

# HYBRIDITY AND THE SYMBOLIZATION OF POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITY IN NEW ZEALAND MĀORI LITERATURE

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Since the Second World War, New Zealand, like other former settler colonies in which a transplanted European culture has come to dominate an indigenous minority one, has seen a resurgence of nationalism on the part of its indigenous people, the Māori, that has shattered the possibility of an easy assimilation of Māori into Pākehā (European) culture once imagined as the inevitable and desirable outcome of colonization. The combined effects of urban migration, technological change, calls for a restoration of Māori sovereignty, the growth of other multi-ethnic diasporic immigrant communities, and the advent of an international globalized culture have forced divergent cultures into contacts that require a new relationship to be negotiated between them. As Roger Maaka and Augie Fleras have pointed out, the result has been a shift away from fixed cultural identities to ones that are “not only relational, contextual and fluid...but are also continually changing and reinventing themselves by fusing elements of the past with the present, in a perpetual hybridization” (Maaka and Fleras 2005: 86).

In fiction written by New Zealand Māori authors, the hybridity of which Maaka and Fleras speak is manifest both in content and form. As far as content is concerned, Māori novels—which first began to be published in the 1970s with Witi Ihimaera’s *Tangi* (1973)—tend to represent characters who are in the process of trying to negotiate their way through a collision between the conflicting values of traditional Māori culture and those of the world of the Pākehā (Europeans of primarily British

descent). Such characters may themselves be hybrid, being of mixed Māori/Pākehā ancestry, like Kerewin in Keri Hulme's *the bone people* (1984), or Jimmy in Alan Duff's *Both Sides of the Moon* (1998), or they may be married to a Pākehā, like Ripeka in Patricia Grace's *Mutuwhenua* (1978), or Tamatea in Witi Ihimaera's *The Matriarch* (1986). The conflict between the two worlds may be dramatized within the internal lives of characters, as with Sam and his nephew Michael in Ihimaera's *The Uncle's Story* (2005) who have to struggle with the choice of being Māori or gay, or it can be dramatized in the action of the narrative itself, as in Heretaunga Pat Baker's *The Strongest God* (1990), which, from a Māori perspective, explores the power struggle between the old ways and the new, symbolically enacted in the historical confrontation between a Christian missionary, the Reverend Carl Volkner, and his rival for the minds of the local Whakatōhea people, the Pai Mārire prophet, Kereopa Te Rau, in Opotiki, in 1864.

Hybridity is also apparent in the way Māori writers manipulate the formal aspects of the novel—a genre inherited from Pākehā culture—in order to intercept and modify its generic expectations for the sake of generating new meanings that can serve an indigenous purpose. This can be seen, for example, in the interweaving of different time levels in works like Patricia Grace's *Potiki* (1986), or Ihimaera's *The Matriarch* and its sequel, *The Dream Swimmer* (1997), or, to an even more striking degree, in his most recent novel, *The Trowenna Sea* (2009), as a means of evoking the simultaneity of the past and future in the present, in accordance with a distinctly Māori world view. A comparable hybridity of form can be found in Keri Hulme's *the bone people*, when the mode of the first half of the novel, which is governed by a literal social realism as found in the Pākehā novel, crossed with a modernist fragmenting of the narrative, is intercepted by, and replaced with, a new mode imbued with Māori mysticism, magic, and mythology—the purpose of which is to provide the heroine with a means of escaping the soul-destroying isolation in which her estrangement from the cultural values of her Māori ancestors has trapped her.

In the rest of this essay, I shall explore how Māori writers have constructed various configurations of cultural hybridity to symbolize what it means to be Māori in this evolving postcolonial world, and how hybrid configurations have changed over time in response to shifts that have occurred in New Zealand race relations since the 1970s, and in the way that particular authors have positioned themselves with respect to them. In the course of this exploration, I shall show how Māori authors use intentional hybridity to construct fictions that can serve as an “evocative object”—that is, a mental representation capable of eliciting awareness of prior or current states of being, or else desired potential future states, with the aim of making the external environment symmetrical to human need—at the level of the imagination—through the creation of a symbolic equivalent.<sup>1</sup>

## MODELS OF HYBRIDITY

Homi K. Bhabha has argued that hybridity takes place in a Third Space, deriving from “the process of gap” posited by Lacan, within which the subject “inhabits the rim of an ‘in-between’ reality” in which “originary subjectivities” or “pre-given ethnic or cultural traits” are necessarily left behind (13). When one turns to accounts of the experience of Māori in New Zealand since World War II, it is possible to find descriptions that suggest the validity of Bhabha’s formulation for *some* Māori, both outside and within fictive literary representation. In a documentary made in 2006, for instance, a young woman of mixed race from the Tūhoe iwi—a North Island tribe notable for its ongoing commitment to a restoration of Māori sovereignty—who had been raised in the South Island away from her cultural roots, describes the difficulty of feeling caught in this interstitial space:

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I consider myself Māori because mostly my whole life that’s how I have been referred to by Pākehā. I was raised in Christchurch and I didn’t have a lot of Māori support down there, and I was referred to as the little Māori girl, so I knew I was Māori all right. I felt I was defined in relation to Pākehā, as I say, as their opposite, which is ironic, because, as I’ve grown up, lots of Māori people consider me the opposite too. I think my lack of cultural understanding makes lots of Māori people uncomfortable, and I feel that I get looked down upon because of it, although no one’s been brave enough to say that to my face. What it feels like is that I operate in a bit of a gap between the two cultures, between Māori culture and Pākehā culture, where I’m a little bit too Pākehā to be Māori and a little bit too Māori to be Pākehā. So I feel like today, on behalf of my friends in Auckland, that I represent the generation that fell through the gap.  
(Pouwhare)

This is the cry of someone who feels caught in exactly the condition of unresolvable liminality that Bhabha describes, brought about by cultural dislocation leading to a loss of a sense of identity.

One should not, however, confuse the type of hybridity articulated here with another kind of hybridity to be found in imaginative fiction written by Māori, in which the relationship between the two cultures is structured in a much more deliberate way. The difference between them can be understood in terms of the sharp distinction Mikhail Bakhtin makes between “organic hybridity” and “intentional hybridity” when discussing the generation of meaning in utterances. Organic hybridity, he argues, is uncontrolled and unintended, with “the mixtures remain[ing] mute and opaque, never making use of conscious contrasts and oppositions” (358-60). Intentional hybridity, on the other hand, is deliberate and conscious, involving “an encounter, within the area of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor” (358-59). Hybridization in the novel, Bakhtin argues, is an artistic device that is deliberate, involving a semantic hybrid that is “not semantic and logical in the abstract...but rather a *semantics that is concrete and social*,” because it is

not only two languages that are mixed, but also two world views (360). The novelistic hybrid is thus “an artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another,” together with the value systems that inhere in their respective world views, in order to set them against each other dialogically (361).

In the case of the young Tūhoe woman quoted above, the sense of identity she expresses is one of indeterminacy because she has not felt empowered to exercise any agency in determining her own self-idiom. Her hybridized identity is therefore unintended and unwanted. The situation of the author of a novel is very different, given that he or she has the ability to select and invent the components that will be incorporated into the story, meaning that, when elements from different cultures are combined within a fiction. Even though the author’s decision to write a novel may arise as a response to a prior “organic hybridity” that affects anyone who experiences a situation involving the mixing of cultures, the resulting representation will reflect an intentional form of hybridity that is instrumentally generative to the formation of a desired identity, rather than an unintended one. The job of the critic, therefore, is, after having identified the form that cultural mixing assumes in a novel, to speculate on the intentions that may have motivated it, together with the implications in terms of its signifying outcomes.

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## APOLOGETIC AND SUBMERGED IDENTIFICATIONS IN MĀORI NOVELS OF THE 1970S

When one turns to novels written by Māori, one finds that intentional hybridity—manifest both in the combination of semantic elements from both Pākehā and Māori cultures (characters, settings, attitudes, values, etc.), and in the way the work’s narrative syntax is contrived<sup>2</sup>—is used to explore a sense of the relative status between the two cultures as perceived by the Māori protagonists of these novels. In the first of them to be published, Witi Ihimaera’s *Tangi* (1973) and *Whanau* (1974), and Patricia Grace’s *Mutuwhenua* (1978), the relationship depicted is one of hierarchical disparity, with Pākehā culture being viewed as dominant, and Māori culture as subservient. Both writers portray the contemporary Māori world as being in a state of relative subservience, if not abjection, relative to the Pākehā world, despite the residual virtues of “the village family unity of rural Māori life,” with its “aroha, love and sympathy for each other,” which are lovingly affirmed (Ihimaera 1973: epigraph). In Ihimaera’s first two novels, especially, there is a strong elegiac sense. “*Tangi*” is the Māori word for funeral, and the return of the book’s protagonist, Tama, who has been living in the capital city (Wellington), to his ancestral marae on the occasion of his father’s death paradigmatically suggests an attempt to revisit a way of life from which one has already become separated, however much one might nostalgically wish to celebrate it. This elegiac sense is deepened in Ihimaera’s second novel, *Whanau*, with frequent references to a more glorious, vanished past when the village “blazed briefly with

beauty,” which, in the narrator’s imagination, highlights the contrast with a present that is marked by decay, shame, poverty, and an awareness among Māori that since the arrival of the Pākehā they have come to form an underclass:

For now there is nothing. There are no great homesteads to give even credibility to the legend. Even the oldest houses in the village do not have that aura of greatness which the large homesteads must have had. They rot in overgrown fields and are used for storing hay and farm equipment. Starlings and sparrows have their nests in them. The elaborate cornices of the verandahs are spun across with spiders’ webs. The wood is riddled with borer. Mice breed in the straw-strewn wind-invaded rooms, scratching sharply at the ripped and yellowing wallpaper. Nothing is left of the greatness. Not much is left of the family land, Māori land. (17)

156 The people who feel the traditional values strongest “are themselves old, with emotional ties with the past” (18). Members of this older generation are out of touch with contemporary reality, like Nanny Paora—a “solitary whale stranded in an alien present” (41). In contrast, the young people, drawn by economics and inclination towards the Pākehā way of life, have either left the village, like Tama Mahana, to join the new urban migration, or else aspire to enter the Pākehā world through marriage to a Pākehā, like Andrew Whatu. As a consequence, they feel “confused between two worlds,” like Tama, or “caught in between,” like Andrew, “a Māori forcing himself against the values of a Pākehā world. And as he steps further into that world, he cannot help but change,” despite his anxiety at the thought of this inevitability (54, 67).

A similar division between the generations, accompanied by similar inclinations in the young, is found in Patricia Grace’s *Mutuwhenua*. The heroine, Ripeka, is embarrassed to have her Pākehā boyfriend visit her family because of the disparity of taste and values, being ashamed of her barefoot mother, with her “face all sweaty, and...two big half circles of wet under her arms, and two stiff hanks of hair like old paintbrushes hanging down,” and fearful at the thought that a dinner of fish-heads, pork-bones, or baked eel might have been served (18-19). To escape from this feeling of being trapped in a situation in which she feels shamed and humiliated, Ripeka decides that, if she has the chance, she will try to be someone different, thinking that “it would be much better to be a girl in buckled shoes bowing a violin than the girl that I was” (24). To do so, she gives herself a Pākehā name, Linda, marries her Pākehā boyfriend, Graeme, and moves to a new life in the city.

In the novels of both writers, the perceived unequal relationship between Māori and Pākehā culture prompts the protagonists to seek to separate from their original culture in order to participate in the alternative one. At the same time, they discover that it is impossible to achieve a complete severance from the Māori culture in which they were raised, the gravitational pull of which repeatedly draws them back to the tribal home and its traditional values and practices. For these protagonists, the relationship between the two cultures does not leave them experiencing a state of interstitial indeterminacy so much as one of conflict, in which the protago-

nist's desire to escape from abjection and shame, and to succeed in the Pākehā world, comes into collision with an emotional identification with Māoridom that cannot be entirely denied or suppressed. As a result, they tend either to bury their Māoriness, like Ripeka, if the identification with Māori is stable, or else tend to swing between the two worlds in an oscillating movement, like Andrew Whatu in *Whanau*.

In Ripeka's case, the relationship of her Māoriness to the rest of her life is expressed in the image of a stone "buried under a ton of earth in a deep gully," with the stone representing that part of Ripeka that will not change no matter what other material is heaped upon it (9). The existence of the stone, representing the values of Māori culture, centered on the tribal marae, constitutes a permanent place, metaphorically speaking, that is capable of being inherited by all those, like her half-Pākehā son, who are raised on it: "And in having a place to stand he would have a place to step from and to return to when that future time came. As I had." (152).

For Andrew, even though he perceives the relative disparity between the two cultures in the same way Ripeka does, the outcome is more turbulent. When his father tells him to "be yourself," Andrew replies: "But I don't know who I am....Sometimes I'm Maori, sometimes I'm Pākehā, sometimes I'm half and half. You just don't understand, Dad" (68). Rather than burying the Māori part of himself, Andrew simply ends up feeling that he is pulled in two different directions, leading to a struggle that reflects a major shift between his generation and that of his father. As Charlie Whatu, who has no doubts about the certainty of his own identification as Maori, observes of his son,

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You feel the old Māori in your blood and it fights with your Pākehā learning. You have to make your own decision about who and what you are. Maybe you'll be able to live in both worlds without feeling a stranger in either...Whatever happens, I can't help you and I feel sorry. (68)

This idea of being able to live in both worlds is a future possibility entertained by both Ihimaera and Grace, even though they differ in the confidence with which they believe it is likely to be attained. It is most explicitly articulated by Grace in *Mutuwhenua*, when she has Ripeka/Linda's father nurture a hope that she might find "a second sanctuary" by entering the Pākehā world—through marriage to Graeme, her Pākehā lover. Ripeka's father does not see this as entailing a loss of originary identity:

I would not, as my father saw it, exchange our old way of life for the new way but would learn to be part of both, as I had already begun trying to be some years before.

The stone was my inheritance. It would always be so, but he wanted me to have another inheritance as well. And he would have been thinking too of the children that Graeme and I would have who would inherit both ways of life. (121)

Ihimaera, too, entertains this possibility in *Whanau*, by creating a character, Hepa Walker, who believes that the future for New Zealand lies in the integration of the two races—an integration that could be attained by Māori through education, which

would enable them to succeed in the Pākehā world. Hepa's vision, however, despite his protestation that to credit oneself in the European world does not entail a debit somewhere in the Māori one, is ironically undercut by his unwillingness to acknowledge the implications of his acceptance of the need to succeed on Pākehā terms. What the reader sees—through the ironies generated by Ihimaera's descent into free indirect speech at this point—but Hepa does not, is the extent to which Hepa has indeed become the “brown Pākehā” that he fears to be, and denies that he is, because of his willingness to conform himself to conditions set by the Pākehā (36). Implicitly, the degree to which Hepa has become “Pākehā-fied” negates the paradigm of hybrid integration he advocates, given that it requires a relinquishing of his Māoriness, despite his protestations. Thus, even though both Ihimaera and Grace look forward to a genuinely bicultural possibility in which elements from both cultures could be embraced without any expense to either, it would be some years before they could formulate a way whereby this could be achieved.

**158** As far the literary form of these early novels is concerned, the mode of representation manifests the legacy of colonization as much as the perception of the relationship between the Pākehā and Māori worlds depicted in them. Most notably, both writers rely on a fairly simple form of social realism, although this is slightly complicated in *Tangi* by an alternation of time levels between a grief-laden present and a nostalgically evoked past; in *Whanau* by shifting focalization to portray the perspectives of the multiplicity of characters who make up the family group; and in *Mutuwhenua* by time shifts that respond to the narrator's associations (Jones 227). Māori cultural content—in the form of interspersed phrases in te reo and recurrent references to Māori customs and practices is subsumed within this inherited Pākehā mode of representation just as Ripeka/Linda's rock is buried under a pile of earth: it is there, but it is subservient to the dominant mode. All this was to change dramatically in the fiction produced during the decade to follow.

## MĀORI ACTIVISM AND THE DECOLONIZATION OF REPRESENTATION IN THE 1980S

By the mid 1980s, race relations in New Zealand had changed dramatically. For decades, the policies of earlier governments had been informed by an assumption that the future for Māori would require “integration” with the Pākehā way of things, which effectually meant “assimilation”. Following the urban migration that began following World War II, however, the growth of a large non-tribal population of Māori in the cities, with ensuing social problems of poverty, crime, and unemployment, painfully revealed how inadequate existing Pākehā-oriented institutions were for providing for the needs of Māori. As a result, the 1970s and the 1980s saw the rise of urban protest groups and political activism, with Māori radicals calling for the restoration of Māori sovereignty, and the rectification of past injustices, including

the return of appropriated Māori land (King 481-84). Attempts by successive governments to address these issues, including legislation that established the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975 to adjudicate grievances going back to 1840, and a thorough-going reformation of social services to ensure responsiveness to Māori interests, meant that, in the words of the historian Michael King, “By the turn of the twenty-first century, major and irreversible adjustments had been made to the relationships between Māori and Pākehā and between Māori and the Crown” (502). Inevitably, these changes would become reflected in literature written by Māori during this period.

The most obvious sign of this so-called “Māori Renaissance” is a shift in the perceived relative status of Māori and Pākehā culture, with the value and validity of Māori culture being forcefully reasserted during the 1980s. In Māori literature, this reassertion is projected through forms of hybridity that involve bold acts of appropriation of aspects of Pākehā culture that subordinate it to an indigenous purpose.

Patricia Grace’s second novel, *Potiki* (1986), strikingly registers this change. Rather than perpetuating any sense of inferiority, the members of the tribe around which the narrative is built come to know, and act out of, their own strength, “which had come from knowing ourselves, and from knowing a direction” (151). As one of the characters, Hemi, affirms, “Kids were different these days. They wanted knowledge of their own things, their own things first. They were proud and didn’t hide their culture, and no one could bullshit them either” (65). Hemi has come to understand how Māori had previously been subverted from within, by internalizing the negative identification of them projected by Pākehā:

Funny how you came to see yourself in the mould that others put you in, and how you began not to believe in yourself. You began to believe that you should hide away in the old seaweed like a sand flea, and how you began not to believe in yourself. (65)

The antidote to the effects of such negative introjections, Grace shows, is for Māori to recover a sense of their true identity, who they really are, by retrieving stories about themselves from the old times, and by weaving them together with new ones. This process is foreshadowed in the “Prologue” of *Potiki*, in the account of how a carver brings the ancestors to life in the elaborate “poupou” (carved uprights) that he chisels for the tribe’s “whareniui” (meeting house), in which he represents “all aspects of their lives and ancestry”:

They wished to include all the famous ancestors to which they were linked, and also to include the ancestors which linked all people to the earth and the heavens from ancient to future times, and which told people of their relationships to light and growth, and to each other. (10)

The carver leaves a space on the last upright, however, to receive the continuation of this evolving story that is not yet known.

Symbolically, the process represented in the carving of the poupou points to the function of the novel itself, which will be to fill in the blank space left by the carver for a future continuation of the tribe’s story, “moving along in the spirals of textual

narrative,” in the words of Eva Rask Knudsen (197). It does this by recounting how stories from the past and present are gathered together for Toko, the “pōtiki” (youngest child) of the title, a visionary Christ-child/Maui-figure whose martyrdom not merely figures the suffering of his people, but also serves as a catalyst for a retaliatory activism that will fire members of the tribe to resist the predatory ambitions of Pākehā developers who wish to deprive the people of their land in order to turn it into a resort.

The recovery of these stories is all-important to the reassertion of Māori cultural identity, because through them, the people discover that “there was no past or future, that all time is a now-time, centred in the being”:

It was a new realisation that the centred being in this now-time simply reaches out in any direction towards the outer circles, these outer circles being named ‘past’ and ‘future’ only for our convenience. The being reaches out to grasp those adornments that become part of the self. So the ‘now’ is a giving and a receiving between the inner and the outer reaches.... (39)

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To convey a sense of this simultaneous presence of the past and future in the now, Grace draws upon the traditional Māori symbol of the koru, or spiral, that has no beginning or end:

Although the stories all had different voices, and came from different times and places and understandings, though some were shown, enacted or written rather than told, each one was like a puzzle piece which tongued or grooved neatly to another. And this train of stories defined our lives, curving out from points on the spiral in ever-widening circles from which neither beginnings nor endings could be defined. (41)

Because Toko, with his crippled little body and prophetic powers is the catalyst for this restoration of a sense of centered being in a now time, he is able to assume the identity of the missing “mokopuna” (grandchild, or descendant) in the unfinished carving. Consequently, when the tribe goes to erect a new meeting house, after the old one has burned down following arson by the Pākehā, Toko’s brother James carves his image into the space left on a poupou that has been retrieved from the fire, in order to make the meeting house of the tribe complete, “with his stories entwined about him” (171).

At a symbolic level, this action figures forth Grace’s vision of the process of cultural recovery in which she believed Māori, by the 1980s, had become deeply engaged. In literary terms, as one commentator has observed, the mode of the fiction shows Grace beginning “to adapt fiction in English to Māori forms, rather than the other way round” (Robinson 448). In other words, a Pākehā genre (the novel) is being appropriated and transformed, using the language of the Pākehā, in order to turn it into the vehicle for articulating a recovered sense of identity. This appropriating and adaptive literary process, for Grace, reflects a larger movement that she detects taking place in history itself, whereby the presence of the Pākehā, and the need to intercept and contain their growing power, paradoxically calls into being an intensi-

fied sense of what it is to be Māori that involves a refusal of any self-identifications that result from Pākehā projections. The cultural self-sense so constructed is far from being indeterminate: to the contrary, it is even more essentialized than it previously had been, and it asserts itself by converting the Pākehā mode of fictive representation to its own indigenous purpose.

A comparable movement can be found in *The Matriarch*, a major novel that Witi Ihimaera published in 1986, the same year as *Potiki*. Ihimaera's strategy is similar to that of Grace, in that he, too, adapts the form of the inherited Pākehā genre to make it embody a distinctly Māori world view and sense of history, but he also extends the act of appropriation far wider by selectively integrated aspects of Pākehā high culture into a new, distinctively Māori amalgam. As Ihimaera would later make clear in his author's note to the revised version of *The Matriarch*, the novel originally grew out of his own personal involvement in "the tumultuous years of Maori protest" in the 1970s and early 1980s (*Matriarch* (2009) 497). Like *Potiki*, the work also tries to structure the representation in a culturally distinct way that would give expression to a uniquely Māori way of seeing things. As Ihimaera later confirmed:

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I had devised a structural framework for all the material, based on the Māori concept of the koru, or spiral. To achieve what I set out to do—to write a work (or two works as it turned out) that would truly capture the metafictional and metaphysical vision I had in mind for it—only the spiral would work. This enabled me to thus 'spiral' from past to present, from personal to political, from history to myth, from reality to fantasy, from fiction to non-fiction and, as far as methodology was concerned, to use autobiography, biography and historical documents, including parliamentary Hansards. (*Matriarch* (2009) 496)

The result was a work deeply informed by a Māori-Pākehā hybridity designed to subordinate things Pākehā to a resurgent Māori nationalism through a breathtaking act of cultural appropriation and power-reversal. This was reinforced by a joining together of the Māori present with the Māori past to suggest a millennial destiny that was itself archetypally prefigured in the exodus recorded in the bible of the Pākehā—with the escape of the Israelites from the tyranny of Pharaoh symbolically foreshadowing the escape of Māori from the oppression and injustice of the Pākehā.

Intentional hybridity is manifest in a number of ways in this epic novel. In terms of its semantic combinations, the matriarch of the title, Riripeti Mahana, who spearheads the fight to recover tribal land confiscated by the Pākehā, is given a background that enables her to combine the accomplishments of both cultures. She has been educated in Venice, equipping her with the sophistication to move with ease in the Pākehā world, being an accomplished opera singer who, wearing pearls in her hair, looks like the Italian diva, Renata Tebaldi (*Matriarch* (1986) 13). Moreover, on her Māori side, she not only possesses supernatural powers, but is also so accomplished in the traditional arts and knowledge that usually only men possess, that she is able to command respect as a female "ariki," or chief (29). The Matriarch's sobriquet, "Artemis," a name drawn from Greek myth, further identifies her with the goddess of the hunt,

while her skill in her political role is figured in her ability to wield a rapier—another accomplishment acquired in Venice. The other name by which she is known, Riripeti (Elizabeth), implicitly affirms that, like the historical Queen Elizabeth I, or the reigning Queen Elizabeth II, in terms of her own role and mana she is a queen. At a fantasy level, therefore, the matriarch represents a new kind of figure in Māoridom: the kind of person foreshadowed in the earlier fiction of Ihimaera and Grace—one who can inhabit both cultures, combining the best qualities of both in order to restore Māori to their rightful place in the world by “spoiling the Egyptians”—that is, by appropriating the things of the Pākehā world to their own use, for their own advantage.

Such spoiling of the Egyptians is visible also in frequent allusions in the novel to the operas of Giuseppe Verdi, especially *Aida* and *Nabucco*, both of which deal with stories of oppressed peoples escaping from slavery. The allusions thus appropriate materials from European high culture to activate implicit parallels between the aspirations of Māori, both in the historical past, and the contemporary present, to throw off the yoke of the Pākehā, and the similar longing of the Ethiopians to escape from Egypt in *Aida*, and of the Hebrews to be released from the tyranny of Nebuchadnezzar in *Nabucco*. Additionally, the allusions to Verdi evoke a further parallel between Māori resistance and the Italian Risorgimento, with the rebel leader Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki being presented as a Māori Garibaldi, leading his people in the struggle to regain Māori sovereignty. Instead of being the villain of Pākehā myth, Te Kooti is also presented as a Māori Moses whose mission is to liberate Māori from the oppression of Pharaoh and lead them to the promised land. This reconceptualization of Te Kooti’s role, made possible by the Italian and Biblical intertextual allusions, allows Ihimaera to reframe Te Kooti’s slaughter of 60 settlers and their Māori allies at Matawhero in 1868, described as a “massacre” in Pākehā historical accounts, as a “Retaliation” for past injustices inflicted on Te Kooti by the Pākehā. In this way, Pākehā culture itself is invoked in order to turn it against its white inheritors, in the service of the Māori nationalist cause.

## THE 1990S AND BEYOND

Following the considerable progress made during the 1980s by successive governments in addressing historic Māori grievances and making the country’s institutions more responsive to Māori needs, by 1990, the year of the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, the political landscape had changed yet again. Most notably, the stridency of the Māori radicals had become muted, while the fostering of biculturalism as an ideology for state decision-making allowed many to foresee a future in which the two races could live happily together.

In this re-stabilized context, the literary practices of Māori writers tended to spread themselves across a wider spectrum of possibilities than had been apparent in the 1980s. If one imagines a matrix formed of a vertical axis recording the diachronic

evolution of historical change, and a horizontal axis marking the political positions Māori authors could potentially adopt, ranging from extreme radicalism to extreme assimilationist accommodation, one finds that authors writing during the 1990s and 2000s not only diverge from one another as to where they locate themselves on the grid, but also shift their own positions over time, as their personal itineraries change. Predictably, the nature of the hybrid configurations that one finds in their novels symbolizes the particular location each author occupies on this matrix, at the time when he or she is writing. To demonstrate this, I will focus on the respective trajectories of Alan Duff and Witi Ihimaera during these two decades.

Duff, a strident new Māori voice, burst on to the literary scene with *Once Were Warriors* in 1990, the writing of which was motivated by his indignation both at the view of the Māori radicals that Māori ills were entirely the fault of the white man, and also the sentimental view of Pākehā proponents of biculturalism, who were pushing the idea that New Zealanders were “one people ‘joined together, hand in hand,’ the blaring music coupled with glossy images of sweetly smiling, teary eyed Maori and grinning Pakeha types with that look of: We’re mates, the Maoris and me” (Duff 1993 vii). Duff saw both views as ignoring the reality of the crime and dysfunction in urban Māori life that he himself had personally witnessed—especially that arising from heavy drinking coupled with extreme violence. Duff’s aim was to shock Māori into realizing that they themselves needed to take action to improve their own lot. This could be achieved, Duff, believed, through “Education. Education. Education” (Duff 1993 122).

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Apart from excoriating the complacency and hypocrisy of the Māori community in *Once Were Warriors* and its sequels, *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted* (1996) and *Jake’s Long Shadow* (2002), with their shocking exposure of the sordid underbelly of Māori life in the suburbs, Duff also exploited intentional hybridity in a deeply personal and autobiographical novel, *Both Sides of the Moon* (1998) as a means of explaining and justifying his message. The protagonist, Jimmy, is, like Duff himself, culturally and biologically a hybrid, having a Māori mother and a Pākehā father, which means that he experiences the collision of the two cultures in his own life, with the effect that he suffers and internal conflict:

The dark half calls my white half, Pakeha. With just a little scorn in the tone, and envy it doesn’t know shows, nor knows the solution to, since envy does not seek to cure itself, it just is. Festering on itself. Hating that which it fears to become. (7)

The white half calls the dark half Hori, and darkie, and whispers nigger amongst its own. With sneer that cannot help itself, not when his thinking has been pitted against the world and come out evident victor, assumedly and demonstrably superior to other men’s thinking ways. (8)

Jimmy’s disgust at the drunken violence of his mother and her relatives fills him with shame at the Māori part of himself, while his father’s inability to contain his wife’s excesses equally fills him with frustration and resentment. The relationship between

Jimmy's parents, therefore, functions as a symbolic equivalent for the relationship Duff sees between the two cultures generally, personified in the novel as '[i]gnorance that thinks itself superior to enlightenment. In this case enlightenment on its knees, bowed to warrior will' (8). The only solution, Duff shows, is for Māori who are slaves to the violent impulses fostered by the old warrior culture to pass from "the dark side of the conceptual moon" into the light of its bright side, by imitating Jimmy's ancestor in the historical plot of the novel, Te Aranui Kapi, who abandons unthinking violence and undergoes a process of regeneration through the awakening of moral conscience.

164 The hybridity configuring the fiction of *Both Sides of the Moon*, therefore, implicitly reverses the direction of the tendencies observable in the earlier fictive works of Grace and Ihimaera. For Duff, it is not a case of burying the Māori part of himself, but of repudiating it altogether, in order to embrace the enlightenment represented by his father's Pākehā culture. The only problem is that the novel represents this enlightenment as ineffectual, meaning that the resolution it proposes is not articulated fully, let alone convincingly, as is shown by the perfunctoriness with which the novel ends. In a work of just over 300 pages, the final sequence depicting Jimmy's adolescent experience from the time he becomes delinquent, to his salutary experience of being made, first, a state ward; then of being detained in borstal; and finally of "making it" (unlike two of his brothers, one of whom commits suicide, and the other of whom is destined to be imprisoned for murder) occupies a mere 37 pages—perfunctory in the extreme, especially when compared with the careful elaboration of the rest of the contemporary plot. Moreover, the concluding vision of a possibility in which "strong, powerful, harmonized Māori voices, sing European hymn: Come Unto Me. And I (we, they, God if you must) shall give you love" (314) is not necessarily convincing in the absence of any elaboration of how this idealized state of assimilated fusion is to be achieved. It is little wonder that Duff has been intensely resented by other Māori, and by the liberal community generally, who have seen him as a reactionary, racist throwback (see Walker 136-37).

Duff himself appears to have concluded that there was something deeply flawed in his first attempt to deal with the implications of his bi-racial hybridity, for he returned to this issue in another autobiographical novel, *Dreamboat Dad* (2008). Like *Both Sides of the Moon*, this later novel has a youthful protagonist, Mark, who is of mixed race, having a Māori mother and, as he believes, a white father. Unlike Jimmy in the earlier novel, however, Mark has never known his father, given that he was the illegitimate offspring of a liaison between his mother and an American soldier stationed in New Zealand during World War II. This means that Mark is able to construct an image of his father that accords with his own idealized projections. Spurned by his Māori stepfather, and ashamed at being himself half Māori, Mark consoles himself by constructing a fantasy image of his real American father as a "dreamboat dad"—an idealized, handsome, white American marine, who variously resembles John Wayne, and at other times Elvis Presley, his idol, who himself, in Mark's view,

was “like a letter from America, addressed *Dear Young World...I, Elvis Presley, give you permission to be whatever you want*” (67).

Mark’s fantasy projections, Duff shows, are merely the product of racial prejudices that he has unwittingly internalized, to his own disadvantage, by making the things of the white world seem superior to things Māori. The false foundation of the self-sense erected upon the basis of these delusional projections is revealed when Mark’s mother finally shows him a photo of his father, Jess Hines, who turns out to be a Negro. The blow delivered to his self-sense on learning he is half-black, instead of half-white, is extremely destabilizing:

*This can’t be. My father is white....I’ve carried this choice of images in my mind for years. This is not him.*

I think of coal, boot polish, the Devil, evil, all the bad and negative moods described as black and dark, even the night is black and the day is glorious light. A virgin doesn’t get married in black. Nothing black is pure. No food is black. Black is what is worn at funerals. (114)

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To compound his dismay, Mark also learns that on his Māori side he is not high-born, as he had been led to believe, “Just ordinary Mark Hines of low lineage, a mix of bloods that some might say made be a mongrel” (133). His initial response to the realization that he is actually descended from slaves is to lurch to the opposite extreme, by identifying himself wholly as Negro. When he actually goes to America, however, he discovers that his new self-identification is equally delusional. On one hand, the African Americans in his father’s impoverished village regard him with resentment on account of his paler skin, while on the other hand, he cannot bring himself to imitate his father’s servile, self-protective acquiescence when they encounter racist discrimination from Negro-hating white rednecks. Eventually, Mark realizes who he really is when he feels a resurgence of his Māori warrior origins: “I am my mother’s blood too: Maori. I am *Maori*. I am also *Scots*, a bit of *Irish*. They were warriors too. They knew oppression. Since when did they stop being warriors?” (234). As his instinct to fight and defeat their pursuers takes over, Mark finally realizes who he truly is: “I am what I was raised as. I don’t have to understand it. I am not Negro, coloured or black. I was raised a Maori” (235).

By having his fictive surrogate make this affirmation, Duff presents a character who no longer feels any need to repudiate or suppress the Māori component in his hybrid makeup. This suggests that Duff, belatedly, has traversed a similar route to that taken by his earlier peers, Grace and Ihimaera, even though he arrives at the destination several decades later.

During this same period, Witi Ihimaera himself moved by degrees in a different direction. Following his display of commitment to the cause of the Māori radicals in *The Matriarch*, when its sequel, *The Dream Swimmer*, appeared a decade later in 1997, the hybridity it contained told a different story. Ostensibly, *The Dream Swimmer* adopts a similar strategy in the use of intentional hybridity, with the novel abounding in allusions to Italian opera—in the form of quotations from Verdi’s *Aida* that serve

as epigraphs at the beginning of each chapter—and the family drama that is enacted being presented as a Māori version of the *Oresteia*, the trilogy of Greek tragedies written by Aeschylus that record the end of the curse on the house of Atreus. The purpose is different, however: rather than elevating the claims and status of Māoridom, these hybridizing devices are used to foreground the dilemma of the hero, Tamatea, who, like Aida, is torn between the obligations he owes to his people, and the attraction he feels for the “enemy”.<sup>3</sup> What Ihimaera was acknowledging through this allusive hybridity was his reluctance to relinquish the possibility of participating in the Pākehā world, with all it had to offer.

His reluctance to be confined within Māori culture narrowly conceived became even more apparent after he came out as gay, in the mid-1990s. It is evident in *The Uncle's Story* (2000) in Ihimaera's development of a love affair between a Māori soldier, Sam, and an American airman during the war in Vietnam, an affair that is mirrored in the experience of the novel's present-day narrator, Michael, as a vehicle

**166** for exploring the dilemma of the gay Māori man who has to choose between being Māori or gay because traditional Māori culture is so homophobic it allows no space for such a possibility.

In Ihimaera's most recent novels, his vision and practices concerning hybridity have continued to evolve. Notably, the deep ambivalence that is reflected in the formal and thematic complexities of *The Matriarch* and its sequel becomes replaced by a view of things that is far more stable and resolved, even to the point of simplicity, as can be seen in the sequel, “The Return,” that Ihimaera added to his first novel, *Tangi*, in the course of rewriting it as *The Rope of Man* (2005). Instead of the circular structure based on the idea of the koru, or spiral, without beginning or end, that informs the symbolic and formal structure of *The Matriarch*, in the later work, Ihimaera opts for the simpler controlling idea of “Te Taura Tangata,” the fabled “Rope of Man” of Māori mythology that “stretches out of Te Kore, the Void at the beginning of the universe, and extends all the way through time to the end of the universe” (191).

This new image of the Rope of Man is particularly apt as a symbolic equivalent for Ihimaera's new sense of how hybridity structures the identity of a contemporary Māori like himself who wishes to participate in the Pākehā world while remaining Māori. Because, like the human genome, the Rope resembles the double helix, in which “two helices spiral around each other, connected by molecular bonds, resembling a rope ladder that has been repeatedly twisted along its length,” (276), it suggests a structure in which two parallel elements can have a coterminous existence within an inclusive relationship, while leaving the integrity of each intact. This equates with Ihimaera's sense of how the relationship between the two races, Māori and Pākehā, is now structured, after nearly 200 years of shared history. When, at the climactic moment in the novel, there comes “spiralling out of nowhere...a rope stretching from the beginning to the end of time, from the beginning of the universe to the universe's end,” a strand of which wraps itself around the half-caste offspring of a Pākehā who raped the Māori mother of the narrator, Tama, the latter realizes that Pākehā are now

irrevocably entwined in the Rope of Man: “The Pākehā has become included with us in singing not our songs but *our* songs, and that rope, well, it’s still roaring along carrying us all towards infinity” (191).

Ihimaera’s adoption of this new symbol of a hybrid inclusiveness which nonetheless does not entail any loss of originary identity can be read as his response to the political changes that he had seen take place in New Zealand since he first began writing. In 1987, soon after *The Matriarch* had been published, he had predicted “grave dangers ahead,” with violence being “a real possibility”; two decades later, his view had decisively changed, as he confirmed in an interview he gave in October 2009:

Oh I don’t think that same way any more. I think that there’s been a huge shift. I’m very proud to be a New Zealander; I’m very proud of the way in which we’ve negotiated our way through all of the Waitangi issues and I think all New Zealanders now are rapidly becoming the kind of community and society that I’ve always dreamed that we would become. (Ihimaera 2009)

For Ihimaera, at least, the country has reached a point in its race relations whereby Māori and Pākehā, and their respective cultures could co-exist harmoniously in a symbiotic relationship that does violence to neither.

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## CONCLUSIONS

What, then, has this survey shown about hybridity in literature? In the case of New Zealand Māori writers, the intentional mixing of elements from diverse cultures allows for the construction of imaginative configurations that allow the work to serve as an evocative object, the purpose being to allow the subject to register his or her self-sense and thus locate identity through a symbolic exemplification. Depending upon the particular circumstances of the author in relation to the current historical moment, the work-as-evocative object can function as the catalyst for self-experience, self-assertion, or self-transformation, with the aim, variously, of evacuating pain, providing an image of future possibility, restoring a sense of equilibrium, recovering pride, or creating images of aspiration or desire. In all cases, the hybrid configuration has a purposeful and constructive role, which is to present an image of the relationship between the cultural systems involved that, at the level of the imagination, can make the external environment symmetrical to human need. Because of this, such hybridity can be interpreted as a reflection of contemporary social dynamics, at the same time as it serves to facilitate social change.

## NOTES

1. Here, and elsewhere in this essay, I draw upon psychoanalytic concepts explored by Christopher Bollas in *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known* and *Being a Character: Psycho-*

*analysis and Self Experience.*

2. I am drawing here on the semantic-syntactic theoretical model of textual signification proposed by Rick Altman with respect to cinema genres.
3. For a fully developed account of the use of *Aida* as an intertext, see Alistair Fox, "The Symbolic Function of the Operatic Allusions in Witi Ihimaera's *The Dream Swimmer*."

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