

HEALING MAORI THROUGH SONG AND DANCE?
THREE CASE STUDIES OF
RECENT NEW ZEALAND MUSIC THEATRE.

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by Emma Johnston

University of Canterbury

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the way “healing” may be seen to be represented and enacted by three recent New Zealand music theatre productions: *Once Were Warriors, the Musical-Drama*; *The Whale Rider, On Stage*; and *Footprints/Tapuwaē, a bicultural opera*. This thesis addresses the ways each of these music theatre productions can be seen to dramatise ideologically informed notions of Maori cultural health through the encounter of Maori performance practices with American and European music theatre forms. Because the original colonial encounter between Maori and Pakeha was a wounding process, it may be possible that in order to construct a theatrical meeting between the “colonised” Maori and the “colonial” non-Maori, “healing” is an essential element by which to foster an idea of the post-colonial, bicultural togetherness of the nation. In all three productions, Maori song and dance forms are incorporated into a distinctive form of western music theatre: the American musical; the international spectacle; Wagnerian opera. Wagner’s attempts to regenerate German culture through his music dramas can be compared to Maori renaissance idea(1)s of cultural “healing” through a “return” to Maori myths, traditions and song and dance.

Introduction

Healing Maori Through Song and Dance? Three Case Studies of Recent New Zealand Music Theatre

I broke my little toe in the theatre. In order to heal this broken toe, I was forced to wear a cast that entombed my entire lower leg and foot. Ironically, the production I was rehearsing for was called *Footprints/Tapuwae*. At the time of the accident, I was trying to overcome my fear of walking across the entwined branches of a semi-circular catwalk that dominated the performance space. Unsure of an effective way to tackle these native branches, I failed to plant my foot. For the next two weeks of rehearsals, I found new ways of moving and the performance was tailored to facilitate my altered footprints. A week before the opening night, a different doctor informed me that the cast was unnecessary and a special sock would suffice.

At the time, the damage and repair of my fifth metatarsal was the only “dis-ease” and “healing” of immediate relevance to me. It did not occur to me that there was a more important and vital exploration of “dis-ease” and “healing” taking place in *Footprints/Tapuwae*. I was more worried about my temporary physical disability, and got completely caught up in the uplifting, sensual pleasure of singing and experimenting with Wagner’s sumptuous melodies. In rehearsal and performance, we took musical motifs from Wagner’s *Ring* cycle and experimented with them, to see where our voices might take the melodies. After many years of formal classical singing training, the liberation of improvising in this way allowed me to transcend my usual manufactured style, with the emergence of a more personal and expressive voice providing a form of therapeutic release. Throughout my experience of *Footprints/Tapuwae*, I was more concerned with

my own individual pleasure and the healing of my little toe, rather than the broader social and political implications of the production.

In 2004, I returned to university to write a thesis exploring the possibilities of music theatre in New Zealand. I was still caught up in the aesthetics and sensual qualities of music theatre, but was becoming aware of other potentials and possibilities. At this time, a new New Zealand musical was about to premiere in Christchurch: *Once Were Warriors, the Musical-Drama*. This seemed fortuitous for me, as there were points of comparison with *Footprints/Tapuwae*, such as the Maori component, the use of music theatre, and the underlying theme of “return”. A month later, while still formulating my initial proposal, I received more fortuitous news: a music theatre version of *The Whale Rider* was to premiere in August. Like *Once Were Warriors*, *The Whale Rider* had originally been a novel before being adapted into a highly successful film. Both *Once Were Warriors* and *The Whale Rider* were set in troubled Maori communities which were “healed” by a “return” to Maori culture and tradition. There seemed to be some significant problems in Aotearoa New Zealand that might be “healed” through song and dance.

This thesis explores the way “healing” may be seen to be represented and enacted by three recent music theatre productions: *Once Were Warriors, the Musical-Drama*; *The Whale Rider, On Stage... a journey between two worlds*; and *Footprints/Tapuwae, a bicultural opera*.¹ In *Once Were Warriors*, audiences see members of a troubled urban

¹ *Once Were Warriors, the Musical-Drama*, based on the novel by Alan Duff (1990) and the film by Lee Tamahori (1994), directed by Jim Moriarty, adapted by Riwia Brown, produced by Anthony Runacres; ARTCO in association with Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu Trust Christchurch: (2-10 March and 24 March-3 April); Dunedin: (16-19 March); Auckland: (10-28 April); Wellington: (3-22 May) 2004.

The Whale Rider On Stage... a journey between two worlds based on the novel by Witi Ihimaera (1987), and the film by Niki Caro (2002), adapted and directed by Toby Gough, produced by Logan Brewer, Asia Pacific Partners Auckland: (20 August-12 September) 2004.

Maori family rediscover the power of their cultural heritage and its potential to heal them. The “healing” is effected largely by performing elements of kapa haka in ways that do not challenge or overcome the production’s Broadway musical components, but rather bring the Maori and the American forms together harmonically in the end. The stage adaptation of *The Whale Rider* begins with the representation of a decaying remote rural Maori community, and like the musical version of *Once Were Warriors*, this production can be seen to demonstrate the possibility of healing social ills through the harmonisation of traditional Maori performance elements with elements of contemporary international music theatre practice, such as can be seen in the work of Cirque du Soleil, De La Guarda and Peter Brook. The journey of a Maori community from dis-ease to well-being was also represented in *Footprints/Tapuwaē*, a bicultural opera that juxtaposed elements of Wagner’s *Ring* cycle with Maori cultural myth, haka and waiata; but in *Footprints/Tapuwaē* audiences were confronted by the two sides of the bicultural divide remaining divided by language, performance practice, and outcome. My thesis looks at the ways each of these music theatre productions can be seen to dramatise ideologically informed notions of Maori cultural health through the encounter of Maori performance practices with American and European song and dance forms. Because the original colonial encounter between Maori and Pakeha was a wounding process, it may be possible that in order to construct a theatrical meeting between the “colonised” Maori and the “colonial” non-Maori, “healing” is an essential element by which to justify the new post-colonial encounter and to alleviate the potential aggression of it.

Footprints/Tapuwaē a bicultural opera based on Wagner’s *Ring* cycle, adapted and directed by Peter Falkenberg with Taiporoutu Huata, Free Theatre, Christchurch: (16-24 November) 2001.

The common thread throughout the three case studies in this thesis is the use of Maori song and dance. In *Once Were Warriors* and *The Whale Rider*, elements of kapa haka were used as part of the narrative and the overall musical structure. Kapa haka is a post-colonial construct which, according to Hone Kouka, was developed by Princess Te Puea Herangi in the 1930s, as a means of preserving Maori song and dance forms at risk of being lost through the effects of colonisation (Kouka, 1999, 11). Kapa haka consists of elements of waiata, haka, karakia, and patere. While kapa haka is a distinctly Maori form, it is a post-colonial Maori form, strongly influenced by European contact. Many components of kapa haka fuse Maori and western forms, incorporating acoustic guitar accompaniment, hymnal harmonic structures, and popular American tunes. Kouka notes that kapa haka “fell comfortably within the European theatrical tradition – they were originally used to illustrate, emphasise or challenge everyday occurrences. Now formalised, they had become something new” (Kouka, 1999, 11). *Footprints/Tapuwaē* did not use kapa haka forms, opting instead for pre-European-contact haka and waiata forms. These were sung without harmonies or guitar accompaniment and only used traditional Maori musical instruments.

Another significant thread throughout the three productions examined in this thesis was the link between Maori song and dance and “healing”. Traditional Maori performance practice can be seen to claim a sense of “healing” through its rituals of encounter and spiritual beliefs. Traditional Maori culture is intrinsically spiritual, providing a sense of place, identity and connection with one’s ancestors. To a more specifically efficacious degree, Maori culture consists of certain rituals that specifically deal with cleansing and purification. For example, when entering a marae, visitors must

wait for their tapu to be lifted before they may proceed, but once greeted onto the marae, the visitors are protected by the tangata whenua and their ancestors. In this way, the ritual of encounter ensures the safety of both sides (Tauroa, 8).

During the rituals of encounter, song and dance forms have specific purposes. For example, the opening karanga, performed by a female, is a call to the living and the dead, and an awakening of emotions (Tauroa, 39). After the karanga, the haka powhiri is enacted to ward off any evil spirits that may be present, and to ensure a safe passage for the visitors (Tauroa, 40). Waiata are sung throughout the proceedings to show support for the whaikorero orators (Tauroa, 51). While Maori song and dance forms have been traditionally associated with notions of protecting, purging, and “healing”, these forms may be altered or seen to lose some efficacy when transplanted from their traditional setting.

The case studies in this thesis each incorporate Maori performance elements into a distinctive form of western music theatre. *Once Were Warriors* uses the Broadway musical; *The Whale Rider* emulates the form of recent international spectacles; and *Footprints/Tapu wae* experiments with Wagnerian opera. While Maori song and dance remains constant throughout these productions, it may be that the different international practices have a different effect on the Maori elements. For example, how might a Broadway musical chorus combine with a haka, compared to the way a Wagnerian aria might sit next to a karanga? Furthermore, both *Once Were Warriors* and *The Whale Rider* were originally novels, then films, before they were adapted for the musical theatre stage. In both of these cases, the stage version was expected to reach a wide international

audience. In contrast, *Footprints/Tapuwaē* was a small, experimental production, which was launched as part of a hui/conference for tertiary teachers and practitioners in theatre.²

When discussing music theatre, people commonly think of the Broadway musical form. Before going international, the Broadway or American musical combined international forms with American themes, settings, and folk music. The Broadway musical developed over time from a number of different sources, such as operetta, music hall, Gilbert and Sullivan, Viennese light opera, French *operabouffe*, burlesque, revue, and extravaganza. These forms of music theatre were developed to appeal to a wide audience, using political satire, with dialogue and lyrics in the local vernacular. In the nineteenth-century, European operettas imported into America were initially very popular, but as American audiences grew tired of the distant European locations, American composers began writing operettas that related more directly to the American experience. As the settings became more locally focused, composers began looking to American musical idioms for inspiration. Thus, American musical forms such as minstrelsy, ragtime, jazz, and Tin Pan Alley were incorporated into the scores, as well as African rhythmic patterns and the tonalities of Jewish folk music. The emerging American musical reflected, and perhaps encouraged, an emerging cultural identity, inclusive – or exploitative - of the various voices that comprised that identity.

Because musicals are commonly derided as frivolous and sentimental, they could be regarded as an unlikely vehicle for confronting problems of serious social and political concern. However, while being intrinsically conservative, issues of race and culture have been played out since the first American musicals. *Show Boat* (1927) was the first serious

² The conference was called *Footprints/Tapuwaē... Return of the Native* and explored themes of identity, “nativity” and “returning”.

American musical, helping to develop the musical as an American genre, through its use of local content and context, and its rhythms and harmonies that reflected the setting in the Southern states of America. This exploration of the American musical idiom was continued in the Gershwins' *Porgy and Bess* (1935), where they used ragtime and jazz as the basis of an American score from which to tell an American story. *Porgy and Bess* and *Show Boat* were both controversial for the way they used black performers, and for allowing blacks and whites alongside each other on stage and in the audience. Thus the musical setting was a place from which to explore race relations both onstage and off, as *Once Were Warriors* - which emulates the Broadway musical form – seeks to do.

Moving away from the common association and assumptions of the Broadway musical, *The Whale Rider* took the form of recent international theatrical spectacles, such as those developed by the Cirque du Soleil, De La Guarda and Peter Brook. The Cirque du Soleil is described as “the modern circus”. Founded in Quebec, Canada, in 1984, the Cirque du Soleil now tours several shows throughout the world, with three shows in permanent Las Vegas locations. The shows consist of a basic plot or storyline which is expressed through a range of artistic forms, such as street performance, circus, opera, ballet and music from rock to classical to world folk styles. One of the fundamental goals of a Cirque du Soleil performance is to create a magical, unfamiliar world. Although the performers hail from many diverse countries and thus from a vast array of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, this difference is overlooked in favour of the construction of a more homogenised, universal, other-worldly realm, where performers are costumed as ethereal beings and the only spoken language is the Cirque's gibberish invention: *Cirquish*. The company's website says it was: “a circus that came from nowhere but was

looking for its roots. In the absence of any, it determined to create some”

(www.cirquedusoleil.com/en/odyss/quete.html, quoted in Harvie and Hurley, 299).

Another major influence was De La Guarda. Formed in Argentina in the 1990s, the group’s first performances were in a three-storey music club, where they performed aerial acrobatics between music mixes. Aerial acrobatics still form the basis of their work but this is integrated into a wider exploration of space and the relationship between performers and audience. According to Robert Knopf’s review of their production *Villa Villa*, all the action takes place above the audience’s heads, and the performers confront, interact with, and molest the audience at various stages of the performance (Knopf, 457 *Theatre Journal* 51:4 Dec 1999). Rather than plot or character development, the emphasis of a De La Guarda performance is on confronting and challenging audience expectations and creating a viscerally enlivening experience. Knopf contends that the ultimate point of De La Guarda “is about what the body can do” (Knopf, 458).

The work of De La Guarda directly influenced the recent New Zealand spectacular, *Maui: One Man Against the Gods*. Premiered in Wellington in 2005, *Maui* used song, contemporary dance, aerial performance and kapa haka to tell the basic myth of Maui, the Maori trickster. The show’s artistic director, Tanemahuta Gray, performed with De La Guarda for five years, and in *Maui*, he combines this experience with his background in kapa haka.

Peter Brook’s intercultural mythic spectacles are another source of inspiration for *The Whale Rider, On Stage*. Brook’s later work investigated theatrical ways of studying the life-force behind culture and discovering “more fully what constitutes living expression” (Brook, 108). He started the International Centre of Research in Paris in

order to start working outside geographical, cultural and linguistic contexts (Brook, 124), following his conviction that “the complete human truth is global, and the theatre is the place in which the jigsaw can be pieced together” (Brook, 129). Brook’s nine-hour epic *The Mahabharata* (1985) combined Indian mythology with an international, multi-cultural cast.

Both Peter Brook and De La Guarda have been greatly influenced by Artaudian ideas of “total theatre”. Artaud’s vision of the “Theatre of Cruelty” would change the concept of space and make the theatrical experience viscerally overwhelming for the actors and audience. Like the contemporary international spectacle, Artaud’s theatre would explore universal themes through an eclectic mix of styles and forms. Diagnosing western theatre as “sick”, Artaud looked to non-western theatrical forms for a “cure”, believing that the incorporation of non-western performances could provoke a transcendent experience for actor and audience. This is similar to the notion that the incorporation of Maori forms into a western theatrical concept may be “healing”. While a notion of “healing” is possible in this type of theatre, it is not of the sentimental or feel-good type. In fact, Artaud compared theatre to the plague, insisting that theatre creates a crisis or can bring out the crises in society. It is both potentially “healing” and potentially destructive. According to Artaud, “Like the plague, theatre is a crisis resolved either by death or cure” (22).

It could be argued that *Footprints/Tapuwae* is closer to the Artaudian idea in that it actually shows the crisis. Furthermore, the *Footprints/Tapuwae* staging was akin to Artaudian ideals about theatrical space, with the audience surrounded by the performers, rather than having the performers framed at a distance by the proscenium arch.

Footprints/Tapuwaē looked to the performance and mythical roots of two distinct cultures, combining pre-contact Maori song, dance and myth with Wagnerian opera form, specifically with music and themes from Wagner's tetralogy: *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Based on Northern European mythology and sagas and poems of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Wagner's *Ring* charts the creation and destruction of a corrupt world order.

Wagner revised and revolutionised the form of the music drama, taking music, sound and theatre to new extremes. Wagner's initial attempts at revolution were in the political sphere, as part of the German nationalist movement seeking to create a German nation, but after being forced into exile, Wagner shifted his revolutionary focus to art as a means of restoring culture and national identity to the German people. Like many of his Romantic contemporaries, Wagner strove to rekindle the essence of the *Volk* (folk), by encouraging a reconnection with the "native" stories, language and culture of the German people. Wagner looked to the Ancient Greek tragedies, with their use of mythology, and their incorporation of art forms, as inspiration for his own concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or "total work of art". The *Gesamtkunstwerk* placed equal importance on each artistic form used in the music drama, with each obtaining its ultimate expression through this synthesis. However, later in his career, under the influence of Arthur Schopenhauer, Wagner decided that the arts were not of equal importance and in his essay, "On Franz Liszt's Symphonic Poems", wrote that "Music can never, regardless of what it is combined with, cease being the highest, the redemptive art" (quoted in Magee, 187).

Wagner's revival of the *Volk* through a "return" to "native" stories, language and culture of the German people can be compared to the so-called "Maori renaissance". In

the early part of the twentieth century, after decades of suppression of Maori language, culture and tradition, Maori leaders such as Sir Apirana Ngata fought to revive their culture by “returning” to and reinvigorating traditional Maori art forms. By maintaining the practice of haka, waiata, te reo Maori and arts and crafts, they believed they could save their dying culture from extinction. Princess Te Puea’s founding of kapa haka was part of the survival strategy.

In contrast to this peaceful stand against cultural suppression, the 1970s and 1980s were a much more aggressive and politically turbulent period, with numerous Maori protests over land and Treaty grievances. However, since this time, while keeping a firm grasp on political issues, the Maori renaissance has “returned” to the Ngata/Te Puea/Wagnerian approach of reclaiming the past through culture and art, as a means of keeping the traditions alive and exploring them in relation to contemporary identity. The “renaissances” of German and Maori culture formed the basis of exploration in *Footprints/Tapuwae*.

The fundamental components of music theatre – music and drama – have long been debated as potentially therapeutic forms. According to Peregrine Holden in *The History of Musical Therapy Since Antiquity* (2000), the therapeutic possibilities of music have been debated for thousands of years. Pythagoras (6th century BCE) is referred to as the “founding father of music therapy” (Holden, 55); with his followers, the Pythagoreans, he devised a system of music therapy for healing physical as well as psychological ailments (Holden, 45). Plato also found music to have therapeutic effects, regarding it as “an aid to bringing our soul-circuit, when it is out of tune, into order and harmony with itself” (Plato, Timaeus, 47 d in Holden, 58). Nowadays, Music Therapy is

a recognised scientific practice in the West and two influential music therapists, Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins, echo Plato's beliefs about the power of music: "its fundamental elements of melody, harmony, and rhythm appeal to, and engage their related psychic functions in each one of us" (Nordoff and Robbins, 15).

More importantly in terms of this thesis were Ancient Greek philosophies about the relationship between certain types of music and their consequent effects. Damon argued that the various modes and rhythms in Greek music were directly connected to different ethical qualities. Damon therefore recommended state regulation of music to ensure that citizens were receiving the appropriate influences (Holden, 57). Ptolemy believed that

our souls are quite plainly affected in sympathy with the actual activities of a melody [...] They are sometimes turned towards peacefulness and restraint, sometimes towards frenzy and ecstasy, as the melody modulates in different ways at different times, and draws our souls towards the condition constituted from the likenesses of the ratio. (Ptolemy, *Harmonics*, III 4-7 in Holden, 65)

This goes beyond the notion of music's potential to "heal", and suggests that some music has the power to cause dis-ease. However, these philosophies do not seem to suggest that some music is inherently "bad" and that some music is inherently "good"; rather, that particular types of music can have certain effects on different people. Perhaps this also suggests that music can incite specific reactions in different cultures and may help to explain how a haka might "heal".

As with music, drama has long been considered in terms of its therapeutic potential. In the Ancient Greek tragedies, Aristotle perceived the drama as our search for greater awareness and deeper truth, regarding the concept of catharsis, the cleansing and purging of emotions and desires, as the major goal and outcome of a successful tragedy.

More recently, theatre has become the site for exploration of more specifically therapeutic outcomes. Psychodrama is the oldest of the modern theatrical therapies. Developed in the 1920s by Dr Jacob L. Moreno, psychodrama draws the dramatic action from real problems and experiences of the performer/patient, transferring the focus from spectator to actor. Moreno's theory focuses on the spontaneity of each dramatic moment, and on the notion of "mental catharsis", purging the mind of psychological anxieties. By playing out in front of an audience of peers and therapists, the problems, fears and fantasies that trouble us, we can practice how to confront these obstacles in reality.

Brazilian director Augusto Boal also re-imagines the notion of catharsis in his *Theatre of the Oppressed* work. Boal's theories were influenced by Moreno's theories of psychodrama, and developed from experimentation with the boundaries and forms of theatre, looking for ways that theatre can be politically, socially and personally therapeutic. In *The Rainbow of Desire* (1995), Boal discusses his experiments and theories regarding the therapeutic possibilities of theatre. Boal proposes four different forms of catharses, by which an individual or group purifies itself of some disturbing element (69-70). There is: the "Medical Catharsis" which seeks to eliminate the causes of suffering; the "Morenian Catharsis" which purges the individual of an inner "poison" by playing with this "poison" on stage; the "Aristotelian Catharsis" which purifies the spectator of the desire to transform the status quo; and finally there is the "Catharsis in the Theatre of the Oppressed" which is the "catharsis of detrimental blocks" (73). Boal's theatre seeks to blur the line between spectator and actor by creating a new kind of participant; the "spect-actor". Theatre of the Oppressed methods encourage and facilitate social and political dialogue, and enable situations for people to play out on stage the

situations that make them feel “oppressed”. Boal’s work is important to consider in relation to *Once Were Warriors* in particular, as director Jim Moriarty has been greatly influenced by his exploration of the political and therapeutic possibilities of theatre.

Once Were Warriors, *The Whale Rider* and *Footprints/Tapuwae* each find different ways of using elements of Maori performance traditions and Western music theatre forms. The different ways that each production attempts to bring together (or not) these different song and dance forms, reflects three different ideological stances of contemporary race issues in Aotearoa New Zealand.

My first chapter will address *Once Were Warriors*, and how it deals with and literally enacts “healing” on stage through Maori song and dance. *Once Were Warriors* proposes that the weaving of Maori song and dance into Western forms can (re)invigorate Maori culture. The overall American musical form is not challenged; rather it may be that the Maori can be seen to be appropriating the form for their own ends. Within an American musical form, not only do we witness the story of one woman’s journey from victim to victor through the practice of haka and waiata, we see the enactment of a Maori theatre therapy session with actors who have supposedly experienced this in reality. The musical form is taken for granted in a story that privileges Maori song and dance forms as potential “healers”.

My second chapter will examine *The Whale Rider* and its concept of “healing” through the integration of Maori forms into a wider, universal context, as a way of rejuvenating Maori culture, and also potentially allowing the world to be “healed” through Maori song and dance. In *The Whale Rider*, Maori performance elements fuse seamlessly with international styles of music, contemporary dance and spectacle.

However, there is a separation between the singing “guiding spirit” set in the mythical realm at the back of the stage, and the present-day actors at the front of the stage. It is not until the final scene, when the two worlds become one, that the dwindling Maori community is “healed” by regaining its “spiritual” links with the primordial world. While this is set in a Maori context, the production has universal aspirations, suggesting that Maori song and dance may have the power to “heal” much further afield.

In contrast, *Footprints/Tapuwae* refused to amalgamate the Maori and European sides of this bicultural opera. While all the performers inhabited the same small space and some common themes were explored in both of these archetypal stories, the two performances remained separate. In the Maori story, the troubled community was “healed” through the performance of pre-contact haka and waiata forms, whereas the world of the European/Wagnerian story was destroyed. In my third chapter, I will discuss the implications and possibilities of this approach in *Footprints/Tapuwae*.

While the three case studies in this thesis each use different forms and ideologies to explore notions of “healing” through song and dance, a similar pathway of this “healing” can be traced through all three. In the following chapters, I will focus on three scenes from each production: the beginning, the end, and the transitional scene in which forms of “healing” are embodied in song and dance.

Chapter One

Once Were Warriors, the Musical-Drama: Healing the Urban Maori?

Once Were Warriors, the Musical-Drama tells the story of an urban Maori family, trapped in a cycle of poverty, alcoholism, and domestic violence. Although the mother, Beth Heke, grew up on a rural marae, she cut all affiliations with her cultural heritage when she eloped with her husband, Jake. Life is tough for the Heke family. Their eldest son, Nig, is seeking gang initiation; another son, Boogie, is sent away to a youth remand centre; Jake spends most of his time and money at the pub with his mates, and is abusive towards his family, particularly Beth. Beth drowns her sorrows in beer and sentimental ballads. Their eldest daughter, Grace, looks after her siblings, cleans up after her parents' drunken parties, and dreams of making a better life, but after she is raped in her bed by a family friend, she commits suicide. This tragedy is the catalyst for Beth to leave Jake and to take her children "home" to her rural marae, where they can rekindle a positive "warrior" spirit through Maori language, culture, song and dance.

Once Were Warriors, the Musical-Drama was based on Alan Duff's novel and Lee Tamahori's subsequent film of the same name. Alan Duff's novel, *Once Were Warriors*, was first published in 1990, the year of sesquicentennial celebrations in New Zealand. Commemorating 150 years since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, the anniversary was promoted as an occasion to look past the racial tensions of the previous decades, and be proud of where New Zealand had supposedly arrived. The Maori activism of the 1970s and 1980s had now been dealt with by government legislation that

addressed Maori grievances concerning land, fisheries and intellectual property. Duff's book challenged this idealisation. In *Once Were Warriors*, the focus was not on the Maori who had been protesting for land and cultural rights, but the disenfranchised Maori, the Maori who did not speak te reo, practice tikanga Maori, or visit a marae, but who nevertheless appeared to be in this predicament because they were Maori.

While *Once Were Warriors* acknowledges the economic poverty of the Heke family and their surrounding neighbourhood, it focuses more on the *cultural* poverty of the urban Maori. Since Maori began migrating to the cities after the Second World War, there has been much discussion of the negative impact of urban life on Maori. Noel Hilliard's novel, *Maori Girl* (1960) tells the story of a young Maori woman who moves to Wellington from rural Taranaki. It is a cautionary tale about the naivety of the Maori and the corrupting influence of the city. This theme is continued the following decade in Rudall Hayward's film, *To Love a Maori* (1972). The sub-plot involves a young Maori woman who moves to the city. As she travels away from her idyllic rural home, the soundtrack plays a gentle folk song with the lyrics: "Go home, Maori girl go home..." The day she arrives in the city, she is lured onto a ship at port and held captive for several weeks. Like *Once Were Warriors*, *Maori Girl* and *To Love a Maori* romanticise rural Maori life in comparison to the harmful effects of the city. However by 1990, when many urban Maori have been born and raised in the city and have little sense of a rural home, Duff seems to be suggesting "go home" in a metaphorical sense, by developing a sense of pride in Maori culture and tradition.

The idea of "healing" through song and dance which is so fundamental to the Musical version is already suggested in the original novel and subsequent film

adaptation. In his novel, Duff introduces this notion of “healing” through song and dance, establishing a dichotomy between Maori and Western forms of music and the extent to which each can be seen to “heal”. American ballads, such as “Tennessee Waltz” and “Strangers in the Night” are the favourite party songs for Jake, Beth and their friends. In an early scene in Duff’s novel, old-time American music is shown to provide a temporary form of therapy for Jake and his mates. Between bouts of violence at McClutchy’s pub can be heard:

Gats going everywhere, there must be four or five ofem: strumdedum, jingjikajingjing, in clashing accompaniment to each cluster of singers, and they weren’t so much singing as *transporting*, away somewhere, on stage probably, or in some state of emotional rescue, thinking they were saving some long lost event happened to em, heads back eyes closed mouths agape and sounds and emotions escaping from the gaping holes like poison from an ever-infected wound, ya can’t kid me, even Jake Heke, even I c’n see why half ofem get carried away when they sing it ain’t singing it’s...? (61)

This passage suggests a potentially therapeutic purging of emotions through music, but when taken in the context of the novel, with the immediate juxtaposition of violence, it is revealed as momentary escapism, like taking drugs or drinking alcohol. “[E]motions escaping from the gaping holes like poison from an ever-infected wound” (61) indicates that temporary relief through sentimental American music releases some of the “poison”, but the momentary escapism of this music never addresses or seeks to mend the “ever-infected wound”.

This can be compared to a scene near the end of the novel, when Chief Tupaea visits the Pine Block neighbourhood for weekly instruction in Maori history, tikanga, waiata and haka. Whilst delivering his speeches, Chief Tupaea is

Sometimes breaking off into this haunting, chanting waiata; and the others with him joining in. Or they let loose with these amazing *haka* that sent shivers and chills through ya, don’t care who ya are, it just gets to you. And the winds so cold

and yet, funny thing, ya only had to be there for a while and you hardly felt the cold. Just this, I dunno, pride I guess you'd call it, that you'd never felt before, at being... well, I guess, a Maori. Make that Maori warrior. (182)

By looking at these two examples, there does seem to be a dichotomy established between the powerful forces of Maori traditional music and the passivity of the escapist Western music. American ballads are the music that Beth and Jake play to escape the reality of life, whereas Maori waiata and haka are the forms of music that provide the potential to confront the past and the present situation. In curative terms, the American music is an anaesthetic to numb the pain, whilst the Maori music is an antibiotic and a vaccination against future infection.

This concept of “healing” through haka could be compared to what René Girard has suggested as being a fundamental link between ritual violence and the health of a culture. In *Violence and the Sacred* (1977), Girard suggests that “Ritual is nothing more than the exercise of good violence” (37). This could be compared to the way *Once Were Warriors* deals with problems of gangs and domestic violence, by proposing the channelling of violence and emotion through Maori song and dance forms, such as the haka. While Girard is specifically referring to sacrificial rituals, his concept could be applied to Maori, whose haka and various other customs were banned or censored by Victorian missionaries because of their seemingly violent and lewd nature. Girard proposes that these acts of ritual violence act as a release and purgation of other violence: “Even the most violent rites are specifically designed to abolish violence. The rite always has its violent aspects, but these always involve a *lesser* violence” (103).

Duff also explores this concept of purging the “bad” violence by way of “good” violence, idealising the traditional Maori warrior as a way of undermining the modern

day urban warrior. In another of Chief Tupaea's speeches, he teaches the Pine Block neighbourhood about their noble warrior heritage:

Of warriors – that's Maori warriors – slipping out onto the battlefield at night to tend to the wounded enemy, giving the enemy food, drink, even touches of comfort... So the enemy might have more strength to continue the battle in the morning. (178-9)

Duff compares this noble, ancestral warrior to the destructive, contemporary, non-traditional Maori warriors: the abusers, the thugs and the gang members. Jake Heke's world is depicted as uncontrollably physical, using mindless violence as a means of purging his own hatred and "so strong was this hatred, he assumed – never even gave it a thought – it to be perfectly justified" (51). The gangs in the novel invent and invert Maori tradition and rituals to justify their action. Duff depicts their violence as equally mindless:

Bad Horse walking amongst his warriors like some great chief; in full regalia, bug round patch on his broad back, urging them, yelling at them, firing them up to a state of war... YA GO OUT THERE WITH YA FUCKIN HEART, YA MIND, YA SOUL... HATRED!!!! HATRED!!!! HATRED!!!! AEE-ARHHHHHHHHHH!! The fuckin veins, man, stickin out on their necks and faces like they were gonna explode. (194-195)

This psyching-up of the gang plays on the idea of the traditional Maori preparation for war, with the chief leading his warriors in haka in order to be emotionally and physically ready for battle. While Maori warfare was undeniably violent, the violence was associated with certain rituals, traditions, and spiritual beliefs. The gangs depicted in Duff's novel misuse these traditions as an excuse for "bad" violence.³

³ The potential "healing" of ritual acts are rejected in Duff's later works. In his 1993 book, *Maori, The Crisis and the Challenge*, Duff refutes many of the solutions he appeared to promote in his 1990 novel. *Once Were Warriors* seemed to assert that by learning about Maori history, culture and tradition, urban Maori could gain the tools by which to transcend their present misery. However, in *Maori, the Crisis and the Challenge*, he takes an opposing stance: "Will a haka explain the financial position of a company to a

While Lee Tamahori's film version of *Once Were Warriors* also distinguishes between the "healing" effects of Maori music and the escapism of Western music, Tamahori takes a different stance from Duff in relation to the concept of "warriors". Jake's violence in the pub is glorified in high-pace action sequences, whilst his domestic violence is portrayed as base and savage, breaking tapu by bringing the god of war into the home, the traditional domain of peace. Jake's status as a lone "warrior" also diminishes his mana in relation to the more tribal gangs. The gangs which were admonished for their "bad" violence in the novel are now endorsed by Tamahori as the modern day "warriors", coming together as a surrogate iwi, upholding aspects of Maori culture and language in their alienated urban environment. Their headquarters are like an industrialised-pa, a gated tribal community, guarded over by a sentry, who gives updates in Maori through a walkie-talkie. In the film, we see only one gang, that of "Toa (warrior) Aotearoa". In the film, their violence is aestheticised, and the only time we see it is in Nig's rite of passage into the gang. This restrained violence is conducted under gang ritual that seems to foreshadow Jim Moriarty's use of Maori combat forms as part of the *Te Rakau* therapy session in *Once Were Warriors, the Musical-Drama*.

For the film adaptation of *Once Were Warriors*, Duff was overlooked in favour of Riwia Brown. In an interview with Vilsoni Hereniko, Duff says that the film "is slightly idealized... And the person who took over writing the screenplay is a self-described politically correct person... She seems to think that our culture and only our culture will save us" (Hereniko, 124). Riwia Brown is a Maori playwright and director who honed her skills working with emerging Maori theatre companies, such as Taki Rua in Wellington.

board of directors? Will an ancient waiata persuade a bank to invest in a business venture?" (Duff, 1993, 47).

Her *Once Were Warriors* film adaptation reflects themes and narratives of her earlier plays, such as her television drama/play *Roimata* (1982/1987-8), the story of a young, rural Maori woman who moves to the city to be with her half-sister, and gets involved in the violent world of her half-sister's gang friends. After becoming pregnant, she returns to the country, taking her half-sister with her. In the play's sequel, *Te Hokina*, Roimata marries one of the reformed gang members who moves to the country to be with her, and her half-sister marries a local country boy. While there is the intimation of a violent tragedy disrupting the peaceful ending, both plays nevertheless promote a relatively simple theme about the healing power of the rural as compared to the corrupting influences of the city.

Brown's romanticised rewriting of the *Once Were Warriors* story was also influenced by the commercial necessities of filmmaking, for as Helen Martin and Sam Edwards suggest in *New Zealand Film 1912-1996*, Duff's story was "too bleak to form the basis for a successful feature film" (175). In the novel, Beth does not appear to have a rural background, and her "return" to Maori culture does not involve a physical shift. The "healing" element comes from Chief Tupaea's visits, and Beth's efforts to deal with problems in her own neighbourhood, rather than a sense of solutions being elsewhere, and the idealisation that running away or "returning" to the rural will solve all their problems. However, in the film, Brown seems to skew the film more towards the ideal of the rural, underlining the "return" to the rural as a way of reconnecting with the essentials of being Maori.

Brown's idealistic script is heightened by director Lee Tamahori's stylised representations of the urban and the rural. While Duff's novel is set in the provincial

town of Two Lakes, with the Heke's house overlooking a neighbouring farm, Tamahori positions the film in the midst of the South Auckland urban jungle, with the Heke's house overlooking the relentless hum of Auckland's Southern Motorway. This tough, LA-esque jungle is home to stylish gangs and a thriving, sexy urban culture. This transplantation to a starkly urban setting delineates a more striking dichotomy between the urban of the Heke's misery and the rural of their potential "healing". In the film, the only reprieve from the dull colours and grit of the cityscape are in the scenes shot on, or overlooking, Beth's ancestral marae. The first shows the Heke family, basking in sunlight, gazing over the lake to the marae, with non-diegetic sounds of haunting Maori flute music. The pace of this scene is much slower and gentler than the relentless drive of the urban scenes. The second marae scene is at the tangi (funeral) of Beth's daughter, Grace. The sky is a cloudless, vivid blue, the lake is sparkling and the green of the grass and trees is calming and refreshing, visually reinforcing the notion of a "healing" rural. In the credits, the Tainui people are thanked for approving the use of this marae: "a place for healing" (*Once Were Warriors* film credits).

The dichotomy created by Duff in regards to the different "healing" effects of Maori and Western music is continued in the film version, with a greater emphasis placed on the therapeutic role of Maori forms of song and dance. As in the novel, we see early on how the harmonious, enraptured, drunken singing of an American-style ballad is closely followed by violence. This is surreptitiously taken further in the film, with background singing and guitar playing often interrupted by violence. Before Grace's suicide, she comes into the house where her father and friends are gathered, singing together to guitar accompaniment. Jake Heke interrupts the singing to berate her, and as

she runs into the backyard to hang herself from the tree, Jake takes up the song again. This immediate juxtaposition of popular song and violence has a jarring effect, suggesting once more that the escapism of ballads may prevent people from seeing the immediate danger or misery in front of them. The American song signals a form of colonisation, replacing more traditional Maori music and imposing certain emotions, conventions and tropes that fail to address pressing concerns and circumstances, as opposed to the way that traditional Maori music was purposeful and relevant.

As mentioned, these ballads are sung to guitar accompaniment. The guitar was originally a Western introduction into Maori music and is now the underscore of most popular action songs in kapa haka, a post-colonial song and dance form that combines popular Western melodies with Maori actions and harmonies. The guitar could be seen as a reflection of modern Maori, carrying the burden of colonisation, but also as a sign of the ability to maintain a sense of tradition by adapting and incorporating outside influences into an existing culture, and thus maintaining its vitality. The electric guitar dominates the theme song and soundtrack of *Once Were Warriors*. In the theme song, the grating Hendrix-style is accompanied by the distant sounds of karanga and haka, sounding like the voices of ancestors singing out over the terror of this industrial musical noise. The electric guitar music seems linked to the urban, whilst the traditional Maori music is a bridge to the rural.

In contrast to the scenes of guitar-led drunken ballads are those of Boogie Heke, living in a youth remand centre. When the social worker, Bennett, comes upon Boogie smashing windows with a taiaha, Bennett seizes the taiaha, and teaches Boogie about his proud warrior heritage, adding that “When I have taught you, your mind will be [your

weapon]. You'll carry your taiaha inside you". In another scene, Bennett teaches the boys how to channel all their anger and emotions through the practice of haka, and we then see Boogie enact this to purge his anger when his family fails to show up for a long-awaited visit.

The film combines social realism with the style and excitement of the action film and the sentimentality of melodrama. While the social realism can expose problems and encourage debate, and the action elements can entertain and bring in the audiences, perhaps melodrama can do something else altogether. Christine Gledhill proposes that "if realism's relentless search for renewed truth and authentication pushes it towards stylistic innovation and the future, melodrama's search for something lost, inadmissible, repressed, ties it to an atavistic past" (31-32). An emotionally heightened genre, with a predominantly female audience, the melodrama – like the musical - is often derided for its sentimentality and perceived frivolity. However, feminists have championed the melodrama for its use of female protagonists and explorations of the domestic sphere, and other typically female spaces. The melodramatic aspects of the film take over in the musical.

It was probably the huge success of the film that prompted Anthony Runacres to produce a Musical-Drama version of *Once Were Warriors*, which was premiered in Christchurch in 2004, a decade after the release of the film. The concept was suggested by Runacres, Christchurch entrepreneur, amateur singer, and lover of musicals, who had been searching for an idea for an original musical to be developed with Christchurch composer, Richard Marrett. It may seem ironical that this Maori-centred musical was produced and premiered in Christchurch, when North Island cities boast much higher

numbers of Maori, but as director Jim Moriarty explained in an interview with Susan Battye: “It’s to do with the lack of numbers of Maori down there that they’re interested. But the key factor is that the guy who is putting up the bucks is from Christchurch” (*Once Were Warriors On Stage* CD Rom “Interview with Jim Moriarty”).

Because Runacres wanted the musical to be an international success, as the novel and film were, he stressed the Maori component, which was the great international draw card of the film. Bringing in Jim Moriarty as director, he also brought in Moriarty’s experience and reputation in the field of cultural and dramatic therapy, placing a stronger emphasis on “healing” than the earlier *Once Were Warriors* incarnations.⁴ Moriarty’s incorporation of Theatre Marae principles into *Once Were Warriors* enabled the musical to transcend formal expectations and boundaries and potentially “heal” through song and dance. Under Moriarty’s direction, we see a form of cultural performance therapy enacted on stage with performers who have experienced it first hand. Runacres also brought in the *Once Were Warriors* film’s screenwriter, Riwia Brown, to adapt the story to the stage, once again drawing out the melodramatic and feminist concerns of the story. The production team claimed the musical was necessary to explore the “passion” that had not yet been realised in the novel and film versions, and this sense of “passion” was brought out through the emotional triggers of melodrama and the live enactment of therapy that formed a major component of the musical.⁵

⁴ Jim Moriarty was approached to play the role of Jake Heke in Tamahori’s film version of *Once Were Warriors*, but he declined due to too many commitments with his theatre company, Te Rakau.

⁵ A specifically political component was added, but this took place outside the theatre. Members of the audience were greeted at the door by children handing out pamphlets promoting the repeal of Section 59 of the Crimes Act 1961 that rules: “Every parent or person in place of a parent of a child is justified in using force by way of correction towards a child if that force is reasonable in the circumstances”. The law is seen to protect people who physically abuse their children and presented in this situation it seemed to tie into the themes of *Once Were Warriors* and hinted at a political edge to the new stage production. At the time of

The ideal of the ancient world of the Maori as one that can come to inform and “heal” the present is introduced from the beginning of the musical. The opening scene of *Once Were Warriors, the Musical-Drama* is set in a mythological world of Grace Heke’s fantasy. This world is later shown as one that could be brought back as a “healing” element. For Grace, Maori myth provides a sense of belonging, but is also an escape from the problems of everyday reality. Throughout the remainder of the first act, we bear witness to this everyday reality of poverty, alcoholism and domestic violence. The major turning point and hope of a more permanent mode of “healing” comes in the second scene of the second act, where a Theatre Marae therapy session is enacted on stage, led by director Jim Moriarty in the guise of social worker Bennett. While the tragic events of Grace’s rape and suicide are yet to occur, this Theatre Marae scene promises some hope through the embodiment of the ancestral world we see at the beginning of the first act. The final scene of the musical shows the fusing together of these elements of past and present, pre-colonial and post-colonial. The finale seamlessly weaves together haka and signature tunes from the show, “returning”, but also moving “forward”. I will focus on these three scenes – the opening, the Theatre Marae sequence, and the finale – to examine the way “healing” is used, represented and embodied.

The opening scene begins in darkness, with a high pitched karanga reverberating around the theatre. As this fades, mist rises at the back of the stage, and the lights come up to dimly light the stage, partly shrouded behind a gauze curtain. We see the silhouetted figure of a woman, alone on stage, and hear a female voiceover: “You are the precious one; your illustrious ancestry holds the very heartbeat of our people”. The

writing, Section 59 is in the process of parliamentary readings and looks likely to be repealed. It has sparked much impassioned debate.

voiceover continues: “You are descended from Hinetitama the Dawn Maid. From her you draw your Inner Light and external beauty”. This scene is hypnotic in its stillness and stilted voiceover, until this is suddenly broken by a child’s voice asking a question. The primordial world is rapidly lost, and we are shown a group of three children, sitting downstage left, lit by spotlight. The oldest child is telling a story to the younger two, and they have now interrupted her to ask questions. As the scene ends, the girl returns to her story, introducing the mythological princess’s lover. The dim lights are brought up on stage again, and we see the appearance of the young chief behind his princess, with the voiceover: “The handsome young chief was not only her betrothed, but he was also her beloved... They were beautiful together” (Act I scene i). The dreaminess of the scene is suddenly interrupted again, but this time the gauze curtain is lifted, and the entire stage is taken over by washing lines and a singing, dancing chorus of women.

This opening scene not only depicts Grace’s desire to reconnect with her ancestral heritage, but lures the audience into this vast mythological landscape, where the Maori world becomes a fairytale land of chiefs, princesses and true love. Grace’s frustration at the interruptions of her younger siblings may reflect the audience’s own frustrations at being removed from this seductive, mystical world. The contrast between the vast world of the dimly lit, shrouded stage and the constricted world of the three children under bright spotlight, suggests the restrictions of the children’s world as compared to the expansiveness of the ancestral world. While they desire to connect with it, the marked separation shows how far removed the children are from this world of their ancestors. The abruptness with which this scene is taken over by the everyday reality of hanging out the washing seems to suggest both that this mythological world is no longer relevant, but

also that this mythology is far-removed. Through the course of the musical, we are shown how these worlds might be brought together again, through the bodies and voices of the performers.

This form of embodiment is highlighted through Jim Moriarty's explicit use of theatre therapy on stage and in rehearsal. The second scene of the second act is set in the youth remand centre where Boogie/Mark Heke has been sent. The scene begins with a group of young men, performing a combat drill with taiaha. They move across the stage in unison, practicing different stances and techniques of the taiaha-wielding warrior. They are presently joined on stage by a group of young women, moving across the stage with patu, beaters. They challenge the men with patu and pukana - wild stares used in Maori song and dance to incite or challenge. All the movement is slow, precise and in unison, set against a rhythmical electronic soundtrack. After a short time, the social worker, Bennett, joins them on stage. This role was taken on by Moriarty, a reflection of the offstage rehearsal process, where Moriarty performed a similar role. Bennett calls instructions, dictating particular stances and actions, and then gathers the young men and women in a semi-circle around him, facing out to the audience. Bennett then organises some one-on-one combat between the women and men. A patu-wielding woman initially wins against a man with his taiaha, but then Mark Heke challenges her and wins. Bennett commends him with a line reminiscent of a parallel scene in the film: "Your mind was your weapon and the taiaha just an extension of it... you overcame your fear, and used it to your advantage" (II ii). This new form of "warrior" being promoted in both the film and the musical is a bicultural, internalised "warrior", a Maori "warrior" imbued with Western "restraint".

In this scene especially, the lines between musical and reality are blurred. Jim Moriarty is the director of the production, who uses Maori cultural practices to help young Maori, often in youth remand centres like the one depicted in this scene. Many of the young actors in *Once Were Warriors* have actually lived in remand centres and have worked with Moriarty as a means of being “healed”. The essence of this scene was fundamental in the development and promotion of the musical. The incorporation of “Theatre Marae” principles under Jim Moriarty’s direction was one of the major selling points and justifications for this new version of the *Once Were Warriors* tale.

Theatre Marae was conceived by Jim Moriarty and Rangimoana Taylor in the late 1980s. Since then, Moriarty has developed Theatre Marae into a uniquely therapeutic form dubbed “Theatre of Healing” or “Theatre of Change”. According to Hone Kouka, in this form of theatre, all the rituals of the marae are adopted and the European concept of theatre becomes secondary to Maori kawa (protocol) and tikanga (custom) (Kouka, 1999, 69). Before founding Theatre Marae, Moriarty had a long history in theatre and television, and a lifetime involvement in Maori ritual and culture. In an interview with Ruth Glassey and Ana Welham, Moriarty claimed that the combination of growing up on a marae - “being part of a whole lot of rituals that Maori do, celebrating life and death and everything in between” - and an early involvement in theatre, had helped him to perceive and work with the rituals of both forms of performance (Glassey and Welham, 59). Much of Moriarty’s early involvement in theatre was politically driven. In the 1970s, he collaborated with Rore Hapipi and Brian King to form Te Ika a Maui players, travelling around the country, presenting issue-driven theatre. In the late 1970s, Moriarty joined Nga Tama Toa, a young Maori political group, which challenged members to use

whatever skills they possessed to promote Maoridom in New Zealand society (Glassey and Welham, 60). From the 1980s, Moriarty has worked as a freelance actor and director, promoting, exploring and potentially “healing” contemporary Maori issues. As well as his acting experience, Moriarty spent five years training and working in the mental health system, and registered as a State Psychiatric Nurse in 1974 (Glassey and Welham, 67). Consequently, Moriarty’s theatre work is very much a culmination of his experience in the promotion and practice of Maori culture, national politics, mental health and contemporary New Zealand theatre.

Moriarty’s theatre company, Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu was founded in 1989 as a theatre in education company. It uses Theatre Marae forms to explore the potential of “healing” and “change” through theatre. The name translates as “the blossoming fruit tree of our sacred grove”, referring to the Tree of Knowledge in general, and to the branch dedicated to the performing arts. Moriarty’s work with Te Rakau is influenced by Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed methods. Alan Scott identifies the key Boalian element underpinning Te Rakau as being the dialogue created between spectator and performer, although in Moriarty’s case this is a post-performance discussion, as opposed to Boal’s activation of the audience – or spect-actors – throughout the performance (Scott, 7).

Moriarty takes this concept of theatre to prisons, schools, and youth remand centres throughout New Zealand. While the process of self-realisation and therapy for the performers is the major drive behind this theatre, each process culminates in a well attended and highly praised performance that ostensibly facilitates an encounter between the marginalised performers and society at large.

According to Moriarty, the fusion of marae rituals and theatrical forms allows for a therapeutic process, because “the rituals in both places serve to dignify human behaviour, to order and modify it” (Battye). Moriarty claims that the ritual element of his theatre is important because it “keeps alive the celestial realm. We need to constantly reaffirm that we are connected to all living things via our whakapapa” (Battye, “Bicultural Theatre as an Agent for Healing”). This affirmation of the connection with the celestial realm is manifested in the closing scene of the musical. Unlike the opening scene, where the ancestral realm is set back, dimly-lit, behind a gauze cover, the final scene brings together the traditions of the past within the present. In the show’s finale, we see Beth, having refused to stay with Jake, don a feathered cloak, and with patu in hand, perform kapa haka with integrated strands of her “Sweet Love Song”. In this final company sequence we see and hear elements of haka, poi, action song and Broadway musical styles woven together, in English and Maori, connecting the past and the present. Jake does not perform kapa haka with the company, refusing to take up the Maori tradition, instead pleadingly singing for Beth not to leave him in a declamatory Broadway style. This refusal to take on the haka suggests that Jake will not find his way out of the cycle of poverty, alcohol and violence in which he is entrenched.

Once Were Warriors, the Musical-Drama shows the progression from an alienated urban Maori world, depicted by the distinct environments of the spot-lit children and the dimly-lit gauze-covered realm; through the transition of (re)learning Maori song and dance via specifically Maori combat forms in the Te Rakauesque therapy session; to a melding together of past and present through the enactment and embodiment of Maori song and dance in the finale, weaving together Maori and Western forms as a

seamless and non-political representation of biculturalism. Here, the American and Maori song and dance forms are fused, maintaining their own formal identity, yet woven together with no apparent knots or inconsistencies. This seamless joining together of two distinct cultural forms in the end denies difference and history, offering seemingly simplistic solutions for contentious issues. While the initial provocation of the musical in addressing problems in contemporary Maori society might force people to confront and question social and political issues, the imposition of the Broadway musical's "happy ending" seems to eradicate the need for further dialogue, as the problem is seemingly solved. In this case, song and dance "heals" the need for audiences to reflect on the social, political and historical implications of why the Heke family might need to be "healed".

In the programme notes, the Hon. Tariana Turia, the then Associate Minister of Maori Affairs writes:

For the Heke whanau, there is also a deeper historical context, of the violence perpetrated upon whanau, hapu and iwi from early colonial contact, which resonates through their story. Healing for the Heke whanau, ultimately comes through acknowledgment of that violence, and the commitment to look to their own cultural framework to restore the well-being of that whanau. ("Letter from Hon. Tariana Turia", *Once Were Warriors, the Musical-Drama* programme)

Turia talks about the colonial violence that has fundamentally led to the problems of urban Maori. However, the Musical-Drama that she writes this letter for seems to avoid understanding the violence effected through early colonial contact, and does instead seem to repeat the escapism of Western music. The overall Western song and dance structure does not yield to any form of confrontation or interrogation. *Once Were Warriors, the Musical-Drama* ends in escapism, rather than "healing".

Chapter Two

The Whale Rider, On Stage... A journey between two worlds:

Healing the Rural Maori and Saving the World?

The Whale Rider, On Stage tells two interwoven stories: the story of the people of Whangara, a rural community on the East Coast of the North Island, and the story of the long, treacherous journey of the community's ancestral whales. In Whangara, the chief, Koro Apirana, is looking for a future leader to ensure the survival of his people and their culture. When his first granddaughter is born, he rejects her, wishing instead for a boy to take up the future leadership and seeing her birth as a bad omen for his people. Despite Koro's objections, the girl's parents name her after the legendary founding ancestor of their tribe, Paikea, who rode to Aotearoa New Zealand on the back of a whale and established a new home for future generations. Despite Koro's rejection of her, Pai is determinedly devoted to him, and as she grows up, she exhibits a passion and an aptitude for all things Maori. However, it is not until Pai saves a herd of stranded whales that Koro realises she is the saviour of the tribe.

The Whale Rider Onstage was based on Witi Ihimaera's original novel (*The Whale Rider*, 1987) and Niki Caro's subsequent film (*Whale Rider*, 2002). Ihimaera wrote the novel whilst living in New York. He was inspired by a stranded whale in the Hudson River, which reminded him of the Ngati Konohi myth of their tribal ancestor who rode to Aotearoa on the back of a whale. He was further inspired by his daughter's complaint, while visiting him in New York, that girls were always portrayed as helpless victims in Hollywood films. Thus, while the novel uses many specific Maori signifiers,

such as Maori phrases, references to Maori myth and cultural traditions, and the East Coast location of Whangara, the story is bound up in universal themes, in particular narratives of coming-of-age and triumph-over-adversity. The cultural specificities of the novel do not get in the way of the fundamental universal themes. Rather than being focused on “healing” a race, it is about a girl who shows she can do anything a boy can do, and can probably do it better. While the later film and stage versions of *The Whale Rider* depict Whangara as a dwindling, rural community, in need of a booster shot of Maori culture, Ihimaera’s Whangara is a strong community that celebrates its roots. Although the story is about forging and maintaining links with past traditions, it is also about adapting to the present and the future. Koro Apirana and the Ancient Bull Whale are stuck in the past and fail to adapt to the present. The two worlds of the novel come together once Koro and the Ancient Bull Whale can let go of aspects of the past. These two worlds are represented by the two interspersing narratives of the novel. It is the young girl who manages to dwell in both and then ultimately bring them together.

In *Once Were Warriors*, Alan Duff exposes some of the major problems in urban Maori communities. Ihimaera’s *The Whale Rider* is already located in the rural, the place that upholds the culture and traditions of the Maori and does not seem to be in any need of “healing”. However, according to Umelo Ojinmah, “being Maori” was one of Ihimaera’s major incentives for beginning a career in writing. Through writing, he was able to do something for the Maori people, particularly to teach young urban Maori about their culture, and to make Pakeha aware of Maori culture and ways of life (Ojinmah, 2).

In his essay, “Why I write”, Ihimaera stated:

My first priority is to the young Maori, the ones who are Maori by colour but who have no emotional identity as Maori. My second priority is the Pakeha – he must

understand his cultural heritage, must understand that cultural difference is not a bad thing and that, in spite of the difference, he can incorporate the Maori vision of life into his own personality. Thirdly, I write for all New Zealanders to make them aware of the tremendous value of Maori culture and the tragedy for them should they continue to disregard this part of their dual heritage. (Ihimaera, 1975 in Ojinmah, 2)

Ihimaera's writing provides an insight into a more traditional and idyllic Maori life, allowing Maori to discover more about their cultural identity and connecting Pakeha to the spirituality and sense of belonging, thus enriching Pakeha identity. Furthermore, Ihimaera's 2003 "international edition" invites the world to connect with Maori. In this edition, released following the success of the film, most of the Maori phrases and words are translated into English, and Ihimaera writes a preface emphasising that the novel was inspired by international factors, such as the stranded whale in New York City and Hollywood films. In this way, Ihimaera is directly opening up the universality of the novel and allowing the world to connect with Maori culture.

The film version of *Whale Rider* fulfilled the role of reaching a wider and more universal audience, while simultaneously increasing the story's potential of "healing" through a stronger emphasis on the cathartic, "tear-jerking" elements of the story, and more of a focus on the "healing" role of Maori song and dance. Highly acclaimed both locally and internationally, the film received Audience Awards at the Toronto and Sundance Film Festivals and earned an Oscar nomination for Keisha Castle-Hughes in the role of Pai. Adapted and directed by Niki Caro, the film version of *Whale Rider* simplifies the mythological/realist dichotomy of the book into a "magic realist" style (Murdoch, 104), existing somewhere between the mythic and the naturalistic, but never quite giving voice to whales and gods, as the book and the stage version do. Another major change is Caro's positioning of the narrator. In the novel Uncle Rawiri narrates the

Whangara story, whereas in the film, Pai becomes narrator and central protagonist. This shift from male to female protagonist/narrator reflects the shift in *Once Were Warriors*, with Beth Heke becoming the central figure in the film. This transference of voice from male to female consolidates the notion that it is the women who will lead their communities out of their troubled situations.

The Whale Rider was optioned for film in 1989, but it took over ten years for producer John Barnett to find a suitable script. According to Caro, the previous scripts were “competently told and faithful to a good book”, but in her script, Caro brought out the emotional struggle of the little girl, Pai (Matthews, 23). Caro claimed it was her feminine voice that allowed her to connect with the character of Pai, which reflects the argument of some Maori that as a Pakeha, Caro could not make a Maori film. She universalises the character of Pai and brings out the tear-jerking, melodramatic elements, inviting audiences to identify and empathise with Pai, so that in some way we can all be “healed” through her.

Claire Murdoch has attributed much of the film’s success to its “simultaneous uniqueness and universality” (97). In this way, *Whale Rider* explores themes that are universally comprehensible, such as inter-generational conflict and triumph-over-adversity, but the Maori specificities provide an attractive, exotic spin, as Philip Matthews explained in the *Listener*: “it’s indigenous yet accessible, exotic yet in English, arthouse yet conventionally told” (24). Caro claimed to have written many drafts for the film, “all with the aim of developing the story for a wide international audience” (Murdoch, 102). In this way, there is a potential that the magic and mysticism of Maori can “heal” us all, and make a lot of money in the process.

Murdoch discusses the idea of “emotional porn” in relation to *Whale Rider*, the idea that we go to films like this in a deliberate attempt to “seek out the breast-swelling, the heart-rending, the tear-making, the *moving*, in motion pictures” and quotes Caro in her assertion that “We crave a connection, we crave to emotionally engage, not just be assaulted and entertained” (Murdoch, 97). In this way, like *Once Were Warriors*, *Whale Rider* fits the melodrama genre. Despite melodrama’s tendency to be nostalgic and removed from more political, “masculine” spheres, critics such as Peter Brooks propose that the melodrama is a product of the modern, post-industrial world, replacing a cultural and ethical void (Gledhill, 29). *Whale Rider* allows us to fill this void by forming a strong identification with the Maori characters and their struggle to rejuvenate their community. Thomas Elsaesser claims that melodrama has the potential to clearly reproduce “more directly than other genres the patterns of domination and exploitation existing in a given society” (Gledhill, 64). Perhaps this underlines the success of *Whale Rider*. Through the victimised character of Pai, we not only see a little girl, but we see “child”, “female” and “Maori” as victims with which we can identify, allowing us to vicariously experience Pai’s turbulent journey to ultimate redemption, but perhaps losing any desire to confront these “external forces” once the “emotional porn” has satiated us.

Another major change in the transition from novel to film is the way Caro infects Whangara with a number of dis-eases that need to be “healed”. While the film depicts Whangara as a vivid, picturesque haven, it is also evident that this community is dwindling. We see Pai’s Uncle Rawiri and his friends sitting round all day drinking beer and smoking dope; Hemi’s dad gets out of prison, only to neglect him in favour of his intimidating mates; Pai’s father, Porourangi, has left New Zealand and his responsibilities

to the whanau and iwi in order to sell his Maori art in Europe. People are leaving Whangara, and those who have stayed behind seem to have nothing to do.

In the novel, Uncle Rawiri talks about a wananga, where men of the community receive instruction in Maori culture and tradition. The sessions were proving very popular because “[a]ll of us felt the need to understand more about our roots” (50). In the film, this wananga, or “sacred school of learning” takes on a more Te Rakau edge. Rather than being a voluntary and popular choice for the men of the tribe, the film’s wananga brings together the young boys of the tribe, under the tutelage of Koro Apirana, to discover who has the potential to lead the iwi. Reminiscent of scenes from *Once Were Warriors*, Koro teaches them to channel or release their emotions through haka and taiaha. However in *Whale Rider*, the action is less focused on the potential “healing” of these boys through haka. The focus is on Pai, banned for being a girl, whose determination to learn haka, karakia and taiaha skills leads her to spy on the wananga and to practice them herself.

It is specifically the “warrior” songs and dances that Pai studies, despite the risk of breaking tapu and inciting the wrath of her grandfather. We have already heard Pai speak Maori and perform action song and karanga. Pai knows much about Maori culture, song and dance, but in order to fulfil her potential as leader, she must learn to be a “warrior”. Through this rediscovery of the “warrior”, the entire community is activated: Uncle Rawiri stops sitting around all day and rediscovers his former glory with the taiaha; Porourangi returns to Whangara and finally finishes crafting his waka; and the entire community appears at the end of the film, enlarged and invigorated, to join together in the launching of the waka. The tapu that Pai breaks in order to become a “warrior” is here represented as a patriarchal relic of the past that needed to be negotiated

in order for the community to “heal”. In this case, the “healing” comes through a resurgence, but also a re-appropriation and repositioning of Maori song and dance. As well as cultural difference, gender difference is diminished. Pai’s desire to make herself into a man, like her ancestor Muriwai⁶ may reflect a Pakeha desire to make ourselves into Maori, and encourage a more globalised ideology of transcending difference. If a woman can make herself into a man, perhaps anyone can make themselves into a Maori. The re-appropriation and globalisation of Maori song and dance is taken further in the stage version of *The Whale Rider*.

As with *Once Were Warriors, the Musical Drama*, it was undoubtedly the huge local and international success of the film version of *Whale Rider* which prompted Logan Brewer and Asia Pacific Partners to produce *The Whale Rider On Stage... A journey between two worlds*, in 2004. Logan Brewer has a background in producing World Expo Pavilions for New Zealand as well as the 1990 Auckland Commonwealth Games opening and closing ceremonies. Thus his background is in spectacle and large-scale productions. To extract all means of spectacle out of *The Whale Rider*, Brewer hired international theatre director Toby Gough to adapt and direct the story for stage. Gough is a “Scot from Botswana who lives in Cuba” (*The Whale Rider On Stage* programme notes) with a very global approach to theatre:

He entered war-torn Sarajevo under siege through a sewerage tunnel to direct an opera with the city’s philharmonic orchestra. He has toured an African *Julius Caesar* in East and Central Africa, directed Kylie Minogue in a Caribbean version of *The Tempest* on a beach in Barbados, a Cuban *Romeo and Juliet* in Havana, a Tibetan *Hamlet* in Lhasa, and an Indian *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in the Red Fort, Delhi. (*The Whale Rider On Stage* programme notes)

⁶ Muriwai is a mythological Maori figure who summoned the gods to make her into a man so that she could have the strength to save her canoe and the women and children on board.

For Gough there are no boundaries; he is a citizen of the world. Almost all the productions listed in his biography involve “ethnic” versions of Shakespearean texts, universalising Shakespeare and, in some ways, re-colonising these countries, using the Bard instead of the Bible.

Maori poet and singer Hinewehi Mohi was brought in to compose and perform some of the show’s music. Mohi is passionate about promoting Maori language and culture through her music. In collaboration with British musician and composer Jaz Coleman, she heads the pop group, Oceania, which mixes ancient Maori chants with electronic dance music. In an interview with an American PBS documentary crew, Mohi claimed that: “For me, it’s a really important responsibility that I have to take the Maori language to a world stage through my music” (www.adventuredivas.com/divas/new-zealand/hinewehi-mohi). While she may have been considered to emphasise the Maori component, the international electronic beats of her music may be seen to dominate and dilute the Maori content.

Logan Brewer also employed Vicky Haughton and Rawiri Paratene to take on the roles of Nanny and Koro Apirana, as they had done in the film and Mabel Wharekawa-Burt was also brought back in the small, comic role of Aunty. Wharekawa-Burt played a conscious link to the film, making jokes about how she only played cards in the film, or how she had only quit smoking in the film. These self-referential references are aimed at people who have seen the film, and seem to assume that everyone in the audience was attracted to the stage version because of the success of the film.

As with *Once Were Warriors*, *The Whale Rider On Stage* opens in a mythological realm. It begins with the telling of the legend of Paikea, the ancestor who rode the whale

to Whangara and founded the East Coast settlement. A voiceover narrates the sequence. The “whale ride” is enacted using aerial techniques, with a large fibreglass whale and an aerial dancer taking the role of Paikea. After this flight across the stage, we see Paikea’s people begin to arrive and settle in Whangara. This action is accompanied by haka and waiata. We then see warriors engaged in playful combat which rapidly disperses into the forming of a line, one behind the other, while the narrator recites his ancestors, a new warrior appearing for each generation: “until she came along”. With this line we see a young girl, Pai, enter stage left, and after an immediate black-out we are thrust into the contemporary world of Whangara, with the stage now becoming divided into two separate realms. The mythological world of human ancestors and whales is set upstage, framed by a pair of giant whale ribs. The lighting is dim, with mystic blues and reds, and a smoke machine is used, to partially shroud the flying whales and jellyfish. This is in stark contrast to the downstage, modern day world of Whangara, which we are then confronted with, blandly lit in yellow. This is reminiscent of the division of the two worlds in *Once Were Warriors*.

In the film, the pivotal “healing” scene is centred on the wananga and Pai’s learning of the “warrior” ways. The stage version of the wananga is closely modelled on the scenes from the film and is presented in a series of vignettes, interspersed with brief blackouts, in an episodic, cinematic style. Unlike the underlying tension and drama of these scenes in the film, on stage the scatological humour of teaching young boys about their masculinity was played up, and one of the climaxes was a loud, electronically-produced fart that undermined any seriousness of this “sacred school”. While the overall spectacle of the stage version somewhat diminishes the transitional importance of this

scene, it is nevertheless important as the inclusion of a specifically Maori “healing” narrative. Although the boys may not take the lessons seriously, this is where Pai learns the “warrior” ways, from spying on these wananga sessions. However, this representation of the potential “healing” qualities of specifically Maori song and dance forms is limited.

The Whale Rider seems to avoid privileging one art form over another. In this way, it emulates Wagner’s early conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, where each art form is of equal importance and works together to create the overall performance. Rather than pursuing the “healing” effects of Maori song and dance forms in their entirety, the “healing” seems to come through a fusion of different cultures and different forms. In this way, it is Hinewehi Mohi’s role as “The Guiding Spirit” that best represents the “healing” in *The Whale Rider*. Mohi dwells in the celestial realm throughout most of the performance, raised on a platform at the back of the stage, backlit by the projection of a moon. She represents the dead mother of Pai as well as being the spiritual guide of the ancestral whales. Her music is a bridge between the two worlds. Mohi’s role in the performance is especially interesting to examine in regards to both the tension between local and global performance forms, and the notion of “healing” through culture and music.

Mohi’s songs use Maori language and contemporary or mythological Maori themes, but are mixed with electronic beats. While Mohi talks about taking Maori music to a world stage, this happens by bringing the world stage into her Maori music. One reviewer described Mohi’s music as “a cross between Deep Forest and Massive Attack” (“Steppin’ Out” *Voice UK*, www.hinewehi.com/reviews). Massive Attack is a British trip-hop group, while Deep Forest is a French group who compose “world music” that

mixes ethnic music with electronic beats. All three groups, including Oceania, fall into the category of “chill out” or “New Age” music, music that people can unwind to and potentially connect to a more spiritual and contemplative mindset through, which can be seen as a form of “healing”. The fact that Oceania can so easily be classed in this category is indicative of the universal approach to ethnic or world music. Cultural significance is lost as the electronic beat ultimately supersedes the music’s cultural specificities. Oceania promote their music as being “where Maori musical culture meets the modern world” (www.hinewehi.com) - a suggestion, but not an acknowledgment of the colonising power of the electronic beat. In this context, the Maori content becomes less about its Maori “roots” and more about its international commercial appeal. Mohi seems to aim for a universal quality in her music, stating that “[t]his album certainly makes one appreciate the beauty of the language and to see the commonalities of all cultures” (www.hinewehi.com/oceania/cfm?contentid=127743). Perhaps it is a sign of the times that a culture must be commercially viable for its existence to be acknowledged, or perhaps it is the ability to fuse and adapt to cultures that demonstrates a culture’s worth and sustainability.

Four Oceania songs are performed live in *The Whale Rider*. Sung in Maori, they centre on spiritual or potentially political themes. One song is about awakening knowledge and connecting with the ancestors; another is about death and mourning; one is a dying lament to the gods; and the final song is about people uniting and having pride in their race. The seriousness and spirituality of these songs contrasts with many of the more skit-like scenes of the production, and there does seem to a sense of “healing” or

cleansing in Mohi's music and the universal quality suggests that we might all be "healed" through this music.

Whether Mohi's role in *The Whale Rider On Stage* was intended to be one of "healing" or not, she is certainly involved in musical healing offstage. In 2004, she and her husband founded the Raukatauri Music Therapy Centre in Auckland. The centre is named after her daughter, Hineraukatauri, who was born with severe cerebral palsy. According to a Dominion Post article, Mohi collaborated on the Oceania album after her daughter's birth because the music helped her through the rough times (www.hinewehi.com/reviews.cfm). On a trip to London in 1999, Mohi took her daughter to the Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy Centre in London, and was so moved by the positive effects it had on her daughter that she started up New Zealand's first Music Therapy Centre, following the Nordoff-Robbins principles.

Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins began their research into the effects of music on disabled children in the 1950s, but their methods are not limited to children or to people with disabilities. One of their underlying beliefs in the transformative powers of music rests on its universality:

Music is a universal experience in the sense that all can share in it; its fundamental elements of melody, harmony, and rhythm appeal to, and engage their related psychic functions in each one of us. Music is also universal in that its message, the content of its expression, can encompass all heights and depths of human experience, all shades of feeling. It can lead or accompany the psyche through all conditions of inner experience, whether these be superficial and relatively commonplace, or profound and deeply personal. (15)

This sense of "healing" is seen to encompass all people and does so in an individualistic sense. All-inclusive universal forms of "healing" seem to be focused on the individual, as opposed to Moriarty's idea of cultural "healing" where the individual is "healed" through

specifically Maori elements, thus (re)connecting with a sense of community and something beyond the individual.

The idea of the “universal” erases difference and thereby eradicates the need to confront or critique society. For example, anything political or socially critical in Mohi’s music is diluted by the underlying beat. This reflects the Western/Maori dichotomy in *Once Were Warriors*, where western music provides escape, whilst Maori music enables a form of “healing”. It seems that Mohi’s music is westernised in a way that causes it to become more like this Western “escapist” music.

In the final scene the two worlds of the stage revert to the oneness of the opening scene, where the union of the humans and their gods is represented in the staging of one performance area in which both worlds co-exist. Since the end of this opening mythological scene, the split between the past and the present is represented by the separation of the stage into two different worlds: Whangara is set downstage, and the celestial realm of the ancestors and whales is further upstage. By the time we reach this last scene, the ancestral whales - earlier performed by human actors adorned in sparkly costumes and headdresses and now represented by fibreglass models of whale humps - have beached at Whangara. The entire stage becomes the beach, a meeting place between both worlds, where the residents of Whangara walk amidst the whales. A giant, moko-ed (tattooed) whale is raised from the orchestra pit. After the townspeople fail to rescue any of the whales, they go home to bed. Pai stays behind and mounts the giant whale in the orchestra pit. With a spout of steam from its blowhole, the two disappear below. Pai returns three days later, and by this time Koro acknowledges her leadership and apologises to her. Pai then announces to the audience that the “story has no ending”, and

all the cast return to the stage to sing and dance to Mohi's upbeat song, "Kotahitanga", and to take their bows. During this sequence on the night I was there, a large crowd of real-life Whangara people took to their feet in the auditorium to give the cast a resounding haka. This spontaneous Whangara haka was in stark contrast to any of the haka performed in *The Whale Rider*, because it was performed in a traditional and culturally specific way, applauding the performers and acknowledging the people from which this story had derived. The efficaciousness of this haka was vastly different to the exotic display of other haka incorporated into the stage show.

The universal forms and elements dilute any attempts to engage with the diagnosis or examine the causes and repercussions of the dis-ease. There were some problems in this represented Maori community, but they were overcome by magic, music and the ideal of bringing worlds together. The two adaptations of *The Whale Rider* by non-Maori have provided two different ways of approaching the Maori content. Niki Caro's adaptation and direction of the film emphasises and perhaps idealises the magic "healing" powers of Maori culture, possibly reflecting a sense of "colonial guilt", or a desire to connect to the spirituality of the "other" culture which she grew up beside. As already mentioned, the stage version was adapted and directed by Toby Gough, a man not from New Zealand, but a man who transcends culture, taking the exotic or exciting elements of a culture and experimenting with them in a theatrical context. The universalising of the stage version of *The Whale Rider* is bound up in Gough's own philosophies and working methods, which appear strongly influenced by Peter Brook.

Brook's *The Mahabharata* was based on the Indian epic poem from which the beliefs, legends, philosophies and lessons of this fundamental poem continue to form

aspects of modern Indian life. Brook's use of a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic cast erased the Indian specificity of the epic in a search for a more universal interpretation. Like Gough, Brook believes in a more universalised approach to culture and theatre, claiming that he once

scandalized an anthropologist by suggesting that we all have an African inside us. I explained that this was based on my conviction that we are each only parts of a complete man: that the fully developed human being would contain what today is labelled African, Persian or English.

Everyone can respond to the music and dances of many races other than his own. Equally one can discover in oneself the impulses behind the unfamiliar movements and sounds and so make them one's own. (129)

It is this making "one's own" on an epic scale that seems to resonate through the work of Peter Brook and Toby Gough.

Gough has an international reputation for making innovative theatre. He has won numerous awards for his productions, many of which take place outside traditional theatrical settings. He has created performances in caves and castles in Eastern Europe, around lakes in Africa, and on the rim of Big Island's volcano in Hawaii, as well as "promenade performances" in Botanic Gardens in Scotland, Australia and New Zealand. I attended his 1996 production of *Linnaeus* in the Christchurch Botanic Gardens, which was an exciting concept for me after growing up with the theatrical model of the Court Theatre. While much of the performance baffled me, the overall experience was exciting and enlightening. The following year Gough returned to Christchurch to create an original musical, *subURB* (1997), in which I took part. Loosely based on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, *subURB* was performed in the Repertory Theatre, and without the spectacle, there was nothing really to say.

In both Christchurch productions, there was nothing specifically of Christchurch or indeed New Zealand, except the cast members and the native flora in the Botanic Gardens, though these were never acknowledged as such. Gough's work predominantly takes on a more universal approach. Admittedly, he does work with indigenous or culturally specific song and dance forms in some contexts, in works like *The Merchants of Bollywood* (2006) or *Lady Salsa* (2000), but Gough seems to privilege their exotic yet universal value, rather than their specific cultural meanings. Gough also sells himself as an exotic creature in light of his various national allegiances.

This passion for the universal and the desire to belong nowhere but everywhere comes through in Gough's treatment of *The Whale Rider*. While the production features specific Maori elements, such as te reo Maori, kapa haka and traditional instrumental styles of Maori music, there is something unsettling about this mix of Maori signifiers within Gough's over-arching universality. *The Whale Rider On Stage* programme is indicative of where Gough's preoccupations lie. The centrefold features pictures from the performance, with various quotations littered amongst them. None of the quotes are specifically associated with Maori or New Zealand, but come from Blake, Shakespeare, the Koran and Akhnaten. His introductory statement is: "In the beginning was the age of oneness, of Gods and man, of the heavens and the earth, of humanity and the world's creation" (Gough, *The Whale Rider* programme). Ultimately, this "same-ing" process denies the layers of social and historical events that have differentiated emerging cultures. Gough's concepts appear to be bound up in the essential universality of all cultures and nations, in which case, a production such as this glosses over any potential for exploring what *The Whale Rider* might mean to contemporary rural Maori, and is

instead about us all. The politics are forgotten in favour of a global “new age” identity. We can all be “healed” through this story, as it is about every one and every thing.

A similar yet different approach to the incorporation of Maori performance and culture into an international spectacle form was taken in Tanemahuta Gray’s production of *Maui: One Man Against the Gods* (2005). Gray is a former member of De La Guarda, and performed in various international locations with the company for five years. He is also a senior regional tutor of taiaha and a kapa haka performer for Ngati Poneke. *Maui* tells the story of the great Maori demigod through a fusion of Western theatre, Maori kapa haka, contemporary dance, aerial performance and te reo Maori. According to Gray, it “has provided a unique platform from which to breathe fresh life into cultural storytelling” (*Maui* programme). While Gray’s end goal is to share these Maori stories with the world, he does not compromise too much on certain Maori cultural elements. For example, the entire show is spoken and sung in te reo Maori, although for the Christchurch season the sun god, Ra, became an occasional English narrator, perhaps after criticism from Wellington audiences who could not understand what was happening on stage. As the show’s producers stated: “we have made Maori culture the spiritual foundation of the show” (Andre Anderson and Richard Boon, *Maui* programme). In this context, it may be possible that the aerial performance, contemporary dance, and Western theatrical and musical forms are colonised by the Maori, rather than the Maori content being overshadowed by dominant international forms. From this perspective, these international forms could be used as a way of further exploring and enhancing Maori ideology, cultural practice, and song and dance forms, rather than being the dominant form into which Maori performance forms must simply be inserted.

While *Maui* and *The Whale Rider* were modelled on similar international forms, *Maui* retained a stronger sense of Maori integrity by its reliance on Maori mythology and language. While *The Whale Rider* made reference to mythology and used te reo Maori in some circumstances, *Maui* was completely subsumed in it. *Maui* achieved a much more “total Maori” aesthetic, as opposed to the almost token incorporation of Maori song, dance and myth in *The Whale Rider*. The one element which disrupted this, aside from Ra’s narration, was the theatrical space in which *Maui* was staged. As in *Once Were Warriors* and *The Whale Rider*, the proscenium arch diluted the immediacy of the performance. While being very much centred on Maori culture and tradition, the end-goal of *Maui* was once again to take Maori culture to the world. As the show’s producers also state in the programme: “the pursuit of our aims has been to share tikanga Māori with the world... our ultimate aim is to take *Maui* to the world’s theatre capitals and to share our stories and culture with the audiences who fill those theatres” (*Maui* programme). While the producers do not seem to be intimating that Maori culture will “heal” the world, they do seem to suggest that it could certainly enrich the lives of peoples of all cultures and backgrounds.

The Whale Rider On Stage is not explicitly concerned with “healing” Maori in the way we see therapy enacted through Maori song and dance forms in *Once Were Warriors, the Musical-Drama*. However, there is an underlying theme of a troubled community which seems to overcome these troubles through a resurgence of Maori traditions and values in the community, embodied in the practice of traditional song and dance forms. However, these song and dance forms are used in such a way that their utmost value appears to be in their aesthetic value rather than a deeper spiritual power as

suggested in *Once Were Warriors*. For these songs and dances to be well-received internationally, they need to be able to connect on a broad level where cultural specificity is important for exoticism rather than efficaciousness. Hinewehi Mohi's music epitomises this dilution of Maori forms as a means to making her music accessible and appealing to a wide international audience. Her music prescribes Maori-inflected tunes as a generic, universal source of "healing".

One of the underlying themes in *The Whale Rider* seems to be the quest to find the inner warrior in us all. Pai is a little girl and the absolute opposite of what could usually be considered a warrior. Warriors more typically destroy little girls rather than save them, but here the notion of warrior-hood is represented as a way of finding inner strength and the ability to assert oneself against injustice and inequality. The Maori warrior culture is therefore represented as something desirable and positive. The specifically Maori elements of the production are diluted and the inherent violence of a highly codified warrior system is opened up to the world, so that we might all be "healed" by the warrior spirit.

Chapter Three

Footprints/Tapuwae: Curable Maori and Incurable Pakeha?

Footprints/Tapuwae (2001) was a “bicultural opera” that I was personally involved in and was the source of my interest in bicultural music theatre. At the heart of *Footprints/Tapuwae* was an exploration of the themes and ideas already examined in relation to the more recent bicultural music theatre examples of *Once Were Warriors*, *The Whale Rider* and *Maui*, which all premiered three or four years after *Footprints/Tapuwae*. Conceived and directed by Peter Falkenberg with Taiporoutu Huata, *Footprints/Tapuwae* explored German and Maori myths through the juxtaposition of two separate, but connected performances. While the European and Maori performances were predominantly discrete, the intimacy of the performance space and the mirroring of themes and motifs allowed for what Falkenberg described as “a dialectical theatre in which the otherness of Maori and European cultural identity – both in myth and aesthetic form – become strands to be interwoven but not merged” (“Theatre of Unease” 7).

In a mythological setting, *Footprints/Tapuwae* explored themes of Maori cultural dis-ease and the subsequent “healing” through the regeneration of song, dance and tradition, but unlike the aforementioned examples, the production was split into two distinct performances – a Maori and a European. While these were performed alongside each other, in the same intimate environment, and mirrored each other’s thematic motifs, they were discrete performances insofar as they maintained their own distinct forms and were not forced to compromise these by merging into a single performance. This was most significant in the finale, where unlike the other case studies in this thesis, the Maori

and European differences were not reconciled into an obvious “happy ending”. While the juxtaposition of the Maori haka with the Wagnerian motifs came to harmonise musically, the ideologies of the two myths remained distinct. In contrast to the ultimate redemption in the Maori narrative, the European story ended in destruction and death, suggesting a striking disparity between the two represented cultures, in which the Maori can be “healed”, but the Europeans must destroy themselves for any hope of being “healed”.

Unlike *Once Were Warriors* and *The Whale Rider*, *Footprints/Tapuwae* was not plot-driven. Rather, the juxtaposition of form and theme took precedence over an idea of linear plot and narrative. The concept was inspired by the striking similarities between the warrior cultures of both Germanic and Maori mythologies, and interrogated attempts to revive a national or cultural identity by “returning” to these myths, through the practice and performance of “native” song and dance forms. The European element was inspired by Richard Wagner’s exploration of the music drama form, and specifically by the themes and music from his epic tetralogy: *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, based on Northern European mythology and sagas and epic poems of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, such as *Nibelungenlied* and the *Edda*. The Maori element mirrored the European themes and explored a similar Maori myth through traditional Maori song and dance forms, specifically those myths surrounding warriors and taniwha/dragons.

There are scores of Maori myths related to the slaying of taniwha. Taniwha were spiritual creatures which resided on earth, often in lakes or rivers, and while many were infamous man-eaters, they could often be placated with offerings of food or appropriate karakia (Reed and Calman, 260). Some “pet” taniwha acted as tribal guardians, protecting a pa in return for food, whilst others would capture and eat any humans

passing their lair. Some taniwha had formerly been human, and a number captured humans as their brides. While taniwha were fearsome creatures, cunning warriors were able to defeat them. It usually took large bands of warriors to slay a taniwha, capturing it in ropes before cutting its large body into small pieces (Reed, 263). According to Reed, cutting into a taniwha's stomach would typically reveal undigested bodies and dismembered limbs, as well as

everything that its victims were carrying. There were greenstone mere, thrusting weapons such as kōkiri and taiaha, weapons made of the bones of whales, tewhatewha (an axe-shaped weapon), darts and clubs, greenstone ornaments, sharks' teeth, mats, precious garments made of dogs' hair, and those ornamented with albatross, kini and kākā feathers, garments of dressed and undressed flax and many other precious possessions. (263)

As well as redistributing this "treasure" to the tribes of the deceased, the taniwha's flesh would be feasted on as a sign of contempt and its fat would be compressed into oil (Reed, 263).

The dragon in Wagner's *Ring* was based on Norse and German mythological traditions in which the hero Siegfried is a dragon-slayer who proves his warrior prowess and wins a treasure by slaying a dragon (McConnell, 43). While this event is only fleetingly referred to in the *Nibelungenlied*, another of Wagner's sources, the *Volsunga Saga*, goes into the event in more detail. As Sigurd kills the dragon Fafnir, Fafnir prophesies that Sigurd will obtain a treasure but that the gold will be the death of him and of any man who possesses it (McConnell, 48). In *Das Rheingold*, the first opera of the *Ring* cycle, we see how the giant Fafner is already corrupted by the treasure as he transforms himself into a dragon so as to more effectively guard the gods' treasure which is now in his possession. Wagner emphasises the futility of the dragon's desire to hoard and guard a treasure which he will never be able to enjoy. This is in contrast to the

taniwha who had merely swallowed the treasure along with its bearers. The taniwha had no use for possessions or treasure, whereas Wagner's dragon represents the monstrosity of needless possession.

In *Footprints/Tapuwae*, a correlation was also drawn between the treasures of gold and pounamu (greenstone). According to Reed, pounamu was the most valuable commodity in Aotearoa. It was usually shaped into ornaments and weapons, and was a prized article of barter (333). There are many legends relating to pounamu, many of which personify the stone, or describe it as a fish. In legend, both pounamu and gold are used to wield power. Both are natural resources which are reaped from the earth and forged into symbols of power and strength, such as a gold ring, or a greenstone weapon. Wagner embellishes the theme of possession of gold as an allegory for his times in which the desire to possess comes to reflect the destructiveness of bourgeois, industrialised society. In Maori and Norse mythology, the possession of these treasures was not imbued with the same dis-ease as is apparent in Wagner's interpretation.

Maori playwright Hone Kouka had already drawn a comparison between Maori and Nordic/Germanic mythology and culture in his play *Nga Tangata Toa* (The Warrior People, 1994) based on Ibsen's *The Vikings at Helgeland* (1858), which is in turn based on the *Nibelungenlied*, a major source also of Wagner's *Ring* cycle. Through the use of Germanic themes, Kouka situates Maori – and New Zealand – within a wider global setting, whilst glorifying and enhancing Maori cultural specificities, such as Maori language, spirituality, and the warrior heritage. This seems to directly connect Maori with other great mythological civilisations through the use of archetypal structures and

perhaps points to a common theme of grievance in the contemporary settings of Wagner, Ibsen and Kouka.

Kouka's *Nga Tangata Toa* transplants the tenth century Scandinavian setting of Ibsen's *Nibelungenlied*-inspired play to the East Coast of New Zealand's North Island in 1919. Sigurd the warrior is here Taneatua, an acclaimed war hero, recently returned from Europe. Taneatua and his wife Te Wai are visiting Te Wai's father, Paikea, at his marae. All but the youngest of Paikea's sons have been killed at Gallipoli. Paikea's foster-daughter, Rongomai, travels from her new home in the high country of the South Island to confront Paikea about his role in her father's death. As in *The Vikings at Helgeland*, it transpires that it was Taneatua who won Rongomai for his friend by slaying the dogs that guarded her at night, and Te Wai reveals the pounamu which had originally been Rongomai's and was gifted to her by Taneatua. This revelation forces Rongomai to now seek utu on both Paikea and Taneatua. Rongomai causes the death of Paikea's last remaining son, and then sets the marae on fire. When she confronts Taneatua about his deed, the two reveal their deep love for each other. As in *The Vikings at Helgeland*, Rongomai then kills Taneatua in the hope that they will be eternally united, but as in Ibsen's play, the dying man concedes that they will not be together because he has converted to Christianity and is no longer governed by Maori – or Norse – gods.

The destructiveness of warrior culture is a key component of *The Vikings at Heldegard* and continued in *Nga Tangata Toa*. Rather than glorifying the heroism of warrior exploits, as most Maori myths do, Kouka's play uses a European mythological template in which the story will invariably end with obliteration and tragedy. After Rongomai kills Taneatua in the hope that they can now be together in death, Taneatua

reveals that: “Even in death we won’t be together. My soul has only one resting place and that is in the arms of Christ. At war he came to me, lifted me skywards and spoke to me” (57). Rongomai pleads with him that: “Your soul is Maori. Maori! Ah, don’t leave me” (57), but their ideological division is too great. Taneatua now believes in a redemptive ideology, whilst Rongomai remains in a destructive, warrior mindset. The play could therefore be seen to take on Christian overtones, but these may be used more in opposition to the warrior’s destructive outlook, suggesting that the two ideologies cannot be merged.

The violence that takes place in *Nga Tangata Toa* revolves around notions of utu, which, as William Peterson writes, is often “mistranslated as simply, ‘revenge’. In fact utu is considerably more complex as it carries with it the larger function of redressing and restoring balance within the community. Utu also represents an obligation” (18). Peterson casts utu in a much more positive light than Kouka appears to. He quotes John Patterson in his extensive studies of utu and his claim that “seeking utu is regarded as a virtue” (Peterson, 18). If utu is a virtue, it is certainly a destructive virtue, but Peterson downplays this destructiveness, instead suggesting that “Rongomai is motivated by more than utu as her own life is greatly out of balance” (18). Peterson removes the social and cultural dimensions of the character of Rongomai and casts her as a mentally-disturbed individual. He goes on to say that

Rongomai carries out her obligation in a way which is false, self-serving, and destructive. Though Rongomai had right on her side at the outset, her honourable intentions are outweighed by her own actions which lead to the deaths of others and a loss of balance within the community, an imbalance which can only be restored through her death. (19)

While Rongomai may be an imbalanced and destructive individual, this does not deny that certain elements of Maori culture may also be destructive, such as the warrior tradition and the concept of *utu*. While Maori myths and legends generally end in triumph, this is because they are passed down by the victors, not by those who are slaughtered. The Maori renaissance promotes an idea(l) of invigorating Maori culture by “returning” to the songs, dances and culture of a warrior tradition, but *Nga Tangata Toa* seems to question the efficacy of “healing” through ultimately destructive elements. This is not solely aimed at Maori culture, as Kouka uses a European myth as the matrix for his tragedy.

By aligning Maori culture with this warrior myth, Kouka could be indicting Maori culture for its violent and destructive tendencies, but if this is the case, it seems strange that Kouka did not choose to set *Nga Tangata Toa* in a far distant past, in the throes of tribal warfare, as with *The Vikings at Helgeland*. The modern-day myth of Gallipoli as the defining moment of a unique New Zealand identity is also called into question with the setting transplanted to 1919, following the Great War that killed thousands of young New Zealanders, including Paikea’s sons. This suggests that the violence and destructiveness come from elsewhere, and were brought here through colonisation. Rather than being merely an individual sickness, it appears that Rongomai’s dis-ease and the overall tragedy and destructiveness of the story is the result of a colonial virus that has infected the Maori way of life. This colonial force makes Maori weak, ill and unbalanced. The Maori warrior codes have now been tainted by North European warrior codes and the myths that once had happy endings now carry the pessimism of the coloniser’s legends.

Ultimately, by merging these two civilisations and myths together, they could be seen to be equated in a way that ignores significant differences, such as the destructiveness of the Germanic ending, as opposed to Maori mythology where the emphasis is on triumph and victory rather than destruction. However, the “warrior people” in Kouka’s play represent a post-colonial fusion of warrior traditions and performance traditions and perhaps it is this amalgamation that gives the play its inevitable tragedy.

One of the most important elements in *Footprints/Tapuwaē* was the separation and juxtaposition of the two cultures and myths, whilst providing constant points of reference and mirroring between the two stories. We drew comparisons between the taniwha/dragon, as commonly destructive, but also fundamentally and ideologically different. Similarly with the gold/pounamu, both have in common their status as prized possessions of natural resources, but each arises from different histories and circumstances. The Maori and Nordic warrior each exist through similar concepts of utu/vengeance, tribal/clan warfare and mythological dragon-slaying, but ultimately, the two brands of warrior are treated differently in ancient and contemporary myths. While there is some ambivalence in the Norse myths as to do with destruction and regeneration, the European myths are fundamentally pessimistic as compared to those of the Maori.

Because the opera took place in a relatively small venue, the physical separation of the two performances was achieved through the use of different levels. This was done in the intimate setting of the University Theatre, a tiered former lecture theatre in the Christchurch Arts Centre. The space was radically transformed with the seats removed, surreal landscapes painted on the walls, a “tree” of lights planted in the middle of the

space, a slide/chute leading to a “mine” under the floor where the tiered seating would usually be, and a large, raised semi-circular ring – with one side made of steel, the middle section made of wood and the other side constructed of twigs and branches – extending from above the traditional stage area to the tiered flooring. The Maori elements of the performance predominantly took place in the lower levels of the theatre, while the European components primarily took place in the raised areas. Over the course of the performance, the Maori began to colonise the upper levels of the theatre and by the finale, the Maori roamed the entire theatre with the Europeans stranded and motionless on the semi-circular ring. The grounded-ness of the Maori was in contrast to the ungrounded-ness of the European, travelling in and out of various realms, although this “ungrounded-ness” did begin from a position of power, in the place where most of the audience resided and where the Maori eventually took over in triumph. While the Maori did expand their territory to include the upper areas of the theatre, they constantly retained their original *turangawaewae* in the lower stage area, branching out from this deliberate point. In contrast, the European side began in the upper areas of the theatre, moved to the lowest area, under the tiers, then ended on top of the ring. The European side had no *turangawaewae*, or a sense of a place to belong to. This could be seen to reflect a notion of the place of the Pakeha in a New Zealand context, not necessarily indigenous to New Zealand, but not belonging to any other place.

In the first scene, the six European performers were scattered amongst the upper tiered sections of the theatre. This scene was something of an overture, with sung Wagnerian motifs of “nature” rising organically from breath and voice. This was immediately juxtaposed with the strident female call of the *karanga*, coming from the

lower areas of the theatre, signalling the beginning of the Maori performance. This positioning of the Maori on the stage and the audience and the Europeans above represented the arrangement of tangata whenua (people of the land/hosts) and manuhiri (visitors) as part of the rituals of encounter on a marae. The Maori scene then went through the various formal elements required for the beginning of a ceremony or performance, with responding karanga, karakia and waiata.

By allowing these two distinct myths and performance forms to be placed alongside each other, rather than being forced to merge, there was more potential for a dialectical encounter between the two traditions, where similar themes such as taniwha/dragon, pounamu/gold, and warrior traditions could be acknowledged, but the fundamental differences refused a seamless joining of the two cultures. To this end, the notion of “healing” was represented and dealt with differently in each of the two performance modes. As with *Once Were Warriors, the Musical-Drama* and *The Whale Rider On Stage*, the European (*Footprints*) and Maori (*Tapuwae*) elements of *Footprints/Tapuwae* each opened in a “natural” mythological setting. The peace was soon disrupted and as in the examples in the earlier chapters, a scene of cultural “healing” took place, which eventually led to a resurgence of Maori ways, embodied in haka.

From the idyllic opening sequences, the *Footprints* performers were plunged into the “mine” and the *Tapuwae* performers lost their warrior chief, Tūkaha, who was eaten by the taniwha. As with *Once Were Warriors* and *The Whale Rider*, both the European and Maori components of *Footprints/Tapuwae* featured a critical transitional scene of song and dance. In *Footprints*, this scene fuelled the decadence by which the Europeans apathetically accepted the downward spiral of destruction, whilst in *Tapuwae*, this scene

took on a “healing” role, through which the troubled Maori community gained the means to regenerate.

In the European transitional scene, the performers emerged from the “mine”, joined together in the form of a dragon. One actor, in the role of “Siegfried”, confronted this “dragon” on the top of the catwalk-like ring, where the “dragon” threatened to “kill” Siegfried’s song. Siegfried eventually killed/seduced, the “dragon” with his song, and the dragon then disbanded into individuals to join with Siegfried in a harmonised rendition of Wagner’s *Winterstürme*. While the power of the dragon was tamed and disbanded by the song, the European performers now became physically deactivated and retreated to positions sitting or lying on the ring, where they remained for the rest of the performance. Here song can be seen as a destructive force, whereby the will to live or fight is abandoned and the illness is embraced, rather than allowing for any form of therapy or cure. Instead, the suffering is transformed into beauty. This scene signals in the decadent decline of the Europeans, with no fight or struggle.

In the corresponding Maori transitional scene, after the death of the warrior chief, Tūkaha, the identity of his successor was established. In this scene, the tribe instilled Kaitaniwha with the skills and mana of leadership, teaching him taiaha, haka and karakia. Due to the aesthetic of *Footprints/Tapuwae*, this was not done in the way that Jim Moriarty or Koro Apirana instructed their young people on technique and meaning. Rather the men and women of the tribe performed haka with taiaha, and Kaitaniwha learned it from his people through this form of mirroring. As Kaitaniwha began to embody the warrior ways, he ran around the entire space, chanting haka and gesturing with his taiaha. Here, the song and dance techniques empowered Kaitaniwha and his iwi,

and allowed Kaitaniwha to transcend his former ground-level status and to enter the upper reaches of the space. The warrior techniques that Kaitaniwha learned had the potential to be regenerative and constructive, rather than in the European mythological sense where these qualities would lead to ultimate downfall or tragedy. While it is common in Maori myth for warriors and their iwi to be eaten by taniwha, this death is always avenged by the remaining iwi and the only destruction is for the taniwha.

In comparing these two transitional scenes, there seems to be a pattern akin to that of the Western/Maori musical dichotomy explored in *Once Were Warriors*. Through the singing of the beautiful, harmonious Wagnerian aria, the ferocious dragon is disbanded and for a moment there seems to be a kind of therapy or “healing” transmitted through the song. However, as with the American ballads in *Once Were Warriors*, after the song has been sung, the promise of “healing” disappears, and the situation spirals into dis-ease and destruction. In contrast, as with *Once Were Warriors*, the Maori forms of haka and taiaha are represented as “healing” and regenerating. These forms provide a means of confronting the present situation through past traditions as a way of moving forward into the future.

The starkly different consequences of the respective “healing” scenes were evident in the final scene of *Footprints/Tapuwae*. The final act of *Footprints* began with an aria from the end of Wagner’s *Ring* cycle. In the *Ring*, the aria is sung by Brünnhilde, the former warrior princess and daughter of Wotan, who sings in contemplation of her decision to destroy Valhalla, the corrupt realm of the gods, in order to ultimately redeem it. In *Footprints*, this aria was sung as a duet, by Andrea and me, while reclining listlessly on the ring, with the other *Footprints* performers lying silent and motionless around the

ring. At the conclusion of the aria, these other performers began to softly sing the “Valkyrie” motif with the words: “Lost we sing, sing to be free”, while Andrea and I sang the descending “twilight of the gods” motif against it, with the lyrics: “We the golden gods sing in death”. Here, as with the earlier *Winterstürme* aria, the singing signals in destruction. Rather than regenerating ourselves, as with the Maori song and dance, the song introduces a decadent death through the beauty of song. We withdrew from the material world and escaped into the artificial world of operatic song.

This was in contrast to the final scene of *Tapuwae*. For the first time in the performance, the European and Maori strands were performed simultaneously in the final act. Against the Wagnerian motifs, a precise, whispered haka emerged from the Maori performers. This haka gradually grew in volume and intensity until it completely took over the space, with Kaitaniwha, the warrior, weaving around underneath the ring, swiping at the dying singers with his patu. The rest of the Maori performers now moved throughout the entire space, covering every corner of the theatre. After the Wagnerian motifs had died out completely, the haka gradually diminished in volume, but the intensity was maintained until the final phrase, signalling life rather than death.

Being an opera, the music was obviously a fundamental component of the performance, and one of the most interesting examples of the way the two cultural traditions could come to both clash and harmonise with each other. The Maori music was used formally in relation to the content being expressed. For example, in the opening scene, it was necessary for one of the females to begin the performance with a karanga, a call to welcome the manuhiri into the space and to allow the performance to proceed. In another example, before Tūkaha attempted to slay the taniwha, a haka was enacted in

preparation for this battle. After his death, an appropriate waiata tangi was performed, lamenting his death through song and ritualised wailing. The Maori music was predominantly performed unaccompanied. The guitar was not incorporated into the Maori music, as the overall aesthetic was that of pre-contact music. This also restricted singing styles, as contemporary Maori harmonising styles are derived from missionary contact and the introduction of hymnal harmonies. As a result, the music in *Tapuwae* featured limited harmonies and the only instruments used were the traditional koauau (Maori flute) and the pūrōrohū (bullroarer).

The European music used motifs taken from Wagner's *Ring*, for which he devised a comprehensive system of motifs, or short musical phrases, to be used as signs of reminiscence throughout his sixteen-hour tetralogy. These orchestral motifs would originally be introduced in association with a theme or character such as "Siegfried" or "nature" or "gold", and would later be woven into a more complex musical theme, alluding to the forces in operation in a given moment on stage. In *Footprints*, working with a small "orchestra" of piano, synthesizer, electric guitar and acoustic guitar, we used our voices to explore and expand these orchestral motifs, improvising with the music and simple text. In the performance, these increasingly lugubrious and wallowing improvisations led to resignation, withdrawal and ultimate destruction for the European performers, as opposed to the active intensity maintained in the Maori singing throughout *Tapuwae*, especially in the final scene. Wagner's excruciatingly beautiful, decadent music signalled the end of the Romantic Movement, as it became clear to composers that nobody could take Romantic music any further than Wagner had done. From the ashes of Wagner and the Late Romantics arose the modern and discordant sounds of twentieth

century music, where this Romantic form of musical decadence was now a relic of an old world order.

The final image of *Footprints/Tapuwae* was of the lifeless European performers suspended on the ring as if on a funeral pyre, and the energised bodies of the Maori performers, now silent but very much alive. The European and Maori endings appeared vastly different, with one culture renewed and the other destroyed. While Wagner's *Ring* ended in the destruction of the gods, this can be seen as pessimistic, optimistic or neither. Under Schopenhauer's influence the ending might be seen as a nihilist withdrawal from the world and all its inherent evil. Or it could be seen as a "rebirth". According to Dieter Borchmeyer: "the myth of the end of the world is also a foundation myth, for the final disaster is also conceived as a new creation" (235). In the *Ring*, after much deliberation as to how he wanted to end his epic tetralogy, Wagner seems to have suggested regeneration through destruction. While Valhalla is consumed by flames, the dominant orchestral motif in the final phrases is indicative of "birth" or "rebirth" and seems to suggest that from the flames a new world order will rise to replace the old. In *Footprints/Tapuwae*, there was a sense that while the European order was destroyed, consumed in the flames of the Maori haka, the presence of the Maori suggested a new world order and the possibility of something else.

Ambivalence was an important component of *Footprints/Tapuwae*. In *Once Were Warriors*, the dis-ease was diagnosed and a suitable cure came in the form of Maori song and dance forms, particularly those with "warrior" roots. In *The Whale Rider*, problems were suggested but overcome and diluted through the overarching sense of universal oneness, which overlooks difference in favour of the essential similarities. Social and

political forces cannot exist in the universal, so in *The Whale Rider*, there was nothing specific to be “healed”. In *Footprints/Tapuwaē*, there was no dis-ease diagnosed or cure prescribed. The process was dialectical rather than didactic, as in the other case studies. This was exemplified by the cyclical structure of the piece, as opposed to a clear, linear narrative, and was embodied by the theatrical space and the repositioning of performer and audience within that space.

The total transformation of the theatrical space allowed for a repositioning of the audience’s usual expectations on entering a “theatre”. As opposed to *Once Were Warriors* and *The Whale Rider*, where the role of the audience had seemingly already been worked out, in *Footprints/Tapuwaē* the audience had much more control over their own position in relation to the performance, both physically and intellectually, as there was no definitive explanation or interpretation of the work suggested. The positioning of the audience was Artaudian in that the actors often surrounded the audience and moved amongst them. This reconfiguration of the traditional Western theatre space forced the audience to reconsider their usual expectations of theatre conventions and allowed them the potential to connect with the performance in a less prescribed way. This enabled the audience to form their own opinions about the relationship between the two juxtaposed myths and cultures and to determine to what extent either could be seen to be destructive or “healing”.

While the surrounding action may have been overwhelming and frustrating for spectators who wished to map out a linear narrative in their minds, the performance worked as a visceral experience as well as a multi-layered, thematic exploration. It was left up to the audience to establish their place in relation to the performance. While most

people chose a spot to sit on throughout the performance, spectators were given the freedom to roam the space and observe from different angles, looking down on the action, looking up at the action, or being completely surrounded by it. This physical positioning also contributed to how the audience might ideologically position themselves. The experience of viewing the performance from the lower area of the theatre where the Maori predominantly dwelled would be vastly different from observing the action from the highest point, as if from the vantage of the gods. One audience member who attended *Footprints/Tapuwaē* on two separate occasions confirmed this, claiming she had a vastly different experience on her second viewing when she chose to sit and stand in the lower areas of the theatre, claiming she perceived the entire performance from the perspective of the “natives”. The audience was given the freedom to experience the performance from different angles and levels, both literally and figuratively, and to form their own opinions about the performance and its themes. There was no concession given to people who wanted easy solutions for the problems raised, as we stayed true to the myths and did not adapt or fuse them in order to make them more palatable or understandable for a contemporary New Zealand audience. While there are many similarities between the two myths, the ultimate distinction of the destructive European myth versus the regenerative Maori myth makes them impossible to reconcile and assimilate.

This need to stay separate and distinct made the development of *Footprints/Tapuwaē* a unique and often difficult process. Much of this was due to the marked separation between the two developing performances that would ultimately have to perform alongside each other in the same confined space. Until days out from the first performance, almost all of our rehearsals were carried out independently of the Maori

group. While it is not uncommon to divide a cast into different rehearsal times for different scenes and performers, this is not usually the way we work in the Free Theatre, where the performance is developed collaboratively with the company present. With *Footprints/Tapuwaē*, it felt like two completely independent companies rehearsing completely independently of each other, which I suppose it was. This separation worked against the desire to connect with everyone and develop the entire performance together, but this may have been antithetical to the overall objective of the separateness of the European and the Maori traditions.

As with the myths and the forms, both groups had different ways of working in rehearsals. We rehearsed at different times and in different places. The European group rehearsed in the theatre throughout the rehearsal period, so from the very beginning we were able to develop our performance in relation to the space. The Maori group predominantly rehearsed elsewhere, so were less accustomed to the space, and most of their performance was not developed within the performance space. In many ways, our group were in fact the tangata whenua, and the Maori group the manuhiri, but when they arrived at the theatre to rehearse, we placed them in the position of tangata whenua. On reflection, this may have seemed uncomfortable to them.

One of the Maori performers has subsequently told me that she thinks the European group missed an incredible experience by not learning more about the way they worked in rehearsals. Perhaps we too could have been “healed” through Maori song and dance, rather than adhering to our more destructive performance practices. While the Maori and European sides did occasionally join together for rehearsals, this was not necessarily relevant for *Footprints/Tapuwaē*. However, one of my fondest memories of

rehearsals was one of the occasions when we did work together under the tutelage of Taiporoutu. On that particular day, Tai taught us the haka that would be used in the final act, and because we were working his way, we were not allowed to write down the words, forcing us to learn it from memory from the start. We learned it within an hour, and I still remember it now, more than five years later. While the European performers learned the Maori haka, the Maori performers did not learn any Wagnerian arias or improvise on Wagnerian motifs. During the early stages of rehearsal we each individually demonstrated how we could freely play with Wagnerian motifs and explore new forms of singing and expression, but the Maori did not seem interested in attempting this for themselves, as this individual exploration ran counter to more collective Maori ideas of performance. While a form such as the karanga is sung individually and is open to some improvisation, it is nevertheless a highly structured form that should only be performed in accordance with specific protocol.

Central to *Footprints/Tapuwae* was the Wagnerian/Maori renaissance idea(1) that a culture could be regenerated through a “return” to “native” myth, culture, language, song and dance forms. Wagner’s aesthetic and ideological exploration and promotion of German culture in his music dramas was easily taken up by Hitler’s racist nationalism in which extreme forms of regeneration and destruction were made reality. The Maori renaissance similarly promotes ideologies of ownership and belonging as being bound up in concepts of blood and soil. This could be problematic and even be considered tapu to discuss. Anyway, it may go beyond the scope of this thesis.

CONCLUSION

I performed my first solo with my school choir when I was fifteen years old. We were competing at the National Choral Federation Competitions. The song was a spiritual called “I’m just a poor wayfarin’ stranger” and was about the dream of returning home whilst “a-travellin’ through this world of woe. But there’s no sickness, toil or danger in that bright world to which I go. I’m just a-goin’ over Jordan, I’m only goin’ only home”. It was a beautifully melancholy piece which we performed well, and many in the audience seemed convinced that we would win first place in the Gospel/Spiritual section. When the results were announced, we were not even given a mention. According to one of the judges, a prominent Maori pop singer, our choir was not a believable interpreter of this song, because we consisted mainly of white and Asian middle-class girls. We were visibly unqualified to understand about “sickness, toil or danger”, and we could not possibly understand the desire of “returning” home. While at the time, I resented the judge’s assumption that our racial background precluded any knowledge of suffering and the right to express this suffering through song, I now see more clearly that this assumption was not about us as individuals, but as members of social groups that were traditionally the oppressors, rather than the oppressed. While our cultural traditions may allow for individual expression of emotion through song and dance, perhaps as a choir we were less believable, because this type of collective expression of grief is not from our own cultural or social tradition. However, in the Baroque section, an all-Polynesian choir was awarded first place for their rendition of Handel’s *Hallelujah Chorus*.

There seems to be a racial divide that precludes me from singing a vast array of music. It may be that the act of giving voice can be seen as a further act of colonisation. As a descendent of colonisers and oppressors it may therefore be a reminder of a wounding legacy, whereas for descendents of the colonisers, the act of giving voice to an other culture's music may be regarded as an acceptance of that culture, or as an acceptance of colonisation. Following this logic, why is it not a sign of my acceptance and respect of Maori culture when I sing a waiata? It may be that Maori have gained a right to sing where Pakeha have not. The Maori have ownership of dis-ease in a way that the Pakeha do not. In today's victim society, this hereditary ownership of dis-ease may be an enviable commodity and may explain why tribal roots and "ethnicity" are currently fashionable accessories, while Maori groups struggle to assert Intellectual Property rights over their cultural assets. As a Pakeha, what songs am I allowed to sing to "heal" my dis-ease of cultural dis-location?

In both *Once Were Warriors* and *Footprints/Tapuwae* there is a dichotomy established between the efficaciousness of Western and Maori music forms. In *Once Were Warriors*, Maori music "heals" by providing a corporal and spiritual means of confronting problems, connecting the individual to a wider social and historical consciousness through the embodiment of traditional Maori song and dance. In contrast, the Western forms of music are represented as providing only temporary escapism, promoting individualism and apathy rather than encouraging an interest in the confrontation of social dis-ease. The momentary therapy of wallowing in an American ballad is seen here to worsen the dis-ease rather than "heal". In *Footprints/Tapuwae*, the regenerative Maori myth is set in contrast to the destructive European myth. In this

setting, music is as an integral component of the destruction or regeneration, with the Maori gaining strength and mana through the ritualised performance of song and dance, and the Europeans apathetically allowing their world to be destroyed in the beauty of the decadent, indulgent music. *The Whale Rider* avoids these Western/Maori musical dichotomies in favour of notions of universality and sameness, diluting the cultural specificities and prescriptions to make the music appealing and potentially “healing” to everyone. While Hinewehi Mohi’s music may be able to connect with people on a universal level, the dilution of cultural specificities may also weaken the possibility of “healing”.

It may be that there is something more vital for Maori contained within song and dance. According to Ranginui Walker:

The psychosomatic nature of illness was clearly recognised in the spiritual healing practices of the Māori in traditional times. The social world was governed by the laws of tapu. It was believed that man consisted of three parts: tinana (body), wairua (spirit) and mauri (life essence).

Bodily well-being was dependent on support and protection of the mauri by the gods. Any transgression of the laws of tapu led to withdrawal of divine protection. The mauri was then exposed to the influence of malevolent spirits. Illness with no observable physical cause was attributed to an attack on the mauri by these spirits. The remedy was to call in the tohunga (shaman or priestly expert) who identified the cause or offence and recited the necessary incantation to ward off its effects. (Peterson, 22)

The Maori possess both the sickness and the cure. As well as owning the right to be diseased, they also have ownership of the means of “healing”. This inter-dependence of tinana, wairua and mauri that Walker writes about affirms the notion of a relationship between physical and mental health and the potential embodiment of cultural tradition via the practice of song and dance. It may be that by embodying culture through vocal and physical forms, an essence of Maori identity and spirituality can be achieved. In a

spiritual sense, this “transgression of the laws of tapu” could represent the urbanisation and alienation of Maori from tradition and culture, and perhaps in a modern context, it is people like Jim Moriarty who take on the role of tohunga and help guide people away from “the influence of malevolent spirits” through rituals from the Maori warrior tradition.

Throughout *Once Were Warriors, the Musical-Drama, The Whale Rider, On Stage* and *Footprints/Tapu wae*, we are confronted with different idea(l)s of the “warrior”. Fundamental to this resurgence of warrior culture is a desire to relate to or belong to something that is lacking in today’s globalised, homogenised Western society. It represents a search for a sense of tradition, culture and identity. In *Once Were Warriors*, we see “warriors” from different sides of the spectrum. Jake is a lone, dis-located, modern-day “warrior” who fights indiscriminately and inflicts violence on his family. His son, Boogie, learns to channel his fear and anger through the practice of warrior rites, specifically haka and taiaha. Taking Girard’s argument, Boogie’s use of “good violence” may be seen as a way of preventing him from indulging in acts of “bad violence”, like his father. The ritual symbolism of violence and aggression as enacted in the haka may provide a means of purging more destructive violent tendencies. Conversely, it may be argued that this glorification of violence represents and reinforces an ultimately violent and destructive ideology. However, *Once Were Warriors* seems to suggest that the embodiment of these warrior traditions through song and dance forms does provide an empowering form of “healing”, displayed by Beth Heke in the final number, as she embodies her new-found strength and identity through kapa haka. Jim Moriarty uses Maori performance forms as a means of acknowledging and confronting serious social

problems. Rather than patching them up with a soft bandage, Moraiarty's theatre therapy centres on the aggression and confrontation of the violent warrior culture from which it emerged.

The Whale Rider also suggests the possibility of a "healing" force in Maori song and dance, but asserts this as something that everyone can connect to. The cultural specificities do not stop anyone, globally, from locating something "healing" in Maori song and dance. It may be that *The Whale Rider* is more concerned with the reception of song and dance forms, rather than with the embodiment of them, as with *Once Were Warriors*. Although the depicted community is empowered by the resurgence of Maori culture and tradition, the "healing" aspect of the production is aimed more towards the audience, providing cathartic "healing" on a "universal" level. In this setting, anyone can become a "warrior", as the warrior culture's tapu is already diminished when a little girl becomes the strongest warrior of her iwi.

Footprints/Tapuwae juxtaposes the mythological and Maori renaissance idea(l) of a regenerative Maori culture with the Northern European pessimism of the mythological representation of a destructive warrior culture. There are many similarities between the two mythological traditions, such as taniwha/dragon slaying, human greed and love, but ultimately the fundamental discrepancy between the positive and negative representations of warrior culture creates a major ideological chasm between the Maori and the European myths. In the Maori tradition, the violence of the warrior culture is seen as vital to maintaining the spiritual and physical health of the iwi. Therefore, violence enacted in accordance with spiritual laws is efficacious and regenerative. In contrast, the Northern European tradition depicts warrior culture as inevitably destructive, regardless of the

justification. However, through the ultimate destruction, a new order may emerge, suggesting that this destruction could potentially “heal”.

There is something extremely powerful in the performance of Maori song and dance that means different things to different people in different contexts. While they may represent exotic entertainment in the international market or a symbol of a unique Kiwi identity to New Zealanders, Maori songs and dances do have a specific purpose and significance within Maori culture. There is something “healing” about freeing the voice and body, expressing individual feelings and emotions, but also potentially expressing social and cultural emotions and contexts, or coming to understand these through song and dance, connecting individuals within a wider framework. There may be something specifically powerful within Maori culture, or this may be related to a broader factor within theatre and music, as more general, universal constructs. There may be something empowering, liberating, and therapeutic in the creation, performance and embodiment of song, dance and theatre. This is something that needs to be continuously explored. While my little toe is now completely healed, the cycles of social, cultural and political diseases are in constant need of diagnosis and “healing”.

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