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**‘Entitled to a History’:  
The World of Alice Tawhai’s Short Stories  
and the Maori Literary Tradition**

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of

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in

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## Abstract

New Zealand short story writer Alice Tawhai is one of the latest additions to the Maori literary tradition. Her three collections of short stories, *Festival of Miracles*, *Luminous* and *Dark Jelly*, deal with issues not entirely unique to New Zealand – from gang life, to domestic violence, to drug and alcohol abuse – and take as their primary subject an alienated, marginalized and disenfranchised underclass. This means she is likely to be read as speaking solely for the Maori experience.<sup>1</sup> This thesis will revise this misconception, which in effect ghettoizes or marginalizes Tawhai's work.

Influential women writers of the Maori literary tradition, such as J. C. Sturm, Patricia Grace and Keri Hulme, have taken a particular interest in the long legacy of colonialism in New Zealand, especially of the impact of that legacy on Maori women. This thesis demonstrates that while Tawhai's work engages with these familiar notions, her gaze is not limited to these issues. This thesis therefore places Tawhai's work within that tradition and matrilineal genealogy before going on to show how she moves the paradigm beyond the usual grievances of biculturalism and colonialism, orienting her work instead around the increasingly multicultural experience of contemporary life in New Zealand.

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<sup>1</sup> See, Wareham, Louise, 'Festival of Miracles by Alice Tawhai', *Leaf Salon* (16/05/2005) <[http://www.leafsalon.co.nz/archives/000670festival\\_of\\_miracles\\_by\\_alice\\_tawhai.html](http://www.leafsalon.co.nz/archives/000670festival_of_miracles_by_alice_tawhai.html)> [accessed 01/06/2013].

The first section of this thesis will establish a platform for reading Tawhai in regards to her literary legacy and in the context of contemporary thinking, drawing on cultural theorist Stuart Hall and his theory on identity formation and identity politics as well as indigenous writings experts Patrick Evans and Chadwick Allen. This thesis will then move into its second section, which is an analysis of some of the overarching themes that can be found in the short stories of Tawhai's literary foremothers, Sturm, Grace and Hulme. These include, for example, racism and discrimination, loss of ancestral lands, problems to do with urbanization and family violence.

The third and final section of this thesis will then consider Tawhai's representation of contemporary experience, taking a particular interest in her portrayals of contemporary multicultural ethnic identities as well as the flexible and provisional nature of gendered and sexual identities today. The final subsection will then analyze her representations of the new family and social structures that may have replaced the traditional family model.

Through a close reading of her short stories and an appreciation of the legacy that she bears, this thesis will show how Tawhai's work is a larger lens of contemporary New Zealand society as well as a significant addition to the Maori literary tradition.

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This project was a group effort and so is dedicated to the people who helped it become a reality.

Ko koe ki tena

Ko au ki tenei

Ki wai o te kete

You hold that handle

And I'll hold this handle

And together we will carry the kete.

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‘When the winds of change are blowing they leave pathways that we must  
follow as best we can’.

*Te Ao Marama: Volume IV*, Witi Ihimaera

Dedicated to those writers who tread the path before Tawhai and to those  
who are yet to come.





## Tawhai and the Short Story in New Zealand

### **‘A writer with an unmistakable talent for short fiction’<sup>2</sup>**

New Zealand short story writer Alice Tawhai was the writer, reviewer and editor, Philippa Jamieson was praising in her 2005 review, just one of the many reviews that accompanied the release of Tawhai’s first short story collection, *Festival of Miracles* (2005).<sup>3</sup> Her second collection, *Luminous*, followed in 2007,<sup>4</sup> and was a finalist in the fiction category of the Montana New Zealand Book Awards in 2008. Her most recent collection, *Dark Jelly*, appeared in 2011.<sup>5</sup>

Many people are not aware that Alice Tawhai is a pseudonym the author uses to protect her true identity. Other than the one photo she supplied herself for David Larsen’s New Zealand Herald interview in 2007<sup>6</sup> – where she is seen taking a photo of herself in the mirror, the camera placed perfectly to hide her face – there are no other images available of her. She avoids posing for photos as well as attending literary festivals or book signings and does this because she does not want people ‘focusing on her rather than on the work’.<sup>7</sup> The only way we know for certain she is of Maori

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<sup>2</sup> Philippa Jamieson, ‘Life between the lines’, *Dominion Post*, 18 June 2005, p. E11.

<sup>3</sup> Alice Tawhai, *Festival of Miracles* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Alice Tawhai, *Luminous* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Alice Tawhai, *Dark Jelly* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> David Larsen, ‘Alice in the Looking Glass’, *New Zealand Herald*, 15 September 2007, p. 53.

<sup>7</sup> Larsen, p. 53.

descent is because her Tainui and Ngā Puhi heritage are one of the few things shared about her on the Huia webpage.<sup>8</sup> In an interview with Huia's Publishing Manager, Brian Bargh, this fact was reconfirmed.<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that with the option of taking up whatever identity she desired, Tawhai chose that of a Maori woman. She is very much a Maori woman writer.

The decision to take up such an identity comes with certain expectations, however, expectations associated with that particular identity. In distinguishing herself as such Tawhai placed her work amongst those of great Maori women writers such as J. C. Sturm, Patricia Grace and Keri Hulme. These women writers took a particular interest in the long and lingering legacy of colonialism in New Zealand, especially the impact of that legacy on Maori, as well as the need for there to be less stereotypical and more nuanced portrayals of Maori and the Maori experience within literature. It is, in part, through their works and efforts that an identity for Maori women writers was founded, an identity based on this shared preoccupation with the mistreatments and injustices being done to the Maori people. In choosing the pseudonym she did, Tawhai became one of the latest in this long legacy, her work being affiliated with that of her literary foremothers as well as being held to the same expectations and assumptions attached to such a specific identity.

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<sup>8</sup> 'Huia Author' in Huia <<http://www.huia.co.nz/?pg=107&authorid=156>> [accessed 23/09/2013].

<sup>9</sup> An interview with Brian Bargh, 28/06/2013.

It is not only her decision to be recognized as a Maori woman writer that places her within this literary line however. Many of her short stories also engage with issues prominent in the works of Sturm, Grace and Hulme; issues such as urbanization, loss of ancestral land, domestic violence, the production of bicultural identities and the effect these problems can have on Maori. Combined with her choice in pseudonym, Tawhai is often seen as speaking solely for the Maori experience, her short stories depicting the increasingly multicultural experiences of contemporary New Zealand, going largely ignored or overlooked. I intend to show how Tawhai is helping shift the paradigm, set in part by her literary forebears, by introducing in her works preoccupations relevant to her time such as multicultural ethnic identities, provisional gendered and sexual identities as well as new family structures that may have replaced the traditional family unit.

I will do this by first placing Tawhai's work within the context of that matrilineal line. In the following section of this thesis, I will show how that lineage and literary tradition originated with Sturm in the 1950s and was then added to by Grace and her work produced during the Maori Renaissance of the 1970s to the mid-1980s. Both writers' works show an interest in their people's experiences with racial discrimination however Sturm's short fiction is focused on their resultant feelings of alienation whilst Grace takes a more in-depth look at the causes behind such prejudices. Grace also includes within her literary gaze her people's experiences with domestic violence as well as their feelings of dislocation due to the loss of ancestral lands. Hulme's often-overlooked short story collection *Te Kaihau*, published in 1986,

reinforces the tradition Sturm and Grace helped establish by taking a more focused and consistent approach to the various problems of early city life, specifically, the systemic racism many urban Maori migrants encountered and which made it impossible for them to attain the ideal city lifestyle they left their rural homes for. I find these various contributions to the Maori literary tradition by Sturm, Grace and Hulme helped set the precedent or standard Tawhai's work is now being compared to and judged by. In the concluding section of this thesis I will therefore explore how Tawhai engages in some of the overarching themes found within their works before discussing how her short fiction introduces new precedents to this tradition and matrilineal line by portraying the increasingly multicultural experiences of contemporary life in New Zealand.

The short fiction Sturm, Grace and Hulme have produced can be seen as a type of conversation that has been had over time where they have been able to express the various issues and concerns they felt to be significant to their people, at the time they were writing. While some of the themes and ideas they discuss in their texts are unique to their specific works, others cross over into the fiction of their peers, helping to form that standard to which Tawhai's work is now being compared to and judged by. What this thesis intends to show is that Tawhai is one of the latest entrants to this conversation or one of the latest additions to this legacy by way of her choice of identity as well as her use of specific themes. What her work offers, however, is the opportunity to re-evaluate and renegotiate the direction this korero is heading by introducing new opinions as well as new perspectives

that are more representative of contemporary life in New Zealand. Another way in which we can view Tawhai's literary heritage as well as her contribution to it is through the concept of te taura tangata.

## **Te Taura Tangata: The Rope of the People, The Rope of the Maori**

### **Literary Tradition**

Witi Ihimaera explained the concept of te taura tangata in his interview with Jane Wilkinson. He described it as being ‘the rope of man’<sup>10</sup> and that the various strands that make up this rope represent that man’s ancestors as well as his current, living family. To him, ‘the rope of man’ represents the coming together of all the various aspects, elements and people that make an individual who they are. I would like to suggest that we take this concept and apply it to the Maori literary tradition.

The writers apart of the Maori literary tradition, and the content of their stories, have left us with a unique body of work. From its outset, there has been a shared preoccupation with representing the various experiences had by Maori in the wake of colonialism and so issues and themes that are generally present within these texts include feelings of disempowerment and dislocation, forced assimilation and subsequent feelings of alienation, casual racism and discrimination especially within the work place and the negative stereotyping of Maori within literature. They may also deal with issues such as the loss of ancestral land, language and cultural knowledge, the lack of employment opportunities as well as the chance for advancement, the inability to access sufficient health facilities and an education, inadequate living conditions, the construction of bicultural identities, the halt in the

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<sup>10</sup> Jane Wilkinson, ‘Witi Ihimaera – Interview’, *Kunapipi*, 7.1 (1985), 98-110 (p. 100).

transmission of whakapapa that came with the post-war urban migration as well as domestic violence, gang life and drug and alcohol abuse. Because of these lingering remnants of colonization, the importance of the marae and whanau is also highlighted within many of these texts as well as the significance of traditional beliefs, myths and legends and the need for that knowledge to be recognized and appreciated by being applied to everyday life. Combined these themes represent the diverse strands that bind this body of literature together and give it form and shape.

Strum, Grace and Hulme help foster these generalizations within their own works, specifically, through their short story collections. In *The House of the Talking Cat* (1983), Sturm shows a particular interest in her people's encounters with casual racism and how that can leave them feeling, at times, alienated from the people around them, from their Maori heritage and from the society that has replaced their own. In Grace's *Waiariki* (1975), *Dream Sleepers* (1980) and *Sky People* (1994), she shows a similar concern with her people's experiences with casual racism and discrimination but she also includes within her gaze the reality that is domestic violence for many Maori as well as their feelings of dislocation due to the loss of ancestral land. While many of these issues can be attributed to problems to do with urbanization, it is Hulme who takes the more focused, direct approach to the consequences of that post-war urban migration, in her *Te Kaihau: The Windeater* (1986). In it she focuses on the consequences of the systemic racism urban Maori migrants had to endure, such as poor living conditions, lack of employment opportunities, racism and discrimination, loss of education as well as a



higher chance for promiscuity, substance and alcohol abuse and the overall abandonment of a belief that there is a more ideal lifestyle available to them, than the one they left behind. Taken as a whole, Sturm, Grace and Hulme's works show an interest in the impact of colonialism on all the various facets of their people's lives, their bodies as well as their minds, and represent some of the strands that make up the rope that is the Maori literary tradition.

Tawhai's short stories strengthen this rope in the way they reinforce those themes and tropes referenced to in the works of her literary forebears however her work also takes into consideration the whole expanse of multicultural, contemporary New Zealand society and issues. In doing so, her short fiction is helping set the Maori literary tradition on a course it has never been on before. Her work, one of the latest strands in the Maori literary tradition's *taura tangata*, is bringing with it new aspects, new ideas, new issues and new concerns, that can enrich the tradition, validate what her literary foremothers have already contributed and strengthen the rope, as a whole. In order to do this however one must first establish a platform for reading the works of Sturm, Grace, Hulme and Tawhai, in the context of contemporary thinking.

## Platform for Reading Sturm, Grace, Hulme and Tawhai

One framework in which to interpret the works of these Maori women writers is that offered by Miriama Evans who argued that there is a distinct connection between fiction and the society it springs from. In a comment made in 1985 she explained the function literature could have in divulging information about society:

Sociological study of literature indicates that there is a patterned connection between society and fiction which provides information about society, its institutions, social structure and technology. In a more subtle way fiction imparts information about values and attitudes.<sup>11</sup>

Witi Ihimaera took this one step further when he commented in his introduction to the first volume of his *Te Ao Marama* series that for literature produced by Maori writers in particular there is an inherent connection between text and context as the function of such literature is to not only reflect society, and all its various aspects, but to critique it as well. To highlight the significance of context he remarked that one 'cannot view the work of the times without placing it against the reality it has sprung from'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Miriama Evans, 'Politics and Maori Literature', *Landfall*, 39 (1985), 40-45, (p. 42).

<sup>12</sup> Witi Ihimaera, Haare Williams, Irihapeti Ramsden and D. S. Long, eds., *Te Ao Marama: Contemporary Maori Writing. Volume 1. Te Whakahuatanga O Te Ao: Reflections of Reality* (Auckland: Reed Books, 1993), p. 15.

The 'reality' he is discussing here is the grim situation his people found themselves to be in politically, socially and economically as a result of colonialism and so literature served not only as a means by which to portray his people's experiences in relation to these problems but also to critique the dominant culture that was allowing these to occur. Maori literature therefore had to serve a political purpose. It had to actively fight and challenge the colonial enterprise by highlighting these issues and by so doing then help bring about social awareness and effect social change. Ihimaera demonstrates this in his own works, in particular, his short story collections *The New Net Goes Fishing* (1977),<sup>13</sup> *Dear Miss Mansfield* (1989)<sup>14</sup> and his novel *The Matriarch* (1986).<sup>15</sup>

With this new understanding we now have a way of viewing those short stories written by Sturm, Grace, Hulme and Tawhai. For Tawhai's literary foremothers their texts reveal something about the societies they were living in at the time they were writing and also grant an insight into some of the difficulties their people were experiencing during those periods. In Sturm's 'Where to, Lady?' her main character, Sally, is actively discriminated against and made to feel alienated by her Pakeha peers and acquaintances because of her Maori heritage. In Grace's 'Journey', her main character suffers from feelings of dislocation after he is informed his land is

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<sup>13</sup> Witi Ihimaera, *The New Net Goes Fishing* (London: Heinemann, 1977).

<sup>14</sup> Witi Ihimaera, *Dear Miss Mansfield: A Tribute to Katherine Mansfield Beauchamp* (Auckland, New Zealand: Viking, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> Witi Ihimaera, *The Matriarch* (Auckland, New Zealand: Heinemann, 1986).

about to be confiscated by developers and his family forcefully relocated and in Hulme's 'While My Guitar Gently Sings', Hinewai experiences disappointment and disillusionment time and time again as she realizes her ideal urban lifestyle is not able to become a reality because of systemic racism in the city. As Evans explained, their short stories could mirror their realities or their people's very real, lived experiences with these lingering remnants of colonization and in doing so stand as a type of criticism of that colonizing culture. This fulfills that obligatory political element Ihimaera mentioned was necessary for literature written by Maori authors as they actively challenged Pakeha hegemony at the time they were writing whilst also calling attention to their people's concerns and grievances. One example of how Tawhai is shifting the paradigm her literary forebears helped establish is in the way her work is not solely focused on this resistance and rectification but is also concerned with reflecting the multicultural experiences of contemporary life in New Zealand.

In *Patrons of Maori Culture*, Steven Webster describes the way of life many Maori found themselves to be living after colonization and urbanization as being a 'whole way of struggle...often not attractive or reassuring'.<sup>16</sup> Patrick Evans expands on this theory in his article "'Pakeha-Style Biculturalism" and the Maori Writer' by explaining the harsh reality of life Webster was implying and what it included: 'incest, neglect of children,

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<sup>16</sup> Steven Webster, *Patrons of Maori Culture: Power, Theory and Ideology in the Maori Renaissance* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1998), p. 225.

the effects of drugs and alcohol [and] larger threats to the larger family'.<sup>17</sup> Violence would also not be out of place on this list especially domestic violence.

What this thesis intends to show is that the short stories written by Grace, Hulme and Tawhai, epitomize this theory. They reflect Webster's 'whole way of struggle' in the way they highlight some of the issues their people were experiencing at the time they were writing. Their works often dealt with those issues that are disturbing and uncomfortable for the reader but are necessary when trying to portray a reality as lived and experienced by many Maori. For Grace and Hulme in particular, their portrayals were utilized in order to incite public awareness, promote social change and help improve the living situations of their people. In a casual, almost offhand way, Grace makes reference to instances of crime, substance abuse as well as domestic violence, in her 'Letters from Whetu', in order to show the prevalence of such issues in the lives of many Maori and Polynesian youths. In her 'The Knife and the Stone', Hulme depicts her young protagonist's world as being one filled with drug and alcohol fuelled parties as well as sexual abuse from her father and the destructive influence of such a lifestyle. For Tawhai much of her short fiction is also interested in reflecting this way of life for many of her people, however her work also shows a keen interest in the struggles of other ethnicities and minorities within contemporary New Zealand and so this thesis will take into consideration those short stories that

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<sup>17</sup> Patrick Evans, "Pakeha-Style Biculturalism" and the Maori Writer', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 24.1 (2006), 11-35 (p. 24).

move away from portraying solely Webster's 'whole way of struggle' theory for Maori.

In his *Blood Narrative*, Chadwick Allen offers us another framework in which we can place Sturm, Grace, Hulme and Tawhai's work, in his description of the type of indigenous writers, writing after the Second World War. He puts post World War II indigenous writing into two distinct categories, two separate 'forms of political opposition',<sup>18</sup> direct and indirect:

Unlike direct opposition, which openly confronts dominant power, an indirect or "symbolic" opposition works to rally indigenous minority peoples around emblematic representations of their communities and cultures without unduly provoking government sanction or negative public opinion. Indirect opposition thus can provide a relatively quiet but nonetheless essential period "preparatory" to a more direct "politics of embarrassment".<sup>19</sup>

He calls this group of indirect writers the 'first generation to move in such large numbers into the "enemy territory" of the dominant society and its discourses'.<sup>20</sup> For the purposes of this thesis I intend to show how Sturm was a part of this essential 'first generation' of indirect writers Allen argued helped establish a Maori voice and identity within literature, which then

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<sup>18</sup> Chadwick Allen, *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts* (United States of America: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 28.

<sup>19</sup> Allen, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> Allen, p. 27.

prepared the way for the success of the more vocal, confrontational and direct writers of the Maori Renaissance. I intend to illustrate how Sturm was central to this form of indirect opposition in the way she shared her people's experiences with casual racism as well as their feelings of alienation because of it and did so delicately and on the sly so as not to overly alarm or embarrass those to whom her criticisms were about. Some of the ways in which she did this was in her use of metaphors and in withholding the ethnicities of her characters as 'The Too Good Memsahib' and 'Where to, Lady?' attest. It is only through the interactions her characters have with their peers that we are able to discern their Maori heritage. This thesis will demonstrate how Sturm's work and her indirect approach towards it helped establish the foundation Allen said was necessary for those more direct, confrontational Maori woman writers such as Grace and Hulme, to then build upon in order to more blatantly criticize Pakeha hegemony and portray, without restrictions, their people's various experiences in the wake of colonialism.

For Grace and Hulme, they helped move the Maori literary tradition and the paradigm Sturm helped establish from one of indirect opposition to a more open, direct and confrontational form of resistance and social criticism. For Tawhai, her work follows the same pattern identified by Allen and appropriated by her more recent literary foremothers in the direct approach she takes when portraying the problems and voicing some of the concerns afflicting her people today. However, this thesis will show that she is extending Allen's methodology by including the experiences of other

ethnicities and minorities to her fiction and taking, for her approach, a direct one, when reflecting some of the problems and issues they are encountering while living in contemporary New Zealand. Issues that are explored include feelings of alienation, dislocation and shame; experiences with prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping and confusion over the relevance of maintaining one's cultural legacy in a new, modernized setting.

As two of the sections of this thesis will be analyzing Tawhai's particular interest in the concept of identity within the context of contemporary life in New Zealand, I will also be drawing on cultural theorist Stuart Hall and his work concerning identity formation and identity politics. Chiefly his theory that identities are not fixed phenomena but are locked in an ongoing process of change, shifting and transforming themselves; reconfiguring, repositioning and restructuring themselves according to the desires of the individual as well as the 'play' of external factors on that individual such as culture, history, economics and power, and more especially during this day and age. Hall explains his thinking in the introduction to his and Paul du Gay's *Questions of Cultural Identity*, where he says:

It accepts that identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic,



discourses, practices and positions...and are constantly in the process of change and transformation.<sup>21</sup>

It is this idea in the flexible, fluid and provisional nature of identities that I find to be most applicable to Tawhai who takes a particular interest in the transformative nature of gendered and sexual identities as well as the shift from bicultural to multicultural ethnic identities, which can be seen within the context of contemporary life in New Zealand. We can see this in 'Pluto' where her female protagonist is struggling to come to terms with the consequences of her new identity after her sex reassignment surgery as well as in 'Pink Frost', where again, her female protagonist is struggling to be recognized and accepted as a woman simply because she was born with an intersex condition. Hall's theory that identities are also too complex to be defined by such simple binary oppositions as male and female, heterosexual and homosexual and Maori and Pakeha, will also be a significant tool when exploring Tawhai's short stories.

Before that however and with these new structures and frameworks in place we now have a sufficient springboard for discussing the works of her literary foremothers, Sturm, Grace and Hulme. From there we will then be able to place Tawhai within that matrilineal line to show just how she has added to that korero, contributed to the Maori literary tradition's taura

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<sup>21</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Introduction: Who Needs Identity?' *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds., Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996), pp. 1-17 (p. 4).

tangata and helped shift the paradigm for Maori women writers of short fiction.

## Legacy of Her Literary Foremothers

### J. C. Sturm: 'the enigmatic presence amongst us'<sup>22</sup>

Born Jacqueline Cecilia in 1927, J. C. Sturm enjoyed a writing career that spanned nearly fifty years and broke much ground for Maori women writers. Her short story, 'For All the Saints', published in 1955, was the first short story written in English by a Maori writer to be published in *Te Ao Hou*. C. K. Stead included 'For All the Saints' in his 1966 anthology of New Zealand short fiction,<sup>23</sup> which made Sturm the first Maori writer to be selected for such a collection and her first compilation of short stories, *The House of the Talking Cat*, would have been the first short story collection written by a Maori woman to be published had its publication not been held up until 1983 due to the inconspicuousness of indigenous writers during the 1950s and 1960s. Ihimaera went on to praise Sturm in his review of *The House of the Talking Cat* as being 'a 'pivotal presence in the Maori literary tradition'.<sup>24</sup>

I find Sturm stands at the head of Tawhai's matrilineal line and the standard her short fiction is now being compared to and judged by as her works set the foundation stones for future writers of the Maori literary tradition to build upon. Otto Heim commented in his *Writing Along Broken*

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<sup>22</sup> Witi Ihimaera. Review of *The House of the Talking Cat* in *Listener*, 17 March 1984, pp. 91-92.

<sup>23</sup> C. K. Stead, ed., *New Zealand Short Stories: Second Series* (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1966).

<sup>24</sup> Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie, eds., *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 518.

*Lines*, that Sturm's fiction 'indicated a direction that many Maori stories would follow',<sup>25</sup> especially Maori women writers and their stories; while Witi Ihimaera remarked in his *Where's Waari?* that it was Sturm who 'marked out the path' the 'new generation of writers followed'.<sup>26</sup>

How she did this was in the way she critiqued the colonial order and voiced her people's experiences and grievances with that establishment indirectly, crafting her criticisms and subtextual messages subtly and hidden within her fiction. As the Maori literary tradition was only in its infancy during the time she was first writing and being published, she and other writers of Maori fiction were required to 'smuggle their messages past the parent culture',<sup>27</sup> as Patrick Evans described it in his *The Long Forgetting*. This meant that in order to be published and yet fulfill the political requirements and obligations Ihimaera said was the responsibility of all Maori fiction, they had to approach their social criticisms in a type of kid-glove manner. Despite her tentative, indirect approach however, her work still reflects her people's various grievances with colonialism and still carries with it those same messages of resistance, those same feelings of fostered inequality and that same spirit of social critique, which can be seen in the works of her literary descendants.

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<sup>25</sup> Otto Heim, *Writing Along Broken Lines: Violence and Ethnicity in Contemporary Maori Fiction* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1998), p. 229.

<sup>26</sup> Witi Ihimaera, ed., *Where's Waari? A History of the Maori through the Short Story* (Auckland: Reed Books, 2000), pp. 9-12 (p. 11).

<sup>27</sup> Patrick Evans, *The Long Forgetting: Post-colonial Literary Culture in New Zealand* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2007), p. 188.

One of the ways in which she did this was through her depictions of Maori life at the time she was writing, in particular, her people's experiences with casual racism and their feelings of alienation. The type of alienation Sturm is concerned with here is that which Powhiri Wharemarāma Rika-Heke described in her essay as being 'an alienation from our [Maori] culture', a type of 'imposed alienation through colonization'.<sup>28</sup> Sturm extends on this in her short fiction in the way she deconstructs her Maori characters' feelings of alienation to an inability to participate fully in the new society that forcefully replaced their own or to find acceptance by that society and its people. Because of this they feel out of place, cut off and isolated from the people around them, unwanted, awkward, insignificant and insecure and for those urban Maori living in the city they also have to deal with feelings of disconnection from their rurally based Maori culture and, at times, shame because of their differences in a predominantly Pakeha setting. The way Sturm went about portraying these issues is significant, as many of her characters are not marked as being Maori. The only way the reader is able to distinguish them as such is through their interactions with others. The reader is only made alert to their ethnicity or their ethnicity is only registered by the way they are treated.

We can see this clearly in her short story 'Where to, Lady?' first published in *Numbers 2* in 1954 before being republished in *The House of the*

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<sup>28</sup> Powhiri Wharemarāma Rika-Heke, 'Margin or Center? "Let me tell you! In the Land of my Ancestors I am the Centre": Indigenous Writing in Aotearoa', in *English Postcoloniality: Literatures from Around the World*, ed. by Radhika Mohanram and Gita Rajan (London: Greenwood Press, 1996), pp. 147-163 (p. 156).

*Talking Cat*.<sup>29</sup> Sally, the protagonist of this story, is trying to escape what she feels to be her dull life for one afternoon so drops by one of the homes of her 'nearest friends' (*HTC*, p. 18) for afternoon tea. The irony behind this becomes evident as their encounter progresses. Keeping in mind Sturm does not divulge Sally's ethnicity to the reader, it is her treatment by her friends that reveals she is Maori or at least part. When she is first escorted into the living room the tone of the husband's comment acts as a type of marker for her ethnic identity and is more revealing than what is actually being said:

"What a pretty dress," said the man as I walked into the living-room, and he did some deft juggling with a baby, a book, and a teddy-bear.

"How clever of you to wear a girdle instead of a belt, much more becoming with that, and your sandals – my dear, where *did* you get those sandals?" (*HTC*, p. 18).

The condescending, patronizing tone here is not lost on the reader neither are the implications he is making by calling attention to her choice in outfit. In complimenting her and the 'girdle' she is wearing, he is in fact criticizing her body shape and suggesting she has a full figure, perhaps because she is Maori or at least part. In calling attention to her sandals he is also implying, indirectly, that someone of her ethnic heritage cannot possibly afford proper shoes and so sandals is respectable enough.

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<sup>29</sup> J. C. Sturm, 'Where to, Lady?' *The House of the Talking Cat* (Wellington: Spiral, 1983), pp. 17-24. All other references will be to this edition.

Although her 'nearest friends' treat her like a type of inferior curiosity they still see Sally as a credit to her race nonetheless. Throughout her visit though the husband and wife constantly highlight the differences between them such as their dissimilar tastes in liquid beverages and literature and when Sally tries to make polite conversation by expressing herself they draw attention to her interests and attack them for being different. The overall tone of this encounter is disturbing in the way Sally's friends treat her like someone less than themselves, like a pet or an oddity. She is made to feel different by having her differences highlighted for her and because of this she feels awkward, out of place and unwanted. She quickly finds an excuse to leave:

"No, no," I said, getting up hastily, "I've imposed my appetite upon you too many times. I really must go home. After all it's getting rather stupid" (*HTC*, p. 19).

'Nearest friends' indeed, this encounter reveals that even though Sally is well dressed, can hold a polite conversation and has at least a partial understanding and appreciation of popular literature, her friends still actively alienate her. Even though some could say she is a prime example of a successfully assimilated Maori, her friends still see her and therefore treat her as Other and that racially discriminatory reality is not lost to Sally, whose slip of the tongue shows she is aware of how they perceive her and so how 'stupid' and ineffective her visit really was.

After leaving she takes shelter from the rain in a grimy grillroom and strikes up a quick and easy acquaintanceship with a kindly 'half-caste Maori woman' (*HTC*, p. 20) eating by herself and whom everyone else seems to be avoiding, an unusual occurrence at the time this story is set if Sally were Pakeha. Not long after this Sally is asked, along with her new companion, to work in the kitchen and 'help out with the dishes' (*HTC*, p. 22), another unlikely event if Sally were European. She is not there long however before she has to deflect the advances of the sleazy restaurant owner, who says he can 'get off early' (*HTC*, p. 24) if she agrees to meet up with him later. Sally refuses him and decides she has had enough of a break from her domestic responsibilities for one day and takes a taxi home to her family.

What Sturm is trying to portray through these brief encounters is a perception held by some of Maori women and the racial based social mores of that time. Even though we are not informed as to Sally's ethnicity, we can speculate she is at least part Maori by the speedy way she gravitates to her new acquaintance in that unfamiliar and 'grubby' (*HTC*, p. 20) grillroom, the ease in which they disregard the racism they encountered there while working in the kitchen and the casual way they discuss racism at her acquaintance's place of work. We can deduce Sally's ethnicity by the way she empathizes with the woman's mistreatment by her work colleagues:

Well-dressed by anybody's standards, if you cared to apply them. Not that clothes or posture or even dignity are any protection, I thought wearily, if somebody wants to call you a nigger (*HTC*, p. 21).



The fact Sally is also treated like a second-class citizen, along with her new companion, when they are asked to help out in the kitchen with the expectation that no offence would be taken, can reflect the relationship the European café workers saw between Maori women – Maori in general, one could argue – and menial work. Also the assumption on the restaurant owner's part that Sally is sexually promiscuous reveals how some at that time perceived Maori women.

In 'First Native and Pink Pig', published first in Ihimaera's anthology *Into the World of Light*<sup>30</sup> a year before being republished in *The House of the Talking Cat*, Sturm takes a far more direct role in her storytelling. The reader is made aware from the outset that her young protagonist, George Harrison, is of Maori descent and that his experiences with racism and his feelings of alienation derive from the bullying he receives at school.

After George and his friend Albert star as the 'first and second natives' (*HTC*, p. 84) in the school play, a group of young boys, led by Michael Caine, begin to bully them incessantly, calling them 'first and second natives' in a derogatory manner. In a conversation George has with his mother, he reveals he is intuitive enough to know that the bullying they are experiencing is not simple name-calling but goes beyond that. These young boys are using

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<sup>30</sup> Witi Ihimaera and D. S. Long, *Into the World of Light* (Auckland, New Zealand: Heinemann, 1982); J. C. Sturm, 'First Native and Pink Pig', *The House of the Talking Cat* (Wellington: Spiral, 1983), pp. 83-93. All other references will be to this edition.

'natives' as a term of abuse. Where he finds this type of bullying offensive and casually mentions to his mother that he and Albert get into fights at school over it, he is more confident in his identity than his friend. Young George knows he is not who Michael and his friends accuse Alfred and him to be. He is confused and hurt by their bullying but he has enough self-assurance to not let their comments rock his identity.

In an attempt to subvert the racially based bullying he is experiencing at his school, he decides to invite Michael to his tenth birthday celebration. Michael, however, practically epitomizes the racial prejudices and stereotypical misperceptions of that time. When he arrives at the Harrison house he is astounded by how clean and tidy Mrs. Harrison's kitchen is. He cannot fathom the idea of a Maori family living in the same type of housing as himself: '...my mother's got a bench just like that' (*HTC*, p. 87). As the party progresses his prejudices about food hygiene manifest themselves in the way he turns his nose up at the homemade fruit salad. He then disdainfully refuses the chocolate rice bubbles offered him because of their color. When fizzy is accidentally spilt on him, he refuses to use any of Mrs. Harrison's towels, preferring to clean the mess up with his own handkerchief instead, as if Maoriness were a contagious disease he did not want to catch: 'What had his mother said about not using the towels?' (*HTC*, p. 88). When George finally corners him for accidentally breaking his glider, Michael retaliates by calling George's mother a 'dirty stinking brown cow of a Maori' (*HTC*, p. 91).

In the end Michael's ignorance wears down young George's forbearance and makes him forsake his plan and lose 'confidence in what he was' (*HTC*, p. 92). He begins to feel the weight of his differences keenly, like Albert, as well as alienated from his peers, estranged from his mother whom he protects from Michael's cruel racism and, most of all, insecure about who he is. Here Sturm seems to be highlighting the destructive power of such ignorant and stereotypical prejudices as George ends his birthday celebration weeping alone, in his room.

'The Too Good Memsahib' was one of the few short stories Sturm wrote specifically for *The House of the Talking Cat*.<sup>31</sup> In it we are introduced to a New Zealand woman living in Calcutta with her family. Sturm seems to favor the metaphor here, as this story is an ideal one when looking at Pakeha and Maori relationships based on the interactions this woman has with her Indian acquaintances and those she encounters. Ironically, it is this memsahib, a self-confessed 'barrier-breaker' (*HTC*, p. 75) in charge of helping the East and the West exist harmoniously with each other, and other English characters in this short story, that Sturm seems to be critiquing. Or, specifically, their Eurocentric attitudes and ethnocentric belief systems that make them think they are superior to their Indian counterparts and so excuse them of their casual prejudices; a mistreatment that leaves some of Sturm's Indian characters feeling marginalized as well as alienated.

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<sup>31</sup> J. C. Sturm, 'The Too Good Memsahib', *The House of the Talking Cat* (Wellington: Spiral, 1983), pp. 63-81. All other references will be to this edition.

As this is a first person narration, the reader is taken directly into the mind of the memsahib, who believes she is not plagued by the racial prejudices that afflict some of her European peers and cause them to think in terms of 'East is East, and West is West' (*HTC*, p. 63) with necessary and insurmountable barriers in between. The memsahib believes she is above such petty, reproachful behavior because she regards herself as a forward thinking, open-minded and culturally sensitive individual. She remembers with disapproval the look on one of her English friend's face when she visited with her children and they were offered food that consisted of local produce. The woman was suspicious of and looked down on the food the memsahib offered simply because it was different, an attitude shared by Michael Caine when he was offered party food by Mrs. Harrison in 'First Native and Pink Pig'. At Okla hospital where the memsahib is trying to seek medical attention for a young Indian boy who was in a motor vehicle accident, she is horrified by the racial discrimination she witnesses when her Indian friend and doctor, Dru, is over-ruled and disrespected in front of her by an English administrator. Ironically, however, she is also doubtful of the Indian doctor's abilities even though she is offended by the English woman's marginalization of her friend.

It is the memsahib's belief in her own inherent rightness and superiority and the casual disregard and disrespect for the Indian characters she encounters, that Sturm seems to be highlighting in this story however as it is from her actions that many of them suffer from feelings of alienation. The irony of this again lies in her obliviousness to this fact or her inability to

admit that she is not the 'barrier breaker' she believes herself to be nor is she as immune to the Eurocentric ideologies she condemns in others.

We can see this in the way she not only speaks condescendingly and in a patronizing tone to the Indian people she meets, like Sally's friend in 'Where to, Lady?' but she also blatantly ignores the advice of those deemed to be in positions of power and authority higher than her own, such as the Indian policemen and Indian doctors. At the sight of the accident she purposefully overrules the boy's frightened mother because she believes she is the only one capable of making the necessary decisions for him. By so doing she completely disregards the woman whose role and right as his mother means she should be the sole decision maker for his well-being:

The mother started forward, her face working, as she saw her child being taken away, but the memsahib held her back by the arm, saying, "I'm sorry, he must go to hospital immediately. Don't worry, I'll look after him" (*HTC*, pp. 65-66).

The memsahib leaves the woman at the scene of the accident, 'clutching her head in her hands, and given over completely to loud grief' (*HTC*, p. 66) while she takes the boy to the hospital herself. When the memsahib returns home later on that evening, the boy's father demands to know why she interfered and points out that it was not her place to do so: "I tell him *not* your car, *not* your taxi, and he say *not* your business then" (*HTC*, p. 79). The memsahib cannot understand his attitude and so dismisses him

from her home, believing him to be nothing but a “[r]iddiculous bloke” (*HTC*, p. 80) like her husband did.

What her actions have shown however is that in her mind the parents’ positions and authority were insignificant and inferior in comparison to her own. Her ethnic identity and the subsequent superiority that she believed came with it, over-rode any parental rights or responsibilities they had and in marginalizing them in that way, in treating them as peripheral and taking control of their son’s well-being herself, she isolated him from them. Her driving Eurocentric beliefs resulted in the injured boy being left alone at the hospital, alienated from his family and abandoned by the woman who eventually left him as well because she was too exhausted to wait with him any longer.

Keeping in mind this story can be seen as a fitting metaphor for Pakeha and Maori relationships, the blatant disregard and at times disrespect for the indigenous peoples in Calcutta by their European peers, casts a spotlight not only on the racist assumptions, elitist attitude and Eurocentric belief systems of the memsahib but on the European culture she represents as well and their treatment of the minority cultures they colonized. Sturm seems to be emphasizing in this short story what she touched on in ‘First Native and Pink Pig’, that being the significance of these false and destructive ideologies as they have the potential, when expressed in a casually racist manner, to leave its intended victims feeling marginalized within their own society as well as alienated from the people around them.

Sturm's approach to indirect criticism by concealing her characters' ethnicities and writing metaphorically are the reasons I find she is a part of that essential 'first generation' of 'indirect' writers Allen said helped prepare the way for the success of the Maori Renaissance and its more vocal, direct writers. Her short fiction met the political requirements Evans and Ihimaera argued were necessary for Maori literature in the way it portrayed Maori people's experiences with casual racism and alienation and critiqued the dominant culture that had allowed this to occur. The use of these two issues, these lingering grievances of colonization, within her works then helped foster those generalizations that make up the Maori literary tradition. As Ihimaera pointed out Sturm helped set the foundation stones for the new generation of writers to build upon. One of the more significant members of that new, rising generation and one of the key figures that helped that 'transition from an indirect to a more direct indigenous minority opposition',<sup>32</sup> was Patricia Grace.

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<sup>32</sup> Allen, p. 109.

**Patricia Grace: 'Ka pu te ruha, ka hao te rangatahi: the old net lies in a  
heap, the new net goes fishing'<sup>33</sup>**

Born Patricia Frances Gunson in 1937, Grace is one of New Zealand's most prolific and well-known writers with a career that has spanned decades and continues to gain momentum today. Like Sturm, she has enjoyed many firsts as a writer. Since her literary foremother's *House of the Talking Cat* was being 'tucked out of sight for 20 years',<sup>34</sup> as Miriama Evans described it, it was Grace's *Waiariki*<sup>35</sup> (1975) that was the first short story collection ever written by a Maori woman to be published. Her novel *Mutuwhenua*<sup>36</sup> (1978) that followed a couple years later then became the first novel ever written by a Maori woman to be published.

It is not for these reasons alone that she is significant to Tawhai's literary heritage however. Her involvement with that part of the Maori Renaissance that lasted between 1970 and the mid-1980s and the short stories she produced during this period also helped shape the tradition Tawhai's work is a part of as well as the precedent her short fiction is now being compared to and judged by. Where Sturm helped lay the foundation for this standard, Grace contributed to it by dealing, in her short fiction, with grievances prominent during the time of the Maori Renaissance. She validated Sturm's concerns with casual racism by dealing with the issue of

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<sup>33</sup> Allen, p. 146. A traditional Maori proverb that also inspired the title for one of the previously mentioned short story collections by Witi Ihimaera.

<sup>34</sup> Evans, 'Politics and Maori Literature', 40-45, (p. 41).

<sup>35</sup> Patricia Grace, *Waiariki* (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1975).

<sup>36</sup> Patricia Grace, *Mutuwhenua* (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1978).



racial discrimination herself but where her literary predecessor was interested in her people's feelings of alienation as a result of this mistreatment, Grace was more focused on the causes behind such prejudices. Like Sturm though, she did have an interest in capturing a more realistic portrayal of Maori life than had been previously available and so domestic violence also became a common theme in many of her short stories. Her work also moves beyond those issues to include her people's feelings of dislocation due to the confiscation of their ancestral lands.

At the time Grace was first being published the Maori Renaissance had already become an established and noteworthy, social and political movement. We can see how her social concerns matched theirs through her involvement with the Maori Artists and Writers Association in 1973 that 'marked the beginnings of [the] Maori literary renaissance'<sup>37</sup> as well as the content of her work. Many of her short stories acted as reflections and criticisms of society at that time and so were politically driven, fulfilling the obligations Evans and Ihimaera said were requirements of Maori literature. The direct approach she took in expressing those issues also helped mark the shift in the Maori literary tradition, Allen described, where they moved from an indirect opposition to a more radical and direct form of resistance. He went onto say that:

these writers of the Maori renaissance, like their activist counterparts, revised the narrative tactics developed in the earlier period so that

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<sup>37</sup> Allen, p. 116.

they more openly voiced Maori claims to native indigeneity and more forcefully challenged dominant power in Aotearoa/New Zealand.<sup>38</sup>

As the Maori Renaissance was a movement interested in the revitalization and reclamation of those aspects of Maori culture that was believed to have been lost due to colonization and subsequent assimilation, Maori writers during this time period put their literature to the use Bill Pearson described, treating their 'fiction as a form of expression'.<sup>39</sup> What they were expressing was a need to resurrect and reinvigorate their Maoritanga as well as critique the Pakeha hegemony whose oppression necessitated this movement. Their works then became a type of protest or a form of social criticism, all textually coded to resist and challenge the colonial rhetoric.

Grace was no exception. Where prominent Maori women such as Whina Cooper, Eva Rickard and Titewhai Harawira held marches and participated in land occupations, Grace was using her literature, in particular, her short fiction, as her own form of defiance or as a type of witness to the grievances she felt her people were suffering from. Her work then became apart of that canon of Maori literature that helped validate the issues expressed by her peers.

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<sup>38</sup> Allen, p. 117.

<sup>39</sup> Bill Pearson, 'Attitudes to the Maori in Some Pakeha Fiction' in *Fretful Sleepers and Other Essays* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1974), p. 66.

It is from this unity or this need for cohesion that the generalizations that form the Maori literary tradition began to truly take shape. It is from these recurring themes, tropes and preoccupations that a type of standard or model was set as to what qualified a piece of Maori fiction. That it should offer a less stereotypical and more nuanced portrayal of Maori life as well as have a cultural and political aim was the expectation. That it should solely address those 'issues vital to the concerns of the Maori people and in frames of reference specifically their own',<sup>40</sup> as Norman Simms described it, was also necessary. Witi Ihimaera said in his interview with Mark Williams that the focus of all Maori writing should always be Maori,<sup>41</sup> and it is from these expectations that the standard or precedent Tawhai's work is now being compared to and judged by, was formed.

Grace is a significant member to Tawhai's matrilineal genealogy because her work fosters these expectations particularly through her representations of racial discrimination and dislocation. She was also interested in portraying an aspect of everyday life for many Maori that had, until that time, only been tentatively touched on by other writers, that being domestic violence. This grim facet of life for many Maori was not lost to Grace and so her short fiction also reflects, at times, Webster's 'whole way of struggle' theory. As part of that she has also validated Sturm's concern with

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<sup>40</sup> Norman Simms, *Silence and Invisibility: A Study of the Literatures of the Pacific, Australia & New Zealand* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1986), p. 112.

<sup>41</sup> See, Mark Williams, 'Witi Ihimaera – Interviewed by Mark Williams', *In the Same Room: Conversations with New Zealand Writers*, eds. Elizabeth Alley and Mark Williams (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1992), pp. 219-236 (p. 221).

her people's encounters with causal racism by disclosing within her own short fiction her people's experiences with racial discrimination.

We can see this mistreatment in 'A Way of Talking'.<sup>42</sup> The narrator, Hera, introduces us to her younger sister Rose or 'Rohe' (SS, p. 7) as her family call her, who has come home for Hera's wedding. Rose is described by Hera as the 'one that speaks out when something doesn't please her' (SS, p. 8) and the 'one with the brains' (SS, p. 7) as she is the only member in the family who has attended university in Auckland. Because of her education and her experience in the city, Hera describes Rose as seeming 'a lot older than me, and tougher...as though she knew much more than me about the world' (SS, p. 10).

At a dress fitting at Mrs. Jane Frazer's home, a casually discriminatory remark made by the Pakeha dressmaker angers both Rose and Hera but it is only Rose who confronts her:

Jane said, 'That's Alan. He's been down the road getting the Maoris for scrub cutting'. I felt my face get hot. I was angry. At the same time I was hoping Rose would let the remark pass. I tried hard to think of something to say to cover Jane's words...But my tongue seemed to thicken and all I could think of was, Rohe don't (SS, pp. 8-9).

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<sup>42</sup> Patricia Grace, 'A Way of Talking', *Patricia Grace: Selected Stories* (Auckland: Penguin Books Ltd., 1991), pp. 7-12. All other references will be to this edition.

Rose asks the surprised woman if she knows the names of those 'Maoris' her husband was employing and when she admits she does not she points out to her that they most likely know her name, so the least she can do is bother to learn theirs. Hera is annoyed at her sister for embarrassing her, she feels, unnecessarily. She is used to keeping her thoughts to herself while others did the objecting: '...yet here I am a young woman about to be married and haven't learned yet how to get the words out' (SS, p. 10). That is, until Rose teaches her a very important lesson she had gleaned from a life in the city, gaining an education, surrounded by 'marches and demonstrations' (SS, p. 8) and open to a diverse variety of experiences. Rose highlights to her older sister the importance of standing up to such forms of discrimination and prejudice or else 'the likes of Jane' (SS, p. 10) will keep making slighting and hurtful comments, some of them unawares.

Grace seems to be highlighting here the practice amongst some of her people of being silent when confronted with casual racism and the need to rectify this. It is disturbing the way Mrs. Frazer feels she can make such a blatantly discriminatory remark and not fear reprimanding but it is even more disturbing the way Hera was aware of her attitude and had been slighted by her comments before, but did not ever try to change or improve her situation. It is here that Rohe is portrayed as the ideal young Maori woman. She is not only educated and forward thinking but she still maintains a connection to her Maori culture and still fosters within herself a deep appreciation and respect for her Maori heritage, which allows her to act when it is being disparaged. Where Hera represents the past where Maori

were forced to remain silent, go unheard, accept their allotted place in society without debate and be governed by their fear of being seen as whakahihi, Rohe represents the future and the ideals of the Maori Renaissance, that being, the need to fight for a society where there is greater bicultural understanding between its citizens. It is from her example that her older sister is then able to also take up the standard: 'I can't say things the same and I've never learnt to stick up for myself. But my sister won't have to be alone again. I'll let her know that' (SS, p. 12).

In 'Parade',<sup>43</sup> we arrive on the last day of a local carnival where a parade is making its way through the town. Matewai, the main character, has been invited to come back and star in the cultural performances with the rest of her family. For them this is a time of celebration but like Rose, Matewai has gained a deeper understanding of the world and her people's perceived place in it, from her experiences outside of their tiny, rural hometown and so she cannot participate as easily in the festivities as the rest of her family. Again, like Rose she also feels 'older than any of them' (SS, p. 62) because of her knowledge and experience: '...during my time away from here my vision and understanding had expanded. I was able now to see myself and other members of my race as others see us' (SS, p. 61).

As Matewai watches her family swing their pois, swish their piupius, stamp their feet, flick their taiahas, bulge out their eyes in the pukana and loll

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<sup>43</sup> Patricia Grace, 'Parade', *Patricia Grace: Selected Stories* (Auckland: Penguin Books Ltd., 1991), pp. 58-66. All other references will be to this edition.

out their tongues as they perform their traditional dances, songs, chants and war cries, she cannot help but feel as if they and their culture were only on display for the benefit of the cheering, clapping Pakeha observers. She compares her Uncle Hirini and cousin Hoani to 'a pair of clowns' (SS, p. 61), there simply for the entertainment of the spectators and cannot help but ask herself: 'Is that what we are to them?' (SS, p. 62). As she observes the crowd 'clapping and cheering to show that they know about such things' (SS, p. 62) she is convinced of this reality.

The irony behind this short story is that the point of the carnival is to give off the appearance of all those ideals supposedly resultant of biculturalism such as cultural acceptance, understanding, unity and equality. However, Matewai notes that a lot of the Pakeha observers forget these principles as soon as the parade comes to an end and that because of this, their encouraging and supportive cheering seem merely perfunctory and not genuine. At the lunch afterwards she observes instances of cultural insensitivity as boys from her cousin Lena's school take her poi and swing it 'round and round [while] making aeroplane noises' (SS, p. 63). She watches as the 'woman president of the CWI' (SS, p. 63) shouts condescendingly at her Granny Rita 'as though Granny were deaf or simple' (SS, p. 63) and she observes Mr. Goodwin, the town councilor, patronizingly and perfunctorily 'touching Uncle Hirini's shoulder and saying, 'Great, great', to show what a great person he himself was, being one of the carnival organizers' (SS, p. 63).

Matewai struggles to understand how her family is so unobservant to these subtle forms of prejudice and discrimination. It is not until she confides in her grandparents and her Old Hohepa replies by telling her: 'It is your job, this. To show others who we are' (SS, p. 64) that she and the reader finally understand what they and Grace were trying to get across. They are aware of the treatment of their Pakeha neighbors but they know they need to take every opportunity that presents itself to help those people come to know who they really are. It is only then that genuine and meaningful cultural understanding and appreciation can occur. It is only then that words such as unity, acceptance, equality and the idea of biculturalism in general, can hold any weight.

In a way Matewai is similar to Hera because in the end they both learn to be proud of and embrace their culture and that in order for them to bring about or enact the level of change they want to see, they need to take every opportunity to show their Maori heritage as being more than cultural performances and stereotypes. They also learned that in doing this, in being active in some way whether through performing or speaking out, they could change those preconceived ideas and attitudes towards Maori that bring about racial prejudices and discrimination.

In 'Kip',<sup>44</sup> we go with a group of young adults to a dance at their local hall. The "Blue Moon' dance hall' (CS, p. 181) is what the locals call it and it is

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<sup>44</sup> Patricia Grace, 'Kip', *Patricia Grace: Collected Stories* (Auckland:



here that one of the young women, Mereana, watches as her cousin Lizzie dances with a young man named Reuben Hails. Like Hera and Matewai and unlike her cousin, Mereana is sensitive to the subtle goings on of the people around her and has 'learned to see' what some people overlook or choose to ignore and so she is aware of Reuben's true intentions towards her cousin: 'Looking at Reuben, Mereana could read the contempt that Lizzie was too close to see, and which in any case she had never learned to see' (*CS*, p. 182). Her suspicions are confirmed when one of their companions, Macky, informs her of Reuben's 'theory': "Reuben Hails", he said, 'has got a theory...about dark skinned women...' Reuben turned to Lizzie, twitched the corners of his mouth, and walked quickly away' (*CS*, p. 183). The implication is not lost to Mereana and she warns her cousin, giving her enough time to prepare to say no when he tries to pressure her later on that night into going 'under the trees with him' (*CS*, p. 184).

This belief that 'dark skinned women' were sexually promiscuous simply because of their ethnicity is not a new concept in literature; however what Grace seems to be highlighting here is that those racially based preconceptions still affected some people's thinking even during a time where bicultural ideologies were being taught and supposedly practiced. To mark Lizzie as sexually promiscuous simply because of her Maori heritage was discriminatory and prejudicial on Reuben's part and his punishment

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Penguin Books Ltd., 1994), pp. 181-186. All other references will be to this edition.

seems justified: “What did she do? What did Charlotte do?” ‘Put a left hook on his jaw. He dropped like a bomb” (*CS*, p. 185).

Keeping in mind Miriama Evans’s observation that there is a ‘patterned connection between society and fiction’, what these examples show is that, like Sturm, Grace was also aware of the racial discrimination or casual racism, many of her people were being made to endure and at such ordinary, everyday events as a dress fitting, a parade and a local dance. What these short stories also portray is an awareness on Grace’s part to the resounding effect these typically small-scale encounters can have on those experiencing them, beyond feelings of alienation, as highlighted by Sturm. As we have been able to see through the characters of Hera and Matewai, their encounters with racial prejudice and discrimination left them at times either embarrassed and ashamed of their Maori heritage and culture or confused and insecure about their place in their respective societies because of their Maori heritage and culture.

Where Sturm presented an indirect view of a problem with very few solutions and many of her characters suffering in silence, Grace offered a more straightforward portrayal of her people’s experiences with casual racism and discrimination and ways in which they can change and improve their situations. Through characters such as Rohe, Matewai and Mereana we are able to see the positive consequences that can come when action is taken over the option of remaining silent and inactive. These characters practically epitomize the ideals of the Maori Renaissance. They believe in the driving

principle of that movement, that in order for there to be proper understanding, respect and appreciation between Maori and Pakeha and in order for the ideals of biculturalism to become a lived practice, instances like the ones they found themselves to be in, instances where it was within their power and ability to act, inform and re-educate, need to be taken advantage of.

In Webster's 'whole way of struggle', he offers another portrayal of reality as lived and experienced by many Maori, particularly those living after that first initial wave of urban migrants at the conclusion of the Second World War. The picture he paints depicts incest, the abuse of drugs and alcohol as well as other threats to the family that could very well include violence. The portrayal he offers is 'often not attractive or reassuring' to Pakeha and Maori alike however it does not take away from the fact that it was a reflection of reality nonetheless, as understood and experienced by many Maori.

Keeping in mind Evans's observation that there is a 'patterned connection between society and fiction', Grace was aware of the prevalence of domestic violence within the lives of a lot of her people. She was also aware of its timid reference within Maori literature up until that time. Heim notes in his work that 'the everyday reality of domestic violence has been recognized in Maori fiction right from its broad emergence...However, its

narrative treatment was tentative and peripheral in the earliest stories'.<sup>45</sup> Knowing some of her literary forebears treaded lightly around this topic and the prevalence of this issue in the everyday lives of many of her people, Grace confronted the problem of domestic violence head on, through the means of her short fiction. In so doing, she became one of the first Maori women writers to take such a direct approach to that violence Webster believed threatened the 'larger family'.

We can see this in her short story 'Valley',<sup>46</sup> where the signs of domestic violence and the effects of it on its victims, are shown to the reader through the eyes of one of the female teachers of a small country school, as they unfold across the four seasons the story is split into. At the school's autumn gala she observes one of her students, Hiriwa, as he interacts with his mother:

Hiriwa's mother is there too. She is pale and serious looking and very young. Every now and again Hiriwa comes and stands beside her and watches her working; his small hands rest lightly on her arm...I notice a white scar curving from her temple to her chin (SS, pp. 39-40).

She later observes Hiriwa while he in turn is watching his father at the 'chopping arena':

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<sup>45</sup> Heim, p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> Patricia Grace, 'Valley', *Patricia Grace: Selected Stories* (Auckland: Penguin Books Ltd., 1991), pp. 31-52. All other references will be to this edition.

Hiriwa stands opposite his father's block, watching. Different, the father. Unsmiling. Heavy in build and mood. Blunt-fingered hands gripping the slim-handled axe. Hiriwa watches for a while, then walks away (SS, p. 42).

It is from these brief yet very different interactions Hiriwa has with his parents that a suspicion begins to grow in the mind of the observant and perceptive teacher and through her, the reader. Both their suspicions are later confirmed when Hiriwa arrives at school a couple months later, '[o]ne side of his face...heavy with bruising' (SS, p. 48). From these signs the reader is able to ascertain the conditions of Hiriwa's home life but the effects of his abuse do not manifest themselves entirely until a class activity where the children are instructed to sculpt gingerbread men out of clay. Hiriwa does so but he demolishes his creation almost instantly with his tiny, bare hands before writing in his journal: "The gingerbread man is lost and I am lost too" (SS, p. 48). It is not long after this incident that Hiriwa's mother comes and confides in her son's teacher that she is leaving her husband for good and taking her son with her.

The reality of domestic violence that Grace seems to be directing her reader's attention to here is that witnesses of it rarely see what is actually happening within the home. Like Hiriwa's teacher, they are only privy to the signs of the abuse and only once those signs manifest themselves in the public realm. However, Grace seems to be warning her readers that they

need to be more alert to those signs or else children and victims such as the ones Hiriwa represents will continue to suffer, some of their injuries more threatening than any physical wound, as they internalize the violence they are experiencing at home. For Hiriwa, the effects of his father's abuse cause him to feel lost and confused and he lashes out in the only way he understands, violently. What is most worrying however is that that violence is aimed at himself.

What Grace also seems to suggest here is that the possibility of a solution cannot be found within the confines of the short story itself. We can see this in the way Hiriwa's teacher plays a very minor role in the drama and stands more as a type of witness to the abuse of Hiriwa and his mother. The fact Hiriwa's violent circumstances only exist in the outskirts of the main narrative and the teacher's consciousness also goes to suggest that Grace is not trying to offer a solution here but instead a cold dose of reality. Like Webster's 'whole way of struggle' theory, Grace is asking the reader to contemplate what is inherently wrong with an individual or their society when victims of domestic violence are so commonplace they exist only in the peripherals of that observer's consciousness. Even though Grace does not offer a remedy to this problem she shows that she, at least, is sensitive to the silent sufferings of these victims and that they are not on the outskirts of her thoughts or vision, by fostering an awareness of their violent situations in her short story.

The casual, almost matter-of-fact way domestic violence is mentioned in Grace's 'Letters from Whetu'<sup>47</sup> voices a similar type of warning to that found in the 'Valley' and epitomizes Webster's 'whole way of struggle' theory for Maori. While writing letters to her various friends in an attempt to fight off boredom at school, a young, Maori girl makes casual reference to recent experiences she had had with drugs, child neglect, stealing and violence. It is her casual reference to domestic violence in particular that is the most worrisome however. In her letter to her friend Lenny she divulges just how much she enjoyed their latest group outing to the beach the past weekend. In an offhand manner she follows that remark up by saying: 'I got my beans when I got home though, boy did I get my beans' (CS, pp. 122-123). When writing about the same incident in a separate letter to her friend Ani, she again casually refers to the beating she received once she got home: 'If we hadn't had to look for our shoes we'd have caught an earlier train home. God I got my beans when I got home' (CS, p. 126). In her final letter to her friend Andy she informs him about their friend Iosefa and how he came to school with a 'black eye' (CS, p. 130) because he was caught with 'some other boys...all puffing up large on the bank by the top field' (CS, p. 130). When his father found out, he physically assaulted him: 'Iosefa got thumped by his old man' (CS, p. 131).

It is this casual reference to something as serious as domestic violence that Grace seems to be drawing our attention to here. Again she is not

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<sup>47</sup> Patricia Grace, 'Letters from Whetu', *Patricia Grace: Collected Stories* (Auckland: Penguin Books Ltd., 1994), pp. 121-133. All other references will be to this edition.

offering a solution to the problem nor is she taking us directly into the homes of these Polynesian youths, she is merely offering a quick insight into their lives and by so doing forcing the reader to consider just how prevalent domestic violence must be in their lives if it can be mentioned so casually and in such an off the cuff manner. She is also asking the reader to consider the state of the society these teens live in and, in effect, what is wrong with it, if domestic violence can be the common place, everyday life thing Webster believes it to be. It is this reality above all else that Grace seems to be highlighting for her readers here.

Unlike 'Valley' and 'Letters from Whetu' where domestic violence is only one of the story's many themes and is mainly concerned with the effects of that violence on children, the sole purpose of Grace's 'The Geranium'<sup>48</sup> is to portray the life of a woman suffering from spousal abuse. Where Grace's previous stories have only shown us a limited view of the life of somebody living with domestic violence or offered us a limited scope as to the full effects of that violence on its victims, in 'The Geranium' we are taken directly into the home of a woman named Marney and given a brief, rare viewing of the violence she is suffering from, experiencing, at times graphically, what had previously only been timidly and tentatively referred to in earlier Maori literature.

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<sup>48</sup> Patricia Grace, 'The Geranium', *Patricia Grace: Selected Stories* (Auckland: Penguin Books Ltd., 1991), pp. 147-156. All other references will be to this edition.



Like the 'Valley', Marney's situation is not automatically revealed to the reader but unfolds as the story progresses and so it is the reader's responsibility to pick up on the cues Grace offers. Like Hiriwa, Marney is also an interesting example of the psychological effects domestic violence can have on its victims. The story is set up in a way that the reader is able to see the mental and emotional state her experiences have put her in. Through a constant shift in focalization, the reader is able to see that Marney is unable to fully process what is happening to her and so devotes a great deal of her time, energy and will power into turning her mind away from her violent situation. When it seems her mind is about to wander near the edges of that reality or near thoughts of possibly changing it, she quickly pulls back, feelings of hopelessness and inescapability causing her to distract herself with meaningless chores that will keep her busy and occupy her mind. We see this while she is spring cleaning her house, a routine we later learn occurs daily:

She began sweeping, moving from the kitchen to the bedrooms. She was sorry the kids were all at school now, and she thought about having a job. She swept, getting into the corners with a dustpan and brush. Some of the women had kitchen jobs or did part-time cleaning, or did machining down at Hayes. When she'd finished sweeping she got a bucket of water and a mop and mopped out (SS, p. 147).

This subtle way of signaling to the reader Marney's violent living situation is further emphasized by her behavior when her two friends, Joey

and Sandra, drop by for a visit. Marney purposefully reminds herself that before they arrive she must 'put on her cardigan to hide her arm' (*SS*, p. 147). She is then scrupulous when it comes to cleaning up any mess their children make and when her friends ask her if she would like to come shopping with them, she quickly finds excuses to stay home, her fear of leaving almost tangible to the reader. As a show of thanks for babysitting Joey's youngest, her friends buy her a geranium but Marney is more worried about having such a gift in her house than grateful:

[S]he was worried about the geranium, and after the women had gone she thought she might get rid of it. Then she decided to put it in a jar of water and put it on the kitchen windowsill (*SS*, p. 152).

It is not until her friends leave with their children and Marney's husband, Bob, comes home from work that we learn why she was so concerned and our suspicions are finally confirmed. He questions her immediately as to what she had done that day and in minute detail makes her recite all that had occurred. It becomes apparent that he expects Marney to spend her days doing nothing else but chores and so the reader can see why she was so scrupulous when it came to the morning spring cleaning as well as tidying up any mess the children made and why she was also so adamant at not leaving the house. When she tentatively mentions they need more pegs, Bob turns violent. He 'reached out and gripped her arm, she could feel his fingers bruising her. 'Stop changing the subject,' he said' (*SS*, p. 153). He goes on to threaten her with the implication of further violence if he ever found

out she had lied to him and once he noticed the geranium sitting on the windowsill his 'grip tightened even more on her arm, he was beginning to twist' (SS, p. 155). Even though she explained it was merely a gift from Sandra he still told her to dispose of it and so like the terrified victim he had made her to be, Marney obeyed and discarded the geranium into the scrap bucket.

Like 'Valley' and 'Letters from Whetu' there is no sense of resolution to be found at the end of this short story. Grace does not offer a solution to Marney's problem because her predicament is a reflection of reality, a reality where the victim of domestic violence rarely escapes it. What she is offering instead is a direct view of that destructive lifestyle, taken from the perspective of an abused wife, in order to highlight the effects of that abuse on its victims, in particular, the psychological effects. Marney is living in a state of constant psychological abuse. From her husband's daily interrogations to her enforced isolation and routine, she is being made to suffer from feelings of loneliness, powerlessness and fear; fear of discovery by others but most importantly fear of that moment when the psychological will turn physical. In order to cope with this daily trauma she resorts to losing herself within the menial, throwing all of her time, energy, resources and will power into her cleaning and the weekly newspaper that gets delivered to her door. Doing this then keeps her mind sufficiently occupied from having to truly process the horrific things that are happening to her. It is this consequence of spousal abuse, in particular, that Grace seems to be directing her reader's attention to here.

Her overall use of domestic violence as a theme within her short fiction helped establish the issue as one of the prevailing topics within the Maori literary tradition. Her example in portraying the psychological and physical effects of such abuse, on its victims, and its prevalence in the lives of many Maori, not only helped foster Webster's 'whole way of struggle' theory but it also helped set this problem, once only timidly and tentatively referred to within Maori literature, as a major focus and a recurring preoccupation within the tradition. It is for these reasons Grace is a significant contributor to Tawhai's literary heritage. Her concern with her people's feelings of dislocation due to the confiscation of their ancestral lands also plays an important factor.

In his 1954 *Te Ao Hou* article, the Very Rev. J. G. Laughton discussed the various elements that he believed constituted Maori culture or what was often referred to as Maoritanga. The fifth and final element he discussed was land and the importance of it to the Maori people:

Nothing can, for the Maori, take the place of his inheritance in the land trodden by his forefathers and handed down as the tribal domain from generation to generation over hundreds of years. That is home to him...Expunge his little title in that land and whatever you may do for him you have made him a homeless wanderer from the tribal life

which is his being. Let him feel that he has no longer any right in the tribal lands and he will never again be other than an alien.<sup>49</sup>

The importance of land to the indigenous inhabitants of a country is not a new idea to literature nor is the fact that through colonization much of their land was taken from them. During the time of the Maori Renaissance however the significance of land was highlighted for the Maori by the efforts of such activists as Eva Rickard and Titewhai Harawira who held marches and participated in land occupations in an attempt to stop the sale of Maori land. Allen accredited the expropriation of Maori land by the government as one of the main motivating factors behind the Maori Renaissance. He explained that at that time the New Zealand 'national government's renewed attempts to force Maori into the Pakeha mainstream by expropriating remaining Maori land holdings triggered a series of indigenous land and cultural rights movements',<sup>50</sup> one of those movements being the Maori Renaissance, in particular, the Maori literary renaissance. As both Evans and Ihimaera believe there is a 'patterned connection between society and fiction' and that for Maori literature in particular there is an essential political element as well, in the very same year Whina Cooper led the 5,000 strong land march to Parliament, Grace released her first collection of short stories, *Waiariki*.

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<sup>49</sup> J. G. Laughton, 'Maoritanga', *Te Ao Hou*, 3.9 (Spring 1954)  
<<http://teaohou.natlib.govt.nz/journals/teaohou/issue/Mao09TeA/c14.html>> [accessed 20/12/2013], 17-18 (p. 17).

<sup>50</sup> Allen, p. 108.

Her interest in the land issues of her time can be seen in the way her work pays particular attention to her people's feelings of dislocation due to the loss of their ancestral lands. The significance of land to the Maori people is highlighted for the reader in the way it acts, in her short stories, as a type of connection or anchor to their past, their ancestors, their traditions and their heritage and so is necessary for the survival of their culture. Her work also reflects the relationship land can have with a Maori individual's sense of identity, sense of being and sense of place and the overall effect it can have on their Maoritanga. The loss of such an important aspect to their being can then bring about feelings of dislocation for some and it is this reality that Grace is emphasizing for the reader.

We can see this clearly in her 'Smoke Rings',<sup>51</sup> where the story begins with her nameless Maori protagonist sorting through her mail. When she reaches the 'brown envelope with the window, and all [her] long names printed on it' (SS, p. 53) she immediately knows what is inside and so throws it away. We learn that what is inside is a cheque of forty-one cents that is sent to her and other members of her family, annually, as a small dividend from the government for taking their land and turning it into a public park.

As the story progresses, we learn the woman is not only craving a cigarette but that her family is forced to live in low socioeconomic conditions, so that any form of money would be a benefit. However, she refuses to use

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<sup>51</sup> Patricia Grace, 'Smoke Rings', *Patricia Grace: Selected Stories* (Auckland: Penguin Books Ltd., 1991), pp. 53-57. All other references will be to this edition.

the money sent to her: 'But smoke or not, broke or not, I can do without their money, and that's why I tossed the cheque out, envelope and all' (SS, p. 53). She does this as her own silent form of protest against the loss of her family's lands and the use to which it was being put to without her family's permission or consent. Her actions also act as a type of expression for her grief over the loss of all her ancestral lands represent to her and her loved ones.

It is mainly because of her brother George and her husband Rangī that she does this. It is their attitudes towards the government and the forceful expropriation of their family's lands that she models her behavior after. She describes them both as being men with 'big ideas' (SS, p. 57), men with principles and values, men who see the political struggles within their communities and the injustices being done to their people and so want to make a difference, want to bring about change. They believe that in order to do so they must reinvigorate their culture, which will then in turn offer a better way of life for their people and help them resist the colonial hegemony. One of the essential requirements to this way of thinking is the reclamation of their tribal lands or the rectification of that displacement which took place in the name of colonization. After gleaning this, it does not surprise the reader then, when George's sister asks him what he does with his cheques and he tells her plainly that he does nothing, as the money he is offered is insufficient compensation, in his eyes. It is his family's lands and what they represent that are of the most value and import.

It would seem that this is the driving message Grace is trying to get across to her reader in this short story, this idea about land and the value of it. The miniscule dividend the government give George, his sister and presumably the rest of their family, in order to use their ancestral lands instead of returning them, goes to show just how little they believe the Maori people value it or how much they in turn value the land and the Maori people's attachment to it. Through her choice in characters though Grace is able to show that despite their being displaced from and dispossessed of their lands, as well having to live with this, they and the Maori people they represent are still aware of the significance of it to their culture and way of being. Despite the absence of it from their lives and the feelings of dislocation it causes, they are still aware of the importance of it to their 'Maoritanga' and that no amount of money could ever match it in worth.

In no story is this message clearer than in Grace's 'Journey', first published in 1977 before being republished in *Dream Sleepers* in 1980 and added to Grace's *Selected Stories*<sup>52</sup> collection in 1991. In it we join a nameless old Maori man as he takes, what he calls, a 'journey' (SS, p. 95) into town in order to 'go in and see those people about his land. Again' (SS, p. 95). The people he is referring to here is the government land development agency that wants to acquire his family's land in order to turn it into a development area against his and his family's wishes. On this particular morning he decides he is going to travel into the city himself, to the head office, and settle

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<sup>52</sup> Patricia Grace, 'Journey', *Patricia Grace: Selected Stories* (Auckland: Penguin Books Ltd., 1991), pp. 95-108. All other references will be to this edition.



this issue once and for all. In portraying her protagonist as being willing to fight in order to retain his ancestral lands, Grace is showing the reader just how significant it is to him and through him, Maori in general.

The tone of the conversation between the old man and the government representative he meets is reminiscent of the conversations Sturm's Maori characters had with their Pakeha peers in the way he is spoken to condescendingly and patronizingly. The government official cannot understand why the old man is so adamant in retaining his family's land when they would be offered, in his mind, 'equivalent land or monetary compensation' (SS, p. 104). He cannot grasp why the old man is so resistant to the idea of being resited along with the rest of his family. To him and the Pakeha government he represents in this short story, all land is the same and is to be used for the sole purpose of appropriation, development and the furthering of capitalism and so he cannot comprehend the attachment the old man is showing towards this particular piece of land as well as the importance he is placing on it. The old man tries multiple times to explain to him that to those who call themselves tangata whenua there is no 'equal land' to that that used to be trod underfoot by their ancestors but it is all in vain:

But what was the sense in that, there was no equal land. If it's your stamping ground and you have your ties there, then there's no land equal, surely that wasn't hard to understand (SS, p. 104).

By the end of the story, the old man is run out of the office, his attempt at retaining his family's tribal lands unsuccessful. The reader is left wondering just how long it will be before he and the rest of his family are dispossessed of their lands entirely and relocated to somewhere new. We are also left with only a shadow of the man we were first introduced to at the beginning of the story. At having to face the prospect of displacement, the old man appears broken and defeated when he finally returns home: 'He turned into his bedroom and shut the door. He sat on the edge of his bed for a long time looking at the palms of his hands' (SS, p. 108).

The message Grace seems to be sharing with her readers here is that to many Maori, land is not the nothing their Pakeha peers sometimes believe it to be and has a worth beyond what the government official was talking about when he was trying to explain to the confused old man about the monetary value of his land. To many Maori, their family lands act as a type of connection to their tupuna and so represent their heritage, their birthright and the continuation of their tribal cultures and tribal identities. When that attachment is threatened or even severed, the consequences for that individual can be extreme. At the end of his journey, the old man becomes the 'homeless wanderer' or the 'alien' Laughton prophesied would become of those Maori dislocated from their ancestral lands.

On a far lighter note to that of 'Smoke Rings' and 'Journey', Grace's 'Ngati Kangaru' takes a more humorous approach to the issues that can arise from the loss of tribal land. First published in *The Sky People* in 1994 before

being added to Ihimaera's anthology *Where's Waari?*<sup>53</sup> in 2000, it is a satirical account about the New Zealand Company that was organized in the 1800s for the sole purpose of obtaining Maori land for Pakeha settlers. Although not published during the time of the Maori Renaissance, I find it still carries with it those same ideas and themes that can be found in Grace's earlier works and accredited to her involvement with that movement and so is therefore still relevant to this analysis.

In this short story we are introduced to a Maori man named Billy while he is reading a book at home about the 'history of the New Zealand Company' (*WW*, p. 188), in particular, the Wakefields or Edward Gibbon Wakefield who was one of the prime organizers of that corporation. To Billy the Wakefields were a family of 'crooks, liars, cheats and thieves' (*WW*, p. 189) but he enjoyed reading about them because their scheming and crookery made him laugh.

On one particular day he sees his cousin Hiko on *Te Karere*, fighting for those Maori living in Australia to return back to New Zealand, to return back to 'their ancestral home' (*WW*, p. 190). Hiko explains to the news reporter interviewing him that one of the more important factors involved when planning a large-scale movement such as this is a 'need for land' (*WW*, p. 190). After hearing his cousin's speech, Billy is reminded of Wakefield and

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<sup>53</sup> Patricia Grace, *The Sky People and Other Stories* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1994); Patricia Grace, 'Ngati Kangaru' in *Where's Waari? A History of the Maori through the Short Story* ed. by Witi Ihimaera (Auckland: Reed Books, 2000), pp. 188-202. All other references will be to this edition.

the New Zealand Company and how they successfully acquired land from the Maori during the 1800s. He is inspired to help his cousin's cause when he recalls Wakefield's philosophy,<sup>54</sup> something he read in one of his books: "Possess yourselves of the soil," he muttered, "and you are secure" (*WW*, p. 190).

The way he goes about doing this is in emulating the process Wakefield and the New Zealand Company used when they were trying to systematically colonize New Zealand and it is here that we feel the full weight of Grace's satire. Through Billy and his attempts to acquire sufficient land for those Maori returning from Australia, she is critiquing the unscrupulous and unethical way land was taken from the Maori for early Pakeha settlers.

In a rap he and his two children invent to celebrate his new business endeavor, Billy draws on examples from his history books about how the New Zealand company successfully attained land and how his company, in turn, was going to obtain that same land needed for their returning whanau:

First you go and form a Co.  
Make up lies and advertise  
Buy for a trifle the land you want...  
Sign here sign there  
So we can steal...

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<sup>54</sup> Refer to 'Edward Gibbon Wakefield: New Zealand Politician', in *Spokeo* <<http://www.spokeo.com/Edward+Gibbon+Wakefield+1>> [06/01/2014].

No need to buy just occupy...  
Bought for a trifle sold for a bomb  
Homes for your rellies  
And dollars in the bank (*WW*, p. 191).

Once the luxury holiday resort, Claire Vista, is decided as being the prime settlement for their first wave of Maori migrants, Billy and Hiko set about trying to acquire its land and resources. Billy starts by first organizing deeds of title to be signed however he does not collect the signatures of the actual owners of the Claire Vista properties but those of strangers instead and only after first bribing them with cheap trinkets as was done before. For 'one hundred bottles of whisky, one hundred packets of hot pies and one hundred old overcoats' (*WW*, p. 194), Billy collects what he believes to be the necessary signatures needed to transfer the rights of those lands and properties to his company and, in the process, reclaim it for his tribe, Ngati Kangaru.

The first initial stage of the 'Return' (*WW*, p. 190) begins with the first wave of Maori migrants arriving at Claire Vista and by mid-December, when the former occupants and holidaymakers arrive, a newly established Maori community is already firmly entrenched. The former occupants and holidaymakers try by various means to have them removed however their efforts are unsuccessful and with the triumph of the Claire Vista reclamation, Billy and Hiko, set their sights on the rest of New Zealand; in particular, other areas of land taken from Maori due to colonization: 'Oh, it truly was high and

holy work. This Kamupene o Te Hokinga Mai was a 'great and unwonted blessing" (WW, p. 199).

Billy and Hiko are like Rangi, George and the old, nameless man in 'Journey' in the way they are men with 'big ideas', men who want nothing more than to help their people regain or, in the case of 'Journey', retain their tribal lands and possess themselves of the soil again. They do this because they know, like those Maori returning from Australia, that feelings of dislocation can arise within some when they have no connection to their tribal lands and so the 'Return' is not just a return to the land itself but to all that land represents. In an interview with Vilsoni Hereniko, Grace describes 'Ngati Kangaru' as being a piece of satirical work that is 'more overtly political'<sup>55</sup> than some of her other short stories as she is unabashedly discussing this issue of dislocation and dispossession while blatantly criticizing a time in our history where the early government wronged the Maori and did so behind the guise of colonization. Through Billy's comic imitation of the Wakefields and their New Zealand Company and his use of historically correct language such as "'high and holy work'" and "'adopt-a-chief" scheme' (WW, p. 189), Grace is throwing into stark relief just how unscrupulous and unethical the Wakefields were when going about obtaining land from the Maori during the 1800s. It also reflects a larger issue at that time, that being the ethnocentric attitudes that justified this mistreatment

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<sup>55</sup> Vilsoni Hereniko, 'An Interview with Patricia Grace' in *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*, eds. Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson (United States of America: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), pp. 75-83 (p. 81).

and exploitation. As the Maori Renaissance was a movement aimed at voicing and rectifying, where possible, those lingering grievances of colonialism, 'Ngati Kangaru' is a prime example of Grace's interest in the cause and how that interest manifested itself through her work.

The reference, in Grace's short fiction, to land and the feelings of dislocation that can come to some Maori with the loss of it, is significant to Tawhai's literary heritage because coupled with the popularity and influence of her work as well as the mana that came with being a direct Maori woman writer, successfully helped establish the concept of land and land issues as a common theme and preoccupation within Maori fiction. It is because of writers such as Grace and those of the Maori literary renaissance, who used their fiction to reflect and express a discontentment with their reality at that time, that the idea of land became so popular within the Maori literary tradition, Allen listed it as being one of the three primary tropes most commonly used by minority writers<sup>56</sup> and Rika-Heke described it as being one of the main underlying themes in Maori fiction.<sup>57</sup>

Grace is a significant member of Tawhai's matrilineal line as she contributed to this standard her work is now being compared to and judged by. This standard has its foundations set in the works of Sturm however when Grace helped move the Maori literary tradition from one of 'indirect opposition' to a more 'radical form of opposition', as Allen described it, she

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<sup>56</sup> See, Allen, p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> See, Rika-Heke, pp. 147-163 (p. 165).

introduced a new standard which other writers of Maori fiction then emulated. She called attention to grievances Sturm's works addressed such as casual racism and discrimination however she also expressed her people's feelings of dislocation due to the expropriation of their ancestral lands as well as a concern with their experiences with domestic violence and its being an aspect of Webster's 'whole way of struggle' theory. It was her work, in part, that helped set those recurring themes, preoccupations and tropes that facilitated the expectations of the Maori literary tradition Tawhai's work is now being held to.

Peter Beatson explained that it was through the efforts of Grace and those writers of the Maori Renaissance that the monocultural New Zealand of the past was able to finally move into the future bicultural Aotearoa of today<sup>58</sup> and so prepare the way for even more vocal writers, one of those being Keri Hulme. Allen complimented both Grace and Hulme for being the 'contemporary rangatahi [or] ("new nets")'<sup>59</sup> that were needed to help shepherd the Maori people into this new, bicultural and urbanized New Zealand. 'Ka pu te ruha, ka hao te rangatahi: the old net lies in a heap, the new net goes fishing'.

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<sup>58</sup> See, Peter Beatson, *The Healing Tongue: Themes in Contemporary Maori Literature* (Palmerston North: Sociology Department, Massey University, 1989), p. iii.

<sup>59</sup> Allen, p. 146.



**Keri Hulme: Kei a Koe Inaianei. It is Your Turn Now.<sup>60</sup>**

Born in 1947, Hulme is best known for her novel, *The Bone People* (1983),<sup>61</sup> which won the New Zealand Book Award for Fiction in 1984 as well as the prestigious international Booker Prize Award in 1985. She is a novelist, a poet and a short story writer; however, in comparison with the success of her first novel, the rest of her works seem to have received very little critical attention. For the purposes of this investigation I intend to explore the often neglected and overlooked short fiction in her collection *Te Kaihau: The Windeater* (1986)<sup>62</sup> and its significance to Tawhai's literary heritage as she said herself in her interview with Philippa Jamieson that Hulme's work was 'an early source of inspiration for her'<sup>63</sup> writing.

Most importantly it is Hulme's influence on the literary standard to which Tawhai's work is now being judged by that I find to be the most significant here however. Where many of the problems Sturm and Grace address in their works can be attributed to the consequences of urbanization, it is Hulme who takes the more direct, consistent approach to this issue, in particular, the systemic racism many early Maori migrants experienced

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<sup>60</sup> See, Michelle Maria Keown, 'Taku Iwi, Taku Whenua, Taku Reo: The Construction of Maori Identity in the Novels of Witi Ihimaera, Patricia Grace and Alan Duff' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Waikato, 1996), p. 89. Patricia Grace makes this challenge at the end of her novel, *Potiki*, calling on other writers of Maori heritage to enter into New Zealand literature and add their testimonies to what has already been said.

<sup>61</sup> Keri Hulme, *The Bone People* (Wellington, New Zealand: Spiral, 1983).

<sup>62</sup> Keri Hulme, *Te Kaihau: The Windeater* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1986).

<sup>63</sup> Philippa Jamieson, 'Private Life', *Listener*, 28 June 2008, 38-40, (p. 39).

whilst in the city and which made it difficult to impossible to attain the ideal urban lifestyle many left their rural homes for. Like her literary forbears, Hulme's preoccupation with this matter can be seen through her short fiction, particularly in the way she tries to highlight the consequences of that systemic racism by offering a more realistic reflection of urban Maori experiences at that time. This includes poor living conditions, lack of employment opportunities and loss of education. Her portrayals also act as reflections of Webster's 'whole way of struggle' theory in the way they describe her people's experiences with incest, drug and alcohol abuse as well as promiscuity. This is a direct similarity to Tawhai, whose work also reflects a keen interest in these matters.

The ideal to which Hulme is addressing, has its beginnings with that rural to urban drift that occurred during those years after the Second World War. With the rapid growth in the Maori population that came with its ending, coupled with increasing poverty and dispossession of land assets, many Maori found themselves being forced to resettle in urban centers such as Wellington and Auckland. For many, they believed the city would offer an overall better way of life than the one they were previously living. The conditions many of these migrants found themselves to be living in once they arrived however were poor, most of them becoming a part of the lower socioeconomic base of that population and living in the worst, most underdeveloped areas of those cities where there was poor housing, high crime rates and low opportunities for work or advancement. For those Maori still able to live in the rural hinterlands, the idea of an urban lifestyle in

comparison to the constant struggle their lives had become, was beginning to look increasingly more attractive, especially for young, idealistic Maori. For these youths they willingly left their homes and all they represented to move to the city and take part, in what they believed to be a better, newer, more exciting, more fast paced and more ideal lifestyle; to be a part of the Pakeha's idea of progress and to be a recipient to the entitlements that came with such membership. What many found however was disappointment. They quickly learned what previous migrants had also come to know, that because they were Maori, they were relegated to the lower socioeconomic base of their populations and so were cut off from a lot of what the city had to offer and which many of them had left their families and rural homes for. The ideal was then quickly replaced by the reality of their situations or the socioeconomic realities and prejudices that accompanied being Maori and living in the city. As urban maraes were still a rarity at this time and as the Maori culture is bound up in the concept of the marae as well as the local community, tribal lands and family, to name a few, many young Maori who migrated to the city also found themselves having to deal with feelings of disconnection from their Maoritanga. The morals and values they were raised on, as children, had no place in this new world where the advancement of the individual was ranked as being higher than that of the community and so a re-evaluation and a discarding of morals, values and ethics was necessary. In concerns with urbanization, Ihimaera said:

The effect that it's had has been one of absolute tragedy...Urbanization has transferred the population from its rural hearths to the cities, has

taken them away from traditional ways of thinking about the world, from earth to concrete, from marae concepts and community concepts to concepts of individuality. All this has meant the gradual death of our culture...that urban drift has left us in a landless and cultureless situation.<sup>64</sup>

With this movement came a shift in focus for the writers of the Maori literary tradition. The stories began to change as Maori writers realized the issues and experiences of their time had moved, along with their people, from the rural to the city or from the 'rural hearths to the cities'. The commonness of the urban experience then began to be reflected in the frequency of its use in Maori fiction and in no time it became one of the general tropes of the Maori literary tradition, to join such themes as casual racism and discrimination, feelings of alienation, domestic violence and land issues. For those Maori writers writing on this matter, Beatson places them into two distinct periods. The first, he says, 'corresponds to the 'hope' of those travelling to the Emerald City, the second to the 'disillusion' of those trapped in it'. He goes on to say that there is a 'continuity of themes between the two periods but there is also a distinct change in mood'.<sup>65</sup> We can see this as being so as some of Grace's early works from her *Waiariki* collection, such as 'Transition'<sup>66</sup> and 'And So I Go',<sup>67</sup> epitomize this first period. In these two

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<sup>64</sup> Wilkinson, 'Witi Ihimaera – Interview', 98-110 (pp.101-102).

<sup>65</sup> Beatson, p. 12.

<sup>66</sup> Patricia Grace, 'Transition', *Patricia Grace: Selected Stories* (Auckland: Penguin Books Ltd., 1991), pp. 18-20.

<sup>67</sup> Patricia Grace, 'And So I Go', *Patricia Grace: Collected Stories* (Auckland: Penguin Books Ltd., 1994), pp. 50-54.

short stories, Grace's protagonists are determined to believe in the ideal that was urban living, the grandmother in 'Transition', hoping it will pull her family out of poverty once they move there and the young, half-caste male in 'And So I Go', believing his moving there will help his two cultures come to a better understanding and appreciation of one another.

Hulme's short fiction helped mark the beginning of that second period of disillusionment or that shift in mood within the Maori literary tradition, from one of hope and idealism to one of disbelief and disappointment. Where Sturm and Grace touched on these issues in their works by dealing, at times, with their people's experiences with racism and poor working conditions in the city, it was Hulme who took the more consistent approach to this problem. In doing so, she fulfills the political obligations Ihimaera believed was necessary for all Maori fiction as well as Evans' supposition that Maori writing was a reflection and criticism of reality, at that time. Her interest in this particular issue is significant to Tawhai's matrilineal genealogy because, as one of the writers who helped facilitate this important move within the Maori literary tradition, she helped prepare the way for Tawhai to express her own preoccupation with this matter and convey her own interest in the predicament of those 'trapped' in the city, through her short fiction.

We can see Hulme's particular interest in her people's negative experiences with urbanization in her short story 'A Nightsong for the Shining Cuckoo', first published in *Landfall* in 1981 under the pseudonym of Kai

Tainui, before being republished in *Te Kaihau*.<sup>68</sup> In it we are introduced to an older Maori woman named Frances just before she suffers an accident that leaves her paralyzed from the waist down. In an attempt to forget her past life and ease the pain that came with knowing she was forever cut off from a life lived off of the land, she makes the decision to move to Christchurch and take up shop keeping at a local dairy: 'My old life is smashed. I want a new way so different I won't have to think about what I was' (*TK*, p. 120). Like Sturm, Hulme seems to favor the metaphor here as she compares Frances's alienation from her land to her accident and that both leave her feeling powerless and disconnected from her former identity and former life.

In her mind, Frances believes she can make a 'new start in life' (*TK*, p. 121) and forget her past if she distances herself enough from her culture, her community and her familial land. What she finds in the city however is an existence worse than that if she had stayed. When she opens her new store, she encounters prejudice as it takes some time before customers arrive: 'I was beginning to think there was a neighborhood black ban on paraplegics or something' (*TK*, p. 125). Once a steady flow of customers starts to build however she notices that because she is paraplegic, shoplifters target her store specifically, preying upon her handicap and causing her store to lose money. That, coupled with the unwholesome environment she feels the city

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<sup>68</sup> Kai Tainui, 'A Nightsong for the Shining Cuckoo', *Landfall* 137, 35.1 (March 1981), 7-19; Keri Hulme, 'A Nightsong for the Shining Cuckoo', *Te Kaihau: The Windeater* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1986), pp. 119-133. All other references will be to this edition.

to be, forces her to the 'comfort of the bottle' (*TK*, p. 127) every night before she goes to bed:

The hard thing I find about the city is the dirt. I wheel out these days, down to the corner, back round the block. Not going anywhere, just getting acclimatized. Used to the filth. Greasy shreds of paper, dogturds, glass-splinters. People-spits, birdshit, grey wads of chewing gum studding the footpath. Clogged air, and too many people to breathe it. Even the rain is dirty here (*TK*, p. 126).

When her nephew, Charlie, stops by for a visit, he notices how thin and sickly she looks and accredits it to her 'new' lifestyle. He convinces her that she needs to end her self-induced 'exile' (*TK*, p. 129) and return home where he will make improvements to her house and properties so that she can live her former life as best she can and recover from her time spent in the city.

What Frances represents in this short story are the numberless Maori who left their rural homes for the ideal lifestyle the city promised. For Frances, the city offered not a better lifestyle to the one she left behind but the opportunity to create a new one, a life so different to the one she was used to, she would not have to live with the reminder that that past life was mostly lost to her now, that life lived off of the land. Like many of the Maori migrants she represents however, her decision to move to the city did not live up to her expectations but came with certain unexpected, disappointing

and negative consequences. The urban life she so desperately desired came with prejudice, discrimination and poor working conditions. The very environment with its overcrowded, polluted, colorless and seemingly lifeless state caused her to feel claustrophobic, unclean and lifeless herself and seek solace with an alcoholic beverage every night. This testifies to the toll her move and the urban environment was having on her mental and physical well-being. The ideal 'new' life Frances was so desperately searching for could not be found in the city and Hulme implies, through the feelings of resolution the reader experiences at the end of the short story, when she finally returns home with her nephew, that that life could only be found in the bush.

In 'The Knife and the Stone',<sup>69</sup> the coastal living environment of our young female protagonist is so unbearable she and an acquaintance from her school, run away to what they hope to be a better life in the city. The lifestyle they are running to however is an unsure and precarious one. These two teens are merely trading a wretched existence for another.

Hulme does not divulge the name of her young protagonist but she does go into precise detail when describing her living situation at home. She lives with a neglectful mother and a father who sexually abuses her, sneaking into her room at night, 'lurching and whispering God I love you girl love you girl, fumbling, delving' (TK, p. 100). The little money her parents do make, her

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<sup>69</sup> Keri Hulme, 'The Knife and the Stone', *Te Kaihau: The Windeater* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1986), pp. 97-106. All other references will be to this edition.



father from fishing, her mother from quilting, is lost almost instantly at the local pub or on drug and alcohol fuelled parties held at their home. After her brother Gareth dies, Hulme's young protagonist is expected to be the sole 'helpmate' (*TK*, p. 102) for her parents; preparing the fish her father brings home and keeping their decrepit house from falling completely apart. Because of this, her family is not only ostracized by their community but she, herself, is bullied incessantly at school as well: 'Giddy Fishy, how's it goin' Gutbucket? Life okay down on the dope estate, giggle giggle' (*TK*, p. 99).

The one person who is not put off by all of this is a boy she meets at school, named Mark. Mark's home environment seems to mirror Hulme's young protagonist's as it is hinted at that he too is abused sexually by his father. The two teens find a commonality in their suffering and so make the choice to run away together to Auckland:

Then he said, I have a cousin who can get us out...I have a cousin with a fish-shop in Auckland. Don't wince. There is a restaurant attached, and a flat attached to the restaurant. I can cook in my poofy way. You can process. He will send the fare...If you want, we can make it? (*TK*, p. 105).

They believe so desperately in the ideal of the city and that what it has to offer is far greater than what they are currently enduring and will free them from their poverty stricken, coastal lives and abusive families, they are unaware of the reality of their situations. They are merely swapping one type

of captivity for another. In dropping out of high school they are condemning themselves to a life of menial, low paid, yet taxing work, poor housing and very little chance of advancement. On top of this, it is implied that Mark is expecting more out of this arrangement than heartfelt thanks and gratitude. The first thing that comes to Hulme's protagonist's mind when she is listing off the few things she can take with her to the city, is her young and willing body, as if Mark will need it for his sexual gratification. As we can see, the life Hulme's young protagonist is, in effect, running away from merely reflects or foreshadows the new life she is blindly running towards and this because of her misplaced hope and belief in a reality that was unavailable to her, in the city: 'But it must be better' (TK, p. 106).

Another victim of this misconception or false impression is Hulme's character Hinewai from her 'While My Guitar Gently Sings'.<sup>70</sup> We are first introduced to Hinewai while she is sitting in a beer soaked chair, recovering from a night of drinking, partying and doing drugs and reminiscing over her childhood, in particular, memories with her estranged mother. We learn at the end of this short story that her mother only recently passed away and that Hinewai was too embarrassed and ashamed to return home for the tangi. She was ashamed because as a young girl she left her single mother to raise her four younger brothers by herself as well as maintain their family farm in Whangaroa, for the city. She did this because, like many young, idealistic, Maori migrants before her, she believed city life would be easier and offer

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<sup>70</sup> Keri Hulme, 'While My Guitar Gently Sings', *Te Kaihau: The Windeater* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1986), pp. 107-117. All other references will be to this edition.

greater opportunities for her than life in her rural hometown and she also did not believe in the backward traditions of her people. She felt she would be able to find more fulfillment living in the city. What she found however was failure, disappointment, disillusionment and shame, shame that her life did not turn out how she imagined.

Hinewai only lasted one year at Teacher's Training College in Wellington before the program overwhelmed her and she was forced to withdraw and then the menial jobs she was trying to escape in Whangaroa, caught up with her: 'I worked in a downtown Woolworth's first; a Lambton Quay hamburger bar second, and a Cuba Street massage parlor, third' (*TK*, p. 113). As was typical in many of these early stories on Maori experiences in the city, she then became one of those young, Maori protagonists whose innocence and inexperience did not prepare them for the more unsavory aspects of urban life. Because of this she took up experimentation with drugs, abused alcohol and became so sexually promiscuous and desensitized to her new urban lifestyle, that when she fell pregnant, she neither knew nor cared whom the father was nor did she share the child's existence and premature death with any members of her family. Her low socioeconomic status meant that when she attempted to improve herself or better her situation, she was met with resistance and failure. Her new urban setting also discouraged maintaining a connection to her rural roots and Maori culture and so Hinewai lost that link to her Maoritanga as well. As her mother highlighted for her in one of their final arguments, she was living in a world now totally different to the one she was raised in and so had forgotten what was really important in

life, 'from the marae at the heart of the village, to the bones, dead in the cemetery and live in every second house' (*TK*, p. 112).

Once her thoughts and memories have come full-circle and she is sitting in the dark, alone with her grief and shame, Hinewai realizes the tragedy that has become her life, the 'disgrace and emptiness of [her] noisy crowded life' (*TK*, p. 117). Her eyes are finally open to the reality that is her situation and it is through this retrospection that the reader is able to discern the meanings and criticisms behind Hulme's story. The systems put in place in the city, at that time, were not built for the advancement or benefit of individuals such as Hinewai. The status her people were relegated upon arrival in the city and the limited opportunities afforded them because of this, meant the ideal lifestyle many left their rural hometowns for, were unavailable to them. Like many migrants before her, once Hinewai realizes this, realizes that she has spent her life in the pointless pursuit of an unattainable ideal, she is overcome with regret and disappointment. In an attempt to escape her rural life and hardships for a believed better one in the city, like Hulme's young protagonist in 'The Knife and the Stone', Hinewai is left with a life devoid of both her mother and Maoritanga and filled instead with feelings of misplaced hopes, expectations, failure and disappointment.

As Beatson pointed out, it was not just the 'good-time, good natured country girl, threatened by the vices of the city' or the 'debauch of the

wholesome Maori country girl',<sup>71</sup> that most interested writers writing on Maori urban experiences. The call of the city and the consequences for those Maori males who heeded that call, was also a common theme and trope for those writers of the Maori literary tradition, during that time. Hulme's 'Stations on the Way to Avalon'<sup>72</sup> is a prime example of this.

Robert, her main character, is a young, aspiring director, working and living in Wellington. We are first introduced to him while he is being racially discriminated against on the train, an occurrence we later learn happens regularly:

"Tickets from Wellington, all tickets please." He stops by me. I knew he would. "You just got on mate?" "No, you collected my ticket as I came in the door." He doesn't believe me. They never do (*TK*, p. 171).

Robert is struggling living in the city. With pollution, overcrowding, substandard housing, low wages, bad work conditions and constant noise, he is beginning to feel as Frances felt in 'A Nightsong for the Shining Cuckoo', like the urban environment itself is trying to suffocate and smother him: 'I mean, I can never get a decent breath of it...It isn't here in the city. Lacklife city' (*TK*, pp. 171-172). To him, the capital is almost sterile with its lack of color and inability to sustain life:

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<sup>71</sup> Beatson, p. 15.

<sup>72</sup> Keri Hulme, 'Stations on the Way to Avalon', *Te Kaihau: The Windeater* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1986), pp. 171-182. All other references will be to this edition.

You know how it can be, sterile Wellington streets with their calcified dog turds and stunted trees...The ferns some inept council worker has planted are dying from windburn. There's plenty of weeds surviving. Thriving. Trust weeds to thrive in the city though (*TK*, pp. 172-173).

Because of this, he finds himself reflecting, more and more, on his childhood lived in the countryside. How he used to watch the slaughtering of the pigs during pig killing season, spend his summers at the beach with his childhood sweetheart and participate in such activities as potato harvesting and herring preserving. The more he reminisces over the life he used to live, the unhappier he becomes with the life he is currently living.

As the story progresses, he slowly starts to lose his grip on reality, living more in his past memories than in the present. Hulme seems to be highlighting, through the decay of Robert's state of mind, some of the negative effects city life can have on the mental well-being of its Maori migrants. The longer Robert lives in the city, the faster his mental health deteriorates. He starts losing track of time, becomes forgetful as well as paranoid and believes the unwholesome environment of the city is causing him to be sickly.

Hulme seems to imply, through his reminiscences, that the solution to this problem lies in his childhood, when he had a tangible connection to his Maoritanga. She seems to suggest that if that relationship were maintained in

some way, even whilst living in the capital, then Robert would not be mindlessly adrift in the city as he was now and he would not be so easily overwhelmed and overcome by its pitfalls. Moving beyond that we could also argue Hulme is offering a cautionary warning to those Maori migrating to the city. Her short fiction seems to take on the role of advocate in the way it reminds its readers that the Maori culture and urban lifestyle need not be separate and distinct features of one's life but that a harmonious balance can be struck between the two. Where that equilibrium cannot be maintained, then situations such as the ones Frances, Hinewai and Robert, find themselves to be in, where their familial relations and mental health are being torn asunder, will continue to occur.

Hulme's consistent approach in portraying her people's urban experiences with systemic racism is a prime example of that shift in tone Beatson believes marked the beginning of that period of disappointment and disillusionment for those Maori living in the city and for those writers of the Maori literary tradition, whose aim it was to reflect their various experiences there. Her short stories also stand as an example of Evans' and Ihimaera's supposition that there is a 'patterned connection between society and fiction' and that for Maori writers of fiction, in particular, there is an unavoidable political element to their works in the way they not only mirror certain aspects of urban society at that time but critique them as well. *Te Kaihau* also endorses Webster's 'whole way of struggle' theory in the way it exposes some of the more unattractive aspects of life for many Maori such as Frances', Robert's and Hinewai's alcoholism, Hinewai's promiscuity and

experimentation with drugs and the sexual abuse addressed in 'The Knife and the Stone'.

Hulme is significant to Tawhai's literary heritage because her short fiction helped establish the platform from which she could express her own concerns with her people's experiences in the city and explore the conflict between the urban ideal and the urban reality today. Just as Grace and Hulme were described by Allen as being 'contemporary rangatahi [or] ("new nets")' needed to herald the Maori people into a new, bicultural, urbanized Aotearoa, so is Tawhai a writer of her time, needed to guide her people into a new, multicultural, contemporary New Zealand.



**‘Tihe Mauri Ora: Now it is My Turn. Here I Stand. I am about  
to Speak. Hear Me’<sup>73</sup>**

**A Literary Mooring Stone, A Study in Multiculturalism**

In 1994 a piece of art work known as the Mooring Stone, was gifted to the Parliament building in Wellington as part of the These Matters of Pride exhibition. The ancient Maori anchor and the numerous yet distinct ribbons attached to it, pay tribute to the various ethnicities that have added to and enriched New Zealand culture since the arrival of the first Maori and acknowledge their communities contributions to New Zealand society.

Sturm, Grace and Hulme’s short fiction stand as powerful social documents of their times, partly in the way they represent the bicultural perspective or the experiences of their people in the wake of biculturalism. Tawhai’s short fiction is the byproduct of her literary predecessors works as their interests in biculturalism helped prepare the way for a multicultural perspective to develop and for her short stories, in particular, to address the various issues and concerns of other ethnicities besides New Zealand Maori. It is in this way that Tawhai’s work can be seen as a type of literary mooring stone as it acknowledges the presence of other ethnicities within contemporary New Zealand society as well as offers a voice for their experiences.

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<sup>73</sup> Michael King, ed., *Tihe Mauri Ora: Aspects of Maoritanga* (New Zealand: Methuen Publications, 1978), p. 2.

Her work still shows an awareness of the issues broached by Sturm, Grace and Hulme however and through her use of language, employs the same 'direct' approach Allen attributes to their fiction, when depicting her own concerns with these problems. Her desire to offer less stereotypical and more nuanced portrayals of Maori and the Maori experience mean many of her short stories also foster Webster's 'whole way of struggle' theory. A further parallel between her, Sturm, Grace and Hulme, lies in the way her short stories can also be seen through the lens Evans and Ihimaera offer in the way they pattern, at times, aspects of contemporary New Zealand society whilst also critiquing them.

Examples of this can be seen in 'Pale Flower',<sup>74</sup> where Tawhai recognizes Sturm's concern for her people's experiences with casual racism, discrimination and feelings of alienation and how it can still be a common occurrence today. In this short story, her nameless Maori protagonist enters into a relationship with a Pakeha gentleman after leaving an abusive one with her previous boyfriend. When she is introduced to his parents, she experiences racial discrimination by his mother: "Your son's brought a Maori girl home for dinner," his mother told his father' (*FOM*, p. 130). The conversation that then follows is hauntingly familiar of the one between Sally and her supposed friends in 'Where to, Lady?' in the way that Tawhai's protagonist is spoken to patronizingly and condescendingly:

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<sup>74</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'Pale Flower', *Festival of Miracles* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2005), pp. 123-132. All other references will be to this edition.

"I don't know that we'll be eating what you like," she [the mother] said anxiously to me. "Do you eat pork?"

"Yeah, we have pork bones and watercress all the time at home," I said.

"Oh," she said. "This is roasted, with crackling and potatoes."

"No problem," I said bravely. "Sometimes we have wild pork down at the pa."

"I think you might find that this tastes slightly different," she said. "But perhaps you might like it" (*FOM*, pp. 130-131).

The tone of the mother's comments reveals her prejudicial assumptions, attitudes and belief systems and because of this causes Tawhai's protagonist to feel uncomfortable and inadequate because of her differences: 'I listened to his mother when she rang to make sure that I cooked food the way he liked it' (*FOM*, p. 131).

For Grace, Tawhai shows her awareness of the continued prevalence of violence against women and children in her short story 'Dark Jelly'.<sup>75</sup> For her two Maori protagonists, Maemae and Ruth, they are the victims of their uncles perversions in the way that they are both sexually abused by them, as children: "Might call into your room tonight girl, to taste some of that dark jelly," her youngest uncle called' (*DJ*, p. 94). As a teenager Ruth is now being

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<sup>75</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'Dark Jelly', *Dark Jelly* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2011), pp. 89-94. All other references will be to this edition.

physically abused by her stepfather, Shane, and is also in a violent, drug fuelled and destructive relationship with her boyfriend, Zeb, a possible reflection of the seemingly inescapable cycle of violence she is in. Ruth's friends are also aware of her and Zeb's situation but do very little to intervene, a further testament perhaps to Webster's theory and the normalcy of such violence amongst them. Tawhai's forward yet casual approach to these issues as well as instances of alcohol and drug abuse, attempted burglary and drug dealing also stand as a witness to the commonality of these occurrences in the lives of her characters and the young, Maori youths they represent as well as epitomize the 'direct' approach Allen attributes to certain works of Maori fiction: "You got on the fry without me!" she [Ruth] shouted. "Fuck you," said Zeb, rousing himself. "There wasn't enough" (*DJ*, p. 89). Tawhai's choice of language goes on to foster this approach and highlights the repercussions of this type of lifestyle on its female victims, particularly, their sense of self worth and mental well-being. We can see this in the reaction one of Ruth's friend's has to her being physically assaulted by Zeb in front of him: "Let him fucking kill her," he said. "We can't do anything about it. She's got a fucking death wish" (*DJ*, p. 94).

In concerns with land issues, Tawhai shows she is also aware of the injustices that were done to her people in the forceful appropriation of their ancestral lands. In 'May 1968',<sup>76</sup> old Kau sets fire to the lake Heck and his family are relying on for duck shooting as a form of protest for the loss of his

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<sup>76</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'May 1968', *Festival of Miracles* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2005), pp. 87-95. All other references will be to this edition.

people's lands and Heck's family's continued refusal to return them. Even though he lives in a hut on Heck's family's farm, Kau still feels dispossessed and dislocated from his tribal lands, which for him offer a tangible connection to his ancestors, his culture and his heritage. These feelings then resonate to the reader just how significant his family's lands truly are to his sense of being, his sense of identity and his overall sense of Maoritanga:

"This is the whenua of my mother's people," he [Kau] told Heck on more than one occasion. "The stories spun into it are our stories. Down under the peat soil, those are our axes, and our bones. Those holes in the hills are our kumara pits. Those are our waka out there at the bottom of the lake" (*FOM*, p. 88).

For Hulme, Tawhai also shares in her concern with their people's continued experiences with systemic racism in the city. In 'Festival of Miracles',<sup>77</sup> Hana leaves her coastal home and family behind to migrate to Auckland in an attempt to forget about the house fire that claimed her baby's life and to start a new, believed better life, in the city. She soon discovers however what many urban Maori migrants before her discovered, that due to systemic racism her urban ideal could never fully become a reality. Being Maori and with little to no skills, experience, education or family support, Hana moves from one menial, degrading, low paying job to the next before having to resort to prostitution in order to survive: "There were men and men

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<sup>77</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'Festival of Miracles', *Festival of Miracles* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2005), pp. 1-5. All other references will be to this edition.

and men' (*FOM*, p. 4). Like Hulme's Hinewai in 'While My Guitar Gently Sings', Hana leaves her home for a believed better life in the city and is rewarded for her decision with disappointment and disillusionment.

Through these short stories and their brief descriptions we are able to see how Tawhai's work fosters the generalizations of the Maori literary tradition as well as the concerns addressed by Sturm, Grace and Hulme. Because of these reasons she is often perceived as representing solely the Maori experience however, her short fiction moves beyond those issues discussed by her literary predecessors to also include those being faced by individuals of other ethnicities living in New Zealand society today. Her short fiction can be seen as a type of acknowledgement of those groups, their peoples and their experiences as well as a means by which to voice some of their concerns. In doing so, Tawhai is showing how she is a writer of her time, like her literary foremothers, and how she is also extending on Ihimaera's supposition that all Maori fiction should have a Maori focus, be grounded within a lived, Maori reality and have a political agenda that would benefit Maori in some way or form. In de-emphasizing the bicultural aspect of past works, in particular, the interest in bicultural identities, and in moving towards a literary focus that embraces multicultural ethnic identities, she is also verifying Hall's theory on identity politics, specifically identity's provisional and conditional nature.

We can see Tawhai's particular interest in these matters through a brief look at some of her short fiction. In 'The Magic Taro',<sup>78</sup> we go with her young protagonist as she reminisces over her childhood and what it was like growing up in a Polynesian family. Her recollections are centered particularly on times spent with her 'Koko Afi' and 'Big Mamas' (*FOM*, p. 37) as well as the believed miraculous healing of her younger brother, Va'aka, from a lifelong sickness.

Alfayad Habib in 'Imagining Winter'<sup>79</sup> leaves Lebanon for New Zealand in search of a peaceful world where he did not have to hear the 'missiles whine as if they themselves had been hit and painfully wounded' but could discover instead the sanctuaries he imagined as a child when he read 'the fables and fairy tales of Hans Christian Anderson and the Brothers Grimm' (*FOM*, p. 47).

In 'Without the Sky',<sup>80</sup> we are introduced to a woman named Adrienne, of Dutch heritage. Adrienne and the protagonist of this story, Lucky, believe themselves to be alien hunters and so spend their time travelling around the North Island, in search of evidence to support their theory. Adrienne is also suffering from anorexia and by the end of this short

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<sup>78</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'The Magic Taro', *Festival of Miracles* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2005), pp. 37-41. All other references will be to this edition.

<sup>79</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'Imagining Winter', *Festival of Miracles* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2005), pp. 47-53. All other references will be to this edition.

<sup>80</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'Without the Sky', *Festival of Miracles* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2005), pp. 97-105. All other references will be to this edition.

story, dies from it: 'He [Lucky] pictured big, broad, blonde Dutch brothers with bread-and-butter pudding skin, hoisting a coffin filled with little more than scraps of a self' (*FOM*, p. 105).

Young Ming in 'The Golden Lotus'<sup>81</sup> is resentful of her Chinese heritage and envious of the Maori girls who eat in her family's restaurant and so yearns for the day when she too can enjoy the freedom she believes they have: 'The Maori girls came in with their families, ate lunch, and went off again to do nothing, or everything' (*L*, p. 36).

In 'Snow in Samoa',<sup>82</sup> the young, nameless protagonist of this story offers us a firsthand view of aspects of Samoan culture from his experiences with his older sister, Lese's, wedding:

Then there were drums and dancing while we waited for the food. The dancers wore pale lemon raffia skirts, and raffia flowers on their tits and hips...We ate raw fish salad, and the coconut cream dribbled down my fingers. White, for a white wedding, white for White Sunday (*L*, pp. 42-43).

Polska, from 'Clipping Stray Strands',<sup>83</sup> takes us into the home she shares with her Polish mother, Elisabeth, who survives internment in a Polish

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<sup>81</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'The Golden Lotus', *Luminous* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2007), pp. 34-38. All other references will be to this edition.

<sup>82</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'Snow in Samoa', *Luminous* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2007), pp. 39-43. All other references will be to this edition.



concentration camp, only to then raise her daughter on Nazi horror stories: 'Polska grew up listening to stories about Nazis...cooking people in ovens and melting them down to make shoe polish or candle wax' (*L*, p. 84).

Yuri in 'Like Japan'<sup>84</sup> takes us into a very different world when she offers us a unique insight into the cultural pressures, expectations and familial obligations of a young, Japanese woman living and attending university in Hamilton:

She would get good marks overseas in New Zealand...Then she would return to take up a position that paid well, keeping the four of them in their apartment complex long after her father had retired (*L*, p. 47).

Finally, in 'Lucky'<sup>85</sup> we go with main character, Siobhan, into the nursing home that is caring for her ailing mother, Patsy. Siobhan describes her mother as being a 'staunch Irish' (*DJ*, p. 142), one who has an obsession with attaining 'the luck of the Irish' (*DJ*, p. 145) and as Siobhan watches her mother's life draw closer to its end, finds herself reminiscing more and more over her childhood and shared experiences they had had.

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<sup>83</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'Clipping Stray Strands, *Luminous* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2007), pp. 83-88. All other references will be to this edition.

<sup>84</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'Like Japan', *Luminous* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2007), pp. 44-50. All other references will be to this edition.

<sup>85</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'Lucky', *Dark Jelly* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2011), pp. 137-145. All other references will be to this edition.

Through these very brief descriptions we are able to see Tawhai's interest in portraying the vast and diverse experiences of individuals who belong to ethnic groups besides her own. In doing so, she validates their presence within contemporary New Zealand society as well as their various yet distinct experiences with it. Her work also shows a keen interest in the shared experiences that exist between these groups and it is these short stories, in particular, that this subsection will take a closer look at. What this analysis will investigate, specifically, are the feelings of alienation, isolation, dislocation and shame, that can occur within members of ethnic groups outside of New Zealand Pakeha and New Zealand Maori. It will also explore their experiences with prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping as well as address the issue of whether a connection to one's cultural heritage should be maintained in a new and unfamiliar setting.

Tawhai is similar to certain members of her literary legacy in the way that she takes Allen's 'direct' and forward approach to these issues and also expands on Webster's 'whole way of struggle' theory in order to include some of the more uncomfortable aspects of life for those not of Maori descent. Alfayad, for example, in 'Imagining Winter', physically abuses his girlfriend Ulrika whilst Yuri from 'Like Japan', is sexually assaulted by a fellow student.<sup>86</sup> In exploring these issues, Tawhai is also critiquing the society that is allowing them to occur and in extending her literary gaze she

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<sup>86</sup> Tawhai, *Festival of Miracles*, 'Imagining Winter', pp. 47-53 (p. 49); Tawhai, *Luminous*, 'Like Japan', pp. 44-50 (p. 45).

is including those who, until recently, have only been a minor presence within fiction written by Maori women.

‘Russian Onions’<sup>87</sup> is a prime example of her desire to rectify this. Mrs. Ling’s feelings of dislocation are exacerbated by her work in her family’s fruit and vegetable store, where she is constantly reminded of the past life she and her husband left behind. From the color of the red, New Zealand earth, that is so different to the brown soil found in China and leaves her feeling ‘disorientated...every morning’ (*FOM*, p. 7) when she awakes to do the gardening; to the customers who come into her store looking for a particular type of cabbage her father would only ever feed his cows with, Mrs. Ling is struggling to adapt to her new environment because she is constantly reminded of and so is comparing it to her past one.

The difficulty of mastering English adds to her feelings of disorientation, dislocation and alienation. She feels out of place and almost as if she does not belong because she cannot communicate easily or effectively with the people around her. When she passes the workers her husband hires, she feels ‘uncomfortable’ (*FOM*, p. 7) because she cannot understand what they are saying and so does not trust that they are not making fun of her when they laugh. Customers who come into the store often disrespect or disregard her because of her inability to fully comprehend what it is they are enquiring of her. In one of these conversations we are able to see Mrs. Ling’s

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<sup>87</sup> Alice Tawhai, ‘Russian Onions’, *Festival of Miracles* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2005), pp. 7-13. All other references will be to this edition.

awareness of her situation and the treatment she receives as well as her frustration and annoyance at being spoken to patronizingly as well as condescendingly and for being perceived as being simple-minded because she speaks halting English:

“Have you got any Russian onions?” asked a lady. Mrs. Ling looked at her with a distaste which she didn’t allow to show on her face. “Rah-shan onions?” said the ice woman again, making her mouth very big and round. Mrs. Ling bristled. Rah-shan onions. She had heard the first time (*FOM*, p. 9).

Her husband, Li-Chen’s, refusal to speak their native language or have their children taught it, further isolates her: “Do not speak to me in Chinese,” he scolded. “We are New Zealand now. We must speak their ways” (*FOM*, p. 12). In her isolation Mrs. Ling yearns to hear her native dialect so much so that she teaches it to her children when her husband is not around. When two Chinese women come into the store one day, speaking in rapid Mandarin, her spirits soar at the very idea of catching just a phrase or two of their conversation. This yearning is so encompassing for her that whilst hidden away, so as not to be discovered in her husband’s underground gambling den, she is also straining ‘her ears desperately, hoping to hear some words in the language of her heart’ (*FOM*, p. 11).

The tension Tawhai creates in this short story can be seen as playing itself out on two stages. Mrs. Ling’s internal struggles with migrating to a new

land highlight her personal feelings of dislocation and disorientation as well as her sense of alienation and isolation from the people around her, including her family. It also draws attention to the pressure she feels from Li-Chen and their family business to fully assimilate and become “New Zealand now”. The tension that exists between her husband and herself however can be seen as representing that which can occur when an old world comes into contact with a new one. Where Li-Chen sees his cultural heritage and ethnic identity as being irrelevant in their new living situation, Mrs. Ling shows that to her it still has a place and significance as it acts as an anchor of sorts, to keep her grounded in the familiar even whilst in a new and unfamiliar place and to remind her of where she came from.

Shem from ‘Dragon Who Cries Frozen Tears’<sup>88</sup> desires no such reminder. Like Li-Chen he also holds his cultural heritage and ethnic identity in low regard and sees it as more of a hindrance or impediment to his idea of progress as well as his advancement into the modernized world. For the reader, Shem is portrayed from the perspective of his younger brother, Twelve, and so it is from observations he makes and conversations they have together, that the reader is able to discern Shem’s inner turmoil.

For Shem, he is embarrassed and ashamed of his cultural legacy because he sees it as being the distinguishing factor that marks him as being different. The son of a wealthy businessman, he is sent, with Twelve and their

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<sup>88</sup> Alice Tawhai, ‘Dragon Who Cries Frozen Tears’, *Luminous* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2007), pp. 89-94. All other references will be to this edition.

older brother Lee, to gain an education and learn English in New Zealand and because of this, desires to be seen as what he considers to be a New Zealander and which does not include his Asian ethnicity. Like Li-Chen, Shem feels that in order to truly embrace his new life, be accepted by those in it and to reap the full benefits of that lifestyle, he must forsake his cultural heritage and the past life it represents:

After school, Shem picked him [Twelve] up, and they went to the Asian Noodle House. Their father owned this restaurant, and they could eat here whenever they wanted to. Shem tried not to. He wanted to move away from that sort of thing. He'd even changed his name a bit, so that it didn't sound so Asian (*L*, p. 90).

Because of his resentment towards his culture, Shem also holds in contempt those of Asian descent who still retain a resemblance of that past life. To him, his new, English speaking, modern lifestyle represents the future, progress and the only path to success. For those who share in his ethnicity yet hold onto their traditional beliefs and dialects, they represent to him the old world, the past world and retrogression. It is here that the significance of language is again highlighted for the reader:

Shem looked scornfully at the overall-clad workers sitting at the tables, waiting to be served. 'Look at them', he said. 'They still think they're back home. None of them speaking English. Don't they know this is a new country now? If you don't speak English, you'll be left

behind. That's why our father's left us here. We'll learn to speak perfect English and we'll get ahead (*L*, p. 90).

Shem's dislike for his cultural inheritance and the insecurity he feels about his place in society because of it also manifests itself in the way he overuses English sayings; a small observation, on Twelve's part, but a revealing one nonetheless. Shem's excessive use of English phrases shows the desperateness in which he wants to fit in. In a conversation with Twelve about their father, Shem remarks: "Better...We can do better. Sky's the limit over here." He liked to use English-language expressions' (*L*, p. 91).

For Tawhai, this short story shows her awareness of the inner conflict that can arise within some migrants when they are faced with a new way of being that challenges their past lifestyle. Through the character of Shem she highlights the feelings of resentment, insecurity and embarrassment that can result from this specific type of confusion. This short story also depicts Tawhai's awareness of the racist ideologies and stereotyping of those of Asian descent through the way Twelve is discriminated against by certain members in his class. In a conversation he overhears in the boy's lavatory, he learns why he is the only one not invited to Kane's birthday and why he has been suffering from feelings of isolation and exclusion:

"You should invite Twelve," said the other boy. "You'd probably get heaps of Dragon Rider cards from him for a present." "Yeah," said

Kane, “but I’m not allowed to. My mum says Asians cause all the crime, and my dad says that the country’s too full already” (*L*, p. 90).

Tawhai’s story also reflects an aspect of Webster’s ‘whole way of struggle’ theory when Twelve stumbles upon Shem with their younger female cousin, Little Chen. For Twelve, he is unaware of what he has momentarily interrupted, however for the reader, they are able to discern the true meanings behind Tawhai’s descriptions:

Without thinking, he went into Shem’s room without knocking. He saw Little Chen lying naked in the bed, twisted up in a sheet. Shem was kneeling over her with his jeans unzipped (*L*, p. 93).

Tawhai is not vague in her portrayal of family violence and child sexual abuse in this scene however that directness highlights the realism of the issue and emphasizes the fact that this problem is not restricted to Maori and the Maori ‘struggle’ alone. Shem’s violence is a manifestation of his own ‘whole way of struggle’, with one of those compounding elements also being the feelings of contempt, resentment and shame he has towards his ethnic identity.

Feelings of cultural shame manifest themselves in a different way in ‘Miss India’.<sup>89</sup> Like Shem, Rani is also embarrassed of her Indian ethnicity because it marks her as being different to those around her, especially those

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<sup>89</sup> Alice Tawhai, ‘Miss India’, *Luminous* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2007), pp. 145-150. All other references will be to this edition.



in the small town in which she grows up. Where her parents are proud of their legacy and try to instill in their daughter a desire to 'retain her heritage' (*L*, p. 145) by entering her into beauty pageants, Rani is ashamed of it. She is embarrassed by the way the spicy smells of her mother's chutney waft through the neighborhood and the way her mother still hangs 'dark blankets with bright, striped tigers on them out on the balcony to dry. "In India," she said, "we hung everything over the balcony." "We're not in India," said Rani' (*L*, p. 146).

In an attempt to be seen beyond her ethnicity or to be recognized as more than just 'the Indian doctor's daughter' (*L*, p. 145), she decides to move to Auckland to attend Polytech. Here, Tawhai highlights the prejudices that may exist within ethnic minority groups as Rani is discomfited at the thought of building acquaintanceships and making friends with students of Fijian Indian descent:

Rani found things hard. The Indians living nearby were all Fijian Indians, and they kept to themselves. Other people thought that an Indian was an Indian, but as far as Rani was concerned, they may as well have been Russian (*L*, p. 146).

In her struggles to meet new people and form new friendships she also suffers from feelings of isolation, alienation and loneliness; a testament perhaps to the barrier her ethnicity can be perceived as being, to those who do not know her: '...[she] sat by herself in class. When she got home, she was

lonely. Very few people spoke to her at all' (*L*, p. 146). In her loneliness, naivety and lack of experience in the city, she is taken advantage of by a group of men and sexually assaulted. Webster's 'whole way of struggle' theory can be expanded on here in the way that Rani's gang rape shows that such forms of violence towards women are not restricted to those victims of Maori descent. The aspects Webster attributes to the Maori 'whole way of struggle' are in fact fluid and applicable to the life experiences of those of other ethnicities.

Rani is so humiliated by the trauma she experiences that she does not inform the police or her parents. However when she encounters some of the perpetrators at her bus stop a couple months later she refuses to remain passive. The strength she draws on in order to overcome her sense of fear and shame comes from the confidence and self-assurance finally embracing her cultural heritage and ethnic identity empowers her with:

She took a deep breath. 'I am Miss India,' she told herself, and in her head, she imagined herself dressed in her pale blue evening gown with the sparkling gold sequins scattered around the bust and the hem, and a ruby bindi marked on her forehead.

She gathered herself up as if she was walking along a catwalk and not a footpath, jutting her Indian nose in the air, and flared one nostril into a sneer.

As she walked past the men, she made eye contact with each of them, and they fell quiet, and dropped their own eyes to look at the ground (*L*, p. 150).

Like Mrs. Ling, Tawhai seems to be highlighting here the continued relevance of an individual's culture to their life, despite their possible shift in location. The experiences of Mrs. Ling and Rani can even go so far as to suggest that in a new and unfamiliar place, culture is even more necessary because it can act as a reassuring anchor to the familiar or as a source of self-confidence and strength. Where Shem was embarrassed and resentful of his ethnicity because it marked him as different and he saw no tangible benefits to its continued application in his life, Mrs. Ling, Rani and Tawhai through these characters, shows that the rewards of retaining a semblance of that legacy are significant, substantial and worthwhile.

Like Sturm, Grace and Hulme, Tawhai is a writer of her time. Where her literary forebears were preoccupied with representing solely the experiences of Maori after colonialism and biculturalism, Tawhai is interested in expanding that literary focus to also include the experiences of other ethnicities living within New Zealand society today. In doing so, in offering through her short fiction a stage in which these groups can play out their various experiences and voice their diverse issues, she is producing work that reflects the multicultural, contemporary state of New Zealand society. In helping move the focus from bicultural identities to multicultural

ethnic identities she is also preparing the way for short fiction interested in the provisional and conditional nature of gendered and sexual identities.

## **The Politics and Dynamics of Gendered and Sexual Identities**

From his study on identity formation and identity politics in *Questions of Identity*, Stuart Hall states that the nature of identities is to be in a constant state of flux or 'change and transformation' and attributes this ongoing process to the various internal and external factors that influence it. He goes onto say that in this day and age and with the amount of influencing factors increased, this process is heightened so that the state of an individual's identity now is one that is 'never singular' but 'fragmented and fractured' instead. He also draws attention to the significance of personal desires as well as society's governing norms and expectations on the reconstructing and reconfiguring process of individual's identities and it is these factors that will act as important methodological tools when exploring Tawhai's short fiction in this subsection, as her work here shows a particular interest in the flexible and provisional nature of identities, specifically sexual and gendered identities.

As her work can be seen as a collected representation of the contemporary New Zealand experience, in incorporating these issues she is not only enriching her account but she is also validating the presence and experiences of those to whom these issues concern. In including characters and concerns that are not commonly seen in fiction written by Maori women, she is also showing how she is a writer of her time and how she is helping move the Maori literary tradition onto a course that reflects New Zealand society today as well as its various inhabitants and their problems. In the

context of contemporary thinking, she verifies Hall's theory on identity formation and identity politics but her work also supports Evans and Ihimaera's supposition that Maori fiction has a 'patterned connection' to reality as one of its functions is to critique specific aspects of society. Tawhai's work endorses this way of thinking as it both highlights and critiques certain governing norms and expectations that effect the construction of sexual and gendered identities today. She also employs Allen's method of directness in her forward and candid approach to these issues as well as her choice of language.

We can see this through an analysis of her short story 'Scars'.<sup>90</sup> The nameless protagonist of this piece grows up in a strict military home where his father raises him to believe in certain preconceptions as to what it means to be a man. A man is a soldier, a fighter, someone who is strong, brave and disciplined: 'We looked like soldiers with our number-one haircuts, dark against our white skin. Our father always cut our hair like that, because that was how men had it' (*L*, p. 70). The protagonist's father was a soldier himself and so was his father before him and so as a child he models his life after these male examples, believing in the same ideals and principles as they did.

Just as he was raised to know what a man was supposed to be, he was also raised to know what a man was not supposed to be, and a man who was sexually attracted to members of his own sex, did not qualify as being a real

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<sup>90</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'Scars', *Luminous* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2007), pp. 69-75. All other references will be to this edition.

man. In his father's eyes, homosexuality was parallel to that of femininity and so made those who engaged in it less than those who did not and if a man were not a real man then he could not be a soldier either. When our protagonist realizes, as a teenager, that he is gay, he learns what happens when he does not meet his father's approved, prejudice based categorization anymore. His father's brutally blunt reaction can also stand as an example of Tawhai's appropriation of Allen's 'direct' approach theory:

When I was sixteen and got my ear pierced with a gold stud, my father had a fit. "You look like a fucking poofter," he said. "Men don't wear earrings. Leave that to the girls."

"It doesn't mean he's queer," said my mother.

But it did.

My father refused to talk to me from the moment that I told him. He looked right through me, and saw the wall on the other side of the room (*L*, pp. 73-74).

Tawhai seems to be highlighting here not only the flexible, provisional nature of her protagonist's sexual identity in the way that it is able to change, grow and develop despite his upbringing and his father's preconceptions and prejudices but also some of the misconceptions and mistaken beliefs that cultivate homosexual stereotypes and assumptions, drawing especial attention to their destructive potential. It is these same prejudices that follow our protagonist into the army when he decides to enlist in spite of his father's beliefs:

I joined the army, and it should have been paradise for me...But there were men like my father there as well, threatened by who I was, as if it had something to do with who they were. A lot of them thought that because I was gay, it meant that I was automatically hot for them personally, even though it wouldn't have crossed their mind to think that about every random woman...also those who made the assumption that if I could love men, I couldn't be a man (*L*, p. 74).

In taking this short story from a first person perspective, Tawhai is asking the reader to consider the negative effects of these prejudice based misunderstandings, personal insecurities and discriminatory beliefs on those to whom they are designed for and is emphasizing just how flawed and inaccurate they truly are. In offering a character that is both a homosexual man as well as a soldier, she is also drawing a parallel between, what is believed by some to be, two very separate and distinct types of men. In doing so, in blurring the lines that keep these groups divided, she is disproving the idea that there is a pre-determined kind of man or an identity that can only fit one specific categorical system.

This idea is further explored in Tawhai's 'Pink Frost',<sup>91</sup> where we are introduced to main character, Jan, who was born with an intersex condition. Where 'Scars' invalidates the classificatory system used by some in order to

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<sup>91</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'Pink Frost', *Dark Jelly* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2011), pp. 45-54. All other references will be to this edition.



distinguish between types of male identities, 'Pink Frost' goes on to expose the same flaws in the system that separates gender identities.

Despite being born without specific, distinguishing genitalia, Jan's parents choose to tick the box on her birth certificate that marks her as being male. However, she grows up believing herself to be female and so in order for her external self to reflect and portray her internal one, she undergoes corrective surgery. Jan also grows up to become an avid horse rider and desires to be a jockey however because of the uncommon circumstances surrounding her birth and the fact that she was legally born a male, the Racing Commission is slow in accepting her application, slow in understanding and recognizing her particular identity:

The Racing Commission was like a birth certificate. You needed to fit into a box. You could be this, or you could be that, but you couldn't be both this and that. Jan had applied for a special exemption to ride, but it was taking a long time to come through. She pictured them sitting in an office full of smoke, saying, "Yes, but what is she? Is she a he?" Unable to picture that she could be both (*DJ*, p. 48).

Like the father in 'Scars', the Racing Commission is trying to place Jan into an already approved of, simple, definable category: "Things were one thing, or they were the other thing. And it was easier for them to be the thing that they already were' (*DJ*, p. 50). However, in doing so they are ignoring the complex, ever changing nature of identities and that due to this people

cannot be so easily defined, so easily categorized and so easily placed within one box. The split nature of Jan's identity is highlighted through the simple description of her riding attire: 'Jan's colors were pale pink and pale blue silk' (*DJ*, p. 51). The Racing Commission however is unable to comprehend the complexity of her identity. She is allowed to compete in the end but she can only do so 'as a male jockey' (*DJ*, p. 50). Tawhai seems to be drawing attention here to the predicament some transgender individuals find themselves to be in after they have reconciled themselves to their new identity but must then wait for others to do the same. She is also addressing, directly, the need for there to be greater understanding and empathy for those who share in her circumstances.

Jan's sexual identity adds to the complicated nature of her character. Throughout the story she is in a seemingly happy, monogamous relationship with a fellow jockey named Toby. However, after a drug-filled night spent with his mother, Violet, and himself, it is Violet who she ends up engaging in coitus with:

The person down below with Violet...was both male and female, but neither a man or a woman. The Jan on the sheets showed passion with her fingertips, and her lips and inner thighs. The Jan above felt nothing (*DJ*, p. 51).

This brief encounter adds a further dimension to the convoluted state Jan's identity is in. She feels like both a man and a woman, a heterosexual and

a homosexual, and yet she feels like neither. Her identity is not divided into one or two simple, binary options but is fractured, fragmented and multifaceted. It is also provisional and conditional as this sexual encounter with her partner's mother was had while under the influence of drugs. Jan is a prime example of Hall's description of the modern aged identity; that it is the product of an individual's own desires compounded with the play of external factors on those desires and that its state is 'never unified...never singular...[but] constantly in the process of change and transformation'.

Tawhai's main character Pluto, in her short story of the same name, shares these same qualities.<sup>92</sup> We learn at the end of this story that Pluto was born male but felt, like Jan, as if her physical, outer self did not truly represent who she believed herself to be on the inside and so underwent gender reassignment surgery. The particular operation she received however did not include the construction of a uterus only the external female genitals. This revelation comes as a shock to the reader as the story is formatted as a first person narrative and Pluto, throughout the entirety of the text, is convinced she is pregnant. Through Pluto the reader comes to believe in this fantasy as well, to believe in the identity she has constructed for herself.

Pluto's past is only known to her mother, Bobby, who reveals to the reader that this is not the first phantom pregnancy Pluto has announced: "Not this again," said Bobby. "We've been through this before, Pluto. You

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<sup>92</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'Pluto', *Dark Jelly* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2011), pp. 55-64. All other references will be to this edition.

don't have the right equipment. You may have had the operation, but they can't grow you a uterus'" (*DJ*, p. 64). Pluto does not inform her friends and family she is pregnant in order to be intentionally deceitful. She honestly believes she is with child when she excitedly tells those she knows because her intense and all consuming desire to be a woman and have all the experiences she imagines are typically and stereotypically had by women, demands she has children. This desire or this drive preoccupies so much of Pluto's mental energies that she starts to believe in the illusion she so desperately creates and the identity she so desperately constructs: 'At night, she would gaze at her newly pregnant puku, and try to imagine a baby girl in there' (*DJ*, p. 60).

In Pluto's mind there are also additional, stereotypical qualities of a female lifestyle that are necessary for her to incorporate into her own in order to validate her way of life and choice in identity. She seems unaware of this practice, so it is up to the reader to recognize the cues and hints she offers. When Bobby buys four rose bushes to plant outside of her flat, Pluto is pleased as she considers them to be quite 'girlie' (*DJ*, p. 58) and so will make a nice addition. At work she feels the need to wear impractical footwear to express her 'obsession with shoes' and to showcase her femininity: 'Even in green factory overalls, Pluto could be guaranteed to be wearing beautiful impractical shoes that would have horrified Bobby' (*DJ*, p. 62). However, it is still the ability to bare children that Pluto sees as the most necessary requirement in authenticating her claim to her chosen lifestyle and identity. After Bobby reminds her, again, that she is unable to fall pregnant, she

despairs: 'Pluto felt the tears brimming up in her eyes. Failed as a planet, and failed as a woman' (*DJ*, p. 64).

It is Pluto's essentialist attitude that Tawhai is highlighting here. Pluto's belief that the female identity consists of predetermined, inherent traits that can be deconstructed into simple, generalized qualities, is a false and inaccurate belief system, as Hall's theory attests. So is the idea that there are certain, necessary characteristics needed in order for an identity to be considered authentic. This way of thinking completely discounts the shift in Pluto's identity that necessitated her gender reassignment operation and which testifies to the ever changing, provisional and complex nature of identities.

In these few short stories we have been able to see an aspect of the modern day identity, Hall describes. That they are complex and ever changing and that they are in an 'increasingly fragmented and fractured' state because of the increase in various influencing factors. Tawhai's work supplements this theory in its portrayals of the multifaceted, provisional and complicated nature of her characters sexual and gendered identities and offers examples of some of those influences Hall mentions. These include personal dissatisfaction with one's outer self in reflecting the inner persona, the imposition of others prejudices, stereotypes and assumptions as well as the effect of governing norms and expectations. In exposing these pressures by offering depictions of the experiences of homosexual and transgender

individuals with them, Tawhai is highlighting their damaging and destructive influence as well as the baseless nature of their claims.

In acknowledging the presence of characters and issues that are uncommon to the Maori literary tradition, Tawhai is also helping introduce a precedent that takes into consideration the whole expanse of contemporary New Zealand society and contemporary New Zealand experience. As part of that representation, her work also shows an interest in the new family and social structures that may have replaced the traditional family model.

## **Contemporary Constructions of the Traditional Family Model**

Evans and Ihimaera theorize that literature has a tangible connection to reality in the way that it reveals information about society's institutions and social structures. In these modern times, long-held institutions and conventional social structures are being reworked and refashioned in order to take on shapes more reflective of the social and economic state of society today. One of those customs being remodeled is the traditional family model. For much of contemporary literature, this shift or change in society is captured in the way they portray the various forms a family unit can now consist of.

Tawhai is a writer of her time partly in the way that her work also reflects this. The portrayals she offers however show a specific interest in certain familial and social structures that may have replaced the more traditional model such as the world of the feminist utopia, the world of the gang and marriage between same sex couples. In doing this, she shows how her work can stand as a social document of its time, in the way that Evans and Ihimaera believe literature to be, and also how she is enriching the Maori literary tradition by introducing precedents that are representative of contemporary New Zealand society today. Tawhai's incorporation of Allen's 'direct' theory in this subsection can be seen in her forward and gritty approach to her portrayals of gang life in particular and adds to the realism of her short fiction.

Through the character of Glory in 'Butterflies and Moths'<sup>93</sup> however, it is the changes that have occurred over time, in the roles and expectations of women, which Tawhai is highlighting. The reader is introduced to Glory, a middle-aged Maori woman, after she has left her husband and is traversing the countryside in search of fossils; a hobby she was unable to foster when she was younger as becoming a paleontologist, let alone receiving a higher education, was unheard of and unconventional for a woman, at that time: 'Glory had wanted to be a paleontologist and hunt fossils. Back when she was younger, there was no possibility. Girls were girls, and then they were wives and mothers' (*L*, p. 52).

In a conversation she has with her daughter, Marama, when she goes to visit her at the university she attends, she highlights this former expectation of women or this earlier categorization for women and the restrictions and limitations that used to exist at not being able to receive an education or be in control of one's own family planning. In doing so she emphasizes the differences between their two time periods and their respective societies:

"You girls have so much opportunity now to go straight into training for what you want to do with your lives," Glory had told her when she left. "In my day, you met a boy, you had some nookie, you got hapu,

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<sup>93</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'Butterflies and Moths', *Luminous* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2007), pp. 51-55. All other references will be to this edition.



and you were stuck. But you girls have got everything under the sun to stop a baby coming" (*L*, p. 52).

Marama's modern aged example is the inspiration Glory needs to reinvent herself and take advantage of the opportunities that were not available to her when she was younger. In the past, her husband, Charlie, swayed her decision to enroll in university once their children had grown because he said it was a "[w]aste of time" (*L*, p. 52). Glory now realizes that in order to feel a sense of fulfillment, she needs to stop neglecting and sacrificing those areas of her life that exist without her domestic sphere and that she needs to do this by capitalizing on the new governing norms and expectations concerning women that endorses education, leisurely pursuits and independence. She also realizes that Charlie, who is still entrenched in the past ways of thinking, will not support her in this endeavor, and so makes the decision to leave him:

Charlie was at home, fending for himself these days. Making his own sandwiches, scratching his own back. Eating baked beans on toast when he forgot to shop, and eating them in the dark when he forgot to pay the power bill (*L*, p. 53).

The reader is given an insight here into the role Glory had in her home and marriage or the role Glory saw herself as having and so is able to sympathize with her desire to want more out of her life. Through her decision to physically recreate herself: 'She'd been called Gloria at birth, but

when the kids had grown up, and it was time to reinvent herself, she'd shortened it to Glory' (*L*, pp. 51-52), she also embodies, for the reader, the changes that have occurred over time, in the roles of women in society as well as the conventions that support the traditional family structure. As Hall has shown, identity is the compilation of multiple, diverse elements that come together in order to make up an individual, and so in pushing beyond what was expected of her so as to find fulfillment in those various spheres, she disproves the deconstruction of the female character to the status of wife and mother only. It is this message that Tawhai seems to be trying to get across to her readers here. That and the potential contemporary society has in being the feminist utopia those in search of it need.

In 'Where I Married the Sea',<sup>94</sup> Tawhai offers a portrayal of another aspect of modern day society, distinctly different to past ones. Through the characters of Mahinaarangi and Niamh and the unabashedly open nature of their same sex relationship, she shows how contemporary society has evolved in a way that those who share in their sexual identities need not hide or be ashamed of them anymore. The open-minded state of society today in regards to homosexuality can be seen in the direct, frank conversation Mahinaarangi and Niamh have with their friends, where they explain why they are lesbian:

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<sup>94</sup> Alice Tawhai, 'Where I Married the Sea', *Dark Jelly* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2011), pp. 155-166. All other references will be to this edition.

“I like being with girls,” said Niamh. “They accept you just as you are”...“Yeah,” said Mahinaarangi, “if you don’t want to shave under your arms, you don’t have to. Men always expect us to be something other than what we really are. Men want us to be an idea of a woman. They don’t want us to be a real woman” (*DJ*, p. 164).

For Mahinaarangi however, there is one drawback to being in a same sex relationship and that is the inability to be legally wed. The reader learns that as a young girl she desired nothing more than to be married as it was a practice that members of her family had participated in for years and so would offer a way in which she could connect to them and feel a part of that legacy: ““I only dreamed of being married,” said Mahinaarangi. “And my photo hanging next to my Nan’s photo on the wall. But it’s never going to happen, because I’m queer”” (*DJ*, p. 157). She is aware of the option of a civil union however to her, a civil union cannot compare to the idea she has constructed in her mind of marriage. To her, a civil union feels cold, detached and businesslike: “We could do the civil union thing,” said Niamh. “Sounds like a railway company”, said Mahinaarangi (*DJ*, p. 158).

Niamh’s behavior gives the impression that, unlike Mahinaarangi, she is resigned to the reality that a civil union is the only available option for those in their situation. However, the reader is offered a glance behind the exterior in order to see her inner desires and to witness that she too dreams, at times, of being married to Mahinaarangi:

“Your eyes are blue like hers. And you could wear a white dress. If we got married,” said Mahinaarangi. “She was the first woman I ever loved.”

“Queer chicks can’t get married,” said Niamh.

But sometimes even Niamh thought about it: getting married, and their arms full of pale blue roses (*DJ*, p. 164).

In constructing her short story around the lives of an openly gay couple whilst making references to the possibility of a civil union, Tawhai is showing how the traditional family model has shifted to include those in homosexual relationships. In recognizing the predicament of those same sex couples who desire the full privileges of heterosexual couples in being married legally, one to another, she is also showing the potential this institution has of shifting and morphing yet again.

As part of that process of transformation, Tawhai also takes us into the world of the gang in her short story ‘Red Moon’.<sup>95</sup> Allen’s ‘direct’ theory is applicable here in the way that Tawhai’s forward, unreserved and gritty approach, seen especially through her choice of language, allows the reader direct insight into the life of a gang member as well as some of the possible consequences of that life. Tawhai’s medium for doing this is her character, Hunter, who is a member of the Mongrel Mob, and the conversations he has with his elderly neighbor, the nameless protagonist of this story. The reader

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<sup>95</sup> Alice Tawhai, ‘Red Moon’, *Dark Jelly* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2011), pp. 81-87. All other references will be to this edition.

also garners information about Hunter and his life from observations the old man makes.

From the very outset, gang life is portrayed as being the only life. It supersedes all former social structures and institutions, such as an individual's cultural ties:

Hunter told me that gangs were the new iwi. I just shrugged. "True," he said. "When I was inside, I wanted to put my name down to learn Maori. But the Mob said, "What are you, Maori or Mongrel?" And that was the end of that" (*DJ*, p. 81).

The use of the word 'iwi' is revealing here because like a Maori tribe, a gang is a community of people with certain distinct features and traits; characteristics Tawhai shares with the reader. The smothering of member's agency, free will and individuality, for example, can be seen in the way Hunter discontinues his pursuit of learning te reo Maori because it was seen as being inappropriate and unacceptable by other members. An observation made on the part of the old man goes on to reveal that Hunter could have been a man with religious inclinations as well if he had not joined the gang and if being a part of a separate organization were allowed in the gang: 'Hunter probably would have been a religious man, but of course, that wasn't allowed either' (*DJ*, p. 82). The casual, cavalier way he discloses to the protagonist his time spent in prison can also testify to the possible commonality of such an occurrence.

The role and treatment of women is a feature of gang life Tawhai draws especial attention to in this story, specifically their objectification by male gang members. While Hunter is in prison, members of his gang call upon his wife, Nita, to provide sexual favors. Hunter is upset when he finds out however Nita, as well as his friends, tell him to 'harden up', implying that her extramarital affairs are merely another characteristic of their chosen lifestyle:

"Think where you met me," she said. "Up on the block. All of you were having a turn. And after you stuck your dick in and did your business, you grabbed me and put your arm around me. Pulled me up next to you and you said, "This is my missus now." You put your tongue in my mouth while it still tasted of other Dog's cocks...You were gone. How was I going to say no to them? Do you think I wanted a punch in the head?" (*DJ*, p. 84).

We can see Allen's 'direct' approach here in the way that Tawhai depicts Nita's objectification. She is seen and treated by gang members, not as an individual but as an item and a group possession at that; someone who's sole purpose is to provide sexual gratification for others. The effect this has on Nita is that she is so desensitized to her mistreatment and hardened by her situation that she cannot see it as being anything other than another inevitable aspect of her life.

The implication of violence in Nita's dialogue is not lost to the reader nor are the references Tawhai makes to instances of alcoholism, vandalism, inter-group fighting, dog fighting and benefit fraud. Combined, these issues help create the world of the gang Tawhai is trying to portray for her reader. It is the simple and frank observation made by her protagonist that reveals her position on this matter however. The tone of her main character's comment is sad after watching Hunter and his friends engage in gang related activities. He describes them as being merely: 'Kids. Kids with guns and knives and drugs' (*DJ*, p. 83).

This direct deconstruction of gang culture offers an insight not only into how Tawhai's protagonist perceives Hunter and those who participate in his choice in lifestyle but also how Tawhai sees gang life. Where the tone and content of her previous stories advocated the new familial and social structures they were representing, portraying them as being beneficial forms of progress, Tawhai is critical of the rising presence of gang culture in contemporary New Zealand society. In 'Red Moon' she asks the reader to consider how an institution that robs children of their childhood, teaches them to be violent and to objectify women, discourages individuality while encourages criminality and employs isolation tactics, is a constructive modification of the traditional family model. Advantageous or not, however, the social and family structures Tawhai's short fiction portray are reflections of the state of New Zealand society today and add to her overall representation of the contemporary New Zealand experience.

### **Conclusion: 'fresh facets of 21<sup>st</sup>-century Aotearoa'**<sup>96</sup>

Alice Tawhai is a writer of her time in the way that her fiction captures certain aspects of the contemporary New Zealand experience. Because of the literary legacy that her pseudonym bares, her work depicts some of the modern day manifestations of the concerns and issues facing her people and which were addressed in the works of past Maori women writers such as Sturm, Grace and Hulme. However, Tawhai's short fiction shifts the paradigm, set in part by her literary foremothers, in order to better reflect the diverse state of New Zealand society today.

Her move from a bicultural focus to a multicultural one in order to explore some of the problems and voice some of the experiences of those belonging to ethnic groups other than New Zealand Maori or New Zealand Pakeha is a testament of this. So are her portrayals of the increasingly fragmented, fractured and multifaceted state of gendered and sexual identities today. The refashioning of the traditional family model in conjunction with current changes in social customs and conventions also proves to be an interest that falls within Tawhai's literary gaze.

It is in these ways that Tawhai is helping enrich the Maori literary tradition. Her work validates that produced by past writers by demonstrating a similar interest in the experiences of Maori people in the wake of biculturalism and colonialism however it also moves beyond those concerns

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<sup>96</sup> Jamieson, 'Private Life', 38-40, (p. 40).



by introducing new precedents that illustrate that those issues of marginalization and disenfranchisement are not restricted to the Maori experience alone but are now had by minority groups and underclass's throughout contemporary New Zealand society.

The addition of Tawhai's short fiction to the Maori literary tradition's *taura tangata* warrants further scholarly attention but, more importantly, strengthens the rope as a whole and will help preserve this unique and significant body of work for future readers and writers alike.

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