers to the custom of the Marquesan people of eating the bodies of their enemies. In 1847, Melville published a sequel, *Omoo*. According to New Zealand writer Graeme Lay, however, both *Typee* and *Omoo* "upheld the Enlightenment ideal of the Noble Savage" (162). As Rod Edmond argues, *Typee* needs to be read "within that Enlightenment and Romantic tradition which imaginatively appropriated the South Pacific in order to construct its case against the ignobility of civilisation" (84).

It could be argued that Melville's novel is exemplary of both figures: he describes the inhabitants of the valley of Happar as Noble Savages, in contrast with the perfidious, dreaded, cannibal Typees, who are represented as quintessentially Ignoble Savages. However, a deeper analysis of *Typee* reveals how Melville justifies the ferocity of the natives, explaining that when the Europeans first landed on the Marquesas, the natives rushed down to the beach in crowds with open arms to welcome them. According to Melville, this was a "fatal embrace" (28) because the natives folded to their bosoms "the vipers" (28) whose sting was "destined to poison all their joys; and the instinctive feeling of love within their breasts" (28) was "soon converted into the bitterest hate" (28).

Melville points out that the Typees were peaceful and loving, like all the other indigenous tribes of the Marquesas, but then turned cruel and ferocious after the atrocities perpetrated on them by French colonisers. In fact, in 1814, French officer Captain Porter, on the frigate *Essex*, landed on the Marquesas and tried to subjugate the Typees, but he and his crew had to retreat and, before abandoning the island, they set

fire to the village, destroying houses and temples. Considering how inhumanely the natives had been treated by the French, Melville argues: “Who can wonder at the deadly hatred of the Typees to all foreigners after such unprovoked atrocities?” (27). Melville thus implicitly suggests that the Typees were once Noble Savages but that they turned into Ignoble Savages as a reaction to the injustices perpetrated on them by European colonisers. Accordingly, ignobility is attributed to the Europeans rather than to the indigenous people of the Marquesas. As we will discuss in Chapter Four, such readings of Melville have not stopped contemporary indigenous writers such as Sia Figiel from presenting Melville as a ‘Peeping Tom’, speaking in the place of the ‘native’, and projecting a still colonialist image of their society.

According to Spurr, Melville’s narrative has a socially symbolic function, representing, in the realm of imaginary wish fulfillment, everything that nineteenth-century America was not. Spurr points out that for an American society characterized by male-dominated social institutions, repressed sexuality, the profit motive and the systematic destruction of native peoples and natural landscape, Melville’s ‘savages’ “offer a visionary antithesis: a free and natural sexuality, a marriage system based on female desire, a society living in ease and abundance, and in complete harmony with its natural surroundings” (127-128).

1.5 Conclusion

As this chapter demonstrates, the literary myth of the Noble Savage had been employed to identify problems in European social and moral development long before the work of French novelists and philosophers of the eighteenth century and of the arrival of the explorers on Pacific beaches; therefore, it cannot be viewed as a theory

limited to a single writer or to a single age. Italian literary scholar Piero Mandrillo argues that the Noble Savage can be considered “one of those inextinguishable ideals inrooted in human beings of every age, so that, apart from its mythico-ideological and pseudo-historical collocation in certain periods of the history of mankind, it is a continuously reviving manifestation, though appearing in various forms” (5).

This particular literary myth has associations with theology, especially in the presupposition that after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Earthly Paradise, God preserved this paradise somewhere else. The great explorations of the seventeenth century seemed to confirm the existence of the Garden of Eden and created the illusion that the New World might be the Paradise Lost humankind had always dreamed of finding. With rhizomatic roots from classical, through biblical and Enlightenment traditions, among others, the myth of the Noble Savage can be seen to have been reinvented by many different cultures and periods: this revisionism has itself been a factor in its popularity and longevity.

European explorations of the New World had a strong impact on Renaissance writers, deeply influencing their works, in which we find a shift from the representation of an ideal individual (the Noble Savage) to that of an ideal city. Indeed, Italian Humanist Tommaso Campanella, in *Città del Sole* (1602), and Sir Thomas More, in *Utopia* (1516), linked into and developed the chain by elaborating the concept of an imaginary perfect society. The observation of indigenous ways of life provided a pretext, for Europeans, to rethink the values of their own developing society; for this reason, it is not surprising that indigenous peoples soon became an ideal, as well as the symbol of a happier state of humankind. Moreover, the Renaissance movement saw a return to the ideals of classical art. Paintings depicting Noble Savages, influenced by models drawn from Greek art, confirmed the association of indigenous cultures with the myth of the

Golden Age. In these imaginative projections, Europeans associated Native Americans and African peoples with classical beauty, portraying them, in this period, through a non-realistic, idealised lens. One example of such echoes of classicism in visual arts can be found in Theodor De Bry's sixteenth-century paintings, in which the shift from observation to imagination is evident.

As Ellingson argues, the “savage”—and the “Oriental”—are “the two great ethnographic paradigms” (XIII): two terms coined by European writers in the fifteenth century, after the great explorations of the Americas. Four centuries later, in the nineteenth century, the antithesis savagery/civilisation was deliberately used by anthropology, to demonstrate the cultural inferiority of indigenous peoples in order to justify colonialism. More recently, the idea of the nobility of an ethnic group and the existence of a ‘subhuman race’ was resurrected by the Fascist Nazi party, fuelling racial discrimination and justifying the persecution of Jewish people.

The Noble Savage was not only a fictitious character created by Europeans during the period of the great explorations; he was also part of an imaginary couple. In fact, between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, western representations of the antipodes of Europe created a feminine counterpart of the apparently generic but quintessentially masculine Noble Savage. This was the so-called Vahiné, a curiously hybrid figure of an indigenous Tahitian maiden, a New Eve and a classical nymph, a ‘Pacific Muse’ as well as a generous child of nature who welcomed and seduced voyagers and sailors, offering them sexual exchanges¹¹.

The popularity of these images created a sort of kaleidoscope through which Europeans represented indigenous peoples. This kaleidoscope of images, in its turn, intensified the scholarly interest in the Noble Savage, defined by John Dunmore as “a

¹¹ See O'Brien, Patty. *The Pacific Muse. Exotic Femininity and the Colonial Pacific*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006. Print.

widely discussed simplification of Rousseau's view of man" (160), and the absorption of the figure into the literary tradition. The long history and the very persistence of the myth, its creation of its own avatars, has perpetuated the question of whether this mythical first stage of humankind ever existed or could exist.

In conclusion, with respect to this history and analysis of the different facets of the myth, we could argue that the Noble Savage is a sort of Janus-faced character indissociable from its opposite (the Ignoble Savage) that has had a significant presence in anthropologic and literary works for many centuries, and it remains fully contemporary because it continues to raise issues of race and power and to provide a basis for social critique. As we shall see in detail in the following chapters, the myth of the Noble Savage has also been borrowed, adapted and recast by contemporary Māori writer Witi Ihimaera to recover, restore and promote the values of Māori culture.

PART II: THE POST-COLONIAL NOBLE
SAVAGE

CHAPTER TWO:

AN ANALYSIS OF “THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE”, *THE TROWENNA SEA* AND *THE PARIHAKA WOMAN* IN THE LIGHT OF WESTERN THEORIES OF THE NOBLE/IGNOBLE SAVAGE

2.1 Noble or Ignoble Savages? Reading “The Other Side of the Fence” alongside Lescarbot’s *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France*

The first part of this research project identified western literary and ethnographic texts containing representations of indigenous people as Noble Eco-Savages. This second part researches the different occurrences of literary response to, uses of, or rewriting of this myth and the particular stereotypes to which Ihimaera chooses to write back. It asks whether his work is merely a writing back in the sense of seeking to unmask naturalised stereotypes of indigenous people or whether it means using the myth of the Noble Savage as an agent of transformation. It could be argued that Ihimaera’s Noble Savage is a Post-colonial Noble Savage, in the sense that it represents the reaction of an indigenous writer to the colonial Noble Savage, and thus to the discourse of colonisation in general. Ihimaera’s Post-colonial Noble Savage interacts with the traditional colonial discourse by attempting to subvert it, rewriting the character of the Noble Savage from an indigenous perspective.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the short story “The Other Side of the Fence” and the novels *The Trowenna Sea* and *The Parihaka Woman* in the light of western theories of the Noble/Ignoble Savage, as a critique of stereotyped representations of natives in western literary and ethnographic works. These texts will be examined for their writing back to certain notions carried by this myth,

demonstrating how Ihimaera's fiction constitutes a distinctive New Zealand indigenous response to the myth.

The literary myth of the Noble Savage, as the first part of this thesis demonstrated, has been part of a western 'kaleidoscope' through which the identity of indigenous people has been defined. As far as the representation of Pacific peoples is concerned, until 1970, most fiction about the Pacific was written from a Eurocentric perspective and this tended to marginalise indigenous peoples. This was a problem not only for indigenous characters but for indigenous writing in general. As post-colonial scholar Bill Ashcroft points out, "indigenous writing has suffered many of the general historical problems of post-colonial writing, such as being incorporated into the national literatures of the settler colonies as an 'extension' rather than as a separate discourse" (Ashcroft and Griffiths 143).

In the works of some writers, natives represented secondary characters or functioned as the companion of the protagonist, while most central roles were reserved for western characters. Pacific Islanders, observed Samoan writer Albert Wendt, were depicted through a western perspective, in stereotypical terms, and transformed into "grotesque colonial caricatures" (*Towards* 642).

In many western novels, Pacific characters "are either noble savages or the equivalent of the biblical snake in the Garden of Eden" (Hereniko 18–20), because their depiction oscillates between simple happy people dancing in a paradise-like setting and ferocious cannibals. It is exactly because of the outsider perspective that, for such a long time, characterised fiction about, or set in, the Pacific that indigenous writers felt the need to affirm their own identities, by decolonising fiction through a rewriting process and producing a separate body of work.

Haunani-Kay Trask, a Native Hawaiian academic, writer and activist, observes that, in her work, “writing is both de-colonization and re-creation. It is creativity against the American grain and in the Hawaiian grain” (*Writing in Captivity* 43). One of the most important representatives of indigenous writing in Hawaii, this author’s aim is to support her people’s struggles for self-determination through her creative writing. For this reason, her fiction tries to correct the image of Native Hawaiian people imposed by colonisers by presenting an account of Hawaiian society through an indigenous perspective.

Although Trask is referring to the Hawaiian cultural context, this quotation can also be applied to other indigenous writings of the Pacific, such as those of Aotearoa New Zealand. Aotearoa’s writers as well have inherited “two traditions, one colonial and the other resistant” (Trask 42), so they too have experienced what “writing in captivity” (Trask 42) means, because they are natives in a non-native society (Haunani-Kay Trask is Hawaiian in an American colony, in the same way that a New Zealand indigenous writer is a Māori in a former British colony). For this reason, paraphrasing Trask, we could say that the aim of the fiction of Māori writer Witi Ihimaera is likewise decolonisation and recreation, because his writing goes against the western grain and is in the Māori grain. Indeed, Ihimaera’s post-colonial narrative depicts New Zealand society through indigenous eyes, resisting and rejecting the outsider perspective of the dominant European culture and reconstructing his own identity.

Ihimaera’s fiction challenges what French philosopher Michel Foucault, referring to the Middle East context and to the assumptions underlying perspectives on Palestine people, called “the regime of truth” (*Power/Knowledge* 131). In the New Zealand literary context, the ‘regime of truth’ can be identified with a representation of indigenous people characterised by prejudices and distortions, all of them consequences

of western colonialism in the Pacific. In this sense, Foucault's statement is representative of Ihimaera's aim in writing fiction, which is to write against this 'regime of truth', to 'revision' Eurocentric and canonical texts by decolonising them and rewriting them from an indigenous perspective.

Ihimaera's post-colonial narrative thus presents an account of New Zealand society through a Māori perspective, at least in part to correct the image of the Pacific imposed by the dominant culture. His fiction demonstrates the capacity of Māori writers to subvert western tradition, and it provides specific examples of how Māori writers resist the effects of cultural imperialism by reconstructing their own identities through fiction. Ihimaera's works are also an example of the ways in which European myths have been appropriated and reworked in Māori writing. In particular, his fiction provides insights into the New Zealand indigenous interactions with the western myth of the Noble Savage, constituting a distinctive Māori response to this figure.

Reading Ihimaera's novels in the light of representations of first nations peoples in western ethnographic and literary works contributes to the understanding of the political and cultural effects of the 'responding' by Pacific peoples to theories depicting natives as Noble Savages over centuries. In this context, Ihimaera's works confront and challenge the western perceptions and stereotypes carried by the myth and that define him. At the same time, the very theories that constituted frames for conceiving Māori-European difference by Europeans have been appropriated and used by Māori themselves. In this sense, an analysis of Ihimaera's texts, written from the 'other' side, aims to deepen understanding of the complexity of the effects of European-Māori cultural contact. Consequently, his fiction raises post-colonial issues, because it attempts to approach the question of Pakeha attitudes towards Māori culture and "it

questions, overturns and critically refracts colonial authority, its claim to superiority” (Boehmer 341).

“The Other Side of the Fence”, a short story in the collection in *Pounamu Pounamu* (1972), provides an early example of the ways in which Ihimaera ‘critically refracts’ the authority of the Janus-faced figure of the Noble/Ignoble Savage. The story is a comparison between two different ways of thinking, with the cultural divide between Māori and Pakeha being exteriorised in the symbol of the fence between the territories of the Heremaia and the Simmons families. “The Other Side of the Fence” might well be seen to refer to “the dichotomy of Postcolonial discourse, that between Self and Other” (Deane 356). More immediately, the fence could symbolically represent the divide between Māori and Pakeha lands. Consequently, Mr Simmons’s affirmation of his territorial sovereignty over a property that previously belonged to the Heremaias (“the land, its occupants and their possessions no longer belonged to them. It belonged to him, Jack Simmons. The sooner they understood that, the better. Times had changed” (*Pounamu* 45–46)) can be seen in the light of the controversy regarding the Treaty of Waitangi, which was supposed to protect Māori ownership of lands.

The long-standing legacy of the imperialist attitude to indigenous land ownership and its omnipresence across time and space is manifest in texts of different cultures. Astonishing similarities can be found, for example, between Mr Simmons’s rejection of Māori peoples’ right of possession of their own land and the imperialistic perspective of French settlers in seventeenth-century Canadian colonies, as expressed, for example, by French lawyer and ethnographer Marc Lescarbot in *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France* (History of New France), published in 1609. Although in Ihimaera’s short story the historical and geographical context is completely different (New Zealand was not a French colony but a British one and colonisation started in the nineteenth

century), his Pakeha character shares with Lescarbot's work the same strong legitimisation of the colonialist project, explicitly justified by the coloniser's assumptions of cultural superiority.

Other similarities between "The Other Side of the Fence" and *Histoire* can be found in the use of Christian religion to demonstrate the association between Christianity and civilisation. Indeed, in Ihimaera's short story, Mr Simmons wonders how the Heremaia children can still behave immorally after being converted to Christianity: "Sometimes they were pleasant and then unpleasant. Good and then bad. Honest, and then dishonest. Generous, then mean. And even though they had received a sound Christian training, their sense of morality seemed to come and go, come and go, with the most astonishing ease." (*Pounamu* 43) Here Mr Simmons implies that Christianity should bestow the advantage of taking indigenous peoples from 'brutishness' to 'civilisation', a concept shared by Lescarbot, but Mr Simmons also argues that Christianity has not made them moral.

The Eurocentric assessment made by Ihimaera's Pakeha character of his Māori 'other' echoes *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France*. In Chapter XX, *Of the virtues and vices of the savages*, the seventeenth-century French ethnographer, noting the differences between the French settlers' way of life and the Canadian indigenous people's 'uncivilised' manners, claims that "the Christian religion only may bring them to reason" (Lescarbot 260). Christianity is also used by Lescarbot in *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France* to support the presupposition that God has taken the natives' land away from them because they were unworthy of it. Lescarbot finds a theological justification for colonisation: the French colonial enterprise in the Bay of Fundy was authorised by God and the settlers did not occupy Canadian land unjustly; rather, they obeyed a kind of 'divine request' as the obedient eldest of God's children:

And as the over conscientious make difficulties everywhere, I have at times seen some who doubted if one could justly occupy the lands of New France, and deprive thereof the inhabitants; to whom my reply has been in few words, that these people are like the man of whom it is spoken in the Gospel, who had wrapped up in a napkin the talent which had been given unto him, instead of turning it to account, and therefore it was taken away from him. And therefore, as God the Creator has given the earth to man to possess it, it is very certain that the first title of possession should appertain to the children who obey their father and recognize him, and who are, as it were, the eldest children in the house of God, as are the Christians, to whom pertaineth the division of the earth rather than to the disobedient children, who have been driven from the house, as unworthy of their heritage and of that which dependeth thereon. (Lescarbot 16–17)

According to Lescarbot's theory, the deprivation of Canadian indigenous people of their land can be compared to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the earthly paradise for disobedience. Ihimaera's Pakeha character in "The Other Side of the Fence" is not only complacent about having established territorial sovereignty over what originally was Heremaia property, but he also regards the neighbouring Māori children as a kind of advancing horde invading his house: "He himself knows it is too much to expect that the Heremaia children would go to bed so early. Heavens, he is lucky that the tribe has not invaded his house yet! He winces to himself. He may as well make the most of these quiet and unassailed moments." (*Pounamu* 42) Read in the light of the history of colonisation in New Zealand, this text is highlighting the irony of Mr

Simmons's language: Ihimaera depicts a Pakeha character whose house is 'assailed' by Māori children, to demonstrate how the ownership of land in New Zealand has been subverted after the Treaty of Waitangi and is still a controversial matter. Not only have Māori people been deprived of their land, but they are also considered 'invaders'.

In his book *Orientalism*, post-colonial scholar Said demonstrated how "every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was [consequently] a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric" (61). Although Said was referring to the Middle East, whereas "The Other Side of the Fence" and *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France* take place in New Zealand and in Canada, this quotation might also be applied to Ihimaera's short story and to Lescarbot's work. Indeed, both of them refract the same imperialist and ethnocentric attitude. The discourse and contexts are very different, but the underlying mechanisms and assumptions are curiously similar.

However, Said recognised the over-generalising effect of his own discourse (which, in its own way, echoes the kind of 'generalising' we find in Mr Simmons's discourse), and his later writings underwent a change of direction. In his *Orientalism Reconsidered* (1985), Said declared he felt separated from some key themes of *Orientalism*, explaining the continuities and discontinuities of the developments in his thinking. He confirms his premise that a relationship between literature and politics has existed in European writing since the eighteenth century, but he also admits that his somewhat monolithic depiction of the representations by western writers was influenced by his own political views. As post-colonial scholar Valerie Kennedy argues, "there is a potential clash between the detachment of the scholarly humanist and the commitment of the polemicist who argues for Palestinian rights" (6).

A reconsideration was made by Ihimaera, as well: at the end of "The Other Side of the Fence", Mr Simmons's perspective on the Heremaia children seems to be

changed when he admits, when talking about them to his wife, “So I was wrong . . .” (*Pounamu* 57). In this short story, Ihimaera writes back to the western distortion and misrepresentation of indigenous peoples. However, Mr Simmons, the Pakeha character, can himself be identified as a stereotype, and the polemical character of the representation of European peoples in “The Other Side of the Fence” can be questioned as well.

An essential question in the analysis of the messages of Ihimaera’s fiction is of course that of the narrative perspective. Through whose eyes do we view the action and, hence, with whom do our sympathies lie? Ihimaera is an acute observer of both Māori and Pakeha cultures; however, he often uses characters to stage either positive or negative aspects of New Zealand biculturalism. In “The Other Side of the Fence”, the narrator seems to tell us the story through a Pakeha perspective, though he looks at New Zealand society through indigenous eyes. In “The Other Side of the Fence”, the narrator seems to tell us the story through a Pakeha perspective.

In his *The Location of Culture* (1994), post-colonial scholar Homi K. Bhaba argued that ‘subalterns’ experience their differentness by partially identifying with the dominant, a phenomenon he calls ‘hybridity’ (from the Latin *hybrida*, something that is mixed). In the light of this, can we hypothesise that Ihimaera is trying to identify himself with a Pakeha voice to demonstrate that literary works written through western perspectives have tended to depict indigenous peoples in stereotypical ways? However, to enable an outsider reader to fully understand the issues emerging from this short story, the text also needs to show that, in New Zealand, two different peoples and cultures—two different voices—coexist, that is to say, Māori and Pakeha. Consequently, the metatextual knowledge that Ihimaera is an indigenous author must be taken into account when evaluating the voice of the non-indigenous protagonist-narrator.

Bhabha's argument then raises the question of how to read a post-colonial text. In studying post-colonial literature, we have to consider that it "centers on the conflicts and contradictions, as well as the advantages and sense of liberation that accompany life as an individual in a postcolonial state" (Childers and Hentzi 234). Ihimaera's fiction is certainly centred on the conflicts caused by the cross-cultural encounter between Māori and Pakeha in New Zealand. For this reason, analysing his post-colonial texts requires a particular approach. According to Bill Ashcroft, an indigenous text necessitates a form of "deconstructing reading" (*Post-colonial* 192) because it requires paying attention to the profound and complex effects of colonisation on literary production. To elucidate the general difficulties in dealing with a post-colonial text, it is useful to go back to the earliest post-colonial analyses, which were based on the antithetical relationship between the 'coloniser' and the 'colonised'.

According to Memmi:

To search for differences in features between two peoples does not in itself characterize a racist, but it has a definitive function and takes on a particular meaning in a racist context. The colonialist stresses those things which keep him separate, rather than emphasizing that which might contribute to the foundation of a joint community. In those differences, the colonized is always degraded and the colonialist finds justification for rejecting his subjects (71).

Going back to "The Other Side of the Fence", we can identify the presence of Memmi's racist attitude of the 'coloniser' in Mr Simmons, the Pakeha character, for example, in his use and repetition of the adjective *black* in the sentence "six little black

heads” or “six little blackbirds” (*Pounamu* 41) when referring to the Heremaia children. *Black* is not necessarily a pejorative term in itself, but here it is used to emphasise differences, suggesting a racist context. By repeating this term, Ihimaera’s text makes the reader aware of the more generally negative and racist depictions of native difference by western people.

Another characteristic of the difference in indigenous cultures that became a significant feature of the literary and ethnographic myth of the Noble/Ignoble Savage was the absence of a strong sense of private property. From a European comparative standpoint, this notion of collective ownership has been perceived both positively and negatively. As post-colonial scholar Michelle Keown points out, Ihimaera’s short story “features a Pakeha man whose affection for his Māori neighbours is tempered by stereotypical views of Māori as light-fingered and conniving rascals” (141–142). In “The Other Side of the Fence”, Ihimaera provides an example of the negative European perception of Māori people’s annihilation of *meum* and *tuum*. The Heremaia children’s habit of borrowing Mr Simmons’s bike supports the long-standing colonial depiction of indigenous people as thieves that we find, once again, already present in Lescarbot’s *Histoire*:

They are subtle, thievish, and traitorous, and, though they be naked, yet one cannot take heed of their fingers, for if one turn never so little his eyes aside, and that they spy the opportunity to steal any knife, hatchet, or anything else, they will not miss nor fail of it; and will put the theft between their buttocks, or will hide it within the sand with their foot so cunningly that one shall not perceive it. Indeed, I do not wonder if a people poor and naked be thievish; but when the heart is malicious, it is inexcusable (Lescarbot 103).

It is to very similar perceptions of indigenous peoples' lack of morality that Ihimaera writes back in "The Other Side of the Fence". In fact, the polemic against Noble/Ignoble Savage representations and received ways of depicting natives is a recurrent theme in this short story.

However, in some literary and ethnographic works—Jean-Jacques Rousseau's texts being the best known—the lack of private property in indigenous societies has been perceived positively by Europeans. Indeed, as our first section demonstrates, for many writers, this feature confirmed the existence of the Graeco-Roman myth of the Golden Age of mankind, when humans lived happy and free, before being chained by the laws of modern society. The importance to this concept of the absence of a sense of private ownership or of the triumphant individual in a 'consumer' society was expressed by Italian historian Peter Martyr d'Anghiera in *The Decades of the Newe Worlde or West India* as early as 1511:

For it is certeyne, that amonge them, the lande is as common as the sonne and water: And that Myne and Thyne (the seedes of all myscheefe) haue no place with them. They are contente with soo little, that in soo large a country, they haue rather superfluitie then scarsenes. Soo that (as wee haue sayde before) *they seeme to lyue in the goulden worlde*, without toile, lyuinge in open gardens, not intrrenched with dykes, dyuyded with hedges, or defended with waules. They deale trewely one with another, without laws, without books, and without ludges. (qtd. in Arber 78)

In "The Other Side of the Fence", as we argued, it is possible to recognise Noble/Ignoble Savage depictions that appeared already in *Histoire*. Lescarbot views

Mi'kmaq Indians with suspicion. When people informed Mr Simmons that his neighbours were Māori, he too expected the worst. In Ihimaera's short story, indigenous people's behaviour is also considered mysterious, strange and wrong. The coloniser, according to Memmi, recognises the cultural differences of the colonised, but he treats these differences as inferior rather than as equal. Moreover, the fact that the habits of the indigenous people are different is used to legitimise 'cultural colonisation'. Consequently, the natives' way of life must be changed because the coloniser does not like it. This concept is clearly expressed in "The Other Side of the Fence", when Mr Simmons argues that the Heremaia children's behaviour is such a mystery that he has given up trying to understand it and he wishes they would soon adjust to European habits: "The quicker Māoris adjusted to European life the better. It was no use their trying to live in their old careless manner. They had to have some regard for their neighbours, accustomed to a more private mode of living." (*Pounamu* 52)

The wish of Ihimaera's Pakeha character echoes works of travel-ethnographic literature in which prospective European settlers wish to see indigenous peoples responding positively to colonisation. Once again, we find similarities between "The Other Side of the Fence" and *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France*; in particular, Mr Simmons's ideas can be compared with the French settler's hopes of Mi'kmaq conforming to the colonial way of life reflecting the colonial politics of assimilation:

In the meanwhile the savages from about all their confines came to see the manners of the Frenchmen, and lodged themselves willingly near them: also, in certain variances happened amongst themselves, they did make Monsieur de Monts judge of their debates, which is a beginning of voluntary

subjection, from whence a hope may be conceived that these people will soon conform themselves to our manner of living (Lescarbot 24).

Although Mr Simmons wishes New Zealand natives to adjust to European life, whereas Lescarbot is talking about Canadian indigenous people, again in both works we can recognise the coloniser's sense of cultural superiority and implicit project of assimilation.

There is a strong resemblance between the themes of this section of Lescarbot's work and Samuel de Champlain's ethnographic *Des Sauvages (On the Savages)*, published in 1603:

This is why I believe they have no law among them, nor know what it is to worship and pray to God, and that most of them live like brute beasts; and I think they would speedily be brought to be good Christians, if their country were colonised, which most of them would like (qtd. in Biggar, H.P. 17).

Here the seventeenth-century French explorer not only expresses his wish for Canadian Indians to adopt a favourable attitude towards colonisation, but he also argues, like Mr Simmons in "The Other Side of the Fence", that the Christian religion is the way through which human beings would move from the state of nature to civilisation to their own benefit.

That we were able to read the discourse of Mr Simmons in "The Other Side of the Fence" alongside a seventeenth-century French-Canadian colonialist discourse argues for a certain generalising and perpetuation of the stereotypes on indigenous people carried by the western literary myth of the Noble/Ignoble Savage. This is picked

up as a theme in Ihimaera's short story, which represents the attempt of an indigenous writer to write back to the continuing presence of such colonial representations of natives.

As we will see in the next two sections of this chapter, Ihimaera continues to use the figure of the Ignoble Savage to write back to the colonial representations of indigenous people, this time in the form of the long-standing European obsession with the fetishised figure of the cannibalistic, uncivilised, ferocious anthropophage, such as can be found in, among other works, Jean De Léry's *Histoire* and Melville's *Typee*.

2.2 Writing Back to the Colonial Representation of Indigenous People as Ignoble Savages: An Analysis of *The Trowenna Sea* and *The Parihaka Woman*

Ihimaera's controversial 2009 historical novel *The Trowenna Sea* is the story of Hohepa Te Umuroa and Te Rauparaha, two Māori belonging to the Ngati Hau, a tribe of the Whanganui River. In 1846, convicted of insurrection, they are transported with three other Māori prisoners to Tasmania and kept at the facility on Maria Island. Their lives intersect with the lives of a British couple, Ismay Glossop and her husband, Gower McKissock, who are travelling to Tasmania via New Zealand and have to escort the Māori convicts. The novel is told through three characters who take turns; one of them is an 80-year old woman relating the events to her granddaughter, Georgina, who is planning to write a book commemorating Tasmania's 50th anniversary as a colony.

Ihimaera's first work of historical fiction can be considered a further example of the author's interacting with the western literary figure of the Noble/Ignoble Savage. In *The Trowenna Sea*, the word *savage* is used very often by western characters to refer to Māori characters, who are variously defined as "children of nature" (280), "noble

people” (269), “exiled men in the earliest stages of civilisation” (280) and “a pack of uncivilised savages” (104). According to the western characters in the novel, the supposed savagery of Māori people is proved by three characteristics: their nakedness, their tattoos and their anthropophagy.

The association between nakedness and uncivilised people is particularly evident in this passage of the novel, in which Mrs Lapham, an English character, whispers, horrified, “I am as naked as the natives” (Ihimaera *The Trowenna* 310). Similarly, another English character, Ismay Glossop, argues, “With the putting on of our clothes, we reassumed our dignity and our English culture” (310). The nakedness of native people is thus clearly considered not only something negative, but also a characteristic of savagery. English characters claim that, by taking their clothes off, thus being as naked as the natives, they lose their dignity and their culture.

In *The Trowenna Sea*, Ihimaera engages with other western misunderstandings of Māori culture, for example, in relation to the moko, the Māori facial tattoo, which has sometimes been considered a mark of savagery rather than a distinctive cultural aesthetic and practice of Māori. This misunderstanding is made evident in two passages of the novel, in this case by a European voice, as Ismay, looking at Hohepa’s tattooed face, observes, “Most in English society would have considered him a savage, but—had I been able—I would have exclaimed, ‘It is beautiful!’” (348) The same English voice expresses rather less appreciation for Māori art forms, but nonetheless an understanding of the interest and sophistication of the people behind the ‘fiercesome’ tattoos: in a previous passage, talking about the settler relationships with Māori people in Nelson, she argues that, “while some appeared fearsome, with their tattooed faces, if you looked past their facial and body moko you discovered a people who were intelligent and honourable in their dealings” (73).

In *The Trowenna Sea*, Ihimaera ‘responds’, in particular, to western representations of indigenous people as Ignoble Savages having cannibalistic attitudes and being renowned for their ferocity. At the beginning of the novel, English characters, remembering the butchering and eating of the sailors aboard an English vessel that arrived at Whangaroa in 1809, wonder if “the Māoris are still of a warlike mind” (47) such as they were 30 years before. They express the wish that colonisation of New Zealand will create a new society “based on the best principles of British governance” (47). To ferocious Māori cannibalism and primitivism is opposed British principle and governance, a ‘principle’ that the history inscribed in the novel will deconstruct as political self-interest and repression of rebellion.

Ihimaera again deals with the age-old western depiction of Māori people as anthropophagi in another ironic, indeed, parodic and comic passage of the novel in which Kui, a Māori character belonging to one of the iwi of Patiarero, a village on the Whanganui River, tells a Pakeha character about the fearsome reputation of his tribe: “And you know that Hohepa’s surname, for instance, means ‘Long Oven’? That could be a veiled reference to the times when we sometimes ate people, but let’s not dwell on that, shall we? Not that you have anything to fear. Too skinny, no meat on your bones, no, you would not be a tasty morsel” (502). Similarly, in a previous passage of the novel, Hohepa, the Māori main character in *The Trowenna Sea*, quotes a Māori proverb about the custom of the Patiarero tribe of celebrating their victories with the ritual eating of human flesh.

In interacting with the western literary figure of the Noble/Ignoble Savage in *The Trowenna Sea*, Ihimaera puts into question the supposed superiority of western culture, as well as the representation of Māori people as savages. This is particularly evident in a passage of the novel in which Hohepa, after having witnessed the whipping

of a convict, asks Gower, “And you call *us* savages?” (337). By pointing out the savagery of western characters in *The Trowenna Sea*, Ihimaera subverts the perspective and questions western assumptions of cultural superiority.

Ihimaera’s novel gave rise to a controversy—Dr Zhang defined it as “the muddy waters of *The Trowenna Sea*” (187)—regarding unattributed passages from historical sources. The *New Zealand Listener*’s reviewer Jolisa Gracewood detected similarities between 16 passages of *The Trowenna Sea* and *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa* (1996), a novel by Peter Godwin; S. W. Jackman’s *Tasmania: the Island Series* (1974); and *Prophetic Histories: the People of Maramatanga* (2002) by American cultural anthropologist Karen Sinclair. According to *Sunday Star-Times* journalist Kim Knight, “an estimated 0.8% of the novel went unattributed. All the other material was sourced.”

Ihimaera apologised, claiming that, while he was trying to integrate the historical material within a creative context, he inadvertently left a few passages unacknowledged. This was not meant to be malicious, it was “unintended—they weren’t supposed to be there like that” (Somerset). Any of the authors involved who wished to pursue Ihimaera for copyright infringement would have to demonstrate that substantial non-attribution occurred and this is not the case. In fact, the queries relate to 16 sentence or paragraph instances, totalling two pages of a 528-page novel, and Ihimaera argued, “Without wishing to delimit the seriousness of the queries, I would still want to put them into this overall perspective” (Somerset).

However, despite Ihimaera’s apology and the fact that much of the text involved is out of copyright, Ihimaera was labelled a plagiarist by most of the New Zealand press and *The Trowenna Sea* affair carried on for many weeks. The book was removed from public sale and Ihimaera himself bought back the remaining warehouse stock (1,800 copies) of the first edition. At the time, Penguin’s publishing director promised an

amended version of the novel would be released in 2010. However, he later decided against republishing *The Trowenna Sea* in the foreseeable future, without commenting on the reasons why the book would not be rereleased.

In this next novel, *The Parihaka Woman*, as in *The Trowenna Sea*, Ihimaera again engages with the dichotomy of civilisation and savagery as well as with western assumptions of cultural superiority. In a passage in the novel, which talks about Henry Albert Atkinson, the Premier of New Zealand in 1876, the narrator argues that Atkinson “made no secret of the fact that he thought we [Māoris] were ‘savages’” (*The Parihaka* 65). The word ‘savage’ is used often by the English characters to refer to Māori people and, in both novels, the indigenous people of New Zealand are defined by the settlers as “bloody savages” (127). In *The Parihaka Woman*, Ihimaera again reverses the perspective, representing British soldiers as ferocious savages responsible for “terrible acts of butchery” (51) against Māori people, such as taking the heads of some warriors because of the beauty of their moko.

The Parihaka Woman also finds origins in Ludwig van Beethoven’s opera *Fidelio* (1805). Ihimaera wrote an opera libretto, entitled *Erenora*, in 1993, recasting Beethoven’s heroine as a Māori woman. He then decided to turn it into one of the novellas of the collection *Purity of Ice*, adding to the original libretto the historical background of the events of Parihaka and the exile of the prisoners of Parihaka to the South Island. The novella kept on growing and Ihimaera finally decided to extract “Erenora” from the collection and publish it as a separate book, entitled *The Parihaka Woman*.

The name of the main character, Erenora, is the Māori transliteration of Leonore (the heroine of Beethoven’s opera), which is the German variant of the French Eleanor, meaning “shining light”. The name could refer to Mt Taranaki, at the foot of which was

the Māori undefended settlement of Parihaka. Furthermore, in Māori, “tara” means “mountain peak” and “naki” means “shining”. Thus, the name of the heroine in *The Parihaka Woman* is symbolically doubled to represent the sacred mountain.

The historical background to Ihimaera’s novel is the brutal invasion of Parihaka by British troops on 5 November 1881. The so-called Land Wars, according to historians, ended in 1870, but from 1879 until 1881, the West Coast of the North Island of New Zealand experienced a ferment that led to a continuation of the wars. A militia of 1,500 men moved against the Māori peaceful settlement of Parihaka, at the foot of Mt Taranaki. Its chiefs, Te Whiti and Tohu, who had led pacific resistance to the enforcement of the land confiscation, were imprisoned without trial; the village was destroyed and its people imprisoned in the caves at Andersons Bay in Dunedin and forced to labour on buildings, roads and embankments, a treatment closely resembling slavery.

The ‘Parihaka question’ received scant critical attention and was often overlooked altogether. According to Dick Scott, the Parihaka story “had been killed by silence or distortion” (*The Parihaka* 14). J. C. Beaglehole, in *New Zealand: A Short History* (1936), relegates what he defined as the “provocative Parihaka incident” (40) to a footnote. The ‘Parihaka affair’, according to historian Hazel Riseborough, was often mentioned only briefly or omitted altogether in twentieth-century history books. Riseborough argues that the story of the Parihaka years has predominantly been seen as a passive resistance, “despite the fact that it was indeed very active resistance, although pacific in nature” (3).

The first full-length book on Parihaka is Dick Scott’s *The Parihaka Story* (1954), followed by an expanded version, *Ask That Mountain*, which includes recollections given to the author by Māori elders. Scott’s books “have been dismissed as one-sided”

(Riseborough 7), but they were “an attempt to redress a hitherto overwhelmingly one-sided record” (Scott *Ask* 7). The events at Parihaka continued to attract little mention, and Ihimaera is the first Māori author so far, other than playwright and journalist Harry Dansey in his 1971 play *Te Raukura: The Feathers of the Albatross*, to have recovered and retried the Parihaka story. The events at Parihaka are also the topic of a contemporary documentary, *Tatarakihi: The Children of Parihaka* (New Zealand 2012), directed by Paora Te Oti Takarangi Joseph, which tells the story of a group of Parihaka children who travel to the South Island of New Zealand 130 years later, following the footsteps of their ancestors who were transported there after the Taranaki land confiscations of the 1860s. The Wellington War Memorial, Addington Jail and Ripapa Island in Lyttelton Harbour are key stations on the long bus journey to the caves at Handersons Bay in Dunedin where the Parihaka men were imprisoned.

CHAPTER THREE:
BEYOND THE ECO-SAVAGE: THE INTERSECTION OF POST-COLONIALISM
AND ECOCRITICISM IN WITI IHIMAERA'S FICTION

3.1 *Kaitiaki*: Māori Environmental Perspectives

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the appropriation and reworking of the European myth of the Eco-Savage in a selection of works by Witi Ihimaera and to show how Ihimaera uses this myth to serve different and successive purposes. In his early fiction, Ihimaera takes up the myth of the Eco-Savage in a positive fashion, notably in his so-called Waituhi novels and collection of short stories, which evoke forms of Māori life resembling 'Arcadian primitivism'. This early fiction shows Māori people's spiritual relationship with the natural environment and, at the same time, carries a didactic message of the need for environmental responsibility. An analysis of the reworking of the myth of the Eco-Savage in Ihimaera's early fiction shows the educational potential of Māori fiction with respect to environmental responsibility as traditional Māori teaching. More generally, it points to the way in which literature can play an important role in stimulating awareness in readers' attitudes towards the environment.

This chapter will investigate echoes of the idea of the Eco-Savage most particularly in the short stories "The Seahorse and the Reef" and "The Halcyon Summer", in the novels *Sky Dancer* and *The Whale Rider* and in the long story "One More Night". The short stories depict Māori characters who fish only what they need, carefully avoiding overexploiting natural resources. The novels symbolise the deep spiritual interconnection between man and the natural world, as illustrated by *The Whale Rider*, which turns on the saving of a pod of beached whales. This chapter will

also read the short stories “Wiwi” and “Dustbins”, the children’s picture book *The Little Kowhai Tree* and the novel *Bulibasha* within a similar ecocritical frame.

The use Ihimaera makes of the myth of the Eco-Savage goes beyond a mere appropriation. A close reading of his works reveals how the ‘eco’ aspect of his fiction is deeply entwined with New Zealand colonial history and, at the same time, integrated with representations of Māori resistance to the dispossession of their lands. In this sense, some of Ihimaera’s works can be considered examples of the intersections between post-colonial and environmental texts, and study of these works can be situated within the two apparently independent disciplines, whose boundaries have recently been crossed by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in their *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*.

Identifying and analysing environmental perspectives in Ihimaera’s fiction can contribute to revealing how the relationship between New Zealand indigenous people and the environment comes to serve as a means of challenging European modes of social as well as environmental conquest. Post-colonial readings of Māori literary and artistic works must take account of this complex interplay between political and environmental questions. However, to read Ihimaera’s fiction in an ecocritical frame, it is first necessary to situate the texts in a Māori values framework and provide the reader with an introduction to the traditional environmental perspectives of the *tangata whenua*.

From a Māori point of view, the environment is important, not only for sustaining a tribe economically, but also as a cultural and spiritual reference point. The spiritual relationship between Māori people and the environment can be encapsulated in a saying of Ngati Tūwharetoa: “Ko Tongariro te maunga, ko Tūwharetoa te iwi” (qtd. in Selby, Moore and Mulholland 241), translated as: ‘Tongariro is the mountain, Tūwharetoa the people’, an expression that refers to the idea that the environment and

Maori people are bound together. In Māori language and culture, then, the land and waterways are not just resources; rather, they represent the primary sources of collective identities. They thus symbolise the roots of every tribe, as is evident, for example, in the eminent Nga Pui Māori leader Sir James Henare's address: "When I look at these landscapes I see my ancestors walking back to me" (qtd. in Selby, Moore and Mulholland 228).

Early twentieth-century ethnologist of European origin Elsdon Best described the relationship between Tūhoe and the environment in the following way: "A land to breed a rude people, a fierce, proud, and warlike tribe of mountaineers. They are here. The sons of Toi and of Potiki hold the savage bushlands. They are the descendants of the Celestial Child, and of Hine, the Cloud-born. They are the offspring of Toi, the Wood Eater; they are the Children of the Mist" (E. Best 1). Here Elsdon suggests that this Māori tribe consists of direct descendants of the environment itself, which is, in fact, what Tūhoe themselves argue, referring to themselves as "ngā tamariki o te kohu" (qtd. in Selby, Mulholland and Moore 97), which can be translated as 'the children of the mist'. Tūhoe trace their origins to the mythical union between Te Maunga (the mountain) and Hinepūkohurangi (the mist maiden). Consequently, to Tūhoe, the mountains and the rivers are their ancestors; they are deeply connected and directly related to the people inhabiting the land.

In traditional Māori cultural terms, natural resources are considered vital *taonga*, a broad concept that refers to "any material or non-material object having cultural or spiritual significance" (Whangapirita, Awatere, and Nikora 2), and are therefore greatly respected by tribes. According to the most generally shared contemporary accounts that Māori scholars, writers and speakers give of themselves, inanimate objects are not lifeless; rather, they possess their own spiritual life force called *mauri*, "the life that is

shared by all objects, animate and inanimate, the state of being, the interconnection between things that exist” (Ryan 257). Māori believe that they have an important role in the protection of the natural environment, arguing that they have to ensure that the *mauri* of their *taonga* remains strong. For this reason, they see themselves as *kaitiaki* or guardians of those natural treasures; they bear the individual and collective responsibility for respecting and safeguarding the environment for present and future generations.

More specifically, the term *kaitiaki* refers to the responsibility of certain individuals, chosen by the tribe through their *whakapapa* or lineage, to protect the environment. *Kaitiakitanga* is the role played by *kaitiaki*. Traditionally, *kaitiaki* are “the many spiritual assistants of the gods, including the spirits of deceased ancestors, who were the spiritual minders of the elements of the natural world” (Matiu 16). Each *hapu* (subtribe) is *kaitiaki* for its own area, its ancestral land, and responsible for looking after and respecting the land, for using it without exploiting it.

According to contemporary Māori scholars, only Māori people can be *kaitiaki* and exercise *kaitiakitanga*, because they are *tangata whenua*, the original inhabitants of the land. The current role of *kaitiaki* is to respond to exploitation, threats to the environment and local mismanagement of natural resources. In Ngāti Kahungunu terms, *kaitiakitanga*, as defined by Pita Sharples, Minister of Māori Affairs in the foreword to *Māori and the Environment* (vii), means to seek balance in sustaining natural resources as the basis for people’s well-being, rather than as limitless commodities to use at their will. *Kaitiaki*, then, playing the vital role of guardians of natural resources, protecting New Zealand flora and fauna for the benefit of future generations, come to share many of the concerns of contemporary ecological movements.

In *Māori and the Environment: Kaitiaki*, Māori scholars, including Rachael Selby, Malcolm Mulholland and Pātaka Moore, have analysed how specific *iwi* have responded to local issues such as: the impact of environmental damage in Lake Horowhenua; the discharge into and pollution of the Manawatu river; the highly controversial practice of spraying poison from the air against pests such as rodents and possums; and the effects of Agent Orange (herbicide combined with a toxic dioxin compound, used as a defoliant to clear forests to enable easier access for American troops) on Māori Vietnam War veterans. These scholars argue that, for over a thousand years, Māori people lived in harmony with the environment, exercising *kaitiakitanga*, but after the colonisation of New Zealand in the nineteenth century, Europeans “arrived in awe of the beauty they observed and in awe of the possibilities the land and environment offered them. These opportunities were, for many, economic.” (Selby, Mulholland and Moore 1) The settlers’ appreciation of the land is noted here, but so too is the potential subordination of that appreciation to economic interests.

According to this joint study, Pakeha interests have almost always been given priority, at the expense of Māori interests. Colonisation has caused over exploitation of land and sea; the economic development of New Zealand as a farming country has been inextricably linked with clearing the land for pasture. Thus, the prevailing ideology was that of the economic benefits, as in the case of native timber shipped overseas to the point where kauri forests virtually disappeared. Dairy farming has brought wealth to New Zealand, but it also continues to cause the pollution of rivers, due to the practice of using waterways as sites for effluent discharge (Selby, Mulholland and Moore 3).

For Māori environmental planner and architect Craig Pauling, water is not only a source of physical sustenance but also “a source of *mana* and spiritual sustenance, being intricately linked to, and reflective of, the well-being of *tangata whenua*” (141). Water

is a *taonga* of great importance; the welfare of the life that it contains determines the welfare of the people reliant on this resource. Māori hold distinct perspectives on water resources; they maintain respect for the life-giving properties of fresh water and attribute particular values to it. This is manifest, for example, in the role of fresh water in creation stories, the value of freshwater resources as a source of tribal identity and the proximity of Māori settlements and historical sites to specific freshwater resources. Māori have always collected information about waterways but it has not always been easily accessible; therefore, it has not been used to help make decisions in the contemporary resource-management environment. Protecting freshwater resources, as might be expected, is an important aspect of the responsibilities of those Māori who are mandated as *kaitiaki*.

The extensive environmental damage to waterways that has continued since nineteenth-century settlement has caused a progressive destruction of traditional food sources. Māori people relied on eel as a major food source; it had many benefits because it was rich in the unsaturated fatty acid omega-3 and assisted in the prevention of many diseases, such as diabetes, argues Māori scholar Marie Nixon-Benton. However, the availability of tuna has now declined because of the pollution of streams and this has had an impact on the diet of Māori people, who have moved from being eel and fish eating people to being predominantly meat eaters.

In recent times, Māori have voiced their concerns at the continual pollution and exploitation of the waterways within their tribal territories. In 2006, for example, local *iwi* organised a march against the Horizons Regional Council's decision to discharge 8,500 cubic metres of effluent per day into the Manawatū River, an action that resulted in many species declining in numbers. However, these protesting voices have been largely ignored by local and regional councils, who have made decisions designed more

for profit than people, according to Māori scholars Selby, Mulholland and Moore. The decisions they made were “based on short-term gains, ignorant of long term costs. They lacked forethought and insight.” (Selby, Mulholland and Moore 2) These decisions have had an impact on Māori people’s role as *kaitiaki* and caused an alteration of the ecosystem.

For these researchers, the problem is increased because the cost of taking cases to the courts is prohibitive, and unless lawyers work voluntarily, Māori have little chance to pursue their legal rights under the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi. Sometimes these protests have been considered by local councils as “hindering progress” and Māori people have been accused of “being obstructive”, their cultural knowledge about the environment seen as somehow “backward” and “primitive” (Selby and Moore 40). This situation, as Selby describes it, suggests that western stereotypes about Māori have not been completely eradicated.

The extensive traditional knowledge held by Māori people about the environment, Māori scholars argue, is largely missing in the management of natural resources. It is undervalued and underutilised because it is perceived as ‘scientifically indefensible’. Such a situation does not help Māori in exercising their role as *kaitiaki*. As we will see in the next section of this chapter, Witi Ihimaera provides fictional representations of *kaitiaki* in the characters of Hoki and Bella in *Sky Dancer*, in the Whangara community in *The Whale Rider* and in the character of Rongo in “The Seahorse and the Reef”, in an attempt to show that the knowledge of the *kaitiaki* is defensible in a number of worlds, including the world of science. Representations of the deep spiritual relationship between Māori people and the environment dominate all these works, and the repeated expression of the desire and need for a non-exploitative use of indigenous land culminates in the utopian children’s story *The Little Kowhai Tree*.

3.2 Teaching Environmental Responsibility through Māori Fiction: Reading “The Seahorse and the Reef”, “Medicine Woman”, “The Halcyon Summer”, “One More Night”, *The Whale Rider* and *Sky Dancer* in an Ecocritical Frame

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate the educational potential of New Zealand indigenous fiction with respect to environmental responsibility, in particular, as it is inscribed in Witi Ihimaera’s fiction. This analysis of the ways in which his fiction provide insight into the role of New Zealand indigenous societies in using natural resources within sustainable limits will be read within an ecocritical frame. It will be argued that Witi Ihimaera’s fiction might well be included in the field of environmental education, which, according to William Stapp, one of the founders of this field, aims at “producing a citizenry that is knowledgeable concerning the biophysical environment and its associated problems, aware of how to solve these problems, and motivated to work towards their solution” (Stapp 30).

UNESCO defined the goals of environmental education in the *Tbilisi Declaration* at the Intergovernmental Conference held in Georgia in 1977. According to this definition, the principal objectives of environmental education are: “Awareness—to help social groups and individuals acquire an awareness and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems [...] Attitudes—to help social groups and individuals acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection” (UNESCO, *The Tbilisi Declaration*).

The emergence of global environmental problems has led to a rethinking of the relationship of human beings with nature, with the goal of returning to a more

responsible use of natural resources. Modern environmental movements were widespread in the 1960s and 1970s, a period during which the first Earth Day occurred and many schools provided environmental education programmes. As Professor Lawrence Buell, chair of Harvard University's Department of English, points out:

The 'environmental crisis' is not just a matter of threat to land or nonhuman life forms, but it is a comprehensively civilizational phenomenon (in a variety of forms and including all the nations on the globe). Not only does it concern the minority of humans who have interactions with nature, it concerns the daily experiential behaviour of the whole human species. (Qingqi 79–80)

The increased concern about environmental issues has influenced literary and cultural studies, leading to the recent resurgence of 'ecocriticism', defined by Cheryl Glotfelty, professor of literature and the environment at the University of Nevada, as "the study of the connections between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty and Fromm XVIII). This literary critical movement originated within the American Literature Association, whose members founded the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment and published an academic journal, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*. Ecocritics argue that there is a point of intersection in the apparently diverging trajectories of literary studies and environmental studies. Consequently, the humanities can make a significant contribution to the goal of adjusting individual lifestyles and encouraging sustainable use of natural resources.

Although fiction does not develop strategies for coping with global climate change (a responsibility of specialised disciplines such as ecology, public policy and law), it can be an important instrument of cultural policy, contributing significantly to the understanding of environmental degradation and increasing awareness that the protection of natural resources is vital for present and future generations. As education scholars Stephen Bigger and Jean Webb point out, “reading stimulates attitude formation and personal agency in readers, with regard to social and environmental responsibility” (3). In light of this, we could argue that, since fiction can play a key role in social changes, it can be used to encourage environmental engagement. Indigenous fiction, in particular, shows a high educational potential for teaching environmental responsibility.

Anna J. Willow, professor of anthropology at Ohio State University, argues that “Native Americans lived admirably close to nature, and by imparting their example we can urge young people to reconsider Western industrial society’s materialistic, disconnected values” (68). Similarly, and somewhat earlier, Canadian author and naturalist Ernest Thompson Seton, who, together with Lord Robert Baden-Powell, established the Boy Scout movement in 1907, affirmed that “the Red Man is the apostle of outdoor life, his example and precept are what young America needs today above any other ethical teaching of which I have knowledge” (qtd. in Deloria 96). Seton and Baden-Powell argue that drawing on the exemplary way of life of indigenous societies can help to adjust individual lifestyles and to return western people to the use of natural resources within sustainable limits. Thus, it is the focus on preserving the environment that distinguishes Rousseau’s Noble Savage from Seton and Baden-Powell’s indigenous ‘ecologist’.

Ihimaera's fiction not only raises environmental issues, helping readers to acquire an awareness of contemporary societies' habit of wasting natural resources, but it also encourages active participation in environmental protection. In his short stories "The Seahorse and the Reef" (1972), "Medicine Woman" (2007) and "The Halcyon Summer", in his long story "One More Night" and in the novels *The Whale Rider* (1987) and *Sky Dancer* (2003), we find echoes of the idea of the Eco-Savage.

The short stories depict Māori characters who fish only what they need, carefully avoiding overexploiting natural resources; the novels symbolise the deep spiritual interconnection between man and the natural world, as illustrated by *The Whale Rider* turning on the saving of a pod of beached whales. In *Sky Dancer*, Manu Valley is described as a Garden of Eden made of sacred mountains, where birdsong is an "orchestral magnificence, a hymnal to Tane [God of the Forest]" (Ihimaera *Sky* 20). The valley is protected by Bella and Hoki, two Māori women whose role is to guard the land and protect the birds who live on it.

"The Seahorse and the Reef", "Medicine Woman", "The Halcyon Summer", "One More Night", *The Whale Rider* and *Sky Dancer* not only embody Māori relationships with nature, but they also encourage environmental responsibility. In "The Seahorse and the Reef", for example, Rongo, a Māori character, explicitly teaches his children to respect the sea, treating it with *aroha* (love) and avoiding wasting its resources:

Kids, you must take from the sea only the *kai* [food] you need and only the amount you need to please your bellies. If you take more, then it is waste. There is no need to waste the food of the sea. Best to leave it there for when you need it next time. The sea is good to us, it gives us *kai moana* to eat. It

is a food basket. As long as we respect it, it will continue to feed us. If, in your search for shellfish, you lift a stone from its lap, return the stone to where it was. Try not to break pieces of the reef for it is the home of many *kai moana*. And do not leave litter behind you when you leave the sea (Ihimaera *His* 20).

In *Maori*, Ihimaera observes that one of the consequences of the colonisation of New Zealand has been the conversion of indigenous people to Christianity. However, Christian religion, he argues, has been adapted to suit Māori needs in a certain way in the Ratana and Ringatu religions. This has allowed the continued observance of the spirituality of Māori culture, in particular, in relation to nature. One of the Māori customs maintained is that the “first fish of a fishing catch is offered to Tangaroa and first bird to Tanemahuta” (*Maori* 13). In Ihimaera’s fiction we find many examples of characters making offerings to the god of the ocean and to the god of the forest. In the short story “The Halcyon Summer”, for example, Nani Puti takes some of the shellfish her grandson Tama collected and returns them to the sea, saying, “To Tangaroa goes the first of the catch” (*Dear* 169). When Tama asks why she made this offering, his cousin Sid explains to him that they always do it, because “Tangaroa is the Sea God. He gives us blessings. So this is our way of thanking him” (169).

In Ihimaera’s short story “Medicine Woman” (2008), the main character, Paraiti, a *tohunga* or traditional Māori healer, asks her dog Tiaki to give her the woodpigeon he has just caught so she can release it back into the woods. She tells him, “Give the first to Tane, Lord of the Forest” (*Ask* 246). The same passage is repeated later on in the short story, but this time the dog is not hunting but fishing; thus, instead of offering to the god of the forest, Tāne Mahuta, the first catch will be offered to the god of the ocean,

Tangaroa: “Of course she will have to throw it back into the sea—first fish to Tangaroa” (266).

Similarly, in Ihimaera’s long story “One More Night” (2012), a Māori character who has just gathered a sack full of paua feels guilty for having overfished: “Shit, I thought, Tangaroa himself must be on patrol and wants me to put some back” (*The Thrill* 79). The long story, from Ihimaera’s latest collection, *The Thrill of Falling* (2012), is adapted from the script of *Whero’s New Net* (2009) by Māori playwright Albert Belz, which in turn is based on Ihimaera’s second collection of short stories, *The New Net Goes Fishing*. The theme of Ihimaera’s collection is the urban migration of Māori people from the East Coast to Wellington, and Belz expanded this theme by focusing on the migration of Māori people to London. Ihimaera then turned the play back into prose in his long story “One More Night”. The story raises environmental issues, as is evident in this passage, which clearly echoes Ihimaera’s early short story “The Seahorse and the Reef”: “Sea, we’ve been unkind to you. We’ve poisoned the land and now we feed our poison into your waters. We’ve lost our aroha for you, and our respect for life. Forgive us.” (*The Thrill* 83)

In “One More Night”, the focus is on the exploitation and pollution of New Zealand waterways. The Māori characters complain that they cannot swim or fish in some areas because of the pollution caused by a sewage pipe and an abattoir: “I can smell the fucking rotten smell of the meatworks. It’s poisoning the sea [. . .] Can’t work for the abattoir any more. They poison the ocean. Won’t do that. Tangaroa doesn’t like it.” (*The Thrill* 114). The protagonist is torn apart by his divided loyalties, to the ocean and to the need to earn a living for his family. The mental illness that blights his life is perhaps not totally unrelated to this tension.

“One More Night” shows Māori people’s spiritual relationship with the natural environment, carrying a didactic message of the need for environmental responsibility. However, at the same time, the long story represents a further example of the intersections between post-colonialism and ecocriticism, a quality that is evident in one of the Māori characters’ response to the pollution of the sea: “First they take our land [. . .] and now our fuckin’ ocean” (*The Thrill* 83). Colonisation is implicitly designated as the main cause of environmental degradation in New Zealand; thus, Ihimaera’s text is clearly both didactic and political. “One More Night” appeared in print at the same time as groups of iwi around the country were consulting about taking legal steps to assert their ownership and/or control over local water¹².

“The Halcyon Summer” (1989) focuses on the young, city-raised Tama going to the East Coast to stay with his grandmother, Nani Puti, gaining experience of Māori rural life. The title of the short story symbolises a kind of ‘Māori Arcadia’. In fact, halcyon is the name of a legendary Greek bird (usually identified with the kingfisher), believed to have the power to calm the sea for 14 days during the winter solstice, in order to brood its eggs on a floating nest. The legend originated from Greek mythology, according to which Alcyone and her husband, Ceyx, were turned into birds by Zeus as a punishment for having sacrilegiously called each other “Zeus” and “Hera”. This mythical story is narrated by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, and it is the origin of the English expression ‘halcyon days’, used to refer to happy, carefree days and, in general, to childhood. Ihimaera’s choice of the term for this short story can be read as a reference to a kind of ‘golden age’ of Māori people, a nostalgic depiction of rural life before the general move to urban centres, after the Second World War.

¹² See Selby, Rachael, Pātaka Moore and Malcolm Mulholland, eds. *Māori and the Environment: Kaitiaki*. Wellington: Huia, 2010. Print.

“The Halcyon Summer” revisits a text entitled “Halcyon”, originally published in *Te Ao Hou*¹³ (The New World), in 1971, and responds to the well-known short story “At the Bay” (1922) by Katherine Mansfield. The revisions of the short story, according to English studies scholar Otto Heim, reflect Ihimaera’s concern “with breaking up the idyllic stereotypes that he felt he had created in his early fiction” (155). In fact, the previous version, “Halcyon”, described by New Zealand critic Bill Pearson as “a nostalgic idyll” (168), lacked a political background. However, in “The Halcyon Summer”, Ihimaera changed the point of view: “Halcyon” is narrated by Tama, whereas in “The Halcyon Summer” the narration shifts from first to third person, to give the story a greater sense of “ideological commitment” (Heim 156). A further change in the second version of the short story is that Ihimaera ‘injects’ “a new political consciousness into his earlier pastoral world, including direct confrontation between Māori/Pakeha” (Albinski 45), as, for example, in the addition of a confrontational meeting about land issues with representatives of the Māori Affairs Department.

Although the two short stories present many differences, the environmental topic (introduced through the initiation of Tama and his sister into a more spiritual relationship with nature) permeates both versions, but in different forms. In “Halcyon”, Tama encounters a shark that, according to his uncle, is “very old and very tapu” (43), a sacred animal that protects the Māori community of that area. The efforts of the Māori people to protect the shark are in stark contrast to the behaviour of the Pakeha people, who would like to kill it. In “The Halcyon Summer”, on the other hand, ecological issues are raised through the character of Nani Puti, who instructs Tama to return the first catch to Tangaroa while thanking the god of the sea for providing food to the people. Although the environmental topic is evident in both versions, it could be argued

¹³ *Te Ao Hou* was a bilingual quarterly issued by the Māori Affairs department from 1952 to 1976 for promoting Māori culture and containing tribal stories, songs and legendary tales, as well as literary forms of European origin, such as short-stories and poems, in English and Māori.

that in the first, “Halcyon”, there are more explicit references to the dichotomy between Māori and Pakeha perceptions of natural resources, “one emotive and communal, the other artificial and exploitive” (Greenland 91), while the second text focuses on explicit ecological and political lessons rather than on the Māori world view.

Ecocritical perspectives are also explicit in Ihimaera’s novel *The Whale Rider*¹⁴ (1987), in which Koro Apirana, chief of a Māori tribe in Whangara, on the East Coast of New Zealand, teaches a group of students not to waste natural resources:

In our village, we have always endeavoured to live in harmony with Tangaroa’s kingdom and the guardians therein. We have made offerings to the sea god to thank him and when we need his favour, and we have called upon our guardians whenever we are in need of help. We have blessed every new net and new line to Tangaroa. We have tried not to take food with us in our boats when we fish because of the sacred nature of our task... Our fishing areas have always been placed under the protective custody of the guardians. In their honour we have often placed talismanic shrines. In this way the fish have been protected, attracted to the fishing grounds, and thus a plentiful supply has been assured. We try never to overfish for to do so would be to take greedy advantage of Tangaroa and would bring retribution (Ihimaera *The Whale* 2007:60).

¹⁴ Ihimaera also wrote a short-story entitled “The Whale”, collected in *Pounamu Pounamu* (1972) in which an old kaumatua nostalgically remembers Māori people’s way of living before colonisation. The old kaumatua is the last of an earlier generation of Māori who still live according to the traditions, in a time in which the younger generations are leaving their own communities, migrating to urban centres and being absorbed by Pakeha culture. The short-story ends with the image of the sun setting over a dying whale, symbolically representing the worry of Māori people of losing their own traditions. The characters of the old kaumatua and of his niece Hera in the short-story “The Whale” share similarities with the characters of Koro Apirana and Pai in the novel *The Whale Rider*, as well as both works end with the image of a dying whale.

Echoes of the myth of the Eco-Savage are not only evident in the novel, *The Whale Rider*, but they also permeate the cinematographic version, *Whale Rider*, by New Zealand director Niki Caro. As we will see in the fifth chapter of this thesis, Italian film reviewers argue that in this case the myth has been exploited for marketing purposes. According to these critics, one of the reasons why the film is so memorable is that it depicts a Noble Eco-Savage New Zealand indigenous community¹⁵. Film reviewers argue that it is precisely the environmental topic permeating the movie that appealed to the viewing public, contributing to the success of *Whale Rider* in North America and in Canada, in particular. According to international film reviewers, Canadian audiences saw Native American tribal values reflected in the depiction of the Whangara community in Niki Caro's movie. The Noble Eco-Savage scenes especially roused audiences' interest, and they have also been a great vehicle for attracting tourism to New Zealand.

In *Postcolonial Ecologies. Literatures of the Environment*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey compares the cetacean communication in four postcolonial novels: *The Whale Rider* by Ihimaera, *People of the Whale* by Linda Hogan, *The Whale Caller* by Zakas Mda and *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh. De Loughrey argues that by characterising these threatened animals as ancestors (Ihimaera and Hogan) and companion species (Mda and Ghosh), these novels "provide guidance for thinking about nonhuman others in ways that risk but ironically resist domesticating or romanticizing the other by focusing attention on the lives, the knowledge, the arts, the values and the beliefs of the people who dwell among these species" (185).

According to DeLoughrey, environmental ethics must respect this rich interconnectedness and consider the historical, material, and political bonds between the

¹⁵ See Cassani, Alberto. Rev. of *La ragazza delle balene*. *CineFile.biz*. Web.; Morreale, Emiliano. Rev. of *La ragazza delle balene*. *FilmTv* 7 Dec. 2003. Web.

human and the nonhuman other within their localized manifestations (185). DeLoughrey points out that both Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* and Hogan's *People of the Whale* focus on indigenous coastal people who have become disconnected from the whales who once were not only companion species but ancestors. In each case, according to DeLoughrey, "the catalyst for ecological reconciliation and postcolonial survivance is the startling step beyond anthropocentrism taken by the main character of each story" (186). DeLoughrey points out that when Kahu becomes the new leader, riding the whale out to sea, at the end of Ihimaera's novel, this restoration revalues Māori identity – as the dynamic interaction between land and sea, between local human cultures and the immediate natural world, between precolonial tradition and postcolonial survivance" (186).

In his 2003 novel *Sky Dancer*, Ihimaera places a fictional representation of the role of Māori people as *kaitiaki* of the New Zealand environment at the centre. The two Māori sisters Hoki and Bella, protectors of Manu Valley and of the birds who live there, give nostalgic and semi-didactic speeches about old times, when Aotearoa was the kingdom of the birds and the land was completely covered with the Great Forest created by the Lord Tane (God of the Forest). In the novel, colonisation is implicitly designated as the main cause of environmental degradation in New Zealand:

When the First Man came to Aotearoa some families were assigned to guard the land, to protect it, and to protect the birds who lived on it. However, when Aotearoa was discovered again, the Second Man was rapacious. Wherever he went he tilled the land and felled the Great Forest. Year by year, the Great Forest has diminished and the bird populations with it. No longer does the moa graze the southern grasslands. No longer does the huia

sing in the forest. Of all the landbird species who once lived here, thirty per cent are now extinct. Many tribes of birds have been decimated, and only fragments of the Great Forest remain. The only reason Manu Valley still exists is because Hoki and I are descended from the original protectors, the women priests who set up our system of guardianship. It's a family thing. My mother and her sisters were the guardians of this sacred valley before me and Hoki. Before Mum and her sisters it was *her* mother and sisters. And so on way back generations (39–40).

Ihimaera's text is clearly both didactic and political. Although the disappearance of the moa is not directly attributed to the settlers' clearing of the land and destruction of the Great Forest, it follows this description and thereby appears connected to it. Yet such an association is somewhat spurious, as moa had disappeared from New Zealand well before the arrival of the Pakeha.

An analysis of "The Seahorse and the Reef", "The Halcyon Summer", *The Whale Rider* and *Sky Dancer* reveals Ihimaera's attempts to stimulate environmental consciousness among his readers. However, the fact that his fiction advocates environmental responsibility does not mean that it will lead to corresponding action, and it could be argued that reservations remain about the potential efficacy of his work in changing the behaviour of his readers. It would be difficult to determine whether and how his works translate into concrete changes in readers' attitudes towards the environment. However, Ihimaera's efforts in the area of ecological consciousness-raising cannot be denied. As ecocritical scholar Scott Slovic argues, "perhaps that's the most that writers can hope to achieve" (170). It does seem that Witi's work succeeds in

making the case for Māori as *kaitiaki*, both spiritual and material guardians of forest and sea in an environment of political struggle over control of these valuable resources.

3.3. Ecocritical Perspectives in *The Little Kowhai Tree*

The purpose of this section is to attempt a reading of Ihimaera's children's story *The Little Kowhai Tree* in an ecocritical frame. As we have seen in the previous section, environmental issues permeate Ihimaera's early fiction, to the extent that some of these works teach environmental responsibility through literature and, therefore, we have argued, should be included in the emerging field of environmental education. In *The Little Kowhai Tree* (2002), Ihimaera's first children's picture book, illustrated by New Zealand artist Henry Campbell, we again find environmental perspectives but, in this case, they emerge in an indirect, allegorical form, through a fable about a kowhai tree that escapes being cut down.

The Little Kowhai Tree can be defined as a quintessentially New Zealand story. Its focus is on a kowhai, a small tree with yellow blooms considered New Zealand's national flower. Kowhais grow throughout the country. It tells the story of a short, stout little kowhai tree that lives in a New Zealand forest, longing for a brother to play with. When a seed is dropped next to it, the kowhai is determined to protect what it hopes will become his little brother. The kowhai chases away the bad creatures (a nosy weka, a wild pig and a dog) who, respectively, try to eat the seed, sit on it and urinate on it.

The first dangers to be faced are constituted by animals, and the kowhai tree makes them run off by pointing its long leafy finger bravely and singing loudly, "I'm a little kowhai, short and stout, if you hurt my brother you better watch out" (Ihimaera *The Little Kowhai Tree*), a chorus that is based on the well-known jingle of the classic

nursery rhyme “I’m a Little Teapot”. The fourth danger and the most perilous is a human, a woodcutter carrying a shiny, sharp-toothed chainsaw. This time, the little kowhai no longer looks as brave as it did facing the weka, the pig and the dog; rather, it starts “quivering with fear” (*The Little Kowhai Tree*). This scene may symbolise the fact that other animals damage the natural environment in certain ways, but no one is able to do as much damage as human beings.

When the woodcutter appears on the scene, it looks like the seed (which, in the meantime has become a little tree) is lost, that there is no hope for it, but Ihimaera inserts a supernatural element to provide a happy ending: a tall, ancient kauri tree with a loud voice frightens the woodcutter and makes him run out of the forest. The figure of the kauri tree is a kind of *deus ex machina*: its unexpected intervention solves a seemingly unsolvable situation. It is interesting to note that both supernatural events in the story (the kotuku bird dropping the seed next to the kowhai tree and the sudden appearance of the kauri tree) are represented as falling from the sky. The former drops the seed while it is flying and the latter is a voice booming from above, echoing Zeus, the god of sky and thunder in Greek mythology. That the kauri tree looks like a god in Ihimaera’s story is not a coincidence. In fact, Māori named a giant kauri tree in the Waipoua Forest in the Northland Region of New Zealand Tāne Mahuta, which means ‘Lord of the Forest’. Through the character of the giant kauri tree, Ihimaera again underlines the importance of the environment in a world where trees are considered gods, sacred.

Ihimaera’s children’s story thus constitutes a further example of his reworking of the western literary myth of the Eco-Savage. *The Little Kowhai Tree* also draws on the rich story-telling traditions of folk tales, nursery rhymes and fairy tales, as is evident from the first few lines: “Once upon a time there was [. . .]” (*The Little*), as well as from

the ending of the story: “[. . .] and they lived happily ever after” (*The Little*). *The Little Kowhai Tree* may also carry echoes of *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, in so far as the animals represented (the weka, the wild pig and the dog) speak, argue with one other and have human feelings. Ihimaera’s children story also shares similarities with Aesop’s *Fables*, in particular the use of a short allegorical tale as a means of conveying a political message and in the use of anthropomorphized animals for illustrating the moral of the story. The trees are personified: the author gives to the kowhai tree a gender, referring to it as a *she*, and describes it as having fingers and a big voice, and being able to sing. Moreover, trees have feelings (the kauri tree hugs the kowhai tree) and constitute families (the kauri tree calls the kowhai tree “his sister”).

That Ihimaera represents New Zealand trees as having siblings and all the creatures in the forest as interconnected with each other again argues for the Māori spiritual relationship with the environment. As we have seen in the previous section of this chapter, in Māori tradition, people are the descendants of the environment itself, nature’s children; therefore, the personification of trees in Ihimaera’s story does not simply echo fairy tales; rather, it expresses Māori environmental perspectives. On one of the trees in the illustrations by Campbell is the inscription “Witi was here”, which seems to suggest that there are autobiographical elements in this story, set in a New Zealand forest the author himself knows well. The inscription might also aim to persuade the reader that what looks like a fable is instead a true story.

The Little Kowhai Tree has a happy ending—the woodcutter runs away and the trees are safe—and can be seen as a kind of utopian story (here nature wins out over man instead of succumbing to his power) through which the author gives voice to his concerns at the exploitation of New Zealand’s natural resources. Ihimaera also engages with Māori people’s spiritual relationship with the environment in his novel *Bulibasha*

and his short stories “Dustbins” and “Wiwi”, as we will see in the next section of this chapter.

3.4 Ecocritical perspectives in *Bulibasha*, “Dustbins” and “Wiwi”

A further example of Ihimaera’s critique of the desecration of New Zealand’s natural environment—the mystery or depth of the natural world that defies human control or prediction—can be found in the first pages of his 1994 novel *Bulibasha*, in which the author describes how human engineers modified the landscape surrounding the Waipaoa River, in the Gisborne area:

Something else happened when human engineers simplified that complex landscape of river bends. With every sculpting movement of bulldozer and grader, they stripped the river of its mythology. Engineers control it with scientific and analytical precision, monitoring its rise and fall by computer, taming its wilfulness by the flick of a button. This simplification has led to an acceleration of time. The epic dimension that existed when you travelled at thirty miles an hour maximum on a twisting, turning road has gone. (11)

In this passage, Ihimaera speaks of the spiritual significance represented by waterways. By using the expression “they stripped the river of its mythology”, Ihimaera aims to show that the alteration of the New Zealand ecosystem symbolically represents a kind of ‘desacralisation’ of tribal territories. As we have seen in Section 3.1, in Māori cultural terms, water is not only a source of physical sustenance, it is also a source of tribal identity and is associated with creation stories. Therefore, Ihimaera’s purpose here

is to critique land development and pollution of the New Zealand environment, but also, and more importantly, to show the implications of the incursions of bulldozers for the spiritual relationship with the land.

Ecocritical perspectives are also evident in the short story “Dustbins” (1995), in which Ihimaera focuses on the production of domestic garbage in contemporary globalised societies, showing the “extreme consequences of consumerism in the paradoxical final episode of the unwanted newborn baby thrown away into the rubbish-bin as any other useless object” (Della Valle *From Silence* 186).

In the short story “Wiwi” (2003), Ihimaera shifts his focus and draws attention to the devastating effects of the American and French nuclear weapons testing in the Pacific begun after the end of the Second World War, ironically subverting the perspective and imagining a Pacific country (New Zealand) conducting nuclear tests on the Île de la Cité in France. “Wiwi” constitutes Ihimaera’s indigenous literary response to the tests. It is an anti-nuclear story, but also a kind of reversal. This is evident in the subtitle “Wiwi or, if New Zealand was the Centre of the World”, which signals to the reader that the author is imagining what would happen if a Pacific country were the metropolitan power conducting nuclear tests in Europe, rather than its victim.

The title of the short story refers to French people, known as ‘Wiwi’ (a Māori orthographic rendition of the French pronunciation of *oui oui*, the French word for *yes*). Although the New Zealand prime minister reassured the French ‘natives’, arguing that the tests “are perfectly safe” (Ihimaera *His Best Stories* 156), the French people strongly criticise them, a reaction that make the ‘natives’ turn from ‘Wiwi’ into ‘NoNo’.

In ‘Wiwi’ Ihimaera also engages with the issues of western underestimation of Pacific cultures. The New Zealand prime minister ironically replies to the German vice chancellor’s request to respect European culture, denying the existence of such a culture,

arguing that anthropologists “have made too much of the so-called treasures of the European cultures” (“Wiwi” 157). Here Ihimaera subverts the perspective, writing back to the western claim of a supposed ‘cultural superiority’.

The environmental issues that permeate Ihimaera’s fiction, in particular, the issue of American and French weapons testing in the Pacific, can also be found in the work of other Māori writers, such as Patricia Grace and Hone Tuwhare, and in the writings of Pacific authors in general.

3.5. Environmental Perspectives in Māori and Pacific Fiction

Māori fiction as a whole embodies the spiritual relationship of New Zealand indigenous people with the land. The natural environment is viewed not only as a source of sustenance but also of tribal identification. Before the arrival of Pakeha, New Zealand land was colonised by and divided among Māori groups arriving from the fabled homeland, Hawaiki, in the western Pacific, from the eighth century on. The land fished up by Kupe, Aotearoa, has come to represent the place to which they belong, the symbol of ancestors buried within it. The significance of land is so strong that Māori observe a birth rite that requires the burial of the placenta in the place in which the child is born (and if the newborn child belongs to a high tribe, the family also plants a tree), the same soil in which, when the child dies, he or she will be buried. However, the spiritual relationship with nature is not only representative of Māori people; it is a feature of Polynesians in general. Indeed, according to Polynesian religions, some gods live in and protect the natural environment, the spirit of their ancestors dwell within trees and birds; for this reason, Māori environmental perspectives are not limited to the

safeguarding of natural resources and should be considered within the broader context of Pacific cosmology¹⁶.

Consequently, the indigenous people criticised the American and French weapons testing in the Pacific, not only because of the devastating effects on the environment, but also because, according to Māori cosmology, the land is the body of Papatuanuku, the earth mother. Thus, despoiling the natural world means physically hurting a Māori goddess. This concept is clearly expressed in Patricia Grace's short story *Journey* (1980), which "describes the incursions of earth-moving machines [opening up a new development on Māori land] as deep, bleeding incisions carved into the body of the earth mother" (Keown *Pacific Islands* 93).

A critique of the use of the Pacific islands as nuclear laboratories is evident in Witi Ihimaera's fiction. In *Routes and Roots. Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*, Elizabeth M. Deloughrey explores how indigenous writers inscribe the complex relation between routes and roots and she also focuses on the repercussions of the presumably unnatural routes of indigenous urbanization and globalization in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Deloughrey traces a continuum from eighteenth-century European colonization of the Pacific and its romantic discourse of idyllic islands to its more contemporary and technological forms of globalization that rely upon analogous interpellations of a supposed western cultural superiority in order to justify the use of Pacific islands as nuclear laboratories. DeLoughrey argues that Ihimaera's novel *The Whale Rider* "offers a broad and profoundly historical genealogy of Pacific peoples while also illuminating the ways in which all creatures that constitute the Pacific whakapapa are impacted by nuclear pollution" (227).

¹⁶ See Selby, Rachael, Pātaka Moore, and Malcolm Mulholland, eds. *Māori and the Environment. Kaitiaki*. Wellington: Huia, 2010. Print.

Patricia Grace's writing, like Ihimaera's, foregrounds Māori respect for the land. Grace argues that "good writing must define, expose and comment on the concerns that people have" (McRae 295). Consequently, her works focus on the politics of land rights and on Māori people's concerns regarding the protection of the New Zealand environment. Her novels *Potiki* (1986), *Cousins* (1992) and *Baby No-Eyes* (1998) all raise land issues, while *Dogside Story* (2001) explores Māori environmental perspectives more closely, describing "a coastal community's attempts to safely accommodate visitors wishing to see in the new millennium sunrise at Gisborne (on the east coast of the North Island)" (Keown *Pacific Islands* 142).

It could be argued that echoes of the myth of the Eco-Savage are evident also in Grace's *Dogside Story*, especially in the nostalgic depiction of the 'golden age', when the waterways were regulated naturally and New Zealand was a kind of Garden of Eden:

In Ngarua's time, water coming off the hills had combed down through thick forest, among rootworks and undergrowth that bound the soil, then down into the equally as densely forested valleys and riversides. It delivered into the waterways only what was light and loose in the way of soil, seed, leaves and old wood. In her time, whether fishing, swimming, playing or making a crossing, except in extremely deep places, people were able to see the river bottom through clear water. (117)

In Ihimaera's fiction, as in many other Pacific writings, there is not only critique of land development and deforestation, but also exposition of the indigenous perspective that colonisation is the main cause of the Pacific eco-catastrophe. In Grace's novel there are also references to an Edenic New Zealand of the past, when waters were

clear and the land fertile and densely forested, whereas now the same ancestral Māori land has been eroded, after being cleared of trees, and its waters are turning brown. However, in *Dogside Story*, according to the critic Ann Pistacchi, Grace “does not examine how the history of Aotearoa-New Zealand’s colonization may or may not be implicated in the actions that led to the ecological degradation of Dogside’s landscape; it examines instead the contemporary issues affecting the interface between Māori culture and their current physical environment” (49). In *Dogside Story*, the focus is not on the connection between colonisation and the overexploitation of the environment, but rather on identifying particular technological developments as the main cause of deterioration of Māori ancestral lands:

But Ngarua lived to see the clear felling and burn-offs that bared the hills and revealed their fragility. She saw hills turn brown in dry summers, where grass had been shorn down by the two front teeth of too many sheep until there was only dirt left. She lived to see the browning of the waters, the heaping of logs, the blocking of waterways and the shifting passages of creeks and rivers. She lived to see lands and livelihoods dwindle and even Ngarua, pioneer as she was, was unable to prevent it from happening, could only do what they all had to do, struggle to survive. [. . .] Ngarua lived to see the first ferry, which was attached to each shore of the inlet by ropes. She lived to see the building of the first bridge and then to see it taken away after a few years by dark and now unpredictable waters. In all the time throughout this clearing of trees, the erosion of land and the changing of water routes, the resulting mud was being taken down through the inlet and belched into the ocean (118).

According to social theorist James O'Connor, Grace's critique of the application of technological development to New Zealand land is shared by "radical ecologists, feminists, political economists, and others who agree that capitalist technology has not liberated the human species from the blind forces of nature and the compulsion of hard labour, but has rather degraded nature and made much of humankind's lot meaner, not safer or easier" (200).

Māori poet Hone Tuwhare engages with similar Māori environmental conservation concerns. Many of his poems contain references to natural elements and, in his anti-nuclear poem "No Ordinary Sun" (1958), he describes the fall of a devastating nuclear bomb on a tree. Tuwhare laments the fact that "the fading green" of the "magic emanations" of the bomb "shall not make pure again / these polluted skies . . . for this / is no ordinary sun" (*Deep* 28), and the poem ends with the vision of an apocalyptic environmental disaster: "O tree / in the shadowless mountains / the white plains and / the drab sea floor / your end at last is written" (28). In "White Opossum", Tuwhare again denounces the commercial overexploitation of New Zealand soil, but in this case, the critique of land development also serves a political purpose. In fact, the reference to the white opossum that is turned out of its house could be read in a metaphorical way, the opossum symbolising Māori people's dispossession of Māori from their land as a consequence of the colonisation of New Zealand:

Inconsolable men, red-skin and white: up they
come to raze the villages, level the forests,
gouge deep wounds, pipe grey earth over the saddle.
Strangers, on the strange machines.

[. . .]

Load by piecemeal load, the steel machines huff
and carry your white house away.

Day and night they're blasting the immense white
dome of your house.

The huge boulder that was your citadel
is a graveyard road of white stones to the sea.
They've turned you out of your house, white
Opossum. (Tuwhare *Deep* 104–105).

The importance accorded to the protection of the environment is a recurrent topic in Māori literature, and is a leitmotif of Pacific literature in general. Hawaiian writers Haunani-Kay Trask and Alani Apio have also denounced the overexploitation of land for commercial development and the effects of radiation on indigenous people. These two independent militants expressed their opposition to American military testing in Hawaii through the Kaho'olawe campaign, a protest movement that aimed to protect Kaho'olawe, a Hawaiian island traditionally sacred to the indigenous people of Hawaii. In her poem "Hawaii", collected in the anthology *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* (1999), Haunani-Kay Trask criticises the fact that the sacred bones of the ancestors have been exhumed for American and Japanese commercial exploitation of Hawaiian land

and for archaeological knowledge: “two thousand bodies exhumed for Japanese money / developers’ dreams / and the archaeology of *haole* [white people] knowledge” (35).

Trask’s concern regarding the ‘prostitution’ of indigenous land in modern society appears in another poem, “Waikiki”, in which she laments that a district of Honolulu, which was a sacred “home of ali’i [chiefs]” (*Light* 60) before the colonisation of Hawaii, is now a profane place renowned for drug traffic:

Waikiki home

of *ali’i*

sewer center

of Hawaii

8 billion dollar

beach secret

rendezvous for

pimps

Hong Kong hoodlums

Japanese capitalists

haole punkers

condo units

of disease

drug traffic

child porn

AIDS herpes
old fashioned
syphilis
gangland murder (60).

Another example of resistance to technological modernity can be found in “Belau Be Brave”, by Palauan poet Cite Morei, a poem collected in the anti-nuclear poetry anthology *Te Rau Maire: Poems and Stories of the Pacific* (1992). Morei’s anti-nuclear poem asks “is not Bikini enough? / Mururoa, Hiroshima? Nagasaki?” (qtd in Crocombe 4), referring to American and French weapons testing in the Pacific. Similarly, Ma’ohi writer Chantal Spitz, in her novel *L’île des rêves écrasés* (1991), critiques French nuclear testing in the Pacific, encouraging Ma’ohi people not to allow French military “to kill you and turn you into / A new [people] without soul or land” (23). New Caledonian Kanak writer and political activist Dewé Gorodé draws attention to the devastating effects of French nuclear testing in the Pacific. Gorodé, who was personally involved in the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific organisation, critiques “the huge white mushroom cloud / infecting the sky over Mururoa” (qtd. in Ramsay and Walker 43) in her poem “Wave-Song” (1974).

In his essay “The Ocean in Us” (1998) by Fiji Islander writer and anthropologist of Tongan descent Epele Hau’ofa, Banaba and Bikini indigenous people are forced to evacuate because of mining operations and atomic tests on their islands. Similarly, in “Da Last Squid”, collected in the Polynesian poetry anthology *Whetu Moana* (2003), edited by Albert Wendt, Hawaiian poet Joe Balaz draws attention to the ways in which the pollution of O’ahu’s environment (a Hawaiian island) is causing the extinction of

marine species, such as squid. The title of the poem refers to the (“Da”) last surviving squid in an area that is so polluted that “nutting [nothing] can even live” (qtd. in Wendt *Whetu* 9) there.

Māori and Pacific theatrical and cinematographic productions also raise environmental issues. In Māori playwright John Broughton’s *Michael James Manaia* (1991), a Māori Vietnam veteran denounces the risks of Agent Orange on human health. The feature documentary *There Once was an Island: Te Henua e Noho*, directed by Elam graduate and Fulbright scholar Briar March and produced by Lyn Collie, presented at the 2010 New Zealand International Film Festival, follows the lives of three people in a unique Pacific Island community as they face the devastating effects of climate change, including a terrifying flood.

Beyond these often apocalyptic visions, love and respect for the land are recurrent topics in Polynesian writings, in which environmental conservationism itself is closely related to animistic beliefs. An example of this can be found in “Song of the Winds” and “Avala”, by Papua New Guinean poets Nora Vagi Brash and Fa’afu N. Patrick. Similarly, the collections of poems *Lomo’ha I am, in Spirit’s Voice I call* (1991) and in *Hembemba: Rivers of the Forest* (2000) by contemporary Papua New Guinean poet Steven Winduo, focus on the strong spiritual connection between indigenous people and the natural environment.

Richard Kerridge argues that ecocriticism “seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis” (Kerridge and Sammels 5). In this sense, it could be argued that Ihimaera’s fiction, as well as the works of the other Māori and Pacific writers analysed in this section, can be read in both a post-colonial and an ecocritical frame. The environmental conservationism expressed in these texts goes beyond western stereotypes of indigenous people as Noble Eco-

Savages. It constitutes both a Pacific literary response to American and French nuclear weapons testing and a critique of the consequences of colonisation on people and land.

3.6. Questioning the Myth of the Eco-Savage

This thesis has argued that Ihimaera's fiction is marked by the appropriation and reworking of the western literary myth of the Noble Savage. This chapter has focused on the 'ecological' character of this noble figure, his capacity to live in harmony with nature, harvesting resources sustainably. The representation of natives as 'champions of conservation' is increasingly present in late twentieth-century western anthropologic, ethnographic and literary writings. For example, in his *Child of Nature, the American Indian as an Ecologist* (1970), Fred Fertig constructs the thesis that American Indians lived in a perfect symbiosis with plants and animals and concludes that "the Indian nearly forgotten land wisdom, his ecological sense, is indispensable to our survival" (4).

In *Fear and Temptation. The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literatures*, Terry Goldie examines the narratives of early European explorers, as well as the fiction of later periods, comparing the representations of indigenous people in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand literatures. Goldie points out that "texts which represent the indigene as an emissary of untouched nature and fear the ecological dangers of white technology turn to the indigene as environmentalist" (36).

A similar turn is expressed in Stewart Udall's earlier *The Quiet Crisis* (1964), which affirms that American Indians lived in harmony with nature, a theory he supports by quoting Indian sayings, for example, "the land is our mother [. . .] our fathers received the land from God" (244). Theodore Roszak's *The Making of a Counter*

Culture (1969) also focuses on the characterisation of Native Americans as ‘ecologically noble savages’, arguing that Native Americans themselves have always considered their attitude towards the environment ‘eco-friendly’ and have criticised western habits of wasting natural resources. Roszak quotes a Wintu Indian chief (a member of a Native American tribe of California):

The white people never cared for land or deer or bear. When we Indians kill meat, we eat it all up. When we dig roots, we make little holes. . . . We shake down acorns and pinenuts. We don’t chop down the trees. We only use dead wood. But the white people plow up the ground, pull up the trees, kill everything. The tree says “Don’t. I am sore. Don’t hurt me.” But they chop it down and cut it up. The spirit of the land hates them. . . . The Indians never hurt anything, but the white people destroy all. (303)

In *Sky Dancer*, Ihimaera stages a metaphorical battle between landbirds and seabirds (the latter representing Māori people, the former representing European settlers), suggesting that colonisation is the main cause of the damage to the New Zealand environment. Although the historical and geographical context is different, Ihimaera’s novel shares the theory of the Wintu Indian chief that indigenous people are protective environmentalists whereas Western people are ecologically disastrous:

If Manu Valley was like this, the Great Forest of Tane must have been awesome: a great confederation of bird tribes, interconnected groups of iwi, just like Māori had today, stretching kilometre upon kilometre from east to west, north to south. Within the tribes had been whanau groups of different birds occupying various levels of the forest strata. No longer; only small

parts of the Great Forest remained. Manu Valley was one of them. Bella and Hoki had kept it for the landbirds. They had created a sanctuary. In an unsafe world, here birds of the land could find safety and protection. [. . .] All our lives Hoki and I have protected Manu Valley and all the birds who live here. We're the only protectors the birds have got. [. . .] I rely on my sister. She relies on me. We rely on each other for the strength we need to draw the line in the earth and say "No" to all those people who want to cross it. [. . .] Do you think it's easy for us [. . .] to keep Manu valley? To stand up to all those people who come to us and want us to sell it? They come because they want to harvest the timber. Or else they tell us, "Look, you two old ladies are standing in the way of progress. Because of you we have to build our road around the coast instead of in a straight line from Christchurch to Tuapa. You're costing us a lot of money". (38–39)

In this passage of the novel, Māori environmental protectionism is opposed to Pakeha's commercial exploitation of the land. However, the representation of the dichotomy between Māori values and Pakeha failings has been questioned, for example, by anthropologist Stephen Webster, who argues that "conceptions of Māori spirituality and harmony with the natural world have become established cultural stereotypes" (29).

The theory that indigenous people are synonymous with ecology has been deconstructed by many scholars. For example, Daniel A. Guthrie, professor of biology at Claremont College, in his *Primitive Man's Relationship to Nature* (1971), argues that "primitive man was no better in his attitude towards his environment than we are today and the concept of primitive man living in harmony with nature is a serious distortion of the facts" (721). According to Guthrie, people in modern society have the same attitude

towards the environment that indigenous people have, but the real difference is the ability to affect it. Today's population size does not allow the accommodation of waste products by natural processes, as happened in primitive societies of the past. Moreover, modern societies turn natural resources into new synthetic forms, which, of course, are not biodegradable. The myth of the Eco-Savage is questioned by Robert Whelan, as well, who argues that it is a white, western artefact and that "native peoples can be as destructive of their environments as anyone else, and that historically aboriginal tribes often changed whole ecosystems by the repeated burning of forests and by hunting animal species to extinction" (1).

According to archaeologist Steven A. Le Blanc, "the common notion of humankind's blissful past, populated with noble savages living in a pristine and peaceful world, is held by those who do not understand our past and who have failed to see the course of human history for what it is" (Le Blanc and Register XI). Le Blanc questions the idea that the past was a sort of Garden of Eden in which non-violent men took care of the environment, carefully avoiding overusing natural resources. In *Constant Battles. The Myth of the Peaceful, Noble Savage*, he rejects this idea of a peaceful ancient past, arguing that during his archaeological research he found evidence of warfare in every continent and in all time periods. Le Blanc also questions the theory of the ecologically noble savage, arguing, for example, that Native Americans killed hundreds of buffalos, far more than they needed, and that Māori overhunting caused the extinction of the moa and other flightless native birds of New Zealand. In *Pleistocene Extinctions* (1967), internationally renowned paleoecologist Paul S. Martin also argues that primitive man's hunting abilities were the cause of widespread extinction of large mammals during the Pleistocene.

Douglas J. Buege, in his *The Ecologically Noble Savage Revisited*, suggests that the stereotype of environmentalist indigenous people not only lacks evidence, but it also negatively affects natives themselves, contributing to their oppression by western societies. As Sura P. Rath, professor of English at Central Washington University claims, “civilized societies define themselves by the distance they have built up between themselves and their respective primitive societies” (61). In this sense, the representation of indigenous people as ‘timeless’ human beings living in harmony with nature, implicitly refers to them as ‘different’ from westerners. Johannes Fabian, in his *Time and the Other* (1983), criticised the spatio-temporal distance between anthropology and its subjects and the representation of indigenous people outside the flow of time, a situation that, according to him, perpetuates the demonisation of the Other. Fabian refers to this ideological distance as “denial of coevalness”, by which he means “a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse” (31). In this sense, an apparently positive depiction of ‘natives’ can easily once again become ethnocentric and further deprecate a group that is already in a disadvantaged position in contemporary society. Consequently, “environmentalists who invoke images of ecologically noble savages reiterate the ethnocentric viewpoint that Euro-American society is ‘more advanced’ than other societies and groups” (Buege 76).

Australian-based anthropologist Roger Sandall similarly critiques what he labels ‘romantic primitivism’ and argues that western idealisation of indigenous people is a ‘culture cult’, according to which “primitive cultures have a uniqueness which should be seen as sacred, to assimilate them to modern ways would be a crime” (VIII). According to Sandall, the utopian representation of natives as Noble Eco-Savages has contributed to the non-assimilation of indigenous people in modern societies, thus

producing more inequality by widening the gap between them and western cultures. Sandall argues that the danger of the ‘resurrection’ of the myth of the Noble Eco-Savage in our time is that it is not limited to a romantic depiction of natives in literature or western movies, but has been used “to confine and define indigenous people according to some vaguely defined essence” (qtd. in Neil 240).

Moreover, the representation of indigenous people as Noble Eco-Savages is a controversial matter “since it necessarily entails evaluating their behaviour according to imposed Euro-North American cultural assumptions” (Nadasday 321). Consequently, indigenous people are expected to act in accordance with standards that have been imposed on them by western societies and their relationship with the environment has been strategically distorted to fit environmentalists’ interests. As ethnohistorian Shepard Krech points out:

The Ecological Indian image distorts culture. It masks cultural diversity. It occludes its actual connection to the behaviour it purports to explain. Moreover, because it has entered the realm of common-sense and as received wisdom is perceived as a fundamental truth, it serves to deflect any desire to fathom or confront the evidence for relationship between Indians and the environment. (27)

Willow also presents a critical view of the Noble Eco-Savage stereotype, arguing that Native Americans have been represented in environmental education curriculum programmes through a western perspective that does not take into account contemporary indigenous environmental activism. In fact, many North American tribes have expressed their environmental perspectives, integrating them with land rights and

self-determination campaigns, as did, for example, the Sokaogon Chippewa Community in 1995 when establishing water-quality standards on its reservation.

Stereotypical images of indigenous people figure prominently in environmental education programmes, where they are depicted in a distant mythical past and subsumed in a simplified category rather than considered real individuals. For Australian anthropologist Diane Bell, in her *Ngarrindjeri Wurruwarrin: A World That Is, Was and Will Be* (1998), this romantic vision of indigenous people has been created by western culture and it strategically does not take into account the effects of colonisation. According to her, the myth of the Noble Eco-Savage cannot be considered representative of indigenous people's real conditions of life; rather, it is a kind of 'revisionism' that silently perpetuates western domination:

The construct of the noble savage, the intuitive native, and a religion that integrates all life forms into one harmonious world, is far more appealing than the historical reality of peoples whose lands have been overrun, whose children have been stolen, whose food sources have been destroyed, and whose beliefs have been under attack since first contact. In the reimagining of the 'native' as untouched and willing to share wisdom, the real lives, struggles, histories, and rights of indigenous peoples can be set aside. . . . Instead, the romantic reconstruction has become the standard against which to measure the authenticity of those claiming to be indigenous. (13)

Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo ironically defines western veneration for indigenous people's environmental behaviour as imperialist nostalgia, arguing, similarly,

that, paradoxically, Europeans yearn for native cultures that they themselves helped to annihilate and exterminate for hundreds of years:

Imperialist nostalgia revolves around a paradox: A person kills somebody, and then mourns for the victim. In more attenuated form, someone deliberately alters a form of life, and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to the intervention. At one more remove, people destroy their environment, and then they worship nature. In any of its versions, imperialist nostalgia uses a pose of ‘innocent yearning’ both to capture people’s imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination. (69–70)

According to American anthropologist Anna J. Willow, contemporary glorification of Native Americans in environmental education programmes is the most evident manifestation of this imperialist nostalgia for environmentally sustainable indigenous behaviour.

In her study of environmental ethics, Sandy Grande, associate professor of Native American education at Connecticut College, observes that “Noble, *Dances-with-wolves* and *Earth-loving*, Pocahontas-like subjectivities have flooded the market as commodified indicators of the growing ambivalence towards the modern project” (309). Her central thesis, shared by many critics, is that the myth of the so-called Noble Eco-Savage has been used by the environmental movement to promote its political agenda. The myth of the Noble Eco-Savage has been constructed and dismantled many times and depictions of indigenous peoples “have vacillated between noble and ignoble depending on the prevailing acceptance or critique of White civilization” (Berkhofer 71).

Utopia has historically shifted easily to dystopia according to the political agenda and continues to do so. Gaile McGregor claims that the Noble Eco-Savage is one of the models that men create, of an exemplary Other, which science fiction has sometimes represented in the figure of the 'Alien'. In our time, the image of the good 'savage' who lives in harmony with nature has been resurrected to serve most particularly the sexual revolution, the New Age movement and, more recently, as noted previously, the interests of environmentalists.

As can be seen in Ihimaera's fiction and other indigenous work, the myth of the Eco-Savage has also been co-opted by contemporary Pacific writers to recreate an illustrious past and to 'write back' to the Empire. The use Ihimaera makes of this myth goes beyond a mere appropriation and serves two different purposes, one didactic and the other political. An ecocritical reading of his fiction reveals the educational potential of his work with respect to environmental responsibility. In this sense, it could be argued that Ihimaera's use of the figure of the Eco-Savage is not just a writing back, rather it shows that a stereotype can have two faces and contain elements of truth. The 'eco' aspect of Ihimaera's fiction is also deeply entwined with New Zealand colonial history and, at the same time, integrated with representations of Māori resistance to the dispossession of their lands. In this sense, it could be argued that some of his works provide examples of the intersection between post-colonial and environmental texts.

CHAPTER FOUR:
DECOLONISING PACIFIC SEXUALITY THROUGH INDIGENOUS FICTION:
THE CHARACTER OF THE NOBLE SAVAGE IN *NIGHTS IN THE GARDENS OF
SPAIN* AND IN *THE UNCLE'S STORY*

4.1. Writing Back to the Colonial Stereotype of the Exotic Pacific Man in Gauguin's Paintings

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse how the character of the Noble Savage in Ihimaera's two gay novels, *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (1996) and *The Uncle's Story* (2000), is used by the author to decolonise Pacific sexuality, in particular, in relation to homosexuality. At the same time, in both novels, Ihimaera uses the figure of the Noble Savage for writing back to the colonial stereotype of the exotic Pacific man that can be found in Gauguin's paintings, as well as to the assumptions that have been made about the sexual conduct of Pacific people by western ethnographic, literary and artistic works about the South Seas.

In his study on sexuality, Foucault demonstrated the significant connection between sexuality and the historical and social context. Gender studies scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick contends that, by refusing to distinguish between sexuality itself and the discourses that structure it, Foucault is stating that "modern sexuality is so intimately entangled with the historically distinctive contexts and structures now called 'knowledge' that such knowledge can scarcely be a transparent window onto a separate realm of sexuality: rather, it constitutes that sexuality" (279).

It could be argued that the sexuality of indigenous people, in particular, has been shaped mostly by the influence of colonial discourses and knowledge in historically distinctive contexts (for example, the explorations of America and, later on, of the

Pacific). French historian and sociologist Georges Vigarello, in “Le viril et le sauvage des terres de découverte” (The virile and the savage of the lands of discovery), argues that European explorers of America, at the end of the fifteenth century, represented the sexuality of indigenous people through the lens of western categories. Consequently, native men were depicted as practicing “libertinage” (402) and “lascivité” (402), and their sexuality was described as a luxurious instinct, a “primitive frenzy recalling once again the animal” (402),¹⁷ thus as exemplary of a “counter-mode” (399)¹⁸ or “counter-mirror” (400)¹⁹ of the ‘controlled’ sexuality of civilised western men.

Ihimaera has inserted his voice into the debate in order to, as he states, decolonise western scholarship, including colonial discourses and knowledge on Māori and Pacific sexuality. This is also a journey of self-emancipation, as is evident, for example, in his two gay novels *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (1996) and *The Uncle’s Story* (2000).

In *Nights* (the title of the novel comes from the orchestral rhapsody *Noches en los jardines de España* (1915) by the Spanish composer Manuel de Falla), the narrator and protagonist, David Munro, is a Pakeha lecturer at the film and media studies department of a New Zealand university, married to Annabelle and father of two daughters, Rebecca and Miranda. Despite his apparent heterosexuality, David leads a double life (one of the chapters is symbolically titled “One’s Real Life is Often the Life One Does Not Lead”), at night, enjoying the company of other men in the Gardens of Spain, a gay bar and sauna. In *Nights*, Ihimaera analyses the dilemma of being both Māori and gay, doubly marginalised through the character of The Noble Savage, while in *The Uncle’s Story* he uses another Māori character, Sam, who falls in love with an

¹⁷ “frénésie toute primitive rappelant une fois encore l’animal” (unless otherwise indicated, all translations from French into English are mine)

¹⁸ “contre-modèle”

¹⁹ “contre-miroir”

American pilot, Cliff, and is forced to face his father's opposition to this relationship, which is unacceptable in Māori culture.

David describes a Māori character with long black wet hair as a Noble Savage, looking "brand new, as if he has just stepped out of a Gauguin painting, straight out of Eden. Sometimes, as this morning, he wears a red flower behind his ear in unaffected delight" (Ihimaera *Nights* 16). Here, the character designated explicitly as Noble Savage is used by Ihimaera to deconstruct and recuperate the colonial stereotype of the exotic Pacific man in Gauguin's paintings.

Whereas gender studies scholar Patty O'Brien, in *The Pacific Muse. Exotic Femininity and the Colonial Pacific*, argues that the 'Pacific Muse' is the most prominent figure of the colonial representation of the Pacific, gender studies scholar Lee Wallace points out that the icon of the South Seas woman is eclipsed by the stereotyped vision of the male body. In her *Tryst Tropique: Pacific Texts, Modern Sexualities*, Wallace observes that colonial representations of Pacific male bodies served as blueprints for subsequent constructs of indigenous people's sexuality. She also argues that the leitmotif of European explorers' accounts of the Pacific is, indeed, Pacific people's relation to gender and their sexual orientation. In particular, according to Wallace, "since contact, Western curiosity has been excited by the 'intermediate' gender categories of the islands of Polynesia" (164).

In his classic book *Orientalism* (1978), Said demonstrated the gender stereotyping at work within colonial discourse. The non-European male was misrepresented, "portrayed as either lascivious and driven by animalistic urges he could scarcely control, or 'effeminate', weak and passive" (Roussos *A Man's True Face*). According to Said, "the Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness" (103). Although he was not referring to the Pacific and he was not using the term 'queer' in the modern

connotation of transvestite/gender inversion, if we read this quotation in the light of gender stereotyping of Polynesians, Said is suggesting that Europeans imagined the Other as queer.

An example that might prove his point can be found in Gauguin's 1902 painting of an effeminate-looking male figure *Marquesan Man in a Red Cape*. Similarly, female figures in Gauguin's paintings can easily be mistaken for male ones, as is evident in the androgynous indigenous woman who is the subject of *Manao Tupapau* (1892), in which the gender of the young Tahitian girl lying half naked on a bed is not evident, as well as in *Reclining Nude*, in which, "without the wisp of hair, the nearly invisible earring and the gentle swelling of the chest, one could almost imagine that the model was male" (Brettell 309).

In his *Journals*, Gauguin himself explains the choice of androgynous women as subjects of his paintings, arguing that he took inspiration from the observation of Māori women, whose proportion of the body, according to him, makes them look masculine: "What distinguishes the Maori women from all other women, and often makes one mistake her for a man, is the proportion of the body. A Diana of the chase, with large shoulders and narrow hips." (*The Intimate* 96)

Gauguin himself was evidently attracted to the indigenous male body and tempted by what he defined as the "androgynous side of the savage" (*Noa Noa* 42), an interest that can be found in a passage of *Noa Noa* in which he recounts an expedition he undertook with a Tahitian boy to fell a rosewood tree from which to make a carving: "again admire, in front of me, the graceful curvel of my young friend—and calmly: curves robust like the tree we were carrying" (28). Foster argues that an historical precedent for Gauguin's encounter with a young Tahitian boy can be found in the

“exoticist tradition. Often in Orientalist art . . . racial others, male and female, are presented as passive, available to the masculinist mastery” (81).

Gauguin’s narrative and paintings demonstrate commonplace representations of the Pacific as a place in which human beings can feel free from the constraints of civilisation. An example can be found in the fourth chapter of *Noa Noa*, in which Gauguin writes about his life among Tahitian people:

Every day gets better . . . my neighbours . . . regard me as almost one of themselves; my naked feet, from daily contact with the rock, have got used to the ground, my body, almost always naked, no longer fears the sun; civilization leaves me bit by bit and I begin to think simply, to have only a little hatred for my neighbour, and I function in an animal way, freely . . . I become carefree and calm and loving (25).

Australian writer Gavin Daws, in his *A Dream of Islands: Voyages of Self-Discovery in the South Seas*, describes Gauguin’s Marquesan atelier, renamed by the French painter as the House of Pleasure, in which everything referred to sex:

This time he identified his home in big characters carved into a wood panel over his lintel: *Maison du Jouis*, House of Pleasure, meaning sexual pleasure, perhaps a reference to the traditional sexual meeting houses of ancient Polynesian culture, certainly a statement of personal appetite. On the walls were forty-five pornographic photographs bought at Port Said between France and the South Seas [Gauguin] went about the house naked, leaning on his walking sticks, the heads of which were carved to represent a

phallus and a couple in sexual embrace. He acquired a dog and named it Pego, a version of the abbreviated signature he sometimes used on his paintings, “PGo”, which when said aloud sounded like sailor’s slang for “penis”. Every time Gauguin called his dog he was being outrageous, and he knew it. (261)

Foster argues that, when Gauguin was living in France, he was sure of his sexuality, but living in the Pacific provoked in him what he defined as “the crisis of white heterosexual masculinity” (102), a phenomenon, he argues, that can be found in Picasso’s paintings as well. According to Foster, both painters feel attraction as well as repulsion for indigenous male bodies, which makes them question their own sexuality:

In these scenes, then, artists like Gauguin and Picasso tease out identity in terms that are both psychical and artistic, and they do so at a time when bodies and psyches were being transformed by imperialist encounters and industrialist techniques alike. Again and again they map racial onto sexual difference and vice versa in a conundrum of oppositions of black and white, female and male, nature and culture, passive and active, homosexual and heterosexual. However, since ambivalence governs these mappings—since “the primitive” both attracts and repels these artists, since they both desire and identify with it—such oppositions are pressured to the point where they begin to falter, where the white heterosexual masculinity founded on them begins to crack (75–76).

Although Gauguin is evidently attracted to an indigenous body, this desire makes feel him guilty; thus, here, homosexuality is seen through Christian doctrine, which condemns it as something wrong—a sin: “I had a sort of presentiment of crime, the desire for the unknown, the awakening of evil—then weariness of the male role, having always to be strong, protective; shoulders that are a heavy load. To be for a moment the weak being who loves and obeys.” (Gauguin *Noa Noa* 25) Peter Brooks argues that this episode is important, “especially for the ambivalences of passivity and aggressivity it displays and the confused conception of the homoerotic temptation as alternately domination and submission” (67).

The encounters Gauguin experiences during his years in the Pacific make him doubt his own sexuality, although he seems to realise his secret desire is forbidden in Europe; thus, it can be unveiled only in the Pacific, where he feels free to live in a ‘state of nature’:

Gauguin is attracted to androgyny. . . [as] it appears to liberate him from European categories of difference. Yet that attraction leads [Gauguin] to an interior experience of his own body as bisexual, to a homoerotic temptation that places him in the role of woman and thus must be repudiated. There is a slide away from androgyny which resolves itself in a feeling of guilt dispersed and innocence achieved (Brooks 67).

Surprisingly, although the character of the Noble Savage in *Nights* is compared to the Polynesian figures of Gauguin’s paintings, in Ihimaera’s novel the portrait is one of a hypermasculine Māori man. Only the red flower behind his ear echoes more feminine aspects of the French painter’s image. Here, Ihimaera appears to be

reappropriating European artistic and literary works that exoticise Pacific indigenous people for his own ‘coming out’ purposes. It is interesting to note that, whereas in the novel the protagonist, David, is Pakeha and homosexual, in the film adaptation, directed by Katie Wolfe, which screened on Television New Zealand in 2010, the main character, Kawa, is Māori. The change in the ethnicity of the protagonist was suggested by screenwriter Kate McDermott and Ihimaera was ready to agree to the choice.

In *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and in *The Uncle’s Story*, we also find a more critical association between the literary myth of the Noble Savage and racism and prejudice: two other Māori characters in *Nights* have nicknames that refer explicitly to the colour of their skin: The Nigger, a classmate of David’s at Saint Crispin’s College and The Black, an attractive Pacific man who simulates sex during his aerobic classes, “a solo champion on the aerobics circuit and a great hit with the women” (18). David, the Pakeha narrator in *Nights*, refers to The Noble Savage, to The Nigger and to The Black using only their nicknames; he never calls these characters by their real names, a strategy used by Ihimaera for commenting indirectly on the racist use of ethnicity. In this way, the negative connotations of these terms are evidently displayed. Moreover, The Noble Savage, The Nigger and The Black have minor speaking parts in the novel, a choice made by Ihimaera that might be read in the light of his polemic against many literary works and films having only European characters as protagonists, confining indigenous characters to secondary roles. At the same time, playfully and somewhat perversely, Ihimaera’s text turns these pejorative nicknames inside out, endowing all three characters with a considerable degree of sexual prestige.

The Noble Savage in *Nights* is an attractive Māori political, gay activist. The character reappears in Ihimaera’s *The Uncle’s Story* (2000), a novel in which, as in *Nights*, Ihimaera explores traditional Māori attitudes towards homosexuality and

masculinity. However, this time, the narrator/main protagonist is a Māori homosexual, Michael Mahana, disowned by his father for coming out before his sister's wedding. Michael discovers the secret of his uncle, Sam, who was also disowned by his father, for falling in love with Cliff Harper, an American pilot with whom he served in Vietnam. Both Michael's and Sam's fathers represent Māori traditional prejudices against homosexuals, and they force their sons to choose between being Māori or gay, arguing that the two are incompatible.

Although the nickname Ihimaera chooses for this character, The Noble Savage, is the same, in *The Uncle's Story* he also has a very significant proper name, Tane Mahuta. In the Māori language, *tane* means 'man', it refers to the male figure; thus, we could argue that the character of The Noble Savage is quintessentially a Māori man. He is a kind of universalisation of Māori man, an Everyman. (In an interview with Roussos in 2003, Ihimaera himself admitted, "I wanted to create a hero who was also an *Everyman*". However, on this occasion, he was referring to the character of David Munro, the apparently Pakeha narrator in *Nights*). In this sense, The Noble Savage represents the essence of being a Māori man, to the extent that he considers his ethnicity more important than his sexuality: "I was born a Māori and that is how my people will bury me" (*The Uncle's* 295).

Both Noble Savage characters, in *Nights* and in *The Uncle's Story*, are 'exoticised': in the former he wears a red flower behind his ear and, later on, a piece of green jade (*pounamu* is a sacred stone for Māori people and it provides the title of Ihimaera's first collection of short stories), while in the latter he has glowing eyes, a smile "as bright as the sun", he wears a whalebone necklace and he looks "as if he had been born with the dawn" (*The Uncle's* 195). When the Noble Savage reappears, at the end of the novel, he has "bronzed skin, eyes as bright as the sun. In his ear, a shark's

tooth pendant” (293). In his descriptions of *The Noble Savage*, Ihimaera emphasises the characters’ ethnicity. In both gay novels, he greets the narrator in Māori, saying “kia ora” and wears Māori symbols (jade, whalebone, shark’s tooth), which serve as a reminder of Māori people’s close relationship with New Zealand’s natural environment.

Thus, in *Nights* and in *The Uncle’s Story*, Ihimaera significantly describes a gay world from an indigenous perspective, representing an effort to ‘liberate’ both Pakeha and Māori from homophobic prejudice but, more particularly, examine ‘regimes of truth’ as these have defined indigenous Pacific (male) sexuality from the colonial era to the present. At the same time, in both novels, Ihimaera uses the literary myth of the Noble Savage to shed new light on and to counter the assumptions that have been made about the sexual conduct of Pacific people in western ethnographic, literary and artistic works about the South Seas. In this way, Ihimaera challenges what Foucault defined as “the regime of truth” (*Power/Knowledge* 131).

Although Foucault was referring to western assumptions about the Middle East context, European stereotypical representations of Pacific people can also be called a ‘regime of truth’, against which Ihimaera, through his fiction, aims to resist, arguing that only an insider perspective can provide an authentic image of Pacific indigenous culture. For this reason, in his article “Masculinity & Desire”, he encourages more representations of the Māori male, both straight and gay, as the only way through which, according to him, Māori people will no more “belong to the Universal Reality” (129) that has claimed them. What is needed is the creation of “specific texts, specific images that do not buy into the Majority framework” (129), but rather “try to subvert the Main discourse, derail Western narrative, in all its forms, provide for Polynesian heroes” (129) and put themselves in the middle of the stories.

The character of The Noble Savage in *Nights* works towards decolonising both Māori and Pacific Island homosexuals, in the sense of liberating them and the groups within which they live from the western discourses of sexuality, towards finding a place for them in the contemporary dominant Pakeha society. In this sense, he represents Ihimaera himself, working towards decolonising New Zealand fiction from the outsider, western perspective as well as towards placing Māori culture alongside western culture. In *Nights*, the struggles of Māori homosexuals within a homophobic society are symbolically associated with Māori struggles for self-determination. In both cases, a minority aims to escape a Pakeha majority 'frame' that does not allow Māori people to express themselves:

His [the Noble Savage's] is a new gay tribe working to uplift the causes of all Māori and Polynesian homosexuals, bisexuals, transvestites and lesbians. They are chanting as they come forward through their own homophobic world as well as ours. They are saying to us all, gay and straight: Move over. We're coming through. (Ihimaera *Nights* 64)

This does not fully address the issue of a homophobia that in some cases is defined as quintessentially anti- or non-Māori.

4.2 Decolonising Pacific Female Sexuality through Indigenous Poetry, Visual and Performing Arts

The character of the Noble Savage in *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and in *The Uncle's Story* is used by Ihimaera to speak of Pacific male sexuality. However, it could be argued that colonial stereotypes of the Pacific body concern not only indigenous men but also, even more so, indigenous women. Before returning to Witi's work and a consideration of his treatment of gender and sexuality, it seems useful to take a bypath, an excursion through the texts in which both theorists and indigenous writers are engaging with the colonial (mis) representation of the exotic Pacific woman in both theory and writing practice.

In *Orientalism*, Palestinian-American literary theorist Edward Said argued that the Orient is not "an inert act of nature" (4); rather, it is a western artificial construct. Although Said was referring to western representations of the Middle East, as we noted earlier, his analyses can be applied equally to the constructed depiction of the South Pacific, which, in the same way, can be seen to be a product of European interests and modes of thinking of the Other. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European explorations in search of *Terra Australis Incognita* fired the imagination of many artists, writers and film-makers representing these southern lands. The Antipodes of Europe were initially described, for example, as inhabited by human beings having dogs' heads and walking upside down. Later on, the representations of Pacific indigenous people in certain accounts of European voyagers, as well as in the fiction of, among others, Pierre Loti, the discussions between authors and well-known books contributed to the construction of the South Seas as the exotic par excellence in the European imagination.

In his *Imagining the Pacific*, art historian Bernard Smith argues not only that the Pacific is a European construct, but that Pacific people have themselves been victims of this distorting vision:

If we are to understand the Pacific world we must also accept the reality of the objects out of which the concept of the Pacific was constructed, together with the reality both of those European minds that sought to understand it and those Pacific minds that found themselves at once the objects and victims of their understanding (IX).

In his article “Masculinity & Desire. Rewriting the Polynesian Body”, Ihimaera points out that the Pacific had been mapped out “not only as a new Eden, filled with Western dreams of liberating sexuality and desire but also as a place to be conquered” (127). Elaborating on his first point, he argued that Pacific indigenous people have witnessed a second colonisation, the colonisation of the body. According to Christian Petr, this might have come about because Europeans did not wish to understand the Other; rather, they used exotic places “as empty shells filled with their desires” (61). The South Seas, in particular, have been a kind of sexual space, the site of western erotic dreams. In this way, the cross-cultural encounter between Europeans and Pacific people has been also an erotic encounter, one that, as Ihimaera suggests, is linked to conquest.

This theory of a sexually potent encounter is pushed to the limit by Fiji Indian academic and politician Satendra Nandan, who, in *The Other Side of Paradise: from Erotica to Exotica to Exile*, claims that “the meeting of the European imagination with the South Seas was orgasmically sexual” (81). In particular, Tahiti, became the symbol of ‘free love’: “it stood for freedom from the constraints and grime of civilization coupled with the delights of sexuality without the albatross of sin hanging around one’s phallus” (Nandan 82). As Peter Brooks observes, for European travellers, “the voyage

out to the South Pacific is also a voyage back, to a time before”, to a “version of the erotic. . . both spatially and temporally removed from contemporary Europe” (55).

The representation of Pacific people by the west has thus been characterised by fantasies and distortions. It could also be argued that many of these depictions constitute a masculinist narrative, providing images of “beautiful and exotic tropical island paradises, on which even the crudest of weary sailors could be welcomed by South Sea maidens who freely engaged in sexual exchanges” (Harrison 9). This implicit speculation on the sexual availability of Pacific women is present in many European explorers’ accounts of the South Seas, as well as in western literary and artistic works. As Leonelle Wallace argues, in Herman Melville’s *Typee* (1846), Tommo “is surrounded by luxurious half-naked women and monumental tattooed men” (65). In his *Voyages and Travels*, Russian explorer George H. von Langsdorff also mentions what he defines as “the ladies of pleasure of the island” (112). He is referring to Marquesan women, who, according to him, are, however, “puny creatures, with bodies debilitated by premature licentiousness” (112). If the South Seas is a place of sexual freedom, it is also represented as a den of vice, with negative physical consequences.

Representations of sexually available indigenous women can be found also in the accounts of Cook’s third voyage in the Pacific. In *Some Account of a Voyage to South Seas in 1776–1777–1778*, David Samwell, surgeon’s mate on the *Resolution*, compares the South Seas to a harem: “We live now in the greatest Luxury, and as to the choice & number of fine women, there is hardly one among us that may not vie with the grand Turk himself” (1159). Western colonial dreams of an imagined sexual omnipotence are accompanied by moral fears: the South Seas of bounty are also a place of potential fall, as is evident in William Ellis’s journal account of Cook’s third voyage:

“there are no people in the world who indulge themselves more in their sexual appetites than these; in fact they carry it to a most scandalous and shameful degree.” (153)

In the accounts of French explorer’s Louis Bougainville’s arrival in Tahiti, we find descriptions of Pacific native women being offered (this time encouraged by native men) to European explorers: “they pressed us to choose a woman, to follow her ashore, and with unequivocal gestures demonstrated the manner in which her acquaintance was to be made” (qtd. in Daws 1). These texts implicitly judge the lack of chastity of Polynesian women. In contrast, a century later, Margaret Mead’s anthropological classic of 1928 *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Study of Adolescence and Sex in Primitive Societies* contains the depiction of an “attractive, sexually liberated, calm Pacific world” (qtd in Clifford 103) that is seen as superior to the prevailing repressed sexual morality of westerners.

The vulnerability of British seamen to the sensuality of uninhibited native girls is the topic of the ‘sexual encounter’ in Hawaii in the accounts of Cook’s third voyage. However, in this case, as the American anthropologist Marshall Sahlins has demonstrated in his *Islands of History*, it seems clear that the Europeans misunderstood the behaviour of the Hawaiian women, who clambered aboard British ships not to seduce seamen but rather to capture their *mana* (power). In fact, the arrival of British ships coincided with the Hawaiian festival calendar, in particular, with the time of Makahiki, the annual return of Lono, a fertility god. As a consequence, the supposed sexual promiscuity of native women was rather an attempt to capture the god’s power. For this reason, “the sexual invitation extended to European seamen by Hawaiian women resulted in transformations within the cultural order that initially engendered such desire” (Wallace 12).

To return to Ihimaera's earlier point, fantasies regarding native bodies can best be understood in the light of the colonial/imperialist desire for power and domination—a desire to possess not only native land but also the native body. This idea is also presented by Said in *Orientalism*, in which he argues that the colonial place has been represented by the west as “a geographical space to be cultivated, harvested . . . as something inviting” (219). To reinforce his point, Said uses words such as “penetration” and “insemination” to refer to the wish of colonisers to possess indigenous land, which clearly allude to sexual conquest.

In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, gender studies scholar Anne McClintock has demonstrated that colonial subjugation was likened to sexual violence and that the bodies of indigenous women were used as allegorical figures representing the virgin land. In particular, according to McClintock, the ‘discovery’ of America was portrayed “as an eroticized encounter between a man and a woman” (25). This idea is displayed in Jan Van der Straet's 1575 drawing *Americen Americus rexit*, in which American colonisation is represented through the image of a naked, disempowered, ‘primitive’ woman who “extends an inviting hand, insinuating sex and submission” (McClintock 26) to the clothed, dominant, ‘civilised’ Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci, who stands erect in front of her supine body carrying a flag and a sword in his right hand, symbolising the colonial conquest. McClintock argues that this scene echoes *The Creation of Adam*, a section of Michelangelo's fresco on the Sistine Chapel ceiling painted in 1511, illustrating the scene of the Book of Genesis in which God breathes life into Adam. Similarly, according to McClintock, the figure of Vespucci in Van der Straet's drawing symbolically represents the European man who civilises indigenous peoples (26).

As with American colonisation, the association between indigenous land and sexually available women was also a pattern of the later European explorers' accounts of the Pacific, in which sexual domination of indigenous women was a means of conveying the physical dominance of the colonisers' culture. A startlingly similar example of the colonial desire to possess native women's bodies reappears in the manuscript of Gauguin's *Noa Noa*, in which he writes: "I saw plenty of calm-eyed women. I wanted them to be willing to be taken without a word, brutally. In a way [it was a] longing to rape" (qtd. in Solomon-Godeau 125). Art historian Griselda Pollock, in *Avant-Garde Gambits, 1888–1893: Gender and the Colour of Art History*, argues that Gauguin's works provide "the fantasy scenarios and the exotic *mise-en-scène* for not only masculinist but also imperialist narratives" (8). Similarly, art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau, in her *Going Native*, suggests that Gauguin's representation of Pacific women reveals a "gendered discourse" and a "dynamic of knowledge/power relations which admits of no reciprocity" and which dates to the "expeditionary literature generated by Captain Cook, Wallis, Bougainville and the countless successive voyagers to the South Seas, [in which] the colonial encounter is first and foremost the encounter with the body of the Other" (123–124).

Gender studies scholar Patty O'Brien has also explored the development of the colonial stereotype of the exotic Pacific island woman, tracing the evolution of female primitivism from the mythic figures of the Odyssean temptresses to twentieth-century Hollywood movies. O'Brien suggests that the stereotype of Pacific peoples took form from eighteenth-century British and French explorations and that the first popular female figure in Pacific imperial narratives was the Tahitian queen Oberea, an imaginary figure based upon the chiefly woman Captain Wallis mistook for the island's queen when she came aboard the *Dolphin* in 1767. Oberea was described as a tall,

sensual and kind woman whose image became widespread in Europe after John Hawkesworth's illustration entitled *Captain Wallis, on His Arrival in O'Taheite in Conversation with Oberea* appeared in his 1773 edition of Britain's early Pacific voyages. According to O'Brien, Oberea launched the myth of the exotic femininity, which she defined as the Pacific Muse (8).

O'Brien points out that this image of the Pacific Muse reduced women to passive, sexually alluring bodies ready to please western men, but she also argues that these stereotypes were partially true. Indeed, for Pacific people, sexuality was not taboo as it was for Victorian people; rather it was seen as a positive life force. In this sense, the celebration of sexuality that European explorers, influenced by Judeo-Christian or Islamic traditions, experienced in some areas of the Pacific was not viewed as cultural specificity; instead, it was misinterpreted as sexual promiscuity. Nevertheless, according to O'Brien, it is undeniable that the malign empty exoticism of the stereotype of the Pacific Muse has continued to convey the idea of "Pacific peoples as blessed by nature's bounty, living healthy, natural lives in addition to being leisured, beautiful and sexually alluring" (8)—a representation far removed from the contemporary problems of the Pacific region, such as, poverty, environmental issues and political instability.

Although the colonial representation of the exotic Pacific woman has persisted, O'Brien argues that "Pacific peoples have not let the stereotype prevail without challenge. Indeed, many have assailed it" (261), trying to decolonise Pacific female sexuality through indigenous poetry, fiction, and visual and performing arts. Niuean artist John Pule, for example, in his installation *Pacific Holiday*, reads poetry about the sensuality of western women while a film representing sexually alluring indigenous women is screened behind him. In juxtaposing the two categories of women, Pule "challenged his audience to *review* the racial and sexualized colonial gaze inherent

within the Pacific muse” (O’Brien 261). Similarly, performers *The Pacific Sisters* and *Pasifika Divas* ‘responded’ to the stereotype, as did J. Castro and D. Taulapapa McMullin with their art and video installation *Coming of Age in Amelika*, which represents *fa’afafine* culture in Los Angeles, mocking Margaret Mead’s anthropological classic of 1928, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Study of Adolescence and Sex in Primitive Societies*. Other indigenous artistic responses to the stereotype of the Pacific Muse are Sima Urale’s film *Velvet Dreams*, which comments upon Charles McPhee’s velvet canvases representing exotic Pacific island women, Karen Stevenson’s *Pacific Art: Moving Beyond the Stereotype* and Lisa Taouma’s documentary *Pacific Body Language* (2005), in which the director engages with colonial images of exotic female beauty (O’Brien 261).

Pacific scholars have also targeted the stereotype of the Pacific Muse. Haunani-Kay Trask and Mililani Trask, in *The Aloha Industry* (1992) have demonstrated that representation of Hawaiian women has been exploited by the tourism industry. Caroline Vercoe, in *Wish You Were Here: Postcards as Signatures of Places* (1996), has argued that the images of indigenous women in postcards of the Pacific clearly reveal a western perspective. Similarly, Tamasailau Suaalii, in “Deconstructing the ‘Exotic’ Female Beauty of the Pacific Islands” (2000), points out how western narratives have described Pacific women as objects of desire of European men. Teresa Teaiwa has also targeted the stereotype in “Bikinis and Other s/pacific n/oceans” (1994), in which she examines the relationship between the bikini and French atomic tests in the Pacific, and in *Last Virgin in Paradise*, a play in which the only virgin on the island is an aging anthropologist from Harvard doing research on the island’s sexual mores²⁰.

²⁰ The most extensive explorations of these issues are offered in: O’Brien, Patty. *The Pacific Muse. Exotic Femininity and the Colonial Pacific*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006. Print.

According to post-colonial scholar Michelle Keown, an indigenous response to the western misrepresentation of the Pacific female body and sexuality can be found in *Where We Once Belonged* (1996), the first novel by Western Samoan writer Sia Figiel, which focuses on the experiences of 13-year-old Alofa Filiga. Keown argues that Figiel's novel critiques the representation of Polynesian female sexuality made by writers and artists such as Herman Melville and Paul Gauguin and by anthropologists such as Ernest Beaglehole, Franz Boas, Margaret Mead and Derek Freeman. In *Where We Once Belonged*, Figiel satirises western discourse about Polynesia through the character of the young Siniva, who verbally attacks tourists in Apia, saying:

“Go back to where you came from, you fucking ghosts! Gauguin is dead! There is no paradise!” . . .

Palagis were confused when they heard such words—most of them were shocked that someone recognized them doing what they usually did: Peeping-Tomming for a past, an illusion long dead, long buried in museums of their own making. (qtd in Keown 187)

In this excerpt, Figiel critiques the representation of the Pacific as a sexual paradise for European men, as in, for examples, the works of Paul Gauguin and Pierre Loti. Keown points out that Figiel's use of the neologistic verbal construction *Peeping-Tomming* refers to Herman Melville's novel *Typee*, subtitled as *A Peep at Polynesian Life*, whose protagonist is named Tommo. In this sense, western tourists in Apia are seen as successors of Tommo, the protagonist of Melville's novel, going to Polynesia in search of an imagined paradise that does not exist. Moreover, the association between the main character in *Typee* and contemporary tourism in Samoa significantly “implies

that these attitudes, which characterised race-relations politics in the nineteenth century in particular, are still extant in contemporary Western society, epitomised in the tourism industry which exploits European (mis)conceptions of the Pacific as a tropical paradise” (Keown 94).

Another literary response to the colonial representation of the exotic Pacific woman can be found in *Fast Talking PI*, the first collection of poems by Samoan scholar Selina Tusitala Marsh. Indeed, the section of the book significantly entitled “Talkback”, contains a number of poems that critique European discourse about the Pacific. The representation of Polynesian female sexuality by French painter Paul Gauguin comes under particular attack in a poem of the collection entitled “Two Nudes on a Tahitian Beach, 1894”, which begins and ends with the very strong statement “Gauguin, you pissed me off” (40–41).

Similarly, in “Guys like Gauguin”, French explorer Louis-Antoine de Bougainville is ironically acknowledged by Marsh for his representation of Pacific women as sexually licentious. By this analysis, Bougainville’s accounts have encouraged Gauguin and his European successors (the ‘guys like Gauguin’ to whom the title of the collection refers) to come to the Pacific in search of a supposed sexual paradise:

Thanks Bougainville
For desiring ’em young
So guys like Gauguin could dream
And dream
Then take his syphilitic body
Downstream to the tropics

To test his artistic hypothesis
About how the uncivilised
Ripen like pawpaw
Are best slightly raw
Delectably firm
Dangling like golden prepubescent buds
Seeding nymphomania
For guys like Gauguin (36)

In the second part of the poem, Marsh satirises Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama's comparison of the world to a body, the Northern Hemisphere being its head, thus representing rationality, while the Southern Hemisphere represents instinct. According to this theory, Pacific women have uninhibited sexual behaviours because they live in the part of the world missing reason and ruled by corporeal needs. The end of the poem argues that colonial representations of Pacific female sexuality have precedents in the western stereotyped depiction of African, Oriental and Native American women:

Thanks for making the South
An erogenous zone
Corporeal and sexual
Emotive and natural
Waiting in the shadows
Of dark feminine instinct
Populated by the Africas

The Orient, the Americas

And now us (37)

The title of another poem of the collection, “Mutiny on Pitcairn”, refers to the most famous insurrection in naval history, the mutiny on the vessel *Bounty*, led by Lieutenant Fletcher Christian, in 1789. William Bligh was leading this expedition to Tahiti to collect the *Antocarpus altilis* (breadfruit) for transplanting in the West Indies in order to feed the slaves in the American colonies without reducing the plantation owners’ profits. The *Bounty* arrived at Matavai Bay in 1788. The crew enjoyed Tahitian hospitality, especially the company of Tahitian women. Bligh reported on the supposed promiscuity of Tahitians and was horrified by their sexual practices. The mutineers sailed the *Bounty* and landed on Pitcairn’s Isle (named after Robert Pitcairn, the boy who had first sighted it from the British explorer Philip Carteret’s ship *Swallow*, in 1767).

In the poem “Mutiny on Pitcairn”, Marsh subverts the tradition of European explorers’ accounts of the Pacific, providing an insider’s perspective that contradicts the description of Pacific women offering themselves to seamen. The poet’s invective emerges predominantly through the point of view of a female indigenous character, which reveals a less romantic version of these encounters in the South Seas:

These seasaltmen

Forcing us to be with them

then others

I will build a boat

Leave this island

These mutineers who think they can

Live paradise
On this land
Kill my men
And be done (39)

If indigenous women writers are particularly concerned to deconstruct the western image of the sexually available and uninhibited *wahine* and to construct female characters who have a critical voice, Ihimaera's two novels focus on decolonising and reconstructing images of masculinity.

4.3 The Character of The Noble Savage as Ihimaera's Mask

The character of The Noble Savage in *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, it can be argued, functions as Ihimaera's mask, concealing and revealing the author's identity. According to English studies scholar Timotheos Roussos, it reveals Ihimaera's 'true' face in the process of concealing the author. However, the character of The Noble Savage, as well as that of David Munro, the Pakeha narrator, are not the only masks used in this novel. In fact, all the characters in *Nights* have nicknames, which are masks for concealing their real names, while at the same time they reveal the nature of their roles in the novel. Some gay characters in *Nights* are anonymous; the only names they have are abstract personifications that have explicitly sexual references: Wet Dream Walking, The Italian Stallion, Size Queen, The Succulent Stranger, and so on.

This is the technique that lies at the heart of theatrical Italian *Commedia dell'Arte*, in which every character has a nickname that, by highlighting a certain attribute, helps the audience to understand immediately that character's role in the play.

This device was also used in Greek theatre, in which masks were employed to identify specific good or bad qualities of the characters, a strategy that is also evident in the work of French writer Balzac, for human types in the *Comédie humaine*. In his discussion of Rabelais's writing, Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin argues that the mask "is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself" and it is "related to transformation, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries to mockery and familiar nicknames" (39–40). Bakhtin theorises the practices of 'carnival' as moments of just such riotous reversal of social laws and limits.

Ihimaera's use of nicknames in *Nights* also echoes seventeenth-century works in which pseudonyms "often referred to the moral qualities of characters in a text" (Gallagher, 288). However, in *Nights*, the qualities referred to are physical, based on outward appearance or its perception; thus, the nicknames of the characters become masks. According to Roussos, by obscuring the names of the men he meets, David (and ultimately, of course, Ihimaera) "presents us with caricatures, stock characters within the 'gay' subculture, stereotypes which we can instantly identify as any number of individuals where individuality is not so desirable. This often takes the form of exaggerated masculine or heterosexual attributes, a kind of hyper-masculinisation of certain 'types'." (Roussos *Island Stories* 87).

As Michael Heppel argues, a masked figure "enjoys a measure of license which would never be accorded him in his normal state" (41) and, indeed, gay characters in *Nights* shed their inhibitions behind their masks/nicknames, feeling free to behave in outrageous ways.

Homosexual characters in *Nights* not only wear figurative masks (their nicknames) to hide their real identities, but they also conceal themselves in the darkness of the steam parlour of the *Gardens of Spain*, in which, purposely, there is no light:

Journeys into places like the Steam Parlour are always accompanied by diminishing light. Nothing blares, nothing glares or explodes. Light dies here, becomes ambient. The discreet darkness hides who we are. Hides what we do. Gives us anonymity and glosses us with glamour. In the netherworlds the wattage is always way down low. (10)

As cultural theorist Efrat Tseëlon argues, “the mask of anonymity can relax the safeguards of controls and inhibitions and shield one from one’s own morality” (30); the anonymity of gay characters in *Nights* is guaranteed both by their nicknames and by the darkness of the Steam Parlour.

In many ways, the character of The Noble Savage in *Nights* can be seen as Ihimaera’s alter ego. The character has the same name as Tane, the god who, in Māori cosmology, separated his parents, Earth and Sky, thus being an agent of change. Ihimaera has always identified himself with Maui, the demigod of change and, indeed, as a post-colonial author, he is an agent of change, trying to critique western stereotypical representations of Māori people, by providing an insider perspective in all his literary works. Other evidence that the character of The Noble Savage in *Nights* is Ihimaera’s alter ego is provided by the gay organisation Te Waka Awhine Tane that the character Tane Mahuta founds. The organisation shares the same name of a homosexual support group Ihimaera himself established in 1990 (it has since been renamed Te Waka

Tane Takataapui, Men Who Love Men Support Network)²¹. Roussos defines the character of The Noble Savage as “fetishized”, and claims that his nickname “alludes not only to the romantic (even erotic) fantasies of colonial Europeans in an earlier era, but also to the contemporary fascination/ repulsion with the mysterious and exotic Other” (Roussos *Island Stories* 91).

Although the character of The Noble Savage in *Nights* (and in *The Uncle’s Story*) is Māori, the novel is written through a Pakeha perspective, a choice explained by Ihimaera himself in an interview with Juniper Ellis:

I wasn’t ready to write a book with a central Māori character as a gay person . . . because I was also trying to work out my own identification. So it was important for me first of all to write about cultural identity [in the early novels] . . . I could then look at the role which sexual identity played in the making of a person”. (178–179)

Roussos argues that Ihimaera inserted a Pakeha narrator in *Nights* as a deliberate strategy for creating a space in which he would be heard, to distance his Māoriness from his message, even though David Munro and his situation mirror Ihimaera and his (it is evident that *Nights* is in many respects an autobiographical novel: David, the Pakeha narrator/protagonist, like Ihimaera himself, is a lecturer at the University of Auckland, although in film and media studies and not in the English Department, and he has two daughters). David provides a fictional persona through which Ihimaera can speak without being too readily identified with the subject matter. By distancing himself from his earlier writing and taking on the narrative persona of a Pakeha man (the mask

²¹ See Roussos, Timotheos. “Island Stories, Alternative Voices. Contemporary Depictions of Transgressive Post-Independence Masculinities”. PhD thesis. University of Sydney, 2008. Print.

through which he speaks), Ihimaera created for himself ‘a measure of licence’ that would not have been accorded him as the author of the first Māori novel. When Ihimaera wrote *Nights*, in 1995, he was clearly not yet ready to write about a Māori gay character (he felt able to do it only five years later, in *The Uncle’s Story*). He was influenced by the widely shared prejudices of his own Māori community about homosexuality, considered a dangerous western import incompatible with the concept of Māori masculinity. For this reason, depictions of Māori homosexuals could be perceived as a further colonisation, as well as a ‘corruption’ of genuine Māori identity, absorbed by Pakeha values²².

By using a gay Pakeha narrator in *Nights*, Ihimaera wears a mask that allows him to distance himself from his Māoriness, thus becoming free to talk about homosexuality without the constraints of his ethnicity. However, through this mechanism, Ihimaera risks falling “into the possible trap of writing himself out of his own story” (Roussos *Island Stories* 92). For Roussos, ironically, by using a Pakeha narrator, he is putting aside his Māori identity; thus, “his ethnicity *does* become marginalised and cannot occupy a more important position within this new narrative” (92).

Through the choice of Pakeha narrator David Munro, in *Nights*, Ihimaera is commenting on the doubling of the difficulties that Māori homosexuals have to face in contemporary New Zealand society. In particular, they are seen as belonging to a kind of second-class group of homosexuals because Māori gays are a minority that has been absorbed by a larger majority composed of Pakeha homosexuals. According to Munro/Ihimaera, that Māori gays are not seen as a group but only as part of a Pakeha-driven gay framework can be considered a further colonisation. As a consequence, The

²² See Roussos, Timotheos. “Island Stories, Alternative Voices. Contemporary Depictions of Transgressive Post-Independence Masculinities”. PhD thesis. The University of Sydney, 2008. Print.

Noble Savage in *Nights*, being not only a Māori gay, but also an activist for the Polynesian gay community, is discouraged from having a relationship with a Pakeha homosexual (David Munro), because having a 'white' lover could cause him loss of credibility. The Pakeha narrator in *Nights* thus argues that he and the Noble Savage have always been friends but never lovers:

He is out of reach. His politics make him unavailable to whites. It is bad enough to be gay in his cultural milieu, but it is doubly disempowering to have a white lover of either sex. He cannot afford an ambiguous credibility. His people have already been fucked by whites. First as imperialists. Then as second-class gays within our own white-driven gay networks. He has accepted his destiny as gay icon of Polynesia. (17)

In *The Uncle's Story*, as in *Nights*, The Noble Savage is a handsome gay activist, but here, as we have already noted, he is not called only by his nickname; he also has a real name, a Māori one, Tane Mahuta. The fact that in his second gay novel Ihimaera decides to 'unmask' himself by giving a real name to the character of The Noble Savage is significant. Indeed, it has been understood that he now feels free to write about a gay Māori character, whereas in *Nights* he had not yet such confidence, and needed to disguise his identity as well as his own sexuality by using a Pakeha narrative persona. In *Nights*, Ihimaera analyses the dilemma of being both Māori and gay, doubly marginalised through the character of The Noble Savage, whereas in *The Uncle's Story* he uses another Māori character, Sam, who falls in love with an American pilot, Cliff, and is forced to face his father's opposition to this relationship, which is unacceptable in Māori culture.

4.4 Challenging Conventional Social Constructions of Māori Masculinity and Subverting Western Narratives about the South Seas

It can be argued that in *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and in *The Uncle's Story*, Ihimaera uses the dominant discourse surrounding Māori masculinity to describe gay characters. In *Nights*, in particular, there are many references to men's physical qualities, as is evident in this description of Wet Dream Walking: "His pectorals pop like mountains in the steam. He needs no darkness to obscure any physical deficiencies, for he has none. He is an athlete of smouldering proportions, the stuff of adolescent desires, and wherever he goes both men and women follow" (8). The Steam Parlour itself is a place in which "machismo reigns" (9) and the Pakeha narrator/protagonist is described as a man who is physically fit, as this scene in *Nights* shows: "My father is there at the doorway, towelling his hair. His eyes show pleasure that he has such a well-formed son." (31)

John Beynon, emeritus professor of communication, cultural and media studies at the University of Glamorgan, in his *Masculinities and Culture*, argued that masculinity is a "cultural construction" (1) and that "men are not born with masculinity as part of their genetic make-up; rather it is something into which they are acculturated and which is composed of social codes of behaviour which they learn to reproduce in culturally appropriate ways" (2). Western notions of Māori masculinity have roots in the colonial period (as Edward Said argued, colonialism "can create not only knowledge but also the very reality [it] appear[s] to describe" (*Orientalism* 94)). However, contemporary New Zealand literary works and movies have also played a key role in perpetuating the image of the physically violent Māori male, as is evident, for example, in *Once Were Warriors* (1994) and in its sequel, *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?*

(1999), or in *Utu* (1983) and *Crooked Earth* (2001), all of them providing descriptions of violent Māori urban life, dominated by male aggression.

According to Brendan Hokowhitu, western notions of Māori masculinity have roots in the colonial period. In *Tackling Māori Masculinity: A Colonial Genealogy of Savagery and Sport*, Hokowhitu argues that the representation of the naturally physical Māori man “began as a conscious attempt to subjugate the masculine Other by limiting him to the physical realm” (271). According to Hokowhitu, the subjugation of Māori men was practised by forcing them into manual labour, confiscating their land and restricting their education options.

The more Māori men recognise themselves in the dominant discourse, which associates them with physicality and inability in intellectual matters, “the less [they] understand [their] own existence and [their] own desires . . . [their] own gestures are no longer [theirs] but those of another who represents them” (Debord 90). For this reason, it is crucial that Māori themselves recognise the effects of stereotypical images of Māori masculinity and resist them with their own distinctive representations, correcting the vision of Māori culture imposed by the dominant discourse.

Ihimaera’s gay novels problematise mainstream notions about Māori masculinity, writing back to the dominant construct and to what Hokowhitu defines as “the colonial indoctrination of a physical masculine prototype” (*Tackling* 270). In *Nights* and in *The Uncle’s Story*, Ihimaera aims to show the inner conflicts of the male characters arising from the dominant discourse surrounding Māori masculinity, as well as from the expectations of the contemporary Māori world itself (exemplified in the character of Arapeta in *The Uncle’s Story*). This effort to resist the concept of masculinity associated with a conventional heterosexual life is not always successful and most of the characters in both novels admit the futility of their struggle to reconcile the two parts of their life.

This is particularly evident in the character of The Noble Savage who accepts marriage with a woman in order to produce a family and serve his depleted community. David Munro, the Pakeha, for his part, ends up living a double life as husband and father during the day and “a compulsively promiscuous cruiser in the sordid netherworld of the homosexual arena” (Fox *The Ship* 176) during the night.

In *The Ship of Dreams. Masculinity in Contemporary New Zealand fiction*, Alistair Fox argues that, by tackling the issue of homosexuality so explicitly, Ihimaera brought to light a version of masculinity that had been disguised and repressed within New Zealand until homosexuality was decriminalised in legislation enacted in 1986. In light of such significant and recent repression, it could be argued that the prohibitions against homosexuality in Māori culture explain Ihimaera’s reticence in dealing with this topic in his previous novels. In fact, as Fox points out, in none of Ihimaera’s first five novels (*Tangi*, *Whanau*, *The Matriarch*, *The Whale Rider* and *Bulibasha: King of the Gypsies*) do we find allusions to same-sex relationships between men. The exception is a passage in *The Matriarch* in which the character of the grandmother, The Matriarch, says to her *mokopuna* Tamatea that he is a skinny kid, so they will put the beef on him and build him “into a strong man, desirable to both women and men” (368). It could also be argued that *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* is the first novel in the history of Māori literature focusing on homosexuality; thus, it is not only a new topic for Ihimaera’s writing but for New Zealand indigenous fiction as well.

However, Ihimaera is not the first to write about same-sex attraction in Māori culture. In fact, his two novels *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and *The Uncle’s Story* can be situated alongside the work of Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, short story writer and Māori lesbian feminist activist. In her first collection of short-stories, entitled *Tahuri* (1989), which focuses on the coming of age of a Māori girl, Te Awekotuku not only

“subverts social construction of women merely as sex-objects within the male gaze” (Stachurski 79-80), but also “the ‘male gaze’ of the coloniser by relegating the position of the viewing subject to her female, lesbian Māori woman protagonists” (Bach 27). Similarly, in *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, Ihimaera reverses a long tradition of western novels having indigenous characters relegated to play minor parts, and creates the Māori character of the Noble Savage as protagonist and also as the subject of male homosexual desire (as, in *Tahuri* by Te Awekotuku, women are the object of female homosexual desire).

As Fox argues, in *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and in *The Uncle’s Story*, the main character does not conform to that conventional social construction of masculinity that requires him to be heterosexual, married and a father. This struggle is also evident in the character of The Noble Savage in *Nights*: an attractive Māori with a strong, muscular body, thus apparently the prototype of Māori masculinity par excellence, he is in reality torn between his love for men and the pressures to meet the expectations of Māori society. At the end of the novel, he will fulfil his mother’s wish of having a grandchild, accepting an arranged marriage with a Māori girl, Leah. In this sense, the character of The Noble Savage represents a certain conformity to a social ideal of Māori masculinity. However, both *Nights* and *The Uncle’s Story* deal with a more transgressive kind of Māori masculinity.

In both novels, then, Ihimaera not only stages but undermines the predominant discourse about Māori masculinity. Representing the Māori character of The Noble Savage as hypermasculine and physically vibrant, he simultaneously characterises this character as effeminate and homosexual. How far do these depictions draw on and how far do they rewrite western narratives of sexuality in the South Seas?

The majority of western literary works and movies represent Pacific women as objects of desire (a recurrent contemporary topic in such movies as , for example, *Bird of Paradise* (1932), *Son of Fury* (1942), *South Pacific* (1958), *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962) and *Blue Lagoon* (1980)), whereas the Polynesian man has occupied the margins of these narratives, where he has often been demonised or represented as a hypermasculine ideal, as in the earliest images of the natives as Greek colossae sent back to Europe by Cook and D'Entrecasteaux's expeditions. Ihimaera himself, in "Masculinity & Desire" argued that, for the most part, the Polynesian male has not been at the forefront of the western gaze in terms of sexualised desire. Western texts were usually focused on a European male hero going to Polynesia, falling in love with a beautiful, exotic Polynesian woman. Relatively few texts contained a Polynesian male hero until the publication of *Sons for the Return Home* (1973) by the Samoan writer Albert Wendt.

By including attractive Pacific indigenous male characters as the object of desire in *Nights* and in *The Uncle's Story*, Ihimaera is not simply writing back critically to western literary images but selecting among these, somewhat perversely, for his own more complex purposes, including reclaiming Māori male images for New Zealand fiction while rejecting a long tradition of western narratives containing representations of ferocious Polynesian male characters. In this sense, it could be argued that the character of the Noble Savage is an agent of change, establishing the more marginalised indigenous male figures of Oceania as protagonists of literary works and films.

CHAPTER FIVE:
CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN RECEPTION AND TRANSLATION OF WITI
IHIMAERA'S FICTION²³

5.1. The Translations of Marinella Rocca Longo: Revealing the Imprint of the Western Literary Myth of the Noble Savage in Early New Zealand Works

Although a considerable body of critical work on the fiction of Māori writer Witi Ihimaera now exists, to date, no published studies have been fully dedicated to analysing the reception of his fiction in Europe. This chapter seeks to address this lacuna, aiming to initiate and advance the scholarly examination of the reception of his work in Italy. This study considers the ways in which Ihimaera's work has been translated, published and reviewed in Italy from the 1970s to the present. However, the point of the chapter is not who produced work on Ihimaera but what reception readings of Ihimaera were produced in Italian contexts, particularly the readings of his images of the Noble Eco-Savage. The analysis of the critical reception is then extended to an examination of the interpretations by Italian film reviewers and audiences of Caro's internationally successful movie *Whale Rider*, based on Ihimaera's 1987 novel *The Whale Rider*, highlighting the ways in which Italian knowledge of Māori people has also been shaped by visual representations.

What, then, was the reception of Ihimaera in a country from which his own work clearly derived considerable inspiration, and how did Italy come to know about the Māori writer in the first instance? Early literary respectability was given to Ihimaera's

²³ The second part of this chapter has been included in my article entitled "Questioning the "Exotic" in Two Italian Travellers' Accounts of New Zealand", published in a special issue (June 2012) of the academic journal *Italian Studies in Southern Africa* (vol.25, no.1, 2012, pp.9–18) dedicated to different aspects of the presence of the 'exotic' in Italian Literature.

fiction through the work of Marinella Rocca Longo, professor of English language and translation studies at the University of Rome and founder of the Associazione Culturale Italia-Nuova Zelanda (Italy-New Zealand Cultural Association). One of the explicit aims of the association is to foster scholarly interest in Māori and New Zealand literature.

In the early 1970s, Italian scholars of English studies began to turn their attention to the literary production of post-colonial countries. Several publications paved the way for Māori and New Zealand fiction to become a focus of academic study in Italy. The first milestone was a 1975 anthology of Māori and New Zealand short stories, translated into Italian by Rocca Longo, entitled *Maori e Pakeha: due culture nella narrativa neozelandese* (Māori and Pakeha: Two Cultures in New Zealand Literature). The anthology contains the Italian translations of “A Game of Cards”, “Beginning of the Tournament” and “Tangi” by Ihimaera, as well as short stories by some Pakeha writers, among others, John Mulgan and Maurice Shadbolt.

In the introduction to the anthology, Rocca Longo provides an overview of the history of New Zealand literature, from the early narratives of European voyagers to New Zealand in the nineteenth century (for example, *A Narrative of a Voyage to New Zealand* (1817) by John Liddard and *A Narrative of Nine Months' Residence in New Zealand* (1832) by Augustus Earle), to the early works of Ihimaera that had been published in *Te Ao Hou* in the 1970s. Rocca Longo maintains that New Zealand literature soon after colonisation was an echo of Victorian literature, in particular, in its “taste for anything exotic and unusual” (*Maori e Pakeha* 23).²⁴ She also points out that, in many of these early novels, Māori characters are described as Noble Savages, echoing Friday, an indigenous character in *Robinson Crusoe* by Defoe, in particular,

²⁴ “il gusto per tutto ciò che è esotico e strano” (unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Italian into English are mine).

with “their joyous primitivism” (*Maori e Pakeha* 30)²⁵ and their way of living without material concerns, in contrast to the less happy life of ‘civilised’ man. Rocca Longo notes that these stereotyped descriptions of Māori people by early nineteenth-century New Zealand novelists reveal their nostalgia for “Rousseau’s Arcadian ideal, that unease of being civilised felt by every generation compelled to compare its own historical traditions with those closer to nature” (*Māori e Pakeha* 30).²⁶

Rocca Longo’s analysis observes that some of these early New Zealand novels also contain representations of Māori people as Ignoble Savages, in particular through the emphasis put on scenes of cannibalism. The negative perspective through which Māori characters are represented is evident, for example, in the writings of Joel Samuel Polack. In his *New Zealand: Being a Narrative of Travels and Adventures* (1838), a Māori character, Rangihua, is described as “an infuriated demon” whose “tongue was thrust out to its utmost length” (qtd. in Reid 12). Rocca Longo argues that the descriptions of Māori people in Polack’s writing, as well as in other New Zealand works of the same period, are “very bleak”²⁷ and the exaggeration and oversimplification in the descriptions of their characteristics “depicts indigenous people as caricatures”²⁸ (*Maori e Pakeha* 25) rather than as human beings. Rocca Longo’s readings thus focus on the trope of the Ignoble Savage rather than the Noble Savage in this early New Zealand literature.

The Rocca Longo anthology is generally regarded as the starting point for the serious academic approach to Māori and New Zealand fiction in Italy. This scholar brought Māori and New Zealand literature to the attention of the Italian academic world, subsequently editing, in 1977, an anthology of New Zealand poems translated into

²⁵ “primitivismo gioioso”

²⁶ “dell’ideale arcadico Rousseauiano, quel certo disagio d’esser civili di ogni generazione costretta a mettere a confronto le proprie tradizioni storiche con altre più vicine alla natura”

²⁷ “caricate di tinte fosche”

²⁸ “dà agli indigeni una forte patina caricaturale”

Italian, entitled *La poesia neozelandese dalle origini inglesi ai contemporanei* (New Zealand Poetry from its English Origins to the Present). This traces the history of New Zealand poetry from the early rhymes of C. J. Martin, written in 1866, to Bill Manhire's poems of the 1970s. Both *Maori e Pakeha* and *La poesia neozelandese* were influential for generations of students and scholars of New Zealand and Māori literature in Italy. Arguably, Rocca Longo's translations of Ihimaera constituted the most important vehicle for foregrounding Māori literature and for the dissemination of Ihimaera's work throughout Italy. Indeed, when she later edited the Italian version of *His Best Stories* by Ihimaera, with translations by Andrea Longo, Patrizia Managò and Marco Romani, she decided to give it the title *Racconti neozelandesi* (2008) (New Zealand Short Stories), instead of *Racconti Māori* (Māori short-stories).

In the introduction, Rocca Longo explicitly engages with the question of the challenges of translating Ihimaera's fiction into Italian, especially that the transfer of cultural material necessitated some quite radical changes of the text to make it more accessible to the target audience. Whereas a New Zealand audience may (or should) be familiar with the meaning of the original Māori terms, these are unlikely to be recognised by an Italian or, more generally, by a European audience. The translator had to replace Māori terms with target language equivalents that are more readily accessible to a western audience but that do not reproduce the specificity and cultural complexity carried by the original terms. Beyond the perennial issues of translation loss, these are examples of the post-colonial issues of power with which many translation theorists are currently grappling, most particularly in the debate between the 'foreignising' or the 'domestication' of indigenous texts²⁹.

²⁹ See Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London: Routledge, 1997.

In *Maori e Pakeha*, Rocca Longo develops her observation of the inevitability of recourse to European frames of understanding, pointing out the tendency for early New Zealand novelists to represent Māori people through the western literary myth of the Noble Savage or its flip side, the Ignoble Savage. In *Racconti neozelandesi*, she maintained, Ihimaera himself in some ways falls into a similar trap in *Pounamu Pounamu*, his first collection of short stories, through his ‘pastoral’ representations of Māori people. Ihimaera has been strongly criticised for these early descriptions, which are considered by New Zealand critics, as well as by Rocca Longo, “too saccharine and idealised” (*Racconti neozelandesi* 9).³⁰ The author himself has since disavowed the overly positive portrait of rural Māori society in his early works (see page 215, Appendix of the thesis). According to Rocca Longo, however, Ihimaera has always tried to keep a balance between his desire to recover a kind of mythical past of Māori people before colonisation, involving a form of magnification and idealisation, and his commitment to describing the social problems contemporary Māori society has to face (*Racconti neozelandesi* 9). Notwithstanding this measured understanding of the dual aims of Ihimaera’s writing, this early critical Italian writing may well be pinpointing the principal sources of Italian readers’ interest in Ihimaera’s work: at once the ethnographic portrait of an otherness and the old romance of a noble primitive or ancient savage—a lost self.

5.2 Paola Della Valle’s Post-Colonial Analysis of Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace’s Fiction

³⁰ “troppo sdolciate e idealizzate”

More recent criticism on Ihimaera in Italy at the level of international scholarship includes the work of Paola Della Valle, Italian scholar of English studies at the University of Turin. In her article *Rewriting History in the Novel and Rewriting the Novel through History: An Analysis of Patricia Grace's and Witi Ihimaera's Fiction*, Della Valle argues that, like many indigenous post-colonial writers, "Ihimaera contests the authority of an official and univocal 'History', suggesting that there can be many histories, within or outside the Maori framework" (104). Through his fiction, Ihimaera questions the validity of the dominant western approach to history and underlines the importance of a Māori version, "which includes myth as its founding assumption" (104). Della Valle cites an example of Ihimaera's different perspective on history in his article entitled "Why I Write", published in *World Literature in English* in 1975, in which he explains that western people argue that New Zealand was discovered by Dutch explorer Abel Tasman, whereas, according to Māori people, Kupe, a mythical Polynesian voyager, was the true discoverer. Similarly, Witi Ihimaera's novels *The Matriarch* and *The Dream Swimmer*, as well as Patricia Grace's *Potiki*, *Baby No-Eyes* and *Dogside Story*, present New Zealand contemporary and past historical events that counterbalance the dominant western approach to history and express an alternative Māori viewpoint. In their reconsideration of the very concept of 'History', both Māori writers question the supremacy of 'fact' over 'fiction'. Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace, concludes the critic, "push the novel into new territories, drawing it away from the Western canon and shaping it into a new indigenous form" (106).

In a further article entitled "Il Risorgimento Māori: l'appropriazione del melodramma italiano in *The Matriarch* di Witi Ihimaera" (The Māori *Risorgimento*: The Appropriation of Italian Melodrama in *The Matriarch* by Witi Ihimaera), published in *Quaderni del '900* in 2007, Della Valle argues that Ihimaera's revisionism of history

through a Māori perspective began with *The Matriarch*. In this novel, the use of quotations from operas such as *Aida* and *Nabucco* by Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi suggests a symbolic comparison between the Māori peoples' struggle against European colonialism and the Italian struggle against Austrian occupation. According to Della Valle, the quotations from Italian opera, interspersed throughout the text of Ihimaera's third novel, serve "to create a parallel between two national movements fighting during the same historical time: Italian *Risorgimento* and Māori Land Wars" (93). Ihimaera himself confirmed this reading of the Italian borrowings in his interview with me in 2010 (see page 215, Appendix of the thesis).

Similarly, New Zealand scholar in English studies Alistair Fox analysed the symbolic function of the operatic quotations from Verdi's opera *Aida* in another Ihimaera novel, *The Dream Swimmer*. Fox argues that Ihimaera's appropriation and reworking of Italian opera in *The Matriarch* and in *The Dream Swimmer* exemplifies the 'appropriation' that theorists have identified as characteristic of post-colonial discourse. In fact, as post-colonial theorist Bill Ashcroft pointed out, the "appropriation of the power invested in writing" is the "source of literary and cultural redefinition" (Ashcroft and Griffiths 78) for post-colonial authors. In light of this, Fox observes that, by invoking key moments in European history, Ihimaera "ironically enlists their expressive power and thematic associations in the service of the Māori people's struggle to resist the oppressive effects of the colonizing culture that produced those same works" (5). Somewhat paradoxically, then, in Ihimaera's battle against a single, dominant, British history of his country, his counter-narratives of a Māori history of struggle draw on parallels with heroic Italian historical narratives of resistance to oppression.

Della Valle's most recent publication on Māori literature is *From Silence to Voice: The Rise of Maori Literature*, in which she analyses "the passage from silence to

voice in the literary representation of Māori—from the role as objects of external representations to becoming agents of self-representation” (VII). Della Valle’s book focuses on the shift of perspective in the representation of Māori people in New Zealand literature, from the early writings by Pakeha authors, containing stereotypical depictions of Māori characters functional to the colonial discourse (‘The Māori Silence’), to the insider perspective that emerged in the indigenous fiction of Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace in the 1970s (‘The Māori Voice’). Her work implicitly opens up the question of how Māori writers, through their insider perspective, engage with the stereotypical depictions of indigenous people and what their insider perspective can add.

5.3 The Representation of Māori People as Ignoble Savages in the New Zealand Press: Marta Degani’s Work on the ‘Exploitative’ Use of Loanwords from Māori in the Local Variety of English Developed in New Zealand

Another Italian scholar who has published extensively on Māori literature, Marta Degani, assistant professor of English linguistics at the University of Verona (Italy), has focused on the specific language contact that occurred between the local variety of English developed in New Zealand and the language of the indigenous people, through examination of both literary and non-literary texts. In her article “This talk is peppered with te reo. Fenomeni di contatto linguistico in contesto neozelandese: una prospettiva diacronica” (This Talk is Peppered with Te Reo. Phenomena of Language Contact in the New Zealand Context: A Diachronic Perspective), Degani explores the phenomenon of lexical borrowing, as described in the literature on language contact, and applies this framework to the situation in New Zealand. The most striking feature of the lexicon of what has been defined as New Zealand English is the use of words in te reo Māori, a

characteristic that particularly distinguishes this variety from Australian English and other Englishes.

Degani argues that the presence of words of Māori origin in New Zealand English is proudly considered by New Zealanders one of the most striking peculiarities of this English variety. This response can also be seen as a “reaction to the threat of the globalizing tendencies which currently affect other English varieties” (*The Pakeha Myth* 170). Māori terms are left untranslated in most of the books and newspapers published in New Zealand, which indicates that the majority of readers are familiar with their meanings. The use of Māori words in New Zealand English can be explained by the need to acquire new cultural concepts. James Cook’s accounts contain the earliest loanwords from Māori, including terms such as *kumara* and *haka*. Presumably, European explorers to New Zealand felt the need to name things unknown to them, which led to numerous borrowings from the Māori language, in particular, for terms relating to local fauna and flora, cultural concepts (e.g., *marae* and *mana*) and place names. Some Māori terms in New Zealand English acquired a special status as markers of national identity, for example, the term *kiwi*, which originally referred only to the native flightless bird, while now it is commonly used to indicate a New Zealand citizen.

Employing Māori loanwords can imply emphasising national identity and marking the uniqueness of this English variety. According to Degani, using Māori borrowings also involves sustaining the ideology of bilingualism/biculturalism of New Zealand, in line with recent political orientation. However, the use of *tikanga* words (words that refer to specifically Māori concepts) out of their context “can evolve into stereotypical notions of cultural reference” (Degani and Onysko 224).

Degani’s analysis concentrates on the early borrowings of *aroaha* and *mana* as they occur in a sample of three representative New Zealand newspapers (*The New*

Zealand Herald, *The Dominion Post* and *The Press*) over a period of one year (2007). She studied the contexts of use of these Māori words, measuring the degree of assimilation of the selected loanwords on the basis of lexico-semantic criteria. Degani aimed to establish whether their original meanings have been lost and which new meanings might have been added to them, and to determine whether the new use of *aroha* and *mana* contributed to the creation of cultural stereotypes about Māori people. Her results demonstrate that the specific context-bound use of these Māori words are “an indication of the multiplicity of devices employed in New Zealand English for ‘othering’ the Māori and other minority groups” (“Are they still” 68). Their use contributes to creating “socially damaging folk-anthropological myths” (*Are they still* 68), reinforcing cultural stereotypes of Māori people, for example, by associating the term *mana* with instinctive aggressiveness.

According to Degani, the presence of Māori terms in some New Zealand newspapers is a deliberate journalistic strategy for catching the reader’s attention while ‘flagging’ the topic of the article. Māori words in articles written in English function as attention catchers and their original meaning is exploited to enhance positive feelings and favourable reactions in the Pakeha reader. This is particularly evident in language constructions such as *Aroha Leisure Pools*, in which the term *aroha* contributes to the sexual suggestiveness of the description and is given particular emphasis by its textual position and function. In this respect, for Degani, the use of such Māori terms as proper nouns can be seen as “a neo-colonialist act of romanticizing appropriation of an ‘exotic’ language” (*The Pakeha Myth* 182).

Degani has also demonstrated the similarly exploitative use of the term *mana* and the covert ideologies that are transmitted by certain discursive borrowing practices outside its original contexts. The word *mana* occurs frequently in articles dealing with

sport in New Zealand, in particular, in relation to the *All Blacks* rugby team and its Māori players, as in the following example: “He’s got a lot of *mana* as an ex-All Blacks captain” (qtd. in Degani *The Pakeha Myth* 185). Here the word *mana* is associated with physical strength and aggressiveness, reprising and fostering, for Degani, the idea of Māori people as primitive, uncivilised, Ignoble Savages. Degani argues that inserting the word *mana* out of context reinforces cultural stereotypes that represent Māori people as violent and hostile thereby contributing to the widespread practice of othering that is commonly used by the dominant élite in order to denigrate minority groups. However, this would be seen as an oversimplifying analysis by the vast majority of New Zealand readers, including both Māori and Pakeha, who understand that an All Black captain’s *mana* is more than physical strength and aggressiveness; it is also leadership.

Degani has also investigated the occurrence of hybrid compounds of Māori and English terms in contemporary New Zealand English, such as *whare boy*, *manuka blight* and *mana-munching*. Degani argues that the phenomenon of hybrid compounding in language contact between English and Māori is a process that “marks the integration of Māori concepts in New Zealand culture” (Degani and Onysko 209). Her analysis thus argues that language borrowing can reinforce stereotypical representations of minority ethnic groups, but also that it can revitalise both the borrowing language and the borrowed, creating new connections.

Degani’s research interests turned her attention to Ihimaera’s fiction. In “Voices from the Tangata Whenua: An Exploration of Conceptual Metaphoricity in Witi Ihimaera’s *Whanau*”, the critic adopts the approach of conceptual metaphor theory elaborated by Lakoff and Johnson for investigating Ihimaera’s novel *Whanau*, interpreting unconventional metaphors in this novel as the manifestation of a specifically localised cultural dimension. Literary works by Māori writers, she claimed,

are highly figurative and convey “culturally specific messages” (*Voices* 170), in particular, regarding the spiritual relationship between Māori people and the natural world.

In *Whanau*, as in most of Ihimaera’s works, the representation of a metaphorical motherhood is prevalent: “The *Whanau A Kai* are the children of this land” (Ihimaera *Whanau* 7); the land is seen as a nurturing mother, a parent looking after her children. The personification of the land is omnipresent: “Land had gradually become calm” (54); “the land sighing for his [Rongo Mahana] return” (134). Ihimaera describes the land as if it were a human being with feelings (becoming calm, sighing). Similarly, the Māori village has human features: “the village is aging”, but it “does not die yet” (17).

Degani continues to demonstrate what she identifies as the cultural specificity of the metaphors Ihimaera uses in *Whanau*, in the analysis of the following description, for example: “this old man, this solitary whale, stranded in an alien present” (*Whanau* 41). Whales feature prominently in Māori culture, symbolising the migration of the ancestors from the mythical homeland of Hawaiki to New Zealand. In this context, in Māori culture, a whale can be seen as a personification of a wise, old man in a metaphor not immediately fully accessible to a western reader. Degani concludes that a study of the metaphors in Māori fiction “can improve our understanding of the cultural Other as well as it can discourage the tendency to ‘exoticize’ the culturally marginal” (*Voices* 160). Her work thus opens up the wider question of what might be entailed by cultural borrowing and cultural appropriation and whether the effects are different between dominant and minority cultures. This is a question that my own study is attempting to address.

5.4 Franco Manai on the New Zealand Chamber Opera *Galileo* and Daniela Cavallaro on *Woman Far Walking*

Two Italian studies scholars at the University of Auckland, Franco Manai and Daniela Cavallaro, also deserve a mention in any overview of the Italian critical reception of Māori literature and Māori appropriation of Italian texts and myths. In “The Italian Myth of Galileo in New Zealand Opera”, published in *European Studies*, Manai examined the representation of Italian Renaissance scientist, mathematician and astronomer Galileo Galilei in Bertold Brecht’s play *Life of Galileo*, Liliana Cavani’s 1968 film *Galileo* and in *Galileo*, a three-act New Zealand chamber opera that premiered at the Maidment Theatre in Auckland in 2002, with music by John Rimmer and libretto by Witi Ihimaera. As far as Ihimaera’s appropriation and adaptation of the story of the Italian protagonist of the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century is concerned, Manai argues that, in this opera, Galileo is represented as a mythical hero, “an exceptionally gifted and driven man, who applies himself to uncovering and explaining natural phenomena whose causes had been considered mysteries reserved for the divine” (Manai and Kirsten 271). Galileo was, in fact, a key figure of the Scientific Revolution because of his contribution to observational astronomy and his support of the heliocentric system as formulated in *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres) by Renaissance mathematician and astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus. According to Copernicus, the Earth and other planets orbit the sun, a theory that contradicted the geocentrism suggested by the Ptolemaic system.

In the New Zealand opera *Galileo*, the Italian scientist is appreciated, in particular, for the astronomical discoveries he made through the use of a refracting telescope,

including the four major moons of Jupiter and the phases of Venus. Praise of Galileo is expressed through the song of the troubadour:

But you, Galileo, alone gave to the human race
the sequence of stars, new constellations in heaven!
O bold deed! O bold deed to have penetrated
The adamantine ramparts of heaven
With such frail aid of crystal! (qtd. in Manai and Kirsten 272)³¹

Manai argues that this section of Ihimaera's opera echoes the praise of ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus in *De rerum natura* by Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius, and he points out that both Galileo and Epicurus challenged the Church, the former through his innovative theories of celestial motion that collided with the geocentrism stated in the Sacred Scriptures and the latter for his materialism, which, by denying the existence of deities, was incompatible with Christian religion (Manai and Kirsten 272). Galileo, in particular, had been attacked by Catholic Church authorities after the publication of his *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* (1632). He faced the Roman Inquisition, was accused of heresy and forced to recant.

Galileo's teachings spread scientific awareness that challenged traditional knowledge and, in this sense, according to Manai, Galileo can be compared to Prometheus, a Titan of Greek mythology who taught mathematics and astronomy to humans and was chained to a rock and had his liver eaten by an eagle as a punishment for stealing fire from the Greek father of the gods, Zeus, and giving it to humankind. Galileo's story reveals some similarities with the myth of Prometheus, especially that both were punished for their efforts to bring new scientific knowledge to humankind,

³¹ The libretto of *Galileo: the Opera* has not been published yet. Manai quoted from a copy of the manuscript kindly provided by Ihimaera.

but, unlike Prometheus, Galileo avoided the death penalty. He was only put under house arrest and required to abjure his claims. It could be argued that the New Zealand opera *Galileo* is a further example of the appropriation and reworking of European myths in Witi Ihimaera's fiction to assert the values of heroic resistance to the dominant model or authority. The character Ihimaera creates in this opera echoes other resistant, mythical figures in his fictional work, such as those in *The Matriarch*. Is Ihimaera's borrowing and adoption of classical European figures of heroic resistance to the authority in power accompanied by an appropriation, a reusing of these western myths for what he calls "politics of difference"? It seems that in this libretto, as in *The Matriarch*, these mythical figures resonate with a predilection for the noble and the heroic in Ihimaera's fiction and for exemplary or extraordinary figure.

Manai points out that Ihimaera's *Galileo*, being obsessed by measuring the immeasurable, "becomes an allegory for contemporary humankind, delving without restraint into nature's deepest secrets" (Manai and Kirsten 273), an allegory that is visualized in the first image projected on the screen, at the beginning of the opera, in the form of the contemporary launch of the spacecraft *Galileo* by NASA to study Jupiter and its moons.

Manai has also translated one of the earliest short stories by Ihimaera, "A Game of Cards", for the Italian periodical *Nae*, which specialises in minority languages and literatures. Furthermore, in 2006, Manai wrote an article entitled "Witi Ihimaera e il Rinascimento Māori" (Witi Ihimaera and the Māori Renaissance) in the Italian journal of post-colonial studies *Kumà*, in which he recognises the primary role Ihimaera played in the Māori Renaissance and points out, especially through a short but illuminating analysis of Ihimaera's 2000 novel *The Uncle's Story*, how the Māori author's revaluation of his own culture is also a critique.

The next section of this chapter examines the works of another Italian studies scholar of the University of Auckland, Daniela Cavallaro, on Ihimaera's play *Woman Far Walking*. Cavallaro's research focused on Māori theatre. In her article entitled "Raccontare per raccontarsi: elementi tradizionali nel teatro Māori contemporaneo" (Narrating the Self: Traditional Elements in Contemporary Māori Theatre), published in the Italian journal of theatre studies *Prove di drammaturgia*, she argues that contemporary Māori theatre draws on elements of traditional Māori performance (such as *haka*, *waiata*, *poi* and *taiaha*) and "revives traditional storytelling techniques, introducing them to the genre of theatre—which, for them, is relatively new" (40).³² In fact, before British colonisation, she claims, Māori people did not have a tradition similar to European theatre. In their oral culture, performances were based on *whakapapa* (genealogies), *whakatauki* (proverbs), *whaikorero* (speech), *waiata* (chanted poetry) and *karakia* (prayers). A significant event in the history of Māori theatre was the founding of the Māori Theatre Trust in 1966. A Māori theatrical tradition was consolidated in the 1970s, with the publication of the first Māori play, *Te Raukura: The Feathers of the Albatross* (1974) by Harry Dansey.

In "Culture teatrali a confronto: il teatro Māori contemporaneo"³³ (The Interface of Theatrical Cultures: Contemporary Māori Theatre), Cavallaro surveys the history of Māori theatre, from the early performances by Māori group *Taki Rua* in the 1980s to two plays representative of contemporary bicultural Māori theatre, *Waiora* (1996) by Hone Kouka and *Woman Far Walking* (2000) by Ihimaera. Cavallaro argues that an analysis of *Waiora* reveals similarities with *Sei personaggi in cerca di autore* by Italian playwright Pirandello (in particular, the fact that there are six characters and that a

³² "recupera la tecnica tradizionale della narrazione inserendola nel genere—per loro, relativamente recente—del teatro"

³³ This article is based on a conference paper by Cavallaro entitled "Nuove tendenze della cultura Māori: il teatro biculturale", presented at the Burcardo Library in Rome in December 2003 and published, in a shorter version, in *Ridotto* 4–5 (2004): 10–12

father is the protagonist), as well as with *The Family Reunion* by T. S. Eliot. *Woman Far Walking*, in its turn, carries echoes of *Waiora* and perhaps of Eliot's play; in both of them, the event at the centre of the story is a birthday party.

Ihimaera's play provides insight into key events in New Zealand history through the figure of Te Tiriti o Waitangi Mahana, the Māori woman protagonist, who is turning 160 and was symbolically born on 6 February, the day on which the Treaty of Waitangi was signed. Cavallaro concludes that *Woman Far Walking* effected "a rewriting of history that is revisionist in two ways: a Māori version of New Zealand history and a woman's version of the history" (133).³⁴ Her analysis again shows the constant interactions between European models and the revision and recreation of these models, productively to create a text that is intertextual, both old and new. We might add the observation that while the political sovereignty and the politics of difference outlined by Ihimaera (see the Appendix) as his writing programme are evident drivers of *Woman Far Walking*, so too is the heroic dimension, evidenced in the presence of the supernatural. Ihimaera's *kuia* protagonist takes on the stature of a far-seeing, resistant heroine who also possesses great, everyday humanity and is not a victim of history.

5.5 Into the World of Light: Anna Grazia Mattei's Work on the 'Emerging' of Māori Literature and Eleonora Chiavetta on Code Switching in Ihimaera's Fiction

The publications of Anna Grazia Mattei and Eleonora Chiavetta constitute similarly innovative contributions to the discussion of Ihimaera as well as of Māori literature in general. In her article *Witi Ihimaera e il Māoritanga*, Anna Grazia Mattei, compares the 'emerging' of Māori literature into the light of day with the Māori story of

³⁴ "una riscrittura della storia doppiamente revisionistica: la versione Maori della storia della Nuova Zelanda e la versione femminile della storia"

the Creation, arguing that this literature, transmitted orally to succeeding generations, has been ‘hidden’ from the European mainstream for many years, like the children of the Māori people’s primal parents, Ranginui (Sky Father) and Papatuanuku (Earth Mother). Yearning to see the light, they were forced to live in darkness, locked in their parents’ loving, tight embrace. According to Mattei, Māori literature became known to the broader public thanks to the works of Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace, who “opened up ‘into the world of light’ a ‘hidden’ and unknown world” (9).³⁵ For Mattei, both writers, the two major figures of the so-called Māori Renaissance, contributed significantly to shifting Māori literature from *Te Kore*, the Nothingness, to *Te Ao Marama*, ‘the World of Light’ (which is also the symbolic title of a 1982 anthology of Māori writing edited by Witi Ihimaera). In this sense, they too can be compared to Ranginui and Papatuanuku’s sons, who pushed their parents apart, bringing light into the world. Again we find a reading of resistant heroism, of ‘savage nobles’, as Ihimaera himself put it (see Appendix of the thesis).

In *Code-Switching and Other Textual Strategies in the Fiction of Witi Ihimaera*, Eleonora Chiavetta, professor (now retired) of English studies at the University of Palermo, like Degani, is particularly interested in the effects of linguistic code switching in Ihimaera’s early works of fiction in English. Chiavetta argues that, even if the predominant language used in Ihimaera’s fiction is English, the writer also made use of significant code switching, mixing terms belonging to the two different linguistic codes of Māori and English. Māori words are inserted into the text, she claims, in order to foreground cultural diversity. The fact that in Ihimaera’s early works these terms are left untranslated suggests that the author thought that an English equivalent of these terms would have been reductive, causing the loss of essential cultural elements and of

³⁵ “hanno aperto ‘into the world of light’ un mondo ‘nascosto’ e sconosciuto ai più”

difference, of language validated as unique and untranslatable, as noble. Moreover, as Ihimaera himself argued, in the works that belong to the ‘pastoral’ phase of his writing, he was addressing mainly New Zealand readers, who were likely to be familiar with Māori terms³⁶.

The use of code switching in post-colonial writing is seen by E. Gordon and M. Williams as “a means of contesting the cultural and linguistic dominance encoded in language” (79). In the case of Ihimaera’s fiction, it should also be read in the light of his claim that Māori language is sacred whereas English language “lacks that talismanic quality that indigenous languages have” (Ihimaera *The Singing Word* 175). Chiavetta notes that the presence of untranslated Māori keywords increases in *The Matriarch*, a novel in which, she argues, the use of code switching “takes on a political connotation” (56), in particular, through the use of long, untranslated paragraphs in Māori. This strategy is used by the author to highlight “the *tapu* character of the language that only the initiates can understand” (56–57).

Chiavetta also identifies Ihimaera’s use of grammatically incorrect sentences in English in the collection of short stories *Pounamu Pounamu* as a further textual strategy, for example, the “lack of inversion of subject and verb in interrogative sentences or the omission of the auxiliary verb in interrogative clauses (e.g., “Dad, when we going? I ask”, 75) and in compound tenses (e.g., “Me and Hine, we been working all our lives”, 76)” (50). These English structures relate to, or derive from, the underlying structures of a first language, Māori; it could be argued that they are ‘calqued’ on Māori structures, whose underlying presence and power they affirm.

Similarly, Michelle Keown and Roger Robinson have analysed the use of code-switching and other linguistic strategies in the fiction of Patricia Grace. Keown argues

³⁶ See page 215, Appendix of the thesis

that Grace's incorporation of oral narrative patterns, and more specifically her use of Māori language and grammatical patterns in her writing, can be considered as potentially subversive practices (*Postcolonial Pacific Writing* 162), in the sense that the language of the 'dominant culture' is used by the indigenous writer in order to 'deterritorialise' that majority language in a politically enabling and subversive manner. The use of code-switching between English and Māori is apparent in Grace's fiction, as well as in Ihimaera's fiction, and Keown points out that in the case of Grace's fiction, is used "as a marker of cultural identity" (*Postcolonial Pacific Writing* 163), particularly among middle-aged or older characters, in keeping with the demographic profile of Māori speakers in the post-war period.

5.6 Issues Raised by the Italian Translations of *The Whale Rider* and *A Game of Cards*

The film *Whale Rider*, by New Zealand director-scenarist Niki Caro, is a translation of Ihimaera's 1987 novel *The Whale Rider*, which in turn draws its inspiration from an ancestral story of the Ngati Konohi people of Whangara, one of the Ngati Porou subtribes of the East Coast of New Zealand's North Island. The Ngati Porou tribe trace their origins to Paikea, the first chief, who arrived in New Zealand from the mythical homeland Hawaiki on the back of a whale, saving himself from drowning when his canoe overturned. Paikea's descendant, Porourangi, is the legendary founder of the Ngati Porou tribe.

The novel tells the story of the birth of Paikea's most recent descendants, Pai and her twin brother, who was destined by gender and ancestry to become the future chief of the Māori tribe in Whangara. When the twin brother dies at birth, the novel

follows Pai's struggle to demonstrate to her patriarchal grandfather Koro Apirana that, despite her gender, she too possesses the skills of a leader. Ihimaera took inspiration for the novel while he was serving as a diplomat at the New York City consulate, from the sight of a whale in the Hudson River, an event that made him think about home. He decided to write a novel whose main character would be a female heroine after he took his two daughters to an *Indiana Jones* movie and "they complained how unfair it was that movie heroes were always male" (Rich 2003). The novel and the film differ in many ways, mostly because *The Whale Rider* is narrated from the point of view of Pai's uncle, Rawiri, rather than from Pai's perspective, as in the film. Caro liked the novel but not the existing scripts, so she wrote her own version, shifting the perspective and focusing on the feelings of the young Māori girl, something which, according to her, was missing in the novel.

Since its publication in 1987, the novel *The Whale Rider* has been translated into more than 30 languages. In this way, the novel has undergone many transformations, which raises issues regarding the responsibilities of the translators of post-colonial texts, not only as agents of language transfer, but also as cultural interpreters. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges of the translation of post-colonial literature is the transfer of cultural material for a global audience, a process that often implies some quite radical changes of the text in order to make it more accessible to the target audience. André Lefevere, in his *Beyond the Process: Literary Translation in Literature and Literary Theory*, defines the act of reworking the source text according to the cultural background of the target audience as *refraction* (21).

Translators of post-colonial texts are responsible for representing indigenous cultures to western readers and, therefore, they need to have a deep knowledge of the source culture in order to avoid misrepresenting or simplifying it. Post-colonial studies

have demonstrated the extent to which translations have contributed to misrepresenting indigenous people by filtering them through a distorting western perspective. For this reason, post-colonial scholars Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Tejaswini Niranjana have encouraged translators to refuse to be complicit with imperialistic attitudes towards indigenous people by subverting the dominant discourse.

Similarly, American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti has advocated 'foreignising' translations, a method that aims to defamiliarise the source text and make its difference visible, thus 'resisting' the text's appropriation by the target culture. 'Domesticating' the source text, according to Venuti, in contrast, leads to the invisibility of the translator, an approach that creates the "illusory effect of transparency that simultaneously masks its status as an illusion: the translation seems 'natural', i.e. not translated" (5). Venuti argues that this method does not stimulate curiosity in the reader in respect to the foreignness of the source text because all unfamiliar words have been transposed in the target language by the translator.

As Spivak notes, "language may be one of the many elements that allow us to make sense of things, of ourselves [, which] is what produces identity" (117). For this reason, she argues, 'domesticising' foreign terms during the process of translation of post-colonial texts serves to eliminate cultural differences and absorb these into western categories. According to Spivak, translation can be seen as an instrument of further colonisation of indigenous people.

In the case of *The Whale Rider*, the novel has been translated into Italian by Chiara Brovelli in a book entitled *La balena e la bambina* (The Whale and the Young Girl). Although it is specified on the cover that the book is a *romanzo* (a novel), the translation clearly resulted in a shift in genre, as is evident not only from the choice of a catchy title used for appealing to an audience of young readers, but also from the

cartoonish image on the front cover by Italian artist Simona Mulazzano (a Pocahontas-like little girl riding a huge whale, surrounded by colourful marine species, against a deep blue background).

A similar marketing strategy is suggested by the title of the German translation of *The Whale Rider*, which echoes a fairy tale: *Whalerider, die magische geschichte vom mädchen, das den wal ritt* (Whalerider, the Magic Story of the Girl Who Rides the Whale). This shift of genre could be seen as aligning *The Whale Rider* with the boom in fantasy fiction for teenagers (*The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* among others) in the publishing and film industry of that time. This inclusion of Ihimaera's novel in the field of children's literature justifies the alterations to the original text made by the Italian translator as the need to respect the conventions of the children's literature genre.

The accuracy of the Italian translation of Ihimaera's novel has been questioned by Julia Maria Seeman in her "Translating Traditions: The Whale Rider from Novel to Film". In this PhD thesis, Seeman undertook a comparative analysis of Italian and German translations "to demonstrate that the deeper translators' understanding of the source text, the vast network of intertextual references that has shaped and continues to shape it, and the impact that their choices bear on its dissemination, the more fruitfully can they exercise their role as cultural mediators" (2).

Analysing the translation of words such as *taniwha* and *tipua*, both closely related to the Māori world view, Seeman observed that in the Italian version of the novel these terms have been replaced respectively by *una gigantesca balena* (a gigantic whale) and *un mostro marino* (a sea monster), that is, by domesticating common understandings that demonstrate Brovelli's lack of engagement with the specificity and cultural complexity carried by the original terms. However, although the strategy adopted appears to be unsatisfactory, the Italian translation of Ihimaera's novel is based

on the international edition of the book, which was conceived for a western audience. Cultural material in this edition had already been replaced by target language equivalents that are more readily accessible to a western readership. Ihimaera himself interpreted *taniwha* as *a gigantic whale*, and *tipua* as *a sea monster*. In the 1987 New Zealand edition of the novel, he added a glossary in which *taniwha* and *tipua* are interpreted as *water monster* and *guardian spirit*. Both of these terms, according to the author, are already reductive but they at least provide a general idea of the meaning of the original Māori terms. It is of significance that Ihimaera himself has apparently recognised and responded to the need for cultural translation to allow his work to be received outside of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Similarly, an analysis of four different Italian translations of a short story by Ihimaera, “A Game of Cards”, reveals a number of strategies whose purpose was to make Māori words more accessible to a European audience. The first translation was by Marinella Rocca Longo, published in *Māori e Pakeha: due culture nella narrativa neozelandese*, in 1975; the second was by Franco Manai and published in *Nae* in 2007; the third, by Andrea Longo, was published in *Racconti neozelandesi* in 2008; and the fourth, by Aldo Magagnino, appeared in *Crocevia* in 2009.

The original version of “A Game of Cards”, written in English, contains Māori words where no appropriate English equivalent exists. Rocca Longo, Longo and Manai chose to leave these distinctively Māori terms, such as *kuia* or *mokopuna*, untranslated; they most often added a gloss in which they explain the terms’ approximate meaning. In contrast, in Magagnino’s translation, Māori words are retained in their original language but their Italian translation is glossed within the text itself. It is interesting to note that the word ‘kuia’ does not mean ‘grandparent’, it means an elderly woman, so Magagnino’s translation is not strictly accurate here: “Tra tutti i miei kuia, i miei nonni,

Nonna Miro era colei che amavo di più” (Magagnino 59).³⁷ Such negotiation of the meaning by the translator for the reader is perhaps the simplest and easiest way of transposing the meaning of Māori words from one culture to another. However, as we noted earlier, it is often reductive, especially in the light of the particular responsibilities of the translator of a post-colonial text, not only as agent of meaning transfer, but also as cultural interpreter and even advocate. The politics of difference advocated by Ihimaera have clearly been mitigated by pressures of international translation and publication.

5.7 The Imprint of the Western Literary Myth of the Noble Eco-Savage and the Appeal of ‘Exotic’ New Zealand: A Reception Study of the Film *La ragazza delle balene* (*Whale Rider*) in Italy

Using both the text of *The Whale Rider* and its film version (released in Italy as *La ragazza delle balene*), this section aims to show the many different ways in which the film has been perceived and interpreted by Italian film reviewers, examining the continuities and discontinuities with the reception of the film by international film reviewers. This section also examines the extent to which Italian film reviewers situate *La ragazza delle balene* in its depiction of an ‘exotic’ New Zealand and of a Māori community as exemplary of the western literary myth of the Noble Eco-Savage. The importance of the topic of the protection of the environment permeating the movie, which also appealed to the viewing public and contributed most particularly to the success of *Whale Rider* in Italy and in the United States is also evaluated.

³⁷ “Among all my kuia, my grandparents, Nani Miro was the one I loved most”

La ragazza delle balene has received mixed reviews since its inception, ranging from the view that it was terrible to that it was excellent. Most of the reviews were short and, on balance, favourable, although cautious. Most showed more appreciation for Caro's movie than had been the case for the earlier cinematographic adaptation of Alan Duff's novel *Once Were Warriors*. The focus was often on the 'eco' aspect of the movie: the review of *La ragazza delle balene* published in *Il Corriere della Sera*, for example, argues that Caro's movie is a "symbol of ecological campaigns" (Grassi),³⁸ whereas Emiliano Morreale, in *Film TV*, is more critical and defines *La ragazza delle balene* as an "ecological fairy tale".³⁹

According to Italian and international film reviewers, the focus of Caro's movie on the relationship between Māori people and the environment contributed significantly to the success of the movie in Canada and in the United States. North American audiences saw their own Native American tribal values reflected in the depiction of the Whangara community in Caro's movie. Moreover, in the United States, the movie was promoted by American actor Robert Redford. Known as one of the most eminent environmentalists in Hollywood, Redford nominated the film for the World Cinema Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival.

Caro's film has thus received much international recognition, winning the People's Choice Award at the Toronto Film Festival and the World Cinema Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival in 2002, to name just a few. Keisha Castle-Hughes was also nominated for Best Actress at the 2002 Academy Awards. Italian reviews suggest that one of the reasons why this film is so memorable is that it depicts a New Zealand indigenous community living in contact with nature. They also argue that the images that most arouse the audience's interest are the ones that glorify the

³⁸ "simbolo delle campagne ecologiste"

³⁹ "favola ecologica"

incomparable landscapes of New Zealand, showing the country as bountiful and Edenic⁴⁰.

Similarly, in “Riding the Whale?: Postcolonialism and Globalization in *Whale Rider*”, post-colonial scholar Chris Prentice argues that *Whale Rider*’s depiction of a ‘lost past’ and of an ‘exotic’ New Zealand, contributes significantly to its appeal for a western audience. The exotic, Prentice maintains, “tends to refer to ideals and values associated with a lost past, and these are sought in ‘Others’ as a compensatory displacement from the present” (260). In other words, the Whangara community is fascinating to a western audience because it represents what contemporary societies have lost, much as the tales of the Great Southern Continent fascinated eighteenth-century readers as lost Edens.

As it is commonly used, the term exotic is usually employed to refer to images of distant places and strikingly unusual habits. The Latin word *exoticus* means foreign or alien and derives from the Greek *exo*, meaning outside. The word exotic thus can signify ‘introduced from abroad’, something remarkable or unusual, originating in a foreign place. French travel writer Victor Ségalen defined the exotic as the shock provoked by the Other or ‘le Divers’. The contemporary Franco-Bulgarian post-structuralist critic and philosopher Tzvetan Todorov also noted the importance of degrees of remoteness—“exoticists cherish the remote because of its remoteness”—thus “the best candidates for the exotic ideal are the peoples and cultures that are the most remote from us” (265).

In geographical terms, the most exotic place for a European is represented by the Pacific. In this sense, for an Italian audience, New Zealand being the most distant

⁴⁰ See Dal Forno, Elena. Rev. of *La ragazza delle balene*. 10 Dec. 2010. Web. <<http://www.film.it/articolo/recensione-la-ragazza-delle-balene/>>; Olivieri, Andrea. Rev. of *La ragazza delle balene*. *Cinemadelsilenzio.it*. January 2011. Web. <<http://www.cinemadelsilenzio.it/index.php?mod=film&id=47>>.

country from Italy, the descriptions of a faraway setting, such as New Zealand, are quintessentially exotic. Therefore, there is a logic to the argument that the success of Caro's movie in Italy is due to the images depicting remote landscapes and a culture (the indigenous peoples of New Zealand) remarkably different from, and almost unknown, to an Italian audience.

Post-colonial studies have argued that the concept of exoticism is predominantly a European construct associated with colonialism and that the widespread use of this term can be traced back to seventeenth-century European explorations of 'strange', foreign places. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said defines the exotic as a kind of aesthetic substitution that "replaces the impress of power with the blandishments of curiosity" (159). Similarly, in *The Postcolonial Exotic*, Graham Huggan argues that exoticism has proved to be an "instrument of imperial power"; thus, "the exotic splendour of newly colonised lands may disguise the brutal circumstances of their gain" (14). Stephen Greenblatt, as well, in his *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, suggests that western subjugation of indigenous people has always been preceded by the evocation of the appeal of their exotic land, as is evident in Columbus's letters, in which "the language of the marvelous is subtly revised [. . .] to function strategically as a redemptive, aestheticizing supplement to a deeply flawed legal ritual of appropriation" (24).

Taking as a starting point post-colonial scholar Kateryna Olijnyk Longley's definition of the term exotic as "a dangerous double-edged sword in the politics of othering" (28), it seems reasonable to suggest that the appeal, for an Italian audience, of a 'marvellous', 'strange', 'exotic' land in *La ragazza delle balene* is due to the influence of western preconceptions regarding indigenous people and land. A deeper analysis of film reviews of *La ragazza delle balene* reveals that the Italian viewers were aware of

the limitations of Caro's movie, to the extent that some reviewers defined it as "a fairy tale" (Massaccesi); "a children's story" (Olivieri)⁴¹ and as "caught up in the superficiality and conformity of so many other commercial movies that only appeal to the under sixteens" (Mortelliti).⁴²

The representation of Māori people in *Whale Rider* raised a controversy regarding the authenticity of the representation of Māori culture in the movie, and Caro has been strongly criticised for her adaptation from novel to script, which, according to many, has been strategically constructed to appeal to a western audience. One could agree with the opinion of some critics that Ihimaera's novel is different from Caro's film. The novel is set in the context of European colonialism and its effects on the characters' lives. In contrast, in Caro's cinematographic adaptation, the focus on the experiences of a 12-year-old girl simplifies the plot, subsuming the historical and cultural background of the novel into a kind of children's story.

One could also share the opinion of Italian film reviewers Elena Dal Forno, Andrea Olivieri and Gianluca Gibilaro that *La ragazza delle balene* is too simplistic and that it "just scratches the surface of crucial contemporary topics".⁴³ The film lacks a political background, whereas the novel includes explicit references to the influence of colonialism in shaping the lives of the Māori community in Whangara. As Prentice pointed out, "the village is represented as a circumscribed, self-contained social space. But what precisely is at stake in the quest for a new leader for the community, what that leadership will involve, what struggles the community faces, and what the 'trouble' is that precipitates the crisis of the whale stranding, is never indicated" (C. Prentice 258).

⁴¹ "una favoletta" (Massaccesi); "una fiaba" (Mortelliti)

⁴² "che rimane invischiato nella sua superficialità e conformità a tanti altri film commerciali appetibili solo per gli under sixteen" (Mortelliti)

⁴³ "lavorando di pialla sulle scabrosità di temi cruciali per il nostro presente"

Māori studies scholar Brendan Hokowhitu aligns with the characterisation of *La ragazza delle balene* as a simplistic movie, which is the view of some Italian film reviewers. He argues that the director of the movie did not take into account the effects of colonisation on the Māori people and, by this omission, “like a colonial painter, Caro rids the backdrop of the colonial reality. . . . She purges Pakeha and other westerners of any responsibility for the oppression of indigenous peoples” (*Understanding* 61). Consequently, for Hokowhitu, the omission of a political backdrop, as well as the concealing of the colonial process in *Whale Rider*, results in a lack of complexity. However, claims Hokowhitu, Caro’s movie would probably not have been so successful internationally had it engendered colonial guilt in a western audience. In her *Deconstructing the Pakeha Gaze: Whale Rider*, post-colonial scholar Tracey Johnson shares Hokowhitu’s opinion about the “colonial amnesia” (115) of *Whale Rider*, arguing that “this text is ahistorical and does not address the consequences of the colonising process and the implications of these omissions” (115).

One could agree with Hokowhitu and Italian film reviewers about the lack of a political background in *La ragazza delle balene* and align with the view of Māori scholar Leonie Pihama that “in discussing Māori portrayals and re-presentations it is necessary to maintain a sense of context” (60–61). However, one could also share the opinions of anthropology scholar G. Thorner and French film studies scholar of Māori descent Deborah Walker that Caro’s approach in adapting Ihimaera’s novel in the film was one that honoured the original material⁴⁴. *Whale Rider* was adapted from a book written by an indigenous author by a non-indigenous director “who strove to preserve the spirit of the text with great respect for and collaboration with the communities they represent” (Thorner 137).

⁴⁴ See Walker, Deborah. “Representing the Self, Representing the Other: Ethics and Ethnicity in the Contemporary Cinema of Aotearoa”. *International Yearbook of Aesthetics* 10 (2006): 99-106.

The fact that the local Māori community has been directly involved in the production of the film demonstrates Caro's respect for the Whangara people. Not only are most of the characters in *Whale Rider* Māori, but many in the Whangara community involved themselves in the film, including the *kaumatua* [respected tribal elder] Hone Taumaunu, who worked as cultural advisor, and a group of Māori women who knitted the traditional Gisborne jersey for the actors' wardrobe. Caro's attention to the local community indicates a commitment of the production to ensure that Māori culture would not be commodified and that New Zealand's indigenous people would be respected. In this sense, the fact that a Pakeha director and a Pakeha crew worked together to produce a movie about a Māori myth did not diminish its value, but rather enriched it and the result has been "a genuine bicultural experience" (Matthews 20).

However, Hokowhitu also criticised the film for its focus on traditional Māori patriarchy, suggesting that this topic contributed to the success of the film in Europe because it represents Māori culture as "not yet liberalised into globally enlightened norms", thus providing "a nostalgic revisit to the pre-enlightenment period" (*Understanding* 56) for a western audience. According to Hokowhitu, Māori patriarchy is a colonial construct used for perpetuating representations of indigenous peoples as savages in need of the enlightenment of western civilisation. Hokowhitu points out that western representations of other cultures as based on male hegemony is a recurrent topic, as in the case of the depiction of oppressed Muslim women in Arab countries. In this sense, the depiction of a supposed indigenous male oppression of women conformed to the colonial discourse and contributed to reinforcing the old image of European men ruled by rationality in contrast to indigenous men ruled by instinct (*Understanding* 56).

According to the definition given by the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, patriarchy is "a social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in

the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line; broadly, control by men of a disproportionately large share of power” (“Patriarchy”). Hokowhitu argues that the supposed traditional Māori patriarchy in *Whale Rider* is a theme strategically used for confirming to a western audience its preconceptions about indigenous cultures. In light of this, Koro’s wish to find a leader from the eldest male line aligns with anthropologists’ definition of ‘primitive societies’ as rigid and fixed in their traditions and ruled by a despotic patriarchy based on genealogy (*Understanding* 56).

That Pai fights against hierarchies and succeeds as leader of the Whangara community implicitly suggests that Māori culture needed to be ‘enlightened’. Consequently, the emphasis put on a supposed Māori patriarchy in *Whale Rider* could be read by a western audience as indicative of a primitive culture that has not yet been civilised, thus contributing to establishing Caro’s representation of Māori culture as authentic rather than fictional, as well as revealing how the perception of indigenous people by western cultures is still filtered through stereotypes.

Hokowhitu accuses Caro of interpreting the role of women in Māori society through the lens of western feminism (*Understanding* 65), an issue that has been raised by Italian film reviewers as well⁴⁵. Similarly, Tania Ka’ai, professor of Māori innovation and development claims that Caro has imposed Eurocentric feminist ideals on a Māori context, implicitly suggesting that there are similarities between western women’s struggle for emancipation and the role of women in Māori society, whereas, according to Ka’ai, leadership in Māori culture is “not at all gender oriented” (5); rather, it is related to the individual’s *whakapapa* and to personal qualities. For this reason, one could agree with Ka’ai and suggest that Caro misinterpreted this particular aspect of

⁴⁵ See Mortelliti, Elena. “Rev. of *La ragazza delle balene*”. *CinemAvvenire* 17 Oct. 2003. Web and Morreale, Emiliano. “Rev. of *La ragazza delle balene*”. *FilmTv* 7 Dec. 2003. Web.

Māori culture because she used “her own set of cultural filters in her role as a director” (5); thus, she was unable to reproduce the peculiar nuances in the film that Ihimaera—being a Māori writer—was able to produce in his novel.

However, one could also question Hokowhitu’s opinion that Caro’s movie reads Māori traditions through the lens of western feminism, considering that Ihimaera’s novel itself depicts Pai’s success in overcoming prejudice in relation to gender roles. The issue of emancipation is evident in a section of the book in which Nanny Flowers replies to Koro Apirana by reminding him that “girls can do anything these days [. . .] Haven’t you heard you’re not allowed to discriminate against women anymore? They should put you in the jailhouse” (79). Similarly, in a previous passage, Nanny Flowers laments the exclusion of Māori women from the *wananga* [a publicly owned tertiary institution providing education for Māori students]: “Ever since the wananga had started, Nanny Flowers had been chucking off at Koro Apirana. While she agreed that the instruction should take place, she couldn’t help feeling affronted about the exclusion of women. ‘Them’s the rules,’ Koro Apirana had told her. ‘I know, but rules are made to be broken,’ she had replied in a huff.” (44)

Setting aside the politically fraught question of the existence and exact nature of a patriarchal organisation of Māori society—a question of more interest to local Māori than to a global audience—and analysing film reviews of *La ragazza delle balene* using the approach of reader-response theory, we could argue that Caro’s movie has been so successful in Italy and in other parts of Europe precisely because it represented New Zealand as an exotic *rêverie* and Māori people as Noble Eco-Savages, thereby meeting western audience’s expectations.

Italian, as well as international film reviewers, argue that the representation of the Whangara community as Noble Eco-Savages in Caro’s movie has been exploited for

marketing purposes by the New Zealand tourism industry. In their reviews of *La ragazza delle balene* published, respectively, in *Ciak* and in *CineFile.biz*, Italian journalists Marco Giovannini and Alberto Cassani suggest that the New Zealand movie *Once Were Warriors* (1994), based on Alan Duff's novel, was a good film but it did not encourage international audiences to visit New Zealand. Instead, prospective tourists were frightened by the representation of violent, intoxicated Māori people. In *La ragazza delle balene*, Giovannini and Cassani maintain, there are references to the dysfunctionality of contemporary Māori communities (in particular, through the character of Rawiri, Koro's second son, who is unemployed, intoxicated and takes drugs), but the movie at times has the effect of a "TV advertisement promoting New Zealand"⁴⁶ (the film received substantial government/public funding) as an idyllic land and, for this reason, it has been a good 'hook' for tourism. Similarly, post-colonial scholar Chris Prentice argues that Caro's movie generated international interest in the beauty of New Zealand's coastal setting and that the panoramic shots of the landscape serve to invite the audience to experience the pleasures and accessibility of New Zealand beaches.

In an interview with Italian newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera*, Keisha Castle-Hughes (who played Pai in *Whale Rider*) herself suggests that Caro's movie "is beautiful like the nature and Māori history documentaries that I love so much"(Grassi),⁴⁷ a theory shared by Giovannini and Cassani, but she also sees the movie as being more than this and carrying very deep meaning. According to Castle-Hughes, the character of Pai contributed to widespread interest in Māori culture in countries in which there was almost no knowledge about New Zealand indigenous people.

⁴⁶ "è come uno spot" (Giovannini); "sembra a tratti uno spot turistico a favore della Nuova Zelanda" (Cassani)

⁴⁷ "è bello come i documentari che tanto amo sulla natura e la storia Māori"

One could share Giovannini, Cassani and Prentice's opinion that Caro's movie has encouraged Italian as well as international audiences to visit New Zealand and that the images of stunning coastal sceneries have been exploited for marketing purposes by the New Zealand tourism industry. There is some evidence of this in the *Whale Rider Tours*, set up in Whangara village (the location of the film and of the novel, as well as Ihimaera's birthplace) after the release of Caro's movie and guided by the cultural advisor of the film, Hone Taumaunu. The film boosted the East Coast, and New Zealand in general, as a potential tourist destination.

As Karena Gaukrodger, marketing executive of Tourism Eastland confirmed, "*Whale Rider* is a hook to get people here" (qtd. in Hammond 12). New Zealand journalist Ian Stuart pointed out that, even before its American release, *Whale Rider* "is being used to help to attract American tourists to New Zealand" (B6) and the then minister of tourism Mark Burton himself, at the preview screening of Caro's movie, in May 2003, argued that the film "proved to be a superb vehicle for promoting New Zealand to this discerning and influential audience" (Coventry 1). Similarly, in *Touring the Screen: Tourism and New Zealand Film Geographies*, film studies scholar Alfio Leotta analysed *Whale Rider* and four other films shot in New Zealand (*The Piano*, *The Last Samurai*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Two Towers*), arguing that all of them have been used as marketing tools for attracting international tourists to the New Zealand film locations. Leotta points out that, since the beginning of the twentieth century, most of the films were "constructed around the stereotype of the 'happy Māoris' who live in a timeless land, spatially separated from the actual New Zealand" (24), a representation that has been used for attracting tourism to New Zealand.

The setting up of *Whale Rider Tours* has raised issues concerning the risk of Māori culture becoming a product for mass consumption. Tourism is one of the most

important elements in the shaping of people's consciousness of other cultures and, in this sense, it can contribute to a better understanding of an indigenous culture. However, tourism can also have a negative influence, in particular, if cultural activities are commodified for global tourist consumption and transformed into experiences that are able to be bought and sold as commodities.

Whale Rider Tours raised issues of authenticity and Hokowhitu pointed out that these tours risked having a negative effect on the Māori communities in Whangara. To carefully monitor the effects of the movie on Māori people in Whangara, the School of Geography and Environmental Science of the University of Auckland undertook research, in 2004, to assess whether the release of Caro's movie has affected New Zealand tourism and to identify whether commodification of Māori culture has occurred. Data collected from the two surveys indicated that the respondents agreed that *Whale Rider* has contributed to the increase of tourism in the Gisborne area (the film location) and 52.5% of them also believed that Caro's movie accurately represented Māori communities in Whangara. This confirms the views of Italian film reviewers, that *La ragazza delle balene* has been a good 'hook' for attracting tourists to New Zealand.

However, the research also demonstrated that the New Zealand tourism industry had not designed a strategy for promoting the film location explicitly, which is evident by the lack of tourist advertising and by the fact that no tourist infrastructures such as gift shops have been built up in Whangara. It could be argued that there is no evidence that Whangara had been transformed in any way into a commodity for tourism's benefit and that the cultural integrity of the Māori communities had been preserved. Consequently, it could be claimed that Caro's movie has had a positive effect on Māori communities in Whangara. In an interview with the *Gisborne Herald* in 2003, then Prime Minister Helen Clark also considered that Māoridom would benefit from the

success of Caro's movie, because the film is based on a novel by a Māori writer and Māori communities on the East Coast were involved in the production.

Local views on the authenticity and/or commodification of the film aside, to comprehend the Italian viewer's relationship with this indigenous film, it is first necessary to explicate western audience expectations regarding representations of indigenous cultures: Italian film reviews of *La ragazza delle balene* can be approached through reader-response theory. According to American literary theorist Stanley Fish, a reader is not an independent agent; rather, the reader brings certain assumptions to a text based on "the interpretive community of which he is a member" (*Is There* 14). As German theorist Hans Robert Jauss argues, a reader's "preconstituted horizon of expectations" (79), which is based on the reader's past experience of literature, orients the reception of a text, its understanding, as well as its appreciation. In this sense, *La ragazza delle balene*, through the depiction of the uncontaminated New Zealand natural environment and of Māori people as Noble Eco-Savages living according to nature, intersected the 'horizons of expectations' of an Italian as well as, more generally, a western audience. European spectators could identify with the traces of their own preconceptions and assumptions about indigenous cultures.

Beyond reception theory, indigenous critics draw frequently on such a theoretical premise to present the double bind of the indigenous writer. Steven Winduo advances the general contention that "the colonised is compromised by the generic expectations, discourses, intertextual and aesthetic frames of the coloniser" (599). From a more militant Aboriginal position, Sonja Kurtzer goes as far as putting the very process of writing for the European mainstream into question:

It becomes a matter of having to speak in terms that ‘white’ audiences recognize as valid, on matters seen as authentic, and in terms that do not threaten. Of concern then is whether such works really meet the desires of Indigenous Australians to tell their own stories from their own perspective (188).

One could agree with Winduo and Kurtzer’s theory that indigenous writers are influenced by the expectations of western readers, and it could be argued that this is also the case of *The Whale Rider*. In fact, Caro’s film was followed by the 2003 release with an international edition of the novel whose changes from the 1987 edition (some words in Māori have been translated into English and a glossary has been inserted to explain their meaning) show Ihimaera’s wish to cultivate his western audience. Ihimaera himself explained in an interview the changes he made for the international edition of *The Whale Rider*, arguing that he wrote the 1987 version for a Māori audience, whereas now he aimed to reach an international audience, a choice that inevitably forced him to limit the use of Māori words in the text as well as to interpret cultural material in order to make it more accessible for western readers, “the majority in power” (Thieme 225).

Maria Tymoczko has argued that post-colonial writers themselves act as translators in writing their fiction, using English (the language of the dominant culture) and adapting their own cultural material to fit into western canons. According to her, this is an inevitable process because “no culture can be represented completely in any literary text just as no source text can be fully represented in any translation” (23).

It could be argued that Ihimaera’s novel *The Whale Rider* is a further example of the way indigenous authors, struggling to write stories from their own perspective, sometimes have to negotiate with marketing strategies associated with globalisation.

Such negotiations occur in the film industry, as well. In this sense, one could share Prentice's definition of Caro's movie as a post-colonial cultural work that "rides the whale' of globalization" (C. Prentice 250), something that is evident in the influence of *Apollo Media*, the German co-production company, on the adaptation of the novel: the character of Ana, Porourangi's girlfriend, is Māori in Ihimaera's novel, whereas in the film she is German and has a European name, Anna. The fact that Germany is New Zealand's second biggest European tourism market after Britain could have influenced this change in the name and ethnicity of the character of Ana.

However, although the adaptation from novel to script has been strategically written to appeal to a western audience, one could agree with Ihimaera's definition of Caro's movie as a Māori film, because it "comes from a specific, regional myth. It deals with a specific people who are in a specific location, in such a way that it can only be a Whangara film" (qtd. in Matthews 23).

Māori film-maker Barry Barclay argues that a Māori film is "a film made by Māori and set in the Māori community" (16). Considering that Ihimaera himself and the Māori community in Whangara were involved in the production, *Whale Rider* might well be considered a Māori film. However, in other Māori films, such as *Ngati* or *Mauri*, there is a representation of the consequences of the process of colonisation on Māori people's lives, while *Whale Rider* is a largely decontextualised representation of Māori culture. Moreover, in *Ngati* there are some shots of the New Zealand landscape, but the focus is on narrating the political situation. In *Whale Rider*, in contrast, the camera indulges in scenic shots and this over-representation of the New Zealand landscape might suggest a marketing strategy that aims to attract potential tourists to the film locations. In this sense, Caro's film encourages what film studies scholar Martin

Lefebvre defined as a “spectacular mode of spectatorship” (XIX), in contrast to the narrative mode.

The categorising of *Whale Rider* as a Māori film has been questioned by Hokowhitu, who argued that its focus on an indigenous subject does not imply that it is an indigenous movie and does not guarantee a “subaltern voice” (*Understanding* 53). Similar criticism regarding questionable representations of Māori people by Pakeha film-makers was raised in relation to New Zealand director Jane Campion, whose film *The Piano* (1993) has been seen in certain intellectual and academic circles as misrepresenting Māori culture (in particular, the scene representing an audience of Māori characters attending a play and misunderstanding a fictional murder for reality) and perpetuating the stereotype of New Zealand indigenous people as Noble Savages. Māori scholar Leonie Pihama, for example, pointed out that Māori characters in *The Piano* “play ‘nature’ to the white characters[’] culture” (Pihama 268).

As we noted earlier, when *La ragazza delle balene* was released, Italian film reviewers raised similar issues regarding the representation of the Māori community in Whangara as Noble Eco-Savages. Ihimaera’s novel is divided in sections named after the seasons, whereas in Caro’s movie seasons are omitted, and “the weather and scenery are consistently wonderful” (Rauwerda 2), which reinforces the representation of the Whangara community as frozen in time. In this sense, one could share Hokowhitu’s opinion that Caro lacked the depth and complexity of knowledge of Māori culture epistemological system. However, it could be argued that what Walker’s point regarding *The Piano*—that Campion “as Pakeha film-maker representing Māori, for her critics, could never Do the Right Thing” (101)—is valid for Caro’s movie as well.

Chapter Three of this thesis illustrated the educational potential of Ihimaera’s fiction in respect to environmental responsibility and it also analysed echoes of the idea

of the Noble Eco-Savage in the novel *The Whale Rider*, especially through the character of Koro Apirana, chief of a Māori tribe in Whangara, who teaches a group of students to fish only what they need, carefully avoiding overexploiting natural resources. The purpose of this final section of our analysis of the impact of western literary myth on the Italian reception of Ihimaera's work is rather to demonstrate how the appropriation of the figure of the Noble Eco-Savage permeates not only Ihimaera's novel, but also the cinematographic version. For Elena Dal Forno, Andrea Olivieri and Massaccesi, Caro's movie represents "an ancestral way of living"⁴⁸—an innocence that has been lost in contemporary societies—and the movie shows that, "despite progress and globalisation, some communities still carry on living according to the principles of their ancestors."⁴⁹

Ihimaera's and Caro's appropriations and reworkings of the literary myth of the Noble Eco-Savage nonetheless differ in a number of ways. In the novel, Ihimaera engages with Māori respect for the land and the book embodies the Māori spiritual relationship with nature; thus, the environment is viewed not only as a source of sustenance but also as a tribal identification and a spiritual living presence. It represents the presence of the ancestors. The 'eco' aspect of the novel is deeply entwined with New Zealand colonial history; it is also integrated with representations of Māori resistance to the dispossession of lands. The story encapsulates the consequences of the British colonisation of New Zealand and it represents the Māori people's resistance to imperialist modes of dominance, including the appropriation and exploitation of indigenous land⁵⁰.

In Caro's film, the imprint of the western literary myth of the Noble Eco-Savage is evident in the representation of Māori characters saving a pod of beached whales, a

⁴⁸ "un modo di vita ancestrale" (Olivieri)

⁴⁹ "malgrado il progresso e la globalizzazione, alcune comunità ancora seguitano a vivere seguendo criteri ancestrali" (Massaccesi)

⁵⁰ See Ihimaera, Witi. *The Whale Rider*. Auckland: Reed, 2007. pp. 52-53-61-68-69.

scene that symbolises the putative deep spiritual interconnection between Māori people and the natural world, but the lack of references to colonisation simplifies the plot. In this way, the film provides insight into the role of New Zealand indigenous tribes in environmental protection and in using natural resources within sustainable limits, but it does not consider the complex interplay of political issues with environmental issues.

For this reason, one could share Hokowhitu's opinion that Caro simplified Māori culture and represented it in a way that is more easily accessible to a western audience, a strategy that aligns with the market logic of the film industry, which privileges the western perspective. One could also agree with Hokowhitu that the success of Caro's movie in Europe is "due to the film enabling the global audience to comfortably transform into cultural anthropologists for two hours, to view societies apparently less civilized than their own" (*Understanding* 54).

The isolation of the Māori community represented in *La ragazza delle balene* contributes to conveying the idea of a culture apparently far from globalisation (even though there is a German character in the film and overseas travel is built into the plot), evoking forms of Māori life resembling a kind of Arcadian primitivism, thus evoking or echoing theories of the Noble Eco-Savage as proposed by French philosophers and novelists of the eighteenth century. In this sense, the critical reading of Caro's film by Hokowhitu, who argued that the location itself of *Whale Rider*, Whangara, undertook a kind of 'disneyfication', becoming "a primitive fantasyland, consciously or inadvertently created by director Caro to avoid the colonial reality" (*Understanding* 57), might have some foundation. Whangara assumes many of the Disneyland characteristics—a frozen, childlike world. The isolation of the Māori community in Whangara and the numerous shots of the beautiful New Zealand landscape contribute,

continues Hokowhitu, to create what French philosopher and social theorist Jean Baudrillard called a 'simulacrum' (a Latin word that means *likeness*).

In his *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard argues that television, movies, computer games and other media influence our perception of the world, preventing us from distinguishing between reality and fiction. Cinema, in particular, according to Baudrillard, "in its current efforts is getting closer and closer, and with greater and greater perfection, to the absolute real, in its banality, its veracity, in its naked obviousness, in its boredom, and at the same time in its presumption, in its pretension to being the real, the immediate" (46). In this sense, a *simulacrum* is not simply a simulation of the reality; rather, it is the reality itself, created through media, which manipulates images, persuading the audience that what they see is real.

Baudrillard coined the term 'hyperreal' (1) for referring to the realm in which we currently live. According to Stuart, contemporary society is experiencing "the loss of the real, where distinctions between surface and depth, the real and the imaginary no longer exist. The world of the hyperreal is where image and reality implode" (qtd. in S. Stuart 21). Baudrillard uses Disneyland as an example of a *simulacrum* that has the power to create, in our mind, the so-called *hyperreal*, showing an artificial world that replaces the real world. For this reason, considering to what extent media are able to affect our perception of reality, Hokowhitu argues that *Whale Rider* is not merely a movie that represents a fictional New Zealand indigenous community; rather, it "has the power to socially construct Māori cultural reality" (*Understanding* 58) on the model of Disneyworld.

Hokowhitu argued that a film such as *Whale Rider* could be interpreted by a western audience as the representation of the real Māori *iwi* of Whangara, the Ngati Kanohi, and that the nostalgic depiction of Māori people as living in a not yet civilised

primitive age risks perpetuating the notion of a supposed superiority of western culture. However, this study of the reception of the film *La ragazza delle balene* in Italy demonstrates how the Italian audience (which can be considered part of the western audience addressed by Caro) was aware of the limitations of Caro's film, to the extent that Italian film reviewers themselves pointed out that it "just scratches the surface in dealing with contemporary crucial topics" (Gibilaro), such as indigenous environmental responsibility. For many, the resulting depiction is too simplistic, because it is too much of a fairy tale. A fairy tale, however, is not necessarily a simulacrum, presenting itself as reality.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has analysed the appropriation and reworking of the western figure of the Noble/Ignoble Savage and of the Eco-Savage in a selection of works by Witi Ihimaera, to show how the Māori writer's use of the trope serves different, political and successive purposes. In his early fiction, Ihimaera takes up the myth of the Eco-Savage in a positive fashion, notably in his so-called Waituhi novels and short stories, which evoke forms of Māori life resembling Arcadian primitivism. This early fiction shows Māori people's spiritual relationship with the natural environment and, at the same time, carries a didactic message of the need for environmental responsibility.

An analysis of the reworking of the figure of the Eco-Savage in Ihimaera's early fiction shows the political and educational potential of Māori fiction with respect to environmental responsibility presented as traditional Māori teaching. More generally, it points to the way in which literature can play an important role in stimulating awareness in readers' attitudes towards the contemporary environment.

The use Ihimaera makes of the myth of the Eco-Savage goes beyond a mere appropriation. A close reading of his works reveals how the 'eco' aspect of his fiction is deeply entwined with New Zealand colonial history and, at the same time, integrated with representations of Māori resistance to the dispossession of their lands. In this sense, Ihimaera's works can be considered political, exemplars of the intersections between post-colonial and environmental texts, and the study of these works can be situated within the two apparently independent disciplines, whose boundaries have recently been crossed by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in their *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*.

Analysis of the range of literary responses to, uses of and rewritings of the western trope of the Noble/Ignoble Savage, as well as the particular stereotypes with which Ihimaera chooses to engage, reveals that his work is not merely a writing back in the sense of seeking to unmask naturalised benevolent and/or malevolent stereotypes of indigenous peoples; rather, Ihimaera uses the myth idiosyncratically, as an agent of transformation of mentalities. This is evident in his two 'gay' novels, *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (1996) and *The Uncle's Story* (2000), in which the character of the Noble Savage is used by the author both as a 'coming-out' narrative and, more generally, to 'decolonise' Pacific sexuality within and outside his own community, in particular, in relation to homosexuality. In both novels, Ihimaera uses the figure of the Noble Savage to address directly the stereotype of the exotic Pacific man exemplified in Gauguin's paintings and to challenge the assumptions that have been made about the sexual conduct of Pacific people by western ethnographic, literary and artistic works about the South Seas.

By including attractive Pacific indigenous male characters as the object of desire in *Nights* and in *The Uncle's Story*, however, Ihimaera is not simply writing back critically to western literary images but selecting among and appropriating these for his own more complex purposes. These include reclaiming the earliest, classically inspired European images of Māori virile masculinity for New Zealand Māori fiction, reconsidering the more positive and indeed gentler aspects of the Noble Savage (see Appendix) while, at the same time, rejecting a long tradition of western narratives, including those containing representations of ferocious Polynesian male characters, the Ignoble Savage. In this sense, it could be argued that the character of the Noble Savage is an agent of change, establishing, somewhat perversely, the more marginalised

indigenous male figures of Oceania as attractive protagonists of literary works and movies alongside the wahine.

In conclusion, the Noble Savage as complex socio-political “counter-myth” continues “to have currency into the present, where it serves writers of both European and indigenous tradition” (Ramsay *Cultural* 12). The discourses of the colonial Noble Savage are rewritten or reversed to influence the “textual self-assertion and cultural reconstruction” (Ramsay *Nights* 3) of contemporary indigenous fiction. In this sense, Ihimaera’s Post-colonial Noble Savage which attempts to critique this western figure but also to use it to reconstruct and value Māori identity and tradition is both exemplary and particular.

English studies scholar Alistair Fox argues that Ihimaera’s fiction exemplifies the paradigm of current post-colonial theorisations of cultural hybridity and, in particular, of what he defines as “intentional hybridity” (275). Following Fox’s theory, it could be argued that Ihimaera’s Post-colonial Noble Savage, too, is a particular instance of intentional cultural hybridity, a figure which “inhabits the rim of an ‘in-between’ reality” (Bhabha 13), a hybrid character mingling elements of both indigenous and European culture.

As we have seen in Chapter Five of this thesis, the ‘in-between reality’ of Witi Ihimaera’s fiction has been demonstrated by the reception of Ihimaera’s work produced in Italian contexts, notably the readings of his images of the Noble Eco-Savage. In particular, the examination of the interpretations by Italian film reviewers and audiences of Caro’s internationally successful movie adaptation of *Whale Rider*, reveals how Italian audiences situate the representation of a Māori community as inhabiting an ‘in-between reality’, half real and half fairy-tale. In this sense, one could argue that the

depiction of the Whangara community as Noble Eco-Savages in *Whale Rider*, is intentionally hybrid, a construction produced by Ihimaera for his own political purposes.

Ihimaera's and Caro's appropriations and reworkings of the literary myth of the Eco-Savage nonetheless differ in many ways. In-betweenness takes different forms. In the novel, Ihimaera engages with Māori respect for the land and the book embodies the Māori spiritual relationship with nature; thus, the environment is viewed not only as a source of sustenance but also as a tribal identification and a spiritual living presence. It represents the presence of the ancestors. The 'eco' aspect of the novel is deeply entwined with New Zealand colonial history; it is also integrated with representations of Māori resistance to the dispossession of lands. The story encapsulates the consequences of the British colonisation of New Zealand and it represents the Māori people's resistance to imperialist modes of dominance, including the appropriation and exploitation of indigenous land.

In Caro's film, the imprint of the western literary myth of the Eco-Savage is evident in the representation of Māori characters saving a pod of beached whales, a scene that symbolises the deep spiritual interconnection between Māori people and the natural world, but the lack of references to colonisation simplifies the plot. In this way, the film provides insight into the role of New Zealand indigenous tribes in environmental protection and in using natural resources within sustainable limits, but it does not consider the complex interplay of political issues with environmental issues. It is in this sense that the Whangara community in the film *Whale Rider* inhabits an 'in-between reality', becoming, as argued by Hokowhitu, and a number of the Italian critics, a "primitive fantasyland" (*Understanding* 57).

This thesis has argued that Ihimaera's Noble Savage is a Post-colonial Noble Savage, in the sense that it represents the reaction of an indigenous writer to the colonial

Noble Savage, thus to the discourses of colonisation in general. Ihimaera's Noble Savage interacts with the traditional colonial discourse by attempting to show its contradictions and complexities, and to rewrite the character of the Noble Savage from indigenous perspectives.

This sustained study in depth of the appropriation of, and variations on, the trope of the Noble/Ignoble Savage in Witi Ihimaera's fiction has sought to deepen our understanding of the complexity of the effects of European-Māori cultural contacts. In researching the different occurrences of literary response to, uses of, or rewriting of this western myth and the particular stereotypes to which Ihimaera chooses to write back, this thesis casts further light on Māori writers' struggle to create counter-narratives that subvert the literary representation of Māori by inverting their role, as argued by Della Valle and by Ihimaera himself, from passive objects of outsider perspective to becoming agents of self-representation. In its analysis of a single but central trope, this thesis may have opened up new perspectives for future research on Ihimaera's fiction and, more generally, on Pacific fiction, encouraging further work by scholars in analysing the nature and the political and cultural effects of indigenous responses to the figure of the Noble/Ignoble Savage.

APPENDIX:
WITI IHIMAERA INTERVIEWED BY VALENTINA NAPOLI
AUCKLAND, 20 MAY 2010

VN: Hello, Professor Ihimaera. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Many of the questions I would like to ask you concern my PhD thesis. My research project analyses ways in which Ihimaera's fiction constitutes a distinctive New Zealand indigenous response to the western literary myth of the Noble Savage. How do you think Māori people have been represented in western literary and ethnographic works and in what ways are you writing back to this western theory?

WI: Well, kia ora, Valentina. It is very nice to see a former student of mine coming to interview me on such an important topic for your PhD thesis. I think it is a wonderful subject for consideration. Of course, you know, the Noble Savage is only one of many of the representations that Māori have been seen through in terms of the European gaze on the Other or the exotic or the Oriental. So that we have had the Noble Savage as one of those tropes. And, possibly, it's the one which is the most benign rather than malign, of all of those frameworks through which Māori have been seen. So, for that reason, I am thankful that, you know, it is not an image of Māori which demonises Māori. This is one which at least affirms them but within the Rousseauian and the Age of Enlightenment theories. I think that Māori people, the way in which we have always wanted to be pictorialised, is as real people, indigenous people, people who shouldn't be marginalised, people for whom our culture is the central *ethos* and aesthetic of all of our lives and so what Māori literature has endeavoured to do is to overturn all of those frameworks that were there previously through which the primary gaze was seen and

create for the world our own way of seeing ourselves. So, basically, that is an inversion of the representations, like the Noble Savage, in the sense that it is an inward gaze looking out at the world and it is an inward gaze from a Māori perspective looking at the world rather than a European gaze looking at Māori. So, instead of being an observation from the outside, which is of course what is implicit in all of these frameworks, it is a point of view which is from the inside. So it is the insider perspective and when we get people operating in that way, and when you get to occur in the 1970s, particularly, a number of people beginning to create a mass behind that and then you get a literature of resistance, you get a literature of renaissance, you get a literature of revolution and all of those aspects we can see in modern Māori literature and 'writing back' is the best term to use for that.

VN: How do you personally define this concept, the concept of writing back?

WI: I personally define the concept of writing back as an act of sovereignty. We call that tinorangatiratanga. It's an attempt to reclaim formally all of those aspirations and ideals that were enunciated in the Treaty of Waitangi of 1840 and, for me, the whole issue of Māori literature is a Treaty of Waitangi issue. So, in my own work, this is reflected, for instance, not always exclusively in the same way, because when I first began to write, my work was enclosed within the frame of a colonial New Zealand literature and my first works, *Pounamu Pounamu*, *Tangi* and *Whanau*, were integrated within the pastoral tradition of New Zealand literature, and that position was forced on me because Māori literature was such a new thing and there wasn't a Māori audience, so most Māori work were actually published by Pakeha presses for a Pakeha audience. Then I stopped writing for ten years and I came back with *The Matriarch* and that I

think was really the first, my first attempt at writing something which was much more resistant to New Zealand literature.

VN: And to the European models.

WI: Yes, yes. But it's a complex book, *The Matriarch*, because what I was attempting to do with that was to show, with the relationship to the Italian material in it, that, in fact, the struggle for sovereignty could be paralleled with the Risorgimento in Italy. I then followed that up with a number of other works and, interestingly, in my career, my work has moved from a position of accommodation to a position of sovereignty, where I tried to establish a more consistent political voice within the aesthetic of Māori and New Zealand literature and I have always . . . I have a little formula and the formula is: aesthetics + politics = the New Zealand story; aesthetics + the politics of difference = the Māori story. So, throughout my career, I have been attempting to find the place from which to write the Māori story without any accommodations and I think I have found that.

VN: In *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and in *The Uncle's Story*, you give the name The Noble Savage to describe a model ideal Māori character. Why this choice?

WI: It's interesting that I only use that character in two books, which are basically about homosexuality and Māori. Both of those books are an attempt to create for New Zealand a different way of looking at sexuality and identity. *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* is an attempt to develop a framework for the New Zealand homosexual. *The Uncle's Story* is an attempt to create the framework for the Māori homosexual. The

Noble Savage . . . because in the pictures that I have seen of the Noble Savage, the Noble Savage always seems to me an idealised but also a feminised Polynesian character, who is not only noble in terms of his bearing but also in terms of his attractiveness. So, it was appropriate for me to use that as the idealised way in which the Noble Savage was seen and then place it within two books about gay relationships where the same physicality and the same characteristics of attractiveness form very, very much a part of the gay culture's signification of desire and of beauty.

VN: So maybe it is a way to dismantle categories of Māoriness and of this depiction of Māori people, and in general, of indigenous people, through stereotypical terms.

WI: Yes, yes, yes. I never used that term in any other of my books. I only used it in terms of masculinity and desire. So I am using the term in a very special way. I don't believe that this term exists in any of my books because I have tried not to make comparisons between the Noble Savage imagery and the imagery for Māori men, which is much more masculine and therefore implicitly is rejected. So, in my other works, the Noble Savage imagery is totally rejected, only in these two books is it affirmed, but for a very special reason.

VN: In *Whale Rider* and *The Seahorse and the Reef* I found echoes of the idea of the Eco-Savage and of the exemplary way of living of indigenous societies. How would you describe the deep spiritual interconnection between Māori people and the natural world?

WI: Well, I am very pleased that you bring this up because throughout my whole oeuvre there have always been two other themes: my primary themes are to do with leadership, with succession, with the role of women within Māori society and also . . . then the two that I am referring to, which have really important echoes of the Eco-Savage, are the role of Māori with the environment and the second is the imperilled state of the world with respect to climate change. So, all of my work has those as primary. *Whale Rider*, of course, is really about a young girl who is attempting to succeed to leadership, but to actually do that, she has to convince the tribe that she is the one.

VN: And she is a woman.

WI: And she is also a woman, yes. But in the book, it requires a supernatural event, and that is of the whale, that is now over a thousand years old, to come to Whangara, the whale, the very same whale that her progenitor Paikea rode, to come back, so that she can ride it again. So, that really is, if you like, that deep spiritual interconnection between Māori and the natural world, is really reflected, very strongly, in *The Whale Rider*. And there is a particular scene in *The Whale Rider*, the novel, where Koro asks all of the people to the meeting house, and in the meeting house there is a very, very important discussion: Is that whale real or unreal? Does it come from the real world or does it come from the unreal world? Why has it come? And then his response, when they are not sure about the answers, is to say: “It belongs to both, it belongs to the real world and to the unreal world, it belongs . . . it is both real and unreal, but the reason why it has come is to reinforce to us that we have an interconnection with the natural world”. So, that interconnection with the natural world is very, very important in *The*

Whale Rider and that interconnection also with the spiritual world is very important to *The Whale Rider*, as well as all of my work. In *The Matriarch*, for instance, the Matriarch's *kaitiaki* is a spider, so she is able to call on the natural world and on the spider for support, whenever she requires it. But, also, the battle that she wages against the Pakeha is not just a battle against the Pakeha to save the human world, but also to save the natural world and so her allies in that are the spiders. So, it is very important really to remember that, you know, my work has got this interconnection and is not . . . and so all the various worlds that all of my characters traverse (Pai in *The Whale Rider*, the boy, Tamatea, in *The Dream Swimmer*, the Matriarch in *The Matriarch*, the characters in *Sky Dancer*), they are all traversing not just a human world but a spiritual world and the natural world and all are in partnership. In *Sky Dancer*, for instance, which I think is probably one of my most eclectic works, the young girl, Skylark, she has to negotiate between the past and the present, she has to negotiate between myth and reality, she has to negotiate between the gods, she has to negotiate with the gods to enable her to solve the peril that the past is in, so that the future can take place. Even in a book like *Whanau II*, the old woman who is Miro Manunui, who is the woman, the *kuia*, who is in charge of the village, has got second sight and she is able to see between the living and the dead and she communes with the dead and she is always used to heal those people, who have done wrong and thereby upset the balance between the spiritual world and the real world. So, it's a very, very important question because, I think, if you ask all Māori, they would say that there is no difference between the human world and the natural world. We inhabit both; we are always saying *kia ora* to the sun, and keen for blessings from Tamatea or from Tanenuiarangi, from the Māori gods, because we believe in that. So, it's a holistic approach.

VN: What is the impact of western culture/models on Māori literature and which are the functions of the appropriation and reworking of European myths such as the Noble Savage, or an idealised rural community existence, in Māori writing?

WI: OK, so I will answer the first one first, the impact of western culture and models on Māori literature. I have written a short story called “Meeting Elizabeth Costello”, which I would refer you to, because it is my best statement on those impacts, which at their worst have been punitive, at their worst have been malignant, and at their worst have been models which not only demonise but also attempt to cause the death of Māori philosophy, Māori language, the Māori canon, the opportunity for Māori to view things from . . .

VN: Their own perspective.

WI: Yes, from their own position. So, that is the worst impact, that is the most lethal impact. And so the short story “Meeting Elizabeth Costello” suggests some antidotes or antivenom for this kind of poisonous approach to the assumptions that people have had about Māori and Māori tradition and Māori culture. The functions of the appropriation and reworking of European myths such as the Noble Savage . . . As I said, the Noble Savage is probably the most benign of all of those critical representations of Māori, but it is still an important one for us to address, because, although it is the opposite to the malign frameworks or constructions, it reinforces the stereotype that we are the same, by for instance, the bleaching of the skin of the idealised Noble Savage characters by only seeing them as maybe within frameworks which are not hostile to European

thought, but which are amenable to European thought, which looked at us as actually belonging in a same way to the kind of Graeco-Roman kind of pastoral tradition.

VN: Yes, I noticed that the early representations of Māori by French explorers share similarities with Greek models, so they cannot be considered representative of real Māori men.

WI: That's right.

VN: So it seems like they tried to describe Māori people not in an objective way but through a kind of kaleidoscope.

WI: That's right. So, the literary equivalent of that would be a book like *Typee* by Herman Melville, a novel about a traveller who goes to Tahiti and who meets up with a savage cannibal tribe. What is ironic is that the tribe is described in the same terms as the natives, and the main character of the young woman, Fayaway, has got blue eyes. So, yes, in this novel you can find a very, very interesting description, almost like the Noble Savage representations of savages with blue eyes and having features like the European ones. So, as I said, the danger about the Noble Savage is that it is like a superimposition of Māori and Polynesians into this particular framework, which then denies Māori or those who have been represented in this way. It's almost as if someone has decided to make a photocopy and put it over, but also to represent those people as being very European looking. So, there's a bleaching effect, not just in terms of the personality but in terms of . . . it's another form of invisibilisation.

VN: And sometimes indigenous women have been represented like objects of desire.

WI: Yes.

VN: Tahitian women, in particular, have been represented as a kind of Eve, as sexually appealing and the object of desire of European men. This is evident in Bougainville's accounts as well as in the character of Fayaway in Melville's novel *Typee*.

WI: Yes, yes. What is interesting about what you are saying is that most of the Noble Savage representations do have to do with French Polynesia, you know, and with more accessible Polynesian people, and Māori as a people, we are not subject to a similar sort of representation. Mainly, because I think we have been seen as too savage to be able to be classified in that same way. So that's very, very interesting thing for you to think about is that when we refer to the Noble Savage imagery, it was instituted in New Zealand later than in Tahiti, you know, the pastoral depiction of Polynesia by European painters.

VN: Gauguin.

WI: Yes, but Gauguin never did his work in New Zealand though.

VN: Yes, but however, I noticed a kind of universalisation of this trope. For example, I compared some descriptions of Native Americans and they can be applied to the New Zealand context as well. I mean, the way in which indigenous people have been represented is the same, although the context is completely different. So, the historical

and geographical contexts are different, but the stereotypical way in which indigenous people have been represented, I think it's exactly the same.

WI: It is exactly the same, but I think that, I would argue that the image that most people saw for Māori was not through . . . was through the Noble Savage, but we, I think that we have been seen as 'savage noble' if I can turn it around and you can see that . . . And so the emphasis is on the 'savage' and so you can see that in the paintings, for instance, of Goldie and other painters who attempted to do the Noble Savage, and they did do that, but those characters within safe settings, you know, where there were very few examples of conflict. So, it would be interesting for you to work out the balance, but I think you are right, I think that there is a universalisation of the Noble Savage imagery and, of course, the idealised rural community is that, yes, I mean, that was always interesting to me that the historical rural community was always like, in many ways, the same Noble Savage setting with big forests painted in bright green rather than the dark green of New Zealand and with canoes on the shores. So, may we go back to my point? I did say that I was in contention, but now I think I was wrong and I think you are right and I am wrong. I think that the idea that the Noble Savage was imposed on the Māori and that would form a really interesting sub-gaze of the Noble Savage gaze . . . I would be interested, for instance, if you took representations of the Noble Savage as Gauguin saw them and other French people earlier than him saw them, and maybe show what the progression was like and what Māori look like in them. That might be interesting for you to do and even Indian, you know, and that would probably prove your case and disprove mine

VN: How would you define yourself, a Māori writer? A post-colonial author? Both? In what order?

WI: I am a Māori writer because most of my work is for a Māori audience first and then a New Zealand audience. So, that's my intimate frame of reference and my tribal frame of reference. And my intertribal frame of reference. I am, however, by virtue of the fact that I am part of an indigenous minority, also a post-colonial author, but I would place that second, in terms of the way that I see my role and my importance. It is more important for my work to be read and have an impact in New Zealand than it is everywhere else. So, therefore, the *kaupapa* or the purpose of my work is primarily for a New Zealand audience.

VN: Last year I read articles in newspapers about the supposed plagiarism controversy regarding your latest novel, *The Trowenna Sea*. Do you think that the fact that you are a Māori writer and the novel raises Treaty of Waitangi issues influenced in a certain way the perspective through which you have been judged?

WI: Yes, I do. I absolutely do. It comes as no surprise to me that the . . . At the time, there was another Māori who was being splashed all over the newspapers and that was Hone Harawira, the parliamentarian. There was also a historian.

VN: And maybe this is not a coincidence.

WI: No, no. There was also a Māori historian, Dr Danny Keenan, from the Victoria University of Wellington, who was also faced with the same plagiarism accusation as I

was and he was fired from the Victoria University of Wellington. In subsequent discussion with Māori academics, we were astounded to see the number of Māori academics whose careers had been critiqued and whose career have been absolutely affected by institutional racism and, among those are, for instance, Dr Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, whose career of confrontation meant that she left the University of Auckland and was marginalised for quite some time, before coming back into academia, and she is now working at the University of Waikato. Another example was Professor Tanea Kahai. She is a professor at AUT [the Auckland University of Technology] whose career as the head of Māori Studies in Dunedin was curtailed because of issues involving her politics and her confrontation and so, based on that, she moved to Auckland and she is teaching out of AUT. I am sure that these people won't mind my mentioning them. I think that what's important here is that the plagiarism that I apologised for was unintended, inadvertent and as soon as I heard about it, I apologised. Despite the apology . . .

VN: Yes, I noticed that . . .

WI: Wouldn't stop, no. So, my apology was not accepted by the news media.

VN: And maybe it was used purposely against you.

WI: Oh yes, yes.

VN: As an indigenous writer.

WI: Yes, most of the newspapers made a great to do about the fact that I was an award-winning Māori author, that I was the author of *Whale Rider*, that I was getting at the same time an award from the New Zealand Arts Foundation, that I was a member of the University of Auckland, so all of those . . . Well, it was a very negative attitude towards me. I don't mind the negative, the negative nature of it, because, you know, but what I do mind was the scale of the attack, based on the very minimum amount of the plagiarism. The University of Auckland, you may have that statement, put out a statement to say that we were talking about only 0.6 per cent of the entire word count and that statement I think you will be able to find it somewhere.

VN: Yes, I read the vice chancellor's statement on the university's website.

WI: Yes, but you would think that the entire book, from the scale of the attack, has been plagiarised, whereas it was only, as I said, 0.6. Well, subsequently, I have done a further investigation, it's around about 0.8, 0.9 of all the book. We tried, my publisher and I, and others tried to turn the media off, but the New Zealand media has actually got a reputation for being like savage dogs, you know.

VN: Yes, you are right.

WI: And people hate New Zealand media for this, you know. New Zealand media is one of the most savage in the world and it is, but, I think what was also in there was the fact that they . . . I felt that my moral integrity and my ethical position was totally misrepresented and inaccurately misrepresented and unfairly misrepresented, especially since I am one of the very few writers that I know of in the world who bought back the

remaining copies of the book. If you look anywhere else, most writers don't do that, but I felt that I had to do that. I announced clearly that there will be a second edition in which all of these issues would be addressed.

VN: But this was not enough.

WI: No, no. Other authors involved with plagiarism, they don't do that. So, in all cases, whenever other journals were asking me, you know, why did I do that and I have said, well, I have apologised for it and this is what I am doing. But they wanted to keep on making me apologise. So, after a while I refused. I said I have already apologised about a hundred times. I have, you know. This is over as far as I am concerned. Now wait for the new edition and you will see, in fact, that the rewriting is extremely small. There's an interesting issue here too, though, because five of the maybe 16 incidents that were referred to, well, first of all, most of the incidents were out of copyright. That's the first. Second is that five of them have to do with the Treaty of Waitangi and they were a Mr Colenso's account of what happened on that day, and I am not arguing for myself, but his are the only accounts, personal accounts of . . . they are not the only personal account but they are the main personal accounts of what happened at Waitangi on the day of the Treaty. When we talked about the gains, although I feel . . . although I acknowledge that I did wrong, in many ways the other question is: he was looking at Māori, he was saying this with the words that they said. Copyright issues today obviously have discounted me as a Māori using these words said by Hone Heke and reported by Colenso in *The Trowenna Sea*. So, for me there is a huge problem if I am unable to use the words uttered on Waitangi Day or to use the descriptions, which are the only ones that Māori have got access to. Do they really belong to Colenso?

VN: And I think that the content itself of your book maybe has been used to attack you. I mean the fact that it raises Treaty of Waitangi issues may have contributed to the widespread of the plagiarism controversy.

WI: The only, or the main, magazine or newspaper that actually pursued this matter was *The New Zealand Listener*, and for a period of six weeks, they really did provide a very antagonist approach on the whole issue by reproducing the words in a way that really made it look bigger than it was. Subsequent to that, it is interesting to me that I never appear in *The New Zealand Listener*. They don't even think, they don't even talk about me. In *The Books of the Year*, *The Trowenna Sea* is never mentioned. So, you know, I sometimes just wonder what was the agenda of that particular New Zealand magazine. What is being really helpful is knowing actually is that the book is a fine book, is the number of . . . I only got two personal negative e-mails. The rest were all positives. And so that's two from around a hundred and twenty e-mails that I received from people, some of them I never even knew, some of them are from Hawaii, a couple from France, three from the UK all asking. "But what is happening down in New Zealand? Why is this happening to you?"

VN: Yes, I talked about it with Professor Marinella Rocca Longo, distinguished scholar of New Zealand literature at the University of Rome, and she was very sorry for you. She really couldn't believe this was happening to you.

WI: But I think that you have to dig deeper and just see what was motivating some of the news media responses. And some of those news media responses, especially those

of the colonists, were really motivated by race and antagonistic attitudes towards Māori. So, as I said, there was Hone Harawira, there was myself, Danny Keegan, and there were a number of others, you know, who were in the focus. I am not going to point a finger at others, but it always seems ironic to me that Māori authors, whenever we seem to do something in error, it seems to me that, you know, there is much, much more of that punitive reaction than with Pakeha writers. Though I have to say that there is a current controversy to do with C. K. Stead.

I think also that my success is a problem for many New Zealanders, especially those who don't like the critical nature of my analysis work regarding Māori-Pakeha relationships. But the interesting thing is that *Pounamu Pounamu*, it went platinum, which is a huge achievement for a collection of short stories, two years ago, and I think it must be the greatest selling book of short stories in New Zealand, even more than Katherine Mansfield. So, I feel that there is a popular . . . Oh, and *Whale Rider* must now in New Zealand be up to 250,000 copies, which is a lot for a New Zealand novel. So I know that there is a public and popular opinion, otherwise, you know, my books wouldn't sell so well. But I tried to do everything right and no matter how much I tried to do it, I couldn't stop it, so it had to run its course.

VN: Why did you decide to revise your early fiction after 30 years? What do you think was missing in your first five novels?

WI: OK, just to end up on the statement regarding the previous question and that is that the controversy over *The Trowenna Sea* was, I think, within the New Zealand psyche, a confrontation similar to their attitude over the Treaty of Waitangi. So, to me, it seems to

be that, until we can reach the position where people can accept two people in one country and accept it in terms of a relationship which is based on *aroha*, we will always keep this conflict and so that was reflected in *The Trowenna Sea* matter. Now, I decided to revise my first fiction because when I first wrote those books, perhaps they were in many ways, especially the first one, *Pounamu Pounamu*, and *Tangi*, the novel, they were too noble. In many ways, they did conform to the Noble Savage picturesque, pastoral image of Māori and so, the process of writing, for me, has been, as I said before, a matter of decolonising myself and recolonising myself in terms of Māori *ethos*. And to take them out of the lens of outside glasses and to bring them into my own . . . there is no way that I could not want that.

VN: So maybe this early fiction was influenced by these western models and culture.

WI: However, I have maintained the European model for *The Matriarch* and for *The Dream Swimmer*, and that is the Italian model, and the reason that I did it is very, very simple, and that is, I think, that our histories are—and especially the Risorgimento period—and the overlaps between them are very, very strong. I think that the associations, the resonances, the way in which Māori feel about Italian people . . . I will give you a copy of the speech that I gave to the Italian conference here in Auckland. I came back in August to give it and it was looking at the Italian interconnection in New Zealand literature.

So, what was missing in my first five novels was mainly a sense of sovereignty and a sense of my developed understanding, of what was important in the work, which was, it should be a work which had within excellence, equity, and a sense of justice about it. So

excellence and the sense of justice with this remain important principles by which my work began to develop after 1980. So, also a wider perspective, one which would embrace New Zealand as a whole. Until then it wasn't as inclusive as I wanted it to be. So, I wanted the work to be inclusive, more inclusive of politics, so primarily in the first five novels there is a huge increase in the politics of difference, so that they would really be Māori novels.

So, always the attempt has been to dig deep in the work, to take it further into *whakapapa*, so that you are not just reading a linear narrative, but that you are getting something at a different subtextual or textual level, that supports the Māoriness, the overall Māoriness of the work.

VN: Your fiction is written in English but it contains also some Māori words. I analysed four different Italian translations of “A Game of Cards” and I noticed different strategies for making Māori words accessible to a European audience. Some translators chose to leave Māori words (such as “mokopuna”) untranslated, inserting a glossary in which they explain their meaning. In contrast, other translators leave Māori words in their original language but their Italian translation is added in the text itself, as a kind of negotiation for transposing the meaning of Māori words from one culture to another. What do you think about these different strategies?

WI: Yes, of course Italian authors come across this a lot when their work is translated in English, but their work is primarily translated as it is into English, and I wonder whether or not Italian words themselves are embedded in the work. I don't think they have, so it's generally a wholesale translation, I presume.

For me . . . I prefer to leave the Māori words untranslated and insert a glossary. In my early career, however, I never had a glossary. And that was because, at that time, I never expected that my work would ever travel outside New Zealand, so I operated from the assumptions that New Zealanders, if they don't know the words, they should know the words, and they should get to know the words. As a Treaty of Waitangi objective, the Treaty is published in both Māori and English, but they stay . . . they are alongside each other, rather than having a glossary for each, so I feel the same thing about New Zealand, that, because Māori is an official language, there is no need for a glossary, of any sort, and that if New Zealanders really do believe in equity and equality between all of us, well, then, that has to happen at a linguistic level, not just—

VN: Yes, of course. The language is part of the biculturalism of New Zealand society.

WI: Yes, that's right. As far as the other option, I think that's probably a very, very good option for Italian people to see the words in the original language and then their Italian translation. But the exciting thing about, of course, the translation of Māori into Italian is that we have the same vowel connections, a, e, i, o, u, and you know, we roll our *r* in a similar way. So, for me, it's less of—it's more of a joy to have my work translated into Italian rather than into English. The other issue too is that because Māori is a more musical language than is English, and Italian is a more musical language, I think that Māori translates better into Italian.

VN: I never thought about it.

WI: But there's also something about the soul, too, because if you think about the soul of the language, I think the soul of the Māori language is much, much more akin to the soul of the Italian language than it is to the English language. So, that, to me makes me believe that Māori into Italian is closer to the emotional and psychic, the meanings, the emotion that comes through language. Because we are not just dealing with a physical and not interactive responsive entity. We are talking about language in all of its connotations, musical, theatrical, intellectual . . . And, to me, that similarity is much more marked with the Italian. So, I want to thank you.

VN: Thank you very much, Professor Ihimaera. I enjoyed our conversation and I appreciate all the time you are dedicating to me.

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