

**Grace's interstitial Oceanic memory  
in Alan Duff's *Once were warriors***

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**Sylvie Largeaud-Ort ega \***  
University of French Polynesia**Abstract**

An exercise in symptomatic reading, this paper studies Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors* (1990) from a postcolonial perspective. It claims that the novel invokes Oceanic memory more than its author is willing to admit. Against the author's intention and ideology, a close examination of the narrative's turning point presents Grace's suicide as an occasion to revisit the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand from times prior to contact with Europeans – including times of so-called Māori 'slavery' – down to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century British settlement. The novel's pivotal passage is also seen as a piece of Māori cosmogony revisited: Grace may be said to reenact the founding myth of Hine-Tītama/Hine-nui-te-pō's flight from her incestuous father into the night. In addition, by encroaching upon the *Pakeha* owner's land, she can be said to create a terrain of difference where the cultural and political values of Aotearoa/New Zealand might be negotiated anew. Like the novel's multiple shifting narrators, and like Duff himself, she constructs 'interstitial intimacy' where readers get glimpses of an 'insider's outsidersness', to use Homi Bhabha's phraseology. This paper suggests that a productive and creative memory of the Maori minority as a social agent may be seen at work throughout *Once Were Warriors*.

**Keywords:** Alan Duff. *Once Were Warriors*. Postcolonial studies. Pacific literature. Māori cosmogony. Hine-Tītama/Hine-nui-te-pō

This paper examines Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors* (1990), a best-selling novel whose very title invokes Oceanic memory. Seemingly following the conventions of social realism, Duff's extremely controversial piece of fiction portrays the Hekes, a dysfunctional Māori family. They are typical of Pine Block, a Māori township where most live on the dole. The time is 1990, a critical era in the socio-economic history of Aotearoa/New Zealand. In the wake of the "Rogernomics" of the 1980s, many businesses had gone bankrupt and the unemployment rate was at its highest since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Jake Heke, known as Jake the Muss, spends most of his time boozing with his mates and looking for a "rumble", at the pub or at home. He is a violent wife beater and an absentee father. Beth, his wife and the main focaliser in the novel, is bitterly critical of this lifestyle but equally prone to heavy drinking and chain-smoking. Although she is a loving mother, she is likely to leave the kids to their own devices whenever she's had too many beers or too many punches in the face. Nig, their eldest son, eighteen, is a prospect in the obnoxious Brown Fists gang. Abe, seventeen, is soon to follow suit. Mark, fourteen, is derisively nicknamed Boogie because of his reluctance to fight – the boy is actually terrified of his bogeyman of a father, an ever-threatening figure who openly

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\* **Corresponding author:** Sylvie Largeaud-Ortega, University of French Polynesia, [sylvie.ortega@upf.pf](mailto:sylvie.ortega@upf.pf)

despises him. Grace, thirteen, is a major character and focaliser whom this paper aims to discuss in detail. There are two younger kids, Polly and Huata, minor characters in the novel.

Grace is an outsider in the Pine Block community. She enjoys going to the Pakeha-system school, and is inordinately critical of her kinfolks. Here is how Beth introduces her to the reader: “My thirteen-year going on fifty-year old” (Duff, 1990: 10; further references to this text list page numbers only), and how Grace perceives herself: “Maybe a little different from many or most of her peers, and certainly different from her Pine Block peers” (24). The first time the reader encounters Grace in person is in the Children’s Courthouse. Boogie has been summoned to Court for shoplifting and she is standing by him, while their parents sleep off their night’s partying/fighting. The next moment the reader meets Grace again, she is trespassing for the first time upon the estate of the Tramberts, the township’s wealthy Pakeha neighbours, just so that she might better gaze at them. Back home, Grace is raped in the darkness of the children’s bedroom, by a man she suspects is her own father. The rapes then recur regularly and towards the middle of the narrative, Grace ends up committing suicide by hanging on the Trambert property. Through her personality down to her choice of a location for suicide, Grace is a highly liminal character in Pine Block. She may be said to represent what Homi Bhabha calls an “insider’s outsidersness” (Bhabha, 2010: 20).

Grace’s suicide proves to be of the Girardian kind (Girard, 1978): her *tangihanga* (funeral ceremony) allows Beth to reconnect with her rural *hapū* (subtribe), to resurrect her sense of belonging and to regain pride in her *Māoritanga* (being Māori). With the aid of the *tobunga* (wiseman) Te Tupaea and under Beth’s emerging leadership, half of the Pine Block community is eventually jolted back into building a better future for themselves. The plot of the novel is therefore clearly divided into two parts: before and after Grace’s suicide. In the second part, the expression of Oceanic memory is fairly obvious and unrestrained. This paper, however, argues that Oceanic memory is also present in the *first* half of the narrative, in a way which may only be revealed through deconstructive structural analysis. Approaching this first part from a postcolonial perspective, this study follows in the footsteps of Grace, to contend that it is precisely her early confrontation with Oceanic memory that triggers her pivotal suicide – and, in turn, allows Oceanic memory to fully emerge in the second part of the narrative.

The reason why *Once Were Warriors* is extremely controversial is that it is often perceived as going counter to the 1980s Māori Renaissance. Prominent writers like Patricia Grace and Witi Ihimaera were actively promoting Māori culture and denouncing collective colonial responsibility for Māori marginalisation. In contrast, *Once Were Warriors* is frequently blamed for encouraging colonial negative stereotypes about the Māori and pandering to neo-liberal politics from the Western world (Thompson, 1994; Heim, 1998; Moura-Koçoglou, 2001; Alia *et al.*, 2005; Keown, 2005; Martens, 2007; Wilson, 2008 and 2009; Stachurski, 2009). This paper fully endorses these critical views. Going by Jakobson’s and Lodge’s distinction between metonymy and metaphor (Jakobson, 1956; Lodge, 1979), Duff’s metonymic text is indeed steeped in colonial discourse; as “a model of reality” and “within a single world of discourse” (Lodge, 1979: 109, 73), it does give cause to such censure. What this paper contends however is that, as a *metaphoric* text, *Once Were Warriors* proves postcolonial. Its structure contradicts the metonymic discourse and introduces alternative chains of sequentiality and causality (Lodge, 1979: 82, 103). This process can only be observed through an examination of the *intentio operis* (Eco, 1992), notwithstanding the *intentio auctoris* – in other words, by allowing the text to stand by itself. This paper’s deconstructivist reading therefore deliberately avoids intentional fallacy. It stands against the declared intentions of both the “empirical author” (Alan Duff, the man – his comments and his subsequent writings) and the “model author” (Alan Duff with an agenda in mind in the process of

writing *Once Were Warriors*). What matters here is the text produced by the “liminal author” (Alan Duff giving way to his creative impulses while writing) (Eco, 1990: 135).

In the footsteps of the novel’s pivotal character Grace, this essay delves into two main sections of Oceanic memory: it first revisits the memory of Māori-Pakeha relationships, from their first encounters to the institutional colonialization of Aotearoa/New Zealand and the settlement of Pakeha farmers. Then it explores the memory of pre-contact Māori slavery, and resuscitates the memory of Māori cosmogony. It thus highlights the metaphoric function of Grace’s interstitial memory, and its role in contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand.

## The Māori-Pakeha Oceanic memory

### *Revisiting first encounters*

Grace’s first appearance in the Children’s Courthouse looks very much like a Māori-Pakeha first encounter revisited. As Greg Denning would put it, it is a case of “crossing the beach”, a metaphorical expression to designate contacts and conflicts between cultures (Denning, 1980; 2004.1, 2004.2). Indeed, the narrative stresses the contrasts between each side of the beach, between the courtroom and the foyer: “how one side of the double doors are one race, and the other this race: Maori” (24). It also highlights Grace’s sense of wonder at discovering the other side of the beach:

Oh far out! Grace at all the wood everywhere, the quiet, the paintings on the wall. The whole atmosphere of the place. Like a church.

[...] Oh wow, at the ceiling with its fancy plasterwork, scrolls and things. Oh, but you wouldn’t think it exists just through those big doors. And then on the other side, what a girl has grown up with [...] and here, a kind of palace, a church, a place to respect and fear all in one on the other side. Who’d believe such a place exists here in little ole Two Lakes? (32)

First encounters in Pacific colonial discourse were conventionally narrated from the perspective of Europeans arriving *from the sea*. This first encounter, however, is seen from a Maori perspective, *from land*. It might be argued that Grace echoes the perception of Pacific islanders who, upon the unprecedented arrivals of Europeans, saw the ships from land and visited them for the first time. But what is most striking in this scene is that this first encounter actually takes place *on land*. There is no trace of any nautical imagery. All this demonstrates that the Europeans have long since barged *inland* and that original European ships have converted into an immovable “kind of palace” permanently settled on Māori territory. The Māori character’s first encounter is now set on Pakeha land.

As happened in first encounters, Grace fantasises about the Other. To her eyes the judge pertains to an altogether different type; within this church-like building, he is the God-like figure: “magistrate (God) spoke from his on high position” (33). “ALL RISE!” at his entrance, and address him as “your honour” (33). This might ring like a faint echo of the anthological Sahlins-Obeyesekere debate over whether Captain James Cook was taken by Hawaiians for god Lono or not (Sahlins, 1985; Obeyesekere, 1992).

She built up a picture of the magistrate, his background, how he must come from a nice home, he’d never seen his father beat up his mother [...].

He’d never been woken from sleep or been unable to sleep for the din of brawling going on beneath you. He’d not experienced any of what the people before him like Boogie have had to endure. (34)

Grace's fantasies about the Courthouse goad her into visiting her Pakeha neighbours' estate for the first time: "Grace thinking this must be how the Trambert big house looks; or sort of" (32). Upon visiting their property, Grace does indulge in the same fantasy as in the courtroom. To her eyes, the Trambert house, "aglow like the moon", looks like "an apparition, a spacecraft from outer space just landed" (80).

... that house... that house (The Dream) Oh not far to go now. Glints of light, like horizontal knives slicing across her vision: that'll be the other fence. Oh my God. Fearful and excited now (84).

Readers thus follow Grace from the inside of the Courthouse to the outside of the Tramberts' house, along what may be viewed as the protagonist's further progress into probing first contacts. This metaphoric chain of sequentiality and causality cannot be overemphasized, because it reads like a postcolonial tackling of the issue of colonial collective responsibility in Grace's suicide – and more generally, in the plight of the Māori people who are described in *Once Were Warriors*. It is only after she has crossed the beach at the Courthouse that Grace decides to cross it again, into the Tramberts' estate. It is therefore her first revisiting of contact history that prompts her into delving it further. What she finds at the end of her quest contributes to her suicide.

To cross over into Trambert land, Grace is once again made aware of the divide between both communities: "... then she was scrambling through the wire-strand fence separating her state dwelling from that stately one, the one lit-up" (79). She scrambles over "The Other Side of the Fence", expanding upon Witi Ihimaera's short story of the same title (Ihimaera, 1972). The similarities between the courthouse and the Trambert house are galore. Upon entering this "different world" which lies "beyond, out there" (29), Grace uses exactly the same expression of wonder: "Oh far out" (79). To her eyes, the big room at the Tramberts' looks a replica of the courtroom:

Furniture real nice, that old stuff, antiques, and paintings up on the walls, and vases with lovely flowers inem, and objects she did not recognise. And the curtains really bright with beautiful bursts of colour, of flowers, and sorta shiny, maybe silky, I dunno, I'm jussa black girl from over the way there. (87)

The *intentio operis* shows the Trambert house as a metaphorical extension of the Courthouse. Both houses similarly symbolize dominant discourse and oppression. The divide between Māori and Pakeha communities proves especially deep when Grace compares the inside of the Heke home to the outside of the Tramberts':

Broken glass, smashed beer bottles, wood splinters and crates, the overpowering stench of beer. [...] and beyond, out there in the vast green expanse, but you wouldn't believe two such different worlds could be so close, Trambert's sheep grazing on his acreage (29)

And again, what this second revisiting of first encounters reveals is a striking inversion of roles in the crossing of the beach: the one who crosses the beach is the indigenous person. It is the Māori protagonist who is the outsider, and who crosses over into Māori land that has been re-territorialized by the Pakeha. The text therefore puts this inversion-usurpation process on trial and by doing so, makes a postcolonial metaphorical renegotiating claim for Māori sovereignty.

### ***Revisiting colonisation***

As Grace enters the Trambert estate, she is labelled "a trespasser" (86) according to Pakeha law. This textual foray into the Courthouse and the concept of "trespassing" consequently conjure a later stage in Māori-Pakeha Oceanic memory: the institutional colonisation of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Let's get back to the Courthouse scene:

Man, what a place. Reminds me of the Queen, Grace registering the familiarity of the coat of arms above the magistrate's bench; the Queen and her loyal, faithful servants, that's it. So where do we fit in this picture? (33)

With its reference to an unspecified British Queen, the description of the courthouse is redolent of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), the founding text of the institutional colonisation of Aotearoa/New Zealand. The Treaty was presented to the Māori as "Queen Victoria's act of love to you" (Orange, 1987: 18). It seems that the same token of "love" brings the judge to impose his law onto the Hekes:

Mark Heke, I have no choice but to declare you a ward of the state. The state? Grace thinking. Like in a state house? Where you shall be under the control of the child welfare authorities... Grace not able to figure it, what it meant in terms of Boogie's future and yet knowing it *was* his future that'd just been decided by a stranger.

A complete stranger, who Boog'd never set eyes on before in his life, and he was making Boog a ward of the state handing him over to the welfare – Oh poor Boogie, Grace letting out a tiny groan before catching it at mention of a Boys' Home, where, the magistrate was promising or assuring or threatening, Mark Heke would find discipline and – through discipline – direction (35).

This passage may be read as a miniature exegesis of the early history of the Treaty. One finds similar misunderstandings due to language differences. The translated words "*tino rangatiratanga*" (supreme authority/sovereignty) in the *Tiriti o Waitangi* (the Māori version of the Treaty) have been the notorious source of diverging interpretations (Sadler, 2014: 13). In a similar way – though on a fundamentally minor scale – Grace finds it hard to understand the judge's words. Also, like the Māori chiefs in history, she needs time to realise how high the stakes are, and when she finally does, it all comes as a painful shock. What is more, like the Māori chiefs, the Hekes are given promises of a protecting authority by the ruling institution. Last but not least, "it *was* [the] future" of the Māori that was "decided by stranger[s]". Mark Heke unwillingly placed under the control of the welfare authorities emblematises the Māori tribes placed under the control of the British Crown. When Grace asks "where do we fit in this picture?" (33), she speaks not only for her mononuclear family, but for all the Māori who were to be gradually dispossessed by colonial powers. Colonisation imposed on them "discipline and – through discipline – direction" which actually violated their sovereignty. The British institutions became supreme judge over the country.

Elizabeth DeLoughrey writes that "[one cannot overstress] the historical importance of the courtroom in Aotearoa/New Zealand and how it institutionalizes opposing epistemologies between Pakeha and Māori" (DeLoughrey, 2007: 223-4). The country's colonial history has indeed been fashioned by a series of legislative texts. Prominent among them is the infamous Native Land Court (1862) which facilitated the dispossession of the Māori. In Māori culture, the land is ancestor. When they were separated from their land, the Māori experienced *dismemberment* similar to the Hekes': "They send him away, Grace? [...] it's Boogie, my own son taken from me" (45).

The courtroom scene's metaphorical postcolonial criticism in *Once Were Warriors* may be compared to Witi Ihimaera's metonymic criticism in *bulibasba* (1994), when young Simeon protests against the Pakeha judge's decision to take young Mihaere away from his family and send him to jail for swearing at this employer:

'There is something wrong, Your Honour, with a place like this, if the majority of the cases which come before you are Maori and are placed by Pakeha against Maori. I cannot thank you for being part of a court which enables this to happen. I cannot' (Ihimaera, 1994: 189).

When Grace enters the Trambert property, the reader is given an opportunity to revisit another side of colonial history: the settlement of Aotearoa/New Zealand by farmers. The Tramberts conjure the memory of British settlement. Quote Beth:

Mr fuckin white Trambert with the big stately dwelling [...] and endless green paddocks [...], with acres and acres of land to feel under your feet, and hundreds and hundreds of sheep growing fat and woolly to add to your thousands and thousands in the fucking bank (8).

The Tramberts personify colonisation through land-grabbing, the kind of people drunken Beth bitterly addresses as “you, the white audience out there, [who] defeated us. Conquered us. Took our land, our *mana*, left us with nothing” (47). Historian James Belich observes that, in the nineteenth century, “progressive colonisation mounted a quadruple assault on nature, natives, emptiness and distance, each of which served the others” (Belich, 1996: 250-251). In the late nineteenth century immigration campaigns proclaimed that there was “no field of investment so safe and so profitable” as farming in New Zealand (Miller, 1958: 143). Farming became the main incentive for land-grabbing, and the main cause for M ori dispossession. The Tramberts’ green pasture also symbolises the massive deforestation that Kerewin decries in Keri Hulme’s *the bone people* (1985):

‘Bloody pines’, snarling to herself. [...] Cutover bush going past in a blur. Where it isn’t cutover, it’s pines. They start a chain back from the verge and march on and on in gloomy parade. ‘This place used to have one of the finest stands of kahikatea in the country.’ ‘And they cut it down for those?’ ‘They did,’ she says sourly. ‘Pines grow faster. When they grow. The poor old kahikatea takes two or three hundred years to get to its best, and that’s not fast enough for the moneyminded. [...] O there’s room in the land for them, I grant you, but why do they have to cut down good bush just to plant sickening pinus? Look at that lot, dripping with needle blight dammit...’

In *Once Were Warriors*, even pines have been felled and burnt down into a name: Pine Block. The township is all the land and (absent) trees the M ori characters are left with. Stachurski identifies this metaphorical process as the “systematic colonization” of the characters (Stachurski, 2009: 134-135).

## M ori memory

When thirteen-year-old Grace gets back home after her first incursion on Trambert land, she is raped one first time. This character is therefore terrified by three oppressive father figures. The first one is the Pakeha magistrate: “Wanting to put an arm around [her brother] but afraid to, not in here, the magistrate might say something, he was sure not to like gestures like that” (35).

The second, Pakeha Trambert:

And Grace watched in horror at [the Trambert’s window] flying open, her vision filled with the man, hearing, too: Who’s there? Grace turning. Grace fleeing. Grace hitting some unmovable object in that now coal-black night. The force tremendous. The blackness darkening. The voice from afar yet yelling at her (87).

The Trambert wall that Grace runs into symbolises the power of land ownership gone into the hands of the Pakeha. The third father figure is the M ori rapist:

... ’m dreaming...? Then this voice going, *Sbbbbbb*. [...] And totally dark. The curtains across. Door closed. [...] I’m scared (89-90)

The text explicitly identifies the rapist as a Māori father figure. Tim Armstrong, however, convincingly argues that in the rape scene, “racial oppression and sexual abuse are directly mapped onto each other. Even as she is raped, she thinks of the Tramberts” (Armstrong, 1997: 62). This means that the rape scene may indeed be read as metaphorical colonial grabbing of the land/raping of the earth, and that the rapist is therefore metaphorically Pakeha. While this paper agrees with this interpretative reading, it further argues that, first, it is the *accumulative* oppression by both Pakeha and Māori father figures that drives Grace to suicide, and second, that this very process contributes to the postcolonial revisiting of the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand. To bolster this argument, I’ll investigate the Māori father figure and Māori memory, by exploring Grace’s father’s heritage of Māori slavery and the collective Oceanic memory of cosmogony.

### ***Revisiting Māori slavery***

Protagonist Jake Heke makes a resounding statement in *Once Were Warriors*, which amply fuelled the controversy around the novel. He announces to his family that he was born a slave.

Hey kids. Know what I inherited as a Maori? [...] My family were slaves. [...] My branch of the Heke line was descended from a slave. A fulla taken prisoner by the enemy when he shoulda – he *woulda* – been better off dyin.

Yep. Slave he was, this ancestor of mine. And Beth getting worried by Jake’s tone.

When I was a kid – me and my brothers and sisters – we weren’t allowed to play with many other families in our pa. No way, not the Hekes, man. Don’t play with them, you’ll get the slave disease. That was what they used to say. [...] See, kids, to be a warrior and get captured in battle was the pits. Just the pits, eh. Better to die. So us Hekes – *innocent* – having to cope with this shit from being descended from this weakling arsehole of an ancestor. Jeez... Shaking his head, and everyone able to hear his teeth grating together. Five hundred years, that’s what they used to tell us Heke kids. Five hundred years of the slave curse on our heads (102-3).

Hazel Petrie’s seminal study of Māori slavery demonstrates that Jake’s statement is highly misleading (Petrie, 2015). A few summary words should suffice to this paper. It is true that, among Māori tribes, being defeated in battle was supremely humiliating; but the novel erroneously compares Māori slavery with trans-Atlantic slavery. Māori slavery was fundamentally related to the sacred concepts of *mana* (spiritual power) and *tapu* (sacredness). The word “slavery” itself is an oversimplification of the various status assigned to war captives. Moreover, slavery was not transgenerational (Petrie in Blundell, 2015). Had it been, it would not have made sense for the Heke family to claim their cursed ancestor over the seven generations since slavery was abolished, *i.e.* from 1830 to the 1950s-1960s, the time when Jake was a kid. Petrie argues that any family would have claimed a different ancestor, a current practice among the Māori. Such strategic manipulation of genealogical history is illustrated in Patricia Grace’s *Potiki* (1986): when the Tamihanas wished to unite with the Te Opes, James “looked back in the genealogies until he found a common ancestress from whom both people could show descent” (Grace, 1986: 153).

What matters more to the point of this paper, however, is that owing to his revelation, Jake Heke should stand out as a particularly oppressive Māori father figure. Not only is he an absentee father who repeatedly beats their mother and ignores or traumatises his children. He also bequeaths onto them the legacy of Māori slavery. Jake therefore embodies a significantly wide range of collectively oppressive Māori father figures. Through him, the vanquished ancestor and all his descendants carry on the burden of a humiliating defeat that is always-already there, and of a Māori potential that is always-already lost. Added to this line of oppressive figures is the line of the abusive Māori father figures from the dominant tribe. As a Māori father figure, Jake therefore stands out as particularly

oppressive, and it is on the evening of the day when she learns about her father's so-called slave heritage, that Grace commits suicide.

This paper's argument therefore posits that the cause of her suicide is the *accumulation* of collectively oppressive father figures, Pakeha and Māori and not, as might be inferred from Armstrong's critical reading, mostly Pakeha. Minimising the impact of specifically Māori memory would run the risk of falling within colonial discourse. Focusing exclusively on the Pakeha collective power of oppression is likely to reflect an exclusively Euro-centred perspective, and to deflect the reader's attention from the Māori's historical agency. Far from blaming the victim, as *Once Were Warriors* has often been charged with, this paper aims at pointing to ethnocentric readings of the novel. This is why it seems fundamental to stress that *Once Were Warriors* conjures the memory not only of colonial historical oppression, but also of pre-colonial Māori history. However debatable Jake's reference to Māori slavery may be, it does highlight that the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand cannot be restricted to the history of New Zealand. The *intentio operis* metaphorically counters colonial narratives of history "from the centre" (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2002), it confronts their monopolistic views and stands up for the memory of Oceanic peoples. It reminds the reader that before so-called first encounters, there were countless encounters – among Oceanians. Preceding Epeli Hau'ofa's ground-breaking *We are the Ocean* (2008), *Once Were Warriors* establishes that contacts with Europeans were but one stage in the long history of Oceania. They turned out to be a crucial stage, especially because history started being documented and written down by Europeans, whereas it had always been orally transmitted by Oceanians. The power of writing sealed the power of the Europeans.

In this novel, Alan Duff as liminal author therefore takes the power of writing into his own hands, and by crossing the beach over historical deep time, he revives Oceanic memory. His presentation of Māori slavery may be lopsided, but it has the merit of trespassing upon the Pakeha-controlled writing of the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand. It confronts the eminently oppressive father figures of ethnocentric historians. It breaks a *tapu*, and integrates the violence of writing by making it his own, and endowing it with the regenerative powers of literary creation.

### ***The Māori memory of cosmogony***

Is Jake even more of an oppressive father figure for being incestuous, as Grace suspects he is? Jake's guilt is never proven – at least not in this volume of the Heke trilogy, *i.e.* by *this* novel's *intentio operis*.<sup>1</sup> To try to answer this question, one must examine what the characters say.

The first time she is raped, Grace wonders: "(What if it's my father?) [...] (Is it Dad?)" (90). After she's been raped repeatedly, she leaves this note: "*Mum, I was raped. [...] Mum, I think it was Dad*" (160). On the strength of this note, the whole town including Jake's wife and close friends consider that he is the rapist. Even though Jake denies the fact, he himself fails to be totally convinced of his innocence:

it can't be true. I'm not like that. But then again... you know how drunk a man gets, I don't remember nuthin half the fuckin time. But surely he wouldn't do *that*? Man don't even have *thoughts* like that, of, you know: havin sex with kids. Let alone with his own daughter. But then again... thinking of the dreams, how violent there were, how – a man don't have the words – but he knows his dreams are strange (162-3).

Literary critics are divided on the issue of Jake's culpability. To Thomas, "Grace is clearly mistaken" (Thomas, 1993: 62-3). For him, the rapist is the aptly-named Bully, one of Jake's drinking mates who

<sup>1</sup> In the sequel to *Once were warriors*, *What becomes of the broken hearted?* a DNA test proves Jake innocent. But this sequel was published six years after the text under scrutiny and is stranger to the first novel's *intentio operis*.

makes her give him a hug before she goes to bed. Michael Gifkins, for his part, acknowledges that Grace hates her father, but not to the extent that she would wrongly accuse him (Gifkins, 1990; 109). Otto Heim also feels inclined to believe Grace, due to “various small hints in the text that make the occurrence of incest seem psychologically plausible” (Heim, 1998: 44).

This paper likewise refers to the *intentio operis*. What does the text say? Early in the narrative, Beth confesses that Jake’s sexuality can be aggressively dominating:

sticking himself inside me – thrusting at me, like I’m some damn dog bitch down the street. Think he gets a buzz, a you know, a kick from doing it so soon after he’s beat a woman up (40).

On several occasions, the narrative indicates that Jake no longer feels sexually attracted to Beth (Heim, 1998: 44). Dramatic irony also points an accusing finger at Jake when, a few hours before Grace’s suicide, Beth makes these two observations: “Hasn’t touched me in weeks. (Maybe he’s got a bit on the side)” and, three lines further down: “(Grace? Why is she so quiet this last few weeks?)” (95). Although Beth fails to connect these observations metonymically, the metaphorical discourse strongly hints that Grace has been raped for “weeks”.

The study of textual strategies also charges Jake. Let’s examine the transition from chapter 6 to chapter 7. In a very bold stylistic device, chapter 6, which is all about Jake, continues straight into chapter 7, which relates the rape. Very noticeably indeed, chapter 7 starts with dots and no capital letter: “... that house... that house” (84). So, on the typographical level, the chapter on Jake literally runs into – one might say, penetrates – the chapter on the rape. What is more, chapter 6’s main focaliser is Jake; chapter 7’s is Grace. The typographic strategy allows the reader to feel that Jake’s focalisation violates Grace’s.

Textual strategies further evince striking resemblances between the ends of chapters 6 and 9, *i.e.* between Jake’s behaviour and Grace’s suicide. Both chapters similarly end by using the narrative technique of editing. More noticeably, they are the only chapters where intrudes an extremely anecdotal character, a “Mr Telescope” (75) who has no metonymic narrative function. His function is therefore strictly metaphorical. At that level, indeed, his twin appearance closely relates Jake to the rape.

*Incidentally*, one might add that the text also hints that, as a kid, Jake may have been the victim of sexual abuse:

all us Hekes – even my cousins and uncles and that – all sorta shunted into this one ole shack because, well, you know how people are when they’re being you know, singled out, they stick together. Jake pausing to expel a long sigh. Cept it ain’t natural, is it? What isn’t, Dad? For people to live together in one little ole house, not sort of, you know, loving each other (104).

Deconstructive reading may ask why Jake refers to male members only in the house. Why does the liminal author insist, through an interrogative repeat, that the family relations were not “natural”? Why does he have Jake specify that these male characters packed together did not love one another? Why the use of a double linguistic prop before Jake can enunciate what amounted to “not loving”? Last but not least, “Jake pausing to expel a long sigh” upon evoking these events, sits strangely with the character at this stage in the narrative. It is well-known that people who have been abused as children are likely to reproduce the abuse onto the next generation (Klein, 1959; 1984). But it cannot be ascertained that Jake was raped as a kid, nor can it be taken for granted that he would have reproduced the rape. The *intentio operis* does raise these questions, but it leaves them unanswered.

To conclude on the issue of Jake’s guilt, what cannot be gainsaid is that Grace is not alone to associate Jake to the rape; the whole town also does – and in several ways, the text does too. Notwithstanding the empirical author’s denial subsequent to the novel’s publication: “The father didn’t do it, and I should know, I wrote the bloody thing” (Duff in McDonald, 1991), this paper conjectures from the *intentio operis* that Jake is an incestuous rapist.

The primal taboo of incest cannot fail to conjure the Oceanic memory of cosmogony. There are many striking metaphorical similarities between Grace and Hine-Titama/Hine-nui-te-pō. First and foremost is the shock of the revelation of incest and the consecutive flight into eternal darkness. When Hine-Titama – a protective mother figure, daughter of the god Tāne and Hineahuone – realises that her father has committed incest on her, she flees to the underworld, turning into Hine-nui-te-pō and becomes the goddess of night and death. Grace may be said to revisit this founding myth through her flight from her incestuous father. She runs away from “Dad. My father. The man who did that to my mother and created me” (25), into the night and into death: “Me and the dark. Me and –” (119).

Intriguingly enough, even as Grace is running away from the Heke home, she compares herself to night: “I’m black. Black as that sky up there” (85), before adding: “Just me being Miss Morbid again; that’s what Mum calls me sometimes: Aee, Miss Morbid at it again. Can’t help it. How I am » (85). She then proceeds to review mentally all kinds of deaths and funeral ceremonies in the community. This thought process seems to confirm that “Miss Morbid” is a modern variation on the Hine-nui-te-pō aptonym.

On Trambert land Grace develops unearthly skills:

my eyes, my hearing: I can see, I can hear so *clearly*. [...] I can hear every rustle on every leaf, over every blade of grass. What’s happening to me? I can picture all the shapes the breeze must take to move around, over an obstacle, and how all those things combined must produce what we call the sound of the breeze. It’s not the breeze, it’s what’s in the way. And she moved forward, cautiously, but with this strange confidence (85).

“Wonder what happened to me back there” (89), she repeats back in her bedroom, just before she is raped. This paper suggests that what happens is the forerunning sign of her metamorphosis into Hine-nui-te-pō. This metamorphosis can be observed when, on Trambert land, Grace herself describes her “hormonal changes” as “turning from one thing into another, changing and yet not changing” (84).

In Māori mythology, Hine-Titama/Hine-nui-te-pō bridges the worlds of the living and of the dead (Sadler, 2018; Wood, 2007: 119). Likewise, Grace is a protective mother figure as well as a modern variation of the goddess of death. Not only is she the one who accompanies Boogie to the Courthouse, in place of their parents. She is fond of children and is used to being her brothers and sister’s substitute mother. Just before the rape scene, the reader follows her into the bedroom she shares with the youngest ones:

Grace off to bed. Check the kids first. [...] they got so used to me being their second mother, poor little buggers, or fuckers, as some in our world call em. Fuckers... Who but a Pine Blocker’d call their own kids fuckers? Huata fast asleep. Looking at the baby of the family, so sweet when he was asleep and pretty good awake too. Over to Polly’s top bunk: her and her doll, Sweetie, out like lights, snuggled up together as usual. G’night, Poll. Grace imagining giving her sister a peck (89).

It is highly symbolical that this maternal scene should immediately precede the rape scene. The narrative sequence thus reproduces the mythical figure’s progress: the metaphorical sequence

motherhood/rape/death. It bolsters the metaphorical link between Grace and Hine-Tītama/Hine-nui-te-pō.

Grace's pivotal suicide closes the narrative's first part. In the second part of *Once Were Warriors*, Grace's spirit literally emerges through the suicide note that she has left, and this brings dramatic improvements to Pine Block. Under the metaphorical protection of Grace/Hine-Tītama/Hine-nui-te-pō, and the metonymic guidance of chief Te Tupaea, part of the community is able to gradually learn about their *whakapapa* (genealogy), resurrect the memory of their Māori past and therefore envision a future:

... his whakapapa [...]. He recalls all those tupuna long gone yet still alive in the heart of every true Maori. He is saying, Beth, that we are what we are only because of our past.... and that we should never forget our past or our future is lost (124).

Like the original mother of manhood, Grace/Hine-Tītama/Hine-nui-te-pō protects her children of the upper world, Te Ao-Tu-Roa. She reconnects the people to the *whakapapa* that she first originated. By allowing them to remember their past, she re-members them.

After Grace's suicide, the narrative in *Once Were Warriors* allows the reader to revisit first encounter experiences once more, but this time, it is the Pakeha character who comes as "a stranger" (133), on the sacred ground of the *marae* (meeting ground) where Māori sovereignty has been preserved. In counterpoise to Grace in the courthouse, Trambert is the one who now stands in awe of the *tobunga* (wiseman), is reprimanded by him, and fantasizes about the Maori community. He then crosses the beach, too, and gets gradually involved in his neighbouring community.

## Conclusion

Even though Grace conjures the Oceanic memory of Hine-Tītama/Hine-nui-te-pō and Māori concepts of the sacred, her name obviously gestures to Christian faith. Like the character Mary in Patricia Grace's *Potiki*, Grace Heke weaves together Māori and Christian concepts of the sacred. A metaphoric hybrid divinity, she demonstrates, on the one hand, that Māori concepts of the sacred now contribute to delineate contemporary cultural identity in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and on the other hand, that Christian concepts have been appropriated as a means of Māori empowerment (Durix, 1997). She stands in an interstitial space between the Māori and the Pakeha worlds, a pre- and post-contact figure that is eminently postcolonial.

Quoting Bhabha's study of "A Missing Person", this paper concludes that Grace inhabits "the rim of an in-between reality", which allows her to develop "a strategy of ambivalence in the structure of identification that occurs precisely in the elliptical *in-between*, where the shadow of the other falls upon the self" (Bhabha, 2010: 84-5). The very place where she commits suicide, in-between the Heke and the Trambert houses, and upon re-territorialised land, becomes an experience of liminality which questions what it means to speak from "the centre of life" (Bhabha, 2010: 20). In this interstitial space where she develops extraordinary capacities, Grace Heke evinces the same "special knowledge" as Patricia Grace's *Potiki*. A Girardian sacrificial child like him, she reconnects the Māori with their own primal ancestors. But by choosing to hang from a tree on Pakeha land, she also tethers the Pakeha to the fate of their neighbouring Māori community. To quote Bhabha again, she illuminates "the otherness of the Self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity" (Bhabha, 2010: 63-4). Forcing all to move beyond a world conceived in binary terms, she paves the way for a new affirmation of the people of Aotearoa/New Zealand's insurgent existence. Through her, *Once Were Warriors*

metaphorically revisits colonial history and urges its critical readers not to “overestimate European impact, and underestimate native resilience” (Belich, 1996: 22). Her suicide powerfully expresses the agency of the aporetic, and her articulation of the unspoken turns into a second coming.

Grace conjures several stages in Oceanic memory and by doing so, she re-members the M ori people. By crossing over into Pakeha land, she creates a terrain of difference where the economic and socio-cultural values of Aotearoa-New Zealand might be negotiated anew, as advocated by the Maori Renaissance.

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### Author's biography

Sylvie Largeaud-Ort ga is associate professor of English literature at the University of French Polynesia, Tahiti. Her L2, 3 and M1 seminars bear on Pacific colonial and postcolonial literatures, and she has been involved in Pacific studies for the last twenty years. Her most recently published work is *The Bounty from the Beach: Cross-Cultural and Cross-Disciplinary Essays* (ed., ANU Press, 2018). She has written a monography, *Ainsi Soit- le* (Honor  Champion, 2012) and numerous scholarly articles and book chapters on Stevenson's Pacific fiction, including "Who's who in 'The Isle of Voices?'" in *Victorians and Oceania* (Ashgate, 2013), "Stevenson's *The Ebb-Tide* or Virgil's *Aeneid* revisited" in *Victorian Literature and Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). She has just finished a monography on Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors* entitled *Agonisme de L' me des Guerriers d'Alan Duff* (manuscript). Her forthcoming professoral dissertation foregrounds postcolonial studies of contemporary indigenous Pacific Island fiction.

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