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## Creating Aotearoa through Discourse: Language and Character in Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*

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CREATING AOTEAROA THROUGH DISCOURSE: LANGUAGE AND  
CHARACTER IN KERI HULME'S *THE BONE PEOPLE*

by

SABRYNA NICOLE SARVER

(Under the Direction of Joe Pellegrino)

ABSTRACT

I will be looking at Keri Hulme's novel *the bone people* as a postcolonial text. The beginning will explore the current conversations taking place about the importance of language(s) within texts that are deemed "postcolonial" as they relate to Hulme's novel which is written in both Maori and English. Other important postcolonial ideas applicable to the text such as space, magical realism, and current postcolonial theory will be looked at. Previous criticism will also be examined.

The final sections of this thesis will focus on Hulme's three main characters separately: Joe, Kerewin, and Simon, and their places within and outside the text. These sections will center intensely on each character's use of the Maori language. These are the sections where I will bring all of the previously discussed points to bear on the novel, and prove that *the bone people* is a successful postcolonial text.

INDEX WORDS: Keri Hulme, *the bone people*, Language, Character, Maori, Postcolonial, Magical Realism, Home Spaces

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother, who was my first and last proof-reader. Also to my father, who has always encouraged me to march to the beat of my own drum.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Gautum Kundu for introducing me to this amazing work. I also could not have asked for better editor that Caren Town. Above all though, I would like to thank Joe Pellegrino for all of his help. Whether fielding a legitimate academic question or answering panicky emails at 1 AM about the standard citation for a novel that has no standards he was there for me.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	6
INTRODUCTION.....	8
PART ONE: <i>TENA KOUTOU KATO</i> A: LANGUAGE AND <i>the bone people</i> .....	11
CHAPTER	
1 SUMMARY OF THE BONE PEOPLE.....	12
2 THE SPACE FOR DISCOURSE .....	16
3 LANGUAGE AND THE POSTCOLONIAL WORLD .....	23
4 PERCEIVED PROBLEMS WITH <i>the bone people</i> .....	30
5 POSTCOLONIALITY AND <i>the bone people</i> .....	37
6 <i>the bone people</i> AS MAGICAL REALISM .....	39
PART TWO: <i>WHAKAPAPA</i> AND <i>WHANAU</i> : CHARACTERS AND FAMILY .....	43
1 JOE: THE MAORI.....	46
2 KEREWIN: THE LOST <i>PAKEHA</i> .....	56
3 SIMON: <i>HAIMONA</i> AND <i>AOTEAROA</i> .....	70
CONCLUSION .....	80
NOTES.....	82
WORKS CITED.....	83
APPENDICES.....	87
A PROLOGUE OF <i>the bone people</i> .....	87
B MAORI GLOSSARY .....	93
C EXAMPLES OF MAORI DOUBLE SPIRALS.....	99

They were nothing more than people, by themselves. Even paired, any pairing, they would have been nothing more than people... Together, all together, they are the instruments of change.

~ *the bone people*

Hulme speaks of her aim to heal this wounded tongue . . . to the way in which Maori concept of the profane (English) and the sacred (Maori) words link together to form the possibility of a healthier discourse.

~ Gay Wilentz

## INTRODUCTION

Many critics have offered a negative opinion on Keri Hulme's *the bone people*<sup>i</sup>; critics have been reading the novel as an either/or text. It is either a *Pakeha* (literally "stranger" in Maori, but now used to refer to a New Zealander with European descent) novel attempting to control Maori ideas and insert itself into the more "traditional" cultural story, or it is a Maori tale that has been corrupted by taking on a *Pakeha* form, thus losing its cultural and aesthetic integrity. What has happened is critics have lost sight of the beginning of the book. Hulme starts the novel at the end, and then spirals in and out of chronological time, creating a work that fits neither of the above concepts, but is something unique, with an identity all its own. In the prologue<sup>ii</sup> called "The End at the Beginning," readers are given different narratives, three experiences that are obviously coming from three very different perspectives. At this point the reader has no idea who the speakers are; but they are closely connected: the impression is given that they are walking down the same street. Hulme has used stream-of-consciousness to communicate with the reader the central core of her novel: "Maybe there is the dance [. . .] Creation and change, destruction and change. New *marae* from the old *marae*, a beginning from the end" (3). The glossary of Maori terms in the back of the book<sup>iii</sup> defines "*marae*" as a place for gathering, to learn, to mourn, teach, welcome and rejoice. The *marae* is a

central concept in Maori culture, serving on the surface as a type of community clubhouse where everyone is welcome and a family can come together. This is not its only function, however; it is also the space that keeps hospitality and spirituality at the center of Maori cultural life.

Right from the beginning, Hulme is telling readers what she is doing: her novel is an attempt to show how three very different people can build a family out of the ashes of pain, destruction, distrust and misunderstanding. Hulme takes this one step farther and asks her readers to apply these ideas to the national stage and create the idea of a “new” New Zealand. By looking closely at how she manipulates the language and characters in the novel; by looking into the colonial and contemporary history of New Zealand, (also called *Aotearoa*, or “the shining land”), we can see her goal, and how she realizes it. *Aotearoa* has been used in poetic language to refer to New Zealand by both Maoris and *Pakehas* throughout the years. Its meaning, “the shining land,” refers to the legend that New Zealand was picked from all of the South Asian islands to continue the old traditions and carry on as a beacon of light in the South Seas<sup>iv</sup>. Many Maori and *Pakeha* writers feel New Zealand has lost its way and that as writers their job, partially at least, is to find new paths that lead New Zealand back to its original destiny. Keri Hulme is one of these writers. “Hulme explores language as a flexible and powerful force, but a force that is also in some way fractured, despoiled. Hulme’s sensitivity to the crises of post-colonialism and of biculturalism forces her to approach the English language as a site of conflict between post-colonising and post-colonised discourses,” Maryanne Dever has stated, stressing that instead of ignoring the conflict surrounding postcolonial criticism and the English language Hulme has integrated it in her novel. *the bone people*, is not, as

some critics have tried to pigeon-hole it, just a *Pakeha* attempt to find a place for themselves in *Aotearoa*, or merely a Maori plea for their history and culture to have a place in New Zealand. *the bone people* is one woman's vision of a healed, whole culture that has room for anyone who wants to be a part of it. This paper will look closely at how Keri Hulme uses both English and Maori languages and characters effectively to show the healing and whole *Aotearoa* that many want New Zealand to become. She never claims this healing process will be easy; in fact, she does the exact opposite. As she says in the very beginning – or the end if you will – the three characters, representing the three parts of New Zealand's population, together are stronger than each separately. Even just two of them paired are weaker than the whole; only when the three come together in forgiveness, understanding, and love will *Aotearoa* become whole again.

**PART 1: *TENA KOUTOU KATO*A: LANGUAGE AND *the bone people***

Before I can get to the close reading of the characters in the novel there are certain questions, discussions, and theories I need to explore. The first part of this paper is broken into six sections. The first one is a general summary of the novel. It is a complex plot and because so much of the interpretation of the language used by the characters is dependent on the situation it occurs in an understanding of the major events in the plot is crucial. The following five sections all discuss important elements of postcolonial study and how they affect the reading of the characters in *the bone people*. Theories of space, place, native language, English, and Magical Realism all have important places in postcolonial studies. Understanding how these ideas have been applied in general and specifically to the bone people in the past is vital to understand where the second half of this paper is going.

## CHAPTER 1

### SUMMARY OF *the bone people*'

The book is divided into two major sections, the first involving the characters interacting, and the second involving their individual travels. In the first half, eight-year-old Simon shows up at the hermit Kerewin's tower on a stormy night. Simon is mute and thus is unable to explain why he is there. When Simon's adoptive father Joe comes to collect him in the morning, Kerewin learns their unusual story. Simon was found washed up on the beach years earlier, with no memory and very few clues as to his identity. Joe and his wife Hana took him in, despite his apparently dark background, and attempted to raise him. However, both Hana and Hana and Joe's infant son died soon after, leaving Joe alone to raise the wild boy.

The fact that Kerewin likes Simon, along with the common bond she and Joe form over their mutual understanding of Maori, allows the two adults to become wary friends. Kerewin finds herself developing a relationship with Simon as well, based on what appears to be a mutual dislike of other people. However, it gradually becomes clear that Simon is a severely traumatized boy whose behavior Joe is unable to manage. Simon not only acts out in school, picking fights and is often truant, but he also acts masochistically, purposefully going to Binny Daniels' house (rumored to be a pederast) when Joe expressly tells him not to. It appears the Simon has never been hurt by Binny; he tells Kerewin he goes because Binny will give him money if Simon lets him pet his hair. This behavior both frightens and enrages Joe. Kerewin eventually finds that, despite a constant and intense love between them, Joe is physically abusing Simon.

For the first time in a long time Kerewin feels the need to connect with other human beings and attempt to help these two. She invites the two of them out to her family's bach<sup>vi</sup> on the coast with the intention of confronting Joe about the abuse. She does, and afterwards she and Joe come to the agreement that any time he wants to hit Simon, to discipline him, He must get Kerewin's permission. While on this trip Kerewin and Joe discuss Simon's apparent European heritage. Kerewin had done some research before on a rosary that was found with Simon. It led her to a disowned son from a defunct branch of the Irish nobility. On this trip she also figures out that Simon understands pidgin French and some blend of Creole. Kerewin, Joe, and Simon all leave the bach feeling closer and happy together.

When they return to Tairaroa, however, the closeness they had developed becomes strained. Kerewin has a run-in with her brother, which reopens all the psychological wounds she had tried to forget. Then Joe comes over and talks about his and Simon's welcoming reception from his family and tells Kerewin he wished she had been there. Kerewin cannot take this familial pressure and feels like Joe is asking too much of her. She pushes both him and Simon away.

Even though Joe tells Simon not to go to Kerewin's because she wants space, Simon goes anyway. He is distraught; he has found Binny Daniels dead that morning and believes he will be blamed for it. Kerewin, wrapped up in her own emotional wounds, does not see how upset he is and tries to throw him out. Simon reacts badly and smashes the guitar that he knows Kerewin treasures. Furious, Kerewin sends him home. Simon then breaks all the windows along the main street before going home. When Joe hears about what he has done he drinks himself into a rage.

Joe calls Kerewin to ask permission to beat Simon, and Kerewin, so far gone in her own rage, not only gives it, but emotionally berates Simon over the phone before Joe beats him. Joe beats Simon half to death this time; Simon however, has concealed a piece of glass and stabs his father with it, resulting in mutual hospitalization.

In the second half of the novel, Simon is in the hospital, Joe is being sent to jail for child abuse, and Kerewin is seriously and inexplicably ill. Simon's wardship is being taken from Joe, a move strongly resisted by all three of the trio, despite their violent relationship. Simon is sent to a children's home, Joe to jail, and Kerewin dismantles her tower and leaves, expecting to be dead within the year.

All three experience life-changing events, strongly interlaced with Maori mythology and legend, eventually leading to their healing and return. Joe wanders deep into the bush, intending to jump off a cliff and kill himself. He survives the fall but breaks his arm. He is taken care of by a *kaumatua*, a Maori spiritual healer. The *kaumatua* helps Joe heal his emotional wounds, take back his *Maoritanga*, and makes Joe the protector of a sacred Maori artifact. Kerewin goes off by herself, believing that she is dying of stomach cancer. She refuses all medical help, only taking pain killers, hallucinogens, and alcohol with her. She again goes to an old family hut, this time in the bush as opposed to the sea. While she is there she slides into what appears to be a hallucinatory state. Depending on the reading, at the end Kerewin is either healed of her stomach cancer by a spiritual encounter with a Maori healer, or she comes to terms with her own emotional failings and guilt for her part in Simon's beating and heals herself. She wakes up from the trance weak but whole, and knows that she is now the connection between Joe and Simon and the one who can bring everyone together again.

While the adults are off finding their lost *Maoritanga*, Simon has run away from the hospital and gone back to Kerewin's tower, or at least where Kerewin's tower was. Simon still believes that the three of them belong together. When he gets there he finds a clay tricephalos (clay sculptor of three heads interlinked in some way) Kerewin had sculpted of the three of them. Simon takes this as a sign that Kerewin knows what he knows, that they belong together. He is taken to a group home and waits there for his "parents" to come get him.

Kerewin adopts Simon, to keep him both near to and protected from Joe, while Joe is able to contact Kerewin's family and bring them back for a reunion and forgiveness. Kerewin builds a new house where the tower once stood, this time a spiral Maura house for the community. Kerewin also commissions a deep water diver to bring up the wreck of the boat that Simon washed ashore from. Hidden in the wreckage of the boat they find a stash of heroin, thus leading Kerewin to understand that Simon was abused by his biological parents. This also explains Simon's fear of needles, hospitals and everything else. In the final segment of the book, Kerewin adopts a blind cat known as *Li*, or balance, seemingly representing the path they have travelled. The novel ends in the new Maura house with Simon, Kerewin, and Joe surrounded by his family and her family. Although they are together there is still anger and tension, especially between Joe and his family, but there are also feelings of hope.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE SPACE FOR DISCOURSE

In order to look at discourse, (dialogue/exchange of information between characters) and language in any text, not just Hulme's, one must look at where these conversations can take place. In postcolonial criticism the theory of place is crucial. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin explain that "the theory of place does not simply propose a binary separation between the 'place' named and described in language, and some 'real' place inaccessible to it, but rather indicates that in some sense place is language, something in constant flux" (391). Language is representative of many things; one of these things is place. Within places in texts there are some areas where some languages are allowed and some languages are not allowed. Very often language becomes a contested site. Characters' interactions in specific places are areas where criticism can see contact between languages, both positive and negative depending on the character and the place. These are often sites of new communication or failed communications.

Hulme makes this very apparent in *the bone people*; the only places Kerewin, Joe, and Simon, interact as a family unit are in Kerewin's tower and at the beach bach. Every other time they are seen in another setting (the bar, Joe's home, or in the community), they fight and cannot communicate successfully. Because Kerewin's homes are neutral territory for Joe and Simon, they allow them to begin conversations that they cannot have in other spaces due to the baggage associated with those places (such as in public the disapproval of both Joe's abuse and Simon's behavior; the memory of Hana and the biological son are present in Joe's home). This is not an accident; Hulme is acutely aware

of how the shape and space of things affects readers. In the “Preface to the First Edition” Hulme explains:

They [her characters] took 12 years to reach this shape. To me, it’s a finished shape, so finished that I don’t want to have anything to do with any alteration of it. Which is why I was going to embalm the whole thing . . . when the first three publishers turned it down on the grounds, among others, that it was too large, too unwieldy, too *different* [emphasis is the author’s] when compared with the normal shape of a novel.

To assume that Hulme didn’t know the implications of her characters inhabiting these spaces is doing her a great disservice. She is too aware of the tensions in her geographical world, the literary world, the artistic community, and the world she created for her characters for any part of her novel to be an accident or coincidence. Types of homes are often representative of the community at large, or each home is a representation of a type of culture present in the community. This is the case in *the bone people*. By looking at the homes Hulme’s characters live in, a reader can get a clearer view of the conditions, cultures, and tensions present in both the *Pakeha* and Maori community.

The discussion of where the home fits into postcolonial discourse is an interesting one. In her article “Domesticity in Magical-Realist Postcolonial Fiction,” Sara Upstone points to the home as “the domestic space that, in the postcolonial novel, in fact embodies the subversion of colonial order” (261). Upstone argues that in theory a nice, clean, orderly home is representative of the colony’s enforced order on the individual family level (262). By creating the desire to conform, by placing favor on families that conform to their ideas of order, the colonizer can begin to erase old, traditional ideas of homes. Joe’s

home is an example of this; he and Simon live in a “typical older State house...” (32) disconnected from the rest of his family. Their home is very neat and clean, not a speck of dust anywhere, but the cracks in the counter tops and the broken and missing china are subtle hints that there is violence beneath the calm, ordered exterior.

The next home is Kerewin’s tower. Because it stands alone on the edge of the community, it becomes “a literal manifestation of her marginal position – as an independent woman but also as a mixed-race individual” (Upstone 263). Yet this tower, though it may seem on the surface to fight colonial ideas of “normal” domestic space, has been divided up into strictly-planned floors that correspond to set pictures Kerewin has in her mind. She has a library that she designed as “book-lined, with a ring of swords on the nether wall,” and she envisions her bedroom as, “mediaeval style with massive roof beams and a plain hewn bed” (7). These elements are clearly more European than Maori. Kerewin also notes that her tower is always quiet; she cannot play her guitar until she meets Simon and Joe. Although she loves music, it is as if there is no space for it in her life until Simon shows up.

Both of the original (in the text, the tower and Joe’s house) home-spaces in the text eventually fail as places where Maori and English can meet. Both of these homes are representative of colonization; they possess elements of ordered space that confine the characters. Traditional Maori homes were large and sprawling constructions where many members of an extended family would live. Family homes were centered around the *marae* house. This leads to a greater feeling of extended family and community, as well as a more connected cultural group who, as a whole, were involved in all aspects of an

individual's life. By breaking up the community into smaller "nuclear" or "European" family groups colonizers created divisions where previously there had been unity.

As the characters grow and change and demand a space where they can speak on the same level with each other, Hulme has Kerewin build the true spiral house, which serves to disorder the colonial perspective and offer "different pathways towards new experiences" (Upstone 266). This new spiral house contrasts with the "spiral" in the tower because the spiral is not simply inlaid in the floor (as it is in the tower); it is the actual shape of the house. This home is a space that embodies community; it is a space of inclusiveness and *disorder*, "So the round shell house holds them all in its spiraling embrace. Noise and riot, peace and quiet, all is music in this sphere." (442-443).

The element that both of Kerewin's homes have in common has already been mentioned: the spiral. The spiral has an important role in Hulme's writing as well as in Maori culture. Hulme wants to utilize the connections and connotations that come with a spiral in her readers' subconscious to begin disordering the domestic space, and through that the place where her text lives. The spiral is probably the oldest symbol of human spirituality. It has been found scratched into rocks from thousands of years ago, on every continent in the world. In modern times, the spiral is still spiritually significant. It is the symbol of spirit, an emblem of the Goddess, and often used as a symbol for fertility and continuity. Instead of building a linear text that readers will be comfortable with, Hulme builds her *whole* text into a spiral, moving her readers into areas they will *not* be comfortable with at first. She uses narrative voices to shape these shifting and spiraling structures. The constant change in location is reflected in the constant change in voice. Dever states:

any suggestion of a unitary voice of authority is subverted by abrupt changes of viewpoint, by disparate voices succeeding one another. These alterations of perspective are frequently accompanied by dramatic shifts in narrative distance and mode, rapid alternation between objective reporting and interior monologue, all which contribute to the general impression of an instable or varied narrative process. . . . the task of establishing coherence increasingly shifts to the reader, whose responsibility it becomes to gradually reconstruct the story.” (25)

Hulme always has her narrative come back to certain points, certain voices. The story always comes back to Kerewin and Kerewin’s homes. The plot/scene can travel out, but it will always eventually spiral back to the center, back to Kerewin.

Hulme starts the prologue at the chronological end of the novel, with the narratives of the three characters walking down the street. Then she moves, without any recognition of a narrative shift, to a place in the past, again with three different narratives, but this time it is the absolute beginning of the story. In the space of five pages, Hulme tells the readers how the story will end, and how the story begins. She is setting up the narrative structure, giving the readers a place to ground themselves in the narrative – if they can figure out the shape of it. This shape is repeated in the beginning of the second chapter as Kerewin describes the floor of the tower:

On the floor there was an engraved double spiral<sup>vii</sup>, one of the kind that wound your eyes round and round into the center where surprise you found the beginning of another

spiral that led your eyes out again to the nothingness of the  
outside. (44)

Hulme takes this symbol, the double spiral, and uses it to draw the reader into her narrative. Then at the end, the reader realizes she is back at the beginning, back outside the story. The double spiral is a major symbol in Maori culture; it can be found in varieties of artwork, carvings, and as decorative touches in depictions of animals like birds and whales.

Hulme's narrative structure is one of the reasons her novel reads so well. Hulme's last words to her readers are in Maori; she ends the last chapter with "*Te Mutunga – Ranei Te Take*" (445) which she translates as "The end – Or the beginning" (450). This serves two functions; on the surface it reminds readers that this is just part of the story of Kerewin, Joe, and Simon, the beginning of the story of the "new" New Zealand. It also serves to reinforce the spiral motif, reminding readers of the prologue that could have been confusing when they first read it. Hulme is sending the reader back to the beginning of the novel with her ending. It is the double spiral; it draws a reader in to the center, to the new *marae* house as the center of the community; then the novel sends a reader back out into the world.

On the national level, Hulme locates the blank space between the two cultures in New Zealand, and that is where she begins and ends the spiral. Like the English and Maori languages in New Zealand, there is no separating the spiral cleanly; to pull it apart would destroy the shape and space. Hulme has worked hard to create three contrasting and connecting home-spaces for her characters to interact in. Her textual depictions of space and place, like any good postcolonial work, use "reversals and inversions . . . the

inversions of large and small scales so that the home itself ultimately becomes the public of a smaller structure . . . that allows domestic space to transcend the colonial model” (Upstone 280). Hulme’s successful spaces bring Maori elements into *Pakeha* homes. As Upstone says, “Its layers and complexity – the very nature of its confusion – make it a space of important protection: outside the linear narrative of history and all that represents in colonial . . . terms.” (280). Language and the characters who use the languages need spaces where they are safe: where they can grow into one another. These types of homes are the places and spaces where postcolonial dialogues can take place.

## CHAPTER 3

### LANGUAGE AND THE POSTCOLONIAL WORLD

Questions of language and the role language plays in postcolonial theory and criticism have raised many ferocious arguments, both in general and concerning specific texts. Hulme's blending of languages is one example of specific debate. In order to understand the argument lobbied against Hulme and her novel, a reader needs to understand the larger language debate in postcolonial criticism. One of the most common apparatuses of colonization was the imposition of the colonizer's language on the native people. The native tongue was regarded as inferior to the colonizers, and the systematic prohibition of the native language was often enforced with beatings, humiliation, and economic punishment. As a result of these actions, some postcolonial writers and critics are calling for a complete return to the native languages that were previously prohibited. Others think that using the colonizer's language (the biggest example being English) better enhances communications between former colonies: writers from India can communicate easily with writers from Africa, the Caribbean, and New Zealand. On top of this, these authors and critics argue that taking the language that has been used as a weapon against them and adapting it to their own needs, making the "European tongue" into their own, not only creates new and exciting literary forms but also counters the colonial past.

The debates over the relationships between language and the mind and language and the world are certainly not a modern invention; the study of the philosophy of language goes all the way back to the Sophists.<sup>viii</sup> They are credited with beginning the process of grammatical classification, but they were certainly concerned about the "correctness of

words” as well (Langer 455). Langer explains, “Thus Gorgias is presented as having raised the skeptical trouble that when I give you a word that is all that I do: there is no transfer of one and the same idea from my mind to yours, and even if there were, there is a gap between my idea and the features and qualities of things it may seem to represent” (455). The question of whether or not one person can truly convey an idea to another person, regardless of the language spoken is perennial. Many different attempts to prove or disprove the concept of universal understanding have been put forward, but none have been universally accepted. The debate that is most applicable here is the discussion of how “reference” works, or the role referring words play in language. This moves us away from pragmatics and towards semantics. Again, this discussion has many different angles and roads to take when talking about language and philosophy. The argument began by Bertrand Russell’s book, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (London, 1940) is important. Russell explains that reference is normally accomplished by the subject having in mind a description which fits the thing in mind. Russell’s theory relies heavily on universals, or features that things can or should share. Russell’s theory of descriptions is objected to by F.P Strawson because of the way it distorts the way that references are normally conveyed (Langer 460). Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam also objected to Russell’s theory, and developed their own, the idea of the “casual account.” This argues that the speaker (or writer) and the listener (or reader) have the same casual and changeable relationship with the reference (Langer 459). This approach to language and communications seemed to have covered all of its bases until the work of Davidson found his point of contention: the idea of “truth-condition.” By glorifying the critic or philosopher as a “truth-seeker” (because the over-arching goal of the critic and

philosopher is to get at the heart of the idea, find the true center) you place the writer in the position of being the primary source of truth (de Man 399). Davidson argues that if the writer is allowing reference words complete freedom within the conversation, the writer allows them to become “untruthful” at will, and there is nothing concrete to tie down the reference words (Langer 460). Unless the limits or constraints of meaning are made very severe, it looks as though arbitrary assignments of different meanings could be made in conformity with them. This problem has led to a feeling among scholars that there is no such thing as the existence of determinate meaning (Langer 461). This means that a sentence cannot express a single proposition or thought. There will always be multiple layers of meaning depending on the reader, and critics must take that into account when looking at a work. This is exactly what Hulme manipulates in her writing, that not one person will read her novel the same way she wrote it, nor will it be read in the same way by two people.

The problems inherent in communication in one language as explained above only get stickier when one begins talking about works written in a different language, as is the case with many postcolonial works. The issues surrounding translation (changing a work from one language to another) not only focus on a reader losing some meaning and creating new meanings, but also the validity of that language an author uses. In postcolonial studies, language not only has a philosophical aspect as explained above, but also in some cases a political one. The debate becomes one over the colonizer’s language verses the native language. It would seem that the critics pulling for the return to native languages are risking losing comprehension and communication with a large population of their readers. The most outspoken of the critics and authors who want to return to their

mother tongue is Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Ngugi had a very successful and writing career, entirely in English, before beginning to write in his native Gikuyu. For Ngugi, the English language in Africa is a type of "cultural bomb" that can be used to erase the memories of pre-colonial cultures, customs, and memories. He also fears English is being used as a manipulative tool for new forms of colonialism. Ngugi sees native language not only as a way to define the world, but as a way of defining and understanding himself. Ngugi sees language as an entirely political issue. It has become a source of national identity for him. It is with these beliefs that he uses Gikuyu to remind readers of the cultural traditions and their continued presence in the modern world. In a general statement in the beginning of *Decolonizing The Mind*, Ngugi states:

[A] specific culture is not transmitted thought language in its universality, but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history. Written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries.

Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world ... Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human begins with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world... (15-16).

Obviously, Ngugi is not concerned with the universality of his work; he is more concerned with reaching and communicating with other Gikuyu in Kenya. Unfortunately, because of his ethnocentric concerns, he misses the opportunity to connect Kenyans'

struggles with other previously colonized cultures and peoples. Ngugi is doing what he thinks is best by writing for the people and culture he wants to help, but some feel this leaves some cultures and people without a voice. It can be argued that this is not Ngugi's problem, and indeed it may not be. This is something I think every author must think about before they decided which language to write in and must be ready to accept the consequences that come with choosing one language over another. Every culture and ethnocenter has artists and writers who produce works in their native tongues, but many cultures do not have authors of Ngugi's literary and academic reputation, worldly standing, or talent. This has been seen as depriving these cultures of representation in the "world market" of cultures. These critics see everything about the colonizer's language as horrible and worthless to postcolonial writers. Those who question Ngugi's stance use these statements as negative positions and counter his arguments that language and culture are inseparable, and to lose the first is to lose the second.

One author and critic who does ask some of the same questions about English's place in postcolonial literature and comes to very different conclusions is Salman Rushdie. Rushdie is just as well known and respected as an author and academic from India; however, unlike Ngugi, he writes in English. The argument could be made that because he writes in English his books are even better known. He tackles history and modern issues of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kashmir, Great Britain, and even the U.S. Rushdie believes in and encourages postcolonial writers to use English as a type of resistance; they are remaking, he argues, a vestige of colonial occupation and abuse to reflect their postcolonial experience. Rushdie makes it clear in his essay "Imaginary Homelands" that he believes it impossible, and ultimately irresponsible to disregard English. He says:

One of the changes [that postcolonial Indian writers who write in English see] has to do with attitudes towards the use of English. Many have referred to the argument about the appropriateness of this language to Indian themes. And I hope all of us share the opinion that we can't simply use the language the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our own purposes . . . To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free. (17)

This idea that Rushdie proposed in 1992, of postcolonial communities transforming English into a new language of their own, has evidence behind it. In 2001, Dr. Edgar W. Schneider published an article on his research exploring and documenting what he calls “new englishes.” He defines “new englishes” as,

distinct forms of English which have emerged in postcolonial settings and countries around the globe, [that] have typically been regarded individually, as unique varieties shaped by idiosyncratic historical conditions and contact settings...[but are actually controlled by] a fundamentally uniform development process, shaped by consistent sociolinguistic and language-contact conditions (233).

Schneider goes on to name and describe his five consecutive phases in this conversion process and then outlines them in his case studies: Fiji, Hong Kong, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand. I bring Dr. Schneider's research up not only because one of his case studies was New Zealand's “new English”, but because he also sees the problem with looking at English as either “essential to international economy, technology, diplomacy, media and communications in general” or a “killer

language” responsible for the deaths of untold native tongues and dialects (233). He points out that to look at English in either of these lights is to make it black or white, good or evil. The very premise of this dichotomy is flawed, because to look at English this way, to look at English as either Ngugi’s English or Rushdie’s English, is to look at “an idealized, homogenous, standardized form,” which is just not the way English exists in the real world (Schneider 233). Schneider asks that, instead of focusing on what English or a new English does, we look at how it does it. This means instead of asking why an author chooses English over his or her native tongue, critics need to drop the cultural baggage they bring to a reading and look at the individual words the author chose, and think about how that affects their reading and understanding. This is one of the reasons when *the bone people* was originally published critics were hard on it. They focused on what they saw as a forced blending of English and Maori characters and language instead of asking *why* it made them uncomfortable. Within the same language meaning is lost and created simultaneously during conversation; when two languages collide this is only emphasized more. This brings back the question of how many layers of meaning there are in one sentence, in one paragraph, in one novel.

## CHAPTER 4

### PERCEIVED PROBLEMS WITH *the bone people*

The issues with native verse colonial tongue as explained above are directly applicable to *the bone people*. Hulme's use of language and her characters were put under fire almost immediately by critics and scholars. The early critics focused closely on her use of Maori and English and her right as an author to use both. To understand how critics have changed their views on the novel in the last twenty years, one must know what the original critics said and why they said those things. One of the most outspoken critics of Hulme's novel is her contemporary, C.K. Stead. In his response to Hulme's winning of the Pegasus prize for Maori authors, he said of the criticism of the book:

So far nothing I have seen written about *the bone people* could be described as "critical". . . . Criticism is always a dialogue. One seldom has the chance to speak first, and what the critic says is always partly in answer to what has been said already. In the case of Keri Hulme's novel "what has been said" is largely a babble of excited voices in public places.  
(101-102)

Stead begins his article by criticizing the work already done on the novel. He finds fault with the previous critics, because in his opinion Keri Hulme's "use of Maori language and mythology strike me as willed, self-conscious, not inevitable, not entirely authentic. Insofar as she is an observer of things outside herself, Hulme has observed Maoris and identified with them" (103-104). The other problem Stead has is that fact the Hulme is only an eighth Maori genetically, and none of the other critics have seen it fit to point this out. Stead claims that her actual "Maoriness" is not strong enough to connect her with the

culture on the instinctual level that he feels more “authentic” Maori writers might. In response to that, I would like to point to an interview with Rima Alicia Bartlett; when Hulme is asked where she gets her inspiration from she replies, “*Tiha Mauriora!* They were the first words ever spoken by the first created human being, a female. According to *Ngai Tahu* (the Maori Tribe of the South Island Hulme belongs to through her mother) tradition she’s saluting Tane who’s given her life” (83). This is a multifaceted understanding of a very specific myth from the Maori mythology. It appears to me that Hulme has a very good grasp and understanding of Maori and feels her connection intensely, not just because she has observed a few Maori traditions. As a result her characters reflect that.

Stead has also forgotten another important issue: Hulme does not argue from the point of the full-blooded, completely-absorbed Maori culture. She argues for the lost people, the marginalized people who feel like they (the “half-breeds” and people of blended descent) have lost their connections to their community (either the *Pakeha* or the Maori) at large. Her Maori character Joe says of himself, “My father’s father was English so I’m not yer 100% pure. But I’m Maori. And that’s the way I feel too, the way you said, that the *Maoritanga* [a person’s Maori culture: their Maoriness] has gotten lost in the way I live” (62). In the same Bartlett interview, Hulme responds to a question of her “weaker” genetic makeup verses her “stronger” Maori essence by saying, “Yes. I wish I could answer that in just one word. If you separate me out, this part’s Maori, that part’s *Pakeha*, it’s not right” (84). Stead also fails to take into account the fact that Hulme is trying to heal the rifts between cultures; her protagonists are flawed individuals, but they are looking for a better life.

Philip Armstrong seems to have a better grasp on what Hulme is doing, writing for several different viewpoints. Armstrong writes:

In the attempt to read this novel, the ethical encounters the bicultural in a way that poses various kinds of challenges to “legibility” – by which I mean several things: the capacity of the novel to be read, and the ability or competence of a given reader to do so, but also the competence of the author to write this particular novel. (8)

Instead of focusing on just the Maori elements of the novel like Stead does, Armstrong looks at the bicultural themes as a whole and questions whether Hulme was competent enough in all the cultures to write the novel as she did. He finds that she is the perfect person to write this novel: Hulme *is* this novel. Hulme has admitted that the character of Kerewin Holmes is based on her, that Kerewin is an idealized version of herself (quoted in Worthington 248). Hulme has her character explain very early in the novel, “by blood, flesh and inheritance, I am but an eighth Maori, by heart spirit and inclination, I feel all Maori ...” (62).

Stead and critics who agree with him are looking at what they think is important, what elements of the book needed to be addressed. Many times critics shy away from making statements that could be seen as raising unsavory or unpopular questions about a work, especially in postcolonial writing. As Marouf Hasian, Jr. points out, “many critics may cringe at the blurring of the line between [postcolonial] scholarship and political action, but one could argue that the very absence of such engagement is itself the tacit acceptance of existing social, cultural and economic conditions” (27). C.K. Stead is certainly not one of these critics. He attacked what he saw as blindness in the part of

previous critics to argue what he saw as a legitimate concern. He was concerned with creating an “authentic” New Zealand perspective, and because he saw Keri Hulme as “outside”, he did not think she could write from that perspective. Armstrong also chose the one element he saw as important: Hulme’s ability to write from a bicultural perspective. However, as Sandra Tawake says of Hulme and her contemporaries (like Alan Duff, Sia Figiel, and Witi Ihimaera) “In no real sense can any of these writers be considered simply an insider or native voice who speaks for Pacific Islanders, since the category Pacific Islander is not clear cut or capable of a definition that allows people to be assigned to one and only one category” (161). There are multiple languages that are part of the cultures that make up “Pacific Islander” identity. An author who chooses to write in one specific language over another shouldn’t make them more or less representative of their culture. It is impossible for singular elements to be perfectly representative of a large group of cultural practices and beliefs. If critics want to find one perfect writer to write from all the different perspectives of “Pacific Islanders” they will fail.

What is the important issue then? It is how do the different ideas of what it means to be Maori come together? This is still a pressing issue in postcolonial studies today.<sup>ix</sup> In her 2001 article Carolyn D’ Cruz says, “The matter of who speaks for and about whom is possibly the most sensitive and impassioned issue circulating within discourses of identity politics” (1). D’Cruz’s article focuses on a very recent debate in Australia about who can speak for the Aboriginals. A discussion about this took place in a critical journal between several people, most importantly a white professor of Aboriginal Studies, David Hollinsworth, and an individual who identified himself as Aboriginal, Mudrooroo

Nyoongah. In the debate (initially over who can claim Aboriginal art) one of the participants explained that to ask the Aboriginals to “historicize” themselves is to ask them to embrace the generalized and one-dimensional history timeline created by non-Aboriginals (D’Cruz 4). Much like the Maori, Aboriginals have a more fluid and cyclic sense of history and time. Hollinsworth knew this, and once he began getting the responses he wanted he threw out his real challenge: how do we know who is Aboriginal.<sup>x</sup> He was immediately answered by critics like C.K. Stead who said it was a matter of genetics and heritage. D’Cruz explains that Hollinsworth challenged this idea because:

this allows some Aboriginal identities [to be] perceived to [have] greater claims to authenticity than other Aboriginal identities. His [Hollinsworth’s] aim is to question various “discourses” that attempt to define what constitutes a person’s Aboriginality, as he believes that some definitions in circulation have a tendency to create a hierarchy of Aboriginal authenticity... for example he claims many urban Aborigines have experienced instances in which their own identities are considered less authentic than rural Aborigines. (4)

This is the basis of the very argument that was launched at Hulme. Hollinsworth wants to protect Australia from creating an Aboriginal “essential identity” on the basis of blood. For Hollinsworth, using “essentialism” in terms of Aborigine biological descent is only going to create a right-wing racist populism where assumptions will be made based on categories such as “full blood,” “half caste”, and so on (6). It is ironic that after the discussion was originally published the “authenticity of identity” for the participant

Mudrooroo has come into question. In response to the questions of identity, race, and authenticity that Hollinsworth put to Mudrooroo, his response was:

I have no wish to weigh [European] theory against [European] theory, and then declare that this or that type of identity has more value; but see [sic] only to crystallize an Aboriginal response to the paper. It is thought provoking; but to suggest that an important Aboriginal theory of identity, an important social reality, may be weighed against European theories of identity, and then be dismissed for being politically dangerous and a useful tool for racists seems almost pernicious, especially when for many Aborigines, Black, Brown, or Brindle, it is the Aboriginal 'essence' which makes an Aborigine, and it is this essence which states, restates, informs and reforms his/her and our culture and social reality. (D'Cruz 12)

After his statement, several different journals and popular periodicals published stories questioning Mudrooroo's biological claim to be an Aborigine. It seems that there were rumors that he was not aboriginal enough to be making statements that are supposed to be based on and reflect the views of multiple individuals. If we as critics or readers remember that we should respect the diversity between cultural identities of groups of people, we also must acknowledge the differences within various cultural identities. Instead of focusing on who is allowed to speak for an Aborigine, we need to listen to what those who claim that identity are saying. Critics who focus on who they think Keri Hulme is instead of who she believes herself to be seem to think there can only be one kind of Maori, their kind. Hulme is building an *Aotearoa* for everyone, the *Pakehas*, the

Europeans, and the Maori. By privileging ethnic definitions on the races of New Zealand critics limit them, and ultimately become no better than the intellectual colonizers.

## CHAPTER 5

### POSTCOLONIALITY AND *the bone people*

Because this novel is about the re-visioning of New Zealand, it is important to look at it in a post-colonial light. In his article “Post-Colonial Culture, Post-Imperial Criticism” W.J.T Mitchell points out that Hulme, “a Maori-Scottish mystic from the remote west coast of New Zealand’s south island” winning the Booker prize for *the bone people* should tell critics that familiar cultural maps are being redrawn (15). His article states that the current trend in literary studies is that the most important fiction is coming from former colonies like Kenya, Peru, Australia, and New Zealand. However, all of the new, provocative criticism is coming from research universities in the former centers of the “Western empires”: Europe and the U.S. (Mitchell 14). This leaves us with a very important question: how can criticism coming from the former colonizers be applied to the literature of the colonized without losing or misunderstanding what the literature is about? We are then back to that same old question, how do we view and interact with the “other” on the colonized’s terms? Is it possible to read the works coming out of former colonies without prejudices? These are questions that are easily applicable to *the bone people* and are the reasons it has been misread before. *How* Hulme expresses herself is essential to an understanding of *what* she is saying. By bringing old prejudices or even racial assumptions to the text, a reader can lose the meaning of the novel. This is not a new argument. What is new is what Ming-yan Lai points out: “the connection between such bias and the postcolonial intellectuals’ formation on the grounds of their own coming to voice, as well as their theorization of where, how, and by whom opposition and resistance can be vocalized.” (32). English systems of thought were forced onto

colonies in the confidence it would have a civilizing effect and would reinforce the idea that civilization was located in the imperial center of the West. Now peoples who were colonized can communicate with each other, and with the metropolis, but at the same time this is no longer their native voice. Gayatri Spivak's definition of postcoloniality is often cited as a defense against the native voice and her definitions of the limitations of discursive positions are applicable here as the main characters are both "native" and female. What is beginning to happen is that contemporary criticism is starting to subvert the imperial economy that supports it. It is "de-centering" the structure of discursive authority (Mitchell 16). This is why it is important to go back to earlier novels like *the bone people* and revisit them now that criticism has caught up with the literature.

Caution is necessary when applying contemporary criticism to works such as this one; criticism that focuses on a rhetoric of de-centering and de-essentializing will not be useful to a culture that is struggling to find a center and an essence for the first time (Mitchell 17). What other critics have done with *the bone people*, picking it apart and looking solely at what made them uncomfortable, is destroying the new center that Hulme is building. As Lai states, "These counterhegemonic voices emerging against current political, social, and cultural structures in the contemporary 'Third World' are precisely what the postcolonial perspective marginalizes" (37). *the bone people* is truly one of those novels that is more than just the sum of its parts, and to understand that we must look at the "big picture" Hulme is painting.

## CHAPTER 6

### *the bone people* as MAGICAL REALISM

One of the techniques Hulme utilizes to paint this new “big picture” of New Zealand in her novel is magical realism. Magical realism, like many elements of this work, raises some critical concerns as well. Because it is most often used to categorize works of literature from Latin and South America (though it is certainly not confined to these regions), it is argued that critics created it because they did not know what to do with the type of work being created there. However, as long as critics do not pigeonhole all works of authors from these regions to being magical realism and do not ignore works of magical realism from other countries (such as Rushdie’s works based in India and Pakistan, Ben Okoi’s texts from Nigeria, or Hulme’s novel from New Zealand) it is a valid literary genre with many narrative strategies which this categorization can help us understand.

In his article “Magical Strategies: The Supplement of Realism,” Scott Simpkins claims that magical realism’s real problem is “primarily from its use of supplementation to ‘improve’ upon the realistic text” (140). He believes that the weakness of language is what prevents authors from being able to perfectly convey their ideas are what drive them to create the “gaps” in magical realist texts. This is something that is also seen in Surrealist art, the visual art movement closely associated with magical realism (Simpkins 142-143). It is magical realist texts’ “awareness of the lack in communication, a condition which prevents the merger of signifier and signified” that forces authors to use unrealistic means in realistic ways, to create the meaning they are seeking to communicate (Simpkins 143). Failure to properly communicate is one of the central

problems in *the bone people*. Hulme seeks to fill in the gaps and create a full conversation between *Pakeha*, Maori, and European.

One of the problems that *the bone people* faced at its original release was that it was taken as a piece of realistic work, and not seen for what it is, a work of magical realism. By definition, magical realism is characterized by two conflicting perspectives, one based on a rational view of reality and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as prosaic reality. Obviously *the bone people* falls into this category. As Benediktsson explains, realism can be seen as part of the imperial force that controls the creativity of a colonized people (122). Ruptures in realism, like what happens in both “The *Kaumatu* And The Broken Man” and “The Woman At The Wellspring of Death” (Joe and Kerewin’s separate sections at the end of the novel, respectively) are violations of the “code” of realism. These can be construed as acts of rebellion against the tyranny of realism (Benediktsson 122). To prevent disbelief from dominating a reader, authors will often use familiar things in unfamiliar ways, (flying carpets, and mass amnesia for example) to stress their different and magical properties. Kerewin’s recovery from “stomach cancer” can be seen this way, as well as Simon’s ability to see lighted auras around people both before and after he is blinded (Simpkins 145). These magical elements are stressed not only to show the magic that exists in everyday life, but also to emphasize elements of reality, things like child abuse, that are always present but often get overlooked because of their familiarity.

Authors who want to offer criticism of politics or history without opening old wounds or suffering political or cultural repercussions often use magical realism. Unfortunately this is not always the way it works, repercussions can result, (Salman Rushdie’s

punishment for writing *Satanic Verses* and *Midnight's Children* were certainly severe), but magical realism is a less abrasive way than to write something like Martin Luther's *Theses* that directly and openly without any subterfuge criticized the Catholic Church. It also is a way for authors to offer criticism of their current culture's political or economic policies subtly, as Hulme is doing. Hulme can point out the flaws in the social services of New Zealand, the treatment of the old ways, even the *Pakehas'* behavior towards Maoris, without inciting a riot. In fact, Hulme has stated on several occasions this is exactly what she was doing in her work. This will be discussed in greater depth later in the second section of this paper.

Another quality in magical realism is the introduction of myth to layer the text. In *the bone people* Hulme uses myth to ground her work in New Zealand's culture. Specifically Hulme uses the myth of the god *Maui's* birth. This will be examined in the close reading of the character Simon. However, the myths are Maori; this makes the "westernized" reader (i.e. *Pakeha* reader) uncomfortable, creating a "fictive realm of possibility and power" to cure the postcolonial malaise (Benediktsson 123). Hulme's use of Maori mythology has appeared to some critics as "forced" and "un-authentic." When questioned about why she chose the novel form, (often seen as a *Pakeha* literary form) instead of something else she replied, "*the bone people* is a *purakau* or fantasy story, part of an old Maori tradition of 'tales told in winter'. . . . The merging of oral traditions and written forms was likely to take place in a country like this. It's a kind of realist writing, albeit playful" (Bartlett 85). Hulme knows that critics may question her use of Maori myth, but she sees it as a critical part of the story, the backbone. She also knows full well it shouldn't be taken as absolute truth and fact; it is a "playful" novel.

There is a magical realist explanation for the clumsiness that some find in the text. In magical realism, the author must have ironic distance from the magical world view for the magical realism not to be compromised. As the author, Hulme needs to keep herself away from the ruptures in reality. In a way, she pretends they are not magical; they are real. She cannot make a huge spectacle of them or they will lose their power in the text. Hulme must keep herself distant from the very language and myths she has grown up with in order for her novel to work, yet she must also strongly respect the magic, or else the magic dissolves into simple folk belief or complete fantasy, split from the real instead of synchronized with it. Techniques for establishing this distance are often an author's sardonic direct address to a reader or portraying the novel as a story told to the author by someone else. Hulme chooses to add, in the very beginning, after the note from the author and before the prologues a recollection of a dream she had. She calls it an "explanatory dream" and at the end of the recollection she says to the reader, "Make of it what you will" (1). Hulme ties her novel to this dream, in a way making the whole novel a dream too. She places the responsibility on the reader to decide what is real and what is not. Hulme embraces the polarities intrinsic to magical realism, knowing that in her heart she believes in the power of Maori spirituality, but is still able to step back and allow her characters to tell the tale they need to tell.

## **PART 2: WHAKAPAPA AND WHANAU: CHARACTERS AND FAMILY**

Understanding the novel's place in the wider criticism of postcolonial theory allows a new close reading of the characters in the text. They are central understanding what Keri Hulme is saying about New Zealand and how she sees the future of New Zealand developing. The individuals, Joe, Kerewin, and Simon, and their use of language, spoken English and Maori, as well as non-verbal communication, are the tools Hulme uses in her own discourses with readers. In her article, "Breaking with English: The Nation as Ethnoscape," Davinia Thornley argues that *the bone people* should be considered a "nation-building text" because of some of the themes it employs. She defines "nation building texts," also called "national allegories," as texts that "often investigate ways to reunite a country, regions or races split along cultural lines... these narratives accomplish national reunification through the family unit" (61). Although in the end she concludes that the *bone people* is a failure in the genre of "nation building" due to the fact that it privileges its *Pakeha* roots over its Maori content, I find her definition of nation building interesting. Instead of looking at this novel as "nation"-building, we would be better served to see it as an "identity-building" text. In his article, Thomas E. Benediktsson comes closer to this conceptual shift. He points out that the characters in the work all fit a common postcolonial theme, found in works by authors as diverse as Achebe, Narayan, Ousmene, and Alexie (123). His stance is that Joe, Kerewin, and Simon are each individually a "literary representation of a deep cultural conflict" (123), who through the plot of the novel will suffer a deathly illness, something that all at once will manifest itself as physical, psychological, and spiritual. During the course of a traditional ritual there will be an encounter (or encounters) with the supernatural and the character will be

healed. At the end of the plot, the character, armed with a new source of transcendent power that he or she has received through his or her “rebirth” after the healing, will come to symbolize the new hope for society “based on the values of the reborn traditional culture” (Benediktsson 123). Benediktsson is arguing that this is a theme consistent in many postcolonial texts, not just unique to Hulme’s. I agree with him, looking at novels like *A Grain of Wheat* (Ngugi), *Season of Migration to the North* (Tayeb Salih), *Disgrace* (J.M. Coetzee), and *Broken Verses* (Kamila Shamsie), there is a defined theme of rebirth of an individual used to symbolize rebirth of a culture or nation.

This focus on a new form of the old culture is closer to what Hulme is doing in her novel. Hulme, though concerned with the present-day problems inherent in a postcolonial society, is focused more on how individuals see themselves and interact with each other and with the community. Her characters who use the Maori language to communicate and build a life are representative of the three types of individuals she sees in New Zealand: Maori, *Pakeha*, and Other. The idea of “nation-building” is an exoscopic concept; it says that *the bone people* is Hulme’s idea of how New Zealand should portray itself to the outside world. “Identity-building,” however, is a more endoscopic concept; it is Hulme’s idea that how a person sees themselves and how others in the community see them changes the identity of the nation. New Zealand is split along cultural lines; Hulme is interested in finding out what happens to those who “live on the edge of two languages, on the edge of two selves named and constructed through language, a condition which she perceives as freeing that self” (Dever 34). The problem is that most of the citizens don’t know which side of the line they should be on, or if they should be on a side at all. Hulme’s use of Maori language in her novel shows how confused these cultural divisions

are; all three characters understand, respect and use both Maori and English; there is no line between the languages for them. This is exceptionally confusing for readers who do not feel this way. For them “it is perhaps more convincing and useful to read the divided nature of Hulme’s text instead as a translation of contrasting or conflicting systems of perception, or a simultaneous rending of past and present” (Dever 27). This way readers can associate with one character and one character’s journey but still find themselves part of the greater whole at the end of the novel. This model of destruction and rebirth of the individual into a stronger and united whole is evident in all three main characters and their manipulation of languages in *the bone people*. Looking at each individual’s journey closely shows the pattern and growth Keri Hulme is creating.

## CHAPTER 1

### JOE: THE MAORI

In the prologue there are passages that tell the reader about the characters she is going to meet. These passages come before the first section; individually they can stand alone, and together they make up the prologue. This prologue is made up of two sections, and each section is made up of three passages, one from each character: Simon, Joe, Kerewin. As a first-time reader it is impossible to know which dialogue belongs to which character, but when one goes back and re-reads the beginning, as Hulme obviously wants her readers to do, it becomes apparent that the second section is Joe's. These first three passages come from the probable future of the novel; they describe an event that has to be taking place after the novel has ended. Joe's section of this part has him interacting in a normal way with the people passing him by; he greets them and they greet him back. It says that, "His mind is full of change and curve, and hope, and he knows it is being lightly tapped . . . Maybe there is the dance, as she says. Creation and change, destruction and change. New *marae* from the old *marae*, a beginning from the end" (Hulme 3). The Joe who's introduced in the beginning of the book, in chapter one, is not recognizable in the Joe of the first prologue. Joe, in this prologue, has completely changed in the portrayal of his thoughts. Instead of being wrapped up in his own loss and blind to the beauty and love in his life, Joe is contemplating the ways in which his life has changed. Instead of focusing on the past and the deaths of his wife and biological child, Joe can believe that there is room for hope and newness in his life. This is important because it shows the reader that Joe has kept his promises to change he made later in the novel.

The second set of passages are set in the past; long before the events of the novel take place. These depict the hardships and the secrets that haunt the characters. For Joe it is the death of Hana and their son Timote shortly after they adopt Simon, the foundling from the sea shore. All of the prologue sections are in third person; this narrator can see inside Joe and tells the readers what he is feeling. At the end of the passage, after Hana is dead, the narrator says, “And he [Joe] no longer really wants it [Simon]. And he knows the rock of desolation, and the deep of despair” (Hulme 6). The use of this pronoun demonstrates that Joe cannot even think of the orphan he and Hana adopted as a human being, let alone his child; Simon has been reduced to a thing he “no longer really wants.” What is more important about this passage is the lack of Maori language. Maori is only spoken once, and it is Hana, the character who dies before the story begins, who uses it. Joe and Hana were a Maori couple, yet in Joe’s recollections he does not speak to her in Maori. This passage about Joe’s loss and grief sets the stage for the beginning of the section set in present time.

The first impression readers are given of “present” time Joe is through Kerewin’s eyes. He (in a drunken state) is in a bar telling a story (full of cursing) to others, and Kerewin thinks to herself:

Why this speech filled with bitterness and contempt? You hate English, man? I can understand that but why not do your conversing in Maori and spare us this contamination? No swear words in that tongue. (12)

In the first meeting with Joe, the reader finds his problem (he’ll spell it out later for those who don’t get it): he is angry at the language forced on him, unable to do his day-to-day conversing in Maori, the language of his heart. During their first conversation Joe tells

Kerewin that he is Maori, but that his “*Maoritanga*,” or the spirit, heart, and inclination that used to make him feel truly Maori, has gotten lost in the way he lives (62). Joe’s use of Maori in the novel is representative of his emotions and feelings. He equates Maori with the things he loves and hates: people, places, and objects he feels deeply about. As Kerewin points out, there are no curse words in Maori; therefore, it is the language of love for Joe. When he thanks Kerewin for taking care of Simon the first time he says, “I don’t know how to say thank you except in this way ... *Ka whakapai au kia koe mo tau atawhai*” (62). He calls people in his life by Maori names, Simon is “Simon *Pake*,” “*Haimona*,” or “*E Tama*,” and Kerewin becomes “*E hoa*.” Joe’s emotional association with Maori is why in his opening sections there are no Maori words; when Hana died Joe lost part of his soul. That loss is manifested through his loss of language. Joe does eventually see Simon as something to remember Hana by; however, because Simon is not Timote, Joe’s biological child with Hana, Joe also resents Simon. This is the basis of the conflict between the two of them.

At first Joe uses Maori only to communicate privately with Simon. Eventually this changes once Joe realizes Kerewin speaks Maori as well. As Kerewin sets the table for the first meal the three of them will share Joe scolds Simon for stealing a ring from her the day before. When Kerewin tells Joe in Maori not to worry about the ring he looks at her in disbelief and says, “I don’t know whether to be delighted or horrified” (57). Joe is still trying to decide what he thinks of the woman who has some kind of control over his child, and he cannot decide if her understanding of Maori is a good thing or a bad thing.

When Joe is drunk he beats Simon. Simon, in turn, tries desperately to hide it from Kerewin in the first part of the book. After a particularly bad beating, when one of Joe’s

family members tells him to tell Kerewin before they tell her, Joe thinks, “Now’s the time. But he freezes at the thought of telling. Not yet, he thinks smiling desperately, I *can’t* tell her yet” (133). When Joe is drunk, angry, or scared he thinks and speaks in English. When he is beating Simon (135-136) he speaks in English: it is not until the end of a beating that Joe calls Simon “*Himi*” (meaning favored child) again. Joe is still trying to define and build the relationship with Kerewin, and because of this he can’t tell her the secrets of his soul; he has not established strong enough ties to be truly comfortable talking to her in Maori, and that is the only way he can truly communicate with another person.

Eventually, as they spend time together as the beginnings of a family unit, Joe finds out Kerewin knows about the abuse, but is willing to try to help him stop the cycle. Kerewin offers to take Joe and Simon to her family’s bach for vacation. It is here that Kerewin confronts Joe; they have a confrontation when Joe goes to hit Simon. Kerewin steps in and she beats Joe in a physical fight, and Maori becomes the shared language for the three of them. This becomes completely evident in the note Joe leaves for Kerewin the day after Joe and Kerewin’s physical fight: “*Kia ora!*... We are making lunch. See you *Arohanui*, H&H” (201). Both the greeting and the goodbye are in Maori; the end translates to “much love.” The “H and H” are meant to represent the two males in Kerewin’s life: *Haimona* and *Hohepa*, or Simon and Joe. This is a seemingly unimportant note between friends, but Joe’s use of Maori is conveying how deeply he is beginning to feel connected to Kerewin. He is making her part of his and Simon’s family.

Another example of Joe’s connection of Maori language to his emotions is in his “talks” with Simon. These are sober discussions with Simon about why he hits him. One

night, as they share a bunk together, Simon has a nightmare, and Joe responds in a mix of both English and Maori, “*Aue, aue... okat tamaiti okay... Taku aroha ki a koe, E Tama...*” (171). He is comforting Simon, trying to help him calm down, and he does it in the Maori language. He tells him that it is OK, and that he loves him, calling him by both the endearment “*E Tama*” for dear child and the literal “*tamaiti*” for child. It is representative of a parent crooning to an upset child in baby talk; here Joe can only express his deep love for his child in his native tongue. Simon calms down, and Joe explains that when he is beating him it doesn’t feel like he is beating Simon, his son, but someone else. Simon smiles and bites him. After Joe is done whimpering, he asks Simon why he bit him and Simon replies “*aroha*” or love. Joe smiles at the joke and tells Simon it’s more like “*utu*” or revenge. Whatever the emotion that drove Simon to bite, Joe can only give it a Maori name. Parts of Simon’s sign language are Maori, because that is what he and Joe communicate in most often. The bond between the two is so strong that Joe relates it to Maori.

The scenes where Joe beats Simon are hard for readers to get through. Gone is Hulme’s elegance with language, gone is metaphor, gone is the Maori language. Many critics struggle with Hulme’s portrayal of Joe as a loving and caring father in large sections of the text. The critics claim that Hulme is trying to justify Joe’s behavior, or to soften a reader’s outrage at the abusive behavior. I do not believe that this is so. This is another way that Hulme is addressing problems with New Zealand’s identity and communities. Hulme states that the reason she portrayed the beatings in the way she did was specifically to draw attention to a problem that New Zealand needs to address.<sup>xi</sup> In a public reading at Montclair State College in May 1987, Hulme said that violence against

children in a “pervasive social problem in New Zealand, among Maoris and *Pakeha* . . . and she had written *the bone people* in part to draw attention to it” (Benediktsson 129).

The scene where Joe almost kills Simon is the tightest, least emotional, and least ornamental passage in the novel. Hulme portrays the event through Simon’s eyes, making sure there is no way for the reader to hide or justify what is going on. Hulme is addressing the community itself: *why* has no one from the family or neighborhood stopped this abuse? Unfortunately, there is pervasive present-day nostalgia in New Zealand for “community care,” which can only happen if the community “cares” (Gordon 121). There is a “deep reluctance” to admit the existence of social problems, including those of destitute, neglected, and abused children. The preference is to believe that these “Old World” problems do not happen in “God’s own Country” but that this only happens to the *Pakeha* children (Gordon 121). Obviously this is not the case, and when talking to Kerewin Joe admits that his own father beat him frequently. Abuse is a deeply rooted problem. Hulme knows that in order to help New Zealand *all* of the assumptions, secrets, and injustices need to be tackled. Hulme chooses to bluntly lay it out for the readers to see: the good, the bad, and, most importantly, the real.

Joe’s last section of the novel, then, “The *Kaumatu*a and the Broken Man,” is not only his rediscovery of Maori faith, but also his recovery of full use of his Maori language. Joe’s loss of his language comes when he beats Simon the final time. He says to Simon, “You have ruined everything, you shit” (308). Joe has reverted back to the role of a drunken Maori male from the first chapter; he is hiding the brokenness of his own culture under the swear words that signal his loss (Williams 92). As when Hana died, Joe can no longer love or feel deeply for anything; the *Maoritanga* that had been emerging again

through his friendship with Kerewin has been destroyed. Joe has become trapped in what Abdul JanMahommed calls the postcolonial “double bind of assimilation.” He cannot use traditional Maori because it has become “calcified... [its] momentum has been checked” nor can he use English because that would “trap” him “in a form of historical catalepsy” (5). Joe goes back to the English. In a way he is identifying with the colonizers, he destroys Simon in the same manner that the *Pakeha* culture destroys the Maori. This is the end of the Joe from the first two thirds of the novel; he is no longer trying to regain his language and fix his brokenness, but embracing that brokenness and attempting to destroy himself. In the last third of the novel, after Simon has been taken from him, Joe uses Maori; but it is the odd word here and there, mostly native words for different flora, fauna, and animal life.

The two most telling accounts of Joe’s complete loss of his language occur first when he goes to Kerewin’s after he is released from the hospital. Joe has been told that Kerewin is packing her things and planning on destroying her tower. He goes to her and asks her to accept him, even though he has almost killed Simon. He knows that he is a broken and defeated man; his eyes are “lusterless and unsoiled” (310). He stands there after asking if Kerewin wants his help, “waiting in the knowledge that she will react with disgust and horror. Waiting for that final reason to die” (311). Instead she replies to him in Maori, saying, “*Ngakaukawa kei te ora taku ngakau. E noho mai*” (Bitter heart, you heal my heart. Stay here) and all he can do is weep. Joe cannot respond to Kerewin in Maori, although she has given him the deepest words of her heart.

For the rest of the section he uses only English. After he has helped Kerewin pack up the whole library, Joe asks her if she received the present he had made and left for her the

day he beat Simon. She replies that she has, shows him she is wearing it, and then says nothing more to him. Joe has taken a lock of Simon's hair, braided it, attached it to a *hei matau*,<sup>xiii</sup> and then engraved "Arohanui na H & H" into a plait of silver on the inner edge of the hook (312). Joe can say nothing to her when he sees she is wearing it; all he can do is think, "it hangs there as he had imagined it..." (312). He cannot even utter "beautiful" or "good"; there are no Maori words for him.

The second instance that proves that Joe has lost his language is in the beginning of his solo section, when he runs to the wilderness. As Joe prepares to throw himself over a cliff, ending his life, he says, "The last measure is me . . . I have rum for blood and blood in plenty. Measure me!" (341). Of all the words and phrases he knows in Maori, none felt right to him in what he expects to be his last moment on earth. Joe has come full circle; he might as well be back in the bar cursing and drunk.

When Joe wakes up after throwing himself off the cliff, he finds that he is not dead, but very sore and in the presence of a *kaumatua*, or a holy man. He was warned when he got off the bus that this was "the middle of bloody nowhere!" and that he might meet Jack, "the last of the cannibals" (335). Jack, who is apparently the last of the cannibals, is the *kaumatua*, and also Joe's savior. Just being around the *kaumatua* begins the healing process, though it is long and filled with stops and starts. As Joe, (dazed and confused, possibly from a head injury) gathers his things to go back to the house with the *kaumatua*, he looks at the cliffs he has jumped from and says in Maori that he will remember them for the rest of his life. What is important about this is that Joe doesn't realize he has said anything at all, let alone said something in Maori. When the *kaumatua* replies to Joe in Maori, however, Joe gets very confused and doesn't believe he has heard

correctly (347). Joe's subconscious reacted to the *kaumatua*'s presence and used Maori, but when Joe is spoken to and is forced to focus on language Maori slips out of his grasp. Then when Joe begins to wake up in the hut the *kaumatua* asks, "*He aha tou mate?*" and Joe replies, "Who is there? Who is that?" (344). Not only can Joe no longer speak Maori of his own volition or when directly addressed, but he has slipped so far down he doesn't recognize Maori as a real language when it spoken is spoken to him.

The *kaumatua* believes it is his destiny to reconnect Joe to his roots. Once Joe is reconnected he can take the *mauriora* (little god statue) back to his people and thus reconnect them to their roots. One day, after hearing Joe's story and why he is wandering in the bush, the *kaumatua* tells Joe that he (the *kaumatua*) is dying and that Joe has to take his place as the protector of a *taonga* (Maori cultural treasure). He becomes very irritated because Joe does not take him seriously. He says:

I take care of it [the *taonga*], because it sleeps now. It retired into itself when the world changed, when people changed. It can be taken and destroyed while it sleeps, I was told... and then this land would become empty of all the shiningness, all the peace, all the glory. Forever. ... How can I make you understand? How? How? How? (364)

Something about this speech resonates with Joe, and he begins to take the *kaumatua* seriously. Joe wants to find a canoe; he knows that it would be one thing that could give him a purpose, a new start. It is believed that the Maori first came to New Zealand in large, sacred canoes. Maoris today organize their tribes around which canoes their ancestors are believed to have arrived in. After he agrees to go with the *kaumatua* on a hike, Joe thinks to himself as he follows through the bush behind the *kaumatua*:

How much more exciting it would be to find a ship of our ours ... not a dusty narrow craft in the desert sand, a river-craft if it sailed at all, but one of the fartravelled saltsea ships, that knifed across great *Kiwa* centuries ago ... guided by stars, powered by the winds and by the muscles of stronghearted women and men... Where will I find this ship? In stone? In water as he suggested? Or only in the clouded remnants of an old man's mind? (366)

When they arrive, Joe discovers it is a great canoe that they have been walking towards. He listens to the *kaumatua* as he tells Joe about his life, and tells Joe how he came to know of the canoe and the little god. In the end, Joe becomes a protector of the canoe and the little god that resides in it. Joe begins the immersion back into his *Maoritanga*. Slowly, as the chapter progresses, Joe begins using Maori again, until he is back to using it when his emotions need to be expressed in ways the English language cannot, such as when the *kaumatua* dies. Joe says, “today I shall cry, *Ki a ko, Rehua! Rehua, ki a koe! Aue te whakama...*” (373). Joe is healed and returned to his Maoriness in the old man's death. Joe becomes completely whole after he retrieves the *mauriora* from its watery home. It is as if Joe pulls his heart back from where it had been lost. Joe knew at the beginning of the text that his Maoriness was lost in the way he lived, and now he has been given a second chance to re-incorporate it into his life. It is time for Joe to return to his home, return to Kerewin and see what they can build together.

## CHAPTER 2

### KEREWIN: THE LOST *PAKEHA*

Kerewin Holmes is one of the most interesting characters in fiction. Her name alone alerts the reader that she is an idealized version of her creator, Keri Holmes. This is one of the reasons the novel can claim mimesis, yet still contains the ruptures in reality that make it a work of magical realism. The personal and genetic make-up of the character and author encourages readers to see this as both a novel and an autobiography (Benediktsson 125). This dual reading of the text not only confuses reality, but it confuses the readers as to how they should respond to Kerewin. Is she the hero? Is there a hero at all in this novel? No matter what personal feelings about Kerewin a reader has, one must look closely at her use of language, literally the dialect and metaphonically her poetics, in order to understand what Keri Hulme is saying.

In her prologues Kerewin is described as “dig[ing] out each thought, each reaction, out of the grey brains, out through the bones. She knows how. She knows a lot. She is eager to know more” (3). Kerewin is characterized as having a deep hunger for knowledge: information of all kinds, important, obtuse, and obscure. In an interview, Keri Hulme explains that she taught herself Maori by writing down Maori words as she heard them and then looking them up. She says, “I speak Maori, but I’d love to become really fluent in our dialect. There’s only one *Ngai Tahu* speaker left” (Bartlett, 84). Hulme also explains that she has over a hundred dictionaries because she always wants to use the perfect word in her writing.

This dedication to learning and to the correctness of language is apparent in her character Kerewin. Kerewin often speaks in what seems to be poetry, an exceptionally

descriptive language blended between Standard English and Maori. In her second prologue Kerewin is deciding on the shape of her home. It is no coincidence that she chooses to build a tower for herself; but more importantly, instead of burrowing into the ground, “a hole, because she was fond of hobbits” (6), Kerewin decides to build a tower because she sees herself removed from everything around her, above the land and her community. She sees it as “her hermitage, her glittering retreat,” but in the end she realizes “the pinnacle has become an abyss . . . at last there was a prison” (7). She is not happy by herself and because of her isolation her art fails. Kerewin has tied herself to the New Zealand traditional “Man Alone” myth,<sup>xiii</sup> a mythology that draws on themes of isolation, violence, artistic identification and a lack of spiritual nourishment (Wilson, 283). In her tower Kerewin definitely fits these characteristics. What is interesting is how she takes these traits and shifts them to fit her gender. By creating this space for herself Kerewin also distances herself from being able to interact with the nation-building inherent in the Man Alone mythology. Instead of bringing herself closer to her community, Kerewin realizes she has purposely disconnected herself from the landscape of her nation.

The real problem for Kerewin is she, like the other characters, cannot survive without being connected to the land. The land presents not only an escape route (from the other people in the community, her land is almost an island) for her, but she also literally lives off of it; she hunts, fishes, gardens, and brews dandelion wine (14, 68, 239, 35). This is not enough for her, however. Thornley points out that:

[although] the land may provide nutritional benefits and a solitary but peaceful lifestyle . . . Kerewin, in true (Wo)man Alone fashion, suffers

from a dreadful “sense of godhunger.” She will find an answer to this hunger, not in any organized, hierarchal form of spirituality, but in a renewed connection to *Maoritanga* with its integral connections to the land, and most importantly, through her new “created” family. (71)

In this way Kerewin will transition between the “Man Alone” figure and the “Mother” figure for this text. It is Kerewin, with her comfort in both English and Maori, who will gather the other characters together to form the roots that will be needed for a new *Aotearoa* to survive. Kerewin sees all knowledge as important and integral to creating beauty and art in her world. It is this curiosity that overcomes her desire for solitude, and that eventually leads her to reject her own death and become a stronger person, a balanced pillar for the community she wants to join. After finishing the novel, a reader can go back to Kerewin’s prologues and see the change in her from the woman who wanted to build a tower with “no people invited, for what could they know of the secrets that crept and chilled and chuckled in the marrow of her bones? No need of people because she was self-fulfilling, delighted with the pre-eminence of her art, and the future of her knowing hands” (7), to the woman who “quickens her steps until she has reached them. And she sings as she takes their hands” (3).

Kerewin is described in the beginning as the strong one; she describes herself as “muscled,” “stocky,” and “strong sinewed.” She will become the sinews of this text: the person that connects the other two. In a way she is a mixture of Joe and Simon: part Maori, part European. When we meet Kerewin she is in the bar, observing Joe. Even though we can hear her disapproval with Joe (he is seen as just another drunk Maori),

there is still something in the way Kerewin says “I can understand that” (12) that tells the reader that although she doesn’t approve of this giant of a man, she can understand where he is coming from. Kerewin presents herself as a loner, always sitting apart from the crowd, going so far as to call herself “*Te Kaihue*” or “the wind-eater.” It is the Maori term for wanderer or loner. In her mind, Kerewin makes the connection that because she feels she fits in neither New Zealand society she is always alone. The fact she uses the Maori term for wanderer tells the reader that she feels that the Maori part of her is the important part who she really is: a *Pakeha* on the periphery of her society, a Maori without a cultural center.

Kerewin is aware of her place in New Zealand’s society. She is not offended by Joe’s surprise that she speaks Maori. When researching Simon’s rosary to try to find his family, she thinks of herself:

I was reveling in the knowledge of my *whakapapa* [Maori genealogy] and solid Lancashire and Hebridean ancestry. Stout commoners on the left side and real *rangatira* on the right distaff side. A New Zealander through and through. *Moanawhenua* bones and heart and blood and brain. (99)

Kerewin has no problem with the fact that her Maori blood is genetically “weak,” or not as “pure” as some. In Kerewin’s mind, being Maori has little to do with blood and everything to do with outlook. She chooses to be Maori because that is what feels right for her. This is another way she can be seen as a reflection of Keri Hulme. Hulme stated in an interview that she believes, “wherever you come from you’re still one person... Maori culture is what we *do*” (Bartlett 84). Kerewin doesn’t see a division in herself; she believes that all the parts of her genes are what creates her as a whole person and that is

what's important, the whole person. Kerewin will apply this to her family group, and then eventually to the community.

Like Joe, Kerewin's Maori language is tied to her emotions, but she has strongly tied the use of Maori to ideas of family. She grew up on the beaches on Moerangi with her family in old Maori baches. She associates this place with her history, her Maoriness. Kerewin's attachment to the sea is no accident. Hulme herself has always lived by the sea. She has said:

I've lived on beaches my whole life, I'm continually reduced to wonder at all forms of life, isopods, marine life, mammals ... the world is always changing, humans are temporary, and when you live on a beach you recognize that ... It is a world of transition and being here [on the coast of New Zealand] makes me know that. (Bartlett 83)

This is a novel about change and evolution on a small and grand scale. As Hulme realizes, life is never a constant thing; therefore a person cannot be constant either. Kerewin will grow into this knowledge; right now it is enough for her to know she is happiest by water. She builds her tower on an "almost island," but it is not enough to soothe her. She also knows that Taiaroa is not the place where Joe and Simon can begin to heal. She knows the pressure and beliefs of the current community are not going to allow Joe and Simon the space they need; she also knows she cannot approach them there, in a mixed community space, to offer her help. Instead she feels that the bach on the beach is a neutral space for Joe and Simon, even if it is not entirely neutral for her.

Kerewin invites Joe and Simon to the bach to see if she can help with the problems of abuse between them. After telling Joe about her family's place, telling him it's a place of

“healing” (90), she sits by herself and thinks on the rifts between herself and her biological family that she feels are too deep to heal. She sings to herself:

Find the *kaik*’ road  
 take the *kaika* road,  
 the glimmering road of the past  
 into *Te Ao Hou*. (91)

“*Kaik*” and “*Kaika*” are dialectic words for village or town, and “*Te Ao Hou*” translates as “new world” or “shining world.” Kerewin’s comfort level with Joe and Simon is reflected in the song. She has been thinking of the rift in her family, yet is looking forward to building a new community with Joe and Simon. Kerewin has already begun to think of Joe and Simon as her family. In choosing Joe and Simon to become part of her new family she is acted upon by the outside forces of family, roots, and belonging, even if these forces are of her own creation (Thornley 71). This is set against her fierce isolationist feelings to show how the attitudes of traditional *Pakeha* and Maori characteristics can be blended into and co-exist alongside each other. Kerewin’s isolation is what has led to her loss of *Maoritanga*; she feels her loss of family strongly. This is why she reaches out to Joe and Simon; she sees their need for a family as a place to start recovering her own Maoriness. Joe and Simon are beginning to fill the void where her biological family used to be.

Joe’s beatings of Simon are heart-wrenching, but the final beating is the most shattering. When Kerewin steps into the relationship with Joe and Simon, she is the savior. Readers do not want her to become a participant in the destruction of Simon. Unfortunately this is exactly what *has* to happen. Simon has come to represent the other

for both Kerewin and Joe, and as a result he is the one who is punished. This violence becomes an “expression of the imperious power over the other that characterizes humanist (and colonist) subjectivity” (Armstrong 14). As the other and a child, Simon has no one to help him. Armstrong explains the necessity of Kerewin’s participation in this beating: “the transactions between self and other in the novel constitute a mode of intersubjectivity predicated upon a violence that is endemic to representation, to language, to the symbolic order” (14). Kerewin’s verbal beating of Simon over the phone is what authorizes, begins, and mirrors the physical abuse by Joe.

Chapter 8, “Nightfall,” is Simon’s first full chapter. It is written entirely from his point of view; it is his interior monologue. When Kerewin calls Joe, Simon thinks:

What she says drums through his head, resounding in waves as though his head were hollow and the words bounced back from one side to smash against the other.

She has finished having anything to do with him.

She hates him...

Did he know what he had wrecked?

She hopes his father knocks him sillier than he is now.

She has every sympathy for his father.

She didn’t realize what a vicious little reptile he had to endure.

He [Simon] choked.

Joe took the phone out of his hands almost gently...

‘I [Joe speaking] think he [Simon] got the message *E hoa*’. (309)

Both before and after she talks to Simon, Joe calls her “*E hoa*,” the term for friend. This links Joe and Kerewin together and places Simon, who is obviously not in agreement with them, on the periphery. Kerewin’s voice distances Simon in the way the sea distances itself from the shore; it is not a part of the coast, yet drums back to “smash” against him. The compassion that Kerewin felt for Simon in the beginning, according to Armstrong, anticipates a sadistic/masochistic identification with Joe (14). Kerewin steps in originally to save Simon, and then in typical Identification Aggression seeks to destroy him (14).

The two most typical forms of Identification Aggression used in psychoanalytic theory are incorporation of the other, and exclusion or destruction of the other. By applying it to *the bone people*, Armstrong argues that Kerewin’s actions are caused by the jealousy she has concerning Joe’s relationship with Simon. According to Armstrong, Kerewin seeks to supplant Simon in Joe’s affections; I disagree with this. Kerewin is attempting to identify with Joe, the full-blooded Maori, in this action, as well as distance herself from Simon, the *Pakeha*. Kerewin is not seeking to supplant Simon, but to firmly identify herself with the Maori. Kerewin is still unsure of her place in this family, and it is her weakness that destroys the family. Nowhere in her anger at Simon does Kerewin talk to him in Maori. Joe calls her by her Maori name, but she herself does not attempt to connect to Simon that way; this makes it easier for her to dissociate herself from him and permit the final beating.

Kerewin’s attachment to Maori as a tool to build a new family comes into full clarity after her family has destroyed itself. In Chapter 9, “Candles In The Wind,” Hulme introduces readers to the important Maori word/notion of “*tapu*.” The opening lines of

this chapter are, “If only was the *tapu* phrase./ If only I had/ If only I hadn’t” (310).

Looking at the translation only gives a reader part of the meaning of Kerewin’s thoughts: “*tapu*” means forbidden in the secular sense. It is more than this, though: it is “the sacred state or condition of a person or thing placed under the patronage of the gods ... the condition of *tapu* is transmitted by contact or association and a person can be contaminated and polluted by it...” (Marsden quoted in Wilentz 115). Unclean or broken *tapu* is often related to sickness or “wrong living” (Wilentz 115). In Maori beliefs, women have a special role: they can neutralize or heal broken *tapu*. Female elders in a community are responsible for leading the ill back to health and restoring the community’s *tapu*, or healing its rift with the gods (Wilentz 115). This is why Joe goes to Kerewin, not because she is his lone friend, but also because she can cleanse him. A reader might struggle with this choice because Kerewin was very involved with this beating. She is as much a part of the broken *tapu* as the way to heal it. When Joe goes to her he expects her to throw him out, to tell him she hates him and never wants to see him again. Kerewin cannot do that because she knows that this is as much her fault as his. He was the physical angle of the attack, but she beat Simon verbally and emotionally first.

That is why her statement to him when he offers her his help, “*Ngakaukawa kei te ora taku ngakau. E noho mai,*” (311) is so important. Not only does she welcome Joe into her home and heart, she does so in the Maori tongue. Joe is officially part of her family, so she needs to forgive him in order to begin forgiving herself. She has begun the process of tearing down her prison, the tower. She looks at Joe, and knows that the two of them are not whole without Simon. She continues to hide the “ache in her stomach” (311) from Joe because at this point Kerewin believes she is going to die. This is her emotional nadir;

she sees no point to her life, no point in continuing to try to build anything. She can forgive Joe, but she has not begun the process of forgiving herself for her part in Simon's destruction. She must go on her own spiritual journey, one that will heal her soul and through that heal her physical ailments.

In Kerewin's solo chapter, "The Woman At The Wellspring Of Death", we see the return of Kerewin as *te Kaihau*, the windeater, the wanderer. She has forgone her need for family and community again and set out on her own, this time in the ultimate pilgrimage, one to her own death. She tells us, "but I seek always for homes. I find, then I lose. And I'm not a traveler at heart... No *marae* for beginning or ending. No family to help and salve and save. No-one no-one no-one at all" (411). Kerewin has come far from the beginning of the text where she believed she was destined and meant to dwell alone; she now acknowledges that she wants and needs a family, home, and community.

Kerewin has been suffering extreme stomach pain that has become worse since Simon was beaten. She also has a large swelling and thickening of the abdomen that she (and consequently the readers) believes is stomach cancer. She refuses medical tests to confirm this, and refuses any kind of medical help other than pain killers, both homeopathic mushrooms and prescription pills. When scolded with an "It's your life" by a doctor who wants her to have tests done, Kerewin replies, "It was," and thinks to herself, "But somewhere long ago it left me. The promised joys were arid nothings. The destiny was never proclaimed, and never fulfilled" (414-15). Kerewin takes a few treasured belongings out to her family's old shack in McKenzie country with every intention of dying alone and (hopefully) forgotten. In this section of the book, Kerewin is portrayed as a "parody of the Cartesian self-reflecting ego" (Armstrong 11). As in the

beginning of the book, she is seen by critics as a pathologically self-contained individual. One of her doctors asks her if she sees the selfishness in her actions, and she has no idea what he is talking about. As she begins to cycle between pain and delirium, all thoughts about Joe or Simon have left her; she becomes completely self-centered. The passages that follow her fruitless trips to doctors' offices depict her physical and mental decomposition.

Near what Kerewin is hoping are her last days on earth, she receives a visitor. There is no way for readers to know if this is a real, physical, person or a hallucination due to the fact she has been drinking, taking painkillers, and eating various hallucinogenic mushrooms. Several critics have issues with these passages because they believe that Hulme has created a Maori Elder who "saves" Kerewin and cures her. They see this as forcing traditional Maori mythologies into her text, or worse yet, using a stereotypic Maori myth to "wrap up" the end of her novel. I do not think she is doing either. In her description of the person who takes care of Kerewin she says:

a thin, wiry person of indeterminate age.

Of indeterminate sex. Of indeterminate race.

Browened and lined, ... A massive burnscar for half a face, with mouth and eyebrows wreaked and twisted by pink keloid tissue. (424)

The only characteristic this person has that could be seen as making him or her Maori is the "browened" coloring. Kerewin herself is referred to as "browened by the sun" earlier in the text yet, she never claims to look Maori. Joe is the only person whose skin color is specifically mentioned and claimed as an ethnic characteristic, and even that is only marked because Kerewin had been expecting a "loud and boisterous Viking type . . . a . . .

. rowdy Aryan barbarian” (28). Therefore to assume this person, of indeterminate age, of indeterminate sex, of indeterminate race, is a Maori is irresponsible and can be seen as racist. Assuming that all people in New Zealand whose skin color at one time or another can be described as “brown” are Maori is no better than assuming that all people with brown skin in America are Native Americans. This is a particularly dangerous assumption to make in this text since Hulme has put so much emphasis on the fact there was nothing specific or “determinate” about the character who visits Kerewin.

Part of the reason readers have been so quick to assume that this character is supposed to be a Maori healer is the fact Kerewin immediately begins to feel better, and her “cancer” is gone after she talks to this person. However, the character does nothing more than give Kerewin a cup of tea/brew that Kerewin believes heals her. Kerewin is never actually diagnosed with stomach cancer. Before wandering off into the wilderness she had asked a doctor if her condition could be caused by “stress and mental discontent” (415), and was told that the human body reacts to stress in many variable and unpredictable ways. Therefore it is possible that Kerewin cured herself. There are a multitude of conditions, hysterical pregnancy, organic tumor, or simply a guilty conscience, that could have caused Kerewin’s symptoms and would explain her sudden “healing.” This person (whom Kerewin refers to with the “neuter” pronoun *ve/vis/ver* (425) which she has made up) tells Kerewin, “O, you’ll live long enough . . . And your mind would have straightened, you’re lovestrong enough. I just cleaned up a bit . . . There isn’t any debt of gratitude. I didn’t really do anything” (425). The interpretation of this section is an individual choice made by each reader. However, I do think that if one is going to read this as a section of “Maori” magical healing, then one also has to

acknowledge a secondary reading, where Kerewin's illness is nothing more than a psycho-physical rendering of her guilty conscience.

Kerewin makes the decision that she will do whatever is needed to heal the *tapu*. She goes to the beach, to the old *marae* site near the ocean where she feels the most connected to her Maori heritage and asks, “*Tena koe... whatautua mai tenei patai aku. He aha koe I karanga ai ki au?* [Answer this question of mine. What did you call me here for? Did you call me? ...] *He aha te mahi e mea nei koe kia mahie* [What do you want me to do?] ...” (430). At first she only hears the silence, and then she is overcome with a warm feeling that comes up from the ground through her feet until it covers her to the crown of her head. She knows then that she must build a new *marae* site that will bring everyone together: the community, her estranged family, Simon, and, hopefully, also, Joe. Kerewin goes to her journal, what she calls her “book of my soul,” and writes down what she calls the “seven new directions for my life”:

Direction one, is recovery; two, a renewed talent; three, rebuilding; and four, tying up loose ends, making the net whole. Direction five is endeavoring not to dodge responsibilities, for me ... Six is related: I know I can move, can lead, can direct. Therefore, I will. No more sequestration, no more Holmes against the world. And seven is the pivot, the point of balance for the needle of my true soul – I have faced Death... but now I want *life*. (436)

Kerewin's new goals are analogues to the points on a compass, and this is the image she is invoking. These directions can be applied to New Zealand as a whole. Hulme is showing how, like a compass, all directions start in the same central place and shoot out.

Kerewin's changing of her life will influence others and slowly, with work, perhaps all of New Zealand will change. Kerewin's last line in the novel, spoken in Maori, predicts/prays/pleads for a new day. She says, "*Ka ao, ka ao, ka awatea...*" or, "It is dawn, it is dawn, it is daylight" (445) . She succeeds in repairing the broken *tapu* and her broken family. Now it is time for New Zealand to follow her example and begin healing the national *tapu*.

### CHAPTER 3

#### **SIMON: *HAIMONA* or *AOTEAROA***

Simon is by far the most enigmatic of the three characters Hulme has created. A washed-up foundling who is mute for reasons that are deemed psychological, he is both completely lovable and completely frustrating. Hulme has said that she never meant for Simon to be “deified” by readers because she felt that this attitude comes too close to complicity with the abuse he suffers. However, to say that Simon is nothing more than a victim of his circumstances is doing his character a great disservice. Simon is:

Depicted experiencing his own form of isolation, living in an alien place among strangers with whom it is difficult for him to communicate. Indeed, within the text, he represents a further element of difference, another affirmation of alterative linguistic possibility. (Dever 30).

Although the physical abuse inflicted on Simon is important, crucial to the text, it is his role as the innovator of language and communication that is the most important.

In Simon’s prologue chapter there is a distance between the boy and his memories, “In the memory in the black at the back of his eyes, there are words, different words. Help, but not help. Words. There were words. But then the overwhelming wrenching groan of the boat as she struck the rocks” (5). We learn later that this is a recollection of the shipwreck that killed the only people he knew and washed him into the arms of Joe. Simon began associating words with uselessness at a very early age. When the readers meet Simon, he is an inquisitive, shy, and unique child of somewhere between 6 and 8. No one knows his age, where he comes from, or even his name. Simon was the only name he responded to as child, so that is what Joe and his wife called him. It is fitting that

Joe calls him “*Haimona*,” since that is what he is to Joe, his dear son. Simon’s particular mode of arrival into Joe’s life is what ties him to the Maori culture. Hulme does not put a glossary or appendix of Maori myths in the back of her novel; she expects a reader to work for these deeper connections. In his collection *Maori Myths and Tribal Legends*, Anthony Alper retells how the Maori god *Maui* was born:

I know I was born at the edge of the sea, and you cut off a tuft of hair and wrapped me in it and threw me into the waves. After that the seaweed took care of me and I drifted about in the sea, wrapped in long tangles of kelp, until a breeze blew me on shore again and some jellyfish rolled themselves around me to protect me on the sandy beach . . . then my great-ancestor *Tama nui kit e rangi* arrived . . . he came and pulled away the jelly-fish and there was I, a human being! Well he picked me up and washed me and took me home, and hung me in the rafters in the warmth of the fire, and he saved my life! (28-9)

*Maui* is characterized as a mischievous god, one who is like a trickster god who helps human out in life. He steal fire for them, beats up the sun so the days are longer, and engages in other exploits for the benefit of humanity. The connections between his birth and Simon’s “birth” are too strong to be ignored. Both are apparent orphans; at least they do not know who their biological parents are. Joe retells his finding of Simon to Kerewin one night:

I saw something at the water’s edge. I thought, ahh *Ngakau* [heart], it’s a weedtangle again, get going . . . Then I saw his head . . . hair long even then, even longer than it is now. He was thrown mainly clear of the water,

but a high wave from the receding tide would drag at him. He was front down, his face twisted towards me as I ran skidding over the sand and weed. There was sand half over him, in his mouth, in his ears, in his nose.

I thought, I was quite sure, he was dead. (85)

Joe goes on to tell Kerewin he gave Simon CPR, and that his breath was the only thing Simon got from him. Joe is joking about how Simon got none of his characteristics (since he is not his biological child) and all he gave the child was “breath.” What Joe doesn’t see is the connection: by giving Simon his breath he gives him a new life, one that is inevitably tied to Maori roots. Like *Maui*’s ancestor *Tama nui kit e rangi*, Joe is Simon’s savior, and eventually Simon will be part of what saves Joe, what saves New Zealand. Simon’s birth on the beach represents his death as a *Pakeha* invader and his rebirth as a Maori god whose role traditionally is to help the people of New Zealand.

Joe assures Kerewin that Simon is “bright. He can understand anything you put to him . . . He doesn’t need special care and attention, he needs people to accept him” (Hulme 50). It is his “otherness” and Joe’s brokenness that lead to the beatings. Simon, to become truly *Haimona*, must be recreated. Thornley explains, “Simon is born out of the sea and then re-born through Joe’s violence to become Maori. Simon performs ideological work for Kerewin, for Hulme, and for Hulme’s *Pakeha* readers, by allowing them access to the rooted claims of the Maori” (72). In his first prologue Simon is enveloped in silence, but to him the silence is music. Readers are told: “He is the singer” (3). At the end of the novel, we see that because of the beating Simon is now deaf as well as mute, yet he is the singer and the protector of music for the whole novel. Hulme places this into his hands to show that the music of life, of connection, is not relegated to

“normal” people. Kerewin loves to play guitar, but she is not given the job of holding on to the music. Joe, a Maori, should be given the responsibility as a male, but he is not given it. Again, this important job goes to the strange, European, mute, deaf, child because he is the one who truly *hears* the music.

In the second prologue Simon’s inner voice is terrified. He thinks, “It is happening again, and like the time before, there is nothing he can do to stop it. It will take away the new people, it will break him, it will start all over again. He cannot change it” (5).

Readers begin to understand that Simon sees himself as helpless. He cannot act, but only be acted upon. This is why the physical and emotional beatings have such strong impact on the reader: Simon never attempts to fight back until the very end. He does act out and push at Joe and Kerewin until they snap at him, but until the last beating Simon never fights back. He may bite Joe after a beating or kick and scream to prevent a haircut or a doctor’s checkup, but once Joe begins beating him in earnest he submits.

In this way it can seem that “Joe’s abuse of Simon is the necessary behavior of a Maori who, brutally beaten himself as a child and deeply thwarted in his life, cannot cure himself of violence” (Benediksson 126). However, Joe is sometimes afraid of Simon because he feels “There is a vicious streak in him ... and I’m frightened it might be bred in him” (107). It is left to the reader to see the connection here: Joe is continuing the vicious cycle of his own childhood and replaying it onto Simon. Simon takes the violence and makes it a part of himself. Because Joe expects him to deserve the beatings Simon believes he does. This continues until the end of the book and the final beating, where Simon fights back, stabbing Joe in the stomach with a shard of glass. Simon is almost killed in this beating, and comes back from it misshapen and damaged, but in some ways

he is also more whole. His time in the hospital, forcibly separated from Joe and Kerewin, gives him time to think about his life thus far, and the roles he wants to play in the future lives he might be a part of.

Since Simon is the most ambiguous character in a novel of ambiguous characters, he has had the least amount of character work done by critics. In some senses Simon is a true *Tabla Rasa*. He is acted upon by all of the characters in the work; it only stands to reason he would be written on by critics as well. In her article, “The White Whipping Boy: Simon in Keri Hulme’s *The Bone People*” (the only full-length critical work done on Simon exclusively) Antje M. Rauwerda makes the claim that Simon is representative of all European influence and violence in New Zealand. However she also claims that Simon should also be identified with the Maori god *Maui*. Rauwerda sees Hulme’s emphasis on Simon’s pale appearance and “classic” European facial structures as Hulme’s way of pushing Simon’s “Europeanness” forward where the reader cannot forget about it. Rauwerda says that the reason Simon’s whiteness is so predominant is because

white masculinity deals with its histories and trauma and terror by presenting itself as if victimized, or by exploiting the appearance of marginalization. Hulme may recentralize the authority and privilege of whiteness by only seeming to abject it; whiteness could thus be reprivilaged because it seems to have been violently, even unjustly marginalized. (26)

I do not agree with this at all, especially in this text. Hulme is not pushing Simon’s whiteness in order to symbolically “beat” the European heritage out of New Zealand; I think she is pushing Simon as “other.” Rauwerda also quotes the text in several places,

saying that Kerewin is never comfortable with Simon because she can only see his strange white skin (26). However, all of the quotations she uses as examples are from the very first day Kerewin meets Simon as an intruder in her tower. At this point in the narrative, Kerewin has shut herself off from everything and everyone *Pakeha* and Maori, therefore her reaction to an uninvited visitor would always be negative, no matter who the visitor is. Rauwerda's claims that Kerewin sees Simon as "'a criminal' ... 'unnatural' ... 'sullen and silent' ... 'almost malevolent'" (26) do not take into account Kerewin's feelings later in the novel where she desperately wants to help Simon, feels pity for him, respects him, and finally comes to love him in her own way.

Rauwerda's reasoning for Joe's beating Simon is a bit more substantiated. Instead of focusing explicitly on Simon as a representation of European repression, she sees that it is Joe's own emotional shortcomings that create the environment that allows him to beat Simon. She points out that Joe "beats Simon whenever Simon makes him feel disempowered, impotent, or emasculated ... He perceives Simon as a challenge to both his masculinity and his Maoriness" (29). Unfortunately, instead of taking this argument further and looking at why Simon's actions make Joe feel this way, she simply decides it is because Simon is representative of colonial power, and colonial power always makes the original inhabitants feel emasculated and disempowered. She does use the example of Joe's fearfulness of Simon visiting Binny Daniels (the local pederast), but Binny is a Maori, so this would be an example of a Maori emasculating a *Pakeha*, and does not really fit her argument.

Rauwerda's last argument for why Simon represents everything that is "evil European" in New Zealand is why he is mute. Rauwerda sees Simon's muteness as "the

violent silencing of *Pakeha* colonist discourse. His [Simon's] muteness suggests the repression of the *Pakeha* he embodies" (30). What Rauwerda has done is rework Susan O'Brien's argument that mute figures have essential places in postcolonial literature because it is through their lack of language that the colonizer's English gets moved from the center into the periphery. However, where O'Brien argues that muteness is a form of resistance and Simon's muteness represents a struggle to move away from his personal nightmarish history, Rauwerda still sees Simon as the enemy and his muteness is Hulme silencing *Pakeha* influence.

Not once in her article does Rauwerda address the interviews where Hulme shies away from the idea that Simon is a symbol, and his beating is symbolic. Hulme has said she was addressing something she sees as a real problem in New Zealand culture; in Hulme's mind child abuse is not just a Maori or a *Pakeha* thing, it is something the national consciousness needs to address. Armstrong puts forward the theory that Hulme rejects readers' attempts to deify Simon because "to make the violence perpetrated against him into a sacrifice which redeems the others comes too close to complicity in it; that the abuse suffered by a child ought not to be put into the service of a closer union between adults" (18). It is too easy to take the character of Simon and say he is nothing more than a symbolic whipping boy in the text. As C.K. Stead points out, Simon is "the most complete, convincing, and fascinating of the three [major characters]" (106). The fact that he is mute has nothing to do with repression, but with growth. Simon is not denying language; he is creating new ways of communication.

Kerewin's last actions before leaving her tower are to make one last piece of art and to burn down the tower. Simon is in the hospital, wrapped and bandaged and locked into his

own world. Joe has beaten him so badly that he is deaf, his jaw is broken, and part of his skull is crushed. Simon exists because he is too stubborn to die; he hangs in there believing that there is a better life for him. Kerewin, dealing with her own grief and guilt, realizes that she has finally found her artistic inspiration again. She sculpts from clay a tricephalos, her own face, Joe's face and Simon's all connected in one sculpture. Kerewin has used the hair to connect the three, specifically Simon's hair. It curls back from his neck, in a series of spirals, to connect him to Joe and Kerewin, and through himself to connect them to each other. As she burns the tower down, Kerewin leaves the sculpture there, firing the clay into stone. This tricephalos becomes a symbol for the possibilities that these three embody for change. Unfortunately, unlike the tricephalos, the characters have not been fired into their new forms. Simon, Joe, and Kerewin must still undergo their own trials by fire to their healing to begin. Only then can the change they represent be brought to New Zealand (Wilentz 136).

Hulme has given Simon the knowledge that even though Joe has treated him horribly, his future is with Joe and Kerewin. He wakes once in the ICU and thinks, "He watches, his hope never quite dead, for them to enter" (386). Simon waits and hopes; beaten, bruised and half dead, he cannot give up his hope or his love. He wakes up again in the ICU and learns that he is now deaf and mute, he is upset, but he is more upset that Joe and Kerewin cannot see him. The night the doctors tell him he is going to a "special home" and he will never see Joe again, Simon's thoughts are:

And if he [Simon] can't go home, he might as well not be... because they only make sense together. He knew that in the beginning with an elation beyond anything he had ever felt . . . He doesn't know the words for what

they are. Not family, not *whanau*... maybe there aren't words for us yet? (*E nag iwi a nga iwi*, ['O the people of the bones' i.e. the beginning people, the people who make another people] whispers Joe; o my serendipitous elf, serendipitous self, whispers Kerewin, we are the waves of future chance) . . . But we have to be together. If we are not, we are nothing. We are broken. We are nothing. (395)

This is by far the longest of Simon's interior monologues we have seen since the prologue. This is also one of the most profound passages in the book. Joe calls Simon the "people of the bones" or the people that will birth another race. He sees *Haimona* as his salvation as well as the salvation of New Zealand. Kerewin has told Simon she sees him as part of herself, part of her soul. Simon runs away from the group home, running for where he thinks he will be whole and safe again: Kerewin's tower. What he finds there is emptiness and a burned-out shell. He also finds the tricephalos in the dirt. This gives him hope again; he sees physical proof that someone other than he knew they needed to be together. He clings to the sculpture, even as the authorities carry him away, because Simon knows he is right; he must wait for Joe and Kerewin to come back to him. Simon knows that the three of them are one unit, the Maori, the *Pakeha*, and the Other. Without one, the other two are worthless; together they are the future.

Simon represents *Aotearoa* itself: like an island born from the sea, he is alone, isolated, and hurt by those around him until they learn to live together, all of them. Simon has learned from his very beginning (when he was probably exposed to Creole, then had to learn English, Maori, and how to communicate without speaking) that he was going to have to grapple with a language that was not "his" and which he would have to

transform into something that he did own. He created a form of sign language as his answer; he took Maori, English, sign, facial expressions and hand gestures to create his own language. This is what Hulme is asking her readers, both *Pakeha* and Maori, to do: to take parts of the language that isn't theirs and make them into their own. Simon is *Aotearoa*, but he cannot survive without both Maori and *Pakeha* support.

## CONCLUSION

Keri Hulme knows that “to heal her characters through a recovery of Maori spirituality, she must create an alternative narration of Maori culture” (Benediktsson 130). She does this by taking the Maori language and working it into the *Pakeha* novel form. *Pakeha* readers, (or European readers, for that matter) with no knowledge of the Maori language are going to struggle with the novel the first time they read it. Having to stop and look up the Maori phrases in the appendix is an onerous task, and may innervate readers. At the same time, her removal of Maori myths and language and placement of them in a traditional Westernized form is going to be uncomfortable for a Maori reader. Reading Maori sentences, phrases, and words all jumbled up with English, the language of the colonizer, is going to be upsetting as well. Hulme has used language, place, space, narrative and character as a way of decentering her readers and moving them, all of them from the norm to the periphery.

It is no wonder that so many critics were quick to place Hulme’s novel on the shelf and forget it, saying it was a failure. Hulme has taken two of the most controversial elements in postcolonial writing, language and magical realism, and made them work for her. She places the responsibility on the reader to read her text and think about it, think about every single part of it, from the specific word choice, to the languages, to the characters, to the overall shape of the text. Hulme has shown that the Maori beliefs of spirituality and family can be integrated into New Zealand at large, but only if all of the cultures of New Zealand are ready to make sacrifices and begin to try to understand one another. As Joe said of Simon, “he needs people to accept him” (Hulme 50); this is what New Zealand needs. Keri Hulme has said her favorite image in the novel is of

“interwoven threads” (QTD in Williams 109). This “implies that cultural traditions can be allowed their discrete integrity, yet worked together into new patterns...” (Williams 109). These patterns would suggest the emergence of a new culture in New Zealand. It will be through the blending of *Pakeha* and Maori culture, like Keri Hulme’s blending of Maori and English in *the bone people* that will ultimately unite New Zealand into a whole and healed *Aotearoa*

## NOTES

<sup>i</sup> Keri Hulme has stated that for aesthetic reasons she has never wanted the title of her book to be capitalized. To honor the author's preference, I will not be capitalizing the name of her novel in this paper.

<sup>ii</sup> Because the prologue is such a vital part of this paper I have included a photocopy of it in the appendix.

<sup>iii</sup> Also reproduced in the appendix of this paper

<sup>iv</sup> For more information about this mythology please see Jonathan Lamb's book *Preserving the Self in the South Seas*.

<sup>v</sup> *the bone people* is a very long and complex work. I have included a summary of the main plot points as well as some of the more minor events that are discussed in detail in this paper.

<sup>vi</sup> For more information on bachs, both historical and present see Christina McCarthy's article "A Summer Place: Postcolonial Retellings of the New Zealand Bach" in *Jouvert: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies*.

<sup>vii</sup> Examples of both the traditional and the contemporary stylized versions of a Maori double spiral have been included in the Appendix.

<sup>viii</sup> This is a very simplified summary of a debate that is far-reaching and has a scope that spans centuries. I am by no means implying that the Sophists were/are the only people to discuss these issues, but for the interests of this paper they are the ones I am focusing on.

<sup>ix</sup> General information about the on-going debates in postcolonial studies concerning all aspects of language please see Margery Fee's article "Who Can Write For Who" and Edward Kamau Brathwaite's article, "Nation Language."

<sup>x</sup> The issue of Aboriginal identity and history has long been discussed in Australian culture. Sally Morgan's novel, *My Place*, and the criticism that surrounds it deals with many of these current issues.

<sup>xi</sup> Information about child abuse, neglect, and other social problems in New Zealand can be found in Deborah Frazier's "Secular Schools, Spirituality and Maori Values", Toon Van Meijl's "Multiple Identifications and the Dialogical Self: Urban Maori Youngsters and the Cultural Renaissance" and Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner's chapter, "New Zealand and Australia" in *Children in Historical and Comparative Perspectives: An International Handbook and Research Guide*.

<sup>xii</sup> A *hei matau* is a traditional Maori symbol of a highly stylized fish-hook. It represents not only their land, but also prosperity, fertility and safe passage over water. They are carved from bone or greenstone.

<sup>xiii</sup> The New Zealand "Man Alone" mythology is very similar to its better known counterpart, the Australian "Man Alone" Myth. For more information about the difference and specifics please see Gordon Collier's essay, "Some Fictive Australian Beginnings, and Levels of Reader-Expectation: Aspects of Rhetoric and Style" in the collection *English Literature of the Dominions* edited by Konrad Gross and Wolfgang Klooss.

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**Appendix A**

PROLOGUE OF *the bone people*

He walks down the street. The asphalt reels by him.  
 It is all silence.  
 The silence is music.  
 He is the singer.  
 The people passing smile and shake their heads.  
 He holds a hand out to them.  
 They open their hands like flowers, shyly.  
 He smiles with them.  
 The light is blinding: he loves the light.  
 They are the light.

...

He walks down the street. The asphalt is hot and soft with sun.  
 The people passing smile, and call out greetings.  
 He smiles and calls back.  
 His mind is full of change and curve and hope, and he knows  
 it is being lightly tapped. He laughs.  
 Maybe there is the dance, as she says. Creation and change,  
 destruction and change.  
 New marae from the old marae, a beginning from the end.  
 His mind weaves it into a spiral fretted with stars.  
 He holds out his hand, and it is gently taken.

...

She walks down the street. The asphalt sinks beneath her muscled  
 feet.  
 She whistles softly as she walks. Sometimes she smiles.  
 The people passing smile too, but duck their heads in a deferential  
 way as though her smile is too sharp.  
 She grins more at their lowered heads. She can dig out each  
 thought, each reaction, out from the grey brains, out through the  
 bones. She knows how. She knows a lot.  
 She is eager to know more.  
 But for now there is the sun at her back, and home here, and  
 the free wind all round.  
 And them, shuffling ahead in the strange-paced dance. She  
 quickens her steps until she has reached them.  
 And she sings as she takes their hands.

...

They were nothing more than people, by themselves. Even paired, any pairing, they would have been nothing more than people by themselves. But all together, they have become the heart and muscles and mind of something perilous and new, something strange and growing and great.

Together, all together, they are the instruments of change.

IN THE BEGINNING, it was darkness, and more fear, and a howling wind across the sea.

"Why not leave him?"

They can't whisper any more.

"No guarantee he'll stay on the bottom. Besides, we'll have to come back for the boat."

The voice. The nightmare voice. The vivid haunting terrible voice, that seemed to murmur endearments all the while the hands skilfully and cruelly hurt him.

"We'll have to move soon."

It is happening again, and like the time before, there is nothing he can do to stop it. It will take away the new people, it will break him, it will start all over again. He cannot change it. And worst of all, he knows in an inchoate way that the greatest terror is yet to come.

There is a sudden pause in the crashing of the waves, and a drawn prescient hissing.

"Jump now! Take the jacket, I'll swim. I can take care of him...."

Even now, the barb of laughter in his voice.

Take care? Aiie!

In the memory in the black at the back of his eyes, there are words, different words. Help, but not help. Words. There were words.

But then the overwhelming wrenching groan of the boat as she struck the rocks.

IN THE BEGINNING, it was a tension, an element of strain that grew and crept like a thin worm through the harmony of their embrace.

"What is it you want?"

"Ahh nothing... you're all the man I need."

Chuckles in the warm dark.

Sitting up then and saying to him urgently:

"You *must* have a son. You *must* have people."

It gnaws at him. She knew, somehow, that she wasn't going to be the person who gave him a son, who gave him people. And she never told him.

Then, he had only chuckled again and said, "Well, we got him on the way, ne?"

But the undefinable careworm was still there.

After the storm-night, they talked about the tide-washed child.

"I think he likes us," he had said.

"He needs you... look at him hold on though he's not himself yet."

"Shall we keep him then?" half-joking.

She had answered "Yes!" without hesitation.

"Before our baby? Before our son?"

"Before them all, man," and she had turned out of his arms and danced, in lumbering triumphant glee.

Then the worm of care had gone. They were whole and sound together until the night they took her away.

It gnaws at him: the last words she gave him as they wheeled her under the flaring lights. Harsh and whispered, "O Ngakau, mind our child."

Timote was already dead.

She meant the other one, the one who sat on his lap unmoved it seemed, while he was shaken and robbed of breath by sobbing.

"Hana is dead, dead, dead..." the pale child held his hand, and looked into his face with alien sea-coloured eyes, unclouded by tears. Marama said how bitterly, how hysterically upset he had been. But he never showed it to me.

It gnaws at him: he has this one thing left of her, this secondhand, barely-touched half-formed relic of her presence.

And he no longer really wants it.

And he knows the rock of desolation, and the deep of despair.

SHE HAD DEBATED, in the frivolity of the beginning, whether to build a hole or a tower; a hole, because she was fond of hobbits, or a tower — well, a tower for many reasons, but chiefly because she liked spiral stairways.

As time went on, and she thought over the pros and cons of each, the idea of a tower became increasingly exciting; a star-gazing platform on top; a quiet library, book-lined, with a ring of swords on the nether wall; a bedroom, mediaeval style, with massive roof-beams and a plain hewn bed; there'd be a living room with a huge fireplace, and rows of spicejars on one wall, and underneath, on the ground level, an entrance hall hung with tapestries, and the beginnings of the spiral stairway, handrails dolphin-headed, saluting the air.

There'd be a cellar, naturally, well stocked with wines, home-brewed and imported vintage; lined with Chinese ginger jars, and wooden boxes of dates. Barrels round the walls, and shadowed chests in corners.

All through the summer sun she laboured, alone with the paid, bemused, professional help. The dust obscured and flayed, thirst parched, and tempers frayed, but the Tower grew. A concrete skeleton, wooden ribs and girdle, skin of stone, grey and slateblue and heavy honey-coloured. Until late one February it stood, gaunt and strange and embattled, built on an almost island in the shallows of an inlet, tall in Tairaroa.

It was the hermitage, her glimmering retreat. No people invited, for what could they know of the secrets that crept and chilled and chuckled in the marrow of her bones? No need of people, because she was self-fulfilling, delighted with the pre-eminence of her art, and the future of her knowing hands.

But the pinnacle became an abyss, and the driving joy ended. At last there was a prison.

I am encompassed by a wall, high and hard and stone, with only my brainy nails to tear it down.

And I cannot do it.

**Appendix B**

## MAORI GLOSSARY

### Translation of Maori Words and Phrases

<i>Page</i>	
12	Aue = exclamation of dismay, or despair Te Kaihau = lit. windeater. Can mean either wanderer or loafer
13	Tena koe = hello, greeting to one person
14	Raupo = a variety of weed Ngaio = a coastal tree
16	Pounamu = New Zealand jade, also called 'greenstone'
24	Manuka = useful shrub, also called 'tea tree'
30	Kia ora koe = good health to you (singular)
33	Mere = a short flat weapon of stone (often greenstone) for hand to hand fighting. Other terms on this page (hei matau, patu pounamu, kuru, marakihau etc are translated in text)
36	Hinatore = glow with an unsteady light, phosphorescent things in general
47	Pake = Simon pake means stubborn Simon
53	E tama = son, kid, boy
57	E noho ki raro. Hupeke tou waewae = Sit down. Hold your foot E whakama ana au ki a koe = I'm ashamed of you Kei whea te rini = Where's the ring? Kaua e tahae ano = Don't steal again E korero Maori ana koe? = Do you speak Maori? He iti iti noa iho taku mohio = O, I understand a bit
58	Ka pai = good, great, thanks mate etc.
60	E hoa = friend, mate etc
61	Nga 'bush' = bush people, primitives Makutu, nei = hoodoo, eh?
62	Maoritanga = Maori culture, Maoriness Ka whakapai au ki a koe mo tau atawhai = Thanks very much for your kindness Ka pai, e hoa = That's okay, mate
69	Na tou hoa = from your friend

- 77 Kia ora korua = Good luck you two
- 82 E moe koe = Goodnight
- 88 Hongi = greeting or salutation by two people pressing noses with each other
- 89 Pakeha = stranger, now used for a New Zealander of European descent. Used here as an adjective, hence the lower case.
- 91 Kaika = Ngai Tahu dialect for home, or village  
Te Ao Hou = the new world, the shining world
- 99 Whakapapa = genealogies, family trees  
Rangatira = chiefly or noble person/people
- 103 Kina = sea-egg or sea urchin, delicious!  
Puha/Puwaha = edible weed  
Pikopiko = fern, young fronds of which are edible
- 104 Kai moana = seafood
- 106 Karengo = edible seaweed
- 112 Tena koutou katoa = greeting to more than two people  
Haere mai! Nau mai! Haere mai! = a formal chant of welcome  
Kei te pehea koe? = How're you?
- 113 Ae = yes  
He puku mate, nei? = Crook stomach, eh?
- 118 E pai ana = also means, Thank you
- 121 Muri iho = Later
- 123 E noho ra = Goodbye, said to the person(s) staying  
Haere ra = Goodbye, said to the person(s) going  
Pipi = edible shellfish
- 124 Kete = basket, generally made of plaited or woven flax
- 128 E hine = woman or girl
- 141 Tika = right, appropriate, correct
- 157 Kahikatea = white pine, a beautiful native tree fond of swamps
- 161 Koromiko = useful tree if you've got a crook stomach or diarrhoea
- 163 Tihe mauriora = lit. sneeze of life fig. I salute the breath of life in you, said at the beginning of formal speeches; with hongis; or at times like this.
- 168 Taniwha = a mythical (?) water terror/monster

- 171 Tamaiti = child  
Taku aroha ki a koe = I love you  
Aroha = love  
Utu = revenge
- 175 Ka nui taku mate = I'm really sick
- 177 Anana = exclamation of surprise
- 178 Mimi = piss
- 183 Kawau pateketeke, K. paka, K. tuawhenua, K. tui = all kinds of shag
- 185 Haere mai = as well as a greeting, this phrase means Come here
- 188 Pupu = edible green snail, also called a catseye
- 198 Taipo = demon, night goblin (a word of dubious origin)
- 201 Arohanui = much love
- 203 Paua = succulent marine univalve
- 213 Terakihi, hapuku = delicious fishes
- 227 Tangihanga = funeral, and the ceremonies connected with it  
Marae = a place for gathering, to learn, to mourn, teach, welcome and rejoice
- 228 E tama, ka aha ra koe? = O child, what will become of you?  
Ae, ko te pono tena = Yes, that's the exact truth
- 229 Iwi kaupeka, nei = would you believe, "Funny skinny legs"?  
Lit. legs - like sticks  
Hui = gathering
- 230 Hori = lit. George. Used by Maori among themselves in a jocular fashion but is an insult when used by an unfriendly Pakeha
- 233 Ponaturi = rather nasty mythical beings who sleep on land but live undersea
- 238 Pi Ta = in this case it translates as shitty nestling
- 239 Ka Tata Te Po = Night is Near
- 250 Hokioi = unknown (and maybe legendary) kind of bird
- 252 The song the ghost sings is an old lullaby and translates roughly as "O child, winterborn, ascend/rise up and join your forbears in the heavens"
- 253 Hapu = next tribal division down from 'iwi'  
E nga iwi! Mo wai tenei? = O people! Who is this for?

- 254 Tukutuku/poupou = forms of wall decoration  
Rimu, rimu, tere tere e = lines from a popular song,  
"Seaweed, seaweed, drifting, drifting ..."
- 273 Korero = talk, argument
- 277 Haere mai ki te kai! = Come and get it! lit. come here for the food!
- 281 He aha koa iti, he pounamu = although it's little, it's jade
- 282 Koha = gift
- 296 Tenei mo Haimona = This is for Simon
- 301 Mere-mere = Venus the evening star
- 310 Tapu = can mean forbidden in a secular sense  
Taipa = Keep quiet
- 311 Ngakaukawa, kei te ora taku ngakau. E noho mai = Bitter heart, you heal my heart. Stay here
- 313 Kaumatua = an elder/elders
- 338 Huhu = NZ's largest beetle, in some areas symbolic of Death
- 345 He aha tou mate? = What's wrong with you?/Where is your sickness?
- 347 Ka maharatia tenei i ahau e ora ana = I shall remember it as long as I live  
He tika tonu ano tena = That is natural, that's the right thing (to do)
- 349 Tutu = a useful shrub, to be used with extreme care
- 351 E taku hine = o my girl, o my woman
- 354 Papa = the name of Earth herself; Rangi = the Sky-father  
Ki a koe, Rehua! = To you, Rehua!
- 355 Rupahu = nonsense
- 357 Haere, mou tai ata, moku tai ahiahi = Go, the morning tide for you, the evening tide for me (an old saying)  
E kui = a term of address and respect to an aged woman
- 359 Mokopuna = grandchild
- 363 Mauri/Mauriora = Life principle, thymos of humans; talisman or material symbol of that secret and mysterious principle protecting the mana (power/vitality) of people, birds, land, forests, whatever ...
- 365 Tangi = weep, mourn

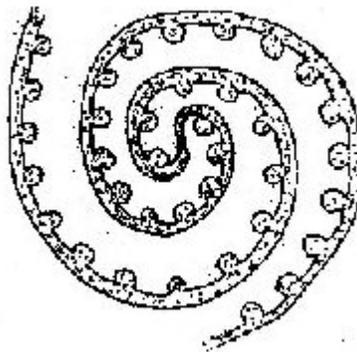
- 366 Tauranga atua = resting place for a god  
 Kiwa = god, also very old name for Pacific  
 Haere = Go
- 369 E pou = affectionate term of respect for an old person
- 373 Moko = facial tattoo pattern, sometimes used as a signature  
 in the old days  
 Tipuna = grandfather/mother
- 375 Pouwhenua = a long spear-club  
 Whare = house
- 376 Pakihi = a term for a swampy acidic barren type of land
- 379 Kai = food
- 382 Aotearoa = the shining bright land, an old name for New  
 Zealand  
 Karakia = prayers, sacred chants  
 Rahui = boundary markers, essentially tapu
- 383 Kia koa koe = wishing you joy
- 390 Hoha = fuss, nuisance  
 E taku hei piripiri, E tawhiri = endearments for children
- 395 Whanau = extended family group — a general term for  
 'family' now  
 E nga iwi o nga iwi = this is a pun. It means, O the bones of  
 the people (where 'bones' stands for ancestors or relations),  
 or, O the people of the bones (i.e. the beginning people, the  
 people who make another people)
- 407 Weka = hensized bird with inordinate curiosity. Tastes good,  
 too.
- 428 Kehua = ghosts  
 Karanga = call of invitation, welcome, mourning, onto a  
 marae  
 Kei whea? = Where?
- 430 Whakautua mai tenei patai aku = Answer this question of  
 mine  
 He aha koe i karanga ai ki a au? What did you call me for?  
 Did you call me?  
 He aha te mahi e mea nei koe kia mahia? = What do you want  
 me to do?
- 445 Ka ao, ka ao, ka awatea = it is dawn, it is dawn, it is daylight  
 Te mutunga — ranei te take = the end — or the beginning

## Appendix C

### EXAMPLES OF MAORI DOUBLE SPIRAL



Traditional Maori Double Spiral



Contemporary Maori Double Spiral