

Mereana

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Table of Contents

1. Attestation of Authorship	p. 3
2. Intellectual Property Rights and Confidential Information	p. 4
3. Acknowledgements	p. 5
4. Abstract	p. 6
5. Thesis – Mereana	Word Count: 61865 p. 7
6. Exegesis – Korimako	Word Count: 7343 p.197

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Abstract

This thesis is a creative work of fiction, which explores the intergenerational relationship between two protagonists, Mereana and Kahukura, who whakapapa Māori and Pākehā. Their tandem narrative speaks to the effects and consequences of trauma, coupled with being matakite. It gives voice to this without pathologising, by normalising the protagonists' kōrero. This is shown in both real and reflective time, and illustrates the interwoven journey of survival and healing. Wairuatanga both underpins and connects the two women.

The accompanying exegesis examines the links between Contemporary Māori Fiction, and Trauma Narratives (within Aotearoa Fiction). In my review of selected key texts, I focused on the themes of whānau, whakapapa, gender, wairuatanga and trauma.

Through comparing these texts the themes were explored further, while making parallels to my own creative process. The aims of this research were to give voice to survivors of trauma who whakapapa Māori and Pākehā, to de-stigmatise abuse and trauma and acknowledge the detrimental effects on wellbeing, and finally to demystify wairua experiences as normative and integral to wellbeing.

Keywords: Māori, Pākehā, wairuatanga, trauma, whānau, whakapapa, gender, creative fiction.

Exegesis – Korimako – Word Count: 7343

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KORIMAKO

Hutia te rito o te harakeke, kei whea to korimako e kō?

If you pluck out the centre shoot of the flax, where will the bellbird sing?

INTRODUCTION

The whakataūākī above illustrates what may occur with trauma. By taking away something that is vital to wellbeing, for example: safety, identity, self-worth, or sacredness, this can impact on many levels, for example: dislocation, grief, dis-ease or a sense of foreshortened future.

My creative work explores the intergenerational relationship between two protagonists, Mereana and her mokopuna Kahukura. Both women whakapapa Māori and Pākehā, and their tandem narrative explores the effects and consequences of trauma, coupled with their experience of being matakite. Strong supernatural experiences underpin and connect the two women—it is their shared language. The main setting for the story is Lake Tekapo, Aotearoa, and is based over one year, Matariki to Matariki.

In the story in the present, Kahukura has returned to the whare at the lake following a traumatic experience. The lake is a place she knows from childhood, and is a place of healing. Her Tāua Mereana sends a trunk of diaries, which are presented in a series of written thoughts, dreams and wairua experiences. As Kahukura reads the diaries, she begins to unpack not only Mereana's history, but also her own. She learns of

Mereana's experiences of trauma, and how much of her life has been informed, influenced and transformed through her connection to wairuatanga. Over time, secrets and shocking truths are revealed through the medium of the diaries.

Mereana and Kahukura's worlds are fraught with complexity and conflict, and I have attempted to replicate and follow this with the story trajectory. The creative work aims to give voice to both trauma and wairua experiences, without pathologising them. The protagonists' kōrero is normalised, and shown in both real and reflective time to illustrate the interwoven, and often-multifaceted journey, of survival and healing.

Motivations

The thesis grew out of a piece of short fiction I composed some years ago, developed now into a full-length novel. The themes of whānau, whakapapa, gender and wairuatanga have stayed with me, and these are added to by my mahi with wahine in the abuse and trauma field. The combination of these themes and experiences, both personally and professionally, have motivated me to write a story, which aims to give a voice to survivors of trauma, and to further de-stigmatise sexual violence. My exploration of fictional writing, literary theory, and the associated themes mentioned above, are outlined below.

Whakapapa and Whānau

Having blended whakapapa informs my writing, as does the racism and shame my grandmother experienced being born a 'dirty baby' (born brown to a fair skinned Māori mother) ninety-four years ago. The impact of this within our whānau has been far-

reaching. I feel cautious about defining myself as a Māori writer and know my grandmother would have an issue with it, given her complete rejection of this part of her whakapapa.

My writing also speaks to the whakapapa of trauma within whānau. My mahi experience (as a psychotherapist) shows me, more often than not, that abuse and trauma are present within most whānau. There is often a history of trauma. I would further suggest that trauma is often unspoken, and as a result, following generations go on to have similar experiences. This is certainly true within my whānau. In saying this, I have not consciously written my own story through Mereana or Kahukura. As the protagonists, they represent a melding of my personal and professional experiences of trauma and wairuatanga.

Gender

As women, our voices are often lost, or minimized, and I wish to address this through the themes in my writing. The timeframes within my novel intersect with radical times for Māori women, for example: the 1975 Land March on parliament led by Dame Whina Cooper, the Ngā Tamatoa movement which included Hana Te Hemara leading the charge on creating Kōhanga Reo and Te Reo Māori in schools. Māori and feminist activism during the early seventies coincided with one another in Aotearoa. In placing Mereana within these timeframes, it contextualizes the socio-political climate and gives weight and meaning to the theme of gender. In addition, in terms of the politics of gender, women are still under-represented in the arts (broadly speaking) and this has further motivated my writing.

Wairuatanga

There is a long history of suppression of indigenous spiritual practice, both in Aotearoa and globally. To comment on wairuatanga is important to me, as I embrace holism on both personal and professional levels, and to leave this out would have been counter-intuitive. There is a large component to my creative work that is about wairuatanga. Having previously written about this, in a non-fictional format, I have explored it further in my fictional writing. Mereana and Kahukura speak to each other through their shared wairua experiences.

Trauma Narratives

My therapeutic mahi, over the past twenty years, informs my writing. In particular, Māori women and the double discrimination they can experience regarding gender and ethnicity, and my specialty in the area of trauma and violence (e.g. Herman 1992, Levine, 1997). I believe there is something to be said for reading (and perhaps writing) your way through trauma. Kahukura and Mereana connect through the written form, both being unable to speak directly to their experiences of trauma. I have endeavoured to create a space between Mereana and Kahukura, where their trauma can be spoken to. I have done this by interweaving narrative threads, through the use of flashbacks and with supporting characters, Rewi and Mākutu, to blend and give reference to the two womens' experiences.

This creative work aims to address several things on a socio-cultural level. Firstly, that it gives voice to abuse survivors who whakapapa Māori and Pākehā. Secondly, that it lends some weight towards the de-stigmatization of abuse and trauma. Thirdly, this

thesis, via its characterisations, plot elements and voice, works to demystify wairuatanga experiences, and their connection to wellbeing.

Exegesis Outline

The exploration within this exegesis will be focused on Contemporary Māori Fiction, Trauma Narratives (within Aotearoa Fiction), and the associated literary theory. I have chosen these two topics because there is a connection between both, in the real world and in fiction. Rather than spread my net too widely, for the purposes of this research, I have aimed to keep the focus local to Aotearoa, as this is where the context of my writing belongs. I will explore the previously mentioned themes of whakapapa and whānau, gender, wairuatanga and trauma within Contemporary Māori Fiction and Trauma Narratives (within Aotearoa Fiction). I am interested in how these themes intersect with each other and how they compare to, or contrast, my creative project.

Firstly, I will discuss key texts within Contemporary Māori Fiction, followed by literary theory and how these examples influence my writing. Secondly, I will discuss key texts with Trauma Narratives (within Aotearoa Fiction), relevant literary theory and how this influences my writing. I will then discuss my personal evaluation of the success and/or difficulty in connecting the two.

CONTEMPORARY MĀORI FICTION

Literary Theory and Creative Works

A number of contemporary Māori authors have influenced me, during my years as a reader and more recently as a writer. For the purposes of this section, I have chosen authors because of their writing style, the resonance of their characters' voices, and their exploration of the themes outlined in this exegesis: whakapapa and whānau, gender, wairuatanga (Durie, 1994), and trauma narratives. These authors often inform readers of indigenous traditions, myths and legends, morals and tikanga.

Whakapapa and Whānau

Tuhiwai Smith (2006) discusses whether writing is important for indigenous people. She comments that this is 'fundamental' (p. 35) in terms of making sense of who we are, to acknowledge our existence and to give voice to indigenous narratives. For example, Ihimaera (1986) in *The Matriarch* describes in detail the lineage handed down between grandmother and mokopuna. There is great importance placed on this knowledge, along with expectations that it will be retained and passed down to future generations.

Whakapapa is also highlighted in *Where the Rēkou Bone Sings*, Makareti (2014), but from a perspective of discovery, Māori and Pākehā whakapapa, and reconnection:

It was as Aunty Liz had said. They had ancestors on all sides. The newcomers from across the sea, who had brought The Book and guns, imposed settlements

and pressure that pushed the ones who follow the War God to fight and never stop fighting. The warriors who refused to recognise kinship and an offer of peace was made. And the ones who chose sacrifice, who gave everything, who almost slipped altogether into myth. Those were all her people. (p. 214)

Panny (1997) explores cultural implications for Māori writers, saying, ‘Readers can miss the full range of cultural implications.’ (p. 1). In Grace’s writing, she often illustrates the importance of Māori retaining their traditions. Her conflicts frequently relate to the intrusion of Pākehā ways, and the place where Māori and Pākehā worlds collide and intersect. She highlights the implications of relinquishing traditional ways, in *Baby No-Eyes* (1998):

The all-important genealogies were being affected, whole families were disappearing, lands and food sources were being abandoned, negotiations were not able to take place, liaisons were not able to be made according to tradition. The world had changed forever. (p. 108)

Ihimaera (1974), in *Whanau*, also speaks to the dichotomy between the two worldviews, Māori and Pākehā, and the impact on whānau traditions:

On that first day of the planting last year, Rongo Mahana had waited alone in the paddock. He’d hoped that somehow, the others of the family would be able to come. Even though they’d told him they couldn’t make it, he had still kept on hoping. The sun had sprung up quickly in the sky. And he had felt his heart breaking. The time of family planting was over but he had been too stubborn to realise it. (p. 54)

Gender

Tuhiwai Smith (2006) states that ‘Writing is part of theorizing and writing is part of history.’ (p. 29) and that this has been ‘taken up by writers of fiction’. Ihimaera and Grace, often identify women as powerful figures, Ihimaera (1986) particularly in *The Matriarch*:

You know more than I do about the status of women in your society, and the way in which they are not recognised as leaders. So the powhiri was done and then, *she* made them *wait*. Oh, I can tell you that there were a few heart attacks about that.’ (p. 29)

In *Cousins*, Grace (1992) shows the story of three cousins, who grow up in a changing world—Māori and Pākehā. She shows the challenges, in terms of wahine role definition:

One of the reasons I left home was because I was never allowed to do anything there. In a place where everyone else worked hard I had never been allowed to work, never been allowed to dirty my hands. I’d been loved and given everything, and now my mother had used the word ‘puhi’ — the cherished virgin daughter. (p. 203)

Rodberg (2014) in her movie *White Lies*, shows three women brought together in a juxtaposition of ethnicity, hapūtanga, wairuatanga, tikanga and bicultural challenges. The film version shows how wahine are challenged on a variety of fronts, navigating between the old ways and the new.

Wairuatanga

Panny discusses the ‘thought of knowing you’, (p. 15), and the concept of wairuatanga. This is shown in Morris’s (2011) *Rangatira*, where she illustrates the importance of wairua connections, and the conflict between Māori traditions and Pākehā values and beliefs:

‘It’s true that times are changing, but as all the talk this week about the spirit waka attests, we still take signs, and dreams like Reihana’s, very seriously. We know that they carry warnings.’ (p. 49).

She goes on to show the conflict between differing spiritual beliefs, between Māori and Pākehā, when the dream is shared with a Pākehā:

‘The only evil to befall you will be this kind of talk, this primitive superstition. Once we’re in England, you’ll find that no one has sympathy with this sort of heathen belief. Civilised people don’t believe in prophesies.’ (p. 49)

In *Cousins*, Grace (1992) illustrates wairua in another way, by showing what is seen, in real time:

When I passed through Makareta’s room someone was in there, someone I remembered from a long time ago, and even though it was dark I recognised the old lady who had looked after Makareta when she was little... Then I noticed the other people. The room was full of them. They were shadowy. They were old.
(p. 247)

Trauma Narratives

With the majority of Māori writing read, sexual violence was rarely spoken to in a direct way, rather examples were given about the after effects. Tawhai (2005) shows this, ‘Their bodies would stiffen up next to me, waiting for him to come in, jerk his thumb at the door, and go, “Out!”’ (p. 113). In several of her short stories she also speaks to the after effects of trauma: addiction, prostitution, dissociation, and suicide. In *Open Your Mouths*, Tawhai (2005) shows sexual abuse from different perspectives. Firstly, where it is both hinted at and unspoken, and secondly where it is spoken about and discounted:

‘Why don’t you do something about it?’ I asked. Why not go to the police and make the bastard pay for what he did to you? George wiped his eyes with the back of one of his hands. ‘Because I look at my uncle Tuki with his kids and my auntie May, or down at the pub with his rugby mates, or bringing in a wild pork on his ute, and I find it hard to believe myself,’ he said. ‘Like it was a different life, my underneath life. How can it fit into the normal happy life of my uncle Tuki? He doesn’t speak about it, and neither do I. It’s as if it never happened, and I wouldn’t want to bring it back. Anyway, it doesn’t really affect me.’ (p. 107)

Conversely, there was more overtness discussing domestic violence. Duff (1994) shows this in a direct way. *Once Were Warriors*, remains in many people’s minds as shocking. While Duff’s portrayal of violence touches on sexual abuse, it was predominantly a narrative about domestic violence. In my mahi, the film is often used as a benchmark for Māori reporting incidents of violence, for example, ‘my upbringing was much worse than *Once Were Warriors*’. That said the most poignant moment for me, in the film, was

when Grace hung herself - the result of unspoken sexual abuse. Duff does not shy away from showing trauma. Whilst many people reacted strongly to *Once Were Warriors*, I suspect this was because they had to face the reality of what exists, not only in Māori whānau but Pākehā too. Caruth (1996) suggests that history implicates us “in each other’s traumas.” (p. 24) and reflects the need to take into account, cultural and political analysis as well.

Heim (1998), comments on the difficulty of language around the effects of violence, and the ‘precarious relationship between the witness and the victim of violence.’ (p. 29). This is illustrated in *Big Brother, Little Sister*, where Ihimaera (1977) shows domestic violence and the impact upon the children who have witnessed it:

— Dad. Mum. Don’t.

Dad yelled at him and pushed him back into the bedroom.

— Get back to bed, you damn kid.

The door cracked shut against the faces of his father and of his mother — her face wide with agony and blood streaming from her mouth.

— Leave them alone you bastard, she screamed.

On the other side of the door, Hema and Janey heard her clawing at their father.

Then they heard her fall heavily to the floor.

Hema opened the door again. Dad was standing there, his fists clenched, kicking at Mum. Hema tried to shield his mother and lay over her. For a while, his father kept on kicking. Kicking. Until he was exhausted. (p. 11).

How Contemporary Māori Fiction Shapes My Creative Work

In thinking about how Contemporary Māori Fiction has shaped my creative work, I realise that the themes above have resonated with me, as a reader, on cultural, social and political levels. It raises questions, which I have grappled with both personally and professionally for many years. For example: How do we survive trauma and is it possible to heal from it? How does trauma impact on wairuatanga, whānau and whakapapa? How does it impact on our identities? What is lost through trauma? Indigenous kōrero often has multiple voices, a whakapapa of layers, as does trauma.

Much of the writing I have read has been by Māori authors, who are more immersed in the traditional Māori world than me. Their writing is frequently based in rural settings, where protagonists are connected to iwi, hapū and whenua, for example Ihimaera and Grace. My personal experience is that I have been disconnected from these things. I can only imagine what it would be like to live in these environments. Therefore, I have not written about things I have no experience in. To do so would have felt inappropriate and tokenistic. My understanding relates more to urban Māori, with dual whakapapa, and their place of belonging that is on, and in relationship with, whenua. This perhaps connects me more with Duff and Tawhai. I decided early on to clearly articulate issues of trauma and violence, rather than hint at them, and to show the subsequent impact on my characters. I believe this needs to occur in order to facilitate change and increase awareness of the issues.

As previously mentioned, Māori authors often explore themes of living in both worlds—Māori and Pākehā, and the associated challenges. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from my creative work:

But being able to assimilate has its price. Pākehā sometimes assume I'm one of them, thinking it acceptable to make their racist jokes. Some may say it's easy for me, looking olive-skinned. I wonder if they could imagine, just for a moment, the discomfort of sitting in a room while those jokes are being made. (p. 75, Mereana)

The theme that resonated most for me was the area of wairuatanga. It was a relief to see all of the writers, without the need for any justification, discussing openly the reality of spiritual experiences as part of everyday 'normal' life. In my mahi I have lost count of the times Māori clients I have worked with have been medicated, for what might be considered existential or spiritual experiences. As I live my life connected to wairuatanga, it has naturally become an intrinsic part of my creative work.

TRAUMA NARRATIVES (WITHIN AOTEAROA FICTION)

Literary Theory and Creative Works

As with the previous section on Contemporary Māori Fiction, the authors chosen in this section are those whose themes and voices resonated with me. Finding relevant literary theory to explore this theme however was a challenge. Mostly my research came from outside of Aotearoa, including Otto Heim's book *Writing Along Broken Lines* which gave a critique on Maori fiction and violence.

Whakapapa and Whanau

As mentioned in the previous section on Māori fiction, many Māori writers accurately describe traditional ways of life, and focus on the importance of whakapapa and whānau, in a normative context. To know where you are from, and to have a sense of belonging, is vital to wellbeing. When trauma occurs, this sense of belonging is fractured, split off and disrupted. Trauma remains embedded within our minds, bodies, spirits and histories. It does not ever go away. 'Trauma questions meaning.' (Johnson, 2014).

An example of this is by Tawhai (2005), in *Open Your Mouths*, which illustrates the complexities of sexual abuse within whānau. Previously the character of George has spoken of his own experience of sexual abuse by an uncle. He then appears jealous towards his older sisters, and what he sees as their special relationship with their koro:

“Open your mouths,” he'd say to Cairo and Alamein. “Shut your eyes and open your mouths and see what God may send you.”

‘And then he’d take his forefinger and slide the paua right down onto the back of their tongue. “You can taste it better there,” he told them. Cairo and Alamein kept dead still. Koro had taught them to lick the juice and butter off his finger as he pulled it out. They never acted like they were very keen on paua. But what’s not to like?’ (p. 111)

Rodberg (2014) in her movie *White Lies* shows the character Rebecca with a history of multiple traumas. Becoming hapū and either giving birth to, or aborting, brown babies that threaten her hidden whakapapa Māori. She endures endless painful scrubbing of her body (with skin whiteners), by her mother (her maid) to keep her skin fair. Her mother’s history is not explored, and we are left to guess at what trauma may have occurred for her, being left with a child who looked more white than brown, and cast into the role of her servant. This lends weight to Caruth’s (1996) kōrero that trauma creates an “...endless impact on a life.” (p. 7). Ihimaera (2013), comments in his notes on *White Lies-Tuakiri Huna*, that “...survival narratives are always central to any family...” (p. 267). Trauma affects whānau and whakapapa, it is remembered, and stays within—it is survived. The cumulative effect however, impacts on hinengaro, tinana, wairua and whānau.

Gender

Ellis (2004) comments that the, ‘...primary gender and romance story culturally available to women normalizes superiority, aggression, and dominance of men, and casts women as dependent, deferent, forgiving, and loyal to their men...’ (p. 281).

Women in literature, who experience trauma, are often portrayed as victims. Ihimaera (1977) shows this in *Big Brother, Little Sister*:

She was strong-willed, but not strong enough with Uncle Pera. She was passionate; she needed a man. Perhaps she was frightened of being left alone with her kids. Whatever the case she began doing whatever her man wanted her to do. (p. 16).

Women already have a long history of oppression and marginalization, and in my experience, sexual and domestic violence are the norm. Herman (1992) says, ‘Rape, battery, and other forms of sexual and domestic violence are so common a part of women’s lives that they can hardly be defined as outside the range of ordinary experience.’ (p. 33). In Aotearoa the statistics speak for themselves, one in three females by the age of 16 (RPE Statistics, 2014) have experienced some form of unwanted sexual contact. This has been our reality for generations. For Māori women, the risk is double that of the general population.

A good illustration of this is shown in *Once Were Warriors* (1994). Beth Heke symbolizes the downtrodden, oppressed, abused and victimized woman, who only makes a stand and leaves after she loses her daughter to suicide. The repetition of her trauma is true to life. It is well known, within the domestic violence sector, that most women in violent relationships try to leave a number of times. *Once Were Warriors* (1994) does not tell a romance and perhaps this was why it was shocking.

Hunt & McHale suggest that both writer and reader ‘make sense or meaning’ (p. 71) through the written word, as a medium for healing trauma. An example of this is George

(2003), in *Hummingbird* illustrating in the character Kataraina an ability to say things she is unable to speak out loud, through her writing.

'I can't feel your hands, the end of your arms, there's just this hugeness to you. No corners, no edges. Like the reflection of the moon I used to watch, lying there in my blanket. Something I could slip into and float within.'

I walked back into the sea until it was up to my waist. Lifted off my dress and tied it around my neck and walked on, letting the ocean find me, all of me. The bits that people paid for and the bits that no one wanted.' (p. 29)

Wairuatanga

Levine (1997) comments, 'Although we don't have the language for it, many of us sense traumatic injury at the soul level.' (p. 59). In *Baby No-Eyes*, Grace (1998) shows parallels between wairuatanga, as normalised spiritual experiences, and the trauma of loss in the on-going relationship between dead sister and living brother:

'Even though there wasn't a photo of my sister, she looked like some of the people in the photos, especially Shane. She was eight now, and tall. She had a long forehead and black holes from where her eyes had been stolen... The holes where her eyes should have been were like holes burnt through wood with a red-hot poker... The holes were black round the edges from the burns. My sister had spaceship pjs, like mine. (pp. 80-81).

In the film *The Insatiable Moon* (2010), the character Arthur is presented as mad, suffering from mental illness. From a Māori perspective it could be argued that he has a

clear connection to Iō . He has a magical quality to him, however once he engages in sexual intercourse; his internal conflicts emerge. His connection to wairua changes and he questions himself (as do others). Arthur is hospitalised, given heavy medication (which ultimately kills him). The representation of this reflects a lack of understanding of indigenous cultural beliefs that still exist in mainstream medical care. It also represents the trauma that occurs when someone is forced to shut off these gifts. This illustrates the reality of a matakite, and how information received from tupuna is unquestioned and always tika. Arthur says at one point, ‘I know what I know, I see what I see, I hear what I hear.’

Trauma Narratives

Heim (1998) comments on the ‘disturbance in the narrative balance caused by violence’ (p. 32), in that trauma alters story. Undoubtedly, trauma impacts on everyone who experiences it. This is illustrated in Ihimaera’s (1977) *Big Brother, Little Sister* where the children are witness to violence, and then run out into the city. The language used to describe their surroundings replicates the trauma, ‘The traffic punched to a stop as the lights turned red.’ (p. 13). He goes further describing the subsequent betrayal by their mother, as she allows a boyfriend to mete out violence toward the children. He shows the cyclic nature of violence. Herman (1998) says of trauma, ‘those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. It is morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. The bystander is forced to take sides.’ (p. 7).

In *The Matriarch*, Ihimaera (1986) tells of violence occurring at the hands of Artemis, by way of wairua. The violence, bestowed on those who offend, comes through a

spiritual process and the witnesses have varied experiences of what occurred. Accounts are given of how others saw, felt, heard or sensed the event. There are believers and non-believers. This would be true, regardless of wairuatanga, for most who experience trauma. Heim (1998) comments on *The Matriarch*, that violence ‘... plays a much more prominent part...’ (p. 33) in the writing and he then goes further by suggesting an ‘incestuous relationship’ which appears to occur between Tamatea and Artemis.

In Frame’s (1961) in *Owls do Cry*, she explores the trauma of loss, of children witnessing both death and potential death. Daphne’s resulting institutionalisation, perhaps in response to prior trauma, is further impacted by ECT treatment:

‘But God or the devil has come, walking the long corridor, squeezing his mind and voice in molecular drops through the forbidding encircling wall. He greets the women. He wrings the blood from their gowns of flannel. It drips upon the floor into a creek flowing to the wall and not passing through and now it is a wave pressing upon the wall and unable to escape.

The women scream. They fear drowning. Or burning.’ (p. 38)

How Trauma Narratives (within Aotearoa Fiction) Shape My Creative Work

Writing about trauma and violence invariably either brings the reader inside the experience, or pushes them away from it. There has been a need in my writing to balance the intensity of trauma by alternating between first and third person, when describing traumatic events. Using a third person narrator gives distance from actual events:

Before she could fully register what had happened, Glen launched himself across the room, and his hands were tight around her throat. He was squeezing hard, her vision blurred and she found it difficult to hear anything. People around them were frantically grabbing at his hands trying to free her, but he held fast. Boozey breath, spittle flying, Glen cursed her. Instinctively, with a strength not her own, she lashed out, punching his face. Blood splattered from his nose, and his hands fell slack. In disbelief, she took the chance to escape.

“Get out moko! Get out now!” her grandmother’s voice shouted inside her head. And Mereana ran. (p. 31, Mereana)

Panny (1997) comments that Grace, ‘...does not recoil from disclosing shameful or unworthy behaviour: racist remarks, discrimination, brutality and abuse.’ (p. 5).

Similarly I have not shied away from such topics, rather focusing on their impact and consequences. My professional and personal experience gives me an understanding of the dynamics of trauma. Although Mereana and Kahukura share the experience of sexual violence, the story aims to explore the differences between their responses to trauma, and subsequent healing.

Mereana’s way of dealing with trauma is to become almost amnesiac—she tries to forget. This is common, for both survivors of trauma and in society in general, in that it is not spoken about. There is also a parallel here, in the long-standing power imbalances between gender and culture:

I lied at the hospital, saying there was someone coming up to look after me. If they would just put me in a taxi, I’d be fine. After standing naked on their paper sheet, my pubic hair combed, my bruises flagrantly shocking them as they

snapped their pictures. “Evidence” they said. The doctors and nurses all knew what had happened, why I ended up there. My insides bleeding and raw—they all understood immediately. I wouldn’t be able to mimi for weeks, without being reminded with each drop of what had taken place. The visibility in hospital was too much for me; I wanted to hide, shame written on my face. Nobody would touch me again, of that I was sure. (p. 26, Mereana)

Kahukura’s way is more visceral, she is in the trauma, and it replays in her world every day, for a time. Everywhere she looks, there are reminders of what has happened, she cannot escape what has happened. The reader is also pushed, to explore his or her own expectations of how long Kahukura will go on feeling this way:

In her mind Kahu was projecting their faces onto the wood. Faces she bashed repeatedly, as she chopped wood to burn that night. Fucking cocksuckers. Defacing the wood, destroying the faces—trying to wipe them from her memory. It was their fault she was back here, their fault she’d lost almost everything, their fault, the fucking bastards. (p. 57, Mereana)

Challenges and Revelations in creating ‘Mereana’

Having my whakapapa firmly in Te Wai Pounamu, it made sense to base the novel there. Although Lake Tekapo is the lake in the story, I have only travelled there once but found that by walking the area, I had a keener sense on a ‘felt’ level of what the energy there was like. The process of finding the location came to me on a trip past Lake Taupō, and the island in the middle called to me. Several years later I saw a photo of Motu-Ariki, the island within Lake Tekapo. In the later part of this year, I relocated to Karitane, Otago and it is here that I have been more able to be ‘in’ the natural environment, and continue writing from this perspective, transforming the energies from moana to awa. Location, as with all of the previous writing I have mentioned, connects writer and reader in space and time. Location, as Māori, is significant in terms of wellbeing and belonging. I have found, through the feedback process, that I am writing intuitively and without conscious effort in drawing metaphoric parallels between environment, wairuatanga and characters:

One night he came to me in a dream. Standing beside me, he smelled like the forest floor, sweet, damp and woody. It reminded me of walking in the forest after rain, every layer of leaves stuck together—light and dark—old and new—decaying, returning back to the earth. It was a sign. (p. 40, Mereana)

There have been moments where I have doubted ‘being Māori enough’ to be in the world Mereana and Kahukura inhabit. I am estranged from my hapū and iwi, as I cannot prove that I whakapapa to these places. I am a remnant of colonization, having to prove who I am, with a whakapapa of illegitimacy and therefore a denial of a place and belonging. I found *The Bill of Rights for People of Mixed Heritage* (Root, 1993-1994)

useful, in terms of both my creative work and this exegesis. It enabled me more freedom to illustrate the complexities of having mixed whakapapa:

Where will I go when I die? I often think of this in the mornings, as I lie in bed watching dust motes dancing on strips of sunlight in my room. Part of me may return through Cape Reinga at the tip of this island and fly away to Hawaiki. Another part may return to my ancestral home in Ireland—if there are any others, which I'm sure there are, I don't know where they'd end up. My soul, when I think about it, may well feel confused and bewildered at the separation of the parts of me—when the time comes.” (p. 74, Mereana)

Through the writing process, I have felt propelled to keep writing about wairuatanga, along with whānau dynamics, trauma and inter-generational differences. I have not translated the Te Reo within this document and my creative work, as I felt it would take away the authenticity of both my characters and my own voice.

To enter the world of my characters is a process that involves wairuatanga. I need to plunge down into depths unknown and see what I can find. Sometimes the answers are obvious like glittering treasure from a shipwreck, and other times I am forced to rise to the surface again empty handed. Writing about wairuatanga in a fictional format has been easier, and having other authors to refer to who have spoken of such things has enabled development of my characters voices. My previous writing on wairuatanga in a non-fictional format was significantly more challenging. I felt I needed to prove the existence of it. Here in my creative work, I have experienced freedom in allowing wairuatanga to emerge and be present in ways that feel natural to me. I am more confident in putting this voice forward in the novel:

When I'm here between the places of past, present and future it is quiet; as though nothing else exists. I feel distended, stretched, yet held between two points of existence, neither being far from the other; and the space between is infinite. (p. 77, Mereana)

That is to say, wairuatanga is personal. In writing about the spiritual experiences in the novel, some were informed by my own experience with kēhua or ghosts, entities, energies and clairvoyance. However, other writing and screenplays have enabled me to draw on both different and sometimes similar experiences. Throughout my life, I have heard of many others wairua experiences, and add these to the kete which Mereana and Kahu share.

A significant challenge for me has been focusing too much on the interiority of my characters worlds. Whilst this is true within trauma, and also perhaps for Māori who feel displaced, it has created intensity at times, where some light has needed to be shone. This is also reflective of my practice as a psychotherapist, where focus on story is often interior and personal. I have been encouraged, through the feedback process, to show not only to the characters experiences of trauma but their environments, and the people and relationships around them. Exploring the ripples outwards, as well as the inward ones.

Rewi stood up, his knees creaking as he moved towards the front door. He picked up an umbrella and twirled it like a taiaha. His large feet were light, like a ballerina, as he moved gracefully from side to side. His movement was unconscious, but he was getting ready. Preparing himself for battle. (p. 181, Mereana)

I have asked myself, am I writing my way through my own experiences of trauma, as Mereana does? In part, I would say no, having had years of psychotherapy, bodywork, wairua healings and clinical supervision. I would say that my own trauma has (for the most part) been healed. Another part of me would say yes. In writing about the traumatic experiences of Mereana and Kahu I have become aware, like snapshots in time, of things from my past. These re-visitations have reminded me, that we can never ‘get rid of’ trauma once it has occurred to us, and our tupuna. It remains imprinted on the fabric of our being. By continuing to work as a therapist in the trauma field, the themes of traumatic experiences are constant and these have contributed to my writing. There is perhaps an auto-ethnographic component to my writing, by way of this. At points throughout my writing this year I have felt stuck, immobilized and unable to go on. Writing about trauma can be traumatizing. Hunt & McHale (2012) discussed the variety of ways people have historically ‘told’ their stories of trauma, and confirmed my decision to make the diaries (in my writing) a form of communication between the two protagonists. It became a safe way to discuss trauma.

The inclusion in my creative work of Mākutu, as a character, symbolizes how trauma is replicated, replayed, and repeated until it is healed. It represents the timeless battle between good and bad, light and dark, love and hate, and in turn symbolises how trauma plants doubt within oneself. Being borne of wairua, and linking to trauma, Mākutu is also unseen and disbelieved. There are parallels between spiritual experience and trauma, and how they are perceived from the outside. As Caruth (1996) mentioned, there is a complex relationship between knowing and not knowing.

Juxtaposing Mākutu is Rewi, Mereana's brother, who symbolises the safe man, one who is trustworthy, supportive, and present in himself and with those around him. He is a symbol for hope, that women need not be afraid of all men when they have experienced sexual violence.

I have endeavoured throughout my creative work to portray authenticity in responses, reactions and experience for Māori/Pākehā wahine, and embody the writing, 'We talk about field work as embodied, but we should also think of the writing process as embodied.' (Ellis, p. 308). I am conscious of the cultural paradigms within Aotearoa, and my creative work. Histories of colonisation and oppression, for both Māori and Pākehā, however through the narrative of trauma, it could be said that women hold centuries of sexual, physical, psychological, psychic and cultural trauma, which has been well documented in both fiction and non-fiction.

CONCLUSION

Overall my creative work aims to explore the effects of trauma upon whānau, whakapapa, gender and wairuatanga. I envisage this work could appeal to Māori, Pākehā, survivors of trauma, those who appreciate the value of narratives as vehicles to recovery, and those who are drawn to wairuatanga and spiritual experiences.

I do not see my work as original within terms of Māori fiction. It aims to lend a voice to those who hold bi-cultural whakapapa and those who are connected to wairua. My creative work may contribute to Māori literature, by giving voice to those with mixed whakapapa and their search for belonging. It may also challenge thinking around what constitutes Māori writing, encouraging space for more overt hybridity of whakapapa to be shown. Given to be Māori is about whakapapa, as opposed to skin/eye/hair colour, this writing may extend the norms of how Māori within literature are portrayed.

This work may contribute to the Trauma Narrative field, by exploring trauma, the impact upon survivors and ultimately their healing. While it may reinforce existing knowledge around trauma, I aim to extend this not only to individuals, but whānau and communities, and to illustrate the deeper effects on whakapapa.

I am hopeful that my creative work might go some way to normalizing wairuatanga, for example: the occurrence of prophetic dreams, visions and voices. Furthermore, this may enable an understanding of such experiences, for those who do not have them.

Normalising dreams, visions, voices and the place of other (for example, Mākutu) could

enable those with similar experiences to feel belonging. For those who do not, the writing could create understanding about differences in spiritual experiences, and that the existence of one world-view does not discount that of another.

I return full circle now to the beginning—the whakatauākī of the korimako and the harakeke. My aim is that this creative work enables several things to occur at a socio-cultural level. Firstly, that it might give voice to abuse survivors who whakapapa Māori as well as Pākehā, and the often conflicting discourses this embodies. Secondly, that it might lend some weight towards de-stigmatization of abuse and trauma, enabling womens' experiences of trauma to be acknowledged as detrimental to wellbeing. Thirdly, that this work might demystify wairua experiences and the correlation to wellbeing, for those who whakapapa Māori and Pākehā. My writing endeavours to channel these points, through the narratives of Mereana and Kahukura, in ways that replicate reality.

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