



The 'Marae on Paper': The Meeting House in the Anglophone

Fiction of the Maori Renaissance

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Abstract

The Maori literary renaissance was a period of intense literary and cultural activity that coincided with a protest movement surrounding Maori rights in New Zealand during the 1970s and 80s. The Anglophone Maori fiction that flourished during this period raised important social questions about contemporary Maori identity, the historical and continuing decline of Maori ownership of their ancestral lands, and the social, cultural and political relationship between the Maori and Pakeha [New Zealanders of European descent] communities. This dissertation considers the work of four Maori writers who address these themes: Witi Ihimaera, Patricia Grace, Keri Hulme and Alan Duff. More specifically, it explores the role of the Maori meeting house – and the material arts it houses – as both a formal and thematic influence in their fiction.

The meeting house is a wooden apex structure that traditionally symbolises the collective body of a Maori community and narrates their history through the imagery that is carved into its internal walls and supporting structures. It is strongly associated with storytelling and historical record keeping, while also acting as a meeting place for both formal and informal gatherings within the community. For each of these four writers it is subject to numerous and varying interpretations and although it features as a physical structure and site of the action in their fiction, it also shapes each author's approach to narrative strategy. Drawing on Jacques Rancière's account of the relationships between aesthetic regimes and sensory perception, I emphasise the importance of perspective and the relationship of perception to the sensible world in the fiction. I show how some Maori authors deployed the Maori meeting house to disrupt the aesthetic protocols and mimetic

practices shaping bourgeois national culture, while others inadvertently promoted assimilation instead.

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Introduction

This dissertation examines the work of four Anglophone Maori writers who were instrumental in shaping what is now described as the Maori renaissance: Witi Ihimaera, Patricia Grace, Keri Hulme and Alan Duff.¹ The Maori renaissance was a period of intense literary activity that began in the early-to-mid 1960s but peaked during the mid-1980s when Maori writers began to engage more directly with the increased public discourse surrounding Maori rights in New Zealand. In the following chapters, I trace the relationship of this new, politically engaged Maori writing to traditional forms of Maori art and architecture, focusing on one of the most structurally significant structures within Maori communities – the meeting house.

As I explain later more fully, the meeting house is a physical structure at the centre, both literally and figuratively, of traditional Maori communities. Typically, the internal walls of the house are decorated with a series of elaborate carvings that tell the story of the community's collective history, while the apex structure symbolically represents the community's collective body. As Patricia Grace points out in *Potiki*, many Maori communities regard their meeting house as their “main book”, which “is itself a story, a history, a gallery, a study, a design structure and a taonga [treasure]” (117). The house is therefore strongly associated with storytelling and historical record keeping, while also acting as a meeting place for both formal and informal gatherings within the community. In my chapters, I pay particular attention to the form of each writer's work and argue that although the meeting house is represented in the novels as a physical structure, it also shapes each writer's method of storytelling in ways that have political potential.

I do not wish to suggest that Maori writers directly imitate the forms of storytelling that shape meeting house art. Instead, I argue that the meeting house inspires a model of aesthetic practice that influences Maori mid-renaissance literature in ways that are diverse and varied. For instance, in *The Matriarch* (1986), Ihimaera captures and redeploys some of the formal and stylistic qualities of Maori figurative portraiture in his revisionist account of nineteenth century politics, while in *Potiki* (1986) and *Baby No-Eyes* (1998), Grace engages with meeting house practices in her descriptions of silence and communicative failure. For both writers, the carved ancestor figures and curvilinear motifs of meeting house art sustain Maori self-expression in situations where communication between Maori and Pakeha communities breaks down. While Hulme, too, is interested in the historical role of meeting house art in *The Bone People* (1985), she describes the gradual construction of her three characters' shared history over the comparably contracted course of a year. Her novel extends the metonymic qualities of Maori carved arts to the material objects exchanged by the protagonists amongst themselves so that the objects come to function as a record of their new shared history. Alternatively, in *Once Were Warriors* (1990), Duff's interest in the meeting house as an institutional meeting place leads him to pair it with the Pakeha courtroom, inadvertently subordinating its history to a programme of Maori cultural assimilation. As these brief examples show, these writers share an interest in the meanings of Maori identity and traditions but engage with the social and aesthetic practices of the meeting house in different ways.

Although I focus on Maori novels here, the literary renaissance can be traced back to early bilingual publications like *Te Ao Hou/ The New World*. *Te Ao Hou* was published by the Department of Maori Affairs between the years 1952 and 1975 and

intended as a “marae on paper” (Allen 45). Historically the term “marae” described a courtyard situated in front of the meeting house, where formal speeches were performed to welcome guests into the community.² The fact that the Department of Maori Affairs described *Te Ao Hou* as a “marae on paper” established the publication as an early forum for Maori written cultural expression and suggested that it was itself a “meeting place” for Maori communities across New Zealand. However, although its readers considered *Te Ao Hou* to be a Maori text, Chadwick Allen points out in his important analysis of the publication that it was often proscriptive and assimilationist in its goals. In fact, Allen argues, it “promotes the virtues of at least some level of assimilation into various aspects of Pakeha life and it endorses a level of subordination of local Maori independence to the greater needs of the predominately Pakeha nation” (44). Despite this, Allen later acknowledges, “in *Te Ao Hou*’s pages, [...] writers explored, set, and challenged the early parameters in the battle over the representation of contemporary Maori identity” (72). This “battle” continued in the early years of the Maori renaissance and although the writing of this early period did not overtly address the inequality of New Zealand’s social order, it offered a subtle critique of the effects of colonialism on traditional Maori communities. As a result, the works of this early period should not be underestimated, since they intervened in a literary system that had up until this point been dominated by Pakeha writers. *Te Ao Hou* was no longer in circulation by the time Ihimaera, Grace, Hulme, and Duff were producing their most politically charged work but the idea that one might establish a “marae on paper” underpins my study here of the relationships between Maori art, literary form and aesthetic politics.

Following the political upheavals of the 1970s, when a number of high profile protests occurred,³ there was a remarkable shift in the tone and narrative

focus of Maori writing. The early fiction, largely concerned with the everyday, domestic concerns of traditional Maori communities, gave way to a series of novels that confronted the Pakeha majority with descriptions of Maori social inequality and political exclusion. In her work *From Silence to Voice* (2010), Paola Della Valle identifies three main concerns expressed by Maori writers during this time. First, she notes, they critiqued the social marginalisation of the Maori population in New Zealand, resulting from “faults in the Eurocentric education system”, “a general proletarianisation of the indigenous community”, and “widespread criminality among their youth” (145). As I will explain further in Chapters Two and Four, these issues were often interconnected and rooted in the forced urban migration that occurred in Maori communities in the 1950s. Second, the writers brought attention to the “conscious repression of Maori language by increasingly dominant English speakers” (145), an issue that is again central to my second chapter. Third and perhaps most importantly, they carefully and assiduously narrated Maori struggles over the historic and continued “alienation of tribal land” (145).

Over the course of the 1970s and 80s, Maori social issues received increased public attention and the literature of the period became an important site of resistance to the continued social, cultural and political marginalisation of Maori communities within Pakeha-dominated New Zealand. As I will show, the physical structure of the meeting house, traditionally held to symbolise the collective body of the people, provided an alternative site for social and political organisation for both Maori communities and the writers who sought to participate in the renewal and cultivation of Maori identity. However, what has been less explored by critics is how the kinds of storytelling used in meeting house art inspired multifaceted, polyphonic and fluid approaches to narrative form on the parts of these writers. Before I turn to

this central concern of mine, it will first be helpful to explore some of the ideological dilemmas encountered by critics in their attempts to define the achievements of these four renaissance writers.

The Literary Criticism on Maori Novels and the Problems with Biculturalism

In her ground-breaking book, *Postcolonial Pacific Writing: Representations of the Body* (2005), Michelle Keown describes the diverse achievements of Pacific Islands writers in the latter half of the twentieth century, ranging from Keri Hulme's Booker Prize win to the increased visibility of Maori and other Pacific Islands texts on the syllabi of Pacific Islands universities. However, she notes that "Pacific literatures have received far less critical attention to date than the literatures (and diasporas) of other designated 'postcolonial' regions such as Africa, Asia and the Caribbean (and, to a lesser degree, Australia and Canada)" (8). She cites, for instance, Robert Young's effort in *White Mythologies* (1990) to introduce the term "tricontinentalism" into postcolonial studies. While tricontinental approaches to postcolonial culture cover Latin America, Africa and Asia, they exclude New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific Islands. As Keown observes, although Young justifies the omission of the latter territories with reference to New Zealand and Australia's status as settler colonies, he ignores the strong traditions of indigenous anti-colonial writing there.⁴ Keown also points out that "a survey of recent books on postcolonial literature, theory and criticism by Bart Moore-Gilbert *et al.* (1997); Ania Loomba (1998); Dennis Walder (1998); Ato Quayson (2000) and Jahan Ramazani (2001) reveals few (if any) references to New Zealand, and almost no references to the Pacific Islands" (8).⁵ By comparison to the tricontinental territories

listed above, the critical literature on Maori writing has been shaped by a small and very recent group of authors, including Keown, Chadwick Allen, Eva Rask Knudsen, Otto Heim and others.

These authors have adopted contrasting approaches to Maori identity, ranging from cautious engagements with biculturalism, on one hand, to more confident arguments for the establishment of a distinct, or even Pan-Maori cultural identity, on the other. Though some have placed indigenous cultural history and practices at the centre of their critical analyses, many still prove themselves unwilling or unable to disengage from biculturalism, as Chadwick Allen has observed. In a comparative study of Maori and American Indian writing, *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts* (2002), Allen concerns himself with “the narrative tactics developed by writers and activists who self-identify as American Indian or New Zealand Maori to mark their identities as persistently distinctive from those of dominant European-descended settlers and as irrevocably rooted in the particular lands these writers, activists and their communities continue to call home” (1-2). Allen, however, only considers the relationship between the meeting house and contemporary Maori identity in very general terms. Although he emphasises its significance as an alternative cultural centre within a Pakeha-dominated social order, he, like the other critics described here, does not consider its many other roles within Maori renaissance literatures. Instead, he stresses the importance of establishing indigenous communities’ distinctiveness from the former settler populations via “the re-recognition of nation-to-nation status inscribed in treaty documents and other binding agreements produced in past eras” (219). For Allen, the recognition of minority rights will not be possible until minority groups stop fighting for equal legal rights within former

settler colonies and insist upon their distinct cultural histories and identities and the cultural and political rights that must follow from them instead.⁶

Like Allen, Nadia Majid and Otto Heim have also been concerned with the role of literature as a means of promoting indigenous empowerment and survival but these two critics have focused exclusively on the Maori context. In *My Mother was the Earth. My Father was the Sky. Myth and Memory in Maori Novels in English* (2010), Majid takes a somewhat contrary approach to Allen, exploring the usefulness of postcolonial theory to Maori renaissance literature with reference to terms such as “hybridity, continuity, variation, identity and memory” (11). These disparate terms, she argues, can help lend coherence to the study of Maori myth and cultural memory since they facilitate “an expansive understanding not only of [the] literary qualit[ies] of the myths], but also of their significance as a Maori literature of survival, identification and empowerment” (12). In *Writing Along Broken Lines: Violence and Ethnicity in Contemporary Maori Fiction* (1998), in contrast to Majid, Heim bases his discussion of Maori literature on the Maori concept of “kaupapa”, which loosely refers both to “principles” (23) and the achievement of a sense of purpose in one’s life. Explaining that kaupapa is understood to empower those who have it, Heim claims that Maori fiction provides “a genuine expression of a culture of survival that consistently turns weaknesses into strength” (25). Although his study focuses upon the ways that Maori characters respond to the difficulties they face in both the private and political spheres, he ultimately describes kaupapa “as a genuine taonga of a bicultural heritage” (233). It is interesting that in both of these studies, contemporary Maori identity is identified as marked by the encounter with Pakeha culture – and, therefore, as “hybrid” or even implicitly “diluted” and “compromised” – in ways that Pakeha culture arguably has not been despite its similarly

heterogenous character in a longer historical perspective. These studies also fail to answer the question of whether Maori communities described in the literature have achieved “empowerment” and “strength” because of their hybrid identities or despite them.

In her thoughtful study of Maori myth in Renaissance fiction, *The Circle and the Spiral: A Study of Australian Aboriginal and New Zealand Maori Literature* (2004), Eva Rask Knudsen appears to share Heim’s interest in displacing the language of postcolonial studies emerging from the Western academy in favour of Maori language and concepts. Her study rests on the proposition that “indigenous literature is an immediate and attentive presence *in* culture, not a purely meditative and aloof reflection *of* culture; it is actively engaged in forming views on society and visions of human community” (315). For Rask Knudsen, the dominant symbols of Australian Aboriginal and Maori culture – the circle and the spiral – act as important narrative devices within the Aboriginal and Maori literary renaissances. She tells the story of the Tihe Mauriora or “Sneeze of Life” integral to the Maori creation myth, for example, and deploys its account of the relationship between nothingness and potential new beginnings as a useful, “spiralling” framework for examining the more recent Maori Renaissance fiction. Since the circle and the spiral are “natural symbols”, she claims, they are “not strained by being adapted to and informed by a new context” (323). She favours the adjective “composite” over “hybrid” to describe the qualities of Anglophone Maori writing shaped by these forms, explaining that while hybridity is imposed, a composite text arises from deliberate and purposeful cultural choices. “Composite”, she explains, is “a term that embraces creativity as part of its intrinsic meaning” (11).

In her 2010 book *From Silence to Voice: The Rise of Maori Literature*, Paola Della Valle echoes some of Rask Knudsen's concerns. While acknowledging that the arguments presented in her book "are positioned in the conceptual space of postcolonial theory", Della Valle also insists that "the analysis of texts rooted in a non-Western tradition requires a localised perspective which takes into account different cultural (and even ontological) premises to avoid the trap of unconsciously Eurocentric criticism" (vii). It would be nonsensical, she argues, to talk about postcoloniality in New Zealand before the 1960s "when the first Maori voices appeared, writing back to a centre located in their own land, challenging mainstream literature and expressing a different point of view on reality" (93). However, this position risks effacing the connections Maori writing has with earlier Maori cultural forms, including, for instance, the material arts first used in carved canoes and later in meeting houses. Moreover, as Benita Parry has argued, the study of colonialism as a primarily "cultural event" means that "the intrinsically antagonistic colonial encounter [is] reconfigured as one of dialogue, complicity and transculturation" (4). Parry goes on to cite Simon During's comment that terms like hybridity "lace[s] colonized into colonising cultures", resulting in "a reconciliatory rather than a critical, anti-colonialist category" (qtd. in Parry 4). It is perhaps unsurprising then that Della Valle also construes Maori literature as "necessarily a hybrid literature" (93) which "moulds the genres of the Western canon and the language of the colonisers into new forms" (93). While she claims to place Maori concepts at the centre of her analysis, I would argue that she ultimately falls back on a Eurocentric understanding of the colonial encounter as the literature's "cause".

In *Narrating Indigenous Modernities: Transcultural Dimensions in Contemporary Maori Literature* (2011), Moura-Koçoglu widens the discussion with

the claim that “Maori identity today is situated not only in a bicultural framework but increasingly in a context that is perceived as multilateral, modern, and global” (xix). Acknowledging the limitations of the tendency to characterise Maori identity and writing as bicultural, she proposes “the notion of transculturality” (xx) as better suited to their study. Like Della Valle, she claims that “Maori identities are enunciated *in relation to* the dominant Pakeha culture, acknowledging a transcultural blend of diverse identitary strands – be they defined along ethnic, cultural, gender, class lines, religious origin or political creed – that form the basis of indigenous modernities” (xxiii). However, although she stresses the need to recognise “indigenous difference and alterity”, Moura- Koçoglu, like Della Valle, fails to place Maori daily struggles at the centre of her analysis. Instead, she prioritises texts which transgresses “(imagined) ethno-cultural boundaries” (xxiv) in order to incorporate the influences of a globalised modernity.

Although Melissa Kennedy’s *Striding Both Worlds* (2011) focuses exclusively on the work of Witi Ihimaera, her understanding of his contribution to Maori renaissance literature is also worth considering here, particularly since it appears to have been influenced by Moura-Koçoglu’s account of Maori transculturality. As Kennedy explains, her title “striding both worlds” expresses her understanding that Maori cultural studies “is not about crossing over from one pole to another but, rather, about how Maori culture is always part of and caught in a web of historical and contemporary, local national and global influences and interactions” (xii-xiii). Just as the Pakeha interest in Maori cultural practice was “essential to the institutionalising of a bicultural state in the 1980s” (xiii), she argues, the Pakeha worldview is also present in how we understand Maoritanga [Maori cultural practices] (viii). After all, Kennedy argues, “over and above perceived differences

that feed an argument for unique cultures, modern Maori and Pakeha cultures are both produced out of the historical and contemporary relationships between them” (xiv). While stressing the “cultural interdependency” (ix) of New Zealand’s programme of biculturalism, on one hand and Maoritanga, on the other, Kennedy works from the assumption that “Ihimaera’s fiction is heavily indebted to artistic traditions handed down from the English canon” (ix).

As I have shown then, recent critical analyses of the Maori Renaissance have judiciously deployed both Maori cultural history and postcolonial theory as resources. Though they have adopted different approaches to Maori identity, all struggle with the issue of biculturalism and all stress the intercultural nature of Maori fiction. Though I too acknowledge that all the fictions I examine here demonstrate cultural interdependency, my aim is to show how they draw not only their content but also their narrative forms and, perhaps most importantly, aesthetic politics from distinctly Maori material cultural history and traditions. To the extent that I consider how Maori visual and material art has shaped contemporary Maori written forms, I am indebted to Rask Knudsen for her discussion of circular and spiralling narratives in contemporary Maori writing. However, I do not subscribe to the distinction she makes between “natural” and “artificial” narrative forms. For me, all narrative form is artificial and as such, subject to investigation from a social or political perspective.

In the following chapters, I offer an account of Maori renaissance literature that prioritises Maori historical experience and cultural practices, including the contemporary efforts of Maori populations to restore and revive Maori meeting house arts and make them available to Maori communities. Yet, although meeting houses have a role in each novel, as I will argue, each novel frames the encounter of literature and the meeting house differently. Indeed, as I will show, with reference to

the work of French philosopher, Jacques Rancière on interdisciplinary modernist arts, each novel illuminates the relationship between contemporary Maori writing and meeting house arts in ways that do not require us to mark the Maori position within New Zealand's social order as "bicultural", and implicitly compromised – "a reconciliatory lacing together of colonised and colonising cultures", to borrow from Simon During. Before turning to my specific concerns, however, it will be helpful to consider the cultural contexts of Rancière's work and, in particular, his challenge to world systems theories of global cultures.

World Systems Theories and the Problem of Time

World systems theory would situate Maori texts within what Pascale Casanova has described as the "World Republic of Letters" (4), a literary system compromised of a literary centre and neglected peripheries. The economic origins of Casanova's account can be traced to Immanuel Wallerstein, who in his work *The Modern World System* (1974) developed a macro-economic theory of global capital flows, structured around the model of core, semi-periphery and periphery.⁷ In *The World Republic of Letters*, Casanova examines the way in which the distance of a literary location from the centre of the "world republic" determines its access to the wider global forms of literary capital. For Casanova, the literary centre is situated geographically in Paris, the "Greenwich Meridian of Literature" (87) and within the world literary system, unequal levels of symbolic capital generate sustained competition between the literatures of the world as each nation or region attempts to achieve recognition at the metropolitan centre. The primacy of the centre, she argues, has largely been achieved through the processes of cultural homogenisation that

accompanied European colonisation of other parts of the world when distinctive indigenous social, cultural and political practices were undermined by the imposition of a predominantly Anglophone and Eurocentric system of governance. Casanova describes the centre's cultural influence as a form of "legal tender" that circulates within the countries of its imperial "jurisdiction" (87). She claims that the centre of the world republic of letters has achieved a degree of autonomy from economic processes so that the power of the literary centre to perform a "consecration" (12) of global texts does not necessarily directly reflect its economic history or contemporary economic power. Within the world system, the colonial legacy that initially shaped world literary space as hierarchical gave way to the aesthetic autonomy of the centre, which, Casanova argues, allowed it to universalise the literatures that were deemed acceptable within its parameters.

Importantly, for Casanova, the centre of the world literary space defines the aesthetic of the present. Literary time does not necessarily correspond to historical time but, even so, "literary space creates a present on the basis of which all other points can be located" (88). According to the views of the literary establishment at the centre, the literatures of other nations can be made modern or – once deemed to have "fail[ed] to conform to the criteria that at any given moment determine the present" (88) – be consigned to the periphery. By establishing the literary present as a point of aspiration for those competing for recognition within this space, a literature's engagement with "the modern" is an important part of determining the parameters of its inclusion or exclusion from the centre of the literary world. The centre is therefore a site of conflict since what is regarded as being indicative of the present is continuously contested and reworked there, framed by a binary opposition between what is viewed as "backward" and "provincial" (93) and what is considered

to be “modern”. Since the designations “backward” and “provincial” are not permanent, peripheral writers can attempt to reposition their work within the centre. However, for Casanova, the parameters of their inclusion or exclusion at the literary centre are clear. Peripheral writers need to “manufacture difference” (220) in order to prevent the literature they produce from being simply assimilated into the dominant aesthetic.

The ramifications of Casanova’s account of literary recognition for Maori texts can be illuminated further with attention to Enrique Dussel’s important essay “Eurocentrism and Modernity” (1993). In the essay, Dussel examines the question of modernity with reference to the colonial encounter, suggesting, more specifically, that modernity arises through a process of negation, in which Europe positions itself in opposition to the ‘other’ of Africa and Asia. According to him, the historical and social realities of the constructed ‘others’ were concealed while Europe propagated images of barbarity and backwardness which it could oppose and through which it could constitute itself as civilised and modern. This means that the “genealogy of modernity” (65), compromising a centre that functions via the negation of the constructed periphery, is based upon a false colonial worldview. Yet, this history has ultimately led to what he describes as the “fallacy of developmentalism” (67) or the idea that “every country must unilaterally follow the path of Europe’s modern development” (67).

One of the more striking aspects, then, of Jacques Rancière’s philosophy of aesthetics⁸ is that his explanation of art’s radical potential does not require us to regard modernity as something that is “progressive” and “new”. In fact, it depends on overturning the structure of the temporality upon which these designations are based. In *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004) and *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (2009)

Rancière revisits the relationship between art and political power since, as he argues, art has been responsible for making global capitalist hierarchies appear natural and inevitable within the law that he describes with the phrase “the distribution of the sensible”: “the implicit law governing the sensible order that parcels out places and forms of participation in a common world by first establishing the modes of perception within which these are inscribed” (85). At the same time, since art is responsible for “modifying the [sensible order], the ways of perceiving it and expressing it, of experiencing it as tolerable or intolerable” (2007 259), it may also disrupt the modes of sensory apprehension that have been established within the sensible world.⁹

Since, for Rancière, “the distribution of the sensible” describes the division and arrangement of the sensible world into a series of different parts that are by their nature unequal and hierarchical, sensory perception becomes political in his work. Even the role that a person occupies within the sensible world is determined by whether he or she can be apprehended as an intelligible subject or a mere “noisy animal” (1999 54). The sensible order, then, can also be described as a kind of “police order” (2009 30), in which the term “policing” refers to the roles of aesthetic regimes in establishing and regulating the social positions and occupations of human populations with various different socioeconomic orders rather than to the act of enforcing state laws. Importantly, however, the “police order” can be undermined by acts of subjectivisation which occur when an individual insists upon his or her equality by rejecting the status (whether gendered, racial, economic or otherwise) attributed to him or her within the distribution of the sensible. For Rancière, then, since the distribution of social positions and occupations depends upon regimes of sensory apprehension, aesthetic practices provide one of the most powerful ways to

disrupt social hierarchies. His evaluation of the ways in which this can occur is worth quoting at length here:

[T]he relationship between aesthetics and politics consists in the relationship between this aesthetics of politics and the ‘politics of aesthetics’ – in other words in the way in which the practices and forms of visibility of art themselves intervene in the distribution of the sensible and its reconfiguration, in which they distribute spaces and times, subjects and objects, the common and the singular. Utopia or otherwise, the task that the philosopher attributes to the ‘sublime’ painting of the abstract painter, hung in isolation on a white wall, or that which the exhibition curator gives to the installation or intervention of the relational artist, both register the same logic: that of a ‘politics’ of art which consists in suspending the normal coordinates of sensory experience. One valorises the solitude of a heterogeneous sensible form, the other the gesture that draws a common space. But these two different ways of relating the constitution of a material form and that of a symbolic space are perhaps two strands of the same originary configuration, namely that which links the specificity of art to a certain way of being of the community. (2009 25)

In *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004), Rancière names three kinds of historical aesthetic regimes: the ethical, the representative and the aesthetic. As I will show over the course of these chapters, the art of the aesthetic regime carries the most power to disrupt hierarchical systems of social organisation, while the representative regime that precedes it alternatively proposes a conciliatory relationship between art

and the social world. Alternatively, in the earlier ethical regime, art did not exist as such but as a “way[s] of doing and making (2004, 21) among others.

Despite the correspondences between Rancière’s regimes of art and particular social systems – between the ethical regime and communalism, for instance, or the representative regime and bourgeois capitalism – he does not provide a unilinear or progressive account of aesthetic development. Instead, he is more concerned with identifying and describing different ways that art may arrange the sensible and social world in time. In the ethical regime of the arts, for example, art objects are indistinguishable from others, since they are produced and evaluated in terms of their functionality. Their aesthetic qualities are secondary to their usefulness. However in representative regime of art, art is used to establish and consolidate social identity, occupations and hierarchies. The art of the representative regime therefore requires the distinction not only of different aesthetic disciplines (music, painting and literature, for example) but also of formal and stylistic elements. These distinctions then produce an image of the world that reaffirms the social and class divisions of a capitalist social order. In the representative regime, then, art requires autonomy to stand alone, distinct from other kinds of objects, and to determine the formal rules and practices that govern the sensible world. But since the representative regime replicates social power, Rancière describes it as a category of “imitations” (2009 29) and a way to “render the arts visible” (2004 22) that is analogous “with a fully hierarchical vision of the community” (2004 22).

Finally, in the aesthetic regime of arts, the “threat” to the social order that Plato first identified in objects that simply mimic reality without apparent usefulness is appropriated and celebrated when the artists explore these aesthetic objects’ disruptive potential. While the role of the representative regime was to “confer

causal logic on the arrangement of events[...]presenting events according to their empirical order” (2004 37), the art of the aesthetic regime, exemplified by Rancière with modernism, “drastically disrupts things” (2004 38). It does this by “destroying the mimetic barrier that distinguished ways of doing and making affiliated with art from other ways of doing and making” (2004 23). This is revolutionary, because by undermining the division between artistic production and other ways of doing and making, aesthetic practice and production becomes accessible to an entire community rather than a small and carefully controlled section of it. The work that an artist produces becomes part of his or her own experience of the social world, rather than conforming to the ethically or formally “accurate” kinds of representation that have been sanctioned by those with social and political power.

While Rancière bases his analysis of the relationship between art and the sensible order largely on a discussion of European aesthetic traditions, it has clear implications for my study of Maori literature. His insistence on art’s potential to undermine social and political inequality unsettles the Eurocentrism of world literary and cultural space as it has been described by writers like Casanova and Dussel. At the same time, as I will show, his descriptions of acts of aesthetic subjectivisation by which individuals claim their status as political, speaking subjects is relevant to a number of the novels that I consider here. In a 2007 interview with Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey, Rancière’s himself demonstrated the potential usefulness of his work to free historiography from Western “grand narratives”:

What interests me more than politics or art is the way the boundaries defining certain practices as artistic or political are drawn and redrawn. This frees artistic and political creativity from the yoke of the great historical schemata that announce the great revolutions to

come or that mourn the great revolutions past only to impose their
proscriptions and their declarations of powerlessness on the present.
(2007 257)

Rancière’s description here of the ways art is implicated in “making” both temporality and history will inform my reading of Maori fiction over the following chapters. I will consider how Maori authors have engaged with Maori art, architecture and material culture in order to find ways of rejecting the spatially and temporally rigid account of Maori history generated by bourgeois Pakeha historians, on one hand, and in order to question both the distribution of land and urban social space in New Zealand, on the other. As I will demonstrate, Maori authors establish a “marae on paper” in order to explore Maori peripheralisation within the social and political spheres with reference to distinctions such as traditional and modern, relevant and obsolete, and central and peripheral.

In chapter one, I focus on Witi Ihimaera’s 1986 ground-breaking novel *The Matriarch*, which describes the long history of the Mahana family who live on the East coast of New Zealand’s North Island. More specifically, the novel centres upon the family’s history of resisting the efforts of successive colonial governments to dispossess them of their lands. The protagonist, Tamatea Mahana, finds himself at the centre of a struggle over land he inherits from his grandmother, Artemis, who has inherited it in turn from her great grandfather, the nineteenth century historical Maori parliamentarian Wi Pere. Wi Pere’s historical struggle then forms the backdrop to Ihimaera’s contemporary story within a complex series of narratives that address matters of historical and political significance alongside social and domestic concerns.

Critical responses to *The Matriarch* have been diverse and contradictory, concerned both with the relations among Maori myth and history in the novel and with its biculturalism. However, since his previous work had been characterised by the early, pastoral style, all of them agree that the novel signalled a turning point for him. The novel is not only complex in its narrative structure but revisionist in its historical goals, as Ihimaera undermines Pakeha accounts of New Zealand's colonial history with its polyphonic and multiperspectival narrative form. Although its numerous historical and fictional narrative strands might be regarded as incoherent, I argue here that the Rongopai meeting house – the ancestral meeting house of both Ihimaera himself and his fictional Mahana protagonists – acts as an effective anchor within the text for them all.

Although art historians like Roger Neich have provided invaluable insight into the painted artwork of the Rongopai meeting house, they deploy scholarly systems of organisation and classification derived from colonial histories that do not allow for rich and complex experiences like those narrated in the novel to be fully acknowledged. Indeed, Maori writers, since the mid-nineteen seventies, have to some extent challenged and counteracted the ways that the meeting house has been conceptualised in the scholarly literature, by re-inscribing it in its sociocultural contexts in their writing. The novel as a genre, therefore, offers alternative ways of perceiving and evaluating its cultural roles.

Importantly, in *The Matriarch*, Ihimaera's engagement with the artwork of Rongopai supports his revisionist stance on New Zealand's history because Maori material arts are themselves aspective, multifaceted and reliant upon the fluid arts of oral storytelling. Ihimaera's deployment of multiple narrative strands in his novel not only illustrates the multifaceted nature of the subjective act of perception but also

inscribes in his novel the difficulty in attaining a fully stable, definitive and authoritative narrative. As I will show, the novel not only supports a multiperspectival and polyphonic approach to New Zealand's history but also disrupts the aesthetic protocols and mimetic practices shaping bourgeois national culture by exploring the relationship of bourgeois aesthetic and representational protocols in contemporary New Zealand to sensory and corporeal experience.

Chapter two focuses on two novels by Patricia Grace, *Potiki* (1986) and *Baby No-Eyes* (1998). Like Ihimaera's, Grace's novels deploy a plural, polyphonic narrative structure but while Ihimaera brings competing voices into contact with each other, Grace's narrators share a common perspective on the events depicted throughout each novel. Each novel also has a much narrower temporal and geographic scope than *The Matriarch* so, in this chapter, I examine the relationship between Grace's descriptions of the social and ritual practices associated with the meeting house and her accounts of Maori experiences of social and political marginalisation on an individual and subjective level.

Potiki is an allegory based upon the historical Bastion Point and Raglan occupations that occurred in 1977 as part of a broader Maori protest movement, while *Baby No-Eyes* describes the 1995 occupation of the Mautoa Gardens in Wanganui. Both novels explore and challenge the ways that Maori communities' ownership of their ancestral lands continues to be contested within modern New Zealand. Although *Potiki* depicts conflicts over the distribution of social space and describes meeting houses as sites of protest, *Baby No-Eyes* investigates the subjective effects of these conflicts upon the lives of the central characters and their perceptions of themselves. Here, the kinds of protests that occurred in *Potiki* are not

only enacted in public spaces over property and civic boundaries but within the homes, minds and bodies of individual characters also.

Like Ihimaera, Grace engages with the kinds of storytelling that typify meeting house art when she describes her characters' attempts to narrate their personal histories. In recent criticism, this process has been described in diverse ways. For instance, Eva Rask Knudsen describes the meeting house as a site that hosts a multiplicity of narrative voices that "address the visiting reader" (2011 2), while Chadwick Allen examines the reconstruction of ancestral meeting houses in *Potiki* as a way to establish a sense of continuity between the past and the future. In this chapter, I am interested in Grace's engagement with different forms of articulation and argue that in both *Potiki* and *Baby No-Eyes*, both the spoken and written word are shown to be inadequate forms of communication. In *Potiki*, communication between the Maori and Pakeha populations comes to take place via the construction and destruction of meeting houses in contested spaces, while *Baby No-Eyes* responds to Maori land loss, cultural dispossession and urbanisation by showing how the Maori concept of *turangawaewae* [an individual's claim to a "standing place"] has been carried over from the ritual space of the meeting house into different, vernacular spaces where a *whanau's* [extended family's] stories can be told. For example, the protagonist Tawera's grandmother, Kura, narrates the collective history of her family within the space of her verandah, while Tawera himself unexpectedly responds to the desecration of the body of his deceased sister by Pakeha doctors during a performance on the stage at his school. Grace's narrative carefully deploys visual and tactile metaphors to connect some of the narrative methods traditionally associated with a meeting house's ornamentation to each character's attempts to make his or her own narrative recognisable. As a result,

although the central family in *Baby No-Eyes* do not often refer to an ancestral meeting house, the novel still draws analogies between the material art of the meeting house and the vernacular forms of articulation and communication employed by the its protagonists.

In chapter three, I focus on Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* (1984), a novel which bears little resemblance formally or thematically to either Ihimaera's or Grace's work from the same period. It is set in a remote part of New Zealand's South Island and much of its action takes place within a medieval-style tower that an artist named Kerewin Holmes has built there. It tells the story of Kerewin's unexpected friendship with her neighbour, Joe Gillayley and his adopted son, Simon, within a fragmented, modernist narrative. As I will show, Hulme's story is much shorter in its temporal scope than the previous novels I discuss which deal with family histories recorded across generations. Indeed, the fact that Kerewin has become estranged from her own family, Joe's wife and son have died, and Joe is unsure of Simon's actual name, age or nationality suggests that Hulme is interested in representing characters who struggle with genealogy. In this chapter, I illustrate her attempt to imagine alternative forms of social relationship among her Maori characters. Additionally, I claim that in *The Bone People*, even traditional Maori art can accommodate new stories of origin and new ways of articulating Maori identity alongside its more historically and culturally obvious iterations.

For example, as their friendship develops, both Kerewin and Joe find pieces of carved greenstone on a beach. Typically, greenstone ornaments are passed from generation to generation and treasured by those who own and wear them. The value of the object is tied to the owner's genealogy and when given as a gift, it ideally enhances the recipient's prestige. Objects such as greenstone ornaments have

therefore been inscribed with centuries of complex social and cultural history. However, while traditional greenstones reflect a person's genealogy and broader family history and can be used to foster important, new relationships, in Hulme's narrative, both the identities of the original owners and stories associated with them have been lost. Initially, Kerewin uses the greenstone that she has found on the beach alongside those that she has purchased to compensate for her lack of family. However, as the narrative proceeds, both she and Joe come to believe that the beach "gave" their greenstones to them. The two pieces, then, come to symbolise a shared origin that establishes a connection between them. When Kerewin later gives one of her most treasured pieces of greenstone to Joe, she aims to establish a new kind of social relationship with him and Simon – "not family, not whanau" (395) but something more indeterminate and difficult to categorise.

As I will show, the greenstone is just one of many objects, which also include a sandal and a chess piece, that are exchanged among the three characters in a process that unsettles the historical association between material objects and Maori identity on two different levels. Firstly, the status of the object becomes undecidable and the reader is unsure of how he or she should interpret it. And second, the example of the greenstone expresses Hulme's rejection of fixed, genealogical narratives of origin in favour of contemporary beginnings. The narrative emphasis upon the three central characters' attempts to establish new beginnings is further supported when Kerewin decides to knock down her tower and replace it with a spiral-shaped structure. With her new home, she aims to repair the bonds that have become damaged between herself and the Gillayleys, perhaps by generating what Rancière describes as a "co-presence of beings and objects constitutive of a world" (2009 57).

Since the spiral structure recalls the curvilinear designs of meeting house art, this act has been construed by some critics, including Chadwick Allen,¹⁰ as signifying Kerewin's rejection of European ways of living and reclamation of the Maoritanga [Maori way of life]. However, I demonstrate here that the relationship between the buildings is not as polarised as this. Instead, it is better understood in terms of the concepts of "*détournement*" and what Rancière describes as "mystery". For example, Kerewin's spiral turns towards the tower at its centre where it is, in some ways, a material "quotation" (Jappe, 59) or "re-use" (Jappe, 59) of its vestiges that "'adapts' the original element to a new context" (Jappe, 59). The spiral becomes the first structure simultaneously to house both the three characters and their story symbolised by the material objects that they have exchanged amongst themselves over the course of the novel. Despite this, it can never offer any real sense of resolution to the three characters' shared story. Instead, the fact that it both refers to and also partially includes the structure that preceded it suggests that the space will continue to evolve and develop further, reinforcing the novel's open-endedness. At the end of the novel, it forms something that resembles a new lifeworld, which acquires its power through both its similarity to and difference from the familiar symbols and strategies of Maori art.

In this chapter, then, rather than attempt to situate Hulme within the Maori literary tradition, I consider how the objects of this tradition are re-signified over the course of *The Bone People*. Within more recent literary criticism, readers have engaged with the novel as a hybridised "blending" of Maori and Pakeha traditions, or as a means of understanding Hulme's national politics and cultural identity. However, I argue that Hulme does not make any overt statement regarding New Zealand's socio-spatial division. Instead, she unsettles the ways that the recurring

and familiar objects, structures and practices of Maori cultural tradition have been deployed ideologically by other celebrated renaissance texts.

While novels like *The Matriarch* and *Potiki* have described both the historical and contemporary struggles of Maori communities to maintain control of their ancestral lands, Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors* depicts Maori characters for whom this struggle no longer carries relevance. Until the final chapters, the novel makes only abstract reference to Maori traditional culture and makes no reference at all to the ongoing land disputes and Maori protest movements. Instead it gives an intimate and comprehensive account of life in an urban community named Pine Block, which is characterised by acute poverty, violence and social dysfunction. In Chapter Four, I discuss Duff's depiction of the assimilation of some members of this community into a social order that has been established and shaped by Pakeha New Zealanders.

As I will show, in *Once Were Warriors*, the meeting house as a communal space is absent for most of the narrative and there is no material or symbolic structure like Kura's veranda in *Baby No-Eyes* or Kerewin's spiral in *The Bone People* that performs a similar function. Instead, an overarching concern with warriorhood comes to act as a metonym for Maori culture more broadly and also becomes a way for the men within the community to claim social legitimacy and power. Ultimately, however, the forms of warriorhood they embrace promote only violence, impulsiveness and excess and bear little resemblance to its historical form. The resignification of Maori identity via warriorhood in Pine Block thus results in a reductive, dysfunctional and destructive sense of self.

The plot is concerned with a decision made by a Pine Block mother, Beth to work towards improving the community after the suicide of her daughter, Grace. Her effort to improve the lives of the people in her community begins with modest social initiatives but ultimately takes the form of a cultural revival, led by Te Tupaea, the chief of a neighbouring middle-class Maori community. In my chapter, I compare the spaces of the Pakeha courtroom in which the hearing of Beth's son is held, and the space of the traditional Maori meeting house, which Beth visits for her daughter Grace's funeral. This comparison illustrates the parallels between them and demonstrates that the scenes of cultural revival at the end of the novel celebrate Pine Block's assimilation to a superficially "bi-cultural" social order rather than a successful re-configuration of unequal social relations between the middle and working-class communities. Finally, I argue that the scene of Grace's suicide carries the most political potential in the novel, since she chooses to end her life outside the home of a white, wealthy landowner in protest of the marginalisation of her community. In my chapter, I argue that, although Duff tries to move his narrative towards an optimistic resolution, he closes off the political gesture underwriting Grace's action in this scene. The narrative ultimately deploys her death as a catalyst for the cultural revival and the inadequate process of cultural assimilation that follows it.

Although Duff has increased the visibility of disadvantaged urban Maori communities in New Zealand through both his novel and Lee Tamahori's film adaptation, the meeting house, when present in his fiction, is deployed in a way that reverses the combined objectives of Ihimaera, Grace and Hulme. Though the latter three each portray the Maori meeting house differently, their novels share a sense of it as a form that can be renewed and used as both a site of contemporary protest and

an alternative centre of social organisation. For Duff, however, it represents a form of Maori culture that is historical and unchanging. Furthermore, as I will show, it becomes a site where genuine social protest is shut down and the disadvantaged Maori community in his novel become depoliticised. Therefore, if, as Rancière argues, democracy disrupts and queries “the organisation of bodies as a community and the management of places, powers and functions” (99), the cultural revival depicted at the end of Duff’s novel is not democratic. For rather than querying the distribution of power and space in New Zealand, the revival at Pine Block arguably consolidates dominant systems of social organisation and closes off the social spaces where disruptions to the status quo might occur. Patricia Grace once described herself as being part of a group of “firsts”, alongside Witi Ihimaera who was the first Maori novelist to be published and Keri Hulme, who was the first Maori writer to win the Booker Prize.¹¹ *Once Were Warriors* might also be listed as a kind of unwitting “first” alongside the novels of Ihimaera, Grace and Hulme – not for its sustained focus on an urban Maori community nor for its representation of gang violence and domestic abuse but for its representation of the process by which that community loses the little political power that it has.

“Separated from the world”: The Politics and Aesthetics of the Maori Meeting House in Witi Ihimaera’s *The Matriarch*

Introduction

Witi Ihimaera’s 1986 novel *The Matriarch*¹ records the genealogy of the Mahana family from its earliest oral histories to the more recent story of its central protagonist and narrator Tamatea Mahana, who inherits the leadership of an ongoing land conflict from his grandmother Artemis. The novel marked the end of Ihimaera’s self-imposed hiatus from writing after the publication of *Whanau* in 1974 and signalled a significant change in his work. Apparently unhappy with what he perceived as the sentimental and idealistic tone of his previous fiction, Ihimaera chose more directly to address the history of the ongoing land struggle in New Zealand in *The Matriarch*, adopting a distinctly politicised and confrontational tone.² Interestingly, the novel did not just signal a turning point in Ihimaera’s career; it also marked a turning point in the thematic concerns and stylistic conventions of Maori literature more generally.

Potiki by Patricia Grace was also published in 1986 and similarly marked a break from her previous, pastoral narrative style. Like Ihimaera, she engages with the question of Maori dispossession and describes Maori attempts to retain ownership of their tribal lands in the Bastion Point and Motuoa Garden occupations of 1977. Furthermore, as I will show in chapter three, Keri Hulme’s 1985 novel *The Bone People* similarly departs from the narrative conventions of early Maori literature. Although only a little over a decade had passed since the publication of Ihimaera’s *Tangi* in 1973, the literature of the mid-renaissance period had begun to

eschew the pastoral representations of whanau and iwi [tribe] in favour of a more direct engagement with the contemporary politics of Maori self-representation.

One of the most effective ways to trace this change is to examine the thematic and narrative functions of the Maori meeting house in the novels of this period. As a number of art historians have explained,³ the meeting house is a structure that also tells a story. Its interior walls are frequently carved with curvilinear patterns that represent ancestral figures and important historical events, while its supporting structure represents both the myth of creation and the symbolic body of the people. *The Matriarch* offers a particularly interesting introduction to my study of the role of the Maori meeting house in the Maori novel, because, as I will argue, it mimics the multiperspectival style of meeting house art work in its own narrative.

When it was constructed in 1888, Rongopai,⁴ the meeting house at the centre of *The Matriarch*, broke with tradition because it was decorated with an experimental style of multiperspectival painted portraiture rather than the carved forms of its predecessors. Like the house, Ihimaera's novel favours a multiperspectival form, which I will examine here with reference to the system of aesthetic classification described by Jacques Rancière in his 2004 work *The Politics of Aesthetics*. As Rancière argues, aesthetic products can either uphold or disrupt the social order in which they are produced and in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, he proposes a series of three "regimes" as a way to explore the social effects of aesthetic practices further. In this chapter, I first aim to show how, in *The Matriarch*, Rongopai can be examined in a way that emphasises the importance of perspective and the relationship of perception to the surrounding social order. Having considered Ihimaera's engagement with Maori art and architecture in the novel, I will then turn

to the novel's own status as an aesthetic object and explore its complex and layered intertextuality. Here, I will show that Ihimaera's novel anticipates its own circulation within world literary space while also demonstrating an awareness that it is just one of the many narratives that explore global history and literary space. Like the historically significant art and architecture of Rongopai that is represented in the novel, Ihimaera's narrative – which, as I argue, is modelled on this art – disrupted the sociosymbolic and literary order in which it emerged, providing an example of what Rancière calls “literary locutions” (35). As Rancière explains, storytelling helps to produce a sense of historical agency; a literary statement “produces effects in reality” (35). For Rancière, however, “literary locutions” are powerfully disruptive “blocks of speech” (35) that have the potential to “introduce lines of fracture and disincorporation” (35) into the sociohistorical world. They express dissent and may help to generate social upheavals and social change. In this chapter, I describe both the textual figure of the meeting house within the Maori renaissance novel and the circulation of the Maori renaissance novel within the world literary space as disruptive locutions.⁵

As a historical novel, *The Matriarch* draws together several different “sources” both real and imagined, including newspaper reports, the parliamentary record of Wi Pere Halbert (1837-1915) and a series of journal entries describing the rise of Te Kooti Te Turuki (1830-1893). Although Wi Pere and Te Kooti were contemporaries, they adopted very different approaches in their attempts to agitate for the return of Maori lands following European settlement in New Zealand. As one of the first prominent Maori parliamentarians, Wi Pere used his parliamentary position to work towards improved Maori land rights within the Pakeha-implemented legal system following his election in 1884.⁶ By contrast, Te Kooti led

the continuing guerrilla-style violence that characterised relations between Maori and Pakeha during the mid-to-late eighteen-hundreds. Most notably, the 1868 Matawhero raid was widely attributed to Te Kooti, who described his attacks on several prominent Pakeha families – including the family of Major Reginald Biggs – as utu [retaliation] for his unprovoked imprisonment on the Chatham Islands and subsequent loss of ancestral lands.⁷ However, while Te Kooti characterised the Matawhero raid as an act of retaliation, it is also frequently described as a violent massacre in historical writing.⁸ As I will show, though the central narrative of *The Matriarch* is narrated by Artemis, a fictional descendant of Wi Pere, Ihimaera’s decision to narrate the raid from a neutral perspective undermines this otherwise dominant Maori voice in the novel and signals his commitment to representing a plurality of narrative voices and styles within his story.⁹

The Matriarch has a complex narrative structure that includes stories ranging from Te Kore [the void] to accounts of historical conflict both past and present represented from multiple points of view.¹⁰ Several of these stories are narrated by Artemis, the matriarch of the novel’s title, who intends to teach her grandson Tamatea about his origins, history and whakapapa [genealogy] while sitting with him in Rongopai, the meeting house that is situated in Waituhi.¹¹ In these scenes, as in the historical building, Wi Pere and Te Kooti are represented on the walls by a prominent portrait and symbolic painting of a thistle respectively; the suggestion that Rongopai forms the community’s “political statement” (194) is fully explored. Artemis gestures towards the paintings and artwork on the walls as a way of illustrating her own narrative and at the same time, for Tamatea, “the painted ancestors seemed to spring to life from the pillars” (133). In the novel, Rongopai constitutes the site where material reality and narrative meet – the materiality of the

house and its artwork, on one hand, and the varied and multifaceted narratives that it provokes, on the other. Importantly, however, a single portrait or painted symbol may inhabit many different, subjective perspectives, undermining the historical stability of any one account of it. Therefore, although Rongopai is a central site in the novel, it is not itself presented as a static entity. Instead, since the way that the meeting house is conceptualised and framed depends entirely on the person who perceives it; it is subject to numerous and varying interpretations.

However, critical consideration of the narrative strategy in the novel has arguably been submerged in wider discussions of Ihimaera's engagement with Maori myth and legend and, as I will later show, the novel's revisionism. For instance, myth and legend are central to the analyses of the novel provided both by Eva Rask Knudsen in *The Circle and the Spiral* (2004) and Nadia Majid in *My Mother Was the Earth, My Father was the Sky* (2009). In addition, almost every account of intertextuality in the novel to date has referred to Ihimaera's engagement with both Maori and European-derived myth.¹² For example, Melissa Kennedy argues in *Striding Both Worlds* (2011) that Ihimaera's deployment of classical European myth contributes to the novel's biculturalism, suggesting that "the concept of striding both worlds is not about crossing over from one pole to another but, rather, about how Maori culture is always already part of and caught in a web of historical and contemporary, local, national and global influences and interactions" (xii-xiii).

The novel's broad temporal span and polyphonic narrative have also been identified as constitutive of Ihimaera's attempt to synthesise past and present, or equally, as initiating a project of pan-Maori cultural reclamation. For example, in *Writing Along Broken Lines* (1998), Otto Heim suggests that *The Matriarch* engages with past examples of Maori art and imagery as a form of cultural "citation", stating

that “it is specifically Rongopai that in its syncretism, combining Maori and European images and forms, becomes a symbol for Ihimaera’s changing view of the Maori present in relation to the past” (204). For Heim, the appeal of Rongopai’s artwork for Ihimaera rests in its hybrid symbolism but this argument does not account for the more complex aesthetic developments in Maori art that preceded the house’s construction.

In another account of the novel, Michelle Keown suggests that *The Matriarch* depicts both the meeting house and the Maori body as having been inscribed by the trauma of the colonial encounter and also argues Te Kooti’s development of the Ringatu faith during the 1860s was an attempt to initiate a process of mass healing and restoration. According to Keown, prophetic figures such as Te Kooti and his successor Rua Kenana were “concerned with establishing a process whereby the Maori communal ‘body’, damaged by the process of colonisation, could be restored and strengthened through a pan-Maori nationalist initiative” (2009 139). This account of *The Matriarch*, which considers how the identity of different Maori communities could be potentially subsumed under a unified representation of Maori nationalism, is affirmed by Eva Rask Knudsen who stresses the novel’s supposed emphasis on unified self-representation articulated through a project of cultural recovery. Additionally, Rask Knudsen suggests that the text’s polyphony is not an example of a fragmented and disparate narrative structure, but is instead representative of the collective memory that is traditionally held by “the indigenous storyteller” (54). She concludes by emphasising the necessity for Maori cultural unity to be established within this intermixing of historical and fictional voices and suggests that “Ihimaera is not as preoccupied with writing back

to the European centre as he is concerned with writing back to a Maori centre in order to find a new means of self-representation there” (340).

Like other critics, I am concerned here with Ihimaera’s project of cultural revisionism but rather than focusing on the harmonising roles of oral and communal practices and modes of story-telling, I examine the thematic and formal functions of the Rongopai meeting house as a site of resistance to totalising narratives of Maori social and political identity. Therefore, while the critical work discussed above generally attempts to arrive at an account of the novel that unifies its numerous and complex narrative strands, I argue that the novel’s disunity contributes to its political energy. Like other critics, I am concerned with the relationship between history and identity in the novel and engage with this relationship in my analysis of Ihimaera’s representation of the Rongopai meeting house. However, as I will demonstrate, Ihimaera depicts the meeting house not only as a clear and tangible statement of a community’s collective identity but also as both a historical and contemporary site of dispute about that identity. Heim’s account of the role of Rongopai as a method of citation within the novel is too reductive because it does not account for the radical incoherence of its multi-perspectival form. Furthermore, as I will argue, rather than being just a simple form of cultural “citation”, Ihimaera’s depiction of this complex cultural structure in the novel represents the process of narrativisation itself. In this chapter, rather than attempting to reconcile stories that range from Te Kore to accounts of the mid 1980s Maori protest movement, I argue that the novel’s fractured and polyphonic narrative structure signals Ihimaera’s rejection of both a spatially and temporally rigid conceptualisation of Maori history and the ongoing land conflicts in New Zealand. Furthermore, it challenges the marginalisation and peripheralisation of the Maori within dominant Pakeha

discourses and grants them a newly important role within the project of national story-telling.

Introduction to the history and architecture of Maori meeting houses

Before turning to consider the material and aesthetic qualities of the Maori meeting house, I will first describe its relationship to European settler culture. As I will show, its three main phases since the mid-nineteenth century are often understood with regard to the influence of European settler culture upon Maori architecture and decoration. For instance, the flourishing of carved meeting houses within Maori communities followed European settlement in New Zealand and later developments, like the interest in painting rather than the carved arts, are often attributed to settler cultures also.

However, historians like Neich tend inadvertently to feminise the carved meeting house as a receptive, post-colonial and hybridised form.¹³ Furthermore, though they have undoubtedly provided useful sources of historical information for critical accounts of Rongopai's role in *The Matriarch*, the systems of categorisation and classification they use do not allow for the rich and complex experiences narrated in the novel to be fully expressed. Indeed, as I will argue, Maori fiction since the mid-nineteen seventies has to some extent challenged and counteracted the ways that the meeting house has been conceptualised in the scholarly literature, re-inscribing and re-emphasising its sociocultural contexts. The novel as a genre, therefore, offers alternative ways of perceiving and evaluating its cultural roles.

The Maori meeting house reflects quite a specific cosmology of the community with which it is associated. Its internal supporting structure itself recalls

the creation myth depicting the parting of earth from sky, while its walls, roof and carved koruru [figurehead] represent, as Tamatea states, “the body of the people” (189). Before the influx of settlers, the elaborately carved waka [canoes] constituted the predominant symbols and expression of a collective tribal identity. However, with settlement and the construction of mission houses on tribal land, the Maori responded with houses of their own (Neich 2001 174). Though there had already been groups of Maori houses on the land, these were dwelling houses as opposed to ceremonial buildings and the largest building was typically occupied by the tribal chief. The meeting house was differentiated from the chief’s house by its shape, size, purpose and status as a sacred structure. Interestingly, however, many of the design features that were typically associated with canoes, such as elaborate curvilinear carvings and painted patterns were transferred to the walls of the “big house” or whare nui, which came to narrate the history of the community alongside their associated claim to land, using symbolic imagery and portraiture.

As Roger Neich explains in *Painted Histories*, “in general terms the traditional meeting house of the 1840s and later was expressing an ideology of group identity based on the idiom of descent” (15). As the meeting house became both a material and a symbolic focal point for the surrounding community, the remaining buildings were located in a way that emphasised its importance, forming an overall grouping that is known as the marae. The marae typically features an open courtyard in which speeches to welcome visitors typically take place. Prior to this, the buildings had sometimes been arranged in fortified settlements known as pas,¹⁴ and Ihimaera engages with both ways of arranging physical space over the course of *The Matriarch*.

The use of figurative painting in place of, or as a compliment to the traditional carved art forms is also frequently attributed in the scholarly literature to the missionary artwork that was used in pamphlets, posters and books, alongside the availability of materials through which these art forms could be reproduced. While the use of specific pigments such as red, black and white were symbolically significant,¹⁵ the use of paint was not governed by the same ritual conventions that tightly controlled the carved arts that preceded it and could therefore be utilised in a much more experimental form of expression. Following the flourishing of this newly liberated mode of expression however, there was a settler-generated revival, dominated by the growing tourist industry and resulting commercial interest in what were considered to be “traditional” Maori arts. This resulted in a somewhat disengaged mode of artistic production, highly formal and self-consciously stylised, a lot of which was then photographed, circulated and put on display, undermining its contextual relationships and leaving only what Neich has described as a formal image in its place (241).

During this revival, certain aspects of the artwork being produced had therefore lost some of its metonymic significance. Furthermore, although Roger Neich complicates this account with his analysis of how Rotorua Ngati Tarawhai¹⁶ carving came to flourish within this period of revival, the use of figurative painting nonetheless constituted quite a significant change in the production and overall conceptualisation of Maori visual arts and material culture.¹⁷ The Rongopai meeting house is one of the most significant examples of Maori figurative painting in this period due to the aesthetic freedom, range and innovation in its portraits and other decorations. As Neich states, “although the decorative work of Rongopai was a composite creation derived from various sources, the special genius of the house’s

designers melded these diverse influences into a magnificent statement of tribal identity and joyous optimism” (192). Ihimaera affirms this account of Rongopai in *The Matriarch*, describing its “glorious colours” (190) and its “exuberance” (190) in a way that reflects its importance as an example of Maori cultural innovation and experimentation in the late nineteenth century. However, his novel places greater emphasis on how the multifaceted mode of representation at Rongopai shapes the subjective act of perception, which in turn makes it difficult to establish a fully stable, definitive and authoritative understanding of the community’s history. In addition, I will highlight the narrative attention paid to some key details of the paintings in the house, illuminating elements of its decorative structure that have been obscured in the historical accounts.

As Jacques Rancière suggests, the disruptive power of aesthetic objects lies in their capacity to escape the conventions of daily practices and circulate symbolically without a legitimating system. As I will show, when a meeting house is deployed as a figure within the novel, it can circulate this way and re-shape the subjectivity of Ihimaera’s characters. Therefore, while painted houses such as Rongopai have been most often viewed in the scholarly and critical literature in terms of their hybridity and syncretism, Ihimaera’s novel appears to show that these terms perform a disservice to the lived experience of the house itself. In the scholarly literature, the emphasis upon biculturalism and aesthetic duality over the subjective experience of the environment of the house arguably peripheralises the indigenous culture within a Eurocentric model of spatially and temporally linear modernity. However, by representing Rongopai and its decorative components in a Maori sociocultural context the novel, Ihimaera reinstates its richness, mystery and narrative complexity and, interestingly, he does this through the use of multiple and

unstable points of view. *The Matriarch*, then, provides a more fluid and enlivening model of Maori material culture and identity, destabilising the Eurocentric model that depicts postcolonial Maori artefacts as both hybrid and passively receptive of settler cultural forms.

It is important to note that, in *The Matriarch*, Ihimaera is careful to pay tribute to the sacred dimensions of Rongopai. For instance, in the opening scenes, Artemis explains that the two central pillars of the meeting house symbolise the parting of earth from sky, or the parting of “Rangi Awatea and Papatuanuku, the Sky Father Above and the Earth Mother Below” (3) who, according to Maori mythology, were in a close embrace that prevented the light from breaking through. Their forced separation eventually allowed light into the world and as she goes on to say, “the Maori still give salutations to Earth and Sky and the Separation which continues to allow us to live in the light” (3). Throughout the novel, all of the house, from its structure to its decoration is depicted as highly significant and sacred to the Mahana family with whom Rongopai is associated. Despite this, when the young people who restore its interior paintings at a later stage in the novel transgress many of the cultural prohibitions that traditionally accompany meeting house construction and decoration, neither Artemis or Tamatea perceive it as problematic, because they acknowledge the importance of the house to their Maori identities and understand its centrality within their community. Indeed, while the vertical poles supporting the roof of the building represent the creation myth, the remaining structural components are linked to different parts of the body as Tamatea explains:

The house has a head, backbone, ribcage and limbs. It is built in the shape of a person and is usually named after an ancestor of the people. The roof of the house has at the apex of the gable a large

carved head which we call the koruru, you will see the sloping bargeboards like an inverted V, one on either side of the head. These are the arms or maihi. And within the house are rafters which represent the ribs. So when you go into the house, you enter into the ancestor, or, if you like, you are taken into the body of the people.

(189)

Highly symbolic but also extremely practical, the meeting house makes a statement about Maori tribal identity. Importantly, it also acts as a site within the novel where many of the social, cultural and political issues concerning Maori land rights can be discussed and debated.

The Cultural Object and Museum Space in *The Matriarch*

Most of *The Matriarch*'s narrative spans the period from the late eighteenth to late twentieth century, although it also makes reference to the Maori journey from East Polynesia to New Zealand where they subsequently settled.¹⁸ Part of this broad temporal span is reflected in the four different generations of the Mahana whanau who are each involved in the attempt to secure the return of their ancestral lands. As previously stated, the historical figures of Te Kooti and Wi Pere are given central roles in the novel; Te Kooti assuming the role of rebellion against the Pakeha settlers, while Wi Pere instead represented Maori interests in the Pakeha parliament. The Matriarch, also named as Artemis Riripeti Pere, is a descendant of Wi Pere and grandmother of Tamatea Mahana. The genealogical heritage of the Mahana family is therefore bound up in a wider historical context and over the course of the novel Artemis teaches Tamatea about her own instrumental role in both their family's

political history and matters of wider state politics.

Since Rongopai's individual paintings form the focal point for several of these important narrative strands, the house and its artwork are given the capacity to circulate in textual form, establishing "uncertain communities" (Rancière 2004 40) that both meet and diverge with each other. As I have mentioned, Rancière suggests that such literary locutions have the potential to introduce "lines of fracture and disincorporation into imaginary collective bodies" (2004 39), which suggests that they do not operate and flourish within situations of cohesion, but instead, by causing "modifications" within the act of perception itself:

They widen gaps, open up space for deviations, modify the speeds, the trajectories, and the ways in which groups of people adhere to a condition, react to situations, recognise their images. They reconfigure the map of the sensible by interfering with the functionality of gestures and rhythms adapted to the natural cycles of production, reproduction and submission. (2006 39)

According to Rancière, literature, like art, therefore has the potential to disrupt the established ways of viewing an object or space, calling into question the established "gestures and rhythms" with which it is associated. Ihimaera arguably approaches his conceptualisation of Rongopai in a similar way and suggests that its associated "distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity" is not static. Significantly, for instance, one of the first sustained encounters that the reader has with Maori art, architecture and material culture is not uplifting but demoralizing. It occurs in the Gisborne Museum and Art Gallery when Tamatea encounters a miniaturised replica pa [fortified settlement] that has been put on display there:

I was staring at the model of an ancient pa site. The model was expertly done in plastic and clay and wooden matches; that's what we had come to these days - mere plastic. What would the old people have thought, I wondered, had they know that their hill forts would be miniaturised in this manner? Made small like this, a reduction to the absurd? (67)

Tamatea observes that although the museum building is attractive there is a sense of discord between the European-style architecture of the building and the Maori objects that are housed within it: "the museum itself was notable mainly for its Maori artifacts [but] here they were installed in a European-looking building" (1986 67). His descriptions of the museum show that the specifically European configurations of display within it reflect colonial power. Furthermore, his imaginative attempt to recontextualise the pa within its original situation "overlooking the Turanganui River" (1986 184) emphasises its status as a model and replica. The pa has been made static, preserved in miniature and reduced, as Tamatea suggests, to the status of "the absurd" within the walls of Gisborne Museum. The model pa then forms a different kind of connection between Rongopai and the historical narrative of the nation to the one used by Artemis in her reference to Rongopai's artwork over the course of the novel. For though the pa as a communal space is framed within the museum as "historical" or "anachronistic", Artemis construes Rongopai, to the contrary, as a contemporary site of cultural vibrancy, as does Tamatea in his descriptions of the "virtual kaleidoscope of colour and form" (190) that soon follow his descriptions of the pa. Furthermore, while the inclusion of Maori objects in the museum space shows some acknowledgement by Pakeha cultural authorities of what Ranci re might describe as the invisible, or peripheralised sphere, in doing so it transforms them into individual and isolated

“memorials to a people who no longer existed” (Ihimaera 67). By reflecting on the grandeur of the Maori past in contrast to its now diminished state, Tamatea invokes some of the novel’s wider concerns within this scene. For instance, his family’s generational struggle to secure the return of their ancestral land is undermined by the suggestion that is implicit in the museum exhibit that such a struggle is no longer relevant in contemporary New Zealand. The model pa has been built with expertise, care, and attention to detail, but its diminutive scale and ethnographic function still betray an underlying cultural insensitivity to Maori people and their culture.

The museum space in the novel does not then provide the aesthetic freedom that Rancière often attributes to artefacts that have been set loose through colonial processes from their vernacular contexts. As he observes:

The imperial and revolutionary pillaging of objects from conquered countries shook up the products of various schools and genres. The effect of these displacements was to accentuate the sensible singularity of works and to undermine not only their representative value but also the hierarchy of subjects and genres according to which they were classified and judged. (2009 9)

Here, Rancière argues that the displacement of artefacts through colonial processes allowed them to be viewed as singular and “aesthetic” entities, rather than as part of a wider sociocultural context. Their displacement thus inadvertently allowed them to challenge the “representative” and ethnographic framework through which they had previously been regarded. However, in this scene, Tamatea is unable to view the replica pa in this way and imaginatively attempts to restore it to its original position within the “ethical” regime of the images. He is acutely aware of the dynamics of

power that are inherent in the museum display.

Rongopai's aspective portraiture and narrative strategy in *The Matriarch*

The scene examining the display of a replica pa within the context of a contemporary museum exhibit is most clearly opposed by the scene of the construction of Rongopai in 1888. Rongopai was the meeting house to which Te Kooti intended to return following his exile from Poverty Bay¹⁹ and the detailed narrative account of the complex and tapu [sacred] process of building this meeting house in the eighteen hundreds stands in sharp contrast to the sight of the matchsticks and plastic structure in the museum. Furthermore, since Rongopai is removed in this scene from the peripheries of the Pakeha-based “representative” regime of the arts and placed instead in a central position within the “ethical” regime of the images, the impression it makes on the reader is suddenly and significantly enhanced. The sacred status of the house is further emphasised by Artemis’s account of its role as a symbol of the growing Maori support for the Ringatu religion within a community that was in conflict with their neighbouring Pakeha settlers. The Ringatu religion was developed by Te Kooti during his imprisonment on the Chatham Islands and was characterised by a blending of Christian and Maori belief systems that put the Maori at the centre of its tenets and practices. It also used the Maori meeting house in lieu of a typically Christian-style church.

As Neich observes, several of the central tenets of the Ringatu religion were established as a direct result of the kupu whakaari [prophesies or visions] that Te Kooti experienced while imprisoned on the Chatham Islands and “filled the gaps that had been left by the missionaries’ inability to reconcile their rigid moral code with

Maori customs and by their abandonment of the mission during the Land Wars” (2002 115). The Ringatu religion therefore performed an important social as well as spiritual function in Maori society and has also been credited for the revival of other traditional arts such as oratory and song that “improved Maori self-esteem at a time when traditional customs and overall cosmology were being significantly undermined” (Neich 2002 115). Ihimaera attributes credit to Te Kooti in his novel for these reasons. As Artemis notes:

He devoted his energies to developing the Ringatu faith, fusing Christianity and Maoritanga in a complementary relationship. He used the church to preserve and encourage Maori arts, especially carving, tukutuku [latticework] and kowhaiwhai [scroll decorations], and to restore pride in the Maori way of doing things. Instead of building churches, his people adopted the carved meeting house as the centre of worship and, as the church itself flourished, so too did the building of new meeting houses to worship in. (Ihimaera 1986 181)

Historically, the house was one of several meeting houses that Te Kooti intended to visit following the end of his imprisonment on the Chatham Islands and was constructed as a means of welcoming him as a prophet of the Ringatu faith.²⁰ The novel describes Te Kooti’s historical instructions to his followers to return to Turanga and “build the Gospel on charity and love” (182), which, Ihimaera notes, was interpreted literally. As Artemis explains, the first house Te Whakahau means “the beginning” (182), Te Rongopai “gospel” (182), Te Ngawari “charity” (182), and Te Aroha “love” (182). These houses all provide resting places for Te Kooti on his journey to the final house of Rongopai and their names reflect the growing popularity of the Ringatu religion at this time.

In her account of the construction of Rongopai, Artemis compares the Maori architects with those of the European renaissance, stating that “it was the establishment of a cathedral on the land. Ae, and our Leonardo da Vinci was named Moanaroa Pere, and he supervised the construction of the pa” (184). Her words establish yet another sharp contrast between the matchsticks and plastic of the museum exhibit and the work of a practised architect who has constructed a ‘cathedral’ upon the land. Although when Tamatea sees the replica pa within the regulated space of the Pakeha museum, it is peripheralised and reduced to an anachronism against which Pakeha modernity constitutes itself, Artemis’s later narrative of the construction of Rongopai in the novel produces an entirely different outcome. As her narrative illustrates, the construction of Rongopai encroached upon the Pakeha system of spatial distribution that had been asserted over the land, extracting the Maori from the “dominant [European] categories of identification and classification” (2004 92). “There was no attempt,” she insists, “to disguise the celebrations of the purpose of the hui [gathering]” (184); “the smoke from the cooking fires must have curled like great signs in the sky, announcing that the building was under way” (185).²¹ The initial reduction and minimisation of a historical Maori meeting house by the dominant Pakeha culture within national space in the Gisborne Museum is therefore challenged and inverted in this scene which illustrates a similar building’s grand size and capacity to form the focus of a community’s memory, strength and solidarity. Here, it is the Pakeha presence and point of view that is diminished and assigned to the periphery.

Ihimaera depicts the Pakeha authorities as having reacted badly to the construction of Rongopai; according to them, the Maori “are utterly beyond any influence of civilisation save that of the strong arm of the law. There is little doubt

that the place selected for the gathering has been chosen for the purpose of showing contempt for and defiance of the opinion of the English settlers” (183). They are unable to understand that there is more than one way of conceptualising temporality and cultural progress and since the house does not fit within their “grid of expressive conventions” (Rancière 2009 29), they view Rongopai as an affront. Interestingly, however, although Artemis sets up this opposition between Maori and Pakeha here, it is also frequently complicated throughout her narrative.

In chapter eight, for example, Tamatea describes the recent restoration of Rongopai’s artwork by members of both the Maori and Pakeha communities, echoing elements from the earlier scene of its construction. The original construction of Rongopai followed a series of strict procedures that would allow it to be considered sacred upon its completion and in chapter eight, Artemis describes how the trees used to build the house were selected, felled and transported under religious supervision. However, since the house was decorated by a younger Maori generation with the unorthodox use of paint and unconventional images,²² it initially caused conflict within the Maori community also and was placed under a tapu from the time of its completion.²³ As the novel confirms, a “kaleidoscope” (190) of painted rather than carved images turned Rongopai into “a strange dream world quite obviously different from those in other meeting houses” (190), making it difficult to place within the traditions of divinity that had been established by the Maori prior to its construction. This sense of transgression is emphasised in the novel when Tamatea explains that “the glorious colours and the exuberance had been applied with little reference to tradition, an obvious break with the past” (190) and that although the painted images were produced with a sense of “reverence” (190) for the

community's history, the blending of styles, forms and subjects proved unacceptable for the elders.

Significantly, this sense of transgression is repeated, later in this chapter, when Tamatea recounts how the meeting house was restored by both Maori and marginalised Pakeha communities as an attempt to heal Maori suffering:

It was Aunt Norma who told me that the young people had come and worked on the house; how many had not held a paintbrush in their hands, and many did not know the first thing about Maori language and culture. Some had never been on a Marae before. Quite a few were street kids, the unemployed driftwood in the teeming sea of humanity[...]Almost a century had passed since the house had been built. Yet the suffering of the Maori nation still persisted (194).

Rancière states that “the distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed” (2004 12), attributing the inclusion or exclusion of an individual to the way in which that activity is perceived. However, in this scene, those who would not typically be allowed “a share in the common” – the working-class Maori and Pakeha – themselves adopt Rongopai as their alternative cultural centre. Furthermore, that the alternative centre has been established at Rongopai does not establish a simple opposition between Pakeha and Maori, since members of both communities become involved in the formation of this alternative series of “parts and positions” (Rancière 2004 12) within the social order. As Ihimaera states, “they were not always Maori, nor were they always Ringatu. They came from throughout Aotearoa [...] from the faiths of the Anglican, the Roman

Catholic, the Mormon; they represented Christian and non-Christian” (194).

Alongside the Maori who have no knowledge of their house or marae, there are also Pakeha who have turned to this process of aesthetic restoration as a way of finding a sense of shared community from within the social peripheries. Significantly, then, a parallel is drawn in the novel between the two generations – the original painters of Rongopai and the youth involved in its restoration almost a century later who also show a lack of understanding and reverence for the ritual practices that they inadvertently transgress as they work. For instance, women are typically restricted to producing the woven panels that are interspersed with the carved, or in this instance painted panels depicting the ancestors, but in Tamatea’s account, they are involved in every aspect of the restoration. For Tamatea and the others involved in the project, these transgressions of the cultural protocols surrounding the construction and decoration of the meeting house are less important than what the restoration represents for “the new Maori woman, fighting for the rights of the dispossessed” (194). This is one of several ways in which Ihimaera destabilises polarised representations of Maori and Pakeha, offering different narrative expressions to both past and present relations between the two communities. Furthermore, despite their respective transgressions, both generations reassert their “faith in Rongopai as a symbol of their Maoritanga at a time when this was being slowly snuffed out by the ways of the Pakeha” (194). Rongopai is therefore depicted as a site in which the initial disruption posed by the Maori to the racist distribution of the sensible upon its initial construction in 1888 is revisited and reasserted in a modern context.

Rongopai and Aesthetic Experience in *The Matriarch*

The many representations of the meeting house in *The Matriarch*, as “just another meeting house in just another Maori village decaying in the wind and the rain” (180) “a reduction to the absurd” (67), a cathedral (184), a place of healing (194), a site of cultural restoration (194) and lastly, a site where subjective perception can be validated and re-affirmed (190) therefore complicate the more contextual and categorical modes of reading the meeting house in the historical literature. Each time that the narrative establishes a historical way of viewing Rongopai, it is later overturned in a process that is repeated until the end of the novel. Significantly, however, even this pattern of reversals is disrupted by Ihimaera’s inclusion of a scene of sensory suspension that unhinges the previous historically-grounded modes of representation and contrasts most sharply with the early scene when Tamatea witnesses the replica pa in Gisborne Museum. While the previous representations of Rongopai focused largely upon its exterior, describing for example its scale, the materials that were used in its construction or how it was situated on the landscape, this last scene instead focuses specifically upon Tamatea’s sensory interaction with the artwork of the house’s interior. This interaction differs sharply from his interaction with the replica pa in the museum exhibit and operates outside the prior readings of the meeting house in the novel. It is described by Ihimaera using the tactile and experiential language of sound, heat and light:

You entered, and were suddenly aware of a change of atmospherics.

There was increased pressure against your eardrums, for instance, and a dampening of the acoustics so that there was no echo to any accidental sound; words uttered seemed to become substantial enough to stand on the edge of the air. There was a rise in temperature and if

your feet were bare you could feel the warmth of the dirt floor like a carpet of heat. Finally, there was a decrease in the light's intensity so that when you looked around you, all you could see were white and painted shapes looming out of the darkness. You were separated from the world. You were in another world, the interior of Rongopai, in itself complete and self-sustaining, its own world without end, its own time-lock. (190)

This passage constitutes a narrative break from prior accounts of the house in the novel that emphasise one or other character's socially-situated view of it within a Eurocentric (post-colonial) historical narrative. Interestingly, Tamatea's description of the artwork of Rongopai anticipates Roger Neich's later careful scholarly description of it in *Painted Histories*. As Neich helpfully explains, the use of an aspective point of view rejects any attempt at a definitive and stable representation of space:

Maori stylised figures are [...] a very complicated synthesis of frontal and profile renderings. The particular space about a figure was never defined and the figure was never put into a landscape. A clear outline separated the figure from the ground, leaving it isolated without any spatial depth relationships. Thus the figure existed in imaginary ideal space. (Neich 2004 141)

Neich goes on to explain that by refusing to root the individual figures depicted in the portraits in a defined relationship with space, the painters gave a greater sense of scope and freedom to the narratives that accompany their viewing. They require a kind of active viewing in which the observer of the painting is not simply a passive

receiver, but instead able to construct his or her own interpretations of the artwork's many potential meanings. As Emma Brunner-Traut suggests, this representational fluidity is also extended to the painting's temporal framework, which ensures that its imagery continues to be relevant and adaptable to contemporary interpretations.²⁴ Described as having the "appearance of a perpetual present" and "sense of complete occurrence" (qtd in Neich 2004 135), the aspective painter attempts to represent several different points of view simultaneously, resulting in the combination of frontal and profile perspectives that was used in many different examples of Maori portraiture at this time.²⁵ It is therefore unlike perspective-based painting, which "fits well with the European model of absolute linear time" (qtd in Neich 2004 136) and fixes its subject to a particular time and space in a way that affects how the artwork can be read. By contrast with this perspective-based approach, Neich suggests that the interior of Rongopai is a "composite creation derived from various sources" (2004 192), from which "the house's designers melded these diverse influences into a magnificent statement of tribal identity and joyous optimism" (2004 192).

By foregrounding Tamatea's subjective perspective and the internal aesthetic dynamics of the house, rather than its static and marginalized position within an external (post-)colonial social and interpretative framework, Ihimaera makes Rongopai singular and a-temporal, "complete and self-sustaining" (190). In this scene, the artwork is "extricated from its ordinary connections and [...] inhabited by a heterogeneous power" (Rancière 2004 23) that overturns all previously offered descriptions of it in the novel and suggests that it has the potential to exist as a singular, autonomous entity. As a result, Ihimaera's depictions of Rongopai's artwork do not derive their political force from any particular socially-oriented issue or message but "because of the type of space and time that it institutes, and the

manner in which it frames this time and peoples this space” (Rancière 2009 23). Furthermore, while Ihimaera’s inclusion of Rongopai in his novel provides a way to explore its different historical meanings and levels of social significance, this scene also suggests that the importance of Rongopai for Ihimaera lies also in its aesthetic power and its capacity to occupy “a place where relations between bodies, images, spaces and times [could be] redistributed” (Rancière 2009 22).

As this scene continues, Ihimaera pays particular attention to the paintings of Wi Pere and Te Kooti, who are represented in Rongopai by a prominent portrait and painting of a thistle respectively.²⁶ Tamatea describes the portrait of Wi Pere in which he is shown standing in front of his parliamentary chair, dressed in a formal Pakeha-style suit with a bird resembling an owl positioned over his left shoulder. Here, every aspect of his portrait, from his clothing and chair, to the representation of his mother as an anthropomorphised bird-like figure, is elaborated.²⁷ Additionally, we learn about Wi Pere’s mana [prestige], which led him to having been painted with moko [facial tattoos] when he was not tattooed in reality. The novel anticipates Neich’s observation that Wi Pere’s portrait provides “a strongly conceptual rather than perceptual statement” (Neich 192) about his character; many of the details of his social and political roles are illustrated metonymically. However, what is most notable overall is that these paintings and their stylistic elements are repositioned within a specifically Maori cosmology rather than within a settler one:

[A]mid the profusion of plants, fabled creatures, men and exotic trees were the small symbols of the interlocking – the moko patterns of the young painters, the astrological signs, the nautical inscriptions, the whimsical patterns of playing cards, the signs of vivacity, of life rather than death, of renewal rather than recession. (192-193)

The novel goes on to describes the detail of Rongopai’s artwork as representing an “eternal continuum” (192-193):

There, the dream, painted on the pillars of puketea wood, and the rafters and in the decorations. *There*, the healing powers of the house, symbolised in the profusion of elaborate trees and vines, twining and climbing in a painted landscape as Eden must have indeed looked; reds and purples, brilliant flowers and pods popping out from large Victorian vases; oranges and yellows, sunbursting fruits defying botanical reality; the glorious purple of the Scotch thistle, the personal symbol of the prophet; [...] the Tree of Life with its twelve separate herbal flowers sprouting from the central trunk. (192-193)

The imagery in this passage evinces some of the new aesthetic freedoms that accompanied the use of paint. Significantly, like the painting of the thistle symbolising Te Kooti,²⁸ the different images could be easily removed, painted over or modified, facilitating a greater sense of experimentation in comparison to the carved arts. This is evident in Rongopai’s transformation during the period of restoration described above, but also in the community’s decision to remove the painted thistle that had offended Te Kooti and contributed to the tribal elders’ belief that he would not visit the house. In *The Matriarch* more generally, Ihimaera’s own writing itself “recycles, rewrites, and comments upon Maori culture and literature in different ways to suit different audiences” (Kennedy 209). As demonstrated in *The Matriarch*, he also engages with these different audiences’ subjective and varied perceptions of Maori culture in turn.

Indeed, Ihimaera's attempt to undermine competing historical narratives in this scene by creating a temporal moment that is purposefully broken off from linear time, or "disincorporated", might invite us to understand the scene and its artwork in terms of what Rancière describes as a "literary [or aesthetic] locution" (35). In his philosophy, the structure of the social order depends on the division of its people into speaking and non-speaking, visible and invisible subjects, alongside the establishment of these divisions within the act of perception itself. When viewed as itself a "literary locution" or passage that disrupts these divisions, it becomes clear why Ihimaera's description of Tamatea's experience in Rongopai constitutes a challenge to official and contemporary accounts of the division and partition of social space in New Zealand. Tamatea's experience is rendered immediate, tactile and sensory and although his same senses uphold a conventional distribution of the sensible elsewhere in the novel, here they are diverted from their established roles. His previous observations about the house's formal qualities or role within the surrounding community are undermined entirely by his observation that Rongopai is a "separate", "other" world to the world outside, placing it within what Rancière describes as the "aesthetic" regime of the arts when "the identification of art no longer occurs via a division within ways of doing and making but it is based on distinguishing a sensible mode of being specific to artistic products" (22). Tamatea is able to engage with the artwork of Rongopai without necessarily deferring to the social or religious norms of the dominant Pakeha order. As a result, this scene does not derive its political force from any particular socially-oriented issue or "message" that it might send, but because of the way in which it unhinges the social distribution of the sensible and re-configures space and time.

Though they use different genres, registers and modes of expression, Ihimaera and Rancière are similarly interested in querying the aesthetic hierarchies and “grid[s] of expressive convention” (2009 29) that divide art from “non-art”. Each writer is also interested in the political potential that emerges from art’s singularity, or art that when viewed at a remove from these hierarchies and conventions, can promote “the equality of represented subjects, the indifference of style with regard to content, and the immanence of meaning in things themselves” (84). Having examined Artemis’s narration of the Mahana family history in terms of its intersection with the style and form of the meeting house in which it takes place, I will now turn to the aspects of her speech that gesture outwards. The intertextual references within her story indicate that the Mahana history circulates alongside and intersects with other narratives of dispossession and alienation and suggest that *The Matriarch* might itself contribute to a multiperspectival, polyphonic and co-temporal account of colonial contact.

Intertextuality in *The Matriarch*: Ihimaera’s literary collage

While Rongopai has been discussed so far in terms of its status as part of the diegesis of Ihimaera’s story, Ihimaera also anticipates the wider global circulation of Rongopai as a figure in the text of his novel. In this section, I discuss two interesting intertextual moments which generate self-reflexivity in the text and signal Ihimaera’s intention to use his story about Rongopai’s role in Maori struggles as counter-discourse in the global literary system. These include a reference to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* in a parliamentary speech of Wi Pere and another to the biblical story of Exodus in Artemis’s narration of the Mahana family’s history.²⁹ Each of

these intertexts are situated within very different temporal and geographical spaces – Defoe’s novel is set in the early eighteenth century Caribbean and the book of Exodus in Egypt at the very early beginnings of Judaism. However, by forming links between his text and two very different representations of empire, Ihimaera comments upon New Zealand’s position within the broader history of global empires and also comments upon the role of concepts such as “justice”, “progress” and “modernisation” within colonial practices.

As I have mentioned previously, the story of Maori people is traced in the novel through several different generations of the Mahana family. It begins with Wi Pere’s parliamentary speeches, continues with Artemis’s narration of the conflict between Maori and Pakeha, and ends with her decision that Tamatea should study the law in order to gain an intimate knowledge of the legal systems against which he is working. Ihimaera describes the process of Tamatea’s education in *The Matriarch* in some detail, also describing his growing awareness of the uneasy relationship that exists between Pakeha law and the tikanga Maori:

At the time, the Magna Carta and King Edward seemed as remote as Olympus to a young man from a place called Waituhi; I was finding it difficult and boring and, worse, irrelevant to Maori. When Governor Hobson said, ‘He iwi kotai tatou, we are one race,’ what he really meant was, ‘There is only one law and it is Pakeha law and it will make us one people.’ It was a revelation to realise that the law was not a protector of Maori but a prison for us. However, Riripeti had wanted me to be versed in Pakeha law, so I stuck it out. Only with this understanding would I know how the law could be manipulated. (1986 381)

There are clear similarities here between Tamatea's and Wi Pere's understanding of the law, since each suggests that although the laws that have been enacted were supposed to resolve land conflicts, in practice they benefited the Pakeha government rather than the Maori. The respective critiques of Pakeha land law by Tamatea, Artemis and Wi Pere extends to the ongoing debates surrounding the Treaty of Waitangi that was signed in 1840 and is described as New Zealand's founding document. Although the treaty's legality is contested, it has been given foundational status within the country's legal system and history. The majority of the contemporary criticism of the treaty relates to its initial translation and some would argue, mistranslation from English to Maori. As Richard Dawson suggests, central terms such as "possession", "right" and "sovereignty" can be interpreted in a number of ways, so that "acceptance by law-makers of one interpretation rather than others in specific cases of conflict will generally have significant consequences with respect to, among other things, the allocation and distribution of resources" (1). Therefore, while stating that the rights and privileges of Maori and Pakeha in New Zealand will be equal, the treaty has initiated a widespread system of land alienation and withholding of rights.³⁰ The rights that have been established in this document are therefore not always applied in practice and as Tamatea states, "the treaty has never had any status in domestic or international law. The Pakeha signed it knowing it was worthless" (73). These issues surrounding the treaty led to the law being viewed by the Maori as a "prison" and therefore as something that must be manipulated rather than used in its intended way.

Significantly, *The Matriarch* includes part of the parliamentary hansard recording Wi Pere's speeches between the years of 1884 and 1905 and with one exception, all of the speeches included in the novel share the common theme of

Maori land loss. Wi Pere is described by Ihimaera as having been educated in a mission station, although his early work as an interpreter in the Maori land court also likely provided the basis for his acquisition of legal knowledge.³¹ The Pakeha government had implemented a widespread system of Maori land purchase in order to meet the demand of settlers who had arrived since the establishment of the New Zealand Company in 1825. The company was interested in the purchase and reselling of Maori land to private buyers at great profit to the settler government (21), a process that was enabled by the use of legal Crown pre-emption.³² Pre-emption allowed the Crown to revoke native land titles under the legislation that had been implemented, meaning that Maori protest against this practice generally had little impact.

The Maori and Pakeha conceptualised land ownership in very different ways and this led to frequent misunderstandings about land purchase between them. Significantly, this issue has also been raised in the Australian context, where it has been argued that the opposition between the indigenous and settler concepts of land ownership does not allow for legal crossover. According to Richard Boast, within the Australian context, “purchases by private European individuals who can have no understanding of that [indigenous] law – a law unknown to the ordinary courts – must obviously be ineffective” (20). He illustrates this further with two examples of Maori meeting houses that were deliberately built by two different communities as symbols of opposition to their continued land loss:

Resistance to the Crown Purchasing programme began first among the Ngati Ruanui of South Taranaki. In 1852 Ngati Ruanui built an elaborate meeting house named Te Kana-Kariri at Katotaruru, which became a venue for many meetings dealing with the issue of halting

or regulating pre-emptive buying by the Crown. Then in 1853 Ngati Ruanui constructed an even larger house at Manawapou named Taiporohenui ('the ending of the matter'), used for the same purposes. Taiporohenui became a critically important centre of resistance. (31)

The use of the meeting house as a material symbol of resistance to the Crown purchasing programme therefore makes it representative of a different social and political life world and in *The Matriarch*, Wi Pere attempts to argue for the recognition of this indigenous life world within the Pakeha legal system through his work in the Pakeha parliament. The historical Wi Pere continuously demonstrated his detailed knowledge of settler law as well as the tikanga Maori throughout his parliamentary career and in *The Matriarch* Artemis uses his example to teach Tamatea how to fight for the return of tribal lands. She insists that, like Wi Pere, Tamatea must learn about the legal system through which the land was initially confiscated. Interestingly, however, the differences between the two cultures asserted here are later counteracted in Ihimaera's fiction by other scenes where the apparent binary opposition between the two is undermined.

For example, in the sequel to *The Matriarch*, entitled *The Dream Swimmer* (1997), the New Zealand Parliament is named as the "House of the European" (276). This nomenclature draws an obvious comparison between the Maori meeting house and the house of parliament, since each is rendered central to an "ethos, the mode of being of individuals and communities" (Ranci re 2004 21). Indeed, I would suggest that Ihimaera's later efforts to complicate the binary opposition of Maori and Pakeha are anticipated in his earlier novel, *The Matriarch*, in his depictions of both the parliamentary speeches of Wi Pere and Artemis's teachings with Tamatea in the Rongopai meeting house.

For instance, in the parliamentary Hansard of August 29th 1884 that is reproduced in chapter fourteen, Wi Pere argues that the financial difficulties of the colonial government have led them to acquire more Maori land in order to reduce their financial shortfall. Here, Ihimaera includes the historical text of Wi Pere's speech, which in this instance is accompanied by a reference to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*:

Sir, in my opinion the present government appear to be bankrupt. If you ask me why, I will tell you. In the year 1882 the Crown and Native Lands Rating act was passed. Because you are not able to pay your own debts, you make this law to make the Maori people liable for it. And this law was brought in force over their ancestral lands. It was not right because the land had been left to them by their ancestors. I had an interview with hon. the Premier today and asked him if he would not make concessions with regard to that particular Act. In my opinion his appearance on that occasion was like that of 'Friday', the man you read about in *Robinson Crusoe*, who was startled and frightened when Robinson Crusoe began to shoot the birds. (317)

As Jamal Benhayoun states in *Narration, Navigation, and Colonialism* (2006), "*Robinson Crusoe* is inexorably tied and affiliated to the world of eighteenth century Europe. It reflects its visions and shifts and reproduces its forms of power and evaluation" (58). The inclusion of Defoe's Friday in this passage in *The Matriarch* is therefore significant in part because it invokes the context of early eighteenth century empire, when Defoe's character was symptomatic of the ways that indigenous peoples were characterised and commoditised within colonised territories. Identified

by Crusoe as “my savage for so I call him now” (172), Friday is first characterised by Defoe with language of possession and ownership and by Crusoe’s assertion that “now was my time to get me a servant” (171). And though valued for his capacity to act as a servant, he is also depicted as a figure of naivety. The agency of the non-European character then is entirely undermined through the implementation of a master-slave relationship that is immediately enforced upon his first sighting by Crusoe. Interestingly, Ihimaera does not revise Defoe’s depiction of Friday by inscribing him with intelligence or what might be described as “indigenous knowledge”. Indeed, Friday is represented as a figure of naivety in Ihimaera’s novel also. But significantly, the positions of “settler” and “native” are reversed by Ihimaera when Wi Pere suggests that it is the Prime Minister who acts like Friday when he shows himself to be naively “startled and frightened” by Wi Pere’s speech.³³

The importance of Wi Pere’s legal knowledge becomes even more pronounced later in the narrative when he is depicted in a newspaper report as strikingly similar to Defoe’s Friday:

[His features] are decidedly European – his forehead is broad and intellectual, his nose long and straight, his eyes black and piercing; [...] His mother fled with him into the wilds, where he lived on roots and grew up as a little savage. What a change in one man’s life. The little wild root-eating savage has been transformed into a grand courteously-mannered Member of Parliament. (314-315)

This passage from the newspaper’s report echoes Crusoe’s portrait of Friday in several ways, particularly in the suggestion that “he had all the Sweetness and

Softness of an *European* in his Countenance [...] his forehead very high, and large, and had a great Vivacity and sparkling Sharpness in his Eyes” (173). In the novel, Crusoe similarly and dismissively credits Friday with a degree of humanity: “*Friday* began to talk pretty well, and understand the Names of almost every Thing I had occasion to call for, and of every Place I had to send him to” (180). However even though the negative cultural influence of Defoe’s novel and colonial stereotypes on settler culture in New Zealand becomes evident here – since the newspaper article describes Wi Pere in ways that reinforce colonial rhetoric – its impacts are complicated for readers of the novel by the later scene of Wi Pere’s parliamentary speech. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the newspaper article against Wi Pere’s parliamentary speech demonstrates that a piece of writing might assume any number of cultural and political roles following its publication, depending on the vantage point from which it is narrated or heard. Importantly, in Ihimaera’s rendition of Defoe’s story, the story itself remains unchanged but just as the novel requires readers to consider the multi-perspectival artwork of Rongopai from several different points of view, it also requires us to look at Defoe’s story of cultural encounter from different social perspectives. Arguably then the narrative art of Rongopai not only provides a model for thinking about Maori history and art in the novel but also a way of exploring the wider global narrative of European imperialist expansion.

Another prominent example of intertextuality occurs in *The Matriarch* when Artemis recites the Mahana family’s history to her grandson Tamatea in the Rongopai meeting house. In this narrative, she illustrates the contemporary importance of the Ringatu religion within the family by correlating Maori experience with the biblical story of Exodus. In her story, the Pakeha are made synonymous with the figure of Pharaoh and the Maori with the Israelites so that the narratives of

the book of Exodus and the history of the Maori land wars run along parallel lines. Ihimaera uses the scene to show his readers how supposedly Christian missionaries exploited the process of Maori land purchase and “advised them to sign the Treaty of Waitangi” (72), profiting greatly as a result. Artemis’s narrative then turns to the language of the missionaries’ bibles to explore the impacts of their greed on the Maori communities:

Glory To Thy Holy Name, His name was Te Kooti Rikirangi Te Turuki and Jehovah chose him at birth to lead His Children of Israel, the Maori nation, out of the land of the Pakeha, out of slavery to Egypt. This he did do, as Moses did also, when Moses opened the Red Sea and led his people to Canaan. (133)

Here, Ihimaera appropriates the story of Moses to explain the rise of Te Kooti. The biblical allusions to Moses – which continue throughout the novel – not only lend legitimacy to the story of Te Kooti but also indicate the disjuncture between the stories of exile and dispossession within the bible and the missionaries’ deployment of them as a means of controlling the Maori population and their land.

Ihimaera continues to utilise biblical imagery and nomenclature to show his readers how Christian missionaries exploited the processes of Maori land purchase for great profit. For example, Artemis states that “although the Maori had named the harbour Te Whanganui a Tara, the Great Harbour of Tara, the Egyptians renamed it Port Nicholson, after an Australian friend of Pharaoh, and then Wellington. In this way, Pharaoh trampled the mana of the Maori and forever made us slaves to his whim” (340-341). By engaging with the colonial laws and religion that were used to legitimise Maori dispossession within his narrative of resistance, Ihimaera

undermines some of their power. But, importantly, he does so by appropriating and resituating the biblical imagery depicting the oppression and disenfranchisement of the Maori in terms that are widely available outside Maori culture and legible to a settler and potentially, global audience. Significantly, Ihimaera's appropriation of biblical stories and imagery arguably parallels the appropriation by young Maori artists at Rongopai of the materials and the style of missionary artwork for use in their meeting house. In both cases, Maori storytellers re-situate settler narratives, requiring their re-interpretation in turn.

In *The Circle and the Spiral*, Eva Rask Knudsen notes that in addition to the long speeches of Wi Pere, the "texts" of other historical events are reproduced without the input of a narrator as though they were, like Wi Pere's hansom, actual historical record. However, the line dividing the real and the imagined is never obvious, as is particularly evident in chapter seven which focuses on the Matawhero attack. The chapter includes a series of dated log-book entries that describe the attack, but do not exist in official records, while these logs are followed by a letter from Te Kooti to Governor Grey which is reproduced verbatim from the historical original. These shifts in narrative form lend a sense of authority to the letters, newspaper reports and speeches that punctuate the novel, but as Rask Knudsen observes "characters represent themselves through their own texts, speaking their own truths – or fictions" (339). The novel has been criticised because of the complexity of its narrative structure and the perceived incoherence of its many historical and fictional strands. However, I have argued that the main narrative strand in *The Matriarch* is narrated in the Rongopai meeting house which itself acts as a model for the novel's somewhat fractured and multiperspectival form.

In addition, in the Author's Note of the revised version of *The Matriarch* (2013), Ihimaera explains that he was inspired by the image of a spiral when establishing the novel's temporal structure and emphasis on intertextuality:

To achieve what I set out to do – to write a work (or two works as it turned out) that would truly capture the metafictional and metaphysical vision I had in mind for it – only the spiral would work. This enabled me to thus 'spiral' from past to present, from personal to political, from history to myth, from reality to fantasy, from fiction to non-fiction, and as far as methodology was concerned, to use autobiography, biography and historical documents, including parliamentary Hansards. (2009 n.pag.)

As he suggests here, the spiral form – like the twining vines of Rongopai's interior artwork perhaps – can inspire multiple different narrative beginnings and indeed iterations over time. In *The Circle and the Spiral*, Eva Rask Knudsen describes the common Maori spiral motif, the koru, as comparable with the Maori conceptualisation of time and space, since it is a way to envision "not one centre, but a multitude of centres" (24) that potentially exist simultaneously. From a narrative perspective, then, a story that is influenced by the koru form might have multiple centres and multiple possible beginnings and each beginning might in turn generate a different "spiralling" narrative arcs. Ihimaera's observations about the imaginative freedom that the spiral form allows is already well established within meeting house art, which is stylistically based upon a series of carved curvilinear forms that even shape the ancestor figures themselves. It therefore follows, as Rask Knudsen suggests, that "quite contrary to 'Aboriginalist' and 'Maorist' views of indigenous cultures as static and unchanging, one finds, in both Aboriginal and Maori literature,

a strong focus on movement, transformation and passage as integral aspects of the indigenous world-views and notions of creativity” (25).

The connection between the spiral and the Rongopai meeting house, which “revealed a world out of kilter, spinning off its axis and out of its own orbit around the sun” (191) has clear implications for my understanding of Ihimaera’s revisionist project. By refusing to provide a linear account the narratives of two of the most culturally significant figures in Maori history – Te Kooti and Wi Pere – Ihimaera questions the received accounts of their lives and sets some alternative versions of these figures in motion. Moreover, by showing how their stories intersect with other narratives of oppression and empire, he also places *The Matriarch* within a much broader global account of dispossession and struggle. Arguably, then, Ihimaera’s circulation and re-circulation of different stories in *The Matriarch* demonstrates both the political power of the written word and the subversion of that power from within a Maori worldview and cultural aesthetic.

Conclusion

In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancière considers the connection between history, fiction and the empirical world. “[T]he arrangement of a poem’s actions” (37), he argues, “is not equivalent to the fabrication of a simulacrum. It is a play of knowledge that is carried out in a determined space-time. To pretend is not to put forth illusions, but to elaborate intelligible structures” (37). According to Rancière, poesis is not simple imitation or fabrication. It originates from the author’s knowledge of the empirical world even as it imaginatively tests the limits of that knowledge.³⁴ This results in the objects of art becoming entangled with the objects

of the social world while they may also come to describe “the phenomena of a civilisation” (37).

The Rongopai meeting house is one of the most striking examples of this idea in Ihimaera’s novel. As both a historical, material structure within the diegesis of the novel and an aesthetic object that provides a model for the narrative structure of the novel itself, the house performs a range of functions that are both ordinary and profound, everyday and “aesthetic”. As the figure of Rongopai exercises these different functions over the course of the narrative, Ihimaera also shows how it intersects with the settler history of New Zealand. The histories of the different Maori leaders are represented variously in the art of the house, national and local newspapers, the historical records of Wi Pere’s parliamentary hansard and colonial accounts of Te Kooti’s role in the Land Wars. Artemis refers to all of these media in her account of the Mahana family history and in doing so she sets in motion a conversation between the “factual” and “fictional” accounts of their lives.

It soon becomes apparent that the novel itself is a “play of knowledge” that tests the borderline separating the real and the imagined. Furthermore, intertextuality in *The Matriarch* demonstrates that Ihimaera’s revisionist project does not simply reject the apparent “facts” of Pakeha history but also the cultural forms by which they are conveyed. In *The Matriarch*, the Maori and Pakeha accounts of colonial contact often conflict with each other and Ihimaera relies on the reader to make sense of their truth value. However, as I have shown here, what distinguishes his story from postmodern pastiche is his emphasis on corporeality, embodied perspectives and the subjective experience of Maori meeting house art.

In this chapter, I have construed Ihimaera's writing, like Maori art, as having the potential to disrupt established ways of viewing a space or a story, calling into question the established "gestures and rhythms" or cultural perspectives which it might typically invoke. I have also demonstrated that although the literature of the Maori Renaissance was tied to the political upheaval of the mid 1970s, Ihimaera shows an awareness in *The Matriarch* that Maori art's contemporary political potential lies not so much in its status as social "message" but in its capacity to disrupt the norms subtending national and global literary space. As I go on to show here, each of the Maori writers discussed in this dissertation recognises and exploits the potential of Maori material art in different ways but every one of them does so, at least in part, by depicting and examining the culturally significant structure of the meeting house. In the next chapter, I turn to Patricia Grace's *Potiki*, showing how she uses the meeting house as an entry to her examination of the forms of communication that may emerge from cross-cultural encounters when neither the spoken or written word proves to be an adequate means of communication.

The Claim to a Standing Place in Patricia Grace's *Potiki* and *Baby No-Eyes*

Introduction

Patricia Grace published her first collection of short stories titled *Waiariki* in 1975 and first novel *Mutwhenua* in 1978. Grace's early work formed part of what Paola Della Valle has described as the "pastoral period" in Maori writing, which "signalled a remarkable change in Anglocentric New Zealand literature" (145), by giving Maori a new literary presence. As I have previously shown, the literature of the pastoral period was concerned with the role of traditional Maori cultural practices within contemporary New Zealand, but did not directly engage with the politics of Maori-Pakeha relations at that time. However, Ihimaera suggests that having "interpreted sufficiently ourselves to ourselves, [it was] time for us to interpret ourselves to the Pakeha" (Della Valle 101). In 1986, both Grace's *Potiki* and Ihimaera's *The Matriarch* were published, and together they indicated an increased political engagement with the issues of both historical and contemporary Maori land loss and social marginalisation. These two important novels were written during a period of intense political activism during the mid-1970s,¹ and in *Pacific Islands Writing* (2007), Michelle Keown suggests that both Ihimaera and Grace were not only interested in their contemporary political climate but also "centrally concerned with the politics of representation" (166). Their writing, she suggests, "posed a challenge to Romantic and negative stereotypes of Maori produced in Pakeha literature" (166). In this way, their initial attempt to "embrace rather than confront a Pakeha audience" (Rask Knudsen 71) during the pastoral period was overturned in

this later work, which fully utilised the novel's potential as a forum for engaging some of the more prominent concerns of the Maori protest movement.

This chapter will focus on Grace's *Potiki* (1986), which has received the most critical attention of all her fiction to date and *Baby No-Eyes* (1998) which was published a little over a decade later. Like *The Matriarch*, each of Grace's novels presents a polyphonic narrative structure through the use of several different narrators spanning three different generations of a single family. However, despite these broad similarities, Grace and Ihimaera each depict the disputes surrounding Maori land ownership in different ways. In *The Matriarch*, Ihimaera favours a multifaceted representation of prominent events, figures and cultural objects spanning a period of time that ranges from the mythical Te Kore to the mid-1980s, while Grace instead gives preference to a narrower temporal span and series of narrative voices. Additionally, while Ihimaera actively brings competing voices into contact with each other, Grace's narrators share a common perspective on the events depicted throughout each novel. As a result, while Ihimaera rejects a stable narrative standpoint in favour of numerous different and competing stories, Grace's polyphonic narrative structure generates a largely collective standpoint on each novel's central events.

As Michelle Keown observes in *Pacific Islands Writing*, both *Potiki* and *Baby No-Eyes* provide "allegorical responses to high-profile land disputes between Maori and Pakeha" (142). The first land dispute in *Potiki* is centred upon the Te Ope community and corresponds to the historic dispute that occurred at Raglan² in 1977, while the second dispute, involving the Tamihanas, is based upon the Bastion Point³ occupation of the same year. In *Baby No-Eyes*, the occupation of Te Ra Park draws from the 1995 occupation of the Mautoa Gardens in Wanganui⁴ "which are situated

in an area of disputed territory ‘purchased’ from local Maori by the settler government in 1848” (Keown 2007 142). Despite her obvious concern with Maori land rights, however, Grace’s stories not only derive from high profile and widely reported events but also from the personal experiences of anonymous individuals and their families. For example, *Baby No-Eyes* is based upon an incident of medical malpractice described in the author’s prefatory note as having taken place “in the pathology department of a hospital” (Grace 1998 n.pag). The incident involved the unauthorised removal by hospital staff of a Maori baby’s eyes following her death and was an act that constituted an acute violation of Maori cultural, spiritual, and bodily integrity.⁵ Upon learning of what had occurred, Grace states that “she wrote *Baby No-Eyes* in order to ‘give that baby a life’” (Keown 2003 423) and saw the novel form as a way to describe and imagine the events surrounding the unnamed child’s death in 1991.

Like *Potiki*, *Baby No-Eyes* forms a bridge between real and imagined events and suggests that Grace is interested in reimagining and reworking the narratives that have been previously recorded in news reports and historical records. In *Potiki* she describes this as the combining of old and new stories, derived from multiple and diverse sources:

There’s a story about Te Ope. Part of the story is old and part of it is new. The old part of the story has been told to us by my second mother Roimata. The new part has been told in the newspapers and on television in words and pictures. But we have also been to Te Ope and have seen the new story for ourselves, and we have been part of the new story too. (82)

By engaging with events that have been previously reported and commented upon in historical texts or media reports alone, she gives the stories of their associated communities a different type of narrative attention and means of circulation in which we as readers are invited to see “the new story” (Grace 1986 82) for ourselves.

In *Potiki*, two separate land conflicts occur, in which the neighbouring Te Ope and Tamihana communities are required to negotiate and interact with the Pakeha council representatives and land developers who have expressed a commercial interest in their land. In the case of the Te Ope dispute, which is based upon the conflict at Raglan, Maori land which had been confiscated purportedly for military use during World War Two was subsequently developed into a golf course.⁶ The community had been temporarily separated and resettled in rented council houses and expected to have their land returned following the war. However, the redevelopment of their land prolonged their separation from each other and having lost the use of their vegetable gardens and fishing grounds, they became increasingly impoverished. The poverty that accompanied a period of rapid urbanisation demonstrates the importance of ancestral land in maintaining Maori social coherence and economic self-sufficiency. In the second part of the novel, the Tamihana community are also shown to be largely self-sufficient and, although they do not have their land directly confiscated from them, they face a series of commercial negotiations and eventually, threats initiated by a land developer named Mr Dolman who seeks to purchase it for commercial use. The resulting conflict echoes the events of the Bastion Point occupation of 1977 as the Tamihana’s urupa [burial ground] is flooded, two acts of arson result in the death of a young child, and both the original and rebuilt meeting houses are lost to acts of vandalism carried out by Pakeha developers.

Although each novel addresses the growing uncertainty of Maori land ownership in New Zealand, the broad depiction of competing claims to land in *Potiki* is given a more complex treatment in *Baby No-Eyes* as Grace investigates the specific, subjective effects that impinge upon the lives of individual characters. Furthermore, while *Potiki* describes the processes through which space is distributed and redistributed on a broad scale that encompasses landscapes, community infrastructures and individual meeting houses, *Baby No-Eyes* explores the different effects of that spatial readjustment upon an individual's understanding of their place within the social order. Therefore, although the novels do not initially appear to share a common theme, each novel attempts to chart the effects of living within contested and uncertain spaces upon both collective and individual forms of Maori identity.

Baby No-Eyes is structured around the narratives of four central characters named Kura, Te Paania, Tawera and Mahaki, the first three of whom are related. Kura is the mother-in-law to Te Paania and grandmother to Tawera, while Mahaki is a friend of the family. One of the novel's more prominent concerns is the potential loss of Maori burial grounds at Anapuke to land developers and scientists, alongside the occupation that takes place at Te Ra Park in order to protest this.⁷ Te Paania's campaign against what Mahaki describes as the "bio-prospectors"⁸ (188) who seek the use of Maori genetic and other bodily materials for scientific experimentation is closely connected to the Anapuke protest.⁹ The community fear that the loss of their burial ground will result in unwanted experimentation upon the remains situated there and perceive the scientists' interest as simply another form of exploitation: "new business old business, but it's all the same business... whether its land or fish... or loot from graves" (188).

In *Baby No-Eyes*, Kura, Te Paania and Tawera each share a sense of alienation and exclusion from a social order in which they have been culturally and politically marginalised. However, throughout the novel this sense of alienation is shown to transcend the obvious landmarks of the Pakeha parliament or legal system, as Kura, Te Paania and Tawera demonstrate that it is also manifested within a series of naturalised inclusions and exclusions that structure the social order, described by Mahaki as “a certain way of thinking of feeling” (122). As I will later demonstrate, each individual’s sensory apprehension of the surrounding world is informed by a subtle form of social “coding”, that is similar to what Rancière describes as the coding of “the police order”:

The police order is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that these bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise. (1999 29)

Although Rancière’s work focuses almost entirely upon the art and politics of the west, it offers a useful framework for the analysis of the social order presented in each of Grace’s novels. My reading of Grace’s work will trace both the material and immaterial facets of her characters’ experiences of social division, beginning with the physical dispute over borderlines in *Potiki* and ending with a reading of *Baby No-Eyes* as a novel that both describes and resists the inscription of such divisions within sensory and bodily experience itself. In doing so, it will show that, to borrow from the language of Rancière, “the legitimacy of domination has always rested on the evidence of a sensory division between different humanities” (2009 31).

In *Potiki*, Grace offers a detailed account of the tikanga Maori, or, the rules and customs governing traditional Maori society. Hirini Moko Mead describes the tikanga Maori as “the set of beliefs associated with practices and procedures to be followed in conducting the affairs of a group or an individual” (12). He continues by suggesting that the tikanga are “tools of thought and understanding” (12) that establish “a right and proper way to conduct one’s self” (12). *Potiki* charts the changing role of the tikanga within the Te Ope and Tamihana communities, as their purpose in shaping two tightly knit communities is undermined by the encroachment of an opposing Pakeha worldview that calls the Maori claim to their ancestral lands into question. However, as the Pakeha interest in Maori land becomes an increasing threat to the stability and unity of both communities, the role of the tikanga also evolves. This process is charted across both novels, with a specific emphasis upon the changing definition of turangawaewae, or, the right to a standing place. Moko Mead describes turangawaewae as having “the right to a place for the feet to stand” (43) which has been established by a long line of ancestors and will be maintained by future generations to come. He states that “turangawaewae represents one spot, one locality on planet earth where an individual can say, ‘I belong here. I can stand here without challenge. My ancestors stood here before me. My children will stand tall here’” (43). An individual’s birthright is therefore shaped by their ancestor’s ties to a particular part of the landscape upon which they can stand with confidence in the knowledge that they belong there.

As I will later demonstrate, the Te Ope and Tamihana land disputes in *Potiki* represent a much broader conflict between two different material and ideological ways of conceptualising space and the resulting inability to find a common definition of “progress” or “potential” regarding the Maori use of their land causes the Maori

claim to turangawaewae to become a contested issue in itself. As the land disputes develop, each community is told by the respective Pakeha representatives that their use of the land is little more than an anachronistic anomaly within mid-to-late twentieth century New Zealand society. While the Pakeha developers view Maori land as a potential commodity that could be valuable and profitable were it to be “improved”, the Maori communities view it as a fully actualised entity that offers them the security of a “standing place”. As a result, although the concept of turangawaewae is initially framed as a societal “given” for both the Te Ope and Tamihana communities, it later becomes something that is subject to question alongside a contrasting, Pakeha view of the land as a material asset. Therefore, as the conflict develops, so too does the concept of turangawaewae. It is no longer a simple assertion of one’s right to live on a piece of land, but a way of defending what is now a contested claim to a standing place.

This chapter will first consider the historical events that have framed Grace’s depiction of the Te Ope, Tamihana and Te Ra Park conflicts, alongside some of the different ways that these conflicts have been critically interpreted. I will then argue that the conflicting definitions of “progress” and “potential” in each of the land conflicts prevents the Maori and Pakeha parties from finding a common point of understanding, which in turn necessitates a new form of communication. This new form of communication initially manifests as the broad rearrangement of material space, whereby ancestral meeting houses are destroyed and subsequently reconstructed upon sites of disputed ownership. These activities form an alternative and mutually understood “language” of sorts, one that is also utilised by the three central figures of *Baby No-Eyes*, albeit on a much more subtle and subjective level. In *Baby No-Eyes* Kura, Te Paania and Tawera realise that their speech will not be

heard as such within the public spheres and attempt to query the definition of the different sensory acts themselves so that their speech might be potentially “seen”, heard or otherwise apprehended by the senses in a different way. While the imaginative acts of characters may not impinge upon their social world, Grace’s novel demonstrates the capacity of three individuals to resist their assimilation into a social order that has undermined their capacity to speak and be heard as political subjects.

My reading of each novel, but *Baby No-Eyes* in particular, will be informed by Rancière’s 2004 essay titled “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?” As I demonstrated in chapter one, Rancière argues that political action occurs in the “intermittent [...] acts of subjectivisation that separate society from itself” (2009 90), a process that occurs at the borderlines that structure the social order. Rancière’s essay opens by critiquing Hannah Arendt’s insistence upon the distinction between the public and private spheres and between political subjects and those who are instead regarded as forming “bare life” (303). He argues that Plato’s configuration of the community and Arendt’s more recent engagement with its structuring principles cannot be considered as promoting political engagement in its citizens, since these ordering systems close the gaps and indeterminate spaces in which, Rancière argues, political action actually takes place. “Politics”, he argues, “is the activity that brings the border back into question” (303).

One of the most important kinds of political action that can take place on the borderlines and in the indeterminate spaces of a society is the “testing” of one’s rights as they have been established in national constitutions, or as Rancière suggests in the title of the essay, the declaration of human rights itself:

Political subjects build such cases of verification. They put to test the power of political names, their extension and comprehension. They not only confront the inscriptions of rights to situations of denial; they put together the world where those rights are valid and the world where they are not. They put together a relation of inclusion and a relation of exclusion. (2004 306)

The attempt to “confront” the written records of one’s rights with the reality of her characters’ lived experiences is central to each of Grace’s novels, which utilise both material and immaterial borderlines as the main site of this protest. In *Potiki*, Grace uses the physical borderline as means to discuss the broad Maori struggle to achieve recognition of their rights to their ancestral land. In *Baby No-Eyes*, however, she uses the unreliability of sensory experience as a point through which fracture and disincorporation can be introduced into the societal given. She calls the boundaries between the literal and the figural, the tangible and the intangible into question, posing the question of whether speech can be seen, for instance, or the attributes of an animal heard within an act of speech. Through this process she suggests, as Rancière does, that social division is encoded within sensory experience and must therefore be challenged there also.

Introducing the Te Ope, Tamihana and Te Ra Park Land Disputes

It is clear that the three land disputes that are depicted across *Potiki* and *Baby No-Eyes* act as a means to express and consider some of the novels’ wider concerns. Grace’s novels repeatedly claim that there is a clear difference between the position of centrality accorded to the Pakeha and the comparative peripheralisation of the

Maori within the social order, a distinction that is perhaps described best in chapter thirteen of *Baby No-Eyes*. In this chapter, Kura describes the rapid changes that took place in New Zealand after European contact, the evolution of Maori-Pakeha relations over the following two centuries, and several significant historical events surrounding the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. Perhaps most importantly, she also describes the difference between Maori and Pakeha ways of conceptualising the land itself. As the Te Ope, Tamihana and Te Ra Park disputes demonstrate, a clear parallel can be drawn between Kura's account of the Pakeha settlers' attempts to gain ownership over Maori land throughout the nineteenth century and the more recent disputes with which the novel is concerned:

Throughout the country Pakeha were increasing in numbers. Guns, alcohol and blankets had done all right for some of them, who had exchanged these for land, and who believed a man could own land in the same way as he owned his coat. He believed that he, one person, could possess land and everything on that land by taking a signature from someone who didn't own land in that way. Or he believed he could take land by drawing lines on paper. For him it was a way laid down. There was fighting and trouble between Maori and Pakeha over this. (112)

As Kura continues, she describes the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, the deterioration of relations between Maori and Pakeha, and the realisation that the new government was “the biggest stealer of land, making more laws to steal by” (113). She then addresses the New Zealand Wars of 1845-1872¹⁰ and the founding of the land court in 1865,¹¹ which she describes as one of the only ways that Maori could

become “owners, in the coat-owning way, of land they really knew was for everyone” (115).

A century later, Grace reframes Kura’s description of these broad social inequalities within the specific landscapes of public parks and contested ancestral land. These spaces become fora in which the central characters of each novel consider some of the causes and results of what is presented as quite a polarised social divide. Throughout *Potiki*, the Pakeha relationship to the land is depicted as being primarily commercial, while for the Maori, it is considered to be “necessary as a means of maintaining social solidarity” (Moko Mead 272). Grace continuously emphasises that the Maori do not consider themselves as owning the land in the way that the Pakeha do and therefore struggle to view it in a commercialised light, a perspective that is emphasised by Moko Mead in *Tikanga Maori*:

The relationship is not about owning the land and being master of it, to dispose of it as the owner sees fit. The land has been handed down the whakapapa line from generation to generation and the descendant fortunate to inherit the land does not really ‘own’ it. That person did not buy it. The land cannot be regarded as a personal asset to be traded. (273)

In *Potiki*, the conflicting values attributed to the land by the Maori and Pakeha communities prohibit any meaningful communication during the negotiations that accompany each land dispute. Both spoken and written forms of communication fail to achieve a common understanding of the land’s value and role within the wider Maori community and in each case, the negotiations between Maori and Pakeha representatives break down entirely. However, in both *Potiki* and *Baby No-Eyes*, the

lack of understanding that characterises the Maori and Pakeha attempts to communicate is indicative of a much wider social dispute. It is not simply rooted in a verbal misunderstanding or the lack of a shared language; it is based upon the perception of one speaker that the other is incapable of articulating sounds that can be understood and heard as speech. As a result, in each novel Grace links the failure to communicate and resulting lack of understanding between Maori and Pakeha to a much more complex consideration of the act of perception itself. She queries the connection between sense perception and understanding, suggesting that understanding does not always come from the spoken word. If one speaker is unable to view the other as a fully articulate subject with a political status, then a mutual understanding must come from another source, which in Grace's work takes the form of a symbolic rearrangement of material space and both the people and objects that inhabit this space. By considering the failures of the spoken and written word alongside the potential that arises from the "language" of material and spatial rearrangement, these apparent divisions can be called into question. In *Baby No-Eyes* particularly, several different characters suggest that their status as speaking, visible subjects can be performed in spaces that confound the established borderline between public and private spheres and in doing so, they disrupt the consensus of the established social order.

Several different critical readings of Grace's work have emphasised that the disputes represented in *Potiki* and *Baby No-Eyes* are as much linguistic disputes as they are conflicts surrounding material space. For example, Michelle Keown argues that Grace's use of language displays a co-presence of both Maori and Pakeha elements and functions through the use of a kind of "code switching" (2005 420). She suggests that in *Baby No-Eyes*, this is carried out through the combination of

Maori grammatical structures within the spoken and written English language, which enacts a “process of linguistic deterritorialisation” (2005 420). This intersection creates “two hybridized zones in which the two languages meet and overlap” (2005 420). As a result, the “authority” of the English language is destabilised and instead, an “estrangement effect” (2005 425) occurs in which the English spoken by both Maori and Pakeha respectively becomes unintelligible to the other. However, the Pakeha inability to fully engage with this hybridised use of language is perhaps more extensive than Keown suggests and as I will later argue, the resulting “estrangement effect” in fact undermines the effectiveness of spoken or written language itself. Furthermore, the English that is delivered by Maori speakers using grammatically “correct” English or a commonly accepted vernacular is shown to elicit a similar sense of alienation between both parties. This suggests that it is not the language itself that causes the sense of estrangement, but how the speakers perceive each other. For example, in *Potiki*, Dolman, named “Dollarman” by the Tamihana family is almost immediately translated into an abstracted symbol of western capitalism, while he in turn perceives the family as equally abstracted symbols of “a broken race” (115). Therefore, although the English language may be subverted in different ways by the Maori speakers, the ability to communicate has become completely obscured by the dynamics of power that are inherent within each speaker’s perception of the other.

Like Keown, Otto Heim locates Maori subversion of the English language in the novel within the speech act. Yet while Keown argues that the Maori “inhabit” the English language through an “intermixing of grammatical codes” (2005 427), Heim’s argument relies on what he describes as the Maori speakers’ superior ability in practices of oratory and speech making. He suggests, for example, that during the

Tamihana conflict, Dolman is “confronted with the Maori spokesman’s well-formed speech” (133). In this particular scene, Grace contrasts the Maori skill in speech – making and formal oratory with Dolman’s rhetorical failures and inability to argue properly for the construction of a tourist resort on Maori land. For Heim, this forms a “confrontation of discursive styles” (133) in the novel that “establishes the Maori control over the situation of communication and has undermined Dolman’s authority” (133). Therefore both Heim and Keown suggest, albeit in different ways, that the Maori speaker establishes a sense of control over their use of the English language via the speech act. However, I would suggest to the contrary that the command and control of language – whether through the process of grammatical “deterritorialisation” or a particularly skilful “way of talking” – has little relevance to a situation where the speaker is not granted the capacity to articulate anything other than mere “noise”. Heim partially acknowledges this issue in *Writing along Broken Lines*, when he suggests that the confrontation between Maori and Pakeha speakers consists in “talking past each other” (133). However, I would argue that since the speech act is intertwined with the act of perception and as each speaker is unable to perceive the other without referring to their position within the broader social order, the subsequent debate cannot be said to produce any sort of meaningful communication. Although both parties attempt to control and manipulate language in different ways, neither produces a statement that can be fully heard and understood by the other. Furthermore, the English language is not simply “inhabited” by Maori grammatical patterns, as Keown suggests, but also by the rhetoric of “progress” and “modernisation” that continues to inform and justify the continued loss of Maori land. Therefore, the inability to communicate via a shared language only ultimately reinforces the divide between the two communities.

Keown and Heim have suggested that the language of *Potiki* and *Baby No-Eyes* is composed of competing internal discourses that register an ongoing conflict between Maori and Pakeha, without fully acknowledging that this dispute does not allow for effective communication and negotiation to ever occur. In fact, *Potiki* documents the failures of both spoken and written language in some detail, since both land conflicts are precipitated by the inability of either party to understand and acknowledge the other. Therefore, while it is useful to consider Grace's attempts to complicate her use of English, as Keown suggests, the appropriation of English by the Maori ultimately fails to produce meaningful communication between the two social groups over the course of each of the three land conflicts depicted by Grace in *Potiki*. Conversely, Grace's preoccupation with the cyclical construction and deliberate destruction of Maori meeting houses in *Potiki* alongside her engagement with non-verbal forms of communication in *Baby No-Eyes* suggests that she may be concerned as much, if not more, with the forms of communication that can arise from the symbolic rearrangement and reclassification of material space as she is with her characters' use of English. Throughout each novel, space and communication are almost continuously linked, incorporating, for instance, both the elaborately carved interior of a traditional meeting house and the innocuous and everyday spaces that include gardens and verandahs, waiting rooms, or the particular corner of a classroom. As a result, Grace establishes a clear connection between the speech act and space and suggests that the claim to a standing place that is discussed throughout *Potiki* could potentially be extended and translated into more unassuming spaces in *Baby No-Eyes*.

Defining Maori land loss: the roles of “progress” and “potential” in the Te Ope and Tamihana Disputes

As I noted earlier, *Potiki* opens with a detailed account of the specific rituals and practices associated with the production and decoration of Maori meeting houses. Grace emphasises the role of the house’s artwork in maintaining a community’s sense of coherence, giving the reader who is unfamiliar with Maori cultural practices access to its complex social, cultural, and narrative functions:

The people were anxious to have all aspects of their lives and ancestry represented in their new house. They wished to include all the famous ancestors which linked all people to the earth and the heavens from ancient to future times, and which told people of their relationship to light and growth, and to each other. (1986 14)

By including these details at the beginning of the novel, the importance of the meeting house within the surrounding community is fully explained. This in turn contextualises the impact that its later destruction will have upon the community, as it constitutes not only the loss of the house as a material entity, but the community’s recorded history also.

The catalyst for the Te Ope land occupation is a series of letters that an elder named Rupena addressed to the local council following the confiscation of his community’s land. Although Rupena’s letters are largely ignored by the council, his grandson Reuben revisits his attempt to have his tribal lands returned two generations later. Reuben’s character is based upon the figure of Eva Rickard,¹² who initiated the occupation of the Raglan golf course in 1975 and eventually won back some of the confiscated land (Hereniko 69). The events leading up to Rickard’s court

case are also mirrored in *Potiki*, while the nature of the initial confiscation of Te Ope land in the novel suggests that it was taken under the public works legislation that formed part of the Public Works Act of 1864 and its later amendment in 1868.¹³ As previously suggested, this legislation did not regard the use of the land by Maori communities as legitimate and similarly, throughout *Potiki* and *Baby No-Eyes*, the Pakeha suggest that they will use the land in a way that benefits the greater public good. However, the term “progress” means two very different things to the Pakeha and Maori speakers and this becomes evident when Rupena writes to the council in order to protest the loss of his tribal land and home and the council representative replies: “since the houses of which you write were substandard I am sure you will agree that there has been no great loss to you” (88). Rupena’s letters and the replies that he receives therefore draw from two different registers, reinforcing Grace’s suggestion that Rupena and the council representatives will struggle to find an adequate means of communication or common point of understanding. In one of his letters Rupena requests a meeting between his community and the council, stating: “we think it would be right to talk of these matters first so that we can give our explanations to you and you can give your explanations to us” (87). However, despite his appeal for a face-to-face discussion, this is rejected by the council and the majority of his letters are ignored.

Since the Te Ope meeting house is not a traditionally carved and decorated structure, the Pakeha council view it as “substandard” (88) and feel justified in their decision to demolish it. While Grace does not directly state why the Te Ope do not have a traditionally carved and decorated meeting house, she implies that they lacked the practical skills that are necessary for traditional meeting house decoration (71). As a result, the Te Ope altered the interior of one of their community’s residential

houses, which was subsequently blessed and made sacred in the same way that a traditional house would have been. In terms of the respect that it demands from the community, the Te Ope house operates in an entirely similar way to a traditionally carved house, even if this is not reflected in its appearance. The council's decision to demolish the meeting house results in the same kind of offense and distress to the Te Ope as the destruction of a traditionally carved example and indicates that there is a disjunction between the Pakeha council's objective knowledge that a building is sacred and their disrespectful and dismissive behaviour towards it in each of the land conflicts represented in *Potiki*. The council's destruction of the Te Ope's meeting house suggests that they view Maori meeting houses as an anachronistic representation of a "past", as opposed to a living culture. They do not consider the possibility that the structure of the wharenui might evolve over time, or that what it represents might be transposed into different settings.

Rather than listen to Rupena's argument regarding their ancestral land, the council impose their own cultural values onto the Te Ope and argue that the loss of their land has in fact improved their lives. As Toko states: "that wasn't a proper meeting-house, they were told. No carvings, no nothing, and it was falling down anyway. They couldn't possibly call that a meeting-house, they needn't try and put that one across" (84). By focusing upon the building's materiality they are unable to reconcile its perceived "derelict" (84) state with the unity, coherence and self-sufficiency that it provides the community. As the occupiers of their ancestral land, the Te Ope could live independently of the Pakeha council, something that their geographically disparate council houses cannot offer. As Grace states in her description of this forced urban migration: "the Te Ope people talked until there was no more use in talking and then they went back to their scattered city houses that did

not belong to them” (84). The loss of their meeting house results in the loss of their turangawaewae, or right to a standing place, again indicating the interconnection of a house’s materiality and the collective history of a community that it evokes.

However, it later becomes apparent that the Pakeha classification and categorisation of the different spaces in the novel, sacred or otherwise, operates along arbitrary and continuously shifting lines.

The Pakeha belief that land can be bought and sold “in the coat owning way” (1998 115) is most clearly illustrated through the figure of Dolman, the land developer who wishes to purchase the Tamihana’s land in order to construct a tourist resort there. He initially attempts to describe the development as being a potential boon to the Tamihana community, suggesting that rather than continuing to live a largely self-sufficient life through the use of their vegetable gardens and fishing grounds, they could instead be employed as performers who would “dress up and dance and sing twice a day and cook food in the ground” (109). Not only do the Tamihana refuse to sell their land, they also reject any suggestion that they might work for Dolman, stating: “we give it to you and we fall through. We’re slaves again, when we’ve only just begun to be free” (107). Over the course of the resulting conflict, Dolman fails to see why the money he offers the community could not compensate them for the loss of their meeting house and burial ground, which they describe as “our identity, our security” (105). The conflicting worldviews that characterise each land conflict in *Potiki* are typified in this short exchange, during which the community describes the ownership of their land as enabling them live outside the broader Pakeha social structure. Throughout the novel, Dolman’s description of “superstition” and “past things” (107) is juxtaposed with the

Tamihana's descriptions of turangawaewae, illustrating a clear disjunction between each party's conceptualisation of the Maori relationship to the land.

When the community, their meeting house and burial ground eventually become surrounded by Dolman's construction works, the physical borderline that this establishes between two spaces becomes symbolic of two conflicting and ultimately irreconcilable worldviews. Prior to the vandalism of the community's house and urupa by construction workers, however, the conflict between Dolman and the Tamihanas is almost entirely verbal and the Maori perceive Dolman's speech as "only words – words without thinking and meaning, words not chosen with care" (109). Similarly, Dolman is unable to understand the Tamihana's argument opposing the sale of their land. The words from both sides of the discussion come to circulate without a receptor who can properly hear and understand them. For example, Dolman proposes that he relocate the community's meeting house to a more central location in return for the use of their land. However, the narrator notes that "everybody had laughed then, because the man had not understood that the house was central already and could not be more central" (112). Dolman's proposal therefore forms "the point that we all realised that the man had not, had never, understood anything we had ever said and never would" (112). Since both the Maori and Pakeha representatives deem spoken language to be ineffectual in this context, the conflict develops into a physical exchange between Dolman and the Tamihanas. Over the course of this conflict, the presence of the meeting house within this contested space comes to represent an alternative, Maori centre, but is countered by the land developers who violently reassert Pakeha boundaries in response.

This process initially begins when Roimata prepares for their coming meeting with Dolman and decides that he should sit on the floor with the others

rather than using a table and chair as he had previously. Roimata suggests that it “would be good psychology” (113) to arrange the space in this way, adding that she does not mean for him to “feel a fool” (113) but instead wants “the boot to be on the other foot for a change” (113). She states “let him feel what we sometimes feel... in different situations” (113). Although the attempt at spoken communication between Dolman and the Tamihanas remains ineffectual, the reconfiguration of the meeting house’s material space signals a turning point in the communication between both parties. It marks the point at which the spoken word is abandoned in favour of Dolman’s destruction and the Tamihana’s reconstruction of their ancestral meeting house, forming a materialised representation of the debate up to this point.

Unlike the confrontation between Dolman and the Tamihanas, the act of occupation publicly and directly “tests” Maori rights against their written forms, a process that is perhaps most evident in the occupation of Te Ra Park described in *Baby No-Eyes*. This protest is not viewed by many of the onlookers as a comment upon the continued loss of Maori land, but as a disruption to what is described as their lives as “citizens” (205). This suggests that the occupiers are visibly performing the part of those who “have no part” and in doing so, they are “testing” the written declarations of equality against the situation to which they are said to apply. The authorities’ anxiety about the occupation prompts them to describe the protestors in terms that resituate them within their prior positions within the social order, as for example, the town’s mayor states that “we cannot have unauthorised constructions on Council property [...] blocking the passage of citizens on their way to work or play (205)”. Here, he draws a dividing line between what he describes as the protestors and those who are instead considered to be “citizens”, which in turn suggests that the right to claim ownership over a particular piece of land can be held

by those who are considered citizens, but not by those whom he depicts as socially located beyond citizenship. In this scene, the protestors undermine the claim to equality that has been inscribed in written record and naturalised as the societal “given”, by confronting the “citizens” with a tangible statement of their continued exclusion from the visible sphere.

The public respond to the occupation with anger, physical aggression and a sense of confusion relating to why the protest must take place at all, expressed in the question “we are all new Zealanders aren’t we?” (214). Recalling the Mayor’s response to the occupation, some members of the community suggest that the protest even compromises the rights of the wider community as a whole, stating: “that crowd down there telling us where we go, where we stand, what we do on our own park. Stamping all over us with their big black boots. Jumping to their tune now. We got rights too” (214). Described as “all those dole bludgers, thieves, radicals and stirrers with their criminal supporters” (214), the anger of this particular group of people is directed at what they perceive as the protestors’ roles, parts and positions in society, positions that would most often be situated within the invisible sphere but have been made visible through this deliberate act of subjectivisation. In this way, and by suggesting that their rights have been compromised, the counter-protesters simply reveal the inequality of the social order prior to the occupation.

While the symbolic and subversive appearance of a meeting house or occupier’s camp in what is quite clearly defined as the visible sphere presents an immediate attempt to communicate in a different way, the gradual encroachment of Dolman’s construction work upon the Tamihana’s land halts the attempted communication between parties. Furthermore, the broad configuration of space that occurs over the course of the Tamihana conflict does not take the form of an

intrusion, but an erasure, as both the original and rebuilt meeting houses as well as the community's burial ground are vandalised by the construction workers. The construction and destruction of Maori meeting houses within this contested block of land becomes representative of a symbolic conflict within the order of the visible. It constitutes a material rearrangement of "signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done" (Rancière 2004 39).

Individual and subjective experiences of social division in *Baby No-Eyes*

In *Baby No-Eyes*, Grace explores what Mahaki describes as a "cross-cultural mismatch" (122) between Maori and Pakeha in more indirect and complex ways. Although the novel spans three generations of a family, all three suggest that they have been excluded from participating within the social order as visible, speaking subjects. This indicates that although Maori-Pakeha relations have improved dramatically over the course of the twentieth century, the two communities remain disconnected from each other in some ways. According to Mahaki, this disconnection is reinforced by the Pakeha's perception of the Maori as "not quite people" (122):

In his type of work there was always a cross-cultural mismatch – people not comprehending what other people were saying or thinking because they each came from a different experience and understanding. [...] It was as though they were not quite people, and therefore their lives didn't matter, as if they were not capable of suffering, had no right to suffer, no cause to feel distressed. [...] And

there you were – each group of people seeing the other as having something missing from being human. The trouble was that it was the little people who bore the brunt of that. To come from a background of being white, Christian and so-called ‘civilised’ was to be right; was to have the power of law and state and wealth, a certain way of thinking and feeling on your side. (122)

Mahaki makes these observations following the death of Te Paania’s child and suggests that the hospital staff’s lack of consideration for her bodily and spiritual integrity is indicative of a much wider dismissal of Maori lives. As Mahaki suggests, the Pakeha perceive the Maori from a position of relative power within the social order, which has been reinforced by their role in the establishment and subsequent control of New Zealand’s financial, political and legal institutions over the previous two centuries. He concludes that this has resulted in the Pakeha having developed “a certain way of thinking and feeling” (122) about their position within society, which has been directly informed by what he describes as having “the power of law and state and wealth [...] on [their] side” (122).

The borderlines and partitions that structure the social order are given a much subtler form in *Baby No-Eyes* and are frequently made visible within the spaces and institutions of everyday life. The opening scene of the novel is illustrative of Grace’s move away from the more obvious stages of social dispute and establishes her concern with the representation of the personal and intimate experiences of social division in her characters’ lives. This scene is set in the early 90s, but forms just one point in a non-linear narrative structure that will address both historical and future events as the novel progresses. It describes Te Paania’s journey through a series of suburban streets in the early hours of the morning, towards a home that she will

share with her friends Dave and Mahaki. Te Paania's second child Tawera has not yet been born, but observes and narrates the events of the novel's opening pages as though through his mother's eyes. He observes that the street is almost entirely empty and attributes this to a possible alien abduction, stating: "it was as though [...] they'd all been whisked off to outer space" (8):

People get taken, whole streets, whole towns of people. After a time they're sent back to earth but are now inhabited by other beings who are going to take over the world. These people, the returned ones, don't like to be inhabited. They want to be how they were before instead of how they are now, because they still have some memory of that, but there's nothing they can do. There's no one to help them or believe them. (8)

By engaging with the themes and imagery of science fiction, Tawera references the novel's broader concern with the global expansion of "other beings". However, as they proceed down the street, he describes the gardens as having been "colour coded", stating: "just kidding, just kidding, about ouda spaze. Because all the cutting, clipping, pruning, planting, colour coding was evidence wasn't it, that there must be cutters, clippers, pruners, planters, coders somewhere?" (8). Although the street is empty and still, the narrator nonetheless views its arrangement as evidence of external control. The source of this "colour coding" is not apparent, or even identified as a unified or organised entity; that it exists at all is only evidenced through these created spaces, described as "shaped up and down via rockeries – white purple pink, pink white blue, white cream lilac, colour code colour code, colour code" (8). These brief observations of a suburban street combine to emphasise the enclosed nature of the space of the state which is comprised of both "shared and

exclusive parts” (Rancière 2004 12). Furthermore, Tawera indicates his mother’s status as an outsider by describing the people living there as “those aliens” (8) and by repeatedly stating: “leds ged ouda hia” (8).

The neighbourhood is therefore a closed space from which Te Paania and her child are excluded and in which they have no part. However, as Tawera’s description of the street continues, a “coagulated [...] technicolour yawn” (8) of kowhai flowers impinges upon the “colour coded” flowerbeds and “clipped green lawns” (8). These colours and shapes interrupt what is an otherwise controlled space, forming a disjunction that the narrator claims “could’ve brought on a nosebleed” (8). As a result, although Grace depicts this neighbourhood as an example of the visible, public sphere, she also suggests that the borderlines defining this space can be disrupted by external influences and made indistinct. The initial description of an organised, regulated space gives way to a disordered arrangement of shapes and colours as the passage continues, a process that is described as having an effect upon the body and senses of the person that views it. Tawera states: “no coding there. [...] Piled on top of it all were browning camellia heads – down every frontage, coagulated. So much it made you want to heave, throw up, chundalucka, technicolour yawn” (8). The opening passage ends with the observation that those who have arranged the space in this way are absent and there is little evidence of them having ever been there apart from the patterns they have left behind. This kind of organised space will be recalled at other points in the novel, as each of the three central characters refer to similar forms of subtle “coding” when describing the spaces that surround them. Although such spaces can be most obviously disrupted by acts of visible, organised protest, here Grace suggests that an individual also has the capacity to interact with and comment upon these borderlines effectively.

Sensory experience and the act of communication: Kui Maata and Kura's "materialised" speech

Grace's focus on the dispute between two different Maori and Pakeha communities in *Potiki* contrasts with her later account of the lives of three Maori individuals in *Baby No-Eyes*. However, despite their different narrative focuses, each novel demonstrates an obvious concern with the language that shapes and mediates the conflict between the visible and invisible spheres. In *Baby No-Eyes*, Kura, Te Paania and Tawera demonstrate a particular concern with the form that this language takes and recognise that an individual's place within the social order determines whether or not that individual is regarded as capable of speech. In response, they call the act of sensory perception into question, so that the senses become unreliable informants of an individual's experience of the world. By undermining the logical assumption that, for instance, a spoken word is immaterial, Grace promotes a sense of fluidity amongst the different senses and prompts us to consider new ways of understanding our experiences of them.

One of the most obvious examples of this occurs in Grace's description of a meeting that is being held in order to discuss the occupation of Te Ra Park, where Mahaki starts to consider the speech that is being delivered by an elder in a different way. Initially, he describes himself listening to Kui Maata "ramble about their old meeting house, telling some of its stories, telling how their old house used to care for them" (201), but adds that "he'd had to listen, flap his ears, turn what was being said, look at the underside" (201) in order to fully understand her. Here, Grace intermixes the different sensory acts; the spoken words are made material, multi-dimensional and tactile and Mahaki describes himself as having the capacity to "turn" the words in order to perceive them from a different perspective. Following this realisation, Kui

Maata's speech assumes a new significance and becomes instrumental in the decision to construct a new, makeshift meeting house in Te Ra Park. By combining the sense of sight and sound, Mahaki gains a new understanding of what he previously regarded as Kui Maata's "rambling" speech. He was able to introduce the sensory experiences of sight and touch into his apprehension of her words and gain new insight into their possible significance. Throughout both this scene and the novel more generally, Grace attempts to undermine the more obvious, immediate or even logical associations between the act of perception and the act of speech. These acts are no longer tied to the individual's apprehension of sight or sound, but are instead included in a multi-perspectival and multi-dimensional engagement with the surrounding world. Here, the act of perception does not limit a listener's understanding of the words being spoken – as was the case in Dolman's perception of the Tamihanas – it instead enables a fuller understanding of a speaker's attempt to communicate.

In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancière suggests that political action does not occur in the wide scale campaign for a particular cause or purpose, but in very "specific acts of implementation" (90) carried out by "precarious figures" (90) who do not have a part as political subjects within the social order. In *Baby No-Eyes*, Grace is most interested in these "precarious figures" and focuses upon their individual attempts to redefine the social positions to which they have been assigned. One of the most prominent examples of this occurs in a series of chapters that describe Kura's attempt to narrate her family's history. She explains that this is the first time that she has told these stories and suggests that until now they were "incapable of being worded" (28).

Kura's son Shane prompts her to tell the history of their family, as he is resentful of the secrecy surrounding it and feels that his Pakeha name has denied him what he describes as "our stuff [...] our names, the secrets, our stories" (26). Despite Kura's explanation that she gave him a Pakeha name to protect him like her cousin "Riripeti, called Betty" (26), Shane argues that he cannot properly identify as Maori without a tipuna, or ancestral name and points out that names form an important part of the connection between a Maori individual and their wider community. Kura states: "we didn't know our children would refuse to be who we were trying to make them be. We didn't know they would demand their names, or that they would tear the place apart searching for what we had hidden from them" (148). Kura realises that Shane's Pakeha name has resulted in a sense of alienation from his Maori identity and uses his enquiries as the starting point for her storytelling that continues throughout the novel:

If I had not been jolted by what Shane stepped up on to my verandah and said, the little ball inside me would not have cracked. Words from it would not have escaped into my throat, remaining there until the tide had been slept out and in. The words would not have propped themselves between my lips ready to pour themselves out over the floor and under the roof of my verandah. And what would my words have made of themselves in an open space anyway? If my verandah had been pulled down, how could we who were there have been grouped so conveniently together on a day of such strong sunlight?
(15)

Spoken words are therefore made solid and material within Kura's verandah and as they are contained within its walls and under its roof, she ensures that they do not

“leak away [...] to be eaten by flowers” (14), while also being protected from becoming “scattered across the yard”, or washed away by the tide (14).

Grace’s use of material figures to describe Kura’s words gives her stories the qualities of meeting house narratives in numerous different ways. Like the meeting house, Kura’s verandah provides a structure that both accommodates and recirculates the stories of a family or community. The highly stylised art of a traditionally carved meeting house is dependent upon the viewer’s engagement with its symbolic and metonymic dimensions, which not only provokes his or her recollection or a particular historical event, but also encourages the viewer to re-tell the story in their own way. Therefore, as Kura narrates her stories within the walls of her garden verandah, she is not simply imparting the family’s history to an assembled audience. In giving the stories a multi-dimensional and material form with her words, she encourages her listeners to perceive them from different and varied points of view. Kura suggests that her first story “starts from a centre and moves away from there in such widening circles that you don’t know how you will finally arrive at a point of understanding, which becomes itself another core, a new centre” (28). Like the artwork of the meeting house, the circular form of Kura’s narrative founds a centre from which other stories emerge and these new centres operate outside the restrictions that have been placed upon her cultural expression by the Pakeha community.

Kura’s first story recounts the life of her cousin named Riripeti, whom she was given the responsibility of protecting while they were children attending a mission school in the early twentieth century. Kura believes that Riripeti’s death was caused by her inability to speak English correctly at school, and describes Maori as “that evil language which killed my teina [cousin] and which I never spoke again”

(38). Furthermore, Kura suggests that Riripeti's experience at the mission school turned her into an "animal" (34) and argues that the punishments following her misuse of English enacted the process of her gradual dehumanisation:

She remembered to speak in English, except that the teacher didn't know it was English she was speaking because Riripeti was too afraid to make the words come out loudly. 'Do I have to shake that language out of you [...]?' the teacher would say, shaking and shaking her. (34)

When Kura recalls Riripeti's death as an elderly woman, she responds to the teacher's attempt to "shake" the English language from Riripeti by giving her language material qualities of its own. However, as we have seen, when describing her own narration later, Kura deliberately gives her words a sense of authority and purpose and describes her act of articulation as "words, unswallowed, [beginning] to fall" (28) from a "little ball" that has "cracked" inside her (15). Furthermore, she ensures that the space is suitable for her words and situates them there so that they can be heard and understood as fully meaningful articulations.

It is notable that this process takes place within the space of Kura's garden verandah. She was offered a newly built patio as a replacement for her "rotten and dangerous" (14) verandah, but she refused, believing it to be the only space in which her stories could be narrated and her speech heard as such. By rejecting the suggestion that she needs to rebuild her verandah, she acknowledges that the active construction, shaping or framing of a space results in a sense of control over what is considered to be permissible there. Kura concludes that an individual's agency is not only shaped by the place that they occupy within the surrounding space, but as Shane also suggests, the associated history of that space. When Kura grants a material form

to her stories with her spoken words, she addresses both history and material reality. She represents the stories of her family as components of the space where she tells them and as a result, her verandah is transformed from a commonplace and unremarkable structure into one that instead imaginatively displays a family's collective history.

“Right Names”; “Wrong Names”: Te Paania’s Use of the Misnomer

While Kura responds to her Pakeha teacher's language with a “material” language of her own, her granddaughter Te Paania instead charts the dehumanisation of the Maori in more literal terms by ironically characterising herself as an animal throughout the novel. For example, Te Paania suggests that her features resemble those of a frog and frequently describes her speech as forming a mere “croak”. In his essay “Politics, Identification and Subjectivisation” (2006), Rancière emphasises the need to question the predicates that are attributed to an individual. He describes this questioning as a process of mediation through which simple categories that state “a woman is a woman or a worker a worker” (2006 60) can be complicated. This allows the political subject to “not only specify the logical gap that in turn discloses a social bias, but also to articulate this gap as a relation, the non place as a place, the place for a polemical construction” (2006 60). In this essay, Rancière also distinguishes between what he describes as policy and politics. He suggests that policy relates to “right names, which pin people to their place and work” where as politics is related to “wrong names – misnomers that articulate a gap and connect with a wrong” (62). The political act is therefore one that exploits the gaps within social discourse and in *Baby No-Eyes*, Te Paania engages with the process of “naming” and labelling in a

way that exposes such gaps. In the opening scene narrated by Tawera, she is first referred to as “my mother the frog” (8), a label which is repeated throughout the novel and used frequently by Te Paania herself. In giving both her speech and physical appearance the attributes of an animal, Te Paania comments upon and ultimately transgresses the identity that she has been historically given (Rancière 1992 62): “I would be part of it, part of the voice” (208) she claims, “I’d have my croak to add” (208).

Like Kura and Riripeti, Te Paania becomes aware of her position within the social order while attending school, where she is told that she should learn how to be “proper” (89). She describes her attempt to argue with the teacher as an effort to achieve dignity, stating: “even if I did it artlessly and without dignity, it was an attempt at dignity, a rejection of the idea of us not being proper people with ordinary hopes and a normal desire to learn and be part of the ordinary world” (89). However, while Riripeti’s treatment at school resulted in her unwilling transformation into an “animal”, Te Paania volitionally embraces the animal characteristics assigned by Pakeha society and gives these characteristics a political content. Similarly, by destabilising the connection between child and animal that was initially formed within the context of the mission school, Te Paania opens up a space in which these predicates can be tested against an individual’s reality.

While Te Paania refers to the distinction between “human” and “animal” and Rancière is instead concerned with the distinction between “man” and “citizen”, they each attempt to undermine the borderline that separates these categories by putting “two worlds in one and the same world” (2006b 304). When Te Paania appropriates the attributes that have been given to her ancestors by the Pakeha and applies them to her own speech and appearance, she undermines some of their historical meaning

and authority. She uses a series of attributes that were originally intended to divide the social order into visible and invisible, political and depoliticised spheres to query the distinction between these worlds instead. Rancière describes the attempt to query an individual's categorisation and classification within the social order as the "opening of an interval for political subjectivisation" (2006b 304) and suggests that the attempt to identify the difference between categorising an individual as a "man" or as a "citizen" is itself a political act:

It appears thus that *man* is not the void term opposed to the actual rights of the citizen. It has a positive content that is the dismissal of any difference between those who 'live' in such or such sphere of existence, between those who are or are not qualified for political life. The very difference between man and citizen is not a sign of disjunction proving that the rights are either void or tautological. It is the opening of an interval for political subjectivisation. (2004b 304)

In a similar way, Grace comments upon the role of the distinction between human and animal in maintaining the separation of the human (political) and natural (depoliticised) worlds. Furthermore, she describes the shift that occurs between Riripeti's forced dehumanisation and Te Paania's deliberate appropriation of animal characteristics as a political act that not only draws attention to the role of such categorising principles in maintaining the social order, but attempts to subvert them also. When Kura told Riripeti's story in the space of her garden verandah, she recalled that Riripeti's "spirit was gone out of her, gone roaming. Her hair was as dry as a horse's tail, rough and hard, her eyes were like flat shadows, not at all like eyes" (34). However, a generation later, both Te Paania and her children reframe such animal attributes in their descriptions of her "wide freckled face; frog mouth; [frog]

eyes magnetised under double glazed glasses (9). It is from this vantage point that Te Paania perceives the world and her position within it, attributing her exclusion from the visible sphere to the suggestion that “I was too native, too froggy, too scary” (103). Here, she suggests that others view her abstractly, not only diminishing her capacity for politicised speech, but also depriving her of a fully developed sense of subjectivity. However, since Te Paania’s self-descriptions are deliberate, purposeful and precise, she appropriates and reworks these reductive characteristics in her attempt to confront the visible sphere with the previously “inadmissible” (Rancière 2006 85) subject.

In chapter ten, Te Paania describes an act of “ill wishing” as having the capacity to inhabit a person’s body. She states: “I didn’t know then that a curse was a matter of potent ill-wishing, and that if we were not to die from it we need to turn speakings back on those who spoke them in order to make them void” (89). While Riripeti was unable to return her teacher’s “speakings” with words of her own, Te Paania concludes that “by opening my big mouth [...] I showed some understanding of what I needed to do to defend myself” (89). Both Kura and Te Paania therefore respond to the “ill-wishing” that has been expressed by others and that has subsequently inhabited their bodies, with an expression of their own. They suggest that if such “ill-wishing” can physically occupy a person, then it can also be removed and re-situated within the social world through the act of articulation. As a result, Grace’s concern with the borderlines that separate the visible from the invisible, the human from animal is intertwined with a broader consideration of the speech act, a connection that is most clearly illustrated by the figure of Tawera.

Mediating the Material and the Immaterial: “Sideways Looking” and the Role of Tawera

As I have demonstrated, Kura and Te Paania are concerned with the borders that divide the visible from the invisible and the human from the animal spheres. However, rather than accept this division, Tawera performs the role of mediator between these spheres when he imagines, throughout his childhood, that his sister who died at birth has continued to grow up alongside him. At times, it appears that Tawera’s sister can also be “perceived” by her grandmother Kura and mother Te Paania who tells Tawera that “you have a sister four years and five days older than you” (19) and describes herself as “holding a ghostly daughter by the hand” (132). Gabriele Schwab states that “rather than conveying Tawera’s psychic reality as fantasy or imagination, the text literalises this hallucination, thus endowing the dead sister with a quasi-realistic presence that is also imposed on the reader” (139). As a result, Schwab argues, Tawera “literally enacts the transgenerational trauma in a performative discourse of externalised psychic life” (139). Although most people are unable to see her, Tawera’s imaginative construction of his sister’s life represents his attempt to reclassify her as a fully human subject following the hospital staff’s treatment of her remains as “rubbish” (83). Tawera believes that he and his sister attend school together, complete their homework together and ensures that a place is set for her at the table each day and as the novel progresses, the humanity that was denied to the child upon her death is gradually reassembled through the ordinary details of her imagined life.

Tawera’s attempt to imaginatively construct a “life” for his sister corresponds with Freud’s description of melancholia, or the attempt to continue “the existence of the lost object” (46) in the mind. Freud suggests that the lost object does not

necessarily have to be a person who has died, but could simply be something that has been “lost as an object of love” (46). Furthermore, a person might not “consciously perceive what it is he has lost” (46), or conversely, might know “whom he has lost but not *what* it is he has lost in them” (46). While Freud argues that grief is finite, melancholia is characterised by an individual’s attempt to preserve his or her connection with a lost object. Judith Butler suggests that the attempt to preserve this connection results in “the loss of the social world, the substitution of psychic parts and antagonisms for external relations among social actors” (1997 179). Tawera’s attempt to include his imagined sister in his daily life demonstrates that he is both an actor within the social world and a figure who is attempting to negotiate the relationship that he has created with his sister as a lost object.

Tawera’s imaginative reconstruction of his sister’s life also corresponds to the Maori concept of the wairua. The term wairua refers to an individual’s immortal soul, which comes into being in the womb when the foetus develops eyes.¹⁴ Although most wairuas do not remain part of their family’s lives after death, if they are unhappy with how their tangihanga [funeral] ceremony was carried out or have any other grievance about how their remains were treated, they will remain within the material world. As James Ritchie states, “the wairua describes the ‘soul permeating the world of both things and not-things’” (Ritchie qtd. in Heim 188) and Hirini Moko Mead also points out that such “spirits” are an acknowledged and readily accepted part of Maori life and death. During the tangihanga ceremony, “the wairua hovers, lingers and watches over proceedings to make sure that the rituals are being done properly. The belief is that if the ceremony has not been done properly the wairua will not leave but it will hover for a long time” (Moko Mead 147).

Freud's concept of melancholia and the Maori belief in the wairua each describes a continued connection between the living and the dead. For example, Freud's suggestion that melancholia is the result of an individual psychic disorder contrasts with the public acceptance and acknowledgement of a wairua's presence within the context of a Maori community. Despite this contextual difference, the wairua, like the melancholic's continued connection with a lost object in their mind also constitutes an acknowledgement of the fact that ordinary processes of grieving can become undermined or subverted in different ways. Therefore, both Freud's melancholia and the concept of the wairua describe a similar attempt to subvert ordinary forms of mourning and produce "an altered articulation" (Butler 1997 176) of the relationship between the living and the dead.

Whether classified as a wairua, a "literalised hallucination" (Schwab 139), or a manifestation of psychic loss, the continued presence of Tawera's sister in her family's life opens up a debate about her status within the broader social order. Her family's perception of her as mokopuna [grandchild] conflicts with the status given to her by the hospital staff, who instead treated her as "rubbish" (83), "kai" [food] (83), a "blind eel" (83) or "old newspaper" (83). Throughout the novel, Tawera's attempt to reconstruct her imagined life centres upon this conflict between two opposing and irreconcilable classifications, as he appears to reject what Butler would describe as "the forms of social power [...] that regulate what losses will and will not be grieved" (1997 183). This conflict is openly acknowledged by Tawera's grandfather, who believes that the child must maintain a presence within the material world in order to redefine her status as human and as mokopuna:

She got to hang around for a while so we know she's a mokopuna, not a rubbish, not a kai. [...] You don't expect her to go away, join her

ancestors, foof, just like that [...] not after all that business. [...] You supposed to send it away, that baby, Kura and them didn't send that baby off. Got to send it off, otherwise trouble, get up to mischief. (83)

Tawera's grandfather also acknowledges that there will be negative repercussions for an individual and their family if they do not finally sever their connection with the child and "send [her] away" (83). However, he also acknowledges that she must first achieve recognition as a *mokopuna* before this severance can occur.

Tawera's imagined relationship with his sister is profoundly ambivalent and reflects Butler's suggestion that "melancholia produces a set of spatialising tropes for psychic life, domiciles of preservation and shelter as well as arenas for struggle and persecution" (1997 171). He narrates each aspect of his day for her and accounts for her lack of sight by describing concepts such as colour and space with imagery derived from the sensory experiences of sound and touch. For example, he describes the colour green for her as being like "someone sticking a pin in your arm" (135), red as "someone blowing a long sound on a conch before the dancing begins" (139), and transparent objects as "a hand on any cat's purr" (139). However, if he does not describe the surrounding objects, colours and spaces as completely as possible, he imagines that his sister becomes angry, stating: "you don't want me to have my learning [...] what sort of eyes are you? You go off thinking, all by yourself" (134). Furthermore, Tawera is sometimes resentful of his role as mediator, as his sister's imagined presence necessitates what he describes as "all that thinking and planning and remembering to talk in my head. All that being pinched and poked and shoved and squeezed" (140). He further argues that his role is to minimise his sister's impact on Te Paania's life, stating that he has to "keep *her* off your back, out of your hair, out of your eyes, your head, your ears" (141). Although she does not have a physical

presence in the world, Tawera's sister dominates the text as a complex entity that is simultaneously absent and present and therefore requires "sideways looking" (140) from her mother and brother.

As Tawera negotiates his own experience of material space, he also attempts to describe and facilitate that experience for another. In doing so, he registers a protest against Mahaki's suggestion that "they were not quite people, and therefore their lives didn't matter" (122). As he makes space for his sister to sit beside him, or sets a place for her at mealtimes, he gestures towards an imagined life while simultaneously registering an absence. However, as readers, we are capable of perceiving simultaneously both the child's absence and Tawera's imaginative reconstruction, which is perhaps illustrated most clearly during a pivotal scene that takes place during Tawera's school play. As I will later demonstrate, this scene describes Tawera's attempt to revoke the attributes that were predicated to his sister by the hospital staff and reassert her status as human in their place.

The play is based upon the myth of Tawhaki, a figure "who is known as the master of disguises" (Binney 2010 189). While the myth contains numerous narrative strands and while regional variations also exist, one recurring version describes Tawhaki's attempt to rescue the soul of his wife which resides in the liminal space between heaven and earth. Her soul has the capacity to move between spheres and does so regularly, but in time she decides to remain in the heavens where Tawhaki must then journey. However, he must first cure his grandmother of blindness, after which she teaches him the appropriate incantations in order to gain access to the heavens. The particular scene described by Grace depicts Tawhaki's attempt to defeat a series of ponaturi – mythical creatures who are incapable of living in the light. The scene emphasises the roles of both visibility and invisibility in

Tawhaki's attempts to exact revenge upon the ponaturi and centres upon an "incantation of invisibility" (Grace 1998 196) which allows him to eventually defeat the creatures.

In *Baby No-Eyes*, Grace draws several obvious parallels between the myth of Tawhaki and the story of Te Paania's unnamed child, utilising the tropes of blindness, immateriality and liminality that were deployed in the myth to explore the relationship between life and death. While Tawhaki must cure the blindness of his grandmother before she will allow him to leave the material world, Tawera must describe the world to his sister whose eyes have been stolen from her before he can recite the appropriate "incantations" (196) that will free her from her liminal state. Interestingly, Grace's engagement with Maori myth does not only arise in her later work, but also shapes her characterisation of Toko in *Potiki*. Both Toko and Tawera's sister have been mistreated and disregarded by Pakeha figures of authority in different ways and their connection to the heroic figures of Maori mythology emphasises Grace's attempt to reclassify the status and position that they have been assigned by the Pakeha within the broader social order.

When Tawera is chosen to play the part of Tawhaki in his school play, he imagines that his sister is unhappy that she has been excluded from the performance. In order to appease her, he invents the role of Tawhaki Unseen and tells her that she will act alongside him, stating "when it's time for Tawhaki to be unseen then Tawhaki visible disappears and the people see Tawhaki Invisible instead" (193). Although the audience cannot see her and are unaware of their participation in her transformation, for Tawera, the performance presents what Rancière would term "a new scene of equality where heterogeneous performances are translated into one another" (Rancière 2011 22) and given an equal status. Tawera considers the

audience an important part of his sister's performance and for him, their presence transforms their otherwise passive spectatorship into an integral part of her transformation into a human subject. He states: "There, for everyone to see, was Tawhaki Invisible. The people clapped and cheered for her as she danced and danced in the sweeping, swirling light until the sun went down" (196-197).

Tawera's belief that the audience has acknowledged his sister's performance constitutes a turning point in the text. For him, the performance generates a public acknowledgement of her existence within the visible sphere. The scene also demonstrates the relevance of Rancière's claim that the act of spectatorship has the potential to register a political dispute:

Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions. (2011 13)

Rancière argues that spectatorship is both active and potentially transformative. Similarly, when Tawera imagines that the audience has acknowledged his sister's performance, he interprets their applause as an affirmation that she is equal to the other children on the stage. Although the audience in this scene do not recognise the child's re-classification as human, Tawera's narration of her story within the novel form allows his account of his sister to reach a much broader audience of readers. Through a process of imaginative reconstruction, Tawera's sister becomes a figure who, to draw from Butler's language, "troubles our sense of reality" (Butler 2009 9)

and who “draws attention to the fact that there are ‘lives’ that are not quite – or, indeed, are never – recognised as lives” (Butler 2009 4). Although many of the protests carried out over the course of *Baby No-Eyes* have a limited social impact, Grace’s decision to make the “precarious figures” (Rancière 2004 90) of the social order the subject of her novel helps to make hidden people and histories visible.

Grace achieves this new visibility for her characters’ stories by describing how they engage with empty material space as having the potential to host new materialised stories, which is evident, for instance, in Kura’s way of thinking about her verandah, and in Tawera’s use of his school’s stage. In the epilogue, Tawera returns to the relationship between empty space and the potential of an untold story when he states: “I can sleep then because I know I’ve been given my incantations – to make visible who was invisible” (294). He describes his attempts to record his sister’s image in a drawing, but suggests that the artwork that he has produced is characterised by omissions and absences. He states that “in each one, space pushes itself outward, and in doing so brings the eye towards it” (294). Absence, or empty space is made conspicuous by the completed parts of the drawing and he concludes that rather than attempt to diminish this sense of absence in his work he should instead “enlarge it” (294):

Instead of ending with that little unbreachable gap I begin with it, embrace it, let it be there, make it be there, pushing my drawing further and further to the outskirts. I persist with this, night after night, until one night everything’s gone, fallen from the edges of the paper. Spaze. Te Kore, the nothing. (293)

By emphasising the “unbreachable gap” rather than attempting to conceal or omit it from the drawing, he can then complete his attempts to depict “Sister Seen” (294) and record her life as he imagines it. Tawera’s attempt to successfully complete a portrait of his sister re-enacts his attempt to imaginatively reconstruct her life over the course of the novel. However, having completed the portrait, Tawera has given her a form that others can also perceive and acknowledge.

Tawera’s portrait of his sister also represents an attempt to record her story since, although she died at birth, she is painted as a teenager, having “lived” an imagined life alongside her brother. As with Kura and Te Paania’s narratives, Tawera’s account of his sister derives both its form and function from meeting house narratives. He describes the act of painting as a way of “breaching space” (293), stating: “I begin to work the drop [of paint], pulling it down, adding colour, moulding it out at either side and stretching it outwards and upwards” (293). He adds: “there’s a nose, curved at its tip, drawing outwards to thin darkened cheeks and down to a stretching jaw” (293). Tawera draws the image of his sister from the canvas in a way that recalls a sculptor’s attempt to “bring forward” (Grace 1986 15) a figure from the wood when carving an ancestral figure. Here, Grace echoes her earlier description of the sculptor’s ability in *Potiki* to reveal “what was already waiting” in the tree” (1886 12) and suggests that the act of aesthetic production is inherently linked to the dormant potentiality of an untold story. In both *Potiki* and *Baby No-Eyes*, the sculpture and the painting that respectively conclude each novel can only be completed when the stories of their two main characters have been told. This demonstrates that while the act of narrating an individual’s story is given the most attention in each novel, its aesthetic representation also performs an important concluding function that bridges the gap between narration and record keeping.

Conclusion

While the performance of Tawhaki Unseen gave Tawera's sister a place "for the feet to stand" (Moko Mead 43), Tawera's later portrait records the process of narrating her life in visual and material form. This process demonstrates that although Grace does not give the ancestral meeting house a prominent role in *Baby No-Eyes*, she finds a number of ways to translate and deploy some of its central social and cultural functions. First, the novel charts the evolution of an individual's claim to a "standing place", suggesting that the concept of turangawaewae can be "translated" into vernacular and everyday spaces that include a garden verandah or a school theatre. Grace then identifies these everyday spaces as forums where a family's stories can be told. Kura narrates the collective history of her family within the space of her verandah, while Tawera responds to the more recent story of his sister's dehumanisation during the performance at his school's theatre. Through each of these figures, Grace connects some of the narrative methods that are traditionally associated with a meeting house's decoration to each character's purposeful attempts to make his or her own narratives material, visual or otherwise tactile in form. As a result, although *Baby No-Eyes* does not make frequent reference to the central family's ancestral meeting house, it draws several analogies between the material art of the meeting house and the vernacular forms of articulation and communication employed by the novel's central characters.

These examples suggest that in both *Potiki* and *Baby No-Eyes*, Grace establishes the contemporary presence of traditional and vernacular forms of Maori storytelling. In *Potiki*, her descriptions of both the Te Ope's unorthodox meeting house and the Tamihana's ancestral meeting house demonstrate that Maori material culture is not a static entity. However, its ongoing influence is explored most fully

over the course of *Baby No-Eyes*, a novel in which the meeting house is largely absent. As each character attempts to narrate his or her stories, they do not do so within their ancestral house, but within domestic spaces, through public performances and, as Te Paania demonstrates, even on their own bodies. Here, Grace does not present a univocal account of Maori culture. Instead, she suggests that Maori material culture and forms of narrative self-representation contribute to the continued flourishing and development of the Maori novel more widely.

“No marae for beginning or ending”: Defamiliarising the tropes of the Maori literary renaissance in Keri Hulme’s *The Bone People*

Introduction

Witi Ihimaera’s *The Matriarch*, Patricia Grace’s *Potiki* and *The Bone People* by Keri Hulme were each published between 1984 and 1986, but Hulme’s novel bears little resemblance to the work of her contemporaries. In their novels, Ihimaera and Grace each demonstrate a concern with a series of high profile land disputes between Maori and Pakeha communities. Furthermore, they each examine the social, cultural and political effects of dispossession on the Maori community and situate their analyses within a broad historical context. In addition, Ihimaera and Grace both recount each community’s attempt to narrate their collective history in the face of social and political adversity, resulting in a polyphonic and multifaceted narrative approach that is central to both of their novels and later, Grace’s *Baby No-Eyes* also. Conversely, *The Bone People*¹ is not concerned with the lives of a particular community and does not engage with either historical or contemporary land protests. Hulme also omits many of the established literary and cultural signs of Maori difference, such as the meeting house and its associated cultural practices, and the novel spans a single year rather than centuries. While Ihimaera and Grace locate their central characters within an extensive historical, genealogical and familial network, Kerewin, Joe and Simon remain comparatively isolated over the course of Hulme’s novel.

The Bone People was published in 1984 and describes the lives of Kerewin Holmes, Joe Gillayley and his adopted son Simon Peter Gillayley in late 1970s or

early 1980s New Zealand. Kerewin Holmes is an artist who lives in a tower that she has constructed in a remote part of New Zealand's South Island. Over the course of the novel, she forms a friendship with Joe and Simon, who is also known in Maori as Haimona, or Himi and who refers to himself as both Clare and Claro. As the narrative progresses, the three spend increasing amounts of time together and eventually become friends, despite Joe's repeated violence towards his son. When Joe assaults Simon with such severity that the child requires hospitalisation, he is arrested and imprisoned, and Kerewin destroys her tower and leaves Whangaroa. Following a period of separation after the assault, the three central characters return to the place where the tower was originally constructed. There, Kerewin has built a spiral-shaped building to replace it. While all three live together at the end of the novel, Kerewin insists that they are "not family, not whanau" (395) but something more indeterminate and difficult to categorise. Interestingly, also, although an unnamed meeting house is only directly referred to once throughout the novel, Hulme alludes to many of the different values and functions that are typically associated with traditional meeting houses through the structures of the tower, the spiral, and the objects of everyday life. Despite this, as I will show, the structures and objects included in the text cannot be regarded as direct substitutions for the absent meeting house. Instead, they become ways of exploring different facets of contemporary Maori identity, which make reference to traditional Maori cultural practices without necessarily embodying them fully.

The Bone People was first published by The Spiral Collective, which Eva Rask Knudsen describes as a non-profit "ad-hoc feminist publishing unit" (128) run by Marian Evans, Miriama Evans and Irihapeti Ramsden. The Spiral Collective were willing to publish the novel without making any editorial changes and each of its two

small print runs sold out before Hodder and Stoughton agreed to act as co-publishers. While the novel divided critics upon its publication, its receipt of the Pegasus Prize for Maori literature in 1984 and the Booker Prize in 1985 generated the most controversy. Funded by Mobil in 1984, the Pegasus Prize was a once-off award for a Maori novel or autobiography published in the last ten years. However, some readers – most notably the Pakeha critic C.K. Stead – believed that Hulme’s ancestry did not entitle her to claim either a Maori identity or the Pegasus prize and argued that she should not be considered part of the expanding group of Maori writers as a result. Hulme’s 1985 Booker Prize win generated similar criticism, but despite this *The Bone People* became the most widely circulated and well-recognised Maori novel to date and secured her place within what Patricia Grace has described as a group of “firsts”. Grace stated: “we are a group of firsts. Hone Tuwhare was the first to publish a book of poetry. Witi Ihimaera was the first to publish stories. I was the first woman, and Keri Hulme was the first Maori to win the Booker Prize” (qtd. in Thompson 333). By clearly identifying Hulme as a Maori writer alongside Tuwhare and Ihimaera, Grace made her opinion on the controversy that surrounded Hulme’s Pegasus and Booker Prize awards known.² While this debate has continued to evolve and develop within recent critical discourse, it is most clearly characterised by an exchange that occurred between C.K. Stead and Margery Fee following Hulme’s Pegasus Prize win in 1984. This debate epitomised some critics’ tendency to focus upon Hulme’s position within the New Zealand literary system rather than the novel itself and is characterised by Stead’s assertion that “*The Bone People*” [...] is a novel by a Pakeha which has won an award intended for a Maori” (104).³

While almost every reading of the novel to date begins with an account of Hulme’s ancestry – this one included – some of the other recurring themes have

variously included her use of myth and the sacred,⁴ the novel as a hybridised “blending” of Maori and Pakeha cultural forms,⁵ and her rejection of a monocultural Pakeha cultural framework in favour of a return to the Maoritanga.⁶ Critics have also paid relatively little attention to Hulme’s omission of the recurring figures of Maori renaissance literature and, as I will later show further, have instead read the tower and the spiral as symbolic of Hulme’s national politics in different ways. In *Postcolonial Pacific Writing* (2005), for example, Michelle Keown argues that Hulme does not promote any clear practical or ideological separation between the Maori and Pakeha communities and rejects the “segregated nationalist model” (126) presented in novels such as *The Matriarch*. For Keown, the spiral structure and the tricephalos that Kerewin sculpts at the end of the novel symbolise “the post-imperial cultural multiplicity upon which the novel’s new nationalist vision is based” (125). She praises the novel as a celebration of a “national unity” (125) that is based upon the promotion of “diversity and difference” (125). In his study of the Booker Prize, Luke Strongman also claims that the novel celebrates New Zealand’s multiculturalism and like Keown, argues that this multiculturalism is only fully realised towards the novel’s end. Before Hulme achieves her “vision of a multicultural Pacific utopia” (93), Strongman argues, each of the three characters must undergo a series of trials and sufferings, after which they reject a bicultural model of New Zealand’s national identity in favour of a multicultural model that is imposed in its place.

As I have noted in previous chapters, the spiral is a symbol that is frequently associated with Maori cultural and aesthetic identity. For instance, in Maori material culture, it appears in the curvilinear carvings of traditional meeting house structures and the stylised depictions of fern fronds, which are repeated across numerous

different Maori art forms. As a result, Kerewin's decision to construct a spiral-shaped structure at the end of the novel is easily portrayed as a rejection of the European forms of identity that are often associated with the tower. Chadwick Allen reads the symbolism of the tower and the spiral in this way and in doing so, presents a contrasting approach to Keown and Strongman. For example, he argues that the tower "embodies Pakeha individualism" (151) which "cuts [Kerewin] off from a Maori identity rooted in community" (151). He continues by suggesting that the novel forms an account of "Kerewin's steps towards regaining her Maoritanga [traditional Maori way of life]" (151). For him, this becomes increasingly possible upon her destruction of the tower, restoration of the meeting house at Moerangi and construction of the spiral structure that "suggests hope for a Maori future" (153). Allen therefore views the transition from a Pakeha to a Maori cultural framework in uncomplicated terms and argues that Kerewin wholeheartedly adopts "a contemporary indigenous identity" (153) upon destroying her tower. He further concludes that the spiral symbolism at the end of the novel "suggests that there will be Maori descendants in some form or another for the future" (153). However, I will argue that the tower and the spiral are not as polarised as this. Although they initially appear to be two different ways of representing Kerewin, Joe and Simon's response to their surrounding social and familial dysfunction, they become a means to explore the concept of whanau itself.

Like Keown, Eva Rask Knudsen argues that Hulme presents a new model for New Zealand's national culture at the end of *The Bone People*. She agrees with Keown and also Strongman that the three central characters must undergo a series of transformations before this new national model can be revealed. While she claims that Kerewin is suffering a kind of "cultural schizophrenia caused by colonialism"

(148), her destruction of the tower “signals a transition from mental illness to sanity, or from madness to myth” (149). To Rask Knudsen, however, the novel promotes New Zealand’s biculturalism rather than an open-ended multicultural model and states that “the new people of this transformed land may be of Maori as well as Pakeha descent” (128-129). Perhaps Rask Knudsen is referring to the political activism that flourished during the 1970s and 80s when she suggests that *The Bone People* is a “nation building” (129) novel, which focuses upon the creation of a sense of national identity to which both Maori and Pakeha can relate.

As these examples illustrate, there is a tendency to read the recurring tropes and figures of Maori renaissance literature in a relatively transparent way. For example, Allen’s reading of the novel suggests that the tower represents a Pakeha cultural presence that isolates Kerewin from the traditional Maori social structures of the marae, whanau or meeting house. As a result, he reads the spiral, which replaces the tower, as a typically Maori symbol and reinstatement of these displaced cultural forms. However, this reading and others like it perform a symbolic substitution that is too direct. Although the tower is European in style, it does not conform to the style of a typical Pakeha home and while the spiral is one of the most prominent shapes in Maori art, it is only one part of a much broader aesthetic whole. Therefore, the spiral is more than a replacement or substitute meeting house. Rather, as I will show, to suggest that the spiral offers any sort of conclusion to the novel as a whole is to reject the fact that Hulme defines the novel’s events as just the beginning of a much broader story that will continue to develop.

In this chapter, I will argue that Hulme presents the recurring textual figures of early-to-mid renaissance literature in an ultimately ambiguous way. Throughout the novel, she describes structures and concepts like the meeting house, the whanau,

or one's whakapapa in ways that are both recognisable and simultaneously defamiliarised and, as a result, the reader becomes unsure of their value, functions and meanings. Unlike Ihimaera and Grace, Hulme does not make any overt statement regarding New Zealand's socio-spatial division. Instead, she comments upon the ways that the recurring and familiar objects, structures and practices of Maori cultural tradition are deployed as textual figures within the political discourses of renaissance literature more broadly. I will demonstrate that whether in relation to the everyday empirical objects that populate their worlds or the large-scale structures that recur throughout Maori renaissance literature, there are no stable reference points in *The Bone People*. As a result, from their initial meeting to the closing scenes of the novel, the three central characters develop a shared history in a way that does not conform to the model established within renaissance literature up to this point.

The Bone People demonstrates an almost continuous concern with both material culture and the context of its display. The novel makes frequent reference, for example, to both the "bric-a-brac" (418) of everyday life and the objects that Kerewin produces and uses within the space of her tower. Hulme also considers how the building's architecture affects the way that objects are displayed and viewed within the space. The tower can, in some ways, be regarded as a whare taonga and fulfils the functions implied by both its standard translation as "museum" and literal translation as "house of treasures". It is a space in which valuable objects are collected and curated but it is also a forum in which the objects of everyday life can be endowed with a greater and more complex series of values and functions as the novel progresses. As a result, it is one of the most diverse cultural spaces in the novel. Hulme's concern with the display, use, and circulation of empirical objects

extends to a consideration of how her text will appear on the printed page. For example, Simon uses brief, fully capitalised and initialled notes to communicate, which contrast sharply with Kerewin's fast-paced, frequently misspelled and deliberately ungrammatical wordplay. In the preface of the novel, Hulme states that her typographic and syntactical choices should provoke "a tiny, subconscious, unacknowledged but definite response" (Hulme 1986 n.pag) from the reader, suggesting that "'OK' studs a sentence", while "'okay' is a more mellow flowing word when read silently" (Hulme 1986 n.pag). She treats words as aesthetic objects and demonstrates an acute awareness of the connection between a word's printed appearance and its influence on the text's narrative development.⁷

Rancière's accounts of both the media of collage and installation offer a particularly effective framework for considering both Hulme's position within the Maori renaissance and her engagement with the recurring figures of Maori cultural identity. In "Problems and Transformations of Critical Art" (2009), he offers readings of both prose and drama, but focuses primarily upon the changing role of the contemporary exhibition space. He argues that "the issue [with critical art] is no longer to present two heterogenous worlds and to incite feelings of intolerability, but, on the contrary, to bring to light the causal connection linking them together" (47). He describes the evolution of critical art from early twentieth century Dadaist collage through to Warhol's widely known installations of the 1960s. He suggests that these works were polemical in their critique of capitalism and intended to provoke a sense of shock in the viewer by juxtaposing images and contexts that were frequently contradictory or controversial. However, although Rancière maintains that polemicism still has a role in contemporary installations and exhibitions, he suggests that an important shift occurred at the end of the twentieth century. Artists working

with different forms of collage and installation have begun to eschew the attempt to provoke a direct sense of shock in the viewer through their juxtaposition of contrasting objects and images in favour of a process of “distantiation” or estrangement between an art object and its interpretation.

Rancière argues that contemporary exhibitions and installations now take four main forms which he identifies as “play”, “inventory”, “encounter”, and “mystery”. A “play” or “double play” refers to a deliberate play on words or other forms of expression. When words or objects are in a state of play, “the value of their polemical revelation has become undecidable. And it is the production of this undecidability that is at the core of the work of many artists and expositions” (53-54). Rancière suggests that many contemporary artists no longer focus upon exposing the mechanisms of social division and domination. Instead, they call the meanings and interpretations that might traditionally be associated with a work, or even a word, into question in a way that produces a profound sense of interpretative uncertainty or undecidability. This kind of art “claims at once to sharpen our perception of the interplay of signs, our awareness of the fragility of the procedures of reading these same signs, and our pleasure in playing with the undecidable” (54).

In *The Bone People*, the three central characters ascribe new social and cultural values and functions to the objects that populate their worlds. As a result, these objects are re-employed and re-circulated within new and diverse contexts. Hulme defamiliarises objects and images including a chess piece, a medieval tower, a greenstone or a spiral by making them strange and at times, slightly absurd. Additionally, she does not foreground the recurring textual figures of early-to-mid renaissance literature in *The Bone People*. Instead, Hulme simply includes them alongside the continuous and repeated references to art and culture that recur

throughout the text, caught in what Rancière describes as the “double play” (53) of the familiar and the unrecognisable.

The second form, which Rancière names the “inventory”, does not juxtapose heterogeneous elements in order to demonstrate their separateness, but instead, to suggest how they might relate to each other. Artists who engage with the idea of the inventory in their work attempt to produce or represent a shared history in a way that rejects the tendency of critical art to “dissolve” objects into a series of “manipulable signs” (54-55). By bringing different objects and materials into contact with each other, artists produce “an inventory of traces of history: i.e. objects, photographs or simple lists of names testifying to a history and a world in common” (55). Rather than evoking a sense of disassociation between the different elements that comprise the artwork, the artist instead produces a sense of communality. While the technique of play focused upon the uncertainty of interpreting the “spectacles, accessories and icons of everyday life” (54), the inventory attempts to recoup and regenerate social bonds from this undecidability. In *The Bone People*, the characters’ uncertainty about their relationship with the iconic objects of Maori cultural identity is not necessarily negative; instead, as I will show, it is productive. For although these objects lack interpretative certainty, they are instrumental in the formation of new social bonds.

The third form of the contemporary exhibition space is the “encounter”. It marks the transition between the inventory’s attempt to gather and make visible the “arts of doing and making which exist scattered throughout society” (55-56), on one hand, and artists’ engagement with forms such as the installation as a “social or community-oriented vocation” (56), on the other. This category of art attempts to form new and unexpected relationships between people, empirical objects and the

space that they temporarily inhabit. The “encounter” is typically staged in a museum space, which is transformed from a place where art is displayed to a space where art is performed. While ultimately, this kind of relational art does not transform problematic or contentious spaces, Rancière argues that art that attempts to produce an unexpected encounter “no longer tries to respond to an excess of commodities and signs but rather to a lack of bonds” (57). Therefore, unlike the forms of play and inventory, the encounter is not focused exclusively upon the juxtaposition and manipulation of material objects. Instead, it intends to produce unexpected meetings between the objects on display, the spaces in which they are displayed and the people who come to view them there.

For Rancière, however, these encounters result in an overly simplistic “short-circuit” (56) between “objects and situations” (56). Since they exist only within the museum space or a carefully chosen site of urban intervention, they do not effectively transform the social spaces in which the encounter is imagined to take place in any lasting way. Later in this chapter, I will argue that Hulme deploys a similar strategy in *The Bone People* when she describes Kerewin’s decision to destroy the tower and replace it with the spiral. When she destroys the tower, Kerewin acknowledges that the structure has provoked the formation of new and unexpected bonds between the three central characters but has not changed the realities of their lived experiences in any lasting way. Despite their friendship, their lives remain individually troubled in a way that corresponds with Rancière’s observation that although the space of encounter promotes the formation of new social bonds, it frequently fails to affect any real change in the lives of the individuals involved.

Rancière names the fourth form the “mystery” and describes it as the “modest, sometimes imperceptible way in which the arrangement of objects, images and signs displayed in contemporary exhibitions have shifted from the logic of provocative dissensus to that of the mystery testifying to co-presence” (58). The mystery frequently refers to the principles of the symbolist movement but is “indifferent” (59) towards the attempt to directly undermine the boundaries separating the recognisable and the defamiliarised which characterised the symbolist art of the 1870s. Despite this, the fourth form of critical art continues to indirectly engage with the ambiguity and ambivalence associated with symbolist art in order to undermine the “perceptual stereotypes” (59) that frequently accompany the act of viewing a particular stylistic or formal approach. Mystery does not emphasise the incompatibility of heterogeneous elements, but the connections that in fact exist between them, therefore demonstrating that “the most disparate realities appear to be cut out of the same sensible fabric” (58).

Over the course of the novel, Hulme describes how Kerewin, Joe and Simon meet and subsequently become friends. Despite their diverse personal histories, they find a sense of commonality by engaging with each other in the space of the tower, once again demonstrating that Hulme is not interested in producing a sense of “provocative dissensus” (58) through her juxtaposition of three very different lives and material histories, but instead how they might, as Rancière suggests, be “cut of the same sensible fabric” (58). As I will later demonstrate, the fourth section of the novel illustrates this idea most clearly. In this section, Hulme initiates abrupt and unexpected changes in both the novel’s overall tone and the context of the plot so that the reader becomes disoriented and the novel as an aesthetic object enacts the

uncertainty and undecidability that has been simply described within it up to this point.

Although the reader is initially disoriented by Hulme's decision to remove her characters from their now familiar settings and routines, the fourth section of the novel is also arguably part of "a tradition of *détournement*" (57) that Rancière refers to in his description of the mystery. *Détournement* is a concept that emerged from the situationist movement of the 1950s and can be described as "the integration of present or past artist production into a superior production of a milieu" (Gilman 196). Anselm Jappe further describes *détournement* as "a quotation, or more generally a re-use, that 'adapts' the original element to a new context" (59). In practice, the idea of *détournement* was originally exemplified by the work of the artist Asger Jorn. For example, Jorn frequently reused, disfigured, or modified old canvases (Gilman 196), or voided an image of its original meaning by disassembling and subsequently reassembling its constituent parts. In more recent examples of the mystery, Rancière argues that the *détournement* "no longer has art's great function of political critique. On the contrary, it effaces the picturesque imagery to which critique was attached" (Jappe 57). Hulme offers a similar re-interpretation of traditional Maori cultural practices in the final section of *The Bone People*, when, for example, her narrators refer to the meeting house and the figure of the kaumatua [respected elder] while simultaneously offering alternative, modified roles for these traditional institutions within her central characters' lives. Furthermore, in the fourth section of the novel, Hulme not only subverts the "picturesque imagery" of previous representations of Maori culture but, as I will show, she demonstrates a self-conscious awareness that her own plot's conclusion might itself be revised or re-assembled in turn.

While the kinds of aesthetic communality described by Rancière take four different forms, they collectively describe an approach to the majority of twentieth century critical art forms that differs from the more confident exposure of “one world hidden beneath another” (51) which characterised earlier forms. In these more recent art forms, the juxtaposition of heterogeneous objects draws attention to the arbitrary connection between an object and its value. Despite this, Rancière questions whether this kind of critical art can fulfil the broader political function that has been assigned to it in the absence of a space in which politics proper can flourish. He suggests that the ever-increasing political consensus within the social order has undermined the potential for political action to be fully implemented. In other words, “this art, uncertain in its politics, is increasingly encouraged to intervene due to the lack of politics in the proper sense” (60). Rancière is concerned by the idea that art might be called upon to perform a “substitutive political function” (60) without effecting real political change. Although art can function as a means to “reshap[e] political spaces” (60), its democratic function may be abrogated if it only parodies them, in this way, reinforcing the undecidability of the status and social function of art itself.

Hulme’s novel is obviously very different to the art described by Rancière, both in terms of its medium and its historico-cultural “origin”. However, I would argue that, conceptually, it marks a similar shift in Maori literature between the aesthetics of “provocative dissensus” characteristic of a novel like *The Matriarch* or *Potiki* and both Hulme and Duff’s very different attempts to discover ways in which apparently disparate and disconnected elements of a society might be surprisingly linked. Unlike her peers, Hulme does not connect the Maori cultural objects that are represented throughout *The Bone People* with a specific or directly stated political

cause. In *The Matriarch*, Ihimaera used the art and architecture of the Rongopai meeting house to trace the establishment and subsequent development of settler rule in New Zealand. Similarly, in *Potiki*, Grace engaged with the Tamihana's meeting house as a way of intervening in the established social order and ways of partitioning the social space. Here, the house becomes a site that hosts the meeting of two ultimately irreconcilable worlds and its destruction and subsequent reconstruction mirrors the broader social conflict between the Maori and Pakeha communities. However, Hulme does not engage with Maori material culture as a way of "intervening" in the established social order or ways of partitioning the social space like Ihimaera's Rongopai or Grace's depiction of the Tamihana's house might. Instead, she is concerned with how these objects come to signify and focuses her attention upon the ways that we attribute different meanings, values and functions to the objects that constitute our worlds. As a result, her text might refer to a meeting place's traditional functions but the building in question might not resemble a meeting house, while the people inhabiting the space might resemble a whanau without having either the whakapapa to support one or desire to be identified that way. By making the meaning of the similarities between groups and objects in her novel, on one hand, and traditional Maori cultural groups and objects, on the other, fundamentally ambiguous, she unsettles our tendency to form immediate associations between them. In doing so, she also arguably opens up the possibility for Maori social institutions and culturally-significant objects to be reappropriated and redeployed within new and diverse representations of Maori cultural identity.

Like Ihimaera and Grace, Hulme is also concerned with constructing the story of a family that has a specific origin. However, unlike Ihimaera's Mahana and Grace's Tamihana and Te Ope families, Hulme's "family" originates in the late

1970s or early 1980s. Furthermore, when Hulme describes the three characters in that family of sorts, she does not refer to the creation myth, the Land Wars of the nineteenth century or the more recent Maori protest movement which featured heavily in both Ihimaera's and Grace's work. Instead, the reader is given insight into the gradual evolution of the three characters' relationship as it develops and changes over the course of the novel. Comprised of Joe, Simon and Kerewin, Hulme's "whanau" is not typical, or even described as such. In fact, each of the central characters explicitly state that they do not wish to be described as a family or a whanau (395) and recognise that their arrangement is something "perilous and new" (5), rather than rooted in the long history of a shared whakapapa. Therefore, while Ihimaera and Grace narrate the story of their families with reference to a complex historical context that preceded the events of the novel, *The Bone People* describes the events that result in the establishment of a new and often extraordinary narrative of origin instead.

The undecidable meaning of "Tara Diptych"

While this chapter will focus on *The Bone People*, Hulme's collection of short stories titled *Te Kaihau/ The Windeater* (1986) offers insight into the way that her characters attribute value to the objects that constitute their worlds. This is most clearly illustrated over the course of the first two stories in *Te Kaihau*, which are collectively titled "Tara Diptych". As the title implies, there are two stories in the diptych and together they form an extended investigation into the word "tara", which has over twenty different meanings in the Maori language. For example, tara could refer to a shard of greenstone, a ray of sunlight or the act of gossiping, depending on

the narrative context. In the first story of “Tara Diptych”, Hulme explores some of the ways that individuals attribute meaning to the empirical objects that surround them and suggests that this process takes place through a combination of both conscious and unconscious thought. As the unnamed narrator considers her surroundings, she notices that her thoughts are separated into immediate observations and what she describes as the “afterthoughts” (12) that follow. She makes her initial observations “idly of course but exceedingly quickly” (12), describing the way that her consciousness moves from object to object, with each “particular wonder tak[ing] about a *nth* of a second” (12). She further describes the human senses as “transit points and blubbery highways and temporally fluid screens [...] somewhere to pass through in a hurry without so much as a by-yr-lve or a pardon” (12). The narrator then concludes that sensory experience acts as a filter and a mediator between the material, empirical objects that populate a world and the values and functions that individual human thoughts apply to that world in order to make sense of it.

The first story of the diptych is also concerned with linguistic shortfalls and inadequacies, as the narrator observes that “there are at least 21 meanings for tara grouped under everything from gossip to rays” (13). She views the world as offering multiple interpretative “frames” (13) and suggests that each individual writer must decide how they will “weave” these different interpretations together:

Don’t bother my head: set up the frame – one marvellous 21 jointed word, full of diversities – and because I am merely weaver, making senses for the sounds – I shall weave anew. You’d be a brave human who would say where all the influences come from, but I think the word sets the whole thing up...

(13)

The first story of “Tara Diptych” is therefore a wide-ranging and discursive meditation on the loose and fluctuating associations between the empirical objects that populate a world and the process by which human consciousness attempts to frame, mediate and apply value to those objects. Conversely, the second story of the diptych focuses upon the word’s multiple significations and loosely moves between the forms of free verse and prose. Each stanza or line uses the word “tara” differently, demonstrating how its meaning changes from one context to another. For example, in the first short stanza, the narrator explores its meaning as a ray of sunlight, describing “the afternoon sun, the lesser shafts/ stealing through a barrier of window” (13). However, in the second, she moves to “cicadas gossiping/ clicking scandal from powerpole to tree” (15), which refers to its translation as gossip, rumour and scandal. Combined, the two stories of the “Tara Diptych” can be read as a study in linguistic and interpretative uncertainty.

Significantly, Hulme plays on the association between the term “sense” and its plural “senses” in a way that draws attention to her concern with the connection between sensory perception and its role in making “sense” of an individual’s empirical reality. In “Tara Diptych”, Hulme also characterises the writer as a “weaver, making senses for the sounds” (13). She uses a similar kind of vocabulary in *The Bone People* when she describes how Kerewin’s early attempts to communicate with Simon consisted of “words that had been spoken across his head before, but never to him... many parts to them, to be stored and untangled at leisure” (72-73). This reinforces Hulme’s later suggestion that a writer or speaker is a weaver of sounds, senses and words, while also indicating that the reader, or listener, can later “untangle” these communicative forms in different ways. “Tara Diptych” offers a wide-ranging account of human sensory experience which is in many ways similar

to Rancière's analysis of the ways that we "assign meaning to the 'empirical' world of lowly actions and commonplace objects" (2009 36). Both Hulme's stories and Rancière's philosophy identify and examine the fundamental ambiguity of the relationship between empirical objects and the values and functions that are ascribed to them in ways that provide a useful framework for the analysis of *The Bone People's* narrative structure.

Rancière also explores the changing relationship between empirical objects and their narrative contexts in *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (2009). Here, he suggests that in the nineteenth century, writers began to undermine the line dividing vernacular and "literary" language and in doing so "plunged language into the materiality of the traits by which the historical and social world becomes visible to itself be it in the form of the silent language of things or the coded language of images" (36). He goes on to suggest that Romantic literature exemplified this shift in perspective, since it demonstrated a heightened concern with the objects and artefacts of everyday life and offered new narrative possibilities to writers working at this time:

Circulation within this landscape of signs defines, moreover, the new fictionality, the new way of telling stories, which is first of all a way of assigning meaning to the 'empirical' world of lowly actions and commonplace objects. Fictional arrangement is no longer identified with the Aristotelian causal sequence of actions 'according to necessity and plausibility'. It is an arrangement of signs. However, this literary arrangement of signs is by no means the solitary self-referentiality of language. It is the identification of modes of fictional construction with means of deciphering the signs inscribed in the

general aspect of a place, a group, a wall, an article of clothing, a face. (2009 36-37)

As literatures became increasingly concerned with the objects of everyday life, they were given new aesthetic values and functions and despite the obvious temporal, spatial and stylistic differences between Romantic European writers and Keri Hulme, I would argue that she similarly shows an interest in how meaning is inscribed within the more incidental objects of her characters' worlds in her fiction. Due to their ordinariness, for example, Hulme might have simply positioned these objects as background props within her three characters' daily routines in *The Bone People*. However, when she makes an object such as a sandal, chess piece, paperclip or polished stone an important part of the novel's narrative development, she engages in a process whereby "the logic of descriptive and narrative arrangements in fiction becomes fundamentally indistinct from the arrangements used in the description and interpretation of the phenomena of the social and historical world" (Rancière 2009 37). This results in a now familiar blending of fact and fiction but more importantly interconnects the story of Hulme's three central characters with the thematic development of values and functions attributed to the material objects that circulate around of the space of the tower in the narrative.

Material culture and the creation of a "world in common"

The relationship between material culture and the novel's narrative structure is immediately established in the opening chapter, when Kerewin discovers Simon's sandal on the beach outside her tower. She regards Simon as an unwanted intrusion into her self-imposed solitude and is hostile towards him when she discovers him

inside her home. She initially describes him through the use of the pronoun “it” and further depersonalises him by variously describing him as an “urchin” (37), “scarecrow” (27) and “goblin” (37). However, her characterisation of Simon as “an enemy inside my broch... a burglar ensconced here” (33) gradually gives way to the realisation that “despite herself, she [has become] involved in a conspiracy of smiles” (39) with the child.

As the following section will demonstrate, the tower is a space that both enables the creation of a shared history among the three central characters and houses the narrative of that history manifest in the objects they exchange among them as their relationships grow and develop. Its role is established early in the novel and can be illustrated with reference to two scenes that foreground the role of material culture in the novel’s narrative development. In the first, Kerewin believes that when Simon leaves her tower she will not see him again. She therefore retrieves the sandal that he had originally left on the beach outside her tower and draws it carefully and precisely as a record of their encounter. By replacing the sandal with the drawing and storing it within the tower, she produces the first part of what will become a shared, material and cultural history. Just as Simon feels that “Kerewin’s multisyllables were [...] going straight in one ear and out the other, leaving behind an increasing residue of strange sounds and bewilderment” (38), his presence in Kerewin’s tower also leaves a trace and a “residue” in the form of Kerewin’s drawing. As a result, the sandal assumes a number of different aesthetic and narrative functions within the narrative in a short space of time. It is not simply an object belonging to Simon but comes to represent his arrival at the tower and a record of the day; later, it provides a reason for Simon to return to the tower again.

At each stage, the sandal's narrative function changes and these changes drive the broader narrative along.

For example, soon after Simon returns home with his uncle Piri, Kerewin realises that “the boy has left his sandal behind. And taken the black queen” (43). By exchanging his sandal for the chess piece, Simon has set in motion a process of material exchange and circulation that will continue throughout the novel. This process not only describes the development of their shared story, but also the three central characters' attempts to establish bonds through the use of “objects [...] testifying to a history and a world in common” (Rancière 2009 55). Joe later describes the chess piece as a “truce flag” (48) that Simon produced upon his return home. He explains that Simon used the chess piece to describe both Kerewin and his time at the tower, stating that he showed it to Joe “not so save himself the beating so much as to say something about you” (48). Like the sandal, the chess piece becomes symbolic of Simon's meeting with Kerewin and also comes to represent his account of the day. Both the sandal and the chess piece are ordinary and unremarkable objects but they become instrumental in Kerewin and Simon's narratives so their value is enhanced. They become both devices for telling a story and ways of giving that story a material form.

A third of many possible examples occurs much later in the novel, when Kerewin discovers that Simon had been stealing a series of objects from the tower and hiding them in his room at home. Like the above examples, the collection is used as a narrative device and way of describing the friendship between Kerewin, Simon and Joe. The stolen objects appear to bear little relation to each other and range from paper clips, to polished stones, to jewellery and when Kerewin discovers that Simon has been stealing her belongings, she is initially bewildered. However, she comes to

realise that he had been using the objects as a way of maintaining a connection with the tower while he was away. For Simon, the objects also metonymically refer to his friendship with Kerewin⁸ which she implicitly acknowledges when she chooses not to include a letter with the collection when she posts it to him. This demonstrates that although the tower was initially used by Kerewin as a “refuge” (7) and a “retreat” (7), upon Simon and Joe’s arrival, the character of the building changes. It is no longer a static and carefully arranged museum space, but a space that hosts what Rancière parallels as a “multiplicity of inventions of the arts of doing and living that make up a shared world – bricolage, collections, language games, materials for demonstrations” (2009 55). Simon and Joe’s presence alters the space so that it no longer describes Kerewin’s life story alone, but becomes a *whare taonga* [“house of treasures” or museum] in its most literal sense, to which all three contribute and with which all three interact in different ways.

Like the protagonist of “Tara Diptych”, Simon queries the values, functions and names that are associated with the objects around him. However, he also uses these objects to produce new relationships between people and things that are not easily categorised. For instance, in the third chapter, he gathers together seashells, stones and marram grass that he has found on the beach. Since Kerewin believes that he wishes to learn more about them, she describes their origin and etymology in great detail. However, Simon thinks that “knowing names is nice, but it don’t mean much. [...] Names aren’t much. The things are” (126). Despite his young age, Simon appears to understand that the attribution of a particular value, name or function to an object is arbitrary, or at best, provisional, and chooses instead to focus upon the object’s materiality. He subsequently uses the objects from the beach to construct what Joe describes as a “music hutch” (102) or a structure that produces music.

When he creates an entirely new object from the marram grass stalks, seaweed, driftwood and pipi shells, their individual names and functions are subsumed beneath their collective, combined role as a “pivot for sounds to swing round” (127). The music hutch acquires an aesthetic quality since it intervenes in the ordinary forms of interaction between an individual and his/her surrounding landscape; it is both a material structure that interrupts the natural distribution of objects on the beach and a structure that produces a sense of sensory disjunction in the person who chooses to listen to it.

Kerewin describes one of Simon’s structures as “about six inches high, sturdy yet delicate, an odd little temple” (127). However, the music hutches only produce music if the person listening is willing to hear the sounds that they produce in that way. Indeed, Kerewin becomes equivocal when she describes music hutches as “focusing points more than anything” (102) and while they intrigue her, Joe finds them frightening:

Feeling foolish, he had lain down beside the husk and listened, absorbed for nearly quarter of an hour. Then he became scared, squashed it flat, and strode home with the wind whining round his heels. [...] He had never told Simon about it, and he never listened to the music hutches again. And he stopped the child making them whenever he caught him at it. (102-103)

The music that these structures produce brings Simon joy but, despite this, the sounds remain difficult to categorise for the reader. They can be interpreted as noises that produce fear, music that produces joy, or Joe’s later and even more

indeterminate classification of “nothing he could really hear” (103). Arguably, then, the music hutch generates “mystery” in Rancière’s sense.

Joe’s decision to destroy the structure may be viewed as an attempt to restore the beach to its natural state. However, it might also be regarded as an acknowledgement that the music hutch produces an uncomfortable sensory “illegibility” (Rancière 2009 46). Despite this, rather than emphasising the incompatibility of the assorted objects collected by Simon, the narrative more often invites us to reflect on the similarities between them. Therefore, while Hulme occasionally engages with the aesthetics of “provocative dissensus” (Rancière 2009 58) in her novel, she also promotes the circulation and use of objects “testifying to co-presence” (Rancière 2009 58). In this way, Hulme demonstrates how “the most disparate realities appear to be cut out of the same sensible fabric” (58). In *The Bone People*, then, material objects become imbued with narrative power and “mystery” in Rancière’s sense. They become imbued with excess meaning by the characters who engage with them and their original or at least most immediate meanings change quite significantly over the course of the novel. Hulme defamiliarises the commonplace and the recognisable and as readers we become acutely aware of the undecidability of the social link between an object and the meanings conventionally attributed to it. In addition, as I will now demonstrate, Hulme extends the sense of mystery to the broader cultural context. While the above examples come from the repertoire of objects of everyday life, I would contend that Hulme is most interested in the ways that Maori objects and spaces may also undergo symbolic changes. In her novel, even the traditional objects of Maori art can accommodate new and mysterious narratives of origin and new ways of articulating a Maori identity.

Genealogy, greenstone and *The Bone People*'s narrative of origin

Hulme's interest in narratives of origin is best demonstrated by tracing the evolution of Kerewin's relationship with her treasured collection of pounamu [greenstone] over the course of the novel. Typically, greenstone ornaments are passed from generation to generation and are treasured by those who own and wear them. A greenstone is also a particularly prized gift and is regarded as a taonga. As Hirini Moko Mead notes, "greenstone objects, big or small, qualify as taonga because greenstone itself is highly regarded throughout the Maori world" (182). He continues by describing the role of gift giving between both individuals and their wider communities:

An important fact in gift giving is the whakapapa of the partners, that is, their genealogical position which in part governs their social standing. Whakapapa implies mana and so the exchange relationship should enhance mana. Not all relationships are equal and some are quite unequal. But all require care in decision making. The culmination of expectations and judgements about appropriateness is the gift itself. The taonga chosen enhances the exchange relationship. (183)

Moko Mead stresses that the process of exchange must be carried out carefully and with concern for each individual's social standing and status. The value of the object is tied to the owner's genealogy and when the object is exchanged, it should ideally enhance the recipient's prestige. Objects such as greenstone ornaments have therefore been inscribed with centuries of complex social and cultural traditions and

expectations. They reflect a person's genealogy and broader family history and upon their exchange are used as a way of fostering new relationships with others.

In the latter stages of the novel, Kerewin describes the act of crafting a piece of greenstone in some detail, emphasising its status as a precious and treasured object:

Centuries ago, people had laboured with great skill on this piece of unflawed jade. Piercing it to make the side decorations, working the stone-tipped drill with precision and painstaking care. Piercing it again, and smoothing the inside circle to an oily fineness. The kaumatua would have rubbed the finished ring against belly and nose to make that shine, for many months. A long time in the making, a long time worn. (313)

Here, Kerewin describes the act of crafting a piece of greenstone with reference to traditional Maori cultural practices. However, although she can trace this particular piece back to the "pre-Pakeha" (313) period, I will demonstrate how the broader context of its use and display in the novel both complicates and extends its symbolic function and traditional associations with familial inheritance and whakapapa.

This particular piece of greenstone jewellery is part of a much bigger collection that Kerewin stores within her tower. She refers to the collection frequently throughout the text and initially describes it as her "precious hoard" (33). Due to the importance of these kinds of objects within Maori cultural traditions, the reader is initially led to believe that Kerewin is fortunate to own an entire chest of these treasured items and pieces of jewellery. This is reinforced by her lengthy description of the collection only partially cited below:

Two meres, patu pounamu, both old and named, still deadly.

Many stylised hook pendants, hei matau.

Kuru and kapeu, and kurupapa, straight and curved neck pendants.

An amulet, mamarakihau; and a spiral pendant, the koropepe.

A dozen chisels. Four fine adzes.

Several hei tiki, one especial – so old that the flax cord of previous owners had worn through the hard stone, and the suspension hold had to be rebored in times before the Pakeha ships came. (313)

Kerewin later reveals, however, that she has only inherited one small piece from her own family and “all the rest of her collection she has bought” (313). Neither Joe nor Simon are aware of this, however, and, for them, the collection continues to signal her prestigious genealogy mistakenly. Despite this confusion, we are not invited to focus overmuch on the separateness of the pieces but to reflect on how they might be related to each other; the collection becomes a kind of “inventory” in Rancièrè’s sense, demonstrating Kerewin’s claim to a Maori lineage and helping her to recoup and regenerate a sense of belonging.

Significantly, despite her social isolation, Kerewin’s decision to purchase a collection of her own expresses a claim to a Maori cultural identity that can be recognised by others and upon meeting Joe and Simon, she begins to view the greenstone in a new light. For instance, when she travels to Moerangi with Joe and Simon, she is reminded of the fact that not all families possess greenstone that can be passed from one generation to the next. She also comes to realise that even if they once had, for various reasons, these once impressive collections might have been

decimated or lost over time. Alternatively, in a scene that takes place in Moerangi, Joe finds a piece of greenstone on the beach that he wishes to keep and wear. Kerewin describes Joe's reaction to his discovery as a form of "love" (252) and recalls the "celebrating" (253) that followed his new-found ownership of it. Joe views it as a gift that was "given me by the sea, on one of your [Kerewin's] beaches" (253) and claims that, just as the beach "loves" him, he has also established a connection with the beach as a place that is associated with both Kerewin and the greenstone.

Some years previously, Kerewin had also found a piece of greenstone on the same beach at Moerangi. Since her experience mirrored Joe's and the beach itself is depicted as having given both "gifts", it comes to constitute a site of common origin for at least part of Kerewin and Joe's stories. Kerewin remembers wondering about the owners of the greenstone when she found it on the beach: "E nga iwi! Mo wai tenei? [O people! Who is this for?] (253). She goes on to claim that the beach itself replied to her, declaring: "te tahoro ruku! Te tahoro ruku!" (253). This phrase is not translated in the glossary to the novel but nonetheless bears significance. "Te tahoro ruku" can be interpreted as the act of diving into something, which is supported by the beaches' second, similarly untranslated declaration of "Keria! Keria!" (256). The term "keria", or alternatively "keri", means to "dig" so Kerewin concludes that her discovery of the greenstone was sanctioned in some way.

While Susan Y. Najita claims that the untranslated terms "keria" and "te tahoro ruku" offer insight into Kerewin's "improper developmental relation to land" (106-107), I consider them equally, if not more, applicable to her relationship to the concept of whanau. The scene described above forms an important turning point in Kerewin's conceptualisation of Maori institutions and practices. For the first time,

she decides that greenstone need not be so rigidly tied to traditional family structures and this decision significantly alters the way that she views the objects. In this particular scene, Kerewin and Joe discuss their separate discoveries on the beach at Moerangi and Kerewin recalls that she was unable to trace the greenstone that she found back to a particular family or community. Despite both her literal and figurative attempts to “dig” for information about it, she ultimately acknowledges that the “memory of it is lost or maybe [...] they’ve changed the name of it” (253). Since both Joe and Kerewin believe that the beach “gave” them their greenstones, each piece comes to share an origin that establishes a connection between the two of them. Again, this origin is not connected to a known family history and Kerewin is careful to point out that any history that was associated with the stones has been lost, altered or even forgotten. In doing so, she makes it possible for the stones to be used as a means to form new histories and new relationships with Joe and Simon in their place.

This scene exemplifies the underlying theme of digging, uncovering, or as John C Moorfield suggests in his translation of “keri”, or “keria”, “scratching something out of the ground” (“keria” n.pag). It refers to both ancestral bones and the act of uncovering these bones, particularly since the greenstone ornaments that Kerewin and Joe found on the beach were washed down to the shore due to the erosion of a nearby cliff face. A burial ground was originally situated there and Kerewin even worries that Joe will be unhappy if he learns where his greenstone has come from:

So I won’t tell him about the graves up on the cliff, and how that probably got washed out with its former owner... sour him off if he knew the smell of bones went with it eh? He can be happy with his

hei matau... because the old ones might have given it to him. They gave mine to me.... (253)

Although a “smell of bones” (253) accompanies the greenstones, both Kerewin and Joe continue to view them as gifts from an abstract and generalised ancestor figure. The fact that this ancestor figure is not named and is referred to as either a disembodied voice, or as one of “the old ones” (253) allows the stones to be used for the formation of new, shared narratives, while also maintaining some connection to their original purpose.

Additionally, Hulme’s engagement with the idea of *keria* or “digging” is not limited to the scene that takes place on the beach at Moerangi. The novel demonstrates an almost continuous concern with the act of recovering something that has been lost or hidden, while also avoiding any totalising account of the form that this “recovery” should take. The concept of cultural and genealogical recovery is even connoted by the novel’s title, which as Eva Rask Knudsen notes, gestures towards a Maori proverb:

The Bone People recalls the ancient Maori proverb ‘e gna iwi o gna iwi’ in which the syntax unhinges referents – the proverb translates as ‘the bone of the people’ (ancestor or marrow) or ‘the people of the bone’ (descendants or new generation) – and gives emphasis instead to the sacred nexus of the two meanings, origin and legacy, or indeed to the perpetual interchange of beginning and end, end and beginning, which is central to the Maori perception of life and living. [...] [A]t the point where it seems as if ‘the bone of the people’ has been ‘ground to make alien bread’ by the overwhelming and destructive

colonial presence that turned Aotearoa into New Zealand, a fraction of the bone is recovered, mended and reclaimed by those who themselves suffer from ‘feldapart sinews, broken bones’ but who are eventually cured of their disorders to become ‘the bone people’. (128)

While I agree with Rask Knudsen when she argues that the novel ends without any real sense of resolution,⁹ it is important to note the pairings within it of past and present, ancestor and descendent, or “the bone of the people” and “the people of the bone”. In particular, Joe and Kerewin recognise and respect traditional Maori cultural practices while simultaneously establishing themselves as a contemporary and new iteration of the Maori family. Although they consider themselves Maori, they acknowledge that the traditional Maori “way of life” has “got lost in the way [they] live” (62). In the final section of the novel, Kerewin and Joe each turn away from an opportunity to live in accordance with the Maoritanga, which, as I will later show, signals their interest in forming a new, shared history that incorporates aspects of the past in a way that is fluid and open to change.

After the scene that takes place at Moerangi, the three central characters frequently use greenstones as a way of maintaining the connections between them. Like the familiar and iconic objects described by Rancièrè which become slightly strange when reframed and repurposed by their juxtaposition with others and positioned within the exhibition space, the greenstone ornaments become caught in a “double play” (53) that undermines their familiar status. In two important examples, Joe and Simon give Kerewin the gift of a piece of polished greenstone and she in turn gives her only piece of inherited greenstone to Joe. Her collection, which she arguably purchased as a response to her familial loss, becomes part of a self-conscious effort on her part to establish a new, shared history with Joe and Simon.

This process unsettles the historical association between greenstone and Maori identity on two different levels. First, the status of the object becomes undecidable and the reader is unsure of how he or she should understand it. Second, the example of the greenstone expresses Hulme's refusal to root her protagonist's recent story in a longer temporal narrative of origins in favour of one that describes the contemporary beginnings of Kerewin, Joe and Simon's shared life. This emphasis upon the three central characters' attempts to establish new beginnings is further supported by the novel's prologue and epilogue.

The prologue and the epilogue of *The Bone People* make direct reference to each other, since the prologue is titled "The End at the Beginning", while the final sentence of the epilogue states "te mutunga – ranei te take" [the end – or the beginning] (445). The prologue contains four short vignettes that describe the ending of the novel followed by three slightly longer passages that describe the beginning of the three central characters' stories. By describing events that take place at the end of the novel in the prologue, Hulme clearly indicates at the outset that the narrative spans a period of years, rather than centuries. Furthermore, the passages that describe the start of each character's story either begin with the phrase "in the beginning" (5-8) or incorporate that phrase into an opening sentence. The repetition of this phrase initially appears to conform to the self-authenticating gestures of other Maori renaissance writers who emphasise the creation myth as an important part of both oral and written forms of Maori storytelling. For example, although they were published slightly later than *The Bone People*, both Ihimaera's *The Matriarch* and Grace's *Potiki* refer to the creation myth in their opening pages. In the prologue of *The Matriarch*, Tamatea describes how he listened "to the matriarch telling him of his ancestry, his whakapapa" (1). She tells him that "your life began even before you

were born” (2), adding that “you have eternity in you” (2). She then begins to recount the creation myth, stating: “at your beginning was Te Kore, the Void” (2) and extends her recital of the Mahana family history back to the creation of life itself. Similarly, Grace opens *Potiki* with a poem describing the Tihe Mauriora, or “sneeze of life” that marked the moment at which human life began. In doing so, she, like Ihimaera, places the central narrative strand of the novel within a much broader and extensive history. As each community narrates, or attempts to narrate their story, their genealogy becomes central and in Ihimaera’s case, integral to the novel itself. Each character strives to describe who they are with reference to the place from which he or she has come, ensuring that the present is always described with reference to the past.

However, Hulme’s narratives of origin are brief and describe events that have occurred in each character’s recent past. Over the course of three short passages, for example, we learn about the shipwreck that resulted in Simon being washed ashore in Whangaroa, Joe’s conversation with Hana that culminated in their decision to adopt him, and Kerewin’s arrival in Whangaroa some years later. These passages are decontextualized and when first encountered, the reader is not yet aware of their significance within the wider novel. Additionally, it later becomes apparent that this is the extent of Hulme’s engagement with “beginnings” and that her characters lack the broad and extensive historical and familial network that shapes the work of both Ihimaera and Grace. Therefore, while Ihimaera and Grace contextualise the adversity that their central characters face with reference to the historical adversities faced by their ancestors, Hulme instead creates three very isolated characters whose family history is either unknown, or unimportant to the novel’s plot. The fact that Kerewin is estranged from her family, Joe’s wife and son have died and Joe is unsure of

Simon's actual name, age or nationality suggests that Hulme is interested in representing a series of characters who struggle with the genealogy that has formed such a prominent part of each novel examined up to this point. Hulme's concern with the beginning of her characters' story rather than their long ancestry can also be considered by examining how the tower evolves into the spiral over the course of the novel. Each structure lacks permanency and the spiral does not offer a harmonious resolution to the three characters' story. Instead, it is simply another structure that is central to their lives and will continue to evolve and develop in order to both accommodate and represent their changing life experiences.

The symbolism of Kerewin's tower

The tower is first introduced in the prologue, where Kerewin describes the construction of her home. She states that "she had debated, in the frivolity of the beginning, whether to build a hole or a tower" (7) in which to live and concludes that although "she thought over the pros and cons of each, the idea of a tower became increasingly exciting" (7). While the idea of living underground in a burrow-like structure suggests a retreat from the public sphere quite explicitly, the tower invites the surrounding community to perceive and acknowledge her isolation instead. Kerewin has no connection to the town of Whangaroa and states that she has "no need of people, because she was self-fulfilling, delighted with the pre-eminence of her art, and the future of her knowing hands" (7). However, despite the fact that she intended to continue working as an artist within the tower, she soon reveals that it has stifled her creative impulse and become a "prison" (7).

While initially the tower is depicted as a static and carefully organised space, Simon's arrival forms the catalyst for its transformation over the course of the novel. As I have already demonstrated, he sets in motion a process of material exchange that precipitates the friendship between the three characters. However, Kerewin comes to realise that the tower is, by itself, incapable of properly accommodating the shared narrative of their lives as it evolves. It is a transient space into and out of which all three figures come and go and ultimately, it fails to facilitate any real change in their individual circumstances. This becomes particularly evident when Joe violently assaults Simon in the third section of the novel, prompting Kerewin to destroy the tower which has formed a focal point for many of the events in the novel up to this point. At the same time, when Kerewin decides to substitute the tower with a spiral-shaped home, she attempts to repair their damaged bonds, perhaps by generating what Ranci re describes as a "co-presence of beings and objects constitutive of a world" (2009 57). The spiral is the first structure simultaneously to house both the material account of their story and the three central characters themselves, forming something like a new lifeworld that acquires its power by both its similarity to and difference from the familiar symbols and practices of traditional Maori culture, as I will later explain.

The tower has numerous different social and symbolic functions. While these become more complex as the narrative unfolds, initially, it appears to evoke both European and Maori historical structures. On one hand, it brings to mind both the Scottish broch¹⁰ that Kerewin refers to in the first chapter and the medieval European towers used during the middle ages as a means of fortification and defence against enemy incursion. For example, Kerewin describes her tower as "medieval style" (7) and featuring "massive roof beams" (7), "tapestries" (7) and "barrels round the

walls” (7). On the other hand, she also describes it in terms reminiscent of traditional meeting house structures by choosing to name its different elements as body parts including, for example, “a concrete skeleton, wooden ribs and girdle, skin of stone, grey and slateblue and heavy honey-coloured” (7). This description directly evokes the symbolic function of the Maori meeting house as the collective body of the people. Importantly, however, Kerewin’s tower does not directly conform to the architectural conventions of either architectural tradition and cannot be readily situated within either frame of cultural reference. Rather, it remains “gaunt and strange and embattled” (7) throughout the novel.

As a tower, Kerewin’s first home is an anomaly in New Zealand and within the less populated landscape of South Island in particular. It does not conform to the Maori or settler-era architectural styles of New Zealand but gestures towards a medieval European aesthetic. Hulme therefore presents it as an oddity and an anachronism that none of the characters or the wider “bewildered” (7) community of Whangaroa can interpret with reference to their established sociocultural codes. For example, while in the prologue, Kerewin attributes human characteristics and features to it, Joe later observes that he does not know how to respond to either the tower or its architect:

Sometimes she seems ordinary. [...] And then sometimes, she seems inhuman.. like this Tower is inhuman. Comfortable to be in, pleasant if you ignore the toadstools in the walls, and the little trees and glowworms in holes by the stairs, and the fact that nobody else in New Zealand lives in a tower... (101)

Joe attempts to view Kerewin's tower as a home but also notes that the strange presence of glow worms and toadstools prevent him from fully doing so. It is a shelter and a place where Kerewin performs her daily routine and, as a result, it performs some of the functions of a home without embodying the definition of such a space fully.

Interestingly, Kerewin experiences a similar sense of bewilderment when she first visits the house that Joe shares with Simon. Just as Joe was ill at ease when he first encountered Kerewin's tower, she also tries to understand why she is unable to regard Joe's house as a home, asking "what's strange? No pictures, no flowers, no knickknacks I can see? Maybe, but not all homes have that sort of thing. Is it the barren cleanliness, the look of almost poverty?" (78). Although she initially describes the house as an "older State house, found in thousands all over the country" (79), she notices that it is empty of the "debris of years" (81) and devoid of any materials or objects that she might typically use to narrate a personal history and establish a sense of self. Joe tells her that Simon has broken nearly every object in the house and is "rough on possessions, his own or others" (81), an insight that makes Simon's later attempts to hoard Kerewin's belongings carefully in his bedroom even more significant. Joe's initial unease in Kerewin's tower is therefore mirrored in her first visit to the home that he shares with Simon in many ways. As a result, Hulme does not offer the reader any standard or archetypal home against which to evaluate the tower. Instead, both Kerewin's tower and Joe's house are "deflected" and ambiguous representations of "home" that are recognisable as such but simultaneously defamiliarized by their individual characteristics.

Critics including Chadwick Allen, Val Melhop and Michelle Keown have tended to view the tower as a European structure, but as I have shown, its status is

unclear. Hulme does not clearly signal whether it represents a European cultural presence or a deflected, displaced gesture towards traditional meeting houses. Instead, her descriptions of it span both. Additionally, since the structure is most frequently described using the capitalised term “Tower”, its different functions as a domestic space, a “hermitage” (7), “glimmering retreat” (7) and “prison” (7) become interchangeable; indeed, the term “Tower” appears to take on whatever function Kerewin, Simon or Joe wish it to at any given moment. Although the different kinds of buildings or places listed above are socially recognisable, the relationship of the tower to them is ultimately undermined by Kerewin’s lack of certainty regarding its overall purpose. And though this hermeneutical ambiguity does not necessarily undermine the bonds between the three characters, it reinforces the tower’s role as a multifaceted and somewhat elusive structure in the text.

By omitting any direct representation of the recurring textual figures of Maori cultural identity, Hulme arguably makes space for narratives of loss, violence and familial dysfunction. Like each of the examples in the chapter up to this point, this process can be effectively explored with reference to the material objects that constitute Kerewin, Joe and Simon’s world. Although Hulme makes frequent reference to her characters’ personal difficulties and the reader learns of the abusive relationship between Joe and Simon early on in the novel, she does not directly engage with these issues until the novel’s third section.

When Kerewin learns that Simon has stolen her knife and that he has also destroyed her “golden” guitar, she encourages Joe to beat the child as a form of punishment for his actions. Here, she acknowledges that she is complicit in the act when she states that “she can’t touch him physically so she is beating him with her voice” (307). For Simon, the spoken words also assume almost material qualities; he

describes how her speech “drums through his head, resounding in waves as though his head were hollow, and the words bound back from one side to smash against the other” (307). Kerewin therefore attributes violence to her words that is reflected in the act of destruction that preceded her verbal admonitions and the physical assault that followed it.¹¹ This scene is pivotal to the novel as a whole and demonstrates that just as material culture can be used to establish and foster bonds between the three, it can also provoke violence and rupture. This scene also reinforces my earlier suggestion that the novel’s narrative is driven by a process of material circulation and exchange that occurs among the three characters. Just as Simon’s sandal originally signalled his attempt to create a friendship with Kerewin, his destruction of her guitar signals his attempt to stall or even end it.

The events that follow Joe’s assault on Simon are explored over the course of the fourth section of the novel and I will discuss them further at a later stage. First, however, it is interesting to note that Kerewin’s and Joe’s descriptions of the material objects that constitute their shared world undergo a significant shift upon their realisation that they have either been complicit in or have directly carried out the assault of a young child. In the descriptions that immediately precede and follow Joe’s assault on Simon, Hulme significantly changes the language that Kerewin uses to describe the objects that once constituted her “precious hoard” (33). For example, following Simon’s hospitalisation, Kerewin personifies her belongings and believes that they are judging her. She states that “she hid all her opal rings. The seaglint disturbs her. Like they’re eyes on her fingers” (310). Gesturing towards the paua shells that are used to decorate the eyes of carved ancestor figures in Maori art, the “seaglint” of her rings reminds her that such figures both evaluate and ultimately condemn her actions. As a result, when Kerewin hides her rings, she attempts to

shield herself from the judgemental “eyes” of her ancestors while simultaneously acknowledging that she has done wrong by participating in Joe’s assault of Simon.

Similarly, the tower that was originally described as a “glimmering retreat” (7) becomes a “forlorn” (313) structure, and the personal treasures and the objects of everyday life that the three figures exchanged and engaged with over the course of the novel become what Kerewin later describes as “mere grimcrack trumpery in gold and azure and scarlet and a glory silver” (418):

They were supposed to be delight and inspiration. They turned out to be the same sort of detritus as everything else. Junk and mathoms and useless geegaws the lot of them, shells, rings, goblets, books and swords... and my pounamu... it was beautiful to have them at first, but all the magic has worn off. (314)

Kerewin responds to her own sense of guilt and shame by destroying the tower and either packing up or giving away her collections. Just as they were instrumental in constructing a shared history between the three figures, by dismantling the tower and removing the objects from further circulation, Kerewin acknowledges that the relationship that these objects and spaces previously represented and narrated has become irreparably damaged.

Considering the “play of analogies” between the tower and the spiral

Following Kerewin’s decision to destroy her tower, she travels to Moerangi to visit the meeting house that is situated there. When she first arrives, she speaks to the house and asks it a series of questions: “Tena koe... whakaautua mai tenai patai aku. He aka kow I haranga ai ki a au? [Hello... answer this question of mine. What

did you call me for?]" (430). When she speaks to the house, Kerewin recalls her previous attempt to address the beach, where she animated the space and objects within it and asked them to "respond" in turn. Just as material objects were appropriated as narrative devices by each of the three central characters, Kerewin offers the objects themselves the opportunity to become involved in their own refashioning. Their responses lead her to conclude that she must restore the house and she starts work immediately because, as she states, "it seemed, in my spiral fashion, the straightforward thing to do" (431). Kerewin initially describes the house as an "old Maori hall" (431) and in doing so, demonstrates that even the culturally significant meeting house can be reclassified as a hall that is easily interchangeable with similar structures from any number of cultures.

Like Kerewin's tower and Joe's house, its function within the surrounding community is unclear. Its derelict state makes it indistinguishable from any other hall and it is only when Kerewin restores it that its identity becomes obvious. While she is left to work alone on the house for some time, others eventually come to help her and she notes that upon its completion "we have not just a hall, but a marae again" (432). When it is transformed from a simple, derelict hall to a meeting house, the building comes to embody one of numerous possible functions. Although it now resembles the familiar shape and appearance of the meeting house, the process of its restoration demonstrates the fragility of the association between the material structure itself and the identity and function of the meeting house with which it comes to be associated.

When Kerewin discovered the greenstone on Moerangi beach, she had reassessed its historical role as a marker of prestige and genealogical standing. She understood that an object's history could change or become lost over time yet the

object could also be instead used to establish and shape new histories in its place. Recalling how her own understanding of greenstone carvings changed over time, Kerewin now recognises the restored house as a meeting house. As she notes, “the prayers and the hallowing will be done this coming Sunday, and glory of glories, the old gateposts from the old marae, each with their own name, will be re-erected” (432).

However, the fact that the house had been allowed to fall into disrepair is also acknowledged; like the greenstone, its original meaning has almost been forgotten. It becomes clear not only that new meanings and practices will be established, but that these will be authenticated with reference to the old structure. In *The Bone People*, therefore, the contemporary and historical iterations of a structure do not become mutually exclusive. Like the example of the greenstone, Hulme represents the meeting house at Moerangi in two ways. First, it conforms to the most immediately recognisable, traditional representation of Maori culture in the novels examined to date. Second, without necessarily rejecting its original role, it provides a space for traditional objects and relationships to be reconfigured. Like the greenstone, the “old Maori hall” comes to accommodate numerous different “versions” of Maori identity over time.

Kerewin does not remain at Moerangi upon completing the restoration work. Instead, she returns to Whangaroa to construct a new spiral-shaped house around the remains of the tower. The spiral initially appears to fulfil the function of a meeting house more successfully than the tower, particularly since Kerewin designs the structure in order to foster a sense of communality with Joe and Simon. Yet just as the meeting house symbolically resembles a collective “body”, the spiral, unlike the tower, is purposefully built in order to accommodate the three central figures

simultaneously. Kerewin states that it will offer them “privacy” (434) and “apartness” (434), while ensuring they are “all connected and all part of the whole” (434).

The spiral is also the first space in the novel to give a more permanent home to the material belongings (and, therefore, history) of the three characters. Previously, their treasured objects circulated to and from the tower and when objects, such as the sandal, chess piece or piece of greenstone jewellery, changed hands, the friendship between the three grew and developed. Kerewin acknowledges that upon its completion, the spiral will be “home in a larger sense than I’ve used the term before” (434) but adds that she may also use it as “a studio and hall and church and guesthouse, whatever I choose” (434). These additional functions extend its role beyond that of a family home and gesture towards the multiple functions of a meeting house within the community.¹²

While critics including Rask Knudsen and Val Melhop have tended to characterise the spiral as an oppositional Maori replacement for a European structure, the spiral retains some form of connection to the tower too. It is constructed around what Kerewin describes as the “struck-down” (330) form of the tower, so that the vestigial remains of the tower are incorporated into the centre of the spiral. The relationship of the spiral to the tower may, then, be better understood in terms of “*détournement*” and “mystery”, as explicated by Rancière. The spiral makes a kind of turn to the tower at its centre where it is, in some way, a material “quotation” or “re-use” of the tower that “‘adapts’ the original element to a new context. The tower and spiral are not ultimately entirely different from each other but “cut from the same sensible fabric” (Rancière 58).

Importantly, the decision to construct the new part of the structure around the foundations of the old acknowledges the tower's importance in their shared history. It also acknowledges the fact that although the tower formed a focal point for the circulation of material objects between the three central characters, they did not remain within that space. They were taken, stolen, given away and returned in a way that lacked permanency. What is more, because of its relationship to the tower, the spiral structure not only acknowledges the "apartness" and "togetherness" that characterised the relationship between the three protagonists but also between the difficult and troubled relationship between Maori and Pakeha.

Interestingly, then, Joe describes the spiral as being part of a cycle of "creation and change, destruction and change. New marae from the old marae, a beginning from the end" (3). This suggests that he had perhaps already viewed the tower as some kind of meeting house and that he considers the spiral to be continuous with the tower. The tower and the spiral resemble each other and despite their contrasting appearances, even the spiral cannot offer any real sense of homeliness or resolution to the three characters' shared story. Instead, the fact that it both refers to and also partially includes the structure that preceded it suggests that the space will continue to evolve and develop further, reinforcing the novel's open endedness.

As I have demonstrated, unlike *Potiki* or *The Matriarch*, *The Bone People* does not use a carefully described, realist representation of an ancestral house as a focal point. Initially, the tower blends the recognisable with the surreal in what is almost a caricature of a medieval structure, making it difficult for the surrounding community of Whangaroa to place. Later, the spiral is also an architectural anomaly and certainly not described in the same careful and detailed ways that characterised

Ihimaera and Grace's early attempts to create a "marae on paper" (Allen 72). Since Hulme defamiliarises the two predominant structures in the novel, the novel gives us an abstract and obscure representation of form and space rather than a carefully described carved ancestral meeting house.

Rancière's description of the nineteenth century symbolist movement – though itself perhaps an obscure critical reference point in light of my concern with a late-twentieth century Maori novel here – offers insight into the difference between Hulme's engagement with material culture and the work of her peers. As he suggests, the symbolist movement was originally interested in "the indefinite boundaries between the familiar and the foreign, the real and the symbolic" (2009 59), a description that, for me, evokes the undecidability of Hulme's engagement with the recurring objects and practices of traditional Maori cultural identity. As Fred S. Kleiner suggests, symbolist artists did not attempt "to see things but to see through them to a significance and reality far deeper than what superficial appearance gave" (671). By replacing the traditional meeting house with the tower and the spiral in her novel, Hulme does not simply describe them as having fixed or static values and functions. Instead, their "superficial appearance[s]" (Kleiner 671) become surfaces on which numerous different values, functions and potential meanings are mapped and charted, allowing Hulme to explore contemporary Maori identity in all its fullness and complexity. Just as the tower and the spiral form transient and continuously evolving structures where the three characters interact, the text itself becomes a meeting place, or a "*forma franca* born of the contact of people and cultures" (Julien 675).

Conclusion

In the fourth section of the novel, titled “Feldapart Sinews, Broken Bones”, Hulme initiates an abrupt and unexpected change in both the tone and content of the novel. Both the characters and the reader are displaced into new and unexpected contexts and spaces. This section describes the individual outward movement of the three central characters into three separate locations and also engages with Maori cultural traditions far more directly than the previous three sections. In some ways, this section describes the meeting of two worlds, since Kerewin and Joe, who believe that their Maoritanga has become “lost in the way [they] live” (62), directly engage with elements of Maori myth and cultural tradition for the first time since the novel began.

For example, when Joe is released from prison, he encounters a kaumatua who claims to have spent his life waiting for Joe to arrive. The kaumatua has been working as a caretaker for a “little god” who is associated with a nearby broken and submerged canoe. Joe is sceptical of the kaumatua’s claims and is unsure of how to respond to them. “Doesn’t he know that the museums are full of them?” (363), he asks, emphasising his sense of disconnection from the traditional myths and stories of Maori cultural tradition and his “bewilderment” (363) upon being confronted with their actuality. He repeats, “what can I say? What can I do? I’ve seen them in museums, Tiaki. Pierced stones and old wooden sticks where the gods were supposed to live. Where the vital part of the thing was supposed to rest. But aren’t they temporary?” (364). When Joe encounters the kaumatua, he immediately understands that he has lived with strictest reference to traditional Maori cultural practice. However, he is conflicted about participating in the rituals recommended by the kaumatua, stating that he “feel[s] foolish” (367) when he is instructed to find the

little god's canoe and tell it that he was to be its guardian. Silently, he castigates the kaumatua: "stupid fool, Ngakau... what do words mean to, whatever it is? If it's anything..." (367). Joe's experience with the kaumatua therefore fluctuates between scepticism and a willingness to participate in the rituals that he proposes. When the kaumatua dies, he realises that he must begin to view his recent actions in a more honest light, stating: "not falsifying, but trying to see the whole thing as an outsider would" (381).

Joe is clearly depicted as an outsider in this passage and the entirety of the novel's final section depicts the broader Maori cultural tradition "as an outsider would" (381). The insular space of the tower and the process by which the three central characters gradually piece together their new, shared history of homecoming through the objects that surround them is replaced by a disoriented study in isolation and repeated loss. Kerewin and, in particular, Joe regard their encounters with the figures of Maori tradition and myth with scepticism and Hulme depicts both him and Kerewin as lacking the capacity to fully participate in the practices that they represent. Here, Hulme appears to revoke the intimate portraits of traditional Maori life that characterised much of the early-to-mid renaissance literature, presenting them, instead, through the eyes of a Maori who feels that the connection with the Maoritanga has become "lost in the way [he] live[s]" (62). This section of the novel also describes each character's individual story following Kerewin's decision to destroy her tower. Kerewin develops a psychosomatic illness that is "cured" by what she perceives as an unnamed and indistinct mythological creature. She leaves Moerangi and becomes uprooted and displaced again, lacking the anchors of her tower, her friendship with Joe and Simon and any kind of familial relationship. As I have shown, Joe too is unable to fully sympathise with the kaumatua or his claim

that he must act as a caretaker for the “little god”. Like Kerewin, he feels displaced and disoriented at the end of his journey away from the tower.

Joe’s assault on Simon is addressed through the dispassionate lens of the hospital space and, since neither Joe nor Kerewin’s frequent admissions of guilt are included in these scenes, the act is exposed and presented in its fullest brutality. However, although each of the three characters are offered the opportunity to establish new “bases” (411) at the end of the novel, none of them choose to do so. Joe does not stay on the land that he inherited from the kaumatua and Kerewin does not remain at the meeting house that she restored. Simon repeatedly runs away from his foster family and attempts to return to the tower, without realising that Kerewin has destroyed it. Each individual narrative in the final section therefore reinforces the suggestion that as the three figures moved to and from the tower, it formed a focal point to which each of them could relate.

The deflected and unstable representations of both material objects and the spaces which house them in the first three sections of the novel means that the spiral cannot be read as a simple symbolic substitution for the Maori meeting house. Instead, both the objects and the structures included throughout the text evoke some of the meeting house’s functions without replicating or embodying them entirely. Similarly, the novel’s final section refers to numerous different facets of traditional Maori cultural identity, but filters them through protagonists who are uneasy and uncertain about their own sense of Maori identity. By approaching the final section in this way, Hulme complicates the more established accounts of Maori cultural tradition, suggesting that just as the novel is a “site of self-fashioning” (Julien 668), it can become a site of re-fashioning also. Like Kerewin and Joe, the reader becomes dislocated and disoriented by the abrupt change in the novel’s tone and content so

that we are prompted to recognise our status as outsiders to the Maori tradition. As a result, Hulme does not simply describe the sudden loss of stability and certainty in her characters' lives; she also embodies and performs them within the narrative form of the novel.

Eileen Julien refers to novel writing as a socially symbolic act when she states that “the past is written through the lens of a projected future, so as to open up possibilities for it” (668). Hulme’s novel makes very few references to the past when compared with *The Matriarch*, *Potiki*, or *Baby No-Eyes*, and those references that do occur are typically abstract and generalised. In this context, Julien’s claim that a writer’s representation of the past is informed by their vision for the future is interesting. Hulme has chosen to make the history that is associated with significant objects in the novel inaccessible to the reader, suggesting that that their memories have been lost, or their names have been changed (253). Her novel therefore refers to the original role of artefacts like pieces of greenstone jewellery, while also complicating the historical narratives associated with them. The objects accommodate both sameness and difference simultaneously and as a result, they are not simply re-signified. Instead, her novel recognises their cultural importance while also ensuring that that they are not used as metonyms for a totalising account of what is otherwise a broad and complex Maori cultural history.

Cultural Revival and Social Consensus: The Parallel Spaces of the Courtroom and the Meeting House in Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors*

Introduction

Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors* focuses upon the working class urban Maori communities who had remained largely unrepresented in Maori literature until its publication in 1990. While novels like *Baby No-Eyes* by Patricia Grace or *The Bone People* by Keri Hulme questioned the largely monolithic representation of traditional Maori communities in early renaissance literature, their plots still made reference to familiar Maori institutions such as the whanau, whakapapa, turangawaewae and to the meeting house with which these institutions are most frequently associated. Although they sometimes interrogated and even undermined the roles of these cultural institutions within contemporary Maori communities, Hulme and Grace remained tied to the inheritance of early-to-mid renaissance literatures even as they reacted against them. By contrast, *Once Were Warriors* describes a Maori community whose collective lives are shaped and defined by an entirely different series of struggles and way of conceptualising Maori identity.¹ Until the final chapters, the novel makes quite abstract reference to Maori traditional culture and makes no reference at all to the ongoing land disputes or Maori protest movement. Instead it gives an intimate and comprehensive account of life in an urban community that is characterised by acute poverty, violence and social dysfunction.²

Once Were Warriors is the first of Duff's six novels and part of a trilogy that includes *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted* (1996) and *Jake's Long Shadow*

(2002). Three years later, Duff published his first major work of non-fiction, a social study entitled *Maori: The Crisis and the Challenge* (1993), which addresses a wide-ranging series of social problems affecting urban Maori including, for instance, crime, racism, gender inequality and education.³ In the introduction, Duff states that the goal of his book is to generate “an understanding of the process that makes for this dreadful disparity between the two races, Pakeha and Maori, which widens and widens as the excuses, the blaming, the refusal to turn the spotlight on Maori continues” (xiii). However, while he offers some informed insights into the causes of poverty and social exclusion experienced by urban Maori communities, his tone becomes increasingly polemical as he repeats his claim that these communities are wholly responsible for their on-going conditions of violence, poverty and social exclusion across almost every chapter. This claim is also reiterated in many of his other works and interviews and seems shaped by his experience of growing up in state housing and, later, state care and prison. In the book, he acknowledges that the descriptions of alcoholism, domestic violence and poverty in his first novel were directly informed by what he witnessed in his own home and argues that if he had been able to improve his life – despite the hardships that he had faced – then other Maori should be able to do so also.⁴

Once Were Warriors describes the daily life of the Heke family and is narrated by Beth, her husband Jake and two of their five children, Grace and Nig. The family live in a social housing community named Pine Block where intergenerational poverty, addiction and domestic violence are commonplace. The opening chapters of the novel focalise the perspectives of all four characters and as readers, we gain insight into the numerous different social issues that contribute to the community’s sense of stasis. This stasis is punctuated by three central events that

occur over the course of the novel – Grace’s rape, her subsequent suicide and her mother Beth’s subsequent attempt to improve the situation of other children in Pine Block through a series of social initiatives. Grace’s suicide therefore acts as a catalyst for social change as Beth recognises that to break the cycle of addiction, neglect and abuse might prevent future deaths within the community. As the narrative proceeds, the social activities initiated by Beth evolve into a cultural revival headed up by a neighbouring Maori chief whom Beth invites to Pine Block to teach the people about traditional Maori cultural practices. While those who participate in the new initiatives flourish and appear to have found new ways to address their problems, others who either choose not to or are unable to do so ultimately appear to lack any hope for the future. As a result, although the end of the novel carries a promise of renewal, it also implicitly suggests that the community has been divided by the new cultural initiatives.

As I have mentioned above, at the time of its publication, *Once Were Warriors* made a unique, if controversial contribution to Maori literature.⁵ The characters in the novel not only differed greatly from the protagonists of early pastoral Maori writing but also had very different social concerns from those of the urban Maori represented in the politically-engaged writing of the mid-renaissance period. While, for instance, *The Matriarch* and *Potiki* describe both the historical and contemporary struggles within a number of Maori communities to maintain control of their ancestral lands and cultural identity, Duff’s narrative depicted Maori for whom this struggle is no longer relevant. Duff’s characters have become completely deracinated from their history and heritage and some are blatantly hostile towards traditional Maori culture and practices which they perceive as having very little bearing on their daily struggles or sense of self.

As I will show, *Once Were Warriors* is uncritical of – and, at times, even appears to advocate conformity to – a social order that has been established and shaped by Pakeha New Zealanders. Although it might initially appear that the cultural revival at the end of the novel expresses the newly established pride of the Pine Block Maori in their traditional cultural identities, very little changes for the community in either an economic or social sense. As a superficial blending of traditional Maori culture and Pakeha social convention, the revival does not address the fundamental inequality of the social order in any significant or radical way. As I will later explain, although the people of Pine Block do not appear to be as marginalised as they had been before the cultural revival, their new social visibility results from their assimilation into the dominant social order rather than their successful reconfiguration of it.⁶

To illustrate this claim, I will first contextualise the novel’s plot by describing the social and material landscape of Pine Block alongside its relationship to the neighbouring Two Lakes. I will then turn to the theme of warriorhood, which preoccupies each of the novel’s central characters and argue that it acts as a metonym for traditional Maori culture in the novel more generally. The “problem” of warriorhood in Pine Block becomes central to the revival that later occurs, as Beth and Te Tupaea implement a number of social and cultural initiatives that are designed to prevent Maori men’s identification with a debased model of Maori warriorhood that has emerged in urban areas, emphasising men’s physical strength and emotional austerity. However, as I will show, these initiatives could have wider negative consequences for the people of Pine Block, by curtailing their political potential. Rancière’s 2009 essay “Democracy or Consensus” offers a useful framework through which to explore these consequences and will inform my

analysis of the novel. First, however, I will examine the troubled relationship between the communities of Pine Block and Two Lakes in the novel.

Narrative Context: The Differences between Pine Block and Two Lakes

Early in the novel, Beth points out that a clearly defined, physical boundary separates her community in Pine Block from the neighbouring community of Two Lakes.⁷ This boundary solidifies her community's sense of social exclusion and negatively effects their collective sense of self-worth. As Beth remarks, there is a "vacant lot of land separating Two Lakes from Pine Block that no one, not in sixteen years, had ever built on" (12). She later adds that "Pine Block [is] Two Lakes' dumping ground for its human rubbish" (14). As a result, the central characters in Duff's novel feel their sense of exclusion from the broader social order acutely. Due to this sense of exclusion, they also spend most of their time in Pine Block and Jake suggests that the familiarity of the people in the streets and bar that he frequents means that the people there become "one big mirror of each other" (60). He goes on to state that since the residents of Pine Block experience very similar difficulties in their lives, they do not make him feel uncomfortable about his experience of poverty and deprivation like the people of Two Lakes do.

The rare moments of contact between the two communities in the novel emphasise the psychological impact that the physical border has on the residents of Pine Block. In an early scene, for instance, Jake describes his attempts to avoid being seen by the Pakeha residents of Two Lakes when he is forced to drive through. Even a brief journey through the neighbourhood gives him "a funny feeling in his gut" (56) and makes him feel like "a monkey in a zoo" (57), perhaps because his ethnicity

and style of dress clearly indicate that he does not belong there. He recalls his only attempt to visit a pharmacy in Two Lakes some years previously, describing how the assistant ran “her eyes up and down a man, thinking he was blind” and adding that “he knew she was telling him she didn’t like his dirty work clothes” (57). His observations suggest that, for the residents of Pine Block, their ethnicity and style of dress are as much markers of difference as the empty fields that separate the two communities. They also explain why the community in Pine Block has remained largely removed from that of Two Lakes, where they are typically perceived as outsiders. Although Jake minimises his reaction as “just a funny feeling in his gut” (56), his attempt to hide when passing through Two Lakes underscores the narrator’s observation that “from the moment they hit the other residential side of Two Lakes, Jake Heke was ill at ease” (56). These and other scenes in the novel suggest that Duff aims to increase the visibility of working class Maori and contribute to his broader efforts to address their exclusion from the public sphere.

Duff describes Pine Block and Two Lakes in entirely polarised and oppositional terms and pairs the respective conditions of material deprivation and abundance with corresponding failings or virtues in both the personal and social spheres. For instance, while the economic success of Two Lakes is mirrored in Duff’s descriptions of its cultural richness and idyllic family life, Pine Block is characterised by severe economic disadvantage, which is again mirrored in his descriptions of a dysfunctional cultural identity and an almost continuous cycle of abuse and neglect within the family home. This opposition limits the potential for interaction and exchange across the entrenched communities. One of the only places where the two physically and visibly disconnected communities encounter each other is the courtroom where the Maori pass from one side of the social threshold to the

other. But even here, the intermediary Pakeha judicial system imposes “corrective” conditions on the encounter.

Chapters seven and nine explore the impact of social exclusion from the perspective of Jake’s daughter Grace, who climbs a fence and wall in order to see inside an affluent and luxurious Pakeha home. The owner, Mr Trambert, is a wealthy landowner who has been both ridiculed and envied by many of the residents of Pine Block and when Grace climbs the wall surrounding his house, she becomes the spectator to an image of middle class familial harmony.⁸ Her status as spectator is underscored by the narrative reference to the lights and the windows that frame the scene; Grace describes what she sees as “a real-life TV scene down there, in that sitting room, or dining room, or whatever the hell they call it” (117). On her second visit, the Tramberts happen to be hosting a dinner party and she watches them through the window “for hours [as] this show went on” (117). The language of theatre and television in this passage suggests that what she perceives is both unattainable for her and entirely removed from her own life:

And she could see the lights of *her* world from her tree perch. And she’d look through the foliage of the row of lights of home – back into the room of the other species – so nicely dressed: the women with, oh, just indescribable dresses, outfits, and the men with a tie and a nice jacket. Grace looking back again, at home. Then down into that room. (117)

Grace’s visits to the Tramberts’ house provide just one vivid illustration of the social exclusion that she has struggled with throughout her life. When she attends her brother, Boogie’s hearing on his truancy from school, she compares his life to

that of the magistrate who sentences him. When she then considers attempting to find a job so that she can afford to visit him in the Boys' Home, she realises that her options are limited to the one supermarket in town where the Pine Block Maori shop. In these and other areas of life, Grace struggles with the recognition that she lives in an unequal society and comes to understand that she is regarded differently to her Two Lakes neighbours.

Grace's visits to the Tramberts' house confirm her earlier speculations about the injustice of her situation and leads to a "feeling that something, someone had *done* this to her" (118). In these passages, she shows an awareness that she is not personally to blame for her poverty; she has a sense, instead, "of having been not deprived but *robbed* of a life" (118).⁹ Her observations about the socioeconomic gulf that exists between the two communities are reflected in a broader representation of the two communities in the novel as opposite and irreconcilable. Economic deprivation comes to characterise life in Pine Block, while the economic prosperity of Two Lakes is reflected in their sense of abundance.

However, although Two Lakes has a predominantly Pakeha population, there is also a more privileged Maori community living nearby whom Grace describes as the "Two Lakes Maori" (85), led by Chief Te Tupaea. They live with an awareness of traditional cultural practices and have a decorated meeting house and a marae at the centre of their lives. When Grace commits suicide for reasons which I will explore later, her funeral takes place on this marae. At the funeral, her mother Beth describes an aunt who works as a translator for the Chief and we learn that Beth grew up on the "Two Lakes" marae. Despite this, her inability to participate in the social rituals led by the Chief or understand the speeches that he delivers shows that

she has had little contact with traditional Maori culture even prior to her life in Pine Block.

Following Grace's funeral, Beth comes to regard the cultural identity and social order of the Two Lakes Maori as something that Pine Block should aspire towards. Indeed, Te Tupaea is a figure who upholds rather than queries the social order that Two Lakes represents and he actively encourages the Pine Block community to conform to the social norms that have been established there. Even his appearance gestures towards the most obvious features of Maori and Pakeha social standing in Two Lakes, as he is described as wearing a carefully tailored suit alongside his facial moko. For instance, at Grace's funeral, Beth describes how "his head might cock to one side like an alert bird, which'd suddenly launch into symbolic flight with an outspread of dark pinstriped arms, and a flash of gold cufflink" (123-124), adding that "he didn't seem to belong to this century, nor of the culture whose attire he'd assumed" (125). His careful attention to Pakeha dress ensures that he conforms to the Two Lakes aesthetic that Jake describes as "flash" and "dressed up" (57), while his moko refer to his social standing and legitimise his role as the leader of the Maori community.¹⁰ As someone who does not seriously challenge the social norms of the white community at Two Lakes, his leadership of the cultural revival in Pine Block seems to ensure that it will not pose a challenge the Pakeha social order either.

Duff's audiences: the social context and impact of *Once Were Warriors*

In *The Circle and the Spiral*, Eva Rask Knudsen notes that by the 1980s "it was now obvious that a major part of the Maori population inhabited an urban

‘landscape of unbelonging’ not markedly different from that of Aboriginal Australia” (20). Duff suggested in an interview with Vilsoni Hereniko that he hoped *Once Were Warriors* would initiate a dialogue in New Zealand about this sense of “unbelonging” and draw public attention to the “real situation” (121) of those who have been excluded from participating fully in the life of the nation. The impact of Duff’s novel was not only unprecedented but also complex. In this section, I will first discuss the readership of *Once Were Warriors*, before turning to the impact that the novel had on New Zealand society and the public perception of Maori communities more broadly when it was adapted for film.

In *Reading Pakeha* (2009), Christina Stachurski writes that “given the common agenda of Duff’s oeuvre and social work, it seems that low socio-economic Maori were his intended readership for *Once Were Warriors*” (145). However, he opens the novel with a description of a “bookless” (10) Maori community and later confirmed in an interview with Vilsoni Hereniko in 1999 that “the great majority of Maori homes do not have books” (Hereniko 128). Furthermore, in a later chapter in the novel, a long monologue delivered by Beth addresses an “imagined Pakeha audience of mine” (47). This would seem to indicate that Duff also had a Pakeha readership in mind. Indeed, his intention to address a Pakeha audience might help to explain his inclusion of some ethnographic details of Maori warriorhood in the pre- and post-colonial periods later in the novel. Despite what Stachurski has suggested, it is fair to speculate that Duff expected to secure the attention of the established middle-class readership of Maori Renaissance literature.

In 1994, Duff established the “Alan Duff Charitable Foundation” or “Duffy Books in Homes” initiative to distribute free books to disadvantaged children and encourage their parents to foster a love of reading in the family home.¹¹ The novel

therefore initiated what would become a much more diverse and direct engagement with Maori education on Duff's part. Taken together, the long opening description of the Heke household in *Once Were Warriors*, the critique of poor Maori educational outcomes in *Maori: The Crisis and the Challenge* and the foundation of the "Duffy Books in Homes" initiative form an interesting intersection between Duff's social and literary endeavours and indicates that he moves easily between social and literary spheres. It also shows that *Once Were Warriors* established and solidified Duff's primary social goals which he has continued to advance in different ways over the course of his career.

While Duff's intended readership is ultimately unclear and while his goals may be contradictory at times, he could not have predicted the social and cultural impact that *Once Were Warriors* would ultimately have in New Zealand and globally. In 1994, Lee Tamahori directed a film adaptation of the novel which reached an international audience and boosted Duff's already significant readership. As Hester Joyce explains in her article "Once Were Warriors", when discussing his film, Tamahori maintained that he had to rework the parts of Duff's that depicted extreme violence and racial politics in New Zealand. "[S]tylistically," Joyce notes, "Tamahori wanted to conform to Hollywood narrative paradigms and to marry his love of action/western films with social realism. He resolved these tensions by developing a 'polished' social realist style" (161). As a result, in Tamahori's adaptation, Grace's suicide does not take place outside the Tramberts' home but near her home in Pine Block, Beth's role in the cultural revival is altered significantly, and the gang warfare that features in a subplot throughout *Once Were Warriors* is sanitised and glamorized.

Together, the novel and film produced what some critics have described as the “Once Were Warriors Syndrome”, strengthening the association of the Maori with violence in the media and augmenting the negative impact of media stereotypes on the Maori themselves. As Valerie Alia and Simone Bull point out, the media coverage of the violence depicted in both Duff’s novel and the film adaptation that followed led to a widespread misrepresentation of the Maori as an inherently violent people. Indeed, as Stachurski notes, the phrase “Once Were Warriors” itself came to act as a form of “cultural shorthand” (130) for violent stereotypes of traditional Maori culture. In this vein, Alia and Bull¹² have compared Duff’s negative portrait of Maori people with the work of his peers and have even suggested that some Maori people began to internalise this new, negative and essentialising representation of their community as violent. This led to a vicious circle whereby violence became more embedded within actual Maori lives and experiences and was in turn reinforced by the media reports on violent crime and poverty:

Each version [novel and film] presents a shocking portrait of urban family life in 1990s Aotearoa. Both resurrect the influential and pervasive stereotype that Maori crimes of violence have their roots in the warrior past. Duff’s depictions do not stand up to comparison with Irihapeti Ramsden’s alternative “Once Were Gardeners” [...] or Keri Hulme’s complex tale of the clash between Maori and Pakeha identities and values [...]. Nor do they stand up to comparison with the Maori myth and legend to which Duff alludes. Nonetheless, his outlook may have encouraged some Maori to commit crimes, believing they are following their heritage. (52)

In addition to the media's dissemination of the damaging stereotypes that were included in Duff and Tamahori's work, Duff's repeated condemnation of disadvantaged Maori communities in *Once Were Warriors* and elsewhere promoted a "tendency towards scapegoating Maori" (Stachurski 131) and resulted in a significant shift in public perception.¹³

However, as Alia and Bull point out above, many of Duff's more useful observations regarding both race and class-based inequality are absent from the film. For instance, whereas the gang members are described in the novel as "filthily dressed" (196) and living in a dysfunctional and chaotic gang house, the film glamorises their appearances and lifestyles. What is more, Duff's novel does not present gang life as appealingly as Tamahori's film does but instead explores the many ambiguous and conflicting feelings that Nig experiences upon his initiation into it. Nig's decision to join the Brown Fists is never represented as mindless and Duff portrays him as regretful of the impact of gang violence on those around them. In chapter twelve, for example, a number of gang members are sent to a nearby, unnamed woman's home to take her possessions in lieu of a payment to a local business that she cannot afford. However, Nig is horrified at the way that the gang treat the woman, because they discover that she does not have any possessions that they can take, the Brown Fists assault her. As Nig watches the assault, which likely kills the woman, he asks himself "what've I got myself into?" (157) and feels "helpless; lost, sad, an invader" (158). When the gang return to their house, Nig is berated by the leader for not participating in the assault and is met with anger when he responds that the whole thing was "not [his] scene" (158). Despite this, Duff does not portray him as a blameless figure. Though he regrets the assault in this chapter, he does not intervene to stop it and continues his involvement with the Brown Fists

in the weeks that follow. Duff's more complex treatment of Nig's experience in the gang is significantly reworked in Tamahori's adaptation where an attempt to achieve a polished visual style and linear narrative seems to outweigh any attempt to capture the psychological complexity of Duff's character.

Tamahori also reworks the scene of Grace's suicide and, in doing so, undermines the statement about Maori class-and race-based social exclusion that the scene makes in the novel. As Hester Joyce points out, a tree in the garden outside Grace's home features as an important visual reference point in Tamahori's version of the scene. Though the novel describes the Heke household as "bookless", Tamahori's film presents the tree as a place where Grace reads Maori myths to her younger siblings and, later, as the site of her suicide (Joyce 160). By staging Grace's suicide at this tree rather than in the Tramberts' garden, the act is contained within Pine Block and Grace does not appear as subversive as she does in Duff's novel. According to Joyce, Tamahori wished to avoid upsetting Pakeha audiences with any "direct reference to colonisation" (162) but by sanitising the narrative in this way, he generated a reductive and essentialised representation of Maori violence. He also ensured that Pakeha viewing audiences could engage with the film without having to question their own social positions and privileges. Joyce notes that "finding a narrative resolution to Grace's story that was politically acceptable in feminist and racial terms proved difficult" (161). However, Tamahori's decision to situate Grace's death in Pine Block rather than Two Lakes suggests that he has failed in each of these goals, by refusing to acknowledge or even engage with the one politically driven act that occurs in the novel. Since Tamahori's film has become one of the most popular and widely viewed films in New Zealand, it has increased Duff's readership and contributed significantly to the use of the term "Once Were Warriors"

as a form of “cultural shorthand” within the New Zealand media. While Duff’s novel is not unique in the attempt to fuse the social, cultural, historical and fictional facets of Maori identity, it – and the film adaptation that followed – had a far-reaching impact upon public consciousness in New Zealand in ways that have not yet been matched by another Maori writer.

For this reason, it is disappointing that though Duff presents the social landscape of New Zealand in *Once Were Warriors* as divided and unequal, he fails to depict the historical causes of these social divisions. *Once Were Warriors* centres upon his portrayal of economically disadvantaged Maori communities as wholly responsible for their problems, though sociological evidence points to the contrary. In his essay “Inequality and Maori” (2013), for instance, Evan Te Ahu Poata-Smith traces contemporary Maori economic exclusion back to the historical alienation of Maori land and the urban migration that rapidly occurred during the post-war period. By rooting his analysis in two important periods in Maori-Pakeha relations, Poata-Smith draws attention to the historical factors behind the continued economic disparity between the two communities and particularly, to more recent economic policies that shaped the capacity of the Maori to participate in the public life of New Zealand.

Following the rapid growth of industry which occurred after the Second World War, Poata-Smith notes, the Maori, now largely dispossessed of their land and reliant upon wage labour, moved to urban areas in large numbers (151). However, due to the widespread discrimination within Pakeha hiring practices, Maori workers had few opportunities to achieve economic stability or advancement (152). In addition, although Maori social and economic inequality in the post-war period was initially deemed to be reparable through the continued growth and

expansion of New Zealand's economy, this progress was undermined by a series of economic crises that occurred during the 1970s.¹⁴ As a result, "a country that [wrongfully] prided itself on good 'race relations' and a perceived absence of class inequality was confronted by unavoidable evidence of Maori economic, cultural and social deprivation" (153). This deprivation contributed significantly to the rise of the Maori protest movement in the 1970s, which was itself representative of an "unprecedented level of class struggle" (153).

As Poata-Smith shows, there are clear connections between race-and class-based inequality in New Zealand and in the post-war era, successive governments implemented economic policies that had a "disproportionate and sustained impact on working-class Maori families" (153):

The dramatic upsurge in Maori protest and discontent, intensified by the prolonged economic stagnation and rising unemployment from 1974 onwards, forced successive governments to respond to the evidence that many Maori continued to experience disproportionately poor educational outcomes, high levels of unemployment, low income levels, ill-health and hence lower life expectance, higher rates of imprisonment, low rates of home ownership and high rates of state dependence. The existence of such dramatic inequalities between Maori and Pakeha New Zealanders in particular, combined with the systemic failure of the state to ameliorate or transcend these inequalities, made Maori challenges to the legitimacy of the state all the more potent and forceful. (153)

Although Duff's novel is set a little later than the period covered by Poata-Smith, the latter's discussion of Maori social and economic disadvantages is relevant to Duff's novel. Although post-war urban migration largely resulted from Maori land alienation, the subsequent, additional exclusion of the Maori from the workforce – resulting from both racist hiring practices and the economic downturn in the 1970s – had a significant effect on the daily lives of the Maori population later in the century.

Duff, however, pays little attention to the historical context preceding the events in his novel. His characters are trapped in Pine Block and the setting imaginatively limits the ways in which social change might occur. From the ideological standpoint of the narrative, individuals from Pine Block can either remain within the intergenerational cycle of poverty and addiction or choose to assimilate into a series of social roles that are represented by the doctors and lawyers who are paraded in front of them in the scenes of cultural revival. Yet such choices are not available to all urban Maori as Poata-Smith's study shows. This contradiction will be explored in greater detail at a later stage in this chapter but first, I would like to consider Duff's representation of warriorhood as a metonym for Maori culture in more detail.

Warriorhood as a metonym for Maori cultural identity in *Once Were Warriors*

The meeting house as communal space is absent for the majority of Duff's novel and there is no comparable material or symbolic structure where his characters can find a sense of belonging like Kura's veranda in *Baby No-Eyes* or Kerewin's tower or spiral in *The Bone People*.¹⁵ While Duff introduces an unnamed meeting house in chapter ten, it does not belong to the Pine Block community and is tied to a

series of cultural traditions from which they have been excluded. In place of an established and coherent Maori cultural identity, the community have an overarching concern with warriorhood. In fact, male warriorhood arguably acts as a metonym for Maori cultural identity and becomes a way for the men, at least, to claim that they are connecting with their cultural heritage. Yet the warriorhood that Duff's characters embrace bears little resemblance to its historical form and the resignification of Maori identity via warriorhood results in a frequently reductive, dysfunctional and destructive sense of self.

In *Once Were Warriors*, characters like Jake and Nig identify as warriors in order to connect with a “traditional” cultural identity without realising that many of the acts that they carry out directly contradict the principles of the tradition they espouse. Chapter 16, entitled “Deep Tattoo” provides one of the most prominent examples of this contradiction as it moves between the narratives of Te Tupaea's speech to an audience in Pine Block, on one hand, and Nig's acquisition of moko upon his initiation into the Brown Fist gang, on the other. The chapter clearly compares Nig's new moko to the moko that Te Tupaea wears and refers to during his speech. There are obvious differences in the respective designs of each character's moko and the tattoos also perform very different social functions despite the fact that both are worn by men who consider themselves warriors. Ngahuia Te Awekotuku points out that historically, “*moko* not only was perceived as a form of artistry and individual self-presentation; it also embodied the self. Patterns identified the wearer to others and were unique to that person, though they could also be recognised as derived from the traditional repertoire of design forms unique to his or her tribe or clan” (128). He further explains that, traditionally, the artist adapted the curvilinear patterns to the shape and features of the recipient's face, resulting in a design that

was unique to the person and his or her life experiences. Indeed, the emphasis on creating individual designs for each person wearing moko was so pronounced that parts of the design could be drawn by the wearer for use as a signature in agreements, deeds and, historically, the treaty of Waitangi itself. As Claudia Orange notes, the different copies of the treaty “all contain the signatures, moko or marks of chiefs who wished to signify their agreement to the Treaty” (2010 253), demonstrating the connection between a tribal chief’s prestige signified by their facial tattoos and the drawn moko signatures that communicate to other leaders and communities that individual’s identity and status.

By contrast, Nig undergoes the procedure in order to conform to the gang’s shared identity and to mark his initiation into their group. He chooses the design from the tattoo artist’s portfolio, suggesting that the design itself is not as important as its role in signifying his allegiance to the gang. The tattoo artist recognises this when he describes the disjuncture between old and new forms of moko:

Design a replica of olden-day moko, which the tattooist’d copied out of a book from a photograph of a real tattooed Maori head. Now, he knew the design and its stock of variations so well he could do it by heart. Was the big thing to do these days amongst these gang members. And a man tried to a very professional job because even if it wasn’t exactly his cuppa tea, the design, the original he’d taken from, was no less than exquisite. A man’d heard that the real thing back in the old days was chiselled in. Man, these Maoris are devils for punishment. I think it must be still in their blood. They like tough things, deeds, acts. (181)

Hirini Moko Mead notes that moko has become a “symbol for persons wanting to validate their identity as Maori” (355) but the contemporary reasons for receiving moko bear little resemblance to those that traditionally inspired individuals to undergo the procedure. The fact that Nig’s tattoos are copied by a Pakeha from a book containing a photograph of a “real tattooed Maori head” (181) indicates the difference between traditional Maori practices and the attempt to replicate those practices from a cultural remove. Nig receives the moko in recognition of his willingness to join the gang rather than as a symbol of his life experiences and contribution to his broader community. As a result, it is almost impossible to reconcile his reasons for acquiring moko with the values of a traditional warrior. Indeed, as I will later show, Duff suggests that the cultural revival at the end of the novel might contribute to the re-education of characters like Nig about traditional Maori culture. The use of warriorhood – and particularly moko – as a metonym for traditional Maori cultural identity is therefore central to the plot.¹⁶

The problems that typify both Nig’s and Jake’s embrace of warriorhood can be at least partially attributed to their limited knowledge of traditional Maori warrior culture and lack of a communal meeting place where they can learn about it. As I explained in chapter one, Maori warriorhood has been comprehensively documented in meeting house art which frequently depicts stylised ancestor figures holding weapons or gesturing in ways that emphasise their status as esteemed figures within the community. As Roger Neich points out in *Carved Histories*, Maori art is primarily metonymical and conceptual in its form and rejects a realist style of representation in favour of making “statements about the relationships between things and between people” (134). The carver typically attempts to depict the ancestor as “timeless” (134) and as a result, the images represent the kinds of

identity that were important to Maori tribal groups when the houses were first carved, while also retaining a sense of relevance to contemporary Maori communities. However, since Maori art is metonymical, it relies upon the individual's ability to interpret its different symbols and piece together the stories with which the figure is associated. If the tradition of oral storytelling has declined within some Maori communities, the numerous associations between the figure depicted in a carving and the story that he or she represents also become broken and lost in turn.

The character of Jake Heke exemplifies the consequences of the gap between historical and traditional forms of warriorhood in urban working-class Maori communities in the novel. Jake repeatedly states that he must achieve the respect of his community by means of intimidation and fear and views a person's position within the urban social hierarchy as tied to his physical strength. He continuously evaluates the social landscape in these terms as he moves through it:

Jake's world was physical; and he was aware it was physical. He assumed damn near the whole world was seeing it the same. It was there when he woke each day (or night) in the canvas of his mind as physical. He saw people all over – but mostly men – and they were engaged in physical combat, the subjects of combative consideration, their fighting potential, how fast they'd likely be, how good a hit they carried and was it both hands or just a normal one, right or left (in that order too) could the dude by from this more modern style of scrapping of using the headbutt, the knee, or just anything that came to hand. His mind covered the field of physical confrontation. He saw

others in terms of their fighting potential first, before he saw anything. (50-51)

Jake's preoccupation with physical struggle and violence limits his worldview significantly; his desire to fight and survive shapes his perception of every person and situation that he encounters as well as his assessment of how he might respond if acts of violence were committed against him.

However, following one such assault, Beth provides an independent assessment of the question of Maori warriorhood and of what it might mean to identify as a warrior in the context of a 1990s urban housing development:

We used to be a race of warriors, O audience out there. You know that? [...] It's very important to remember that. Warriors. Because, you see, it was what we lost when you, the white audience out there, defeated us. Conquered us. Took our land, our mana, left us with nothing. But the warriors thing got handed down, see. Well, sort of handed down; in a mixed up sense it did. It was more toughness that got handed down from generation to generation. Toughness, eh. Us Maoris might be every bad thing in this world but you can't take away from us our toughness. But this toughness, Pakeha audience of mine, it started to mean less and less as the world got older, learned more, and new technology and all this fandangled computer stuff, oh, but even before computers, it all made the toughness redundant. (47-48)

Here, Beth observes that the "warriors thing" (47), once based in pride, prestige and social standing, is now associated with mere "toughness" (47). She appears to

understand how the problems with violence in contemporary Maori communities relate both to colonialism and to a related series of cultural shifts, such as the rise in industry and new technology: “all this fandangled computer stuff” (47). The mechanization of physical labour has lessened the need for Maori men to remain physically strong without offering an obvious, alternative rationale for cultural self-care or self-expression for those who considered themselves warriors.

Beth recognises that the modern Maori self-identification with warriorhood has become debased and disconnected from its traditional origins. Nonetheless, Duff’s engagement with warriorhood in the novel remains equivocal and, as Michele Keown points out, reflects a contradiction that recurs throughout his work more generally:

Duff’s writing offers an ambivalent response to the ‘Maori warrior’ legacy and his comments on violence within the contemporary Maori community are at times contradictory. In his 1999 autobiography *Out of the Mist and Steam*, for example, he suggests that Maori have a natural predilection for violence, claiming that his ‘Maori warrior genes’ have helped him overcome many male assailants over the years. [...] On the other hand, Duff has also recognised that much violent behaviour is socially-determined, targeting domestic violence as a repetitive and destructive cycle within working-class Maori society. (2007 105-106)

As Keown has demonstrated, Duff fails to give a clear account of the origin or causes of contemporary Maori violence in the novel or elsewhere. More worryingly still, his claim in *Maori: The Crisis and the Challenge* that Maori have an inherent

propensity for violence reinforced the kinds of colonial stereotypes that his peers have attempted to challenge. For instance, he states that “Maori have no overwhelming disapproval of violence” (66), and attributes this attitude to a lack of education. In *Once Were Warriors*, the “corrective” force of education is explored fully, and delivered by both the figure of Te Tupaea and the Pakeha dominated judicial system.

The parallel spaces of the courtroom and the meeting house in *Once Were Warriors*

As I have previously shown, the Pine Block community do not have access to the kinds of Maori culture that historically originated on the marae. In response, the men turn towards the concept of Maori warriorhood in order to connect with and perform their understanding of traditional Maori cultural identity. Ultimately, however, the kind of warriorhood that becomes normalised within the community is dysfunctional and characterised by irrational violence, impulsiveness and excess. Critics agree that the end of novel sees an overt movement away from this debased model of urban warriorhood towards a recuperation of traditional values of moderation and self-discipline.¹⁷ However, I will argue that the new model of Maori warriorhood provided by Duff is too superficial and the novel’s ending disappointingly offers us the trappings of Maori cultural identity and cultural difference without providing a longer historical view that would recognise the structural causes of impoverishment and hardship which initially gave rise to the changes in Maori understandings of warriorhood.

There are therefore a number of problems with Duff's engagement with contemporary warrior identity and the broader cultural revival that the novel promotes. To elucidate these further, I will next compare the spaces of the Pakeha courtroom and the Maori meeting house in the novel to show the parallels between them and to argue that the scenes of cultural revival at the end celebrate Pine Block's assimilation to a superficially "bicultural" social order rather than a successful re-configuration of unequal social relations. I will then return to the scene with the most obvious political potential in the novel: the one of Grace's suicide. It is undoubtedly the lowest point in the novel and carries a disturbing emotional impact. Nonetheless, it is important that Grace chooses to enact her suicide outside the home of a white, wealthy landowner and, in doing so, she protests the marginalisation of her community. Despite this, in his effort to move his narrative towards a more optimistic resolution and closure, Duff closes off the political gesture underwriting Grace's action in this scene. The narrative ultimately deploys her death as a catalyst for the cultural revival and the inadequate process of cultural assimilation that follows it.

In *Once Were Warriors*, the courtroom is one of the first sites of confrontation between the Two Lakes and Pine Block communities. Since Duff otherwise depicts the two communities as having only intermittent and fleeting contact with each other, the courtroom acts as an intermediate space where a more sustained confrontation between them takes place. Although the Maori meeting house is not comparable to the courtroom in any modern legal sense, an encounter similar to the one that takes place in the courtroom takes place at another key point in the novel when Beth and other members of the Pine Block community attend the marae at Two Lakes for Grace's funeral. Chapters three, four and ten are connected

by their titles which address the theme of history. Chapter three is entitled “They Who Have History” and chapter four, “... And Those With Another” while chapter ten echoes the title of chapter three, “They Who Have History II”. The three chapters respectively describe the court hearing on Boogie’s truancy, Grace observing other Maori waiting for their hearings in the corridor of the courtroom and Beth’s visit to the Two Lakes marae for Grace’s funeral. Through the chapter titles, Duff unexpectedly pairs the court hearing with the funeral on the marae at Two Lakes, and in doing so, suggests that both the Pakeha and the privileged Maori communities living in Two Lakes can lay claim to a recognisable history. Conversely, the underprivileged Maori who await court hearings in chapter four have “another” history, a history distinct from the histories of both privileged populations. Unfortunately, this “other” history is not given much consideration over the course of the novel and remains largely implied throughout. Indeed, in both of the chapters named for those who have “History”, men in power, the magistrate and Te Tupaea, show themselves unwilling to engage with either the personal or collective stories of the people living in Pine Block. It becomes clear, then, that the urban, underprivileged Maori represented by the community of Pine Block in the novel, do not suffer social exclusion only at the hands of the Pakeha but at the hands of the more privileged Maori population also.

The scene of Boogie’s hearing in chapter three is narrated from the point of view of his sister Grace who accompanies him there. He is called to the courtroom to explain his truancy and is sentenced to an undetermined period of time in a boys’ home. As Grace notes, Boogie had stopped attending school for a number of reasons including his unwillingness to participate in gang violence, his consequent exposure to bullying, and his inability to see how acquiring an education could help him in

either his present life or the future. His father, Jake, dismisses Boogie's difficulties and "disown[s]" (23) him due to his reputation as a "wimp" (23). Although Grace recognises her brother's moral bravery, kindness and sensitivity, Jake prioritises his son's ability to fight above all else. Significantly, through Grace's eyes, we also learn that Boogie's difficult school experience is not exceptional. She notices, for instance, that many Maori children do not receive the same educational opportunities or parental support as their Pakeha peers. She states: "if I had a head start like they do I could be a magistrate too" (34). Grace continues to observe her social and economic disadvantages throughout the hearing and concludes that the magistrate lacks a contextual understanding of Boogie's truancy and the difficulties that he has faced.

Before the hearing begins, Grace and Boogie are led through a series of doors and passageways into the courtroom and Grace speculates that these separate the Maori and Pakeha "worlds" (36). Her initial response to the art and architecture of the courtroom reinforces this idea further:

[...] all the wood everywhere, the quiet, the paintings on the wall. The whole atmosphere of the place. Like a church. Sitting down where Bennett indicated. Oh wow, at the ceiling with its fancy plasterwork, scrolls and things. Oh, but you wouldn't think it exists through those big doors. And then the other side, what a girl has grown up with, she knows them (though she does not understand nor empathise with them) and here, a kind of palace, a church, a place to respect and fear all in one on the other side. (32)

Significantly, Grace's characterisation of the courtroom as "like a church" echoes Artemis's description of Rongopai in *The Matriarch*. Indeed, the wider similarities between the courtroom and a traditional meeting house in this passage are obvious. In a purely material sense, the "fancy plasterwork, scrolls and things" (23) of the ceiling are reminiscent of the carved koru that decorate the beams and rafters of a traditional meeting house, while both structures also feature a series of paintings that line the wall and depict important figures who contributed to the establishment and development of the surrounding community and its institutions. The fact that the room is reminiscent of a church prompts her to behave with "respect and fear" (23) and her later description of the magistrate as "magistrate (God)" (33) even endows him with some kind of spiritual authority.

Indeed, as the chapter continues, Grace becomes increasingly ashamed of her connection to Pine Block. This seems to stem from her intimidation by the room itself. The portraits lining the walls of the courtroom appear as "great big fancy things in fancy frames and every one ofem a grey-haired white man" (33). The predominance of white figures appears to further reinforce the social, cultural and educational divide between the Maori and Pakeha in the room. Having previously speculated that the magistrate must have had educational supports that are not afforded to most Maori children, Grace now imagines that the men in the portraits "must've done something good to be up on the wall here" (26). She seems to have moved towards equating the social recognition that the men have received with moral goodness. This tendency is reinforced by the portraits' roles as records of the magistrates' achievements and successes and Grace's recognition that the Pine Block community do not have a comparable means of marking theirs.

Later, in chapter ten, when Beth visits the Two Lakes meeting house, a number of similarities between her experience and Grace's experience in the courtroom become apparent despite their different contexts. I do not wish to suggest that the courtroom and the meeting house are identical because they are culturally distinct buildings with unique aesthetics and cultural traditions. However, the parallels that Duff draws between the two buildings in two chapters bearing the same titles are clear. They are therefore worth exploring in more detail.

First, Grace and Beth describe the art and architecture of each building in similar ways. As I have shown, Grace is initially overawed by the ornate details of the courtroom decorated with "fancy plasterwork, scrolls and things" (23) and rows of painted portraits. Similarly, Beth is overawed by the artwork at the meeting house at Two Lakes: "every pace a carved wooden slab of wall column, depicting an illustrious ancestor, the legends of the people; the lore of the tribe etched out in intricate (but secret) detail" (121); the rafters, she notices, are "painted in traditional fern-curl or geometric pattern" (121). Although the buildings' decorations are far from identical, the similarities between the scrolls and fern-curls on the ceilings are clear. And while the reader can infer that the realism and perspectival composition featured in the portraits of the courtroom must look quite different from the metonymic relief carvings of "warrior figures with huge tongues poking grotesque defiance at the imagined (and assumed) enemy" (121) in the meeting house, broadly speaking, the portraits and decorative elements of each space perform similar roles and also have the same daunting effects on Duff's socially underprivileged female characters.

As each chapter proceeds, the art and architecture of each building appears to have the same emotional impact on both women and a further parallel emerges when

we see that the social and cultural protocols of each space are secret or at least inaccessible to them. In chapter three, Grace describes “the court officials talking in whispers” (32). She thinks that “maybe they don’t want us to know. Maybe it’s like a secret club where the members jealously guard their secrets and special codes and exclusive membership” (32). Likewise, Beth struggles to understand the speeches that are made during the funeral and the rituals surrounding death since she was not taught the Maori language or traditions as a child. She observes that “this very place, its cultural practices, had always been a mystery to a young girl growing up” (120). She similarly struggles to interpret the artwork of the Two Lakes meeting house, suggesting that it is “a bookless society’s equivalent of several volumes. If you knew how to translate it, that is” (121). Though Grace was subject to Pakeha cultural and social authority in the courtroom and Beth to Maori cultural and social authority at Two Lakes, their experiences are similar and equally confused.

Clearly then Duff’s female protagonists feel equally excluded from the Pakeha and Maori histories that the courtroom and Two Lakes meeting house narrate. For instance, although Grace recognises the coat of arms above the magistrate’s bench, representing “The Queen and her loyal, faithful servants” (33), she is unable to find a role for herself in the historical narrative implied, asking instead, “where do we fit in this picture? Me and more especially my poor brother here?” (33). At the Two Lakes funeral, Beth feels similarly excluded from the proceedings, describing “an elder rising to make another speech in a language a mother did not understand. (And yet he is part of me, my heritage; probably related to me. Yet he speaks his tongue and I understand only another)” (120). Here Beth recognises that cultural practices conducted in the meeting house are embedded in a historical tradition and have contributed to shaping the social order she inhabits.

Though she refers to the different “tongues” spoken by herself and the elder, her comments arguably allude to the broader cultural divide that is evident during her time at the marae. As a result, the descriptions of the art, architecture and ritual practices of the courtroom and the meeting house do not simply represent a random sense of strangeness experienced by Grace and Beth respectively; they demonstrate their common sense of class alienation from the recognised historical narratives and cultural traditions of the modern nation.

Finally, both women describe the figureheads that occupy each space in similar terms. That is, chapters three and ten are also linked by the similarities between the unnamed but God-like magistrate in the courtroom and chief Te Tupaea. Each man directs the proceedings and each is regarded as an expert, capable of adjudicating and guiding the futures of the people within their communities. Upon seeing the magistrate, Grace speculates that his powerful position is merely an accident of birth; she recognises that, as a Pakeha, he had been given a “head start” (34) in life. Likewise, when Beth first sees Te Tupaea, she is dismissive of him, noting that “he wasn’t tall, nor particularly distinguished. Just an ordinary man who’d been born with chiefly status”¹⁸ (124). These observations emphasise the class-based character of the social divide further and illustrate the frustration of those who live in Pine Block. Both mother and daughter note that the authority figures hold power over their communities that they have not necessarily earned. As I will later argue, the chief is also troublingly similar to the judge insofar as he helps to bring Pine Block into line with the rules and protocols of the dominant social order. The process of assimilation that occurs under the leadership of the chief arguably extends the significant parallels that exist between the courtroom and meeting house in the novel.

This narrative involving Maori assimilation to the dominant order begins in chapter three (“They Who Have History”), continues in chapter ten (“They Who Have History II”), and concludes in the final chapters, beginning with chapter fourteen (“Hark! The People Cometh) and ending at chapter eighteen (“And Still They Cometh”). It concerns the change that occurs in Boogie when he spends time in the Boys’ Home and Beth’s subsequent hope that she can initiate a similar change in Pine Block, more generally. Although her intentions might initially appear unremarkable, traditional Maori culture plays a significant role in both Boogie’s transformation and the cultural revival in Pine Block. However, the adoption of traditional Maori cultural practices becomes part of the process of assimilation for the residents of Pine Block in Duff’s novel.

In chapter three, the magistrate promised that, during his time in the Boys’ home, Boogie would “find discipline and – through discipline – direction” (35) and later, when Boogie attends Grace’s funeral, Beth notices that this promised transformation has occurred. She describes herself “looking through her tears at how proud, how ramrod-straight this teaching had made her boy. And thinking of how he yet belonged to the state, was still a ward of Them, and yet looked so... *free* (132)”. He is accompanied by a child welfare officer named Mr Bennett who appears to be associated with the Two Lakes Maori community and “is well versed in these matters of culture and protocol and that something else extra [...] that goes with these traditional Maoris” (132). Mr Bennett opens the final day of the funeral with a waiata [song] and is joined by Boogie. When the group of people attending the funeral “[make] an involuntary exclamation of surprise and delight at such a young man versed in such matters” (132), it becomes apparent that an education in traditional Maori cultural practices has been part of Boogie’s programme of reform.

Here, the state apparatus of the courtroom intersects with what is now the largely cultural apparatus of the marae and together they promote a way of behaving that upholds the values of the dominant social order. Boogie's transformation is the result of the magistrate's imposition of "discipline" and "direction" on him and a number of characters including Beth, Te Tupaea and Mr Trambert imagine how they might extend such a transformation into Pine Block more generally. For instance, while attending Grace's funeral, Mr Trambert observes a group of "ill-at-ease adults who looked as out of place as he felt – (Pine Blockers, see: with none a this cultural learning, no social precedents, rules, no regulated teaching that'd given the means to pay their proper respects)" (188). Ironically, his comments echo a number of remarks that Beth and Te Tupaea make over the course of the novel about Pine Block's cultural practices, including the practices of tattooing, singing and even the funeral rituals that have become established within Pine Block itself. In each case, the residents of Pine Block are measured against their Two Lakes neighbours and evaluated negatively.

Duff's chief Te Tupaea is not interested in learning the history of the community in order to gain insight into their condition of violence and poverty, nor does he recognise the regenerative possibilities of secular and domestic spaces. In *Baby No-Eyes*, a space like a garden verandah can be used to "display" the history that Gran Kura describes as falling from her mouth while, in *The Bone People*, an object like a chess piece or jade pendant becomes part of a material record of history appropriated by her three central characters and exchanged among them over the course of the novel. In Pine Block too, the objects of everyday life arguably comprise a material history of the people who live there, albeit one that describes two decades of social dysfunction. For instance, the rusted and broken-down cars

where some children sleep tell us something about the community's problem with domestic abuse and child neglect, while the fact that "for years the kids put their marks on the footpath" (11) in the form of drawings and graffiti might represent their attempts to record their lives. These objects and drawings might not offer insight into centuries of complex history like a meeting house might, but Beth and Te Tupaea fail to recognise the evidence they provide of two decades of social and cultural exclusion. Furthermore, when they attempt to establish the cultural revival at Pine Block, Duff's characters promote a rigid and homogenising model of Maori identity – based on the "precedents", "rules" and "regulated teaching" (188) that Te Tupaea has established within his Two Lakes community – rather than one that fully acknowledges the different history of Pine Block.¹⁹

More worryingly still, when Beth and Te Tupaea organise the revival in response to Grace's suicide, they effectively ignore her last statement. The revival is concerned with the social and cultural assimilation of Pine Block into Two Lakes, perhaps to ensure that an event so terrible cannot occur again. But as I have previously observed, before she died, Grace looked back and forth between Pine Block and Two Lakes and concluded that she had been "robbed of a life" (117). By choosing to end her life in Two Lakes rather than Pine Block, she places part of the blame for her suffering upon the people of Two Lakes. Unfortunately, Beth and Te Tupaea's exclusive focus on reforming the residents of Pine Block does not account for the role of the broader, Pakeha-dominated social order in generating Grace's sense of alienation, meaning that their response to her death is inadequate.

Grace's political protest and its subsequent suppression in the novel can be further explored with reference to Rancière's 2004 essay "Democracy or Consensus". More specifically, Rancière's argument that in a "world of total visibility [...] appearance has no place to occur or to produce its divisive, fragmenting effects" (104) is particularly relevant to the closing chapters of the novel, since, as I will argue, the cultural revival that Beth initiates is centred upon the conditions of social consensus or complete visibility. In such conditions, there are no longer any gaps within the mechanism of social organisation where political action might occur. Grace's unexpected and unprecedented suicide at the home of the wealthiest landowner in Two Lakes is the most disruptive and politically charged act in the novel and has the potential to provoke real and significant change in the relationship between the two communities. As Rancière notes, "appearance, particularly political appearance, does not conceal reality but in fact splinters it, introduces contentious objects into it, objects whose mode of presentation is not homogenous with the ordinary mode of existence" (104). In *Once Were Warriors*, Grace becomes such a contentious object. However, when Beth acts as though Grace's death was the result of personal rather than institutional problems and when she works hard to assimilate her community at Pine Block into a social order that produces social, political and economic disadvantage for urban, working-class Maori, she obscures the issues that her daughter exposed. Furthermore, she also fails to bring about any meaningful change in the social position of her community.

Rancière's "Democracy or Consensus"

In "Democracy or Consensus" (2009), Rancière argues that modern democracy bears little resemblance to its Greek origins. He suggests that although democracy is generally thought to represent "the power of the people" (96), there are few opportunities under modern democracies for "the people" to achieve recognition as political subjects. He describes an act of subjectivisation as one that disrupts the established organisation of society by introducing "contentious objects" (104) into the visible sphere, "objects whose mode of presentation is not homogenous with the ordinary modes of existence (104). This observation underlies his related claim that democracy is "a way for politics to be" (99) because it is something that is enacted and performed. For him, embodied performances characterised the early beginnings of democracy, unlike representative parliamentary processes associated with democracy today.

While Rancière associates democracy with the act of subjectivisation, in a postdemocracy, it is no longer possible to "appear" as a political subject. He argues that "the principle of postdemocracy is to make the troubled and troubling appearance of the people and its always false count disappear" (103). This is achieved by the elimination of any sense of ambiguity or indeterminacy in the structuring and organisation of a society. Within a postdemocratic social order, he argues, there is no way to enact a dispute because that social order no longer has any uncounted, invisible positions from which to act. There are no longer any margins, or peripheries; instead, each part of the society has been counted and accounted for within what Rancière describes as the social "aggregate" (116). Rancière describes the social aggregate using the metaphor of school grading (116), which incrementally lists the most and least successful grades, accounting for each but

placing more value on some grades rather than others. He states that “in this ‘classless’ society, the barrier has been replaced by a continuum of positions, starting at the top and going all the way to the bottom, mimicking basic school grading. Exclusion is no longer subjectified in this continuum, is no longer included in it. Beyond an invisible, unsubjectifiable line, you are simply out of the picture” (116). Similarly, the social aggregate includes those who have a high level of political power and visibility and those who have been politically marginalised. The inclusion of a marginalised community within the social aggregate does not change its status in any real or practical sense; it simply makes the community appear to count. Since many marginalised communities struggle to achieve visibility and recognition as political subjects, an aggregate of social positions within a society based on the principles of consensus might be regarded as a positive development. However, Rancière points out that the kind of visibility that is promoted within a postdemocratic society is very different to the deliberate and intentional act of political appearance. As he observes, a society based on the establishment of complete visibility results in “the absolute removal of the sphere of appearance of the people” (103).

According to Rancière, when every individual is made visible within a society based on the principles of social consensus, those who are socially and politically marginalised are counted, but the problems that led to their marginalisation are not adequately addressed. In fact, he argues that problems such as unemployment, homelessness or poverty are actively reconfigured as an “identity problem” (118). This allows the dominant social order to avoid taking practical steps to address them as genuine issues. For instance, by attempting to reinstate a previously “absent” cultural identity that corresponds with that of the established,

communities are brought “in line with the image of the whole” (103) and positioned within the social aggregate. However, the issues that they might be experiencing with poverty or the lack of employment persist:

In aid of such [marginalised] people, the powers that be then make an effort at additional saturation, designed to stop the gaps that, in separating them from themselves, separate them from the community. The powers that be go out of their way to provide those little extras of missing identity and ties in lieu of jobs, which the authorities simply do not have. A personal medicine aimed at mending the community fabric, to give back to each person excluded the identity of a mobilised capability and responsibility, to establish in every derelict dwelling a cell of collective responsibility. The social reject and the abandoned urban wasteland then become models of a ‘new social contract’ and a new citizenry, thrown up at the very point where the responsibility of the individual and the cement of the social bond were crumbling. (117)

Here, Rancière explains both how and why social consensus is established within a community. The process of establishing consensus is based on the premise that the “gaps” in the social fabric are a threat to the “powers that be” because they act as spaces where an individual or community might enact a political dispute.

By incorporating marginalised communities into the aggregate of social roles and positions, that is, the new bicultural and liberal social order, those who are in positions of social and political power achieve a number of different results. Firstly, they successfully sidestep the practical issues like poverty, unemployment and

homelessness that contribute to social marginalisation. Secondly, they suggest that a marginalised community's problems result from their unwillingness to conform to the established community's social and cultural identity. This transfers the burden of responsibility from the established community to the marginalised community and simultaneously disempowers the latter politically. Finally, when social "ties" and cultural identity are used to incorporate marginalised communities within the social aggregate, the identity of the individual and the broader society in which he or she lives become inseparable. The individual's identity now reflects the identity of his or her society more broadly, closing off the indeterminacy of their previous position. Rancière writes that "the constitution of each individual as a threat to the community [is] the strict correlate of the consensual requirement of a community wholly realised as the identity between the people and the population reflected in each person" (117). Proper political subjectivisation achieves momentary equality between the individual who enacts the dispute and the social order forced to confront his or her "radical otherness" (119). It therefore follows that to prevent such individuals from threatening the social order in this way, their identities must be aligned with the identity of their society more generally. This contributes to the establishment of a superficial social consensus while the potential for political subjectivisation is no longer possible. *Once Were Warriors* offers readers a superficial sociocultural consensus of this kind as a solution to Maori social and economic exclusion.

The cultural revival as a model for consensus democracy

Before turning to the cultural revival itself, let us first consider the symbolic significance of the wall that separates the Tramberts' home from the land

surrounding Pine Block. The wall acts as both a material and a symbolic barrier that prevents the people of Pine Block from accessing the social and political opportunities available to the residents of the Two Lakes community. To draw from Rancière's comments about theatre, "politics plays itself out in the theatrical paradigm as the relationship between the stage and the audience, as meaning produced by the actor's body, as games of proximity or distance" (17). As I have shown when Grace climbs the wall, she initially acts as a spectator, watching the Tramberts "from her perch like they were a film, a TV show" (116). But in choosing to end her life outside their home, she becomes an actor in Rancière's sense, using her body to inscribe her acute sense of social exclusion into the scene of social politics. In doing so, she entirely undermines the social distinctions established and maintained by the Tramberts' wall. Her act also initially achieves its desired effect, since Mr Trambert recognises her humanity. He describes Grace as "a mirror of my own daughter" (133) and, in doing so, acknowledges that the differences between the two are the products of their class positions rather than any inherent difference.

However, although Grace's suicide initially carries a political impact, the novel ends by closing politics off through the process of cultural revival. The cultural revival alters the relationship between Pine Block and Two Lakes by establishing a social structure that is based on the principles of consensus rather than debate. This consensus appears as a new and carefully-crafted biculturalism, a compromise of sorts in which the Two Lakes communities tolerate Pine Block as long as they perform the ostensibly Maori behaviours and cultural identities that Te Tupea teaches them. In the final chapters of the novel, Duff charts the progress of the cultural revival in three clear stages. Firstly, the encounter between the Pine Block and Two Lakes Maori communities at Grace's funeral establishes the differences

between them. Secondly as an expert in Maori cultural matters, Te Tupaea teaches the people of Pine Block about traditional Maori cultural practices and history. Finally, having learned about their cultural history, the people of Pine Block perform the new Maori identity that they have been instructed in. As carpenters, rugby players and musicians, they no longer pose a threat to the Two Lakes community and have become at least superficially incorporated into the society from which they were originally excluded.²⁰

The process of cultural revival in Pine Block can be understood as a microcosm of the bicultural project that began to develop in New Zealand alongside the Maori renaissance in the 1960s and 70s, becoming officially established in the late 1980s and 1990s. However, in *Beyond Biculturalism* (2007), Dominic O’Sullivan points out that within New Zealand, “biculturalism facilitated limited progress toward [Maori] self-determination, but its underlying philosophical premises about where power properly lies prevented a fuller realisation of autonomy” (1). In fact, he suggests that “biculturalism is inherently colonial. It positions Maori in junior ‘partnership’ with the Crown and oversimplifies the cultural and political make-up of its assumed homogenous Maori and homogenous Pakeha entities” (3). As I have shown, this assumed homogeneity of Maori identity is reflected in *Once Were Warriors* since Te Tupaea is the leader of the Maori community but he encourages Pine Block’s assimilation into the dominant social order, closing off the more radical cultural sources of Maori political action at Pine Block as a result.²¹

Pine Block’s assimilation can also be understood by tracing what Beth describes as her “cultural journey” (127), which begins when she visits the marae at Two Lakes for Grace’s funeral. Her experience there causes her to conclude that her

own community “got no structure” (161) and upon returning home, she decides to help establish one there. Her initial efforts centre upon the provision of food, education and support for those who lack access to these kinds of resources and she funds these initiatives by holding community raffles. Her efforts are successful because the community comes to view her home as a focal point for both children and adults who need assistance, and her actions approximate the kind of self-sufficiency that O’Sullivan, in his study of biculturalism, associates with political agency. He argues that a social structure based on the self-sufficiency of indigenous communities creates “political space for a more independent and less constrained pursuit of political goals” (3). Such goals are arguably evident in Beth’s initial attempts to address the shortfall in basic resources that she has identified in Pine Block.

However, the early political potential of her efforts is undermined when she invites Te Tupaea to visit them and he suggests that they establish a “Wainui Committee” there. The establishment of the committee, named after the Two Lakes Maori community, both formalises Beth’s efforts and marks the emergence of a new social structure that undermines the distinct identity and agency of Pine Block over the course of the revival. Te Tupaea quickly establishes himself as the expert who can educate the Pine Block community about traditional Maori cultural practices and fill the empty cultural space that he has identified there.²² Having told them that they are “not Maori” (181), he educates them in behaviours and cultural interests that will allow them to “become” Maori through a series of speeches that he delivers each Sunday in the garden outside Beth’s home.²³ The narrator describes “the chief putting into words their vague thoughts, giving their minds a shape they could visualise” (179) and points out that the Maori history he teaches is not something

that they had ever learned in school. However, despite understanding that the Pine Block community have not had access to either traditional Maori or mainstream Pakeha culture, Te Tupaea believes that they have responded to the difficulties in their lives poorly and berates them:

He told the people off, shouted and speeched aтем to change their ways before the ways changed them; you know, in that funny poetic way he speaks. Nor was Chief into blamin people, the Pakeha, the system, the anything for the obvious Maori problems; you know, our drop in standards just in general. He didn't care bout no damn white people ta blame, no damn systems meant to be stacked against a people, he just toldem: Work! We work our way out. Same way as we lazed ourselves into this mess. (191)

Here, Te Tupaea implies that neither the racist hiring practices nor the social order that promoted such practices should be taken into account when attempting to find a solution to Pine Block's problems. Earlier in the novel, Grace had noted that many of the businesses in the area do not hire Maori and if they do, they do not typically hire the Maori who live in Pine Block. Te Tupaea's speeches, while attempting to promote change in the community, do not account for circumstances like these that contributed to Pine Block's "drop in standards" (191). The work that Te Tupaea refers to in his speech is therefore predominantly cultural and centres upon the renovation of a community hall where much of the new activity takes place. Here, the Pine Block community perform the cultural identities that Te Tupaea has taught them. They become "rehabilitated" Maori and learn the signs of the dominant social order. They no longer pose a threat to the Two Lakes community as they "hammer and saw on the latest community project" (194).

The development of the cultural revival in *Once Were Warriors* closely mirrors Rancière's account of the transition that occurs between a democratic and a postdemocratic society – or a society in which political action is possible, on one hand, and one in which it has been closed off, on the other. Rancière notes that “any dispute in [the postdemocratic] system, becomes the name of a problem. And any problem can be reduced to a simple lack – a simple holding up – of the means to solve it” (107). In the novel, those who occupy positions of authority and power within the Maori community respond to the immediacy and unexpectedness of Grace's act of suicide with superficial reform rather than with an attempt to achieve genuine change. Corroborating Rancière's account of post-democracy, this process begins with the involvement of an “expert” (107) who can identify the different parts of the social body involved in the dispute and formulate a solution to it in response.

The narrator's observations about the changes that have occurred in Pine Block since the cultural revival began are revealing, particularly since they suggest that the divisions that originally separated Pine Block from Two Lakes are now being replicated within Pine Block itself. The narrator comments on those who have chosen not to participate in the revival, stating: “who cared about them? The chief didn't. He said they got their chance. They don't wanna change then we can't force em” (192). The hostility towards those who choose not to reform suggests that the identities of those who have participated in the revival now reflect the identity and values of the social order, more generally. Having been incorporated into the social aggregate, they are now suspicious of the unpredictability and indeterminacy that they perceive in their “unreconstructed” neighbours. Beth's observations come to mirror Te Tupaea's as she describes those who have chosen not to participate in the revival as “hellbent on emselves their own selfish pleasure, a guvmint payin em to

carry on that way. Feedin their rotten habits” (192). The newly reformed are “in contempt of them” and “stopped talkin to em [because] ya couldn’t like identify withem no more because, well, they weren’t like you anymore, were they? Or you weren’t like them” (192). Clearly then, the initial distinction between Pine Block and Two Lakes has therefore not been effaced. Instead, since those who have adopted the new cultural protocols now look on their close neighbours as the unidentifiable “others”, it has only been recreated within Pine Block itself.

Rancièrè’s description of the impact that superficial mechanisms of social consensus have on socially and politically marginalised communities offers insight into some of the problems with the process of cultural revival in *Once Were Warriors* as I have described above. In a democracy, he states that “the uncouncted could make themselves count by showing up the process of division and breaking in on others’ equality and appropriating it for themselves” (116). But in a postdemocracy, the inclusion of marginalised communities within the aggregate of social positions does not alter their marginalised status in any meaningful way and can even reinforce it, because the community can no longer dispute the social position that they occupy. Therefore, he argues, the erasure of the borders and barriers that structure a society under liberal multiculturalism is superficial since the inequality that was initially the source of the dispute persists. Likewise, in *Once Were Warriors*, Mr Trambert might initially appear to break down the barriers that exist between his land and Pine Block when he donates the equivalent of a rugby pitch to the Pine Block community. However, his gift erases the visible barrier that the Pine Block community might have used to stage a dispute about their socioeconomic exclusion without radically altering their economic status.

As I have shown, Duff's novel queries the role of traditional Maori culture within contemporary Maori communities and, in doing so, returns to a familiar theme of Maori renaissance literature. Duff also deploys the meeting house in his novel as a site for exploring the clash of two different kinds of Maori identity. However, despite these superficial similarities between Duff and his peers, his treatment of the meeting house is unprecedented. For example, while Beth's experience in the meeting house is a turning point in the plot, leading to the revival that later occurs in Pine Block, the traditional building itself does not feature in her effort to develop a new identity for the community. Instead, a series of entirely functional spaces such as Beth's garden and, later, a community hall form the main gathering points for Te Tupaea's weekly assemblies. These spaces neither communicate a pictorial narrative like a meeting house would, nor appear to have the potential to do so in the future. Patricia Grace demonstrated how ordinary spaces can become rich with symbolic significance and even function as sites of resistance to Maori social, cultural and political marginalisation, but this kind of potential is not recognised in *Once Were Warriors*. Instead, the lawn and the community hall simply operate as spaces that facilitate Pine Block's assimilation into what Rancière describes as the postdemocratic social order. As I have argued, this process of assimilation carries the most finality in *Once Were Warriors* while the role played by Maori material culture remains superficial and, unlike the other novels I have examined, it has little or no impact on the novel's narrative form.²⁴

Conclusion

Let me end this chapter on *Once Were Warriors* by offering some conclusions from my thesis as a whole. In these chapters, I draw from Grace's wide-ranging understanding of the meeting house as "a story, a history, a gallery, a study, a design structure and a taonga" (1986 117). I argue that this important structure was influential in the formal, thematic and stylistic development of the literature of the mid-renaissance period, while also attempting to demonstrate that each writer engaged with it in individual and diverse ways. For instance, I argue that in *The Matriarch*, Ihimaera draws from the multiperspectival, metonymic art of the Rongopai meeting house not simply as a way to retell the stories of Wi Pere and Te Kooti, but as a way to unsettle the reader's understanding of how stories are themselves told. Rongopai's interior paintings act as starting points for the many intertwining narrative strands of the novel, and Ihimaera's close engagement with the formal and stylistic dimensions of the painted house emphasise his interest in the role of individual subjectivity and sensory perception in both social and historical forms of storytelling.

Grace is also interested in the relationship between individual sense perception and storytelling, and queries its role in both upholding and undermining the divisions within her characters' social orders. In the second chapter, I suggest that Grace explores how the creative practices associated with meeting house art might transform vernacular spaces into sites of political dispute, and offer new ways of communicating in situations where ordinary forms of language are no longer adequate. However, while Ihimaera and Grace remain tied to the recurring signposts of Maori renaissance literatures even as they query them, Hulme offers quite a radically different perspective on the relationship between Maori material culture

and the renaissance novel. In *The Bone People*, she describes how the objects and practices of Maori cultural tradition might be defamiliarised and made available for new purposes, and, more specifically, for the purpose of establishing a new, shared history between the novel's three central characters. The undecidability of Hulme's engagement with traditional Maori culture perhaps contributed to the reputation of *The Bone People* as an "unreadable"²⁵ novel. However, I argue that this strategy led to the development of one of the most politically empowering and productive representations of a Maori meeting place in any of the novels considered over the course of these chapters. Indeed, it stands in stark contrast to *Once Were Warriors*, which signalled a turn away from the political energy of the mid-1970s Maori protest movements, and the creatively invigorated renaissance literatures that followed less than a decade later.

In chapter three, I referred to Patricia Grace's comment that she, Witi Ihimaera and Keri Hulme formed a group of "firsts". Grace pointed out that Ihimaera was the first Maori prose writer to be published, she was the first Maori woman writer to be published and Hulme was the first Maori writer to win the Booker Prize. This chapter has shown that although *Once Were Warriors* is also arguably a "first" due to its sustained focus on the dysfunction of an urban, working class Maori community, Duff's relationship to his literary peers is ambivalent. Since his achievement is arguably undermined by the logic of assimilation underpinning his narrative, it is difficult to place his novel within the Maori canon.

The resistance of *Once Were Warriors* to categorisation could be a celebrated aspect of this novel which, as I have shown, sparked debate about the social position of the Maori in New Zealand. The novel did not uphold the sympathetic historicised representations of modern Maori communities that were established in foundational

novels like *The Matriarch* or *Potiki*, but it engaged with traditional Maori culture in ways that are shallow when viewed alongside Ihimaera's and Grace's early work particularly. Although I have criticised Duff's interpretation of Maori material arts in this chapter, he has undoubtedly drawn readers' attention towards many of the themes that recur throughout Anglophone Maori fiction. However, the meeting house, which has been the focus of each of my chapters up until this point, when present in Duff's fiction, is deployed in a way that reverses what I can now describe as the combined objectives of Ihimaera, Grace and Hulme. Though the latter three each portray the Maori meeting house differently, their novels appear to share a sense of it as a form that can be renewed and used as both a site of contemporary protest and an alternative centre of social organisation. For Duff, however, the meeting house represents a form of Maori culture that is historical and unchanging.²⁶ Furthermore, in his novel, it appears inadvertently to become a site where social protest and resistance is shut down. As a result, though Duff has argued that *Once Were Warriors* was unprecedented in its unsympathetic depiction of a violent and socially disadvantaged urban Maori community, I would suggest that the novel achieves this status for other reasons also.

If, as Rancière argues, democracy disrupts and queries "the organisation of bodies as a community and the management of places, powers and functions" (99), then the cultural revival depicted at the end of Duff's novel is not democratic. For rather than querying the distribution of power and space in New Zealand, the revival upholds dominant systems of social organisation and closes off the social spaces where disruptions to the status quo might occur. This is perhaps why *Once Were Warriors* might also be listed as a kind of unwitting "first" alongside the novels of Ihimaera, Grace and Hulme – not for its sustained focus on an urban Maori

community nor for its representation of gang violence and domestic abuse but for its representation of the process by which that community loses the little political power that it has.

Notes

Introduction

¹ The spelling of certain Maori words has not yet been standardised. Some writers and critics type words containing a long (double) vowel using a macron (Māori; Pākeha), while others do not. In some, much rarer instances, writers type the double vowel (Maaori; Paakeha) rather than use either the simplified version or the version containing a macron. I have chosen to use the simplified version of the spelling across this dissertation. Some critics also choose to include Aotearoa [the Maori name for New Zealand] in their references to New Zealand (Aotearoa/New Zealand) while again, others do not. As I hope this dissertation demonstrates, although I have chosen to include the English only, I fully respect the effort to promote a bilingual description of the “land of the long white cloud” (Aotearoa). The simplified forms of Maori terms and place names standardise a range of different spellings for those who might not be familiar with the variations in spelling and also demonstrate an understanding of my own status as someone who is not a New Zealander and is therefore unfamiliar with the possible contextual nuances of these different spellings. Finally, the term Pakeha is used throughout this dissertation to refer to New Zealanders of European descent because it is a standard descriptive term in both New Zealand and the critical literature.

² The term marae is now used to describe the complex of buildings that are typically situated at the centre of traditional Maori communities, however.

³ These protests include the Maori Land March (1975) and Bastion Point occupation (1977-78), which I discuss in detail in chapter two.

⁴ See Keown (2005) p. 8

⁵ Keown cites Graham Huggan's account of the "postcolonial industry" (qtd. In Keown 8) as a way of at least partially explaining the critical blindness towards those beyond the "handful of famous writers" and "celebrity critics" (qtd. In Keown 8).

⁶ See Allen (2002) p. 220.

⁷ Stating that "a world-system is a social system, one that has boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation and coherence" (347), Wallerstein argues that the world system functions in a state of continuous tension and competition, enabled by the comparative stability of the capitalist economy (348). Adopting a long view of the tension that is ongoing between the core, the semi-periphery and the periphery in his analysis, he emphasises the pronounced inequality present within the market economy of this world system. Although it is primarily an economic model, Wallerstein's theory of the world system has been greatly influential in the study of literature, as is evident in Casanova's work and in other disciplines such as sociology and the work of Pierre Bourdieu, for instance.

Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984) analyses the circulation of symbolic capital on a national level and within what he terms an "economy of cultural goods" (1), which describes the production, commodification and circulation of cultural objects to which symbolic value is applied. This is an idea that draws from Wallerstein's wider global analysis and has also strongly influenced Casanova's work in several respects, particularly since Bourdieu states that within this economy, the cultural capital is distributed in accordance with a hierarchical structure that defines different levels of "competence" within the class system. The functioning of this system is also influenced by the position of an individual within the habitus, which he describes as "not only a structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of

practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organises the perception of the social world” (166). In *Distinction*, Bourdieu therefore argues that the interaction of the individual with material culture is determined by his or her position within the class hierarchy and its related levels of symbolic capital. This hierarchy is centred upon a “fundamental opposition” (172) between the objects and practices of legitimate culture that have a sense of value attributed to them and those that do not, which subsequently effects how they are used and positioned within the lifestyles of the different classes. For example, through an analysis of the artwork and decorative objects within the home, Bourdieu suggests that the bourgeois emphasis on form and elaborate decorative style is countered by a working-class preference for functionality and the sentimental within their choice of art. This strict dichotomy between the types of aesthetic preference is just one example of the way in which patterns of production and consumption are enforced by the divisions and partitions within the different social spheres of the class system. As I will later show, Rancière’s analysis of the art of the aesthetic regime overturns Bourdieu’s reading almost entirely, because for Rancière, the art object has the potential to intervene in the established social divisions rather than working to uphold them.

⁸ Although I refer primarily to *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004), Chapter Two incorporates Rancière’s 2004 essay “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?” and Chapter Four discusses an earlier essay titled “Democracy or Consensus” (1999) amongst others.

⁹ Rancière expresses the relationship between art and politics very succinctly when he states: “art is a work on the distribution of the sensible. Sometimes, but not

very often, it rearranges the set of perception between what is visible, thinkable and understandable, and what is not. This is the politics of art” (2015 n.pag).

¹⁰ See *Blood Narrative* (2002) p. 151.

¹¹ See Christina Thompson’s “In Whose Face? An Essay on the Work of Alan Duff” in *Inside Out*, p. 333.

Chapter One

¹ Although Ihimaera published a revised version of *The Matriarch* in 2008, I am referring to the original 1986 version in this chapter.

² In *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, Paul Millar writes that “where *Whanau*’s pastoral narrative makes the politics of Maori alienation subordinate to its focus on unity and community, *The Matriarch* is overtly political, its protagonist, Tamatea, a tool being sharpened by the matriarch to bring about the Pakeha’s destruction. To this end, Ihimaera fragments his narrative and uses abrupt changes in voice and tone (ranging from polemical and didactic to domestic) to make the novel’s politics explicit” (in Robinson and Wattie “Matriarch, The”).

³ Although I focus on the work of Roger Neich here, two recent publications offer a welcome contribution to the field: Damian Skinner’s *The Māori Meeting House: Introducing the Whare Whakairo* (2016) and Ngarino Ellis’s publication from the same year *A Whakapapa of Tradition: One Hundred Years of Ngati Porou Carving, 1830-1930*. For a survey of more recent Maori art, Skinner’s *The Carver and the Artist: Māori Art in the Twentieth Century* (2008) is a useful text.

⁴ Rongopai is Ihimaera’s ancestral house and it recurs throughout his fiction. For instance, it appears in the sequel to *The Matriarch*, titled *The Dream Swimmer* (1997), *Whanau* (1974), *Bulibasha: King of the Gypsies* (1994), *The Uncle’s Story*

(2000), *The Rope of Man* (2005), and *Band of Angels* (2005) amongst others.

However, it receives the most sustained attention in *The Matriarch*. Here, Rongopai is made central to one of the main narrative strands in the novel in which Artemis recites the Mahana family history to her grandson Tamatea.

⁵ Rancière's use of the term "locution" is interesting, since it typically describes a speech act. If a novel is regarded as being composed of such locutions, or utterances, then the surety that is typically associated with the written word is undermined by the intangible nature of the speech act.

⁶ Wi Pere's parliamentary career spanned two decades, during which he served five parliamentary terms.

⁷ Major Reginald Biggs – a central military figure during the New Zealand Wars – suggested that it was Te Kooti's disloyalty to the Pakeha military that caused him to be imprisoned, despite having subsequently settled on Te Kooti's land.

⁸ In "The Maori House of Fiction", Bridget Orr contrasts the Maori and Pakeha responses to the attack. "For Pakeha", she argues, "it is recalled in the familiar tropes of settler myth as a massacre of the innocents, women and children slaughtered in their beds, an act of excessive cruelty without strategic military value, comprehensible only as unrestrained savagery" (87). Conversely, she argues, Ihimaera "emphasizes both the role of *utu*, or revenge (a fundamental concept in Maori culture concerned with conflict and recompense), and holy mission in Te Kooti's decision to attack the home of his chief settler persecutor, Major Reginald Newton Biggs" (87). Orr interprets the scene by referring to Te Kooti's Ringatu faith, which blends Maori and Pakeha belief systems, and informs Te Kooti's "desire for *utu* and "Old Testament understanding of divine justice as vengeance" (87). However, it does not fully acknowledge Ihimaera's emphasis on the brutality of the act.

⁹ In *Pacific Islands Writing*, Michelle Keown argues that “Ihimaera describes Maori historiography as a highly subjective discourse which varies from tribe to tribe” (54) and is informed by both the real and the imagined. “In keeping with this perspective”, she writes, “the novel establishes a repeating pattern in which putatively established historical ‘facts’ recorded in dominant (Pakeha) accounts of New Zealand history are followed by ‘Maori’ perspectives, which often draw upon Maori mythology and cosmogony as counterdiscursive sources of historical knowledge” (54-55).

¹⁰ Paul Sharrad’s article “Strategic Hybridity” offers a comprehensive account of the novel’s many narrative strands and styles, which he lists as following: “Maori oratorical style (1-6), letters, parliamentary transcripts (315-29) and press reports (174, 183), staged debates, dramatized scenes from history, religious incantations (134-7, 152-7), highly coloured moments of the visionary or fantastic – critics invoke *Star Wars* or *The Raiders of the Lost Ark* as comparisons (109, 112-5, 442-6), blocks of Maori language (193, 216), the nineteenth-century family saga novel, and polemical commentary directly addressed to ‘you Pakeha’ (74, 174). Maori creation myth sits beside allusions to Renaissance Europe intrigue and specific details of New Zealand’s Land Wars are likened to Garibaldi’s Rosorgimento Italy via a consistent line of operatic citations from Verdi (45, 78, 121 and so on)” (114). Sharrad refers to the 1986 version of the novel in his citations.

¹¹ Paul Millar points out that although Ihimaera’s fiction is based on fact, his “work is never simply autobiographical” (in Robinson and Wattie “Ihimaera, Witi”). He writes that “Waituhi, for example, the village setting for many of his narratives, is an imaginative recreation of the actual place. The fictional Waituhi’s ‘physical cohesion [providing] an “object correlative” to the ethos that binds the tangata

whenua together” (in Robinson and Wattie “Ihimaera, Witi”). For Millar, Waituhi – which features in much of Ihimaera’s writing, therefore represents a shared Maori identity that encompasses individual families such as the Mahana family and the Maori people in New Zealand more generally.

¹² Simon Perris focuses on Ihimaera’s use of ancient Greek myth in his article “Greek Myth and Mythmaking in Witi Ihimaera’s *The Matriarch* and *The Dream Swimmer*”, offering a thorough account of the parallels between Greek mythical figures and their counterparts in Ihimaera’s novel. Perris argues that the central characters in *The Matriarch* are based upon the familiar classical figures of Diana/Artemis and Circe and traces the parallel development of their stories over the course of both *The Matriarch* and *The Dream Swimmer*. He states that “the Matriarch, Riripeti ‘Artemis’ Mahana, bears the name of the Greek goddess. Tama’s mother, who challenges Riripeti, is Tiana (= Diana). Each novel thus depicts Tama investigating a female ancestor named Diana/Artemis. Tama’s aunt, who challenges the succession, is named Circe” (149). Perris returns to the subject of myth in “Witi Ihimaera and the Dread Goddess” (2015), while Nadia Majid also addresses Ihimaera’s engagement with both Maori and Pakeha forms of myth in ‘*My Mother was the Earth, My Father Was the Sky*’: *Myth and Memory in Maori Novels in English*.

In “‘It all Depends on what story you Hear’: Historiographic Metafiction and Colin Johnson’s *Dr. Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* and Witi Ihimaera’s *The Matriarch*” Joanne Tompkins makes an interesting point about the relationship between the Pakeha reader and Ihimaera’s use of myth in the novel. She states: “whites cannot write of Kupe or Maui or Takitimu with the authority that Tama[tea] can discuss Italian (both ancient and modern) and Greek

myth, the legend of King Arthur and Avalon, the Ark of the Covenant, and even literary legends such as Carroll's Jabberwocky and Melville's Queequeg. These stories, infused here with several layers of meaning, force the Pakeha reader to ask important questions. If Western myths are worthy of allusive reference, then Maori myths also deserve more serious consideration. Interestingly, both novels [*The Matriarch* and Colin Johnson's *Dr Woodreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*] acknowledge that the indigenous myths cannot be accepted as the only 'truth,' preventing charges of reverse exclusivity or ethnocentrism" (490).

¹³ See Eileen Julien's "The Extroverted African Novel".

¹⁴ In *Tikanga Maori*, Hirini Moko Mead clearly describes the evolution of the terms "marae" and "pa". He writes that the term "marae" once referred to the space outside the meeting house, while the space surrounding the marae was known as the pa (95). However, the marae now refers to the entire complex of buildings, including the meeting house. He suggests that "this change would have come about in the late 1960s partly as a result of the publication by the Department of Education's School Publications branch of a book called *Washday at the Pa*, by Ans Westra. There were a lot of negative reactions to the book, after which the word pa became very unpopular. Today we use the word marae to describe the complex of land, buildings and facilities as they exist today" (95).

¹⁵ In *Carved Histories*, Neich points out that the colour red is a "colour of high rank and value" because "red kokowhai [a species of tree] pigment was obtained only by much toil and preparation" (146). He adds that "its replacement on carvings by European store paints must have devalued the carvings in the eyes of the traditionalists" (146). The New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage offers further information about the significance of the colours red, black and white with

reference to the Maori flag. They suggest that the colour black represents te kore [the void], white represents the material world and red represents the earth which sustains life. See “The National Maori Flag” on <https://nzhistory.govt.nz> for further information on the colours black and red.

¹⁶ The Ngati Tarawhai are an important group of Maori woodcarvers from Rotorua.

¹⁷ Neich suggests that following the Land Wars there was a shift in the ways that meeting houses were used. Prior to the Land Wars, the traditional meeting house expressed “an ideology of group identity based on the idiom of descent” (1994 15), but the period of upheaval from approximately the 1870s onwards resulted in the forging of new alliances between previously disassociated tribal groups. Neich states that “to establish and promote their special identity, many group leaders and prophets turned to the specific history of their people and constructed new historical narratives that explained these new differences. In the new meeting houses built by these groups in the 1870s and later, these new historical narratives were given visual form, especially in figurative painting, which had the flexibility to respond to the new needs” (1995 15).

¹⁸ As Philippa Mein Smith has noted, the period in which this original settlement took place has varied widely in historical accounts and is currently estimated to have taken place around the thirteenth century (1).

¹⁹ Te Kooti’s attempt to return to Poverty Bay was contested by many living in the region due to his orchestration of the 1868 Matawhero attacks in which 54 people were killed. As Roger Neich points out, Poverty Bay was “his birthplace and the home of many of his followers, but it was also the area where some of the most savage killings had occurred after his escape in 1868 from the Chatham Islands

exile” (2011 189). The government discouraged his attempts to visit the region since the attack, but Te Kooti “had travelled widely in the Bay of Plenty and Hawke’s Bay, spreading his influence and convincing many people that he was now a man of peace” (2011 189). Although Te Kooti did not visit Rongopai as he originally intended, he visited the other houses that were constructed to accommodate him on his journey.

²⁰ In *Redemption Songs*, Judith Binney describes the Ringatu religion as “the means by which Maori analysed their colonial situation in the 19th century” (1). Te Kooti, who developed the religion, experienced a vision of God, who told him that he would work to free his people from colonial oppression (Binney 1). However, Te Kooti’s history lacks a sense of overall coherence and Binney points out that there are two primary ways of interpreting his life and work. The first suggests that “Te Kooti was a martyr, unjustly imprisoned by a colonial system which brought war to Maori tribes in order to dispossess them” (1). The other, “extensive until very recent times”, suggests that “he was the most ruthless of Maori leaders” (1).

²¹ Artemis’s account reflects a 1987 report in the *Poverty Bay Herald*, which stated that “there is no attempt at disguise; the meeting house is already built and the food is being collected for the entertainment of Te Kooti and his companions. The promoters are known to be amongst the leading men of the district, and they will be able to muster a large meeting” (qtd. In Neich 2011 189).

²² Rongopai is perhaps the most important example of the second phase in Maori figurative painting. The first phase, as Neich notes, was primarily naturalistic, while the second phase signalled an increased diversity in painted meeting houses (2011 185). Rongopai is arguably the most imaginatively decorated house and at the time, “was unique in the wide range of its artistic expression” (Neich 2011 193).

²³ It is difficult to offer a unified account of painted houses, since their development did not occur in a linear or unified way. Unlike the carved arts, painting, as Roger Neich notes, “was more of an individualistic art where the artist has more freedom to invent his personal symbolism” (2011 1). Neich also points out that although the development of Maori painting occurred in conjunction with other meeting house art forms, these forms were themselves developing individually. He writes that “one major painting tradition developed directly from kowhaiwhai, another tradition rendered woodcarving figures and motifs in paint, while a third borrowed from European naturalistic art. Some painted meeting house used only one of these traditions, others blended all three. Consequently, when all these arts were brought together into the building of one particular meeting house, each discrete art-form represented one stage in the development of that art. Only in rare circumstances would that same configuration of art stages be repeated in another house” (2011 1). Although Rongopai was declared tapu until 1963, Neich points out that it continued to be used as Ringatu church (2011 192), which allowed other painters to see and be inspired by its art. The continued use of the house during the tapu period is not directly acknowledged by Ihimaera in *The Matriarch*.

²⁴ The influence and reach of the figurative painting that is found in Rongopai remains evident in Maori art today. In *New Zealand Painting: A Concise History*, Michael Dunn describes the work of Robert Jahnke, who attributes his decision to turn towards figurative painting to Neich’s inspiring account of the form. Dunn states that “he used the naïve style of drawing and painting found in the Rongopai meeting house as a basis for imagery including plants, utensils and landscape details. He also introduced differences of scale to indicate the symbolic importance of his imagery rather than perspective relationships. By doing so, he connected his

contemporary paintings to a meaningful past tradition in a way that enriched their effectiveness as political statements” (195).

²⁵ This aesthetic approach directly contrasts with perspective-based representation, in which “things are shown as they appear to the sight from one viewpoint selected by the artist and at one instant in time” (Neich 1994 135). Perspective-based art necessarily limits the subject that it depicts, because “the artist becomes the centre of his world, choosing his viewpoint and hence in a sense creating his own world” (Neich 1994 135).

²⁶ Te Kooti did not visit Rongopai due to a vision that he had of the thistle that was painted there as a symbolic representation of him. Judith Binney states that “the thistle of Waituhi came to be seen as heralding misfortune. Of it, it was said forcefully, the thistle only draws blood. In later times, therefore, it was washed over with white paint on the advice of the tohunga [expert] and spiritual healer Hori Gage” (1995 372). The thistle was also used to describe the Pai Marire faith (which later became associated with the Ringatu religion), because it spread ‘like the scotch thistle, self sown ... whose down is about to float away to all parts of the village’ (1995 372). However, although Te Kooti did not visit Rongopai, he could visualise the thistle and came to refer to the house as “E hine tangi kino” [O girl crying bitterly] (1995 Binney 372).

²⁷ Wi Pere’s status within both the Aitanga-a-Mahaki community and New Zealand more broadly is marked by the fact that his portrait was painted prior to his death and also, due to the fact that he was painted with moko. Ordinarily, an ancestor is not included in the carved or painted narrative of a meeting house until they are no longer a part of a community’s living memory and therefore, until at least a generation has passed. As Neich notes, the painter was anticipating Wi Pere’s

inclusion amongst the most important ancestors, suggesting that there were few doubts about his importance to the Maori land movement at the time (2004 192). The chair that is situated behind Wi Pere's figure is representative of his seat in parliament, while the feathered figure perched on his shoulder represents his mother, Riria Mauarauni.

²⁸ Ihimaera also refers to the symbolic depiction of Te Kooti in Rongopai in *Whanau II, The Rope of Man* and *Bulibasha*.

²⁹ Artemis also makes repeated references to Italian opera and, more specifically, the operas of Verdi. These references are integrated into her vocabulary, her use of the Italian language, and as Paola Della Valle has pointed out, the melodrama of her account (in Oboe and Bassi 104). Artemis is likely interested in Verdi due to his involvement with the Italian Risorgimento movement, which led to Italy's unification in 1861 and which resonates with her desire to establish what she describes as the "Maori Nation". Della Valle notes that "the spirit of the Italian Risorgimento is fully evoked by Ihimaera's drawing on the emotional Manicheism and characterization of Verdian operas, and by blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, which also characterised both the Risorgimento and its most remarkable artistic product, the *melodrama*" (in Oboe and Bassi 104). The intensity of emotion and dramatic affectations that accompany Artemis's account clearly gesture towards the influence of the Italian melodrama and suggest that her account of the Mahana family history might even be read as a performance in its own right.

³⁰ In *The Treaty of Waitangi*, Claudia Orange offers a concise summary of the issues at the core of the debate: "Confusion surrounded the treaty from the first. The treaty in English ceded to Britain the sovereignty of New Zealand and gave the Crown an exclusive right of pre-emption of such lands as the Maori people wished to

sell. In return, the Maori were guaranteed full rights of ownership of their lands, forests, fisheries and other prized possessions. The treaty also promised them the rights and privileges of British subjects, together with assurances of Crown protection” (1). Orange adds that because the majority of the Chiefs signed the Maori version of the treaty, the linguistic nuances of the agreement were not clear. As a result, “each party to the treaty was left with expectations about the power they would receive (1).

³¹ Roger Neich emphasises the fact that Wi Pere’s education spanned both the Maori and Pakeha traditions, pointing out that “he was given a deep grounding in traditional Maori esoteric lore and genealogy at the Maraehinahina branch of the Tokitoki Whare Wananga (school of learning) reserved for the sons of chiefs” (2001 190).

³² In *Buying the Land, Selling the Land*, Richard Boast points out that Crown pre-emption was improperly defined in the Maori versions of the Treaty of Waitangi, meaning that the Maori leaders who signed the document relied upon a verbal explanation of the process. However, he suggests that “quite what pre-emption means to see to have genuinely confused Maori and a number of Pakeha too. It is possible that Henry Williams at Waitangi had explained the right of pre-emption as a Crown right of *first refusal*, whereas Colenso believed that it meant an absolute prohibition of sale to any but the Crown but that ‘the Maori themselves were unaware of this’” (23). There was therefore a clear lack of understanding on the part of both the Maori and Pakeha parties involving the implications of Crown pre-emption for both parties.

³³ When read with reference to Rancière’s philosophy, Wi Pere’s decision to confront the Prime Minister can be regarded as an act of subjectivisation. As outlined

in the introduction, in Rancière's philosophy, subjectivisation is "the process by which a political subject extracts itself from the dominant categories of identification and classification" (Rancière 2004 92).

³⁴ As I have previously shown, Rancière argues that the blurring of the boundary between the empirical world and mere "simulacrum" was exemplified by the writing of the Romantic period and has continued to develop and evolve since then.

Chapter Two

¹ In "Ka Tika A Muri, Ka Tika A Mua?" (2004) Evan Te Ahu Poata-Smith describes the impact of the Maori protests on New Zealand's political landscape. He lists the land protests of the 1970s, the anti-Apartheid protest against the Springbok tour of 1981, and the annual Waitangi Day protests throughout the 1980s as undermining New Zealand's perceived unity. In fact, he suggests that these protests "encouraged the widespread perception that New Zealand's 'multicultural utopia' was suddenly tottering on the edge of a prolonged and irredeemable ethnic conflict" (73). In many ways, *Potiki* can be understood as an allegorical account of this conflict.

² In her article titled "Influences on Writing", Patricia Grace explains that the Raglan occupation centred upon Eva Rickard's effort to win back her family's land, which includes a burial ground and which had been taken for use as an airfield during World War Two (in *Hereniko* 69). A golf course was instead built on the land and Grace states that "the protests over this land escalated until one Sunday, Eva Rickard and others occupied one of the greens on the golf course and held a church service there. This upset the golfers, who couldn't get on with their games and couldn't get a word in edgewise through the hymn singing, so they called the police.

Several people were arrested, and the whole matter was taken to court” (qtd. in Hereniko 69). Grace states that there was a nationwide interest in both this and the Bastion Point occupation of 1977, but also notes that she has also been attempting to retain her own family’s land which “has for many years been under one threat or another, from housing developers, industrial developers, shipping companies, local council, the lands and survey and conservation departments, all wanting a slice, or a reserve or public access” (qtd. in Hereniko 69). Therefore, while *Potiki* focuses upon two high-profile land disputes, it also describes the reality of many Maori communities who continue to struggle with Pakeha interest in their family’s land.

³ Patricia Grace suggests that both the Raglan and Bastion Point occupations “legitimized the political thread of *Potiki* that I began to work into the story” (qtd. in Hereniko 68). Bastion Point was “an area of prime land in Auckland from which the Ngati Whatua people had been removed in the 1940s, prior to their own houses being destroyed and their meeting house being burned down” (qtd. in Hereniko 68). Grace notes that when the 1970s government led by Robert Muldoon decided to construct high-cost housing on the land, the descendants of those who were originally disposed decided to occupy the land. It was only when hundreds of police and military personnel were sent to surround the occupation that it ended after a period of over five hundred days (in Hereniko 68-69). Grace notes that the death of a young child and a suicide in the community were tragedies that occurred as a result of the occupation, and indeed, the death of Toko in *Potiki* and the fires that are described as having occurred in the community’s meeting house are directly connected to the historical events at Bastion Point during the occupation. However, although the Ngati Whatua have secured some of their ancestral land, “not all issues to do with it have been resolved yet” (qtd. in Hereniko 69).

⁴ In *The Story of a Treaty* (2015), Claudia Orange offers a succinct account of the Moutoa Gardens occupation. The occupation “which lasted eighty days, from 28 February to 18 May 1995, drew attention to Maori claims for rights relating to the Whanganui River. For Maori, the park was a traditional fishing place called Pakaitore” (152). Orange also notes that “in February 2001, an agreement was made between the Whanganui District Council, the Crown and the local iwi Te Ati Haunui-a-Paparangi: there would be a joint management board to take care of the historic reserve” (152). David Young notes that much of the immediately available information surrounding the occupation at the Motuoa Gardens, or Pakaitore is contradictory (98). Despite this, the occupation can be viewed as “an assertion of rangatiratanga” (98), or, the right to exercise authority, chieftainship or self-determination. The protesters attempted to draw attention to the differing perceptions of the land as a commodity and the land as a “source of life” (99) and although the protest was a “direct “denial of Crown sovereignty and law”, it simultaneously “reasserted iwi traditional rights and obligations to care for the land” (Young 99).

⁵ Clare Barker notes that the event that Grace refers to in her Author’s Note was “part of a spate of medical scandals surrounding the removal and disposal of human organs” (159) in the early 2000s without the consent of their families. She points out that although the discovery involved both Maori and Pakeha, the unauthorised removal of Maori organs was considered to transgress the laws of tapu (159). In *Tikanga Maori*, Hirini Moko Mead also states that an individual’s head is “the most tapu part of a person” (31), which demonstrates why the unauthorised removal of a Maori child’s eyes would cause particular distress and demonstrate a lack of understanding of Maori cultural protocol that surrounds both life and death.

⁶ See chapter 14 of *Tangata Whenua: A History* (2015) for further information on the individual protests and occupations that occurred between 1970 and 1990. Here, Aroha Harris and Meilssa Matutina Williams note that “during the Second World War, the government had used emergency regulations to take Tainui Awhiro land at Raglan for an air strip. Despite assurances the land would be returned after the war, it was instead leased to the Raglan County Council and, from 1968, to the Raglan Golf Club. By then, it was too late for the Tainui Awhiro marae, gardens, homes and urupa, all of which had been destroyed” (373).

⁷ Irene Visser suggests that the oral narratives that Mahaki collects about Anapuke and the action that they provoke within the community form a “ceremonial act” (qtd. in Dodgson-Katiyo 293). She states that the storytelling that is central to *Baby No-Eyes* “contributes substantially to its overall significance as ‘words against death’ enabling a coming-to-terms with the violence and injustice of death and opening a path to renewed vitality” (293). Although the issue of Anapuke’s burial ground may not have been as widely reported as the Raglan and Bastion Point occupations, Grace still views the act of narrating and recording an event from a subjective and intimate point of view to be an important part of an individual’s relationship with New Zealand’s colonial history.

⁸ Grace is likely referring to the Human Genome Diversity Project here, which aimed to collect and store DNA from “‘genetically distinct’” indigenous populations around the globe” (Barker 1). See Clare Barker’s article “‘The Ancestors within’; Genetics, Biocolonialism, and Medical Ethics in Patricia Grace’s *Baby No-Eyes*” (2013).

⁹ As Alan Peterson notes, the traditionally collective Maori approach to land ownership extends into issues of bioethics and medical consent. He notes that “there

is a deep antipathy to the individualistic approach to consent that underlines most scientific research” (65). He further states that “collective consent is congruent with cultural values and collective decision-making and provides the opportunity for members to engage in debate about the significance of new technologies and their impact on Maori cultural values. It also provides a means for collectively resisting health technologies that detrimentally impact on Maori cultural norms and values” (65). Such a collective resistance is evident in the Anapuke protest, in which a community responded collectively to the use of Maori bodily material in scientific research and stated their case as a whole.

¹⁰ James Belich gives an excellent overview of the New Zealand Wars that were composed of “a series of conflicts involving the British, Imperial and colonial, and the Maori tribes of the North Island” (15). Lasting 27 years in total, Belich points out that “they were not, as is sometimes suggested, storms in a teacup or gentlemanly bouts of fisticuffs, but bitter and bloody struggles, as important to New Zealand as were the Civil Wars to England and the United States” (15).

¹¹ As Richard Boast notes in *Buying the Land, Selling the Land*, the Native Land Court that was established between 1862 and 1865 remains in use today (63). He states that “it is New Zealand’s oldest specialist tribunal” and adds that “the Land Court has long been, and remains, an important part of the New Zealand legal system” (63). However, the difficulties that Maori face in the court when attempting to secure the return of their tribal lands is well established. Boast notes that “in a celebrated phrase Hugh Kawharu once described it as an ‘engine of destruction for any tribe’s tenure of land, anywhere (64)’. Other writers have been even harsher in their criticisms, with Judith Binney going so far as to refer [to] the Native Lands Act 1865 as an ‘act of war’” (64). Boast complicates these understandings of the

Native Lands Act and the Native Lands Court in his analysis and points out that although they have come to represent some of the ways in which the Crown has failed Maori communities, this was not the intention of those who drafted the legislation and established the court. See Chapter Two of *Buying the Land, Selling the Land* for further information.

¹² Eva Rickard (1925-1997) led two of the more prominent Maori land protests: the occupation at Raglan golf course, and a protest against the Waitangi Day celebrations in 1984.

¹³ In “‘Bursting-Up’ the Greatest Estate of All”, Tom Brooking describes the loss of 3.1 million acres of Maori land through government land purchase between 1891 and 1911, though he notes that “most first-class land had passed from Maori hands by 1900” (167). He adds that “large scale land purchase was more effective as an agent of colonization than war” (167).

¹⁴ Hirini Moko Mead notes that when the foetus develops eyes the wairua does not simply form, it also develops the capacity to think. (54). After birth, a wairua can become damaged by the things that a person experiences over the course of his or her life (55) and it can also become detached from the body during the act of dreaming (54). It therefore occupies a liminal space between the material and immaterial worlds.

Chapter Three

¹ The title of Hulme’s novel is sometimes typed using lowercase letters only (*the bone people*). This is likely due to the fact that Hulme requested that the earliest editions of the novel be typed in that way. However, the titles of subsequent editions

have been typed using a combination of upper and lowercase letters and in this chapter, I will follow the standard of my own 1986 edition of the novel.

² Sarah Shieff offers insight into this debate in her essay “*the bone people: Contexts and Reception, 1984-2004*” (2007). In her opening remarks, she notes that “it seems that while many young New Zealanders are still drawn into the world it describes, a significant minority find it almost unreadable. Some are repelled by its violence; others find it too long and too hard to follow. Still others, especially those from non-English speaking backgrounds, find themselves terminally disconcerted by the book’s linguistic and structural idiosyncrasies” (143). Shieff describes many of the initial reviews of the novel as being characterised by a “messianic fervour” (145), particularly among Pakeha readers “who were more than ready for a fitting imaginative response to an era of profound social upheaval” (146). However, she points out that the act of “feel(ing)” bicultural (157), or mediating on one’s Pakeha identity is not enough to overcome the “intellectually demanding problems of historical injustice towards Maori” (157)

³ In “Keri Hulme’s *The Bone People*, and the Pegasus Award for Maori literature”, C.K. Stead acknowledges that most, if not all Maori writers were publishing their work in English rather than Maori. However, he claims that the prize should have been granted to a novel that was “considered ‘Maori’ not in language, or in form, but by virtue of the racial antecedents of the authors” (103). In “Why C.K. Stead didn’t like Keri Hulme’s *The Bone People: Who can Write as Other?*”, Margery Fee directly responded to Stead, describing his article as a polemic. In defence of Hulme, she suggests that the novel “threatens two related social constructs: that of [the] New Zealander and that of New Zealand literature, both worked out mainly by the national (mainly Pakeha and male literary tradition” (12).

Specifically addressing Stead's insistence upon cultural "authenticity", Fee points out that he reduces the complexities of cultural identity to a simplistic opposition between Maori and Pakeha, but concludes that the novel proffers a hybridised cultural model for New Zealand's future. I sketch this exchange here to illustrate the polarised reception of the novel upon its publication. Importantly, this polarisation seems to have at least partially arisen as a result of the critics' attention to Hulme's ethnic identity rather than to the novel itself.

The debate surrounding both Hulme's and Stead's cultural identity re-emerged in 1994, when C.K. Stead, who is a Pakeha writer and critic, was asked to edit *The Faber Book of Contemporary South Pacific Stories* (Te Punga Somerville 30). Te Punga Somerville notes that Albert Wendt (a Samoan poet), Witi Ihimaera, Patricia Grace, and Keri Hulme withdrew their work from publication in protest of Stead's role as editor (30). Both Wendt and Ihimaera had published anthologies prior to this and Te Punga Somerville points out that "as well as implicitly sidelining the achievements and capacity of these two as editors, the Faber anthology also failed to recognise that Wendt's and Ihimaera's earlier work as anthologists in the 1980s was instrumental in providing the opportunity for writers in the Faber collection to enjoy recognition in the first place" (31). Te Punga Somerville later complicates this reading by explaining that the Faber publication might offer other Pacific writers who had not had the opportunity to be anthologised a welcome sense of visibility. However, her account of the protest encapsulates the ongoing dispute in New Zealand surrounding both Maori and Pakeha writers' cultural identities.

⁴ As was the case with Toko in Patricia Grace's *Potiki*, Simon is sometimes read as a sacrificial, Christ-like figure. This reading derives from his name Simon Peter, which recalls that of the biblical figure who acted as a symbolic "rock" upon which

the church was then established. This reading, Otto Heim notes, “expels him from the ordinary people into some other world and thereby makes his pain meaningful as a condition of the empowerment of the three protagonists in terms of a resurrection” (67-68). However, he also points out that Hulme’s emphasis on the violence that Simon suffers roots him in the tangible, human world and exposes a tension in the novel between the material and the immaterial, the mythical and the real. Heim and other critics have also focused on the final section of the novel, in which Kerewin and Joe find “redemption” via their trust in a series of metaphysical, supernatural figures and events. See also: “Inside the Spiral: Maori Writing in English” (2005) by Judith Dell Panny.

⁵ Sarah Shieff notes that due to the political upheaval of the period, “the early 1980s [...] were ripe for a vision of a bicultural future for New Zealand, and *the bone people* seemed to provide such a vision” (147). She argues that “the novel shows that in order to reconfigure a purified ‘bone people’ [...] it is also necessary to reconfigure the institutions, beliefs and metaphors which constitute personal identity” (151). Biculturalism, then, is not as closely associated with race as it is with the construction of “hybrid identities based on choice” (151). See also: Maryanne Dever’s “Violence as Lingua Franca: Keri Hulme’s *The Bone People* (1989), Simon During’s “Postmodernism or Postcolonialism?” (1995), “The Void as Creative Metaphor” in Eva Rask-Knudsen’s *The Circle and the Spiral* (2004), and Erin Mercer’s “‘Frae ghosties an ghoulies deliver us’: Keri Hulme’s *the bone people* and the Bicultural Gothic” (2009).

⁶ In *Blood Narrative* (2002), Chadwick Allen argues that “*The Bone People*’s complex narrative is fundamentally a chronicle of Kerewin’s steps toward regaining her Maoritanga” (151), as does Michelle Keown in *Pacific Islands Writing* (2007).

See also: Janet Wilson's "Alan Duff, Brown Man's Burden?" (2008) in which she compares Hulme's and Duff's engagement with the Maoritanga alongside their different understandings of New Zealand's biculturalism.

⁷ One of the most notable examples of this occurs in chapter eight, when Hulme describes Joe's assault on Simon following his destruction of Kerewin's guitar. At the very beginning of this chapter, Simon's physical collapse is mirrored in the typesetting of the page, which appears as follows:

TRY

KEEP

A LITT

ill lon

guron

your fee

he slumps. (302)

Although this extract initially recalls Simon's brief, handwritten and fully capitalised notes that he uses to communicate, the "slippage" between lines, words and the upper and lowercase typefaces lead the reader to understand that we simultaneously "hear" Simon's thoughts and visualise his collapse.

⁸ Sarah Shieff recognises the connection between material objects and the formation of social bonds in Simon's life, noting that "he knows that possessions can connect you to people, or to a person, or to the past, and treats them accordingly" (156). However, although he collects objects that belong to Kerewin in order to maintain a sense of connection with her, he destroys those that he associates with a "dead past" (156). In doing so, he suggests that "'things' are only useful to the

degree that they enable closeness, but can cripple when they stand in the place of meaningful connection” (156).

⁹ Rask Knudsen argues that the novel’s main “metaphor of promise” (183-184) relates to Te Kore, which is most commonly associated with the beginning of the Maori creation myth. She argues that it gestures towards the movement “of nothingness turning into somethingness, of incipient thought turning into consciousness, of potential turning into ability” (184). This reading corresponds with my argument that *The Bone People* is a novel that is more concerned with narrative beginnings than narrative resolution.

¹⁰ In *The Oxford Companion to Scottish History* (2007), Michael Brown describes the broch as a defensive structure that, alongside other methods of fortification in Scotland more generally was revolutionised by the arrival of Anglo-French settlers and styles in the 12th century” (“Warfare, Weapons and Fortifications” n.pag.). Interestingly, he notes that alongside crannogs, hill forts and promontory forts, brochs “were probably quite widespread and often served as political centres as well as simple refuges” (“Warfare, Weapons and Fortifications” n.pag.). It is therefore clear why Kerewin might associate her tower with a broch (33) and why she becomes alarmed when she believes that her refuge has been breached by Simon, an intruder who she regards as “an enemy inside my broch... a burglar ensconced here” (33).

¹¹ Sarah Shieff argues that although spoken language is “usually regarded as a marker of authenticity, authority and ‘presence’ over and above the printed word” (153), this is not the case in Hulme’s novel. Simon’s inability to speak means that he must be present to communicate via the written word (153) and the fact that many of the novel’s “disaster[s]” (153) occur when Simon’s mode of communication proves

inadequate “points to a narrative anxiety about the usefulness of spoken language as a medium for communication at all” (153).

¹² The meeting house performs a similar array of functions, both practical and spiritually significant. As well as performing the role of a community’s “text”, it is a functional meeting place, a space for visitors to sleep, and a place in which important religious and spiritual ceremonies are held.

Chapter Four

¹ In an interview with Vilsoni Hereniko (1999), Duff states: “I don’t like the Maori agenda. I don’t mind being called a writer who is a Maori but I’m no Maori writer. I’m a very proud Maori but I’m no Maori writer” (128). Duff has distanced himself from the renaissance writers that I study here and has also said that he has little regard for academic or critical readings of his work. The critical reception of Duff’s work has been divided, as Jenifer Lawn points out in “Neoliberalism and the Politics of Indigenous Community in the Fiction of Alan Duff and Witi Ihimaera” (2011). Lawn writes that “in particular, the Maori intelligentsia shunned Duff as an Uncle Tom figure who betrayed the interests of his people by pursuing a highly individualist ethic and advancing a shallow understanding of the dynamics of colonialism” (91). The novel appealed to right-wing Pakeha, however, who “saw in Duff’s story of ethnic regeneration a parable of the values of self-belief, thrift, routine, work, self-control, and self-reflection” (91). Lawn goes on to argue that the polarised public reaction to the novel, alongside Duff’s sometimes abrasive public persona has not accommodated a nuanced reading that the novel.

² In an important essay entitled “Multiple Identifications and the Dialogical Self: Urban Maori Youngsters and the Cultural Renaissance” (2006), Toon Van Meijl

points out that although the Maori renaissance has bolstered the Maori political movements that have continued to develop in recent years it has also alienated those who feel unable to relate to the kind of Maori identity that these movements promote. Van Meijl argues that “many young Maori people are engaged in a psychological dialogue between, on the one hand, the classic model for a Maori identity that prescribes them to embrace traditional culture and, on the other hand, their personal identification as outcasts in daily practices of New Zealand society” (917).

³ For a thorough overview of the social and political context of this period, see Christina Stachurski’s analysis of Duff’s work in *Reading Pakeha?* See also: Janet Wilson’s “Alan Duff: Brown Man’s Burden?”

⁴ As Michaela Moura-Koçoğlu notes, “Duff regards adaptation to and integration into the changed socio-political and economic environment as critical in order to compete with fellow citizens on equal terms” (104). For Duff, the ongoing discourse surrounding New Zealand’s colonial past is pointless and Maori should instead engage with the Pakeha-dominated social order to further their advancement out of poverty and to improve their situations of exclusion from the social and political worlds. For further insight into the influence of Duff’s personal experiences on his work see his interview with Vilsoni Hereniko in *Inside Out*. See also: Otto Heim’s “Fall and Response: Alan Duff’s Shameful Autoethnography” (2007) for an analysis of the tension between Duff’s “appeal to the authority of first-hand experience and simultaneous disavowal of any autobiographical impulse” (5).

⁵ However, Duff’s “pugnacious stance” (Heim 2007 3) and open hostility towards literary critics has led to a relative lack of critical material on *Once Were Warriors*. Heim suggests that “while all of his books have been dutifully reviewed and there is

no shortage of interviews and portraits featuring him as a bestselling phenomenon and controversial public figure, hardly a handful of articles have engaged in any depth with his literary efforts” (2007 4). Although this has begun to change since the publication of Heim’s article in 2007, the article nonetheless demonstrates the impact that Duff’s public persona had on the critical literature of the period.

Heim’s article also offers an insightful analysis of the ways in which Duff uses his fiction as a way to respond to his critics. Heim refers to *Both Sides of the Moon* (1998) in his article, but *One Night Out Stealing* is another obvious example of how Duff engages with critical assessments of his work within his published fiction. *One Night Out Stealing* describes a robbery that two men carry out at the home of a wealthy Pakeha family, and although the Pakeha character, Jube, is characterised as violent and amoral, the Maori character, Sonny, achieves a new insight into the world via the objects of European high culture that he has stolen. While this rehearses the now familiar narrative of redemption and enlightenment that reoccurs in Duff’s work, his decision to characterise the Pakeha character as the “villain” of the novel is likely a response to the criticism surrounding his negative depictions of Maori in *Once Were Warriors*. In fact, Duff describes *One Night Out Stealing* as “a little crack at my critics” (in Hereniko 126), which supports Heim’s argument.

⁶ Janet Wilson notes that Duff “has since turned his back on the implications of the novel’s conclusion [...] and come out emphatically in favour of assimilation” (125).

⁷ In *The Circle and the Spiral*, Rask Knudsen describes *Once Were Warriors* and similar Aboriginal Australian novels of the period as “fringe novels”. She states that “the fringe is a diaspora in the absurd sense that Aboriginals – as well as many Maori

– live as urban exiles in their own country. Most fringe novels relate the mood of mental incarceration to physical displacement” (79).

⁸ Eva Rask Knudsen describes Grace as “sitting quite literally on the fringe of white society” (80) here.

⁹ In *Reading Pakeha?*, Christina Stachurski suggests that “Grace Heke serves to show that poverty is not simply economic, but also spiritual, emotional, and intellectual deprivation” (105).

¹⁰ In chapter 15, Te Tupaea describes the role of moko in traditional Maori warrior culture: “He told them of how the warriors of old used to have full-facial tattoos and on the nono – patting his rump with a smile – down to their knees, to signify their warriorhood” (180). As his speech continues, he associates moko with both masculinity and the warriors’ stoicism in the face of hardship and pain: “this process, people, this *manly* painful chiselling went on for months... but never did it occur to the warrior to show in sound or sight his terrible pain...” (180). He concludes by suggesting that the people of Pine Block have been enduring their pain “like slaves” (180), and “by the false courage of *beer*” (181).

¹¹ See www.booksinhomes.org.nz for more information about Duff’s charitable work surrounding child literacy in New Zealand. The Mission Statement of the programme states that “kids who can’t read become adults who can’t communicate and that’s a serious disadvantage in a world that operates on the written word” (n.pag). Duff’s claim that bookless homes contribute to the continued marginalisation of disadvantaged urban Maori communities is as evident here as it is in many of the novels that he has published since *Once Were Warriors*.

¹² See *Media and Ethnic Minorities* (2005) p. 52. See also Michelle Keown’s *Pacific Islands Writing* (2007) p. 106-107. Here, Keown points out that “in contrast

to Duff's 'filthy' and debased delinquents, the gang members in the film are represented as well-toned, shiny-leather-clad modern warriors" (106). She also notes that Tamahori changed the name of the gang to Toa Aotearoa, which "translates literally as 'warriors/champions of Aotearoa'" and suggests "a return to a traditional (and collective) Maori warrior ethic that presents a positive contrast to the destructive muscularity of Jake's wife-beating generation of Maori men" (106).

¹³ See Stachurski, p. 131 for further information.

¹⁴ One such crisis is described as the "energy crisis", or "oil crisis" of the 1970s. This derived from a sudden, steep rise in oil prices, which had a significant impact on New Zealand's industry and eventually led to a recession.

¹⁵ The closest that Duff comes to describing a communal "house" in Pine Block is the Brown Fists' gang house, which is described as "The House of Angry Belonging" in the title of chapter 11 (136). McClutchy's – the bar that Jake and many others in Pine Block frequent – also appears to form a community focal point of sorts. However, it, like the gang house is both a non-inclusive and socially destructive space. As a result, these spaces cannot be said to perform the same function as Kura's verandah or Kerewin's tower.

¹⁶ The contrast between Te Tupaea and Nig's moko becomes even more obvious when the mythical origins of the practice is taken into consideration. In "Mata Ora: Chiseling the Living Face" (2006), Ngahua Te Awekotuku describes the story of Mataora, a "jealous mortal chief" (122). In the story, Mataora falls in love with Niwareka, who is from the underworld. He beats Niwareka because he is "unsure of her love" (122) and she returns home while Mataora's tears cause his facepaint to run. Niwareka's family "mocked him as a vain and arrogant fool" (122) and upon repenting and promising to take care of Niwareka in future, Mataora's skin was

marked permanently. When the mythical origin of moko is taken into consideration, it appears even more at odds with Nig's design, since it can be said to have emerged from both a promise to cease violence and as an act of remorse for violent behaviour in the past. However, Nig receives his moko as a way of establishing his commitment to the often-brutal Brown Fist gang.

¹⁷ See: Michelle Keown's *Pacific Islands Writing* pp.105-107. See also, Eva Rask Knudsen's *The Circle and the Spiral*. Here, she argues that the title of *Once Were Warriors* has "referred ironically to the shallow and passive use of tradition as a mere slogan of indigeneity, but eventually [it] come[s] to signal a repossession of proud inheritances and the active move towards recentering fringe experiences through those legacies" (105)

¹⁸ Here, Beth is arguably influenced by the way that warriorhood is conceptualised within Pine Block when she points out that Te Tupaea is of average height and does not resemble what she perceives a warrior to be. Although he fulfils the role with a far greater understanding than any of the men who identify as warriors in Pine Block, Beth still perceives warriorhood superficially at this point in the novel.

¹⁹ Jennifer Lawn offers insight into some of the problems with Duff's description of Pine Block's assimilation into the dominant social order: "What Maori cultural nationalists despised most strenuously [...] was Duff's use of Te Tupaea as a mouthpiece for a Calvinist New Right morality. His parable of colonialism as a destructive storm offers a typical example. [...] This metaphor naturalises a series of massive and deliberate colonial injustices into an elemental accident, as well as eliding some of the trickier details" (92). She later complicates the more straightforward understanding of cultural assimilation that the "Duff detractors" (94) argue

for by focusing on the “renewed drive to deliver social services by Maori, for Maori” (94). While Beth’s initial efforts resembled this kind of drive, I am most interested in the kinds of social services that Te Tupaea claims to deliver to Pine Block and what this means for them politically as a community.

²⁰ Christina Stachurski points out that “during New Zealand’s early colonial period, one of rugby’s functions was to contain European men’s (assumed) belligerence by channelling it into sport, a controlled, ‘healthy’ and ‘safe’ situation” (103). It is therefore interesting that one of the initiatives that is highlighted at the end of *Once Were Warriors* is Mr Trambert’s provision of a new rugby field. Stachurski suggests that this field “is an arena in which general pan-Maori warriorhood will be played out” (104), which implies that it will enable the performance of Maori warrior identity in what is believed to be a “healthy” and “safe” way.

²¹ In *Writing Along Broken Lines*, Otto Heim observes that Te Tupaea’s vision for the community of Pine Block is reductive and might even cause further damage to the fabric of the community. He states: “The best use that can be made of Maori culture, it is implied, lies in controlling the violent propensities inherent in the racial genes and directing this aggressiveness into harmless and socially constructive paths. Such a reduction of Maori culture to a warrior ethos leaves no room for an indigenous sense of production and economy that would sustain a society beyond the pride it takes in its past” (49).

²² I have noted elsewhere that Duff’s work is frequently contradictory, which is particularly evident in his engagement with the figure of the kaumatua. In *Once Were Warriors*, Te Tupaea is heralded as a cultural expert who can guide the people of Pine Block towards the appropriate means of cultural expression and self-

identification. However, in *Maori: The Crisis and the Challenge* (1993) Duff suggests that “to be winners, we need winners to lead us. Not this tired old lot of loser elders, pig-ignorant kaumatua who know simply nothing about anything outside their tiny little Maoritanga orbit” (118). Duff’s comments are representative of a broader series of contradictions that are present throughout his work.

²³ In his study of Maori identity in underprivileged urban communities, Toon Van Meijl describes the establishment of training programmes for unemployed young Maori people on maraes. Here, the people attending would not only learn skills relating to their future employment, but the protocols and practices of life on a marae also. However, as Van Meijl notes, “Underlying the ‘cultural’ component of training courses [...] was also an assumption that marae practices are emblematic for a Maori identity. When you are unable to join in, you are not considered a genuine Maori” (918). Van Meijl’s comments are both interesting and relevant to the cultural context of Duff’s novel. As Van Meijl points out, a computer training course (which is the example used in his article) is not simply about learning how to use a computer when it is held on a marae. Instead, it becomes imbued with a cultural significance and a sense that one’s cultural identity and sense of self depends on being able to understand and successfully perform the kinds of cultural practices that are associated with marae life. The woman in Van Meijl’s example struggled to fully relate to the identity that had been proposed there and came to the conclusion that “she was not a ‘real’ Maori or a ‘good’ Maori, as the local idiom goes” (918). For her, being Maori meant as quoted in Van Meijl’s article “living in a tin shack and being poor” (918) and as he notes “her sense of self as Maori was rooted predominantly in the feeling of being an outcast in New Zealand society” (918). The woman described in the article articulates many of the problems that Duff articulates

in *Once Were Warriors*, but in doing so also gestures towards some of the reasons why the revival in Duff's fictional community will likely be unsuccessful.

²⁴ This is likely deliberate, since in *Maori: The Crisis and the Challenge* Duff argues that the Maori oral tradition has led to a quality "of *unthinkingness*" (6) within traditional Maori communities. He states that "the Maori of old, as of now, never had to think for himself; his decisions were made for him. His knowledge, all that he'd likely need was already learnt orally off by heart by the select holders of knowledge" (6). His criticism of the Maori oral tradition as anachronistic extends to Maori material arts, as he asks: "will learning the traditional flax weaving arts, the carving skills, give its students an in-depth knowledge of global financial affairs? Will a long-winded speech in Maori do anything to assist a massive Futures trade on the New York stock exchange?" (52). His comments not only reinforce the incoherence of his account of the role of Maori culture in *Once Were Warriors* and elsewhere, they also demonstrate why he has not formally engaged with Maori material arts and architecture in his work like the other writers considered here.

²⁵ See Sarah Shieff's essay "*the bone people*: Contexts and Reception, 1984-2004" for further commentary on both literary critics' and the reading public's response to Hulme's novel.

²⁶ Although Duff claims that Maori art is in many ways anachronistic, I am reminded of the recent flourishing of Maori art that draws from both new and old styles and forms. For instance, an artist like George Nuku produces carvings that are very clearly derived from meeting house art, but he frequently works in unorthodox mediums like plexiglass. In a carving of an ancestor, for instance, the plexiglass might even be inset with shell or bone, so that that the old and new materials compliment each other. Furthermore, when Nuku works in plexiglass, the familiar,

curvilinear Maori carvings are made transparent. The viewer can peer through them, beyond the image or design depicted in the carving while still maintaining a connection to it also. Nuku, like many of the writers considered here, perceives Maori cultural tradition as being open to change. It is not an anachronism to which he remains tied, nor is the act of altering some of its forms disrespectful. Instead, it is a means of engaging with what is a changing, fluid sense of Maori identity.

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