

When grief inhabits the desolate house . . .

Jon Battista

Hone Tuwhare's belief that the heart was irrepressible when grief inhabits the desolate house was affirmed by him in a 2001 interview. (Sharp) The other subjects he felt strongly about, the political issues, the relationships, and his 'dialogue' with the environment, the 'sea and the elements, the sky, the rain, sunshine [and] birds...' (Smith) received a lot of attention. Criticism dealing with the many poems involving death drew little comment however. The selection which appears in this analysis reveals that death has many moods. The relevance of the writer's Māori ancestry is an important part of this essay and I also consider the second of two inescapable facts. The first needs no elaboration other than a brief appreciation of the tongue-in-cheek humour in 'One-way trippers.' Death is no respecter of persons. On the distinction between the trappings of wealth that accompany the departing 'favoured' and the unpretentious 'lowly folk,' the learned man is certain: 'But one conclusive fact impresses me: they are all dead.' (Tuwhare 1987, 95) The second thing, truism or otherwise, is that death is not the end of things.

Many people had opinions, feelings and memories they wished to share following Hone Tuwhare's death in January 2008. This outpouring of tributes was a reflection to some extent of the critical interest and acclaim his poetry had attracted over the previous five decades. The phenomenal response which marked the end of a great life may also have accounted for the note of mild cynicism in Janet Hunt's poem 'Nothing mawkish, on the death of a poet': 'On the day your heart gave up,' she wrote, 'poets, scribes and politicians / scrambled for their pens.' (2008, 10) Suddenly, it seemed that everybody needed to be warmed by their memories of whatever encounter, small or extended, they had enjoyed with the writer. Or they wanted to be able to claim association with the man as if some of that great mana might smudge off on them.

Along with the many tributes came a desire, it seemed, to eulogize the work and the person by pinning down Tuwhare's 'poetic voice' with lots of words. This response was characteristic of the articles and interviews that had appeared over the years, among them this assessment by Cilla McQueen:

Tuwhare's is a Maori voice. A master and lover of his second language, English, he revels in its ample dimensions, exploits its flexibility and universality, questions its conventions and adapts it joyfully to uses as political as they are poetic. Grounded in the oral Maori traditions of his early upbringing, he uses te reo Maori to inform the poetry, English to allow its essence to be heard. (3)

English, and Tuwhare's tenacious attitude toward his work, did allow the communication of what were frequently Māori perspectives to a wide audience. But the idea of English *allowing* the essence of the poetry to be heard, especially in the context of a use of 'te reo Maori to inform the poetry', seems excessive. I think, if we are talking about Hone Tuwhare as a Māori voice, it was a Māori ethos and te reo, where used, which gave these texts the *essence* that enabled an awareness of something extraordinary being offered – even if English was the language of choice.

The view that the poet's work addressed universal themes and concerns was frequently aired. Similarly, he was Māori yet 'big enough to be a secure bridge' (Riach, 255-56) because his work defined Māori yet linked cultures. His work could be claimed by Māori and Pākehā, justifiably, since he drew on the formal elements and the literary artefacts of a number of European writers. Sometimes the poetry is exceptional because of the deliberate juxtaposition of cultures, as in 'Tangi.' (Tuwhare 1964, 16) In this poem one set of images leads towards a verse distinguished by end focus and the evocation of beauty even, or especially, in death. In the first three verses Shakespeare's Ophelia is summoned with artful grace:

I did not meet her
on the bordered path
nor detect her fragrance
in the frolic of violets
and carnations.

She did not stroll riverward
to sun-splash and shadows
to willows trailing garlands
of green pathos.

Step by frail step she traces her way towards a moment read or acted into existence but not, in this instance, death. In the final verse, death, not veiled by artifice, subsumes the fiction of the previous lines:

Death was not hiding in the cold rags
of a broken dirge . . .

But I heard her with the wind
crooning in the hung wires
and caught her beauty by the coffin
muted to a softer pain –
in the calm vigil of hands
in the green-leaved anguish
of the bowed heads
of old women.

This verse reverences the shared burden of care and its synaesthetic weaving of elements, like the green wreaths the elderly attendants wear to denote mourning and grief. The lines are less studied and more subtle. In ‘Tangi’ the personification of death succeeds at this point as the disclosure of an intensely personal experience for the writer, and as an expression of lived culture. Tangihanga are a huge concept for Māori.

I refer briefly here to three poems with resonance for both Māori and Pākehā readers, all of which relate to those dwellings that house the wairua of individuals and people.¹ The following lines are taken from the third stanza of Tuwhare’s poem ‘The Old Place’ (Tuwhare 1964, 18):

No one except the wind
saw the old place
make her final curtsy
to the sky and earth :

In his review of Tuwhare’s work Mac Jackson quotes Mason’s foreword to *No Ordinary Sun* in order to acknowledge ‘the main strength [drawn] from his own people’ (190), but principally conveys the universal resonance the work holds:

¹ The following discussion first appeared in Battista 2004, Vol 1, Ch. 1.

Not only does ‘curtsy’ give the movement of the house sinking to the ground, but by humanizing the house in the language of the theatre the noun (which denotes an appropriately feminine gesture) evokes all the associations which cluster around the time-honoured idea that ‘all the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players’. Wind, sky, and earth are also drawn into the humanization in their capacity as audience. (Jackson, 190)

This house, a player in a universal drama which localises the theme of nostalgia for Pākehā dwellings lost to time, is conveyed by a poet with an aptness for words that ‘almost always serve to humanize some inanimate object.’ (Jackson, 191) Yet this stage has a dual audience, in cultural precedent embedding a Māori whakapapa, where the wind, the sky and the earth, and the house are all part of that mythic lineage, and where the supremacy of sky and earth is implicitly acknowledged. I have wondered if this old lady is not the ancestral house Puhimoana-Ariki in the north where Mihipaea, Tuwhare’s mother, was taken after her death. Puhimoana-Ariki is the real and symbolic subject of Tuwhare’s poem ‘Not By Wind Ravaged’ (1964, 20):

Deep scarred

not by wind ravaged nor rain
nor the brawling stream :
stripped of all save the brief finery
of gorse and broom ; and standing
sentinel to your bleak loneliness
the tussock grass –

O voiceless land, let me echo your desolation.

The mana of my house has fled,
the marae is but a paddock of thistle.

Symbolising the experience of all Māori, as implied in the inclusive reference to the tussock (Tuwhare in Manhire, 279) that covers the expansive southern tracts of the country, the fall of the meeting house to the elements is secondary to the loss of mana which was the outcome of disputes over the land on which Puhimoana-Ariki was built.²

² Tuwhare: ‘The site on which [the meeting house] stood . . . became disputed ground and all work of a renovatory nature to the meeting house and dining place was abandoned and the site left to go back to gorse, blackberry and kahikatea.’ (Hunt 1998, 147) It was not until ten years after the Land March of 1975 that space for the new marae, Kohewhata, was formalised on land bequeathed to Tuwhare and his siblings from Mihipaea.

The third poem is 'A burnt offering to your greenstone eyes, Tangaroa' (Tuwhare 1987, 101):

When I go, Earth, I shall not succumb
to your pervasive clutch:

...

Burnt and sere, my soul on ashen wings
shall dust instead the leaning

greenstone walls of Tangaroa advancing,
crumbling . . .

*Ah, then watch him froth and gag, Earth.
Watch him heave!*

Tangaroa, intensely personalised in name and character, gags on one of his own, and on a concept with its concerns in a contemporary world since Tuwhare wanted 'the final encounter to be on his own terms' (Hunt 1998, 192) and to this end subscribed to the Euthanasia Society of New Zealand:

After death, [he said,] he [did] not want to lie on the marae but to be cremated, his ashes scattered on the four harbours he has known so well – Hokianga, Waitemata, Whanganui-a-Tara and Otakou. (Hunt 1998, 192)

Apart from 'disputes over the land' some of the tensions that surfaced in interviews and in his work derived from an experience in his childhood:

The fact is that Tuwhare has spent most of his life avoiding Northland. [. . .] One big reason for this is an abiding fear of being trammelled by tribal ties and oversolicitous relatives. He has never forgotten how, when he was five, and his mother had died, and her body lay in the house, people stood around drinking and, in his words, skiting that 'I looked after her better than you did' and 'I'm closer to her than you are.' (Welch, 20; 22)

Part of the poet's attitude is explained by the formal posturing at tangihanga he objected to in several of his poems. The practice where the tūpāpaku is claimed by another group, in indication of the mana that person commanded, gets an acerbic response in this tribute to Matiu in 'Tangihana':

Rest, Matiu. Lie easy
My voice grown tall has found legs

*I sense your apprehension: know
that your canoe teeters
on inconclusive reefs of argument*

I will beach your canoe
For I am your mother's kin
...

Northern blood of Matiu
hear me without preliminary
Your loud-mouthed declamations resolve
nothing
...
(Tuwhare 1970, 14)

Nonetheless, as Denis Welch later commented: 'he clearly has deep feelings about being back'. (22)
Iain Sharp also affirmed: 'Although he spent most of the second half of his life in Otago [. . .] he was
always proud of his Northland roots.' (Sharp) These things aside, he needed the creative silence of
Kākā Point, the stimulation of Tangaroa on his doorstep and their frequent skirmishes:

I'm isolated here. I'm not bothered by all the relatives calling in and annoying the hell out of
me. [. . .] It's a solitary job, this writing. I need the peace and I find it here. (Conway, 1)

In one of his most enjoyable poems, 'Country Visit' (Tuwhare 1972, 14-15) hell is an expletive with a
positive outcome:

But when my
dear
little
grandnephew banged
my shin with his tricycle, through clenched
teeth I hissed: not to worry. *Hell, no.*

After all the gardening is done and with a double dose of sisterly advice administered he settles down:

. . . in a house shaking to a pop tune
throbbing, I dangled my grandnephew high and by
the legs because the pain had gone from my shin
and my favourite niece said she would make
doughboys to go with the kamokamo, the meat
and the puha . . .

Bloody good to get home now and again.

In 'Grand-daughter Polly Peaches' (Tuwhare 1992, 23-24) death is kept waiting by a bond limited only by a pair of arthritic knees:

There's no time between
now and my transition
to say goodbye to you.

. . .

. . . No

you may NOT sit on my knees.
You don't KNOW how swiftly
they grow numb when blood
flow is cut off.

. . . – and when those Saints come
stompin in, well I ask you –

Now, be a good child, and piss off, will ya?

Pith off, y'thelf, Gwun-dud.

Here is the easy familiarity that tells us he's taught her well; she has mastered the words and the attitude if not the lisp. There is an edge to the poem of knowing time is running out. But when he is pulled back from the introspection of 'just going, thanks' and the prospect 'of starched and whitened angels,' the poem delivers its delightful coup de grâce. If we want to dwell on the inadvertent irony of the child telling him to piss off, when he has been contemplating that very act, the humour of the situation demands we enjoy her back-to-earth response. We may, if we choose to, resist the morbid or sad impulse to focus on the limited number of special audiences Polly Peaches can command. Or we can enjoy the way a chuckle outwits the expectation of a different outcome.

Tuwhare often portrayed death in disturbingly graphic detail. In 'The Sport' (Tuwhare 1970, 13) the humour of life after death experiences dispels the gravity of yet another leave-taking. During the funeral the rain holds off until 'the last clot of earth / had been patted down.' But when it does come down we are told how: 'jubilation ran high among / those who knew that his horses performed / rather well on a heavy track.' Having their winners perform well was not just an outcome for good punters. In 'dredging for [his] own bedraggled myths' ('Ron Mason,' Tuwhare 1987, 93) Tuwhare produced 'A Tail for Maui's Wife' (1974, 43), a less flamboyant account of the 'little death' that the protagonists in his 'love pomes' frequently enjoyed.

A Tail for Maui's Wife

Hine: I am moved
as water moved
by eel's verve
and impudence

Tuna: *I move with her*
I move against her
I move inside her
She is water

Maui: There, just behind
the gills, my fingers
dig his soft belly:
tighten

With his body coiling

hard and shuddery against
my wrists, I glop eel
from his hole

See, wife: I've chewed
his head off.
I shall grill him.
Throw wood on the fire

Hine: You disgust me
I am nerveless,
without pulse.
I am still water

The poet's note to this poem explains: 'Hine-a-te-Repo (the swamp-maid) complained one day, to her husband Maui, that Tuna (the eel) had touched her most improperly. Whereupon Maui caught the eel and killed him.' (Tuwhare 1974, 43) Originally published in Tuwhare's 1974 collection *Something Nothing*, this poem was included in K.O. Arvidson's essay 'The Emergence of a Polynesian Literature.' No comment is included on the poem other than the restated footnote and a comment on the title. *Something Nothing* 'apparently t[ook] its title from the Pidgin dialect of the Solomons and the Melanesian islands to the north through which Tuwhare has travelled – *samting nating*: a verbal shrug of the shoulders. . . . "This is the way we Maori are. Take it or leave it."' (28)

There are two stories in the poem, one the surface story, the 'tale' for public consumption – as opposed to the 'tail' – which the footnote seems to support. In this version, Hine is subjected to Tuna's 'improper advances' whereupon Tuna is properly punished by Māui. The poem begins as trilogy until Tuna is dispatched and a dialogue between husband and wife begins. In the second version, Hine, customarily unmoved as swamp-maid, is aroused or 'moved' by Tuna's 'verve and impudence,' words which coincidentally describe Māui. The sensual relation between eel and his natural environment – tuna's sinuous weaving through water – compares with Tuna's role in the performance in a play underlined by a scripted format and actors. The phallogocentric 'Tail for Māui's Wife,' a title which implicates Hine and Māui as much as Tuna, anticipates the sexual exchange identified in Tuna's speech. Māui's participation, over the next three verses describes a progression from foreplay, orgasmic release to detumescence – 'See, wife: I've chewed his head off.' Hine reverts to her former state but not before displaying a bit of post-coital coyness – 'You disgust me / I am

nerveless / without pulse / I am still water' – unmoving but still able to be moved, she is the environment in which Tuna interacts and lives.³

Whether it concerned the death of an ideal, a house, family and friends gone ahead, or a beloved mother, Tuwhare's writing embodied his 'thoughts' and his 'best feelings'⁴ about life as he experienced it. The poetic environments he created, in which death achieved an endless significance, grew out of this merging of inner and outer worlds. In 'Traffic Statistic for *Hone Whitau*' (Tuwhare 1987, 79-80) the poet reflects: 'Well, a physical parting is a desolate thing. It's so final' but he concludes: 'And I will say to you now, Hone, a poem / is just as hard to build as a concrete bridge. But they both / help people to get across . . .' The ellipse points to the start of the processes of communication, and of making the transition from one side to the other – but not before time.

Since the central issue in 'Pension Day Blues' (Tuwhare 1972, 18-19) concerns impending death, the 'blues' and the visit to the pub somewhere near the Domain in Auckland could be the result of a pensioner who has become aware of his mortality. But if death is the principal focus in the poem so is resisting the good manners of *Hine nui te pō*.

At noon today a sneak-thief dawn wearing dark
glasses sidled up to me and said: Can I
buy you a drink?
...

Later . . .

I had misgivings when he introduced me to
a couple of hard cases I already knew.
My sister twilight, he said. And the dark
sort behind her is our mother:
o, tell us another one, croaked
the morepork in the Domain behind
the hospital.

³ Elsdon Best refers to 'one of the most interesting myths pertaining to Maui [and the] concept of the phallic eel [. . .] The story concerns the ravishing or seduction of a woman by an eel, the eel being personified under the name of Tuna.' In one of many versions Māui builds a skidway up which Tuna is induced to crawl. 'Tuna the phallic eel, who had interfered with the wife of Maui, died on the ninth skid, as Tiki, the personified form of the phallus, perished (i.e., was enfeebled).' Best goes on to make the comparison between 'the pre-Christian myth of Eve and the serpent [in which] the phallic eel and the phallic serpent are the same.' (Best, 364-65)

⁴ Mentor and friend R.A.K. Mason advised: 'Write your thoughts, your best feelings, you know, about things . . . write freely and express yourself more without hedging yourself.' (Hunt, 'No Ordinary Son,' 2008, 25)

I'm no good at remembering names,

I said.

...

This poem reminded me of a northern myth recounted by Te Rangi Hiroa. In their passage towards Te Rerengawairua (The Spirit's Leap) the spirits of the dead cannot return once they drink from the waters of the stream Te Waioraropo (The Water-of-the-Underworld) unlike those who, not drinking, might still rejoin their bodies. From this place the wairua (spirit) passed on to 'the beach named Te Oneirehia, which may be [. . .] interpreted as the Twilight Sands.' (Buck, 429) By the end of 'Pension Day Blues,' a fair bit of drinking has taken place. The sun has been and gone, and, gender notwithstanding, the sneak-thief dawn has undergone a transformation. As the pensioner's first encounter, the sneak-thief corresponds to Hinetītama, the dawn maiden of the mythic account. The sun is next, twilight arrives later followed closely by 'the dark / sort . . . our mother'. Dawn, no longer 'the rosy-fingered type you read about' is now 'A bit / shady looking, even: with dirty finger-nails.' As in the myth she has become 'our mother' the Great Lady of the Night, Hine nui te pō⁵, who waits at the portal of the Underworld to receive him – and us. Twilight and 'our mother,' whose behaviour is 'impeccable' do not tell him to piss off or form a 'tight circle' to exclude him. The dubious inference is a circle which encloses him.

Although the clear progression of events in 'Pension Day Blues' underlines the inevitability of death there are other facets which suggest that resistance is a crucial element of the poem. The ruru, or morepork, which reveals the subterfuge behind the sneak-thief's introduction, is not only a harbinger of death but for some may serve a protective function as kaitiaki, or guardian. If naming the spectre makes it a reality, the pensioner can maintain the stance: 'I'm no good at remembering names, / I said.'

While the physical finality of death was defined by the images of the 'ritual earth' ('Lines to a Better Poet,' Tuwhare 1982, 27) and the determination not 'to succumb / to Earth's pervasive clutch' (Tuwhare 1987, 101), resolution ultimately lay in living the moment. Life was a performance in which Papatūānuku played a part. 'Papa-tu-a-Nuku (Earth Mother)' (Tuwhare 1987, 24) commemorated the Māori Land March, the protest against the further alienation of Māori land, which

⁵ Tāne, son of Ranginui and Papatūānuku, was the God of the Forests, who initiated an incestuous relationship with his daughter Hinetītama. When she asked him who her father was he avoided a direct answer, referring her instead to the posts of the house. Realising her shame, Hinetītama retires to Rarohenga, the Underworld, where she becomes Hine nui te pō.

began at Te Hapua, the northernmost settlement of Te Aupouri, on 14 September 1975 and ended at Parliament Buildings, Wellington, on 17 October.

We are stroking, caressing the spine
of the land.

...

with our sore but ever-loving feet:
hell, she loves it!

Squirming, the land wriggles
in delight.

We love her.

‘Papa-tu-a-Nuku (Earth Mother)’ expresses the affection the writer and the tangata whenua (the people of the land) have for the vibrant and responsive Papa they marched so many miles to save. This love, reciprocated in January 2008, saw the writer’s return to his papakainga, the homeground from which he grew. In time, the wind and the rain will erase the words on the stones of Wharepaepae, the family urupa at Kotahitanga marae but the fragments Hone Tuwhare left behind, the words we never got to hear or read, will continue to speak to us. I conclude with the following thoughts on ‘On a theme by Hone Taiapa’ (Tuwhare 1974, 6):

On a theme by Hone Taiapa

Tell me poet, what happens to my chips
after I have adzed our ancestors
out of wood?

What happens to your waste-words, poet?
Do they limp to heaven, or go down easy
to Raro-henga?

And what about my chips, when they’re
down – and out? If I put them to fire

do I die with them?

....

Bite on this hard, poet: and walk careful.
Fragmented, my soul lies here, there: in
the waste-wood, around.

Here carving and writing are the creative ground linking a man who carved from wood and another who carved with words. The 'living context' from which the poem emerged was the first Māori Writers' and Artists' Conference, Tūkāki Marae, Te Kaha, in 1973.⁶ Tuwhare read from his work, Hone Taiapa spoke on examples of carving from the Māori Carvers' Institute, Rotorua. Tuwhare later commented in his conference report that Taiapa's 'main work of course, stands out as most impressive of all – Tūkāki meeting house.' (Hunt 1998, 109)

In the poem, Tuwhare takes a deeply introspective look at the nature of the poet's and the carver's work, and its reliance on a Māori ethos. Assuming the voice of the master carver, the poem begins with the carver's challenge: 'Tell me poet.' At its conclusion the poem spirals back to the beginning and the carver's challenge is reiterated ('Bite on this hard poet: and walk careful'). These directives centre on the term 'adze.'

In the process of carving, the adze makes a distinctive sound as it 'bites' into the wood, beginning its journey of discovery and exploration into the timber. Three famous adze techniques, respectively known as ngao tū, ngao pae and ngao matariki are used in waka construction, for example.⁷ In 'On a theme by Hone Taiapa' the 'bite' of the poem's adze requires the poet to embark on a journey in which the theme of a spiritually endowed cultural identity links waste-wood and waste-words.

In the first stanza, the carver asks 'what happens to my chips / after I have adzed our ancestors / out of wood?' Here the physical expression 'adzed our ancestors / out of wood' from te Waonui o Tāne (the great forest of Tāne) linearly connects descendants with ancestors and gods. To this end a carver may say:

⁶ Hone Tuwhare in conversation with Taura Eruera: 'Most of my poems sprang up from job situations, from a living context, and to renew myself I've got to get back there again.' (Hunt 1998, 110)

⁷ 'Ngao: 1. v.t. [. . .] ngao pae, *work with coarse finish*; ngao tū, *with a medium finish*, ngao matariki, *with a fine finish*.' (Williams)

The belief I practise is that the image is already in the timber, the tree grew for this purpose, its whole existence was/is for the completion of this task. Thus the adze seeks out what is hidden within. (Coromandel)⁸

The second and third stanzas reinforce the relationship between waste-words and chips with contrastive phrases and imagery. 'Heaven' is juxtaposed with 'Raro-henga,' the abode of the spirits of the dead; 'down easy' contrasts with 'down – and out.' Both of these paired phrases suggest a transitional phase up to the point of completion marked by '– and out.' The ambivalence surrounding this transition results from a double play on the word 'chips.' From a practical perspective, the phrase 'down – and out' refers to a state of impoverishment. Writing poetry and carving are not lucrative professions. Similarly, while the saying 'when the chips are down' is evoked in describing the waste-wood put to fire it also refers to a time of testing and crisis:

Once you burn the chips your job is done. Others take over. At Tāpapakanga, when they thanked all and sundry, Gordon was heard to yell 'What about the carvers?' Should they get thanks? How often is it heard 'the carvers are unknown.' Do I die with the carving? No more job. No more money. One thing's for sure, once I have burnt those chips they really don't care, the people that is. In a whoosh of flame I have gone from being indispensable to nice to have you around, when will you be leaving, be sure to visit.
(Coromandel)

This time of crisis, and the aesthetic focus of the poem, however, lies in a spiritual dimension in which it is not simply the chips, or waste-words, which are sacred but what they represent:

The cultural concepts of *mauri*, *mana* and *tapu* are essential components of *whakairo*. The nature of *tapu* in the crafts is now a matter of personal choice rather than an imposition because no one believes that it is enforceable, either spiritually or physically, as it once was. Carvers involve themselves in ritual behaviour because it gives them a spiritual link to forebears who acted in the same way, using virtually the same processes. (Harrison, 117)

⁸ Johnny R Coromandel is a **carver from Ngāti Whanaunga, Hauraki**. His response to the poem contributed significantly to this critique of 'On a theme by Hone Taiapa.'

One such behaviour involves the prohibition against blowing on the carving to clear away the chips. Apart from an obvious practical element, this caution avoids the possible sacrilege of the work by spit. But also the work must not be given life before its time.⁹ In the poem the underlying protocol relates to the disposal of the waste-wood either by being buried, or burnt in a fire made specifically and solely for that purpose. All the questions the carver has asked, in relation to himself and the poet, focus at this point on the fire and a spiritual relationship with forebears which inspires the final enquiry and its response:

Is that my soul's spark spiraling; lost
to the cold night air? Agh, let me die
another hundred times: eyeball

to eyeball I share bad breath
with the flared nostrils of the night.
For it's not me I leave behind: not me.

During the creative process, the chips, and waste-words, have provided a record of the carver's industry and his approach towards his subject. On one level, the 'share[d] bad breath' suggests the restraints he has imposed on himself during this process, working long hours without the de-sanctifying presence of food and water. On another, the exchange of breath 'with the flared nostrils of the night' relates to old knowledges, when senses attuned to the promptings of Te Pō, the carver is able to realise the deep affinity he has with those who came before:

How many times have I sat there and watched the chips burning, thinking these thoughts, just me, other times and the boyz. I have given my all. I have nothing left, and in the end it is only me who truly believed. It was I whose soul spoke with them, received their counsel, felt their presence, and now they're gone, as though burnt up in the chips, what of my soul now the job is done? Does it leave with them? One thing is sure. I always felt the loss of a presence. Yes – let me die a hundred more times, for each death, I have lived or carved a hundred more. (Coromandel)

The works once completed belong to the people who commissioned, or who read them. They have become an expression of their readers' needs and desires, their responses and their ownership. The

⁹ Patricia Grace writes about the outcome of contravening this protocol in the Prologue of her novel *Potiki*. See Battista, 156.

thought 'For it's not me I leave behind: not me' (Tuwhare 1974, 6) looks forward to a time beyond the imposition of meanings upon the work. But for this brief period, the fragmented soul of the carver, the poet and the ancestors lies waiting on the floor until dispersing, artisan and tupuna go into the fertile darkness of the night.

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