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Me he korokoro kōmako

[‘With the throat of a bellbird’]

A Māori Aesthetic in Māori Writing in English

Jon Lois Battista

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in English, University of Auckland, 2004

Abstract

The primary aim of this thesis Me he korokoro kōmako [‘With the throat of a bellbird’] is to demonstrate the existence of a distinctive Māori aesthetic in Māori literature written in English. Its introductory section, of three chapters, investigates the ways in which mainstream critical discourse in various ways appropriates Māori literature to its own Western-derived models of meaning and values, and proposes instead a definition of a Māori aesthetic grounded in the principle of whakapapa, whose whole cultural components for Māori literature include distinctive textual functions for myth, orality, acts of naming, other aspects of language, and symbolism.

The concept of whakapapa also provides the organizing principle and methodology of the central chapters of the thesis, which are divided into two Parts – each of six chapters. These are framed by a Prologue and Epilogue, whose subject is the profound cultural symbolism of the waka in the work of a founding figure for Māori writing in English, Jacqueline Sturm, and in Star Waka, by a major later writer in English, Robert Sullivan. Part One devotes three chapters each to the adult fiction of one female writer, Patricia Grace (Potiki and Baby No-Eyes), and one male writer, Witi Ihimaera (The Matriarch). Part Two, following the principle of whakapapa, devotes six chapters to Māori literature for children. Its primary text is the major anthology of such writing – Te Ara O Te Hau: The Path of the Wind, Volume 4 of Te Ao Mārama, edited by Witi Ihimaera, with Haare Williams, Irihapeti Ramsden and D.S. Long. It grounds its reading of the volume’s many texts (literary and visual, in Māori and in English) in the many distinctive cultural behaviours and meanings attached to the figure of Māui.

Each of the authors and texts has been chosen in order to study and exemplify a particular aspect of the Māori aesthetic defined in the Introduction, through close readings which draw strongly on the work of major Māori social historians, authors of iwi histories and genealogies, and interpreters of cultural meanings attaching to the natural worlds, and recent work on literary stylistics by Geoffrey Leech and others. It also draws on conversations with numerous Māori informants, including some of the authors discussed. The readings are designed to reveal the rich, culturally contextualised knowledges which Māori readers bring to the texts, and which their authors share and invoke through their deployment of the values and practices of whakapapa. While such representations and explorations of self offer new interpretive possibilities for Pākehā readers, they are also part of a global movement in which indigenous peoples engage in the politics of decolonisation from a position of strength, the stance of self-knowledge.

E kore e hekeheke he kākano rangatira

Our ancestors will never die for they live on in each of us.

VOLUME I

He whakamaumaharatanga

ki a te whenua rangatira.

MIHĪ

Haere mai e ngā iwi o te hau e whā mai i te tīmatanga ki te ao mārama. Ko tō tātou Matua nui ko te hōnore o te Runga rawa. Kāore he tīmatanga; kāore he mutunga. Ko Ranginui hei runga he mihi atu ki a koe. Kia tū hei marumaru i a tātou ki te rangipai ki te rangiora. Ko Papatūānuku e takoto nei tēnā koe. Ko koe tō tātou whaea nāu i tiaki i āu tama iki. Ka arohanui ki a kōrua.

Ki te tini mate ki a koutou i haere ki muri i te tuārai. Me mihi hoki ki ōku tūpuna whaea a Hēni Herewaka Toataua rātou ko Te Ratuhi, ko Maraea. Ka mihi arohanui ki ākū mātua a Roger rātou ko Beatrice, ko Emma Marama Coromandel. Haere ki tō wahi tūturu ki a Io Matua kore, ki tōnā poho māhana. Haere ki a Hawaiiki, ki a Hawaiiki nui, ki a Hawaiiki pamamao. Haere, haere, haere.

Ki te Hungaora. Ka mihi, ka mihi nui, nau mai, piki mai, marunga i te aroha māhana a ō tātou tūpuna ki tēnei take

I ngā ra o mua ko ngā waiata me ngā kōrerorero o ngā tūpuna e tohu ana i ngā tamariki, i ngā mātua hoki. Ko ngā pakiwaitara me ngā waiata i tuku iho ki te rā nei.

Ko ngā pakiwaitara me ngā waiata hou ka whai tonu te tikanga i takoto ai mai i ō tātou tūpuna ahakoa e tuhituhi ana ki ngā kupu o te reo tuarua.

Ka mihi nui ki ngā kaituhi Māori mo ngā taonga tino maha rawa atu. Ki a rātou te whakatauki – Me he korokoro kōwhiri.

Kia mihi ātu ki ōku rangatira mahi a Professor Terry Sturm rāua ko Doctor Robin Hooper mo a rāua tohutohu ki ahau. Nana au i awhina me āku mahi mai i te tīmatanga ki te mutunga.

Ka tino aroha rawa ki ākū tamariki a Siola rātou ko Tawhiao, ko Tane-Ariki, ko Tai, ko Johnny, ko Mana mo a rātou manawa nui me te tautoko. Ka mihi aroha hoki ki toku hoa rangatira Pāpu rātou ko ākū mokopuna.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

Preface: a personal statement

I hope the content, style and organization of this thesis will be helpful in addressing the concern of many Māori, and of the authors themselves, who have wished to see a critical recognition of the signifiers peculiar to Māori ways of seeing and feeling in literary work. Many of the stories told in this writing reflect the kinds of situations that Māori writers and readers have experienced at some time in their lives. I have found this to be the case in my own life. I did not have to dig too deeply to remember my own religious upbringing at a hostel founded by ‘missionaries’ in New Plymouth where the decision was made that the residents were to communicate only in English. Later I would add the story in which I raised my children in south Auckland, the northern parallel to Duff’s gang-ridden ghetto. But long before that I had the recollection of my Māori grandmother who, not permitted to speak Māori after she married an immigrant, retained the accent and idiom of her first language.

This thesis represents my attempt to make a difference. For years I have seen many Māori, leaders in their field, working to have Māori approaches to learning recognised. Many of them have been overworked and have died in the process. I met Maharaia Winiata when I was only 15 and even at that age saw the drive and the vision but also the shadow of early death. My own quest for identity out of a multicultural background has posed its problems, among them the awareness that I could not say my mihi because mine was a fractured history, Italian through my father and connected with Ngapuhi and Ngaiterangi through my mother. *Me he manu au e kakapa*, like the fluttering of a bird – aware that one language was missing and that I had no place to stand. Aware that the best thing I could do in Māori contexts was to remain silent so that I didn’t give away too much, to be quiet because I did not have the words, or to say nothing for now because this was not my time to speak.

In 1994 the gradual movement towards self-recognition was represented in an article ‘I Am Who I Say I Am’ published (as Jon Warren) in Te Pua Vol 3, No.1. In 1995 I was asked to speak as a graduate student at the University of Auckland Conference on ‘The Recruitment and Retention of Māori Students in Tertiary Education.’ My self-chosen topic was ‘Equity in Language’. How could the faculty expect to recruit Māori students, let alone retain them, if it made no effort to pronounce their names correctly, or to at least approximate the sounds of Māori terms in texts under study? The seminal Address: ‘Why Did You Paint Her Lying On Her Back: The Identity of Māori Women in the World Today’ followed in 1996 at the

Women's Studies Regional Conference held in Auckland. This topic resulted from a conversation with Mihipeka Edwards, one of several Māori writers whose entries I submitted as a contributor to the 1998 publication The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature (edited by Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie). Referring to the illustration of Papatūānuku in Toi Wahine (edited by Kathie Irwin and Irihapeti Ramsden), Mihipeka had raised the subject of gender relations by asking Robyn Kahukiwa 'Why did you paint her lying on her back?' This topic was subsequently expanded in a PH.D seminar entitled 'A Māori Aesthetic in the work of Robyn Kahukiwa and Ngāhuia Te Awekotuku' in the English Department at the University of Auckland. The seminar also led to a number of guest lectures for 175.108 Children's Literature based on a publication by A. W. Reed, and on work by Patricia Grace anthologised in Te Ao Mārama 4. These critical appraisals related to the parallels and contrasts that could be drawn between writing for children and adults, and between European folklore and Māori mythology. It also led to Part Two of the thesis because once I started reading the stories and poems I was fascinated by aesthetic qualities that were distinctively Māori, and the rapport I imagined between the authors, their stories, and Māori readers. In the interim, the 1997 University of Auckland Conference on 'Stasis' had given me the opportunity to explore a possible relevance between Michel Foucault's work on 'genealogy' in the talk 'Foucault and the Māori Worldview.' Another significant event in my journey involved the 1997 publication of 'Ngā Ahorangi: A Bibliography of Māori Women's Creative Writing' in Hecate: A Women's Interdisciplinary Journal XXIII/i and XXIII/ii. This bibliography, described as a work in progress, impressed on me the number of Māori who were writing and publishing work of an exceptional quality. More recently, I have had the opportunity to acquaint Masters students with aspects of my doctoral thesis.

My experience has been that people who are not Māori have been deeply interested in these critical analyses which have allowed them to appreciate a point of view, and knowledges, they were unaware of previously. For Māori students, critical work which capably demonstrates a Māori aesthetic not only validates the affinity they may experience for Māori writing in English but also affirms their right to respond to the writing in kind. I am strongly aware of the deficit of critical work which addresses a Māori aesthetic in depth, and of the journey that Māori writing in English is still travelling in terms of its recognition as a specialist literature. For the

books are there and continue to appear, clamouring for recognition in a country and in a system that influenced the observation in Patricia Grace's Potiki: 'It is rare for us to find ourselves in books, but in our own books we were able to find and define our lives.' Māori people, the tangata whenua, finding and experiencing their own sense of self, sharing a deeply felt affinity for their culture at each dawn ceremony, understanding the aura of timelessness that surrounds such events, the sense of community at each tangi and the uniquely expressed approach recorded in the work of Māori writing today.

No reira, kia haere mai marunga i te koru matauranga mai i Te Kore Te Po ki Te Ao
Mārama – Tiheiiii Mauri Ora!

Jon Battista

University of Auckland
2004

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Hine Herewaka Toataua



Te Ratuhi



Maraea



Beatrice Ann

Ion Battista

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INTRODUCTION

PREAMBLE

Each time I begin work on a new piece of writing, a theoretical essay, a critical book, fiction, autobiography, I confront within myself extreme dread that the subjectivity that I have fought so hard to claim will not assert itself. Paralyzed by the fear that I will not be able to name or speak words that fully articulate my experience or the collective reality of struggling black people, I am tempted to be silent.¹

The decision to deploy Whakapapa as the central motif and methodology in the thesis, in fact my motivation as a whole, was prompted by a conference address – ‘The Māori Worldview’, by prominent scholar and academic Ranginui Walker.² An exchange between two overseas visitors following the address reflected a typical response to the prioritising of cultural knowledge in other than culturally exclusive contexts. Disparaging the whole notion of a Māori worldview, their opinions demonstrated the inadmissibility of subjective experience as the basis of academic debate. An added incentive for my project derived from Professor Walker’s reference to Gramsci and Foucault, both of whom he encouraged students to study in relation to Māori studies. I was intrigued, given Foucault’s *rejection* of ‘ . . . the phenomenological approach which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, . . . [and which] places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity . . . ’³ Subsequent study allowed me to recognise a local relevance for the methodologies Foucault proposed where genealogical or historical systems of descent are used to expose the self-interested interrelationship of power, truth and knowledge. This process simultaneously allows the validation of culture on its own terms, and its reassertion within a colonial context.

¹ Bell Hooks, “Narratives of Struggle,” in Critical Fictions: The Politics of Imaginative Writing, ed. Philomena Mariana (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991) 53.

² Ranginui Walker, “The Māori Worldview,” First Paper presented at the David Nichol Smith Seminar IX “Voyages And Beaches: Discovery And The Pacific 1700-1840,” University of Auckland, New Zealand, 24-28 Aug. 1993.

³ Michel Foucault, foreword, The Order of Things: An Archaeology Of The Human Sciences, English translation of the original publication in French Les Mots et les choses (London: Tavistock Pub., 1970) xiv.

At the same conference, I also noted a difference in choice of topics and treatment by tāngata whenua and tagata pasifika compared with other speakers. Among the former groups the prevalent choice of myth as a focus of attention and of intellectual deliberation accentuated the relevance of mythic accounts, not only in terms of cultural belief and identity, but also in relation to academic discourse. Not interested in cultural beliefs *per se*, European and Pākehā speakers⁴ illustrated a curious anomaly and ongoing practice of academia. That is, while Māori, and things Māori, continue to be an approved topic for non-Māori as the focus of discursive practice, representations of self by Māori are treated as having insular value alone. This use of taha Māori as a resource by European commentators influenced my decision to demonstrate in the thesis that there *is* such a thing as a Māori aesthetic and that it is exclusive even in indigenous writing which deploys the English language. What I propose, then, is the objective study of the ways in which Māori systems of thought and practice are reasserted in my chosen texts, not excluding recourse to the subjective experience of Māori writers as the basis of independent discourse.

The relevance of Foucault to Māori writing clearly relates to his preoccupation with genealogy, in particular:

the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which . . . filter[s], hierarchise[s] and order[s] them in the name of some true knowledge'.⁵

Since Māori systems of thought in the wider context of New Zealand society and more narrowly, in the literary forum, exemplify Foucault's 'fragmentary genealogies', they constitute belief subjugated to the unitary knowledge represented by Pākehā discourse. My attempt, therefore, to disrupt the unified history represented in the New Zealand context through the formation and institutionalisation of Pākehā systems of

⁴ In the thesis, my use of the term 'Pākehā' corresponds to Michael King's definition i.e. '... citizens of New Zealand whose cultural and genetic origins come mainly from Europe. They derive their identity primarily from their New Zealand location and experience, however, rather than from the countries from which their ancestors emigrated.' Michael King, ed., Pakeha: The Quest For Identity In New Zealand (Auckland: Penguin, 1991) 7. For other views on the term and its application see Richard A. Benton, The Flight of the Amokura: Oceanic Languages and Formal Education in the South Pacific (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1981) and Alan Pappill, Paul Hartstone and Graham Harris, Language Issues: New Zealand English In Action (Auckland: New House, 1991) 53-4; also "Pakeha, the name we can embrace" in The New Zealand Herald 42421, 2 Jan. 2001: "Learning to Be a Pakeha" New Zealand Listener 3-9 Feb. 2001.

⁵ Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books/Random House, 1980) 83.

control, employs Foucault's methodology in favour of the aberrant group. In this context history, or (his preferred term) genealogy, works as 'a privileged instrument' of investigation, by refusing 'the certainty of absolutes', in other words, the source or origin from which truth, knowledge and power interact.⁶ Recognition of Foucault's genealogies of power offers a number of possible positions in terms of the present study. One approach acknowledges the contingency surrounding the notion⁷ of a New Zealand literary corpus steadily evolving and developing from its centre firmly 'within European hegemonic cultural discourse.'⁸ Prior to the 1950s the British literary tradition dominated New Zealand writing in English, hence the unsettling image in the genealogy of adherents 'waiting at the wharves for the culture to arrive' from 'the Middle Kingdom' and 'elsewhere' for the last 150 years.⁹ Another approach concerns the way that Māori systems of knowledge occupy an oppositional stance as a necessary consequence of the central power by whose definition they are 'naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity.'¹⁰ From a Pākehā perspective, the Māori historico-cultural and social complex is not a 'particular, local, regional knowledge'. It is a 'differential knowledge'.¹¹ Differential knowledge, in non-Māori terms a subjugated knowledge, manifests simultaneously the inclusion of the marginalised group as subsidiary, and its exclusion as other. The acknowledgement of a Māori aesthetic in literature, on the other hand, recognises that Māori writing in English is a differential knowledge marked and privileged in its distinctive and exclusive nature. The relevance of Foucaultian analysis, in this second application, focuses on the disclosure of universals of power exercised by Māori.

Genealogy is a recurrent theme in the analysis of New Zealand traditions, not surprisingly given the dual function Foucault recognised in the deployment of history.

⁶ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in Interpreting Politics: Readings In Social And Political Theory ed. Michael T. Gibbons (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 230.

⁷ Barry Smart, Michel Foucault (London: /Ellis Horwood and Tavistock Pub., 1985) 56.

⁸ Lydia Wevers, "The Short Story," in The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English, ed. Terry Sturm (Auckland: Oxford UP, 1991) 203.

⁹ Iain Sharp, "Stuck in the middle – or the New Zealand publishing scene observed," New Zealand Books 1.1 April 1991: 10.

¹⁰ Foucault, Power/Knowledge: 82.

¹¹ Foucault, Power/Knowledge: 82.

Patrick Evans's retrospective realisation 'that it was the idea of the tradition that was all wrong'¹² allows a direct association with Foucault's idea of genealogy. Genealogy, that is, is both a means by which claims to knowledge are first asserted and established through ostensibly unbroken lineal descent, and a scrutinising tool that exposes the true nature of power systems. Both Terry Sturm's Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English, and Evans's Penguin History of New Zealand Literature appeal to Foucaultian precepts of 'history' and 'genealogy'. For instance, the Oxford's preference for 'inclusive rather than selective principles'¹³ approaches the idea of Foucault's series of infinitely proliferating branches which lead nowhere, as opposed to the authoritarianism attached to totalising discourse and the notion of continuum common to traditional genealogies or histories. Evans qualifies the term 'history', and acknowledges the 'provisional nature of the field' in order to conceptualise an 'unhistory' (Harry Ricketts's term) in an attempt to displace the conventional notions of history associated with the formation of 'a national literature'.¹⁴ Oxford contributors are encouraged to explore 'the genealogies of texts', to recognise the 'powerful hierarchy of genres' which came to dominate critical discourse,¹⁵ and to avoid forcing 'all genres into . . . a single model of evolutionary progress, or a single model of aesthetic value'¹⁶. Evans describes 'the story of New Zealand literature [as] a chapter of accidents'.¹⁷ The Oxford invites a consideration of 'Variations among genres – time-lags and disjunctions of theme and preoccupation', which are 'at least as important as continuities and similarities'.¹⁸ In Foucault's methodology:

¹² Patrick Evans, The Penguin history of New Zealand Literature (Auckland: Penguin, 1990) 8.

¹³ Terry Sturm, ed., introduction, The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English (Auckland: Oxford UP, 1991) xi.

¹⁴ Evans, The Penguin history: 11, 10; Harry Ricketts, "Myth-busting," New Zealand Books 1.1 April 1991: 6.

¹⁵ Sturm, introduction, The Oxford History: xiv, xiii.

¹⁶ Sturm, introduction, The Oxford History: xiii.

¹⁷ Evans, The Penguin history: 11.

¹⁸ Sturm, introduction, The Oxford History: xiii.

[T]o follow the complex course of descent is to . . . identify the accidents, the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us.¹⁹

Consequentially, both histories repudiate the notion of an authorised version. This agreement does not extend, however, to the treatment of Māori writing in English. The Oxford's inclusion of and commentary on Māori writers and writing according to genre is consistent with a general recognition of published Māori authorship in New Zealand. Evans, at his 'myth-busting best', is accorded a favourable review, the reviewer noting, however, that the final two chapters 'show Evans at his least assured, especially on Maori and women's writing'.²⁰ In other words, genuflection aside, Evans effectively participates in Foucault's 'play of dominations' by presenting a lineal discourse which affirms 'the importance of middle-class European males in the story of New Zealand literature'.²¹ The 'momentary manifestations' of Māori, and of women, reveal that they are the ironic 'accidents' which underline Evans's deflection from the 'unhistory' initially proposed.²²

The *structure* of this thesis itself deploys the idea of whakapapa as an organizing principle, and as the core concept underlying the culturally distinctive Māori aesthetic which it seeks to establish as operative in Māori literature in English. The Introduction, consisting of three chapters, establishes the general propositions which the rest of the thesis aims to demonstrate. The first chapter, drawing especially on the examples provided by mainstream anthologies of fiction and poetry, explores the various ways in which mainstream New Zealand critical discourse denies the existence of a unique Māori aesthetic. The second chapter begins the process of defining an alternative discourse by exploring the concept of whakapapa itself, and in particular the ways its relevance to Māori literature in English might be theorised. The third chapter offers a preliminary outline of the central components of a whakapapa-grounded Māori aesthetic, and of the ways they might be seen as operative in particular texts. Throughout these introductory chapters a wide range of authors and

¹⁹ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in Gibbons, Interpreting Politics: 225.

²⁰ Ricketts, "Myth-busting,": 6.

²¹ Evans, The Penguin history: 9.

²² In fact, Evans expected to be criticised in this respect: 'It will be clear enough where I have felt uneasy, and I am sure these places will be pointed out to me time and again . . .' Evans, The Penguin history: 14. He does raise significant points of interest in the small section on a few Māori writers.

texts are briefly discussed, preparatory to the much more detailed focus on particular texts and authors in the main body of the thesis.

The main body of the thesis is divided, simply, into two Parts, each consisting of six chapters, and the relationship of these two Parts is itself, also, intended to exemplify a core principle of whakapapa. The first Part examines texts by two major adult authors, one female and the other male, Patricia Grace and Witi Ihimaera. The second offers a detailed analysis of contemporary Māori literature for children, exemplified by the rich body of children's texts in the anthology Te Ara O Te Hau: The Path of the Wind, the fourth volume of Te Ao Mārama, the five-part anthology of Māori writing selected and edited by Witi Ihimaera, with Haare Williams, Irihapeti Ramsden and D. S. Long. None of the close readings of particular texts which constitute the core method of these chapters – of Patricia Grace's Potiki and Baby No-Eyes and Witi Ihimaera's The Matriarch in Part One, and of the many children's texts discussed in Part Two – is intended to be definitive. Each text has been selected to exemplify a particular aspect of the Māori aesthetic hypothesized in general terms in the Introduction. From this perspective their aim is a demonstrative one: to 'prove' the existence of a whakapapa-grounded aesthetic manifested in many different ways in the themes, styles and language of the texts, and to reveal core dimensions in the texts (and in the specific cultural knowledge Māori readers bring to them) that are largely unavailable to other readers. From another perspective, the aim is to provide a model for an alternative reading practice, challenging mainstream (mis)representations of these authors and texts, enabling their extraordinary originality and richness to be revealed.

This main body of the thesis is framed by a Prologue (a discussion of Jacqueline Sturm's poem, 'E Waka') and an Epilogue (a discussion of Robert Sullivan's epic sequence, Star Waka). These brief sections are designed to ensure the association of whakapapa on several levels. The first level allows metaphoric recourse to the waka as a significant symbol of identity – all Māori have lineal ties with the paramount chiefs of the great waka. Furthermore, irrespective of the colonial process and ongoing interventions, waka are the bearers of, and the visual reminders of, a culturally exclusive people and body of knowledge. Jacqueline Sturm's poem as the tauihu, or prow, of the thesis acknowledges her as a forerunner in the submission and acceptance of work for publication. Robert Sullivan's writing a generation later forms

the taurapa, or stern. Together with all the other analyses of the texts I have selected, they represent the vehicle by which a Māori aesthetic of writing is substantiated.

Me he korokoro kōmako

[‘With the throat of a bellbird’]

A Māori Aesthetic in Māori Writing in English

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