

Indigenous Ritual Aesthetics on Stage:
A Survey of Contemporary Syncretic Theatre of Oceania.

By

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ABSTRACT:

The use of indigenous ritual (both formal and informal), ritual performance, and mythology in modern Oceanic theatre speaks directly to cultural practitioners and informed audience/readers. Various contemporary syncretic plays originating from Oceania will be analyzed for their connection to indigenous ritual. These plays include John Broughton's *Te Hokinga Mai (The Return Home)*, Sudesh Mishra's *Ferringhi*, Jo Nacola's *Gurudial and the Land*, Briar Grace-Smith's *Ngā Pou Wāhine* and *When Sun and Moon Collide*, Vilsoni Hereniko and Teresia Teaiwa's *Last Virgin in Paradise*, Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl's *Ka Wai Ola*, Albert Belz' *Te Maunga*, and Makerita Urale's *Frangipani Perfume*. Understanding the way in which syncretic theatre is created in postcolonial societies within Oceania will help to build a greater understanding of how cultures and communities are restructuring and reclaiming traditional cultural practices within their respective communities. Using various play-specific dramatic and anthropological theories, scripts are analyzed in order to identify the indigenous cultural element present within the respective scripts.

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I would be remiss not to acknowledge the work of various theatres around the Pacific. While none of them supported me directly, it is no small leap to say that without their willingness to produce new work in Oceania these plays might never have come to light. These theatres are focused on developing the indigenous or “local” voice and so embrace theatrical syncretism as part of the process toward reclaiming identity. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Taki Rua Theatre’s mission statement includes: “Envisioning and developing new, New Zealand work by encouraging new voices in Māori and English while providing professional development for the next generation of theatre practitioners” (“Four Strands”). This is a theatre that has devoted itself to developing work and new voices within Aotearoa New Zealand.¹ In Hawai‘i, Kumu Kahu Theatre has a mission to promote “local theatre” which, according to founder Dennis Carroll, includes both local and local Hawaiian (124-125). The mission statement of the theatre expressly states that its mission is: “to provide theatrical opportunities for the expression of local community lifestyles, [...] to provide training and theatrical experiences for local playwrights, directors, performers and other theatrical artists” (“Mission”). Kumu Kahua seeks to both present plays that explore the Hawaiian experience and provide training so that local theatre practitioners have the opportunity to add their voices to the development of a unique kind of theatre.² These theatres are just a small representation of the many individuals, performers, and practitioners who are dedicated to shaping and developing theatre in Oceania. While it is unknown what the future of syncretic theatre in Oceania might be, it is clear that there are theatres and artists throughout the

¹ For more on Taki Rua see the work of: Hone Kouka, David O’Donnell, Marc Maufort, and Lisa Warrington (amongst others).

² For more on Kumu Kahu Theatre, see the work of: Dennis Carroll and Josephine Lee (amongst others).

region dedicated to ensuring the development of future generations of theatre artists in Oceania.

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INTRODUCTION:

Building Foundations and Defining Terms

The climax of Albert Belz's play *Te Maunga* takes place in Aotearoa New Zealand on the peak of Mount Hikurangi on the first day of the new millennium. Two Māori brothers and an English expatriate have climbed the mountain in the hopes of seeing, and being cleansed by, the first rays of sunlight from a new dawn. When the brothers climbed the mountain in their youth, one brother saw the traditional landscape and daily activities of their homeland, the other, looking in the opposite direction, saw the lights of the big city and the bustling activities that accompany metropolitan areas. What the brothers and the English woman see now is a mystery, but on the peak of that mountain they are finally able to resolve the differences that have separated them all the years since their initial ascent.

Belz's play acts as an allegory for the current state of Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand (at least as Belz portrays it): straddling a mountain between two worlds and struggling to find their place in each. The allegorical connections deepen once this stage image is viewed through the lens of syncretic theatre theory. In Māori mythology sunlight is considered to have healing properties, so having the two Māori brothers and the British expatriate gathered together to feel the first light of dawn opens up the themes in the play. The play is no longer just about these two brothers and their divergent world-views finding common ground, it now takes on a deeper significance between both of the Māori brothers along with a British settler. Each character becomes an avatar for the population of Aotearoa New Zealand – they have hiked to the peak of the mountain together, and together they are offered the healing light of the new dawn.¹ Having this one connection to Māori mythology affects the play in such a way that it becomes more than just a play about two Māori brothers;

¹ More on *Te Maunga* can be found in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

it becomes an allegory for all peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand, both indigenous and settlers, finding a way to come together in the new millennium.

Before some of the connections to indigenous ritual and ritualized performance can be made however, it is important to first establish a working vocabulary and acknowledge the theoretical frameworks upon which this thesis is built. This chapter will begin by discussing syncretic theatre and the theories surrounding it. It is important to examine these ideas as this thesis uses syncretic theatre theory throughout as a basis for play analysis. These opening sections help to explain and survey the theories and terms that will later be employed in this study. Structuring the chapter in this way allows for both clarity and focus when analyzing theories and concepts, as well as allowing for the jargon and the vocabulary specific to the field to be placed upfront. This study uses syncretic theatre theory as a basis to examine a range of Oceanic plays – specifically John Broughton’s *Te Hokinga Mai (The Return Home)*, Sudesh Mishra’s *Ferringhi*, Jo Nacola’s *Gurudial and the Land*, Briar Grace-Smith’s *Ngā Pou Wāhine* and *When Sun and Moon Collide*, Vilsoni Hereniko and Teresia Teaiwa’s *Last Virgin in Paradise*, Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl’s *Ka Wai Ola*, Albert Belz’s *Te Maunga*, and Makerita Urale’s *Frangipani Perfume*. The various plays will be analyzed in order to illuminate dramatic texts which, while working within Western dramaturgical structures, employ metaphysical, spiritual, and ritual elements as a means of reclaiming and redefining cultural modes. This chapter, much like Belz’s *Te Maunga*, is the base of the mountain that must first be climbed if there is any hope to reach the peak and the awaiting daylight.

Ritual and Theatre

Many theatre practitioners in the West have been trying (in earnest) over the last hundred years or so to rediscover and/or recapture the ritualistic and metaphysical

connections that used to be found in early Western drama. Grotowski's Theatre Laboratories and paratheatrical work, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, Schechner's theories on ritual and performance, The Living Theatre, Brook's Holy Theatre, even the writings of Gordon Craig and Richard Wagner aspire toward the act of transcendence for the actor and in some cases the audience (Rappaport *Ritual and Religion...* 1-2). Colonialism's influence was not just limited to the indigenous cultures being subjugated; it could be argued that the desire to reintroduce ritual into Western performance bloomed from the interchange of ideas between the colonized and the colonizers. After all, Artaud's theories developed in part after he saw a Balinese dance performance in a Paris exhibition. However, the metaphysical world was once no stranger to the Western stage. In this modern era it is easy to forget that the witches of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* – written in 1606 – were featured on stage incanting their strange spells, while at the same time actual witch trials were being conducted throughout the country.² Witches, spirits of dead kings and fathers, and other metaphysical incarnations were not out of place in the Elizabethan worldview. It has only been in the last hundred years or so – in part because of colonialism and globalization – that Western theatre has sought out ways to reclaim the sacred and reintroduce the supermundane. There are certain elements that are essential to the ritual experience:

- 1.) A unified congregation
- 2.) Actions that must be seen through to completion
- 3.) Truthfulness (at least for the practitioners)
- 4.) A unified and universally understood purpose
- 5.) Offers a permanent change³

² See: Witches of Warboys Witch Trials (England, 1589 - 1593); Pendle Witch Trials

³ See the work of Roy A. Rappaport.

Once the component parts of ritual are understood, then ritual can be recognized when it is placed inside of a framework for which it was not initially designed to fill. Discussing syncretic theatre requires more than just examining the nature and framework of existing ritual in isolation; for the purpose of this thesis, and the study of syncretic theatre in general, it is essential to note the way that rituals operate within Western dramaturgical frameworks.

One thing on which all the major theorists seem to agree is that theatre and ritual are not the same thing.⁴ They may share certain characteristics, but they exist in two separate spheres within the performative realm.⁵ While they may exist in separate spheres, they do share common traits. One of these common traits that ritual and theatre share is the ability to

⁴ In his book, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Rappaport goes further in his discussion of why theatre can never be ritual. He directly compares a number of the elements found in both ritual and theatre to make his argument.

⁵ Richard Schechner also discusses the performance continuum between theatre and ritual; to Schechner the polar ends of the continuum are entitled “Efficacy” and “Entertainment” (*Ritual, Play, Performance* 207). He notes: “The basic opposition is between efficacy and entertainment, not between ritual and theatre. Whether one calls a specific performance ritual or theatre depends on the degree to which the performance tends toward efficacy or entertainment. No performance is pure efficacy or pure entertainment” (207). Practitioners during this time did not consider themselves to be working in syncretic theatre, rather they referred to their field as “Interculturalism,” which seemed more interested in appropriation and leveling than combining. As Pavis notes of Schechner: “Schechner is not afraid of mixing (even of leveling) cultures; indeed he locates this as a principal characteristic of any cultural fact” (41). Pavis also says of Robert Wilson: “Wilson has no concern for cultural exactitude, his only interest in other traditions being on the level of how they might be used in his own aesthetic project” (99). The intercultural work of theatre practitioners such as Brook, Schechner, Grotowski, and others seem to have more in common with appropriation and evisceration of ritual performance/events than with their honest incorporation. This disregard of the original purpose of the ritual event is generally not found within syncretic theatre. At the other end of the scale are theorists like Joanne Tompkins, Helen Gilbert, and Roy A. Rappaport who are more interested in pointing out the separation of theatre from ritual, rather than trying to find common structural unities. The main criticism Gilbert and Tompkins level at Schechner and those who espouse similar theories is that; “his [Schechner’s] scheme ascribes ritual status to so many activities that ritual becomes diluted to the point of being any meaningful activity that has a sense of ceremony, an actant, and an audience [...] The distinctions between ritual and theatre must be acknowledged if either is to have agency” (*Post-Colonial Drama* 56-59). According to Gilbert and Tompkins, without understanding and celebrating the differences between ritual and theatre, then both ritual and theatre lose whatever power they have.

communicate. The role of ritual, according to Bernard Spilka, is “a means of communicating both with the supernatural and concurrently with oneself and others” (368). This act of communication is of particular interest to this thesis.⁶ In a way, this process of communication plays into the definition of Western theatre.⁷ In ritual, communication is established between participants and the spirit world, whereas communication in theatre happens between the audience and the performers (*Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance* 1348). While both ritual and theatre share the ability to communicate, the two must not be equated. This thesis is not attempting to enter the debate surrounding the connections between ritual and theatre – for the purpose of this thesis ritual and theatre exist as two separate and distinct modes of communication and performance.

Here, ritual and theatre are examined as two separate elements that, when combined as they are in syncretic theatre, result in the emergence of new patterns of performance and codification. Gilbert and Tompkins discuss the nature of ritual within theatre:

In many cases, dramatized rituals keep some sacred elements/functions, but they are also secularized as part of a larger activity that is arts and entertainment based. While this does not necessarily deny the sacred quality of the ritual, it does force it to interact with the secular. The resultant coexistence of ritual and drama

⁶ See Tremmel, W.C. *Religion: What is it?*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1984.; Pruyser, P. *A Dynamic Psychology of Religion*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.; Lawson, E.T. & R.N. McCauley. *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

⁷ For the purpose of this thesis, the definition of “theatre” comes from the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*: “[...] for a performance to be ‘theatre’ requires two sets of participants – audience and performers – and an organized spatial relationship between them. A theatrical event, a collaboration between spectators and performers, is a construct of its participants. [...] The tentative nature of any definition of theatre, however abstract or general, is made necessary by the great variety of theatrical traditions that have flourished throughout the world and continue to expand in their diversity” (1348).

preserves and disseminates traditional forms and practices.

Nevertheless, even when ritual's overlap with drama appears to associate the two very closely, they must be recognized as distinct practices. (60-61)

What Gilbert and Tompkins are getting at is that even though the ritual and the secular dramatic elements/devices might intermingle, the resultant product (the syncretic theatre performance) is not a ritual. The ritual remains a separate practice even if/when the sacredness of the ritual is retained and carried over into the secular performance. That the representative plays and playwrights utilize indigenous ritual practices in their writing is evident, as will be shown in future chapters of this work.

Syncretic Theatre: Defined

Not to belabor a point, but Belz's final stage image in *Te Maunga* is an excellent metaphor for syncretic theatre. Syncretic theatre, like the two brothers and their English companion, incorporates elements of both the indigenous world and the Western world; it combines traditions brought by European colonizers with performance traditions already in place. Christopher Balme, one of the first to really define the nature of syncretic theatre, describes it as "The process whereby heterogeneous signs and codes are merged together can be termed 'theatrical syncretism'" (*Decolonizing the Stage*, 1).⁸ Syncretism has long been

⁸ Balme gives a more detailed definition in "Indian Drama in English: Transcreation and Indigenous Performance Tradition." (Post)Colonial Stages: Critical & Creative Views on Drama, Theatre & Performance. ed. Helen Gilbert. West Yorkshire: Dangaroo Press, 1999. 146-160. He notes: "Syncretic theatre can be defined as those theatrical products which result from the interplay between the Western theatrico-dramatic tradition and the indigenous performance forms of a postcolonial culture. Syncretic theatre is in most cases a conscious,

recognized as a factor in the creation of postcolonial drama from the former (and in some cases current) colonies. Balme's research specifies what syncretic theatre is and analyzes how it is constructed, allowing research into the overall process – rather than just attributes analyzed in individual plays – to be accomplished.

Postcolonial⁹ theatre theory has long pointed to the syncretic elements within dramatic productions. Gilbert and Tompkins acknowledge this in *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* when they state: “When traditional performance elements are incorporated into a contemporary play, they affect the play's content, structure, and style, and consequently, its overall meaning/effect” (54). The effect the indigenous performance elements have, along with the way in which those performance elements are incorporated into a Western dramaturgical framework, is where syncretic theatre focuses its analysis. This incorporation of indigenous elements is not simply referring to superficial exoticisms that can be found in Western dramatic texts since the Renaissance. The indigenous performance elements are not just there to add an exotic flair to a Western piece. In syncretic theatre, as Balme notes,

[...] there exists a consciously sought-after tension between the meanings

programmatic strategy to fashion a new form of theatre in the light of colonial or postcolonial experience” (147).

⁹ The spelling ‘post-colonial’ is also used/accepted by scholars. See Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back*. 2nd Edition. London: Routledge, 2002. 197-198: “The use of the hyphen seems to us, then and now, to put an emphasis on the discursive and material effects of the historical ‘fact’ of colonialism, resisting an increasingly indiscriminate attention of cultural difference and marginality of all kinds.” Also: Appiah, Anthony Kwame. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. London: Methuen, 1992. 241. Some even argue that the term “postcolonial” is just a new form of colonialism, a kind of academic colonialism. For more on this see: Parry, Benita. *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*. London: Routledge, 2004. For more on the theoretical origins of postcolonial studies see: Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon, 1978.; --- “Orientalism Reconsidered.” *Culture Critique*. 1 (1985); Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.; Spivak, G.C. *In Other Words: Essays in Culture Politics*. London: Methuen, 1987.

engendered by these texts in the traditional performative context and the new function within the Western dramaturgical framework. [...] cultural texts retain their integrity as bearers of precisely defined cultural meaning.

(5)

This retention meaning is important to this study in that indigenous/initiated audience members will be able to read those signifiers within the Western dramaturgical piece. Syncretic theatre carries with it the ideas of dynamic cultural change; as Balme notes, “Syncretism can thus be reinterpreted as one of the positive results of direct or indirect colonization and cultural imposition” (“Inventive Syncretism” 9).

Syncretic theatre, it should be noted, is a transitional theatre. The theatre deemed syncretic today is being absorbed into the performance traditions and cultural mindset of those societies in which it is present. As Bode Sowande notes,

Syncretism is a stage of derivation from the history of any two or more cultures coming into contact via either the productive routes of trade, the coercive means or conquest, or the vagaries of human migration. It is therefore one of the dynamics of cultural evolution, by force or by pastoral means. (19)

Syncretic theatre serves as a marker for possibility; it is an exploration by postcolonial playwrights in their efforts to personalize and interact with varying performance forms. As Balme notes, syncretic theatre is not simply an “aesthetic phenomenon” but is rooted in cultural change and interaction (*Decolonizing the Stage* 3). Ultimately the dramatic styles and

conventions born out of theatrical syncretism will no longer be defined as syncretic theatre at all (16).

Efficacy and Ritual Change

In *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama*, Balme makes an important argument:

In order to gain an intercultural perspective on the question of ritual and theatre, it is important to bear in mind that in many cultures the aesthetic functions performed by the profane activity of theatregoing are in fact contained and carried out in the sacred actions of ritual observance, where there is frequently no apparent specialization and division of labour. For this reason the emphasis on the distinction between ritual and theatre, which is so characteristic of Western theatrical theory, must be re-examined for those cultures which do not evidence such a distinction. (67)

As Balme rightly notes, many cultures have performance forms that blur the line between the sacred and the profane. The distinction made in the West between entertainment and the efficacious are not as cut-and-dry as they are often made out to be by Western theoreticians. While in the West it is easy to separate ritual and theatre into two separate categories, it must be remembered that many indigenous cultures – including those in Oceania – make little to no distinction between performance or theatre and ritual.

While it is true that the focus of the analysis will be on the scripts themselves, this does not mean that performance will be ignored completely. The scripts themselves will function as a kind of archive of – or roadmap toward – live performance. Many of these scripts (*Frangipani Perfume*, *Last Virgin in Paradise*, etcetera) were published after their initial performance, so the published scripts reflect those initial productions. In addition, many of the scripts also had their premiere production directed by the playwright(s), meaning that the published/written material is directly linked to the playwright's vision as reflected by the collaborative process of performance. In terms of the ritual element within each play, the intention of this study is not to directly analyze ritual nor argue for commonalities between ritual and a theatrical performance (as defined by Western dramaturgy). The intention of this thesis is to recognize the ritual element within script. For the purposes of this thesis, understanding the unifying factors that operate within ritual is simply a means to an end. The ritual's efficacy is determined by the participants. A performance of *Te Maunga* or *Ferringhi* will have a different impact on an audience in New Zealand or Fiji respectively, from that which it would on an audience in Berlin, New York, or London. So this study will focus on where those elements of ritual that exist within the plays for those who are able to find and engage with them. It is this amalgamation that forms one of the major elements of syncretic theatre.

Being Aware of the Dangers

Within the varied Pacific nations and micro-nations in the islands that make up Oceania, there exist many unique cultures and culture-specific beliefs. While island groupings have been described based on similarities of language and mythology,¹⁰ there is

¹⁰ i.e.: Polynesia, Melanesia, Micronesia.

still a unique cultural makeup existing on each of the islands, island groups, and archipelagos. Within the nation of Fiji alone, language and cultural practice vary from island to island, sometimes from valley to valley. With all these similar yet unique cultural and ritual practices, the question might be asked: Does this study run the risk of becoming comparative ethnography? The accusation comes out of the work of Edward Said.¹² Said argues that any time an individual from one culture discusses another culture there is an automatic power dynamic constructed which hinges on the otherness of the culture being discussed. Linda Tuhiwai Smith makes similar arguments in her call for more indigenous researchers. As an indigenous scholar, her view on academia is through the lens of the colonized; she states: “From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” (1). While this may seem to be purporting a kind of academic isolationism (you talk about your culture and I will talk about mine), Said states that this was not his intent:

You know, I think one of the great flaws of *Orientalism* is the sense that it may have communicated that there is no alternative to that, which is a sort of hands-off sort of thing. That's not what I would imply. And I think, at the very end I say something like that. That there is a kind of "already given," you know, a sort of messiness and involvement of everyone of everyone else. It's just that I would like to think that the inequalities, as between, say, a native informant and a white ethnographic eye, weren't so great. (“Criticism, Culture, and Performance,” 41-42)

¹² See Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1993.; --- *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

By Said's own admission, his argument is not that all Western academics should refrain from writing about other cultures; nor is Smith calling for an end to all extra-cultural research. Said and Smith are simply asking for parity: that the academic material gathered be informed by and respectful of that which is being investigated. Academic investigation, when done responsibly, is not a new form of colonial oppression; a shark may be able to bite you, but that does not mean it will. A number of factors are involved and, once we are aware of those factors, we can better navigate the waters. Additionally, as has been stated before: this study does not endeavor to directly compare cultures or cultural practices. While plays may be grouped together based on similar structural attributes, the indigenous properties will not be judged based on their similarities or differences to any imposed ideal. This thesis will be a survey of Oceanic syncretic plays. The scripts that are investigated were written by the authors, not transcribed by some outside anthropologist or ethnographer. The art of these playwrights has not been compromised; this is the genre and style in which they chose to present their art.

When writing in 1985, Subramani commented on the lack of plays written by Pacific Islanders up until that point. The reason he gave for this was that oral traditions, including what he calls "skits and playlettes" (68), still met the entertainment needs of the indigenous peoples and that "The important breakthrough for written plays would be when traditional music, dance, poetry are incorporated in a major contemporary play" (68). That is – in part – what this thesis examines: those indigenous performative elements found within Western dramaturgical structures. The plays examined here are the plays for which Subramani was wishing: plays that interact with, and incorporate, traditional oral performance events. As Finnegan states, "Individual creativity building on established themes and audience expectations is part of contemporary tradition [...] and thus is itself as authentic as earlier

practices – of which it probably represents a continuation” (14). The fact that these plays are written and do not meet the expectations some may have set forth for traditional indigenous literature does not mean that they should be negated or somehow marginalized.

Positioning Statement

Before going further I should take a moment to position myself in terms of who I am as a researcher and what theories and theorists I am building my work on. I freely acknowledge my position as a non-indigenous scholar who is living and working in Oceania. I approach this research in the spirit of sharing knowledge with indigenous playwrights and theatre practitioners, with the aim of extending scholarship on Oceanic theatre.

My study of contemporary theatre in Oceania began in 2005 when I began my Master of Fine Arts degree in Theatre with an emphasis in Playwriting at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. I was introduced to the theatre of Oceania in a graduate level course taught by W. Dennis Carroll (founder of Kumu Kahua Theatre and noted playwright) and Vilsoni Hereniko (Rotuman playwright and filmmaker) that gave me an immense appreciation for the theatre coming out of Oceania and the stylistic choices made by Pacific Islander playwrights. Seeing the way that these contemporary playwrights out of Oceania incorporated ritual practice into their work immediately excited me. While the fact that there are spiritual and ritual connections within these plays is nothing new to Oceanic scholars and playwrights, it was new to me. My purpose in this research is not to appropriate, or level, the sacred, but to illuminate one way in which theatre is able to connect to its community on a deeper level.

Review of Current Scholarship

My primary sources will be the play scripts themselves. The research around these plays will be dependent on the nature of the script and the syncretic elements it utilizes. The specific research around these plays will come from a variety of sources: anthropological studies, cultural studies, journal articles, narratives, previously published interviews, etcetera. I will be examining each script in terms of how the play handles various established conventions found within most Western drama. While some plays will not fit neatly into Western dramatic models, that will not disqualify them from analysis. This simply means that I will need to alter my approach accordingly for each specific script.

The methodology I plan to utilize for my research will be varied and for the most part dependent on the needs of specific scripts. Overall, the methodology I intend to use focuses on Christopher B. Balme's theories surrounding postcolonial syncretic theatre. While general postcolonial theory will also be used, it is Balme's analysis of syncretic theatre that will provide the major basis for my research. Wherever possible, in the analysis of indigenous ritual and ritualized elements, I will use the work of indigenous practitioners, writers, and scholars as primary source material.

Research in the field of Syncretic Theatre in Oceania has been pioneered by Balme in his books *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama*, and *Pacific Performances: Theatricality and Cross-Cultural Encounters in the South Seas*, along with new studies like *Remaking Pacific Pasts: History, Memory, and Identity in Contemporary Theatre from Oceania* by Diana Looser. While there are anthropological writings on indigenous theatre in the Pacific, new theatre emerging from Oceania is still relatively under-researched despite the work of these theorists and historians. Part of this has to do with the nature of syncretic theatre. Syncretic theatre is a theatre of change, it has not

yet settled into any distinct genre, and as such it is harder for scholars to “pin down.” In addition, it is important to note that the writing of indigenous authors in Oceania is considered writing by Fourth World peoples.¹³ Consequently, it is often difficult for these works to find publication, production, or media support within their (post)colonial societies. This is especially true for the plays that criticize the colonial culture, or diverge too drastically from the expected Western dramaturgy (Balme “Between Separation and Integration” 180-181). Syncretic works are sometimes dismissed as being inferior attempts at Western-style writing, rather than acknowledged as a form of transitional theatre. Some of the plays to be discussed have never had any published studies attached to them, others may be mentioned in larger works, while a few have had some limited academic exposure in the form of journal articles or book/anthology introductions.

The plays of Briar Grace-Smith which will be analyzed later in this study have had some exposure to academia. Mary Trotter mentions Grace-Smith’s work in her summary of the 1997 International Women Playwright’s Conference: “New Zealander Briar Grace-Smith’s *Nga Pou Wahine* develops a rich narrative about several generations of a Maori family, revealing the ways contemporary Maori negotiate the expediciencies of modern, westernized New Zealand and the traditions of Maori language and culture” (523). *Ngā Pou Wāhine* is also mentioned in a review of Helen Gilbert’s book, *Postcolonial Plays: An Anthology*. Here, the play is described as a, “[...] mournful search for identity through the ancestor spirit Waiora of the young Maori woman Kura [...]” (Fensham, 114). While both of these accounts are more descriptive than analytical, there has been some analysis of her work. The closest anyone has come to detailed analysis of her plays lies in the work of Marc Maufort, Helen Gilbert, and Alice Te Punga Somerville. Te Punga Somerville offers a few

¹³ See: Graburn, Nelson. *Ethnic and Tourist Arts*. “[...] the collective name for all aboriginal or native peoples whose lands fall within the national boundaries and techno-bureaucratic administrations of the First, Second, and Third Worlds” (1).

sentences on the relationship between *maramataka* and the play *When Sun and Moon Collide*, stating: “The structure of *When Sun and Moon Collide* is derived from Māori knowledge of the lunar cycle. The play starts on Mutuwhenua [...] and then cycles through a month until the climax takes place, also on Mutuwhenua” (Foreword, *When Sun and Moon Collide*, viii). While the structural relationship between the play and the lunar cycle is mentioned, no further analysis into the relationship is offered. Helen Gilbert makes a similar statement about *Ngā Pou Wāhine* in her introduction to the play: “The various monologues that make up this text can be seen as analogous to the individual speeches of the marae ritual” (Introduction, *Postcolonial Plays*, 349). In his analysis of Briar Grace-Smith’s plays, Marc Maufort notes the metaphysical connections in her work.

In Grace-Smith’s works, the element introducing this “magic” universe is often connected with the spirituality of Māori craftsmanship, such as the carving of pous in *Ngā Pou Wāhine* and the weaving of tukutuku panels in *Purapurawhetū*. Grace-Smith’s plays thus exhibit closer affinities to Māori carvings and woven panels than to the rhetoric of Western poetic naturalism. (*Performing Aotearoa*, 248)

Of all the published scholarly work on Grace-Smith’s plays, few offer the kind of analysis this thesis offers. While there are tantalizing hints as to the nature of the metaphysical in her plays, the references are usually only made briefly without any greater discussion of the syncretic elements at work.

The work of Teresia Teaiwa and Vilsoni Hereniko has had a similar amount of scholarly exposure as that of Briar Grace-Smith. Teaiwa and Hereniko’s play, *Last Virgin in Paradise*, has been discussed in three published academic articles. The first article, “The

Tourist and the Native: Rereading Myths of Conquest in *Lucy* and *Last Virgin in Paradise*” by Carolyn Cooper, analyses the play as a rereading of, “[...] the myths of discovery and conquest that are embedded in the transnational project of tourism” (21) and examines “[...] the contradictory motivations of island migration that drive the native to escape the hellish prison of paradise” (21). While the article makes some interesting arguments that may color analysis of the play, it is not concerned at all with the play’s connection to traditional performance in Oceania. While the article by Sina Va’ai focuses mainly on how the play reflects national identity, there are a few mentions of the script’s use of traditional performance elements. Va’ai notes; “The power of the clown (known as *han mane’ak su* in Rotuma and referred to in Samoan tradition as a *fa’aluma*) and Pacific comedy is demonstrated in Vilsoni Hereniko’s play, *Last Virgin in Paradise* [...] which is based on a true story told by Teresia Teaiwa” (“Pacific Utopias,” 17). The role of clowning is again mentioned later in the article: “The wedding feast in scene two demonstrates Hereniko’s ability to blend a Pacific flavour into his work with traditional forms of Polynesian performance arts like secular clowning” (19). The use of traditional performance modes is secondary to Va’ai’s analysis of the portrayal of national identity within the piece. The final article by David O’Donnell is the most thorough in terms of its analysis and does an excellent job breaking down the play scene-by-scene. The focus of O’Donnell’s article is on the play’s satirical response to the work of Margaret Mead (and other academics), noting: “[The] intertextual engagement with Mead’s anthropological Pacific studies is [...] apparent in the Fijian play *Last Virgin in Paradise*” (“Quoting the ‘Other’” 116). While O’Donnell’s article does not specifically explore the intersection between indigenous ritual and Western performance, he does make some interesting connections to the performative sections in the play:

Sub-titled “a serious comedy,” *Last Virgin in Paradise* adopts the style and parodic stance of Pacific ritual clowning to deconstruct European stereotypes of Pacific women. [...] In effect, the entire play is an extension of the overt clowning in [scene 2], with the constant inverting of expectations of the European characters underlining the point that there is no easy access to understanding cultural practices. (“Quoting the ‘Other’” 118)

O'Donnell's observations here are of great interest to this study. While he does not go into as much detail in terms of describing the ritual clowning practice itself, he does recognize the connection to ritual clowning.

Sudesh Mishra's play *Ferringhi* is mentioned in Vijay Mishra's book on the literature of the Indian diaspora. In his analysis of the play as commentary to the 1987 coup in Fiji, Mishra makes the following statement: “[...] Mishra's play space in a hyperreal rendition of it [tragedy], is structured to re-create an ‘in-betweenness’ around an alternative scansion of temporality” (49). V. Mishra also notes that the play is centered around a kava bowl, and the implications surrounding that: “The centerpiece of laughter in Fiji is the *talanoa* around the *tanoa*, the kava bowl. *Talanoa/tanoa* echo each other, dragging one into the other through euphonic and socially semiotic [...] connections” (45). These two observations directly relate to this study's approach to the play; the way in which the kava ceremony is utilized as a dramatic construct of play is the primary area of interest. In John O'Carroll's introduction to the play, he focuses on *Ferringhi*'s power as a vehicle for memory. He states: “For this is a play about memory as a discursive site of home and belonging. [...] Memory here is paramount. We *are* what we remember” (*Beyond Ceremony* 318-319). All of these scholars make mention of the kava ritual as an important structural component of the piece.

Jo Nacola's play, *Gurudial and the Land* (which is similar to *Ferringhi* in its use of kava to create and reinforce community), is only mentioned briefly in Subramani's study entitled *South Pacific Literature: From Myth to Fabulation*. Here, the author has only the following to say of the play: "'Gurudial and the Land' is also interesting for the use it makes of traditional rhetoric which at moments raises the play to a poetic level" (67). Other than this one line, there is no other mention of the play.

Further analysis of Makerita Urale's play *Frangipani Perfume* in this thesis will focus on the traditional dance utilized within the play, as well as the creation of frangipani oil and how that unique cultural knowledge and practice grounds the play and the characters within it. In his introduction to the play, David O'Donnell makes a similar observation, stating:

The loss of cultural knowledge is evoked in the play's title. Pomu imagines that the beautiful oils made by women in the islands must be made by a complex scientific process, with all sorts of chemicals. Her scientific knowledge obtained through her New Zealand upbringing therefore blinds her to her own heritage. At the end of the play, the older sisters explain to Pomu the natural process by which the frangipani blossoms are made into perfume by the village women. (v)

O'Donnell's observations on the nature of the play's relationship to community and cultural knowledge directly relate to the approach this study will take in the analysis of the play. In another article, O'Donnell makes note of the play's criticism of the over-sexualization of women in Oceania, stating: "In Makerita Urale's *Frangipani Perfume* [...] Samoan sisters critique studies of Pacific women by famous anthropologist Margaret Mead, suggesting that these have contributed to sexualized stereotypes of Pacific women" ("Quoting the 'Other'"

115-116). This is also apparent in the play's critique of the "dusky maiden" stereotype to be discussed later in the thesis.

Each of the studies mentioned here offer glimpses into the nature of the syncretic connections within the respective plays, but none fully examines that relationship in isolation. Each mentions the syncretic element in passing before moving on to the main argument each scholar is endeavoring to make. This thesis will look at the syncretic element directly, in a way that has never been fully explored before.

Structuring this Study

My thesis will be broken down into three chapter, each focused on a distinct kind of ritual action: Formal Ritual Action, Ritualized Performance, and Informal Ritual Action. Under these three headings I will cover a wide range of ritualized performance in Oceanic syncretic theatre and how those performance practices are reinvented and recodified within Western dramaturgical traditions. While the plays I will analyze are by no means the only Oceanic plays which utilize ritualistic elements, they offer the most clear evidence for my argument. Each play will be grouped into one of those sections mentioned above, starting with formal ritual action.

Formal Ritual Action will be defined as those actions/activities which contain a conscious formality and traditionalism. I wanted to avoid using the term "ritual" as a generalized category, since all three of my research categories would fall under the relatively broad Western understanding of ritual or of something which possesses ritualized elements. The Formal Ritual Action category in my thesis (Chapter One) will cover elements of indigenous traditional performative action such as kava preparation, welcome ceremonies, funerary rites, birth and marriage celebrations, rites of passage, and other actions that carry

with them a self-conscious formalized traditionalism. To illustrate the way Formal Ritual Action operates within the syncretic theatre of Oceania, four plays will be analyzed: John Broughton's *Te Hokinga Mai (The Return Home)*, Sudesh Mishra's *Ferringhi*, Jo Nacola's *Gurudial and the Land*, and Briar Grace-Smith's *Ngā Pou Wāhine*. Once the area of formal ritual action has been explored, we will then move on to the area of ritual performance.

Chapter Two deals with Ritual Performance, this would cover those areas of indigenous performance which are more liminoid in nature. These are the performative elements which have a connection to the spiritual realm, but which lack some of the formality found in traditional ritual performance. This would include indigenous dance, song, chant, clowning traditions, storytelling, and other similar performance traditions. These performance elements are often part of those ceremonial actions/events dealt with in the preceding section but are limited in terms of scale and intention. These are the performative actions in which individual performers find connections to the metaphysical realm. The Plays analyzed in that chapter are: Vilsoni Hereniko and Teresia Teaiwa's *Last Virgin in Paradise*, Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl's *Ka Wai Ola*, and Makerita Urale's *Frangipani Perfume*. Once each of the plays has been examined, we will move on to those plays that feature informal ritual action.

Chapter Three of my thesis covers Informal Ritual Action, this includes mythology, weaving, carving, astrology, horticulture and husbandry, and other knowledge bases which are unique to the particular culture. These are the knowledge bases in which objects or elements are connected to the spirit world either through human action or natural process. The plays under examination in this section are: Briar Grace-Smith's *When Sun and Moon Collide*, and Albert Belz's *Te Maunga*.

Summary

The main thrust of this introductory section has been toward defining syncretic theatre, and syncretic theatre's connection to indigenous ritual and ritual performance. This information forms the lens through which the plays will be viewed. This chapter also outlined some of the pitfalls of which any study of this kind needs to be aware. This awareness of the dangers of Orientalism and/or comparative ethnography will help guide discussion away from any neo-academic colonialism and ensure that each play is analyzed based on its own merits and function. Each play will be analyzed as it stands, meaning without some imposed value judgment placed on either the ritual(s) or the play in terms of aesthetic quality or efficacious ability. For the purposes of this thesis, ritual and theatre will be viewed as two separate and unique elements which both contain aspects of the performative. As Gilbert and Tompkins note,

Ritual and drama are often similar in their transformative, translational qualities, but they are emphatically not the same. [...] Not all drama is ritual, however, and not all ritual is drama even though ritual usually employs elements of dramatic performance. A consideration of ritual in post-colonial contexts requires a reconsideration of drama itself. (56)

The reconsideration of theatre (or “drama”) for which Gilbert and Tompkins call is exactly what syncretic theatre does. Early in this chapter, a comparison was made between this thesis and Albert Belz's play *Te Maunga*. Now, as the chapter comes to a close, there is another comparison that can be offered between this thesis and Tammy Haili'ōpua Baker's play *Kupua*.

Baker's play is actually a combination of two shorter plays dealing with transformation. Both plays involve a father and his daughter (or daughters) who have married or fallen in love with men who transform into animals at night. The first play features a woman who is married to a caterpillar and the second involves two girls who have taken an eel and a sea cucumber as lovers. Each play ends with the revelation that the men are not what they initially appeared to be, and the father character kills the offending interloper(s). While the images on stage might at first suggest that creatures that live in two worlds belong in none, Baker handles each story in such a way that it becomes clear she is writing for as wide an audience as possible. Despite telling stories from Hawaiian mythology, the play is written in Pidgin (Hawaiian Creole English) in order to make it more accessible to the modern audience, yet the setting is "Traditional Hawai'i" (*He Leo Hou* 84-141). The two plays are themselves shape-shifters, existing in two worlds – the ancient and the modern. The two stories, taken from the oral traditions of the Hawaiians and reinterpreted using Western dramaturgical practices, straddle both the past and the present – or as Baker herself states: "[...] look[ing] to the past to guide the future. [...] it's your responsibility to make sure this stuff is passed down to the next generation" (86). In Baker's plays, it is not the images on stage from which the metaphor for this thesis is being drawn, but it is the structure and form of the scripts themselves. Like Baker's plays, this thesis looks at contemporary plays that have an "eye toward the past." Those plays which, like *Kupua*, have a structure based in Western dramaturgy, but their content and meaning from indigenous sources of knowledge.

CHAPTER ONE:

Formal Ritual Action in *Ferringhi*, *Gurudial and the Land*, *Te Hokinga Mai (The Return Home)*, and *Ngā Pou Wāhine*

There are a number of syncretic plays coming out of Oceania that incorporate formal ritual into the text and/or structure of the play. This chapter focuses on four plays, two from Fiji and two from New Zealand, to examine the way in which formal ritual action is utilized in each piece. In *Ferringhi* and *Gurudial and the Land*, the Fijian kava ceremony is discussed in greater detail and in relation to the structure and themes found within both plays. Both *Te Hokinga Mai (The Return Home)* and *Ngā Pou Wāhine* are deeply influenced by the *marae* protocols; *Te Hokinga Mai (The Return Home)* acts as a kind of *pōwhiri*¹⁶ and *Ngā Pou Wāhine* takes on a more expressionistic/symbolic stance in relation to the protocols. The plays that will be examined in this section are all structured around at least one formal ritualized action.

Formal Ritual Action: Building on What Came Before

The first chapter of this thesis introduced a working definition of ritual for the purposes of this analysis. This short section is designed to build on that definition. To be clear, formal ritual action encompasses those actions/activities that contain a conscious formality and traditionalism,¹⁷ and includes elements of indigenous performative action such

¹⁶ See: Bennett, Adrian John Te Piki Kotuku. "Marae: A Whakapapa of the Maori Maraе." Diss. University of Canterbury, 2007. 23-24

¹⁷ I acknowledge that "traditional" is a contested term. Where possible, I have endeavored to avoid it. See: Mallon, Sean. "Against Tradition." *The Contemporary Pacific*. Vol. 22, No. 2, 2010. 362-381

as *kava* preparation, welcome ceremonies, funerary rites, birth and marriage celebrations, and rites of passage. These are the performative actions that connect the community and/or participants to the spirit world.

In his work on the maritime rituals of Aboriginal people in Australia, Ian J. McNiven makes an important distinction between formal and informal ritual engagement, noting:

People ritually engage with spiritscapes either formally or informally.

Informal ritual engagements tend to be situations where people experience a spiritual presence/power while undertaking everyday acts. They may occur when a person comes into close contact with spiritually charged contexts (e.g. Dreaming sites) or when a person simply senses that a spirit has made its presence felt – it is difficult to be alone in a spiritscape. Formal ritual engagements involve people taking an active role in controlling spiritual forces through special codified performances. (335)

What is important about McNiven's distinction between formal and informal ritual action is the idea that in formal ritual action the participants take an active role in the process. It should be noted that the term "participants" here refers to both the performers and the audience (to put it in theatrical terms). In both the traditional performance of the ritual and its syncretic theatre counterpart the audience has no choice but to engage with the ritual action once it has begun. All participants in formal ritual action are involved in the physical world making demands and/or trying to control the metaphysical world. This chapter examines the use of two different formal ritual actions: the Fijian *kava* ceremony, and Māori *marae* protocols (specifically those protocols related to the *pōwhiri*) – both of which will be described in greater detail later in the chapter.

Similarities and Outcomes

One of the most striking effects that both the Fijian and the Māori rituals have on their respective participants is their ability to create and facilitate dialogue and community even amongst divided groups. Both of these rituals work, in part, to ensure peaceful relationships and open dialogue between their participants and the spirit world. The very nature of ritual action and performance already imply (and create) a community, as Michel-André Horelt notes in his study on reconciliation rituals.

The morphological quality (form) takes logically [sic] precedence over the substantial quality (content) of the ritual. So, one might say that the ritual is not a product or reflection of social reality. The ritual is not external to the production of social reality. Through ritual the social reality reveals its realness. The ritual *produces* and *is* social reality. (3)

For Horelt, it is not society that creates the ritual, but the ritual that creates society. Douglas A. Marshall notes that “The practice of ritual produces two primary outcomes – Belief and Belonging [...] social integration and a sense of unity are among the most noted outcomes and functions of ritual [...] the use of rituals is a means of social bonding common to many social species (360).” The nature of ritual implies/creates community – however, what is common to the Fijian and Māori rituals is that both of these rituals specifically set out to open a dialogue between others (even others outside the community), the participants, and the spirit world. Community is not created as a byproduct of these rituals – as it might be in

coming of age rituals, or cleansing/healing rituals, etcetera – community is created because that is the intent of these rituals.

The *kava* ceremony in Fiji and the Māori *marae* protocols are designed to bring two or more different communities together – including communities whose members are uninitiated or ignorant of the ritual's purpose or those that reside on a different plane of existence (i.e.: the spirit world). In his study of the Māori *marae*, Adrian John Te Piki Kotuku Bennett makes the following observation:

For any hui, there are common forms of ritual that may occur to welcome visitors. This process is known as a powhiri, or greeting ceremony, during which a series of steps are followed, establishing a ritual dialogue between the tangata whenua, the local people of the marae, and the manuhiri, the visitors. [...] The ceremonies complete, the manuhiri become, at least temporarily, part of the tangata whenua, the people of the land, the locals. [...] These ceremonies aid the transition between barriers that exist on any marae. While some of those barriers are clearly those of fences or other physical interpositions between the marae and the world around, many of them are metaphysical. In order to breach such barriers, gateways are needed and pathways that lead from the outer spaces to the inner – into the protected spaces, secular and spiritual. (23-24)

What Bennett describes here is the way in which community is established because of the ritual actions, a community that includes the initiated participants, social and cultural outsiders, and the ancestral spirits. While this is a very generalized summary of the Māori

marae protocols, it still gives some insight into one aspect of the ritual actions. In his work on the Fijian *kava* ceremony, James W. Turner makes similar observations about that ritual:

[...] the kava ceremony makes a statement about continuity within society; that is, continuity through time. [...] In the context of ritual, the mana of kava has a transformative function. Through its agency, an assembly is brought into contact with the sacred and during the ceremony at least some of the participants are identified with their ancestors or ancestral deities. It is through the kava bowl, placed as it is at the base of the circle, that linkage is achieved both physically and symbolically. The kava ring models the structure of the societies with which it is associated. (“The Water of Life” 207-208)

The *kava* ceremony creates a space in which both the living individuals and the ancestors are allowed to voice opinions and concerns. As with the *marae* protocols, we see the ritual action building community between both the participants and the metaphysical world. Here we can begin to see the connections between the respective ritual and the four representative plays chosen for this chapter.

Syncretic Connections

The chapter has been structured so that both the Fijian and the Māori plays are discussed in concert with their partner so that each play is coupled with its respective ritual action. This has the added benefit of depicting the way in which syncretic theatre is developing within a culture. The play *Gurudial and the Land* was written in 1978, while its counterpart *Ferringhi* was written in 1993; the play *Te Hokinga Mai (The Return Home)* was

written in 1988, while *Ngā Pou Wāhine* was written in 1995. As Balme and others have noted (and has been discussed in Chapter 1), syncretic theatre is a theatre of change, as Aisha Khan observes: “[...] syncretic processes are ‘fluid’ rather than ‘crystallized,’ [...] syncretisms are not uniform but vary in degree and meaning, depending on viewpoint” (763). What we are seeing in these plays is the evolution of a new and culturally distinct form of theatre, one that is specific to the culture and rituals that have affected it:

The occurrence of syncretic change is especially interesting. [Indigenous] peoples have taken foreign ideas, institutions, and material goods, filtered them through the matrix of peoplehood, and given them meaning within their own cultures and societies. The crucial element in syncretic change is a degree of autonomy. (Holm, Pearson, and Chavis. 18)¹⁸

By examining how each of these plays uses ritual action within its respective structure, we can begin to see how the syncretic theatre is developing in each of the representative cultures.

What these four plays share is a connection to formal ritual action. While there are, no doubt, social and political connections that can be made (especially in regards to postcolonialism), this thesis intends to focus on those elements of formal ritual action that function as syncretic theatre conventions.

¹⁸ The term “peoplehood” refers to the theories of Robert K. Thomas and Tom Holm. “During the 1980s, Robert K. Thomas began work on a perceptive and encompassing view of group identity. His formulation went beyond the conventional notions of grouping human beings as members of classes, polities, cultural units, races, or religious groups. He deliberately chose the term “peoplehood” to transcend the notions of statehood, nationalism, gender, ethnicity, and sectarian membership. [...] Thomas and coauthor Tom Holm discussed the concept of peoplehood on numerous occasions before Thomas’s death in 1991. Thomas perceived that the four factors of peoplehood – language, sacred history, religion, and land – were interwoven and dependent on one another” (Holm, Pearson, and Chavis. 11-12).

The Life. The Land. The People.

Kava drinking in Oceania has been a fascination of explorers and anthropologists since the first contacts between Westerners and indigenous peoples were made. *Kava* has been thoroughly analyzed by anthropologists and novelists from the late 1800's until today; Melville described the process of *kava* making in his novels *Typee* and *Omoo*, and *kava* is even the drink of choice for human colonizers to Mars in Kim Stanley Robinson's sci-fi book series *The Mars Trilogy*. The preparation and serving of *kava* is a ritual that varies from island to island throughout Oceania.

In Fiji the preparation, presentation, and drinking of *kava* (Fijian: *yaqona*, *waka* or *grog*) has been described by anthropologists and ethnologists as one of the most central and integral rituals within the community (Turner "Substance, Symbol and Practice" 97, Brison "Constructing Identity..." 309); so it comes as no surprise when those same rituals work their way into contemporary Fijian drama. *Ferringhi* by Sudesh Mishra and *Gurudial and the Land* by Jo Nacola both incorporate *yaqona* preparation and consumption rituals into the structure of their work.

The plot of *Ferringhi* is fairly straightforward. Five men are sitting in a pool of light drinking *yaqona*. Suddenly, they are interrupted by Ferringhi, who joins their group and begins telling stories. The five men eventually learn that Ferringhi is telling their own stories, stories from their lives that they are trying desperately to forget. Once each man remembers, he is then able to leave the *yaqona* circle and return to his life in order to continue creating his story. John O'Carroll describes the action best, stating: "Each character slowly, painfully recalls the past and takes responsibility for it. At the moment of epiphany, he leaps out of the circle, and back into the world he has suppressed" (322). The dialogue and staging of the play is equal parts realism, surrealism, and absurdism, while always maintaining its connection to

the main thrust of the play: the reclamation of memory. As a play, *Ferringhi* recontextualizes Western theatre for a culturally specific audience. The *yaqona* rituals found within the structure of *Ferringhi* serve to highlight issues pertaining to the community, and demand that the audience confront issues of ethnic tension between Indo-Fijians and Indigenous Fijians, postcolonial economic oppression, and the abandonment of indigenous culture in favor of a modern Western homogenous society, just to name a few. The *yaqona* drinking is the central unifying element within the structure of the play; it binds the scattered memory fragments together with culturally specific codifiers easily recognized and interpreted by a postcolonial Fijian audience. At a glance Jo Nacola's play, *Gurudial and the Land*, seems like a more naturalistic piece exploring the routines of rural Fijian villagers, however, as in *Ferringhi*, it is the inclusion of the *yaqona* drinking which elevates the play into a microcosm of ethnic relations within Fiji.

Gurudial and the Land concerns the efforts of the villagers of Rara to purchase a steer from Gurudial, an Indo-Fijian who lives nearby, for a parish fundraiser/feast. The body of the play consists of various villagers of Rara trying to gauge Gurudial's willingness to sell a steer and how much he would be willing to accept in payment for the steer. This leads to a tense meeting between the heads of the village of Rara and Gurudial, in which Gurudial essentially refuses to sell them a steer by suggesting that he cannot sell the steer without the permission of his mother, who is out of town. The villagers see through this flimsy excuse and are angry with Gurudial, whom they had considered a part of their community up until this point when he has fallen short of his obligations to the village. The play resolves with Gurudial bringing a steer in the nick of time, and the villagers learning that the two steers Gurudial had provided for them on previous occasions had not been paid for as promised. The use of *yaqona* drinking throughout the play serves as a social indicator while at the same time

underscoring the piece with a connection to both the ancestors and the *vanua*.¹⁹ Ian Gaskell points out Nacola's use of *yaqona* in his introduction to the play:

[...] the specific delivery of the individual speeches [...] and the placement of actors in relation to the *tanoa* correspond to the location of their characters within the social hierarchy. The degree of formality given to various character interactions and the structure of the dialogue itself are culturally determined by the forms and protocols of kava consumption. [...] So fundamental is indigenous ceremony to the action of the play that it almost subsumes the latter's naturalistic frame, practically transforming a European theatrico-dramatic art form into a celebration of indigenous cultural expression. (11-13)²⁰

Within *Gurudial and the Land*, the language itself changes based on the drinking of *yaqona*, going from a more naturalistic style of dialogue when *kava* is not being consumed, to an almost poetic rendering of everyday Fijian discourse (Subramani 67). The *yaqona* drinking in this play serves to highlight issues surrounding the changing socio-economic relationships within rural Fijian villages, the rising ethnic tensions between Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, and the role that traditional obligations play to those who are not of the same cultural background, but live within the same community. While both plays utilize *yaqona* to accomplish similar results in regards to community building and ancestor influence, what is especially interesting is that each play offers a different view of ethnic tensions within Fiji,

¹⁹ The *vanua* "is the living soul or human manifestation of the physical environment which the members have since claimed to belong to them and to which they also belong" (Ravuvu 70-76).

²⁰ The "*tanoa*" being the large wooden bowl from which *yaqona* is customarily prepared and served (Turner "Spirit, Symbol and Practice" 109).

with *Gurudial and the Land* being written about ten years before the two 1987 coups d'état, and *Ferringhi* being written six years after the coups d'état.

Pre-Coups/Post-Coups

In 1987 Fiji had recently undergone two coups d'états in response to what Indigenous Fijians saw as Indo-Fijian political dominance. A new constitution was adopted in 1990 which was considered racist by many Indo-Fijians, since it ensured Indigenous Fijian political dominance; however it also led to a mass emigration of Indo-Fijians and a collapse of the Fijian economy.²¹ During the coups years (1987, 2000, and 2006 respectively – but in this case 1987 specifically,) the Fijian community was torn apart. Prasad recalls the violence surrounding the coups as follows:

Indo-Fijian leaders [...] were rounded up, detained, questioned, harassed, abused or assaulted. [...] Hindu temples, a Sikh shrine and a Mosque at Lautoka were set on fire. Gangs of Fijian youth, aided and abetted by the army and police, moved menacingly against Indo-Fijians. [...] Fijians who had been their friends the day before became part of the malevolent force wreaking

²¹ Reinout E de Vries summarizes the recent Fijian coup d'états nicely in his 2002 study on ethnic tensions in Fiji: "In the last 14 years, Fiji has experienced 2 major upheavals in the form of multiple coups by Indigenous Fijians to assert the ethnic supremacy of Indigenous Fijians in the political arena. Sitiveni Rabuka, an army commander, led the first two coups in 1987 and consecutively became prime minister. After a period of political supremacy of Indigenous Fijians and two new constitutions (a racially biased one in 1990 and a multicultural one in 1997) an Indo- Fijian, Mahendra Chaudhry, became prime minister in an Indo-Fijian Labour party dominated government. The third attempted coup on May 19, 2000 was carried out by the Counter-Revolutionary Warfare Unit together with a few civilians, the most notable being George Speight. The parliamentary take-over and hostage operation did not receive the full back-up of the army, and after 2 months George Speight and his men were apprehended and brought to justice. However, in the meantime, a new, Indigenous Fijian dominated government was instated with approval of the army, and has been successful in consolidating its power in the August 2001 elections." (312).

racial vengeance on Indo-Fijians. They acted as if they had never known them, which shocked the victims. [...] Physical violence against individual families, destruction of homes and looting of their [Indo-Fijian's] possessions created mass hysteria. (218-225)

This is the world in which the play *Ferringhi* exists: one in which the community has been torn apart. Lila Two²² draws one of its main dramatic moments from a mob as Prasad described it above. As the other characters drink *kava*, the character of Ferringhi tells a story of the marketplace, when he is suddenly set upon by a mob of Indigenous Fijians:

Ferringhi: I know you and you and you and you and you. Why?

Seru: Cause you never watch native rugby!

Rioter A: Cause you never know native custom!

Rioter B: Cause you on chief's native land!

Rioter C: Cause you go fish our native fish!

Rioter D: Cause you never worship native Christ!

Seru: Cause you go urinate on native Sunday!

Rioter A: Indigenous bacteria!

Rioter B: Indigenous goats!

Rioter C: Indigenous world!

Rioter D: Indigenous heaven! [...]

Seru: (*highly agitated*) You must remember your place here. We taukei, you vulagi. You breathe when we say you breathe. Otherwise we gonna drive you

²² See: Hein, Norvin. "The Rām Līlā." *Journal of American Folklore* (1958): 279-304.

into the sea. We are the indigenous people, you jus an immigrint race. [sic]
(344-345)

The complaints and the exclamations of the indigenous rioters become more and more absurd as the scene builds until there is no reason or rational argument that can stop them. At this point the moment climaxes with the mob attacking Ferringhi. Here the *yaqona* acts as a vehicle into memory, literally bringing the mob out of the story and into the realm of the *kava* circle. As the play progresses, the characters are made to confront actions they had taken during the coups. Mishra is quite literally trying to heal his community through the use of drama and he is capitalizing on *yaqona*'s ability to aid in this healing and discussion.

While *Gurudial and the Land* is a much less violent play, there are still examples of ethnic tension between the indigenous villagers and Gurudial. *Gurudial and the Land* was first published in *Mana: A South Pacific Journal of Language and Literature* in October of 1978, almost ten years before the first coup in Fiji. While this play does not have the kind of urgency that *Ferringhi* has in terms of community repair, there are some haunting statements of ethnic unrest and tension. Near the end of the play, after Gurudial has refused to sell the steer to the villagers, the character Waka makes the following statements: "[...] They're Indians. No matter how hard we tried to include them in our tribes. They'll always be different" (67); and a bit later in the scene: "[...] Who was that English administrator who said, 'A good Indian is a dead Indian?'" (68). This kind of conversation is especially chilling when, later in the scene, the character of Lala – described in the script as: "A youth of Rara" (14) – makes the following oath: "In the name of my uncles, in future, if anything from those Indians is brought here, I am going to say, take them to their kinsmen. Not here, we people of this land don't know you" (68). Here, Lala declares that any children of mixed parentage should not be accepted by the community, despite the fact that his niece and nephew have an

Indo-Fijian father. He calls his own relations “bastards” and wants them thrown out of the village (68). For an indigenous Fijian, this is a very strong statement to make, especially when it concerns blood relations. In contrast to Mishra’s use of *yaqona* as a means for remembrance and healing, Nacola’s play utilizes *yaqona*’s ability to smooth out offences and facilitate open dialogue as a dramatic device. Both plays capitalize on *yaqona*’s role as a social lubricant. The variation in the texts is in their portrayal of Fijian ethnic tensions, and in the way the *yaqona* ritual operates as a structural device.

The Ritual in Practice

Before any real analysis on the structure and themes of *Ferringhi* or *Gurudial and the Land* can be accomplished, it is first necessary to have a basic understanding of the cultural and religious connections Fijians associate with the preparation and drinking of *yaqona*.²⁶ The

²⁶ Stanly offers a rough description of the formal ritual: “*Yaqona* (yang-GO-na) is a tranquilizing, nonalcoholic drink that numbs the tongue and lips. Better known as kava, it is made from the *waka* (dried root) of the pepper plant (*Macropiper methysticum*). This ceremonial preparation is the most honored feature of formal life of Fijians, Tongans, and Samoans. It is performed with the utmost gravity according to a sacramental ritual to mark births, marriages, deaths, official visits, the installation of a new chief, etc. New mats are first spread on the floor, on which a hand carved *tanoa* (a wooden bowl nearly a meter wide) is placed. A long fiber cord decorated with cowry shells leads from the bowl to the guests of honor. At the end of the cord is a white cowry, which symbolizes a link to ancestral spirits. As many as 70 men take their places before the bowl. The officiates are adorned with tapa, fiber, and croton leaves, their torsos smeared with glistening coconut oil, their faces usually blackened. The guests present a bundle of *waka* to the hosts, along with a short speech explaining their visit, a custom known as *sevusevu*. The *sevusevu* is received by the hosts and acknowledged with a short speech of acceptance. The *waka* are then scraped clean and pounded in a *tabili* (mortar). Formerly they were chewed. Nowadays the pulp is put in a cloth sack and mixed with water in the *tanoa*. In the ceremony, the *yaqona* is kneaded and strained through *vau* (hibiscus) fibers.” (619-620). The ritual is also discussed by Ravuvu who notes: “Before the *yaqona* is mixed, the mixer announces that he is ready to mix the drink, *Sa vakarau lose na yaqona vakaturaga*. He will *cobo* (clap with cupped hands) three times and start mixing. It is customary for the one who is mixing and preparing the *yaqona* to announce when it is cleared and ready to serve. He will *cobo* three times with cupped hands and then fill the *bilo* held by the cup bearer who presents it to the first person to drink. The person being served should *cobo* once before he receives with both hands his bowl of *yaqona*. After

importance of *yaqona* and what it represents to Fijian society cannot be overstated. The role *yaqona* plays in the creation and restoration of communal life in Fiji is one of the most pervasive semiotic indicators within *Ferringhi*'s narrative construction. Turner states in his article "Substance, Symbol and Practice: The Power of Kava in Fijian Society" that *yaqona* functions as a kind of social lubricant, easing lines of communication between individuals within a community.

Kava (*yaqona*) is an integral part of the community life in Fijian villages [...]
Drinking *yaqona* is a social activity rather than a private indulgence [...]
Drinking together reflects ties of kinship, neighbourhood, and friendship, and so the composition of *yaqona* circles reveals salient interpersonal ties. [...]
One does not have to spend much time in this setting before he or she realizes that, while Fijians consider *yaqona* drinking to be a pleasurable pastime, they also attribute a deeper significance to it. The drink itself is treated with respect. Once it is mixed, it must be completely consumed. In time one learns that it is regarded as a powerful substance that can be used for good or evil.
(97)

It is this type of community activity, so ingrained into the fabric of Fijian social life, around which Mishra structures his play. *Yaqona* is more than just a drink for Fijians, and it is more than just stage business in *Ferringhi* and *Gurudial and the Land*. The drinking of *yaqona* in the play provides a direct connection to the ideas of community, relaxation of social tensions,

draining his cup in one draught, he passes the cup back to the cup bearer and then again *cobo* several times showing his thanks and appreciation. This is a very simplified ritual describing a semi-formal session. In a much less formal situation of social drinking, this procedure is not strictly observed. However, sometimes certain aspects of the rituals will unconsciously be observed as an automatic response rather than something expected." (41)

and communication, all of which are intrinsically linked to the consumption of *yaqona* within the Fijian community. The idea that *yaqona* facilitates communication is especially relevant to both plays. Turner states: "... [Y]*aqona* is the only thing that brings men together in a setting conducive to conversation. Informal conversation around the *yaqona* bowl keeps men of the community informed about current and future events and the actions of others" ("Water of Life" 207). It is safe to say that one of the most prominent themes in both plays concerns communication. By using *yaqona* as a basis for the action of the play, both Mishra and Nacola are immediately able to engage a Fijian audience through a cultural ritual that is intrinsically linked to their community and culture.

The action of Nacola's play is not structured so much as a single *yaqona* ceremony, but rather it orbits around a series of ceremonies. *Gurudial and the Land* consists of nine scenes, six of which feature a *yaqona* ceremony. Given the play's focus on the village's negotiation process for a steer, the audience is immediately made aware of the central role the *yaqona* ceremony plays in facilitating discussions and negotiations. In his introduction to the play, Ian Gaskell notes: "[...] the closed circle of kava drinkers becomes an immediately recognizable icon of community" (11). By using the *yaqona* ceremony in this way, Nacola has created something that is immediately recognizable to Fijian audiences. Through the *yaqona* ceremony, character relationships (both to each other and to the rest of the community) are expressed, as is the tension between the characters. While an uninitiated audience might simply look at this play and see a group of Fijian men drinking and arguing over a steer, for an audience aware of the cultural implications, and the weight the *yaqona* ceremony places on the events, the tension depicted becomes much more immediate. The events of the play are suddenly transported from the realm of the everyday to the tense life-or-death negotiation that might be expected in a behind-the-scenes political thriller. One of the characters – Rotuna – is even described as a *matanivanua* (22), adding to the importance

and tension in the scenes.²⁷ The presence of a *matanivanua* immediately relates the importance of the steer to the people of the village: the land itself is in danger if this dissension is not resolved. The stakes are raised tremendously and the negotiations take on an importance far beyond just the price of a steer.

The setting of *Ferringhi* even suggests that the audience is a participant in the *yaqona* ceremony. The setting for the play merely reads: “A spotlight illumines a group of men palavering around a *tanoa*. The rest of the stage is in stygian darkness” (Mishra 333). Throughout the play the audience is addressed directly, making clear that there is no fourth-wall, and that the presence of the audience completes the *yaqona* circle. Puglu even walks among them, questioning the audience in the same way he questions the other *yaqona* drinkers. This inclusion of the audience implies that they too are unable to leave the *yaqona* circle until they confront their own stories, however unpleasant they might be.

For if harsh things have been said, and some *are* harsh, this is a play where memory defeats amnesia, where self-knowledge overcomes ignorance, and energy overwhelms lassitude, despair and loss ... [T]he characters realize, one by one, that they are hearing parts of their own stories. Each time the *ferringhi* comes, it is as if a little more ‘light’ illuminates the repressed areas of their collective memory. This collective memory of the *grog* circle stands for the wider society’s memory. (O’Carroll 321)

²⁷ In their article “Have We Been Thinking Upside-Down? The contemporary Emergence of Pacific Theoretical Thought” Huffer and Qalo describe a *matanivanua*: “[...] the *matanivanua* (herald; literally, the eye or face of the land)” (95). A *matanivanua* is an individual who can walk between two worlds, they are both a representative of the chief and a representative of the people. In his book *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*, Ilaitia S. Tuwere quotes an individual named Opetaiā Dreketirua who describes the *matanivanua* as: “[...] the cords of the land (*wa ni vanua*) binding together the people and their leaders. [...] they are called the ‘Stomach of Evil’ (*kete ni ka ca*) for their first responsibility is to preserve the land from weakness of destruction through dissension” (83).

Through the use of *yaqona* in the play, Mishra taps into the socio-cultural consciousness of the Fijian community.

Transformation

The spiritual/religious connotations associated with *yaqona* also provide interesting insight into the play's reception. *Yaqona* not only serves as a medium for communication between persons within society, but also as a means of communication between the physical and spiritual worlds.

The power of *yaqona* is doubly relational since it is manifested in relation to social relationships. It lies in *yaqona*'s ability to activate or transform relationships within a human community and between that community and its ancestors. ... Fijians claim that *yaqona* is *mana* – that is, true or efficacious. (Turner "Spirit, Symbol and Practice" 113)

For Fijians, *yaqona* possesses transformative properties; those drinking *yaqona* are identified as the physical embodiment of their ancestors. The drinker is not just communicating with the spirit world, they are the living host to their ancestors and ancestral deities. Their actions and their words are messages from ancestors passed down to the drinker in order to communicate with the living (Brison 311-315, Turner "Water of Life" 208-209). With this in mind, the drinking of *yaqona* in *Ferringhi* takes on a deeper significance. *Yaqona* gives the drinker a social and spiritual power and authority.

In Fiji it is believed that a person's *mana* can be nurtured or enhanced by the drinking of *yaqona*, for *yaqona* is itself *mana*. [...] *Yaqona* can also be a source of, or a path to, knowledge of the deeper nature of things. For this reason, persons who would cure certain kinds of illnesses or see beyond the normal confines of space and time drink *yaqona*. (“Water of Life” 209)

By structuring the play around a *yaqona* ceremony, Mishra transforms the play into something sent by ancestral spirits to the participants. The character of Puglu even walks into the audience offering them sips of *yaqona*, and reciting a kind of benediction.

(The light follows Puglu as he walks into the audience, offering the bilo to several people, reciting these lines before every offer.)

[PUGLU:] Drink deeply, my friend,
For your personal thirst
Is but a national thirst.
What you sip in solitude,
Sips the noisy multitude.
Drink deeply, my friend. (Mishra 347)

Mishra is using *yaqona* as a kind of political device, turning the drink into a communal desire for socio-political change. As Turner states, “Curers and seers use *yaqona* in their practices because it enhances communication with the realm of the spirits. The transmission of prayers or benedictions is more direct or efficacious when they are spoken over *yaqona*” (“Water of Life” 209). The *yaqona* drinking immediately injects the text with a ritual significance for a

specifically Fijian audience. Any issues or morals within the play are now directly linked to the community for which they are intended, and heightened in such a way as to demand attention from this community.

While there is no direct mention of the spirit world in *Gurudial and the Land*, and the play does not occupy the kind of dream-like alternate reality that is seen in *Ferringhi*, the presence of the spirit world is still felt. The language itself changes in the play once the *yaqona* ceremony has begun. Whereas the characters initially speak in prose, the *yaqona* elevates their speech into a kind of free verse.

Ratu: (*Cheerfully*)

Grandchildren of this land –
Must you daily,
Greet the morning sun
With such a cheerful bowl,
Of your ancestors' blood?

Tai: (*solemnly*)

Marvel you must not,
Dweller of the pandanus plant;
'Tis only your duty, we your people,
Full length and breadth of this land,
Can evoke blessings only in your presence.

Ratu: (*jovial*)

Bravo! Sentinel of the Underworld –
Blossoms be the youths of this our land,

Because of your forefathers' conquests
To claim and secure for us,
Kindreds of our other lands.
May their manas continue to overwhelm
Enemies of our immediate present,
And ever bless new additions to our clans. (22-23)

Admittedly this change in language is due, in part, to the arrival of characters who are of a higher station, however the *yaqona* ceremony also contributes to the degree of formality in the scene. All the characters acknowledge that the *kava* is the blood of their ancestors, and that all who drink from it take on the *mana* or spiritual power of their ancestors. Ratu who is described as the “head of federation of Bure tribes [sic]” (14), even calls out to the ancestors – the Sentinels of the Underworld – to bless the proceedings and the individuals involved. The spirit world is an ever-present force within the play. Gurudial’s initial refusal to provide a steer for the village is then seen by an audience aware of the spiritual weight placed on the proceedings as an affront to the ancestors’ spirits and to the gods, as well as to the land itself. The spiritual nature of the land – the *vanua* – cannot be overlooked when discussing the embodiment of the metaphysical in *Gurudial and the Land*.

Yaqona: Wai Ni Vanua

The elements of the *yaqona* ceremony are a symbolic representation of the *vanua*. Degei mentions this connection, noting: “The key symbols are the *tanoa* (wooden serving bowl) in which the *yaqona* is prepared and the *yaqona* itself. These represent important Fijian concepts. The *tanoa* symbolizes the *vanua* (the land and all it embodies) and the *yaqona* is

the *wai ni vanua* – the water or drink of the land” (64). The *yaqona* ceremony links the kava to the *vanua*; it is both a pathway to the spirit world as well as a representation of the people, place, and ancestry of Fiji. By refusing to provide the steer, Gurudial is standing against all who came before him – the ancestors of the Indigenous Fijians who share his community.

The Indigenous Fijian concept of the *vanua* is one of the most important spiritual and social elements within *Gurudail and the Land*. In Fiji the land and the people do not exist as two separate entities; they are one and the same. Ravuvu notes:

One feels good and comfortable when he feels that he belongs to a particular *vanua* or a particular social unit identified with a particular territorial area in which its roots are established. It is the place where he or his forbears were born and brought up, and where he prefers to die. In its spiritual dimension, it is a source of *mana* or power to effect things. It is the place where his ancestors preceded him and in which their spirits or souls linger and watch over the affairs of those who come after them. The *vanua* contains the actuality of one’s past and the potentiality of one’s future. It is an extension of the concept of the self. To most Fijians, the concept of parting with one’s *vanua* or land is tantamount to parting with one’s life. [...] [The *vanua*] is the living soul or human manifestation of the physical environment which the members have since claimed to belong to them and to which they also belong. [...] A land without people is likened to a person without a soul. The people are the souls of the physical environment. (70-76)

For a Fijian audience, Gurudial’s refusal to sell the people of the village a steer is not just a rejection of the community, it is a rejection of the land/people/traditions/ancestors: a rejection

of the *vanua*. The title of the play itself, *Gurudial and the Land*, serves to highlight the importance of the *vanua* within the play. This play is not just about Gurudial providing a steer for the feast, it is about Gurudial's relationship with the villagers and the land itself. Nacola makes a very obvious point with the title alone: as an Indo-Fijian, Gurudial is not a part of the land, he is separate from it, and he is not bound by the traditions and expectations of the *vanua*. The importance of *vanua* is also mentioned in the play. Near the climax, when it does not look as if Gurudial will produce a steer for the village, the men of Rara gather together to discuss what is to be done:

Waq: [...] Now listen properly. We came down for a steer. Guru has refused his steer. That is, a steer has not been found. This land still has a burden of producing us a steer. [...] Guru as an adopted member of this land has refused or failed to meet our need. It rests on you now as a true member of this land to make good that failure. [...] It is not just between us three and Guru. It's between our village and this village, between people and another people, land and land. Vanua and vanua. [...] this land, its people, and everything on it – soil, animal, and trees, and its past as well" (59-60)

Gurudial's refusal to provide a steer has major implications for the health and prosperity of the village. If the village is not able to meet its obligation then they risk insulting other villages, other *vanua*, and the ancestor spirits of the village as well.

In both plays, we see the use of *yaqona* as a way to communicate within the community as well as between the community and the world of the gods and ancestor spirits. Re-establishing balance within the community resonates strongly as one of the themes central to both *Gurudial and the Land* and *Ferringhi*. In *Ferringhi*, as the characters in the play

search and gradually attain memory of the past and the things that they have chosen to forget, balance is attained. The characters each come to terms with their past and are then able to leave the *yaqona* circle and return to society. In *Gurudial and the Land*, Gurudial throws off the balance of the village by refusing to provide his community with a steer. The tension within the script is created by this lack of balance and, after many negotiations around the *yaqona tanoa*, balance is finally restored with Gurudial reluctantly providing the animal.²⁸ In both plays, the world must be put right again - the *vanua* restored to balance - and the *yaqona* ceremony is the only thing holding the play and the community together, without which they face the wrath of the ancestor spirits.

From Fiji to Aotearoa New Zealand

In the two Fijian plays (*Ferringhi* and *Gurudial and the Land*), the shifting relationship(s) between Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians is one of the predominant themes. The relationship between, and coexistence with, each ethnic group has extreme social and cultural importance to any resident of Fiji. Both of these plays deal with Fiji's "birth pains" as it struggles to develop into (and with the idea of) a bi-cultural society. While this thesis is not focused on the future development of Fijian culture and society, there is no

²⁸Further evidence as to the importance *yaqona* plays in Fijian society can be found in the work of Karen J. Brison. She states: "...Fijian communal affairs are governed by a concern that relationships must be *dodonu* (straight). Here, straightness refers to everyone correctly following the requirements of his or her role as governed by time-honored Fijian tradition" ("Constructing Identity..." 311). Also: "In an economy which is still very much subsistence based, the idea of caring for and sharing with others is an important aspect of the value systems of the Fijian people. The members of the community often depend upon one another for their various needs for survival. [...] The idea of share and care is embodied in the Fijian ideal terms of *veivukei* (offering a helpful hand), *veinanumi* (the act of being considerate), *veilomani* (loving and friendly with one another) and *duavatai* (togetherness) or *yalovata* (of the same spirit). These ideals, when manifested in action, are the means through which the concept of share and care is realized." (Ravuvu 81-82)

denying that those issues are extremely important to all Fijian people and those concerns are displayed prominently in each play. At first glance, it might seem as if the plays surrounding the Fijian kava ceremony and the plays which incorporate Māori *marae* protocols have very little in common. Earlier in the chapter the point was made that both rituals (and by extension all four plays) use formal ritual action to create a unified community.

With the two plays from Aotearoa New Zealand – *Te Hokinga Mai* (*The Return Home*) and *Ngā Pou Wāhine* – there are similar concerns for the development of a bi-cultural society. Both plays use the *marae* protocols to create a unified audience. Regardless of the distinct cultural backgrounds of the individuals in the audience, once the *marae* protocols have been enacted, the group is spiritually (and culturally) united. The protocols allow for the spirits of ancestors to enter the space and view/comment on the material being presented. What these two plays attempt to address is the way in which both indigenous Māori and the descendants of European colonial settlers can work together to form a new society irrespective of past social and cultural differences, while still maintaining some form of cultural autonomy.

The Marae on Stage

John Broughton's play *Te Hokinga Mai* (*The Return Home*) (hereinafter *Te Hokinga Mai*) is an excellent example of how syncretic theatre can display a convergence of cultures, time, and place through the use of formal ritual action. Once the *marae* protocols begin, there is a shifting of time and place, allowing both the past and the world of the spirits to inhabit the same space as the character in the present day. In its premiere performance these actions were reinforced beyond the world/reality of the play, due to the fact that Broughton chose to

perform the piece using an actual Māori Meeting House exhibited at the Otago Museum (Broughton 9).

The plot of *Te Hokinga Mai* centers around a Pākehā²⁹ soldier, Martin, visiting the family of his fallen friend, a Māori named J-J. Martin has returned to J-J's home in order to share details of their time together in Vietnam during the war. As Martin recounts the story of his friendship with J-J, the spirit of J-J enters the space and assists him in telling his story. Broughton literally places the spirit world alongside the physical world, with the characters from both realities interacting with each other in the present and the past. His play does not so much incorporate *marae* rituals as dramatize them, with Western dramaturgical structures interwoven into the formal ritual actions of the *pōwhiri* (welcome).

While Broughton's play uses literal *marae* protocols in the structure of his work, Briar Grace-Smith uses a more expressionistic/symbolic style in her handling of various elements of the *marae*. *Ngā Pou Wāhine* by Briar Grace-Smith is a piece that uses Māori ritual and cultural codifiers to create a piece that bridges two worlds in the search for contemporary Māori identity. The plot centers around Kura, a young Māori woman who has been living with her aunt and uncle since the death of her mother.³⁰ Ultimately the play is Kura's struggle to find her own identity – she wants to know the truth about her past, about

²⁹ “The term Pakeha was coined by the indigenous people of New Zealand, the Maori, to refer to non-Maori. Today, it refers to non-Maori New Zealanders of European heritage, particularly those from the United Kingdom [...] Originally, Pakeha had the neutral meaning of different. [...] The majority of Pakeha are New Zealand-born, although immigrants from a wide variety of European, North American and Scandinavian countries are also included in this group” (Chong and Thomas. 275).

³⁰ In an interview with David O'Donnell, Grace-Smith notes: “The myth was actually a story told to me by my Pākehā father. And I grew up thinking it was true. The story of the red-haired woman. He told me about a quarter of the story as written in *Ngā Pou Wāhine* and the family all said they vaguely recognised it but it seems pretty clear to me that my Dad made the whole thing up. But people know the play now, so it's turned into a myth. It's turned into something people believe is true, believe it's come from a genuine old story. So you can actually create myths.” (*Performing Aotearoa: New Zealand Theatre and Drama in an Age of Transition*. 274)

who she is and who she wants to be. As Kura learns more and more about her past, so does the audience as they travel with Kura on her journey of self-discovery. The play is meant to be performed by one actor and is structured around a series of monologues from the viewpoint of various characters in Kura's life. In the introduction to the play, Helen Gilbert notes that "This quest for cultural and personal 'memory' takes place through the invocation of a mythical past" (349). This statement offers a very truncated view of the amount of influence the metaphysical world has in the play. This is a play that transcends Western dramaturgy and utilizes indigenous formal ritual action as a syncretic theatre construct.

Theatre Marae

Both *Ngā Pou Wāhine* and *Te Hokinga Mai* have their roots in a theatrical development within Aotearoa New Zealand known as Theatre Marae. While *Ngā Pou Wāhine* does not fully incorporate the *pōwhiri* experience, it is definitely informed by and references various ritual and spiritual elements within the *marae* protocols. The play is neither fully ritualistic nor fully mundane: it exists in both spheres without ever fully embracing or rejecting either. *Te Hokinga Mai* takes a different approach to the *pōwhiri*; the play is literally one dramatized *pōwhiri* – incorporating both the formal ritual actions as well as the dramaturgical structures one would expect in a typical Western realistic play. Of the two plays, Broughton's is closer to a "true" Theatre Marae experience, while Grace-Smith's work engages the audience in a similar way, but uses a more modern stylistic approach. Hone Kouka describes the first Theatre Marae event, stating:

The kaupapa was entirely Maori, non-Maori were welcome visitors. Maori plays, storytelling and music played from early morning until late at night

throughout the three week festival. The theatre adopted the rituals of the Marae – guests were welcomed with powhiri and karanga, food was forbidden inside the house, on entering the theatre space the audience was asked to remove their shoes, and prayer and speech making were an important part of each performance with the audience being given an opportunity to reply, their thoughts, congratulations, condemnation. (*Ta Matou Mangai* 16)

Te Hokinga Mai fully embraces the structural dictates of Theatre Marae. In his stage directions, Broughton even goes so far as to note: “The actors should feel quite free to use their own karanga, tauparapara and whaikorero, especially pertaining to the area where the play is performed” (12). For Broughton, the lines he has written in the script are secondary to the formal ritual actions that make up the *marae* protocols. The language Broughton has crafted is not nearly as important as the language that would connect a local/regional audience to the ritual actions with which they are familiar. Helen Gilbert describes the more theoretical aspects of Theatre Marae as follows:

The basic premise of Theatre Marae is that European concepts of theatre are secondary to Māori protocols. The welcoming and performative codes of the marae, or meeting house, the heart of the Māori community, became the model for this encounter. [...] Theatre Marae thereby alters the status of the audience from the Western theatrical norm of unacknowledged and silent observers who judge the performance, to that of participants in a ritual, collective experience. (*Postcolonial Plays...* 348)

Gilbert's assertion is especially important to this thesis. What Gilbert makes note of here is the transformative power of the *marae*. With the *marae* protocols intertwined in the structure of the play, both *Te Hokinga Mai* and *Ngā Pou Wāhine* use the ritual to create a unified audience. Even *Ngā Pou Wāhine*, with its more expressionistic take on the *marae* protocols, embraces the ritual actions that unify an audience and open a dialogue between the physical and metaphysical world of the ancestors.

Waiata Tangi in Both Plays

The first scene of *Ngā Pou Wāhine* and the first performative moment in *Te Hokinga Mai* consist entirely of song, and their importance to each play cannot be overlooked. In *Ngā Pou Wāhine*, the scene opens with Waiora standing alone singing a *waiata tangi* or lament (Mitalfe 2), leading into a *karanga* (Grace-Smith 352). Here Waiora laments her plight, but willingly sacrifices her life/power by cutting off her hair and giving it to her people. The *waiata tangi* is sung entirely in Māori, with the last lines translated by Grace-Smith as: “The severed strands / are left unto the people / A symbol of power and strength / For a future time / If there is no hope / All will be lost my people” (363). In Broughton's play, Kuini (the mother of J-J) informally begins the action of the play with a song. In his stage directions, Broughton notes: “KUINI appears at the door of the Meeting House. She has a broom and begins to sweep the porch. She hums the song ‘E Pari Ra’ quite loudly” (13). The choice of song here is especially important. The modern song “E Pari Ra” was composed for the New Zealand soldiers leaving for Europe during World War I.³¹ There is evidence that the song

³¹ “1. E pari rā e ngā tai / ki te ākau. / E hotu rā ko taku manawa. / Aue! Me tangi noa / Ahau i muri nei / Te iwi e / He ngākau tangi noa.

has its origins in a Māori song, as Archer observes: “A footnote in this book [Begg's *Famous Maori Songs*, 1926] says this song is based on one sung in about 1824 by a young Hawkes Bay chief. Titirangi Pa had been overrun by Ngāphi and Uruwera warriors, and the chief's lover was being carried off into slavery” (“E Pari Ra...”). This is a song that carries with it an extreme cultural and emotional weight for both Māori and Pākehā audience members. The First World War is one of the defining moments in New Zealand national identity, and to place this song here has a unifying effect on the audience. Not only does the song provide an emotional framework for the play, it also calls to the past – to a shared sense of nationalism, pride, and unity. This is also the song that Broughton closes the play with, bringing the connections to the past and present full circle.

To open the plays with *waiata* of lament not only sets the overall mood of both plays, it also has its roots within the Māori custom of gift giving and exchange. Barry Mitcalfe makes the following observation regarding Māori *waiata*: “The ceremonial and reciprocal exchange of words, in oratory and song, no less than the exchange of goods, services and women, keeps contact between different descent groups and maintains social coherence within a culture” (2). Broughton and Grace-Smith begin their plays with an offering to the

Chorus: *Tēnā rā! Tahuri mai! / E te tau! te aroha. / Tēnei rā ahau te tangi nei. / Mōhou kuā wehea nei. / Haere rā! mahara mai. / E te tau! kia mau ki au. / Haere rā! ka tūturu ahau. / Haere Rā!*

2. *Haere rā e tama / Haere rā. / Haria rā te aroha i ahau / Aue! me tangi noa / Ahau ki muri nei / Te iwi e / He ngākau tangi noa*”

John Archer provides the following translation:

“1. The tides surge / onto the seashore / [and] my heart throbs. / Alas! Weeping without restraint / I am left behind. / Everyone are / Utterly heart-broken.

Chorus: *So come back, return / My beloved, my love / I am weeping here / for you now far away / Farewell! and remember, / Beloved! be true to me / Farewell! I will be true to you / Farewell!*

2. Farewell young man, / Farewell. / Take my love with you / Alas! There is weeping inside of / me, left behind here / [and inside of] the people / Weeping in our hearts” (“E Pari Ra...”)

audience – a gift of words. In his book *Tikanga Māori*, Mead discusses the cultural weight placed on gift giving: “The transaction is either the beginning of a new exchange relationship with others or it is part of a series begun long ago [...]” (181). Grace-Smith and Broughton are opening a relationship with the audience, a relationship that implies some kind of reciprocity in the future. The audience must provide something for the gift of words/song – the plays make a demand on the audience to respond to the plays in kind: through thought, through words, through discussion. Gift giving also has connections to the *marae* – although the presentation of gifts usually comes at or near the end of the *pōwhiri* ceremony.

At the close of the *waiata tangi* in *Ngā Pou Wāhine*, Waiora begins a *karanga* which translates as: “Oh spirits, / Return the mana to the people. / Alas!” (363). Here we have Waiora directly appealing to the spirit world, to the spirits of her ancestors. It’s significant that this is the opening of the play, since structurally it references *marae* protocols for an initiated or indigenous audience. The first event at the *marae* when welcoming visitors is the *karanga*. The *karanga* itself is important both in that it is a call to the visitors to enter the space, and it is a direct invocation of the spirit world. Barlow notes the following:

When a woman’s *karanga* or call to welcome is heard, the visitors begin to advance on the *marae*, and at this point the *marae*, and so the visitors, become *tapu* or sacred. [...] The woman’s *karanga* arouses the spirits of those who have passed on to the spirit world. [...] The high-pitched cry penetrates beyond the confines of the physical world and into the spirit realm. (39)

In this first moment of each play, the spirits are summoned into the space. The voice of the performer literally penetrates into the spirit world, opening a direct line of communication between the physical world and the metaphysical world. Waiora directly appeals to the

spirits, but she also appeals to the audience. The *karanga* is something that is immediately recognizable to an initiated audience, and has the effect of creating an atmosphere of expectation.

Broughton too makes use of the *karanga* in his piece. *Te Hokinga Mai* does not have a formal *karanga* until the play is already well underway. Once the opening ritual actions of the *pōwhiri* are complete and the characters begin *te whaikorero*, the spirit of J-J literally enters the space. Broughton makes sure to mention that J-J is not entering as a flashback or a memory/fantasy of some sort, he is a spirit returning to the present:

(J-J walks onto the marae from the right side of the Meeting House. MARTIN does not bat an eyelid, but the family are aghast.)

KUINI: Aue! Junior.

HUIA: Mum, Oh Mum. It's J-J. [sic]

JOHN: You were right Mother, J-J is with us.

KUINI: *(She sobs quite loudly.)* (28-29)

Broughton deliberately crafts J-J as a character in the present world of the play. He is not a memory or some other playwriting device used to dramatize exposition. J-J is both of the past and of the present. This dual existence is attained through the use of the formal ritual actions of the *marae*.

Not only do the *karanga* and the *waiata* appeal directly to the spirit world, opening a channel of communication between the performers/audience/ancestors, but they also unify all participants into one indistinguishable group. Kotuku Bennett makes the following statement:

The spirits of the manuhiri [guests/visitors] and of the tangata whenua [local people] are bound or intermingled, making them as one. [...] The calls that are made generally refer to the summoning of dead spirits, both those of the locals and those of the visitors, thus intermingling the ancestors of the two groups and providing a spiritual link to Hawaiki – the traditional Maori homeland and also the place to which dead spirits return. Spirits are also invoked to return to their ancestral house, the Whare tipuna, the (carved) central meeting house of the marae. Because of the (implied) presence of spirits, the atmosphere takes on a tangibly more charged nature. (209-210)

Waiora's *karanga* unites the audience into one unified whole regardless of ethno-cultural background; the audience is now a unified and united congregation whom the spirits recognize as one people. Since all participants are now joined together in both the physical and spiritual realms, the ancestors Kura appeals to and identifies with are now our own. Her story is now personally relevant to everyone in the theatre space – regardless of the cultural identifiers that may have separated them upon entering the theatre. When Kura hits her final pose and creates her own *poupou*³² she becomes the ancestor of everyone in the space.

One of the most distinctive visual elements of *Ngā Pou Wāhine* is the use of *poupou* as both a set piece as well as the embodiment of various characters within the piece.³³ In her introduction to the play, Helen Gilbert observes that "Individual *poupou* [...] underline the solo actor's transference from one character to another. They also serve to transform the stage

³² Defined by Kotuku Bennett as "Carved ancestor figure from the interior of a Whare whakairo" (253).

³³ See: Archey, Gilbert. "Evolution of certain Maori carving patterns." *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* (1933): 171-190; Mead, Hirini Moko. *Tikanga Māori: Living by Māori Values*. Wellington, N.Z.: Huia, 2003.

and auditorium into a distinctively Māori space, which is both sacred and personally significant [...]” (348-349). The presence of *poupou* immediately brings the indigenous or initiated audience member into a sacred space. As mentioned before, the *poupou* are the carved ancestor bas-reliefs running along the interior of a *whare whakairo* – a carved/decorated meeting house (Kotuku Bennett 31). The suggestion that the performance space is the interior of a *whare whakairo* has quite a bit of spiritual significance. McKay and Walmsley – in writing about the use of time in architecture – make an interesting point about the *whare whakairo*’s relationship to time: “It is clear that the house [...] provides us with both our domicile space and it mediates our relation with time, it remembers, it acknowledges and iterates a connection with the past” (91). Grace-Smith creates a theatre space that remembers the past and is free of the limitations of linear time. This “remembering” corresponds with the structure of the play itself. The play moves throughout time, with characters presenting monologues of their memories without ever directly interacting with one another. The play is a series of memories as Kura struggles to find her own identity. It is interesting to note another juxtaposition of opposites here. The play is structured around the memories of Kura’s family and ancestors, yet is meant to be performed by only one actress (Grace-Smith 352). This gives the impression that Kura’s story is in part the story of her ancestors/family. With only a single performer ever onstage each family member is embodied by the same individual – there is no physical distinction between the characters: they are as one.

Formal Ritual Action: A Summation of Ideas

Beyond the fact that all four of these plays contain some form of formalized ritual action, what has bound them all together here in one place is their ability to create a unified

community between cultural practitioners, uninitiated audience members, and the spirit world. The desired outcome of these formal ritual actions is to find the common ground across cultural and metaphysical barriers, so that an open dialogue can be achieved. The inclusion of these ritual actions by the respective playwrights was not accidental, but crafted especially for this purpose: to engage in an open dialogue dealing with the social and cultural concerns of living in a multi-cultural postcolonial society. Using formal ritual action as a structural component only serves to strengthen the bond between audience members and performers, as Kuusela mentions, “Religion and its rituals indoctrinate followers into accepting its ideology and peoples’ sense of group cohesion is at its strongest when participating in common rituals” (40). Rituals, by their very nature, form a united congregation. There have also been numerous studies on the ways in which Western theatre promotes group cohesion and community building, with the work of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal leaping immediately to mind.³⁴ Even amateur Western theatre productions have the effect of creating community within diverse groups of people. In her study on group social work amongst a mixed group of elderly and English/Spanish speakers, Diana Halperin states: “Theatre, as an ensemble art form, necessitates cooperation and teamwork. [...] The purposeful use of expressive activity helped to create a community within a bilingual group of elders who had limited opportunity and means to create more meaningful relationships with each other” (34-45). These four syncretic plays, using methods from both indigenous ritual and Western dramaturgy, strive to create a common community. This is what syncretic theatre is all about: the intertwining of various ritual and performative elements representative of both cultural groups in order to create a new performance form as well as

³⁴ See: Boal, Augusto. *Theater of the Oppressed*. Pluto Press, 2008.
Boal, Augusto. *The rainbow of desire: The Boal method of theatre and therapy*. Routledge, 1995. Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum, 2004. Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. Rowman & Littlefield, 1998.

communicate themes and ideas through a medium that is able to reach all social and cultural groupings. The voices of the present collide with and amplify the voices of the ancestral past for the purpose of discovering and improving the future.

CHAPTER TWO:

Ritual Performance in *Last Virgin in Paradise*, *Ka Wai Ola*, and *Frangipani Perfume*

There are a number of plays coming out of Oceania that incorporate elements of ritual performance. These particular plays are set apart by the way they utilize indigenous performance styles to create a link to the spirit world. Some may argue that the ritual performance styles take a back seat to the Western dramaturgy, but this does a disservice to the plays and the playwrights. The inclusion of each of these ritual performance styles actually opens up the plays to indigenous audiences. The first two plays, *Last Virgin in Paradise* and *Ka Wai Ola*, both use elements of ritual clowning to connect the audience to the spirit world, with the former focusing on the *hän mane 'āk su*, a Rotuman wedding clown, and the latter on the Samoan *fale aitu*, a kind of skit-based ritual comic performance. In the final play, *Frangipani Perfume*, the playwright uses a mix of Samoan contemporary and indigenous dance as the main syncretic element. All four of these plays use various indigenous ritual performance techniques alongside cultural practices to enhance Western dramaturgy.

“Ritual performance” is different from the “formal ritual action” that was central to the discussion in Chapter 1 and that difference is important to emphasize here. As mentioned in the Introduction, ritual performance is more liminoid in nature; it still allows for a connection to the spirit world and the gods, but it is not as strictly structured as formal ritual action. In each of these plays, the playwright has utilized elements of the customary performance as a way to bridge the gap between the indigenous and the Western world. Ritual performance is an efficacious event; it is used to achieve something.³⁵ Each of the

³⁵ As Laurence J. Kirmayer notes, “Where illness is understood as the result of mechanical or physical injury, specific physical measures may be taken. Where illness is attributed to spirit attack, shamanistic practices involving communication with or journeying to the spirit world

rituals incorporated in the plays has a real purpose and a specific occasion for when it is meant to be performed; the *hän mane 'äk su* in *Last Virgin in Paradise* appears only at Rotuman weddings and the *'ailao* in *Frangipani Perfume* is a war dance in honor of the goddess Nafanua. While the occasion for presenting a play is often different from the occasion for presenting the ritual performance in its customary form, the framework of the indigenous performance still carries over into the contemporary dramatic work.

One of the most important distinctions between ritual performance and a formal ritual event is the rigidity with which the participants must adhere to the internal movements and unique components. Formal ritual must be performed exactly as prescribed – there is no room for interpretation or error.³⁶ Ritual performance has more leeway for individual interpretation. In his work on why ritual fails, and on the implications of failed rituals, Edward L. Schieffelin notes that “the ‘flow’ of a ritual performance can be perceived as more important than avoiding deviations” (22). Ritual performance contains an observed flexibility. Another important distinction between formal ritual action and ritual performance is the allowance for innovation. In his work on traditional Hawaiian beliefs and practices, Chun notes that “[...] a powerful event can be caused when creativity, innovation, risk, an element of challenge, and courage – the elements of experimentation – go beyond the boundaries of the accepted norms and come together to forge something new and possibly revolutionary” (93). Formal ritual, in many cases, is static; it must be enacted the same way every time or it loses its potency. On the other hand, ritual performance allows for change and innovation; as mentioned earlier, the

and enlisting the aid of spirit helpers are employed. When the spirit comes to dwell within or possess the afflicted person, it must be exorcized. Where spirits or ancestors are offended, they must be propitiated through sacrifices and offerings. Where illness reflects an imbalance, efforts are made to restore balance by supplying the missing element or augmenting the appropriate process, which may be physiological (e.g. humoral systems, hot/cold), or involve various subtle energies (chi'i, ki, etc.)” (34-35).

³⁶ See the work of Rappaport and Spilka, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.

“flow” of the performance takes precedence over the execution. The plays selected for this chapter use ritual performance as a means to communicate with the participants.

The plays in this chapter have been grouped based on the similarity of the indigenous performance style. The first two plays, *Last Virgin in Paradise* and *Ka Wai Ola*, both focus on ritual clowning practices in Oceania – specifically on the islands of Rotuma and Samoa – while the final play, *Frangipani Perfume*, features a Samoan war dance. Each of these plays shares an ability to connect the performers and the audience using indigenous ritual performance practices. Each play in some way tries to impart indigenous knowledge, social norms, or cultural practice using ritual performance as a medium for communication.

The Influence of the *Hän Mane‘äk Su* on *Last Virgin in Paradise*

Comedy in Oceania has recently received valuable attention from academia due to the work of Vilsoni Hereniko, Caroline Sinavaiana-Gabbard, and others. They have brought clowning practices in Oceania to the attention of many scholars who, before this, had no idea that the art form even existed. Hereniko goes even further by incorporating the Rotuman ritual clown into one of his plays. The play *Last Virgin in Paradise*, written by Vilsoni Hereniko, is based on a story told to him by Teresia Teaiwa³⁷ and features a wedding scene in which a character called “Male Clown” is acting as a kind of jester/master-of-ceremonies for the wedding. While the play itself never identifies Male Clown as being the *hän mane‘äk su*, the connections between the *hän mane‘äk su* and the clown in the script are apparent.

The play itself concerns the wedding of an older European man to a much younger Pacific Island woman. The European, Helmut Klinghorst, has been searching the Pacific for a

³⁷ While the cover of the play lists both Hereniko and Teaiwa as author, the “Acknowledgements” page later in the script says this: “The following script, written by Vilsoni Hereniko, is based on a story told by Teresia Teaiwa” (*Last Virgin in Paradise*... 7).

virgin to marry and it is not until he comes to the fictional island of Marawa – Fijian for “happy” (Va’ai 17) – that he is able to find Hina, his virgin bride. Adding to the mix are Jean, a Harvard anthropologist studying sexual harassment amongst the Marawan people and Temanu, a Western educated Marawan expatriate coming to the island to discover her roots. As the four characters clash over what is best for the Marawan people, Hina becomes stuck in the middle of their tug-of-war for her future without ever having a voice in their arguments. Finally, it is revealed that Hina is fully aware of what marrying Helmut means and that she is not actually a virgin; she is fooling Helmut to get her own way. David O’Donnell notes, “The final image is a celebration of an Indigenous character who has rejected those who would commodify her body or colonize her mind [...] She has come to terms with her ‘other,’ and seeks to engage with the outside world rather than letting it impose its assumptions on her” (“Quoting the ‘Other’...” 120). With the exception of O’Donnell’s article, most analysis of the play focuses on its relationship to the Western/European idea of an island paradise. However, as O’Donnell’s article notes, the play’s structure and thematic goals have a direct link to Pacific ritual clowning: “Sub-titled ‘a serious comedy,’ *Last Virgin in Paradise* adopts the style and parodic stance of Pacific ritual clowning to deconstruct European stereotypes of Pacific women” (118). While O’Donnell’s article does not address the specific type of ritual clowning happening in the play, the character of Male Clown closely resembles the Rotuman wedding clown: the *hän mane ‘äk su*. Again, although the play never calls for a *hän mane ‘äk su* specifically, the presence of the ritual clown is felt, both in the literal body of the play, as well as the overall comedic devices and outcomes.

The *hän mane ‘äk su* is a kind of clown-as-master-of-ceremonies for a traditional Rotuman wedding. Unlike other cultures in the Pacific, where clowning and performance may be created spontaneously by guests, “Rotumans have an invited clown whose role is formal. In theory, she is the supreme ruler of the wedding and all the associated rituals”

(Hereniko, “When She Reigns Supreme...” 171). The character of Male Clown in *Last Virgin in Paradise* has a similar role. The stage directions make Male Clown’s duties clear: “The clown is standing at center stage. [...] At the clown’s command, singers and dancers enter [...]” (15). This is the first thing we see once the lights come up on scene two. Male Clown is in a position of power in both the actual position on stage and the role he has in orchestrating the wedding ceremony. Male Clown also seems to have more power and notoriety than the bride’s parents in the ceremony:

(Before the song ends, the mother of the bride goes and whispers to the clown who stops the singing.)

M/Clown: Stop fooling around! They coming.

(Everyone stops laughing. [...]). (17)

By whispering to Male Clown rather than announcing the arrival themselves, the bride’s family is deferring to Male Clown and acknowledging the power and control he has over the wedding. The clown in the play, just like the *hän mane’äk su*, controls the wedding and the guests must follow her commands. This connection between the bride’s family and the Male Clown also hints at the relationship between the *hän mane’äk su* and Male Clown.

The *hän mane’äk su* is always chosen by the bride’s family and is a woman who is past childbearing age (Hereniko “When She Reigns Supreme...” 171).³⁹ However, the

³⁹ The *hän mane’äk su*’s duties in modern weddings seem to be much more limited than they were in the past, a change Hereniko attributes to more Westernized weddings and a lack of understanding about the clown’s traditional role in Rotuma (*Woven Gods...* 135-137). In this, the *hän mane’äk su* is not alone; ritual clowning across the Pacific has seen a diminution of authority since the arrival of Christianity. “In the Pacific, ritual clowns were woven into the ancient religious fabric of society. With the spread of Christianity world-wide and into the Pacific, the old beliefs in spirits disappeared, and so began the demise of the ritual clown. Although in some parts of the Pacific ritual clowning is still evident, its performance has lost

anatomical sex of the *hän mane 'äk su*, in the metaphysical sense, is questionable. The gender of the clown becomes important when viewed through the lens of the play since the clown character is listed as male. While the true anatomical sex of the ritual clown's host is almost always female, the *hän mane 'äk su* is a gender-free being. In his discussion of the origin of the *hän mane 'äk su*, Hereniko states:

If indeed the origin of clowning is in religious beliefs about fertility and the role of the spirits in procreation, then the clown was an integral part of the ritual. As the representative of the supernatural world, she supervised the rituals that were enacted to invoke the gods to act. Assuming the persona of a spirit, she was neither male nor female, human nor divine, but a liminal being. Her laughter was the mocking laughter of the gods who ruled over mortals and whose power manifested in bad luck, illness, inability to conceive, and thunder and hurricanes. (Hereniko "When She Reigns Supreme..." 183-184)

Being a representative of the spirit world removes the confines of gender and gender roles from the participant. The *hän mane 'äk su* is a conduit for the spirit world, and as such is not bound to social mores in the way others in attendance might be. The lack of gender is also suggested by the ritual clown's behavior throughout the ceremony. The *hän mane 'äk su* acts in direct opposition to Rotuman social norms. Though the clown is performed by a woman, she behaves in a way more traditionally prescribed to men; "A clown is female but behaves as male, both male and female attributes are indirectly communicated" (Hereniko *Woven Gods...* 82). There is also some evidence to suggest that the role of the *hän mane 'äk su* can

much of its *mana*, "potency and efficiency", and socio-religious import" (Hereniko "Pacific Clowning" 65).

be filled by a man if the need arises.⁴⁰ While the script of *Last Virgin in Paradise* calls for a Male Clown, the gender-free nature of the Rotuman ritual clown does not negate Male Clown's connection to the *hän mane'äk su*. The social functions that Male Clown serves in the wedding scene are directly in line with the *hän mane'äk su*. It is these social functions, with their connection to Rotuman ritual clowning, that offer us another window into the *hän mane'äk su*'s influence on the play.

Two of the primary functions of the *hän mane'äk su*'s clowning are of inverting and reinforcing the norms of society. Much of the *hän mane'äk su*'s humour comes from this comedic technique. While this technique is not exclusively Rotuman,⁴¹ the values and the social norms that the *hän mane'äk su* chooses to invert are.

Clowning is related to a society's values in an inverse way. For example, the Rotuman clown, by ostensibly subverting the important Rotuman values of behaving appropriately, containing one's sexuality, and maintaining social harmony, evokes laughter from the spectators. Paradoxically, the clown's violation of these values reinforces them at the same time. (Hereniko "When She Reigns Supreme..." 175).

The *hän mane'äk su* is not a role model. The job of the *hän mane'äk su* is to disrupt the wedding ceremony with wild antics, overt sexuality, disrespect to chiefs or "big men" and to cause trouble in general. As the clown showcases bad behavior, she is backhandedly

⁴⁰ Hereniko notes: "The clown did not perform on this day because of a death in her family; instead, two *häään re mälumu* 'funny women' and a man provided the entertainment. The funny man appeared wearing a skirt of leaves and a blackened face. He ogled the girls and pranced around trying to scare the children. Accompanying him was a funny woman from the bride's side and another from the groom's side" (Hereniko *Woven Gods...* 75).

⁴¹ See the Roman Saturnalia, the medieval Feast of Fools, Samoa's *Fale Aitu* (discussed later in this thesis), etc.

reinforcing the values Rotumans hold dear. She provides an example of the bad behavior to be avoided by wedding guests. Through her inversion of social norms, the *hän mane'äk su* discourages others from acting in that fashion. The inversion during the *hän mane'äk su*'s performance also has the effect of temporarily altering power structures within Rotuman society. Hereniko notes: "During this period of free play, the world was turned upside down; the weak became strong, and the strong were forced to submit" (*Woven Gods...* 79). It is this cycle of inversion and reinforcement that is apparent throughout scene two.

The wedding scene offers a number of very specific instances of inversion and reinforcement that are directly related to the clown character in the play. In the wedding taking place on stage, Male Clown at one point pretends to be a female prostitute, while a female wedding guest (wearing a similar toupee to Helmut's) joins in the fun with some spontaneous clowning of her own. She proceeds to haggle with him over the price and asks if he is a virgin (*Last Virgin in Paradise...* 15-17). Here we can see a direct correlation between the *hän mane'äk su* and the clown character in the play. With Male Clown taking on the role of a female prostitute, and the female wedding guest acting out the role of a male European customer, gender and gender roles are inverted, but so is the wedding ceremony itself. No longer is the wedding ceremony a respected occasion; Male Clown's sarcastic commentary makes it into nothing more than a bargaining session with a prostitute. The wedding, at least for the Marawans, is a sham, merely a way for the family to profit by selling their daughter to Helmut. Male Clown, acting as a translator for the bride's father, furthers the idea of the bride being married for money by intentionally mistranslating the father's speech:

M/Clown: I think God he bring me very handsome man, a man with plenty money, to be the husband of my daughter. Before we very poor, but now that our daughter getting married, we soon be very rich. Now we can pay back all

the credit we take from the village co-op and all the money we loan from all our relatives. Praise be to God! God is good! Yes, Hallelujah! [sic]" (*Last Virgin in Paradise*... 20)

By undermining the father's speech, Male Clown is in fact reinforcing those values that should be present at a wedding. Since the wedding guests all look down on Hina and on her family's decision to marry her to Helmut, it can then be inferred that this kind of behavior is frowned upon. As Hereniko states: "But the clown does more than provoke laughter through mock insults, burlesque, exaggeration, use of irony, or deriding others or herself. Through humor she reinforces the values of Rotuman society..." (Hereniko "When She Reigns Supreme..." 183). While the play is set on a fictional island, the themes the playwrights are trying to reinforce through Male Clown seem fairly clear: the indigenous populations of the Pacific need to be wary of exploitation by outsiders and those same outsiders need to be respectful of indigenous cultures, customs, and individuals.⁴²

The influence of the *hän mane 'äk su* plays a tremendous role in the comedy of *Last Virgin in Paradise*. While inversion, reinforcement, and gender reversal are elements of comedy which are in no way exclusive to Rotuman comedy (they are all standard devices of satire and other comedic forms), their presence together in a single play points to the *hän mane 'äk su* as an influencing force. Add to that a playwright who is Rotuman, and is the foremost scholar of the *hän mane 'äk su*, plus a wedding scene featuring a clown with a similar function to the *hän mane 'äk su* and the links begin to become apparent.

⁴² In his analysis of the play, Va'ai notes: "The comedy of the play hinges on the fact that Helmut is searching for a lost Paradise, and that while Hina and her people seem simple and naïve they are all well aware of the issues and they are just as quick-witted, manipulative and shrewd as others are. They are all very aware of what they want out of life and the advantages as well as the limitations that their small island existence places upon them" (Va'ai 21).

Comedy Around Oceania

Throughout Oceania there are many traditions of ritualized comedic performance. Hawai'i has a kind of comedic puppet *hula* called *Hula Ki'i*, in which the puppets serve a similar function both socially and spiritually to the Rotuman clown.⁴³ Clowning in Oceania serves an important social role. One of the most important functions of ritual clowning is the ability to bring possible conflict to the forefront of people's attention by making light of it. Clowning and comedic practices facilitate the release of tension within society. Hereniko states:

To observers, the clown's behavior provokes conflict. [...] In a population of less than three thousand, most are related or at least acquainted with one another. As to be expected, a close-knit community places a high premium on harmonious relationships. The process of diffusing tension through humor in a socially acceptable frame is therefore necessary. [...] Peace is valued all the more. (Hereniko "When She Reigns Supreme..." 178-179).

Ritual clowning and comedy are able to bring things out into the open. Performing participants are not bound to be respectful to anyone, rather it is their responsibility to highlight points of tension or conflict, and through humor, diffuse them. The plays *Last Virgin in Paradise* and *Ka Wai Ola* also function in a similar manner. The plays use humor to diffuse, and examine, a serious situation. Rather than write a confrontational, militant play, the authors have chosen to encase their respective message within comedy. The plays both deal with many serious issues and, while they never devalue or trivialize those issues, both

⁴³ See Katharine Luomala's work *Hula Ki'i*.

plays are able to bring them into the audience's mind through the use of various comedic devices and situations. In Samoa there is a skit-based form of ritual comedy called *fale aitu*. This form of ritual comedic performance provides a major structural component of Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl's play *Ka Wai Ola*. In the play, Kneubuhl uses *fale aitu* and its connection to the spirit world to highlight the issues surrounding water rights in Hawai'i.

Fale Aitu in Victoria Kneubuhl's Ka Wai Ola

Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl is one of the foremost playwrights currently living and working in Oceania. She was born in Honolulu, Hawai'i in 1949 and is of Hawaiian, Samoan, and Caucasian descent. Her plays often carry historical weight, either dramatizing moments in history using an individual's letters, journals, and other various writings of the time, or by using that same material as a jumping off point to craft dialogue that is imbued with a historical gravitas. As Diana Looser notes, "Kneubuhl's works over the past two decades have had an important ethical, social, and political role to play in the ongoing reassertion of Hawaiian culture, identity, and self-determination" ("Our Ancestors..." 74). This kind of "living history" work stems from Kneubuhl's time working as a reenactor and education coordinator for the Hawai'i Mission House Museum.⁴⁴ Her most widely produced play, *The Conversion of Ka'ahumanu* (1988), is actually the first published play written by a Polynesian woman for an all female cast. Kneubuhl was also the recipient of the Hawai'i Award for Literature (1994) and the Elliot Cades Award for Literature (2006).

While most of Kneubuhl's writing is firmly grounded in history, there are elements of the metaphysical world that bleed through. Her play, *Ola Na Iwi* (The Bones Live), deals with the reparation of Hawaiian remains from European museums. During the play, the bones

⁴⁴ "Reenactor: a person who participates in reenactments of historical events." From Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

in question come alive again and return to their last living ancestor so that they can be buried properly and finally find peace. *Ka Wai Ola* (The Living Water) contains similar connections to the spirit world – mostly through the inclusion of ritual clowns and *fale aitu*, a kind of Samoan comic theatre.

The play itself could be categorized as children's theatre – it was commissioned and first performed by Honolulu Theatre for Youth (HTY) – but the issues and themes that are prevalent in the play are by no means childish or exclusively for children. The play centers around a young boy named Keanu who is upset with his mother, an extremely active member of a Hawaiian rights group. The family has recently won the right to have water returned to their *kalo* (taro) field. Keanu wants his mother to stop her political activism and does not understand what is so important about the water returning to the *lo'i* (taro patch). To help Keanu understand the importance of water rights, members of the Hawaiian rights group put on an impromptu performance for him. Each skit lasts for only a few moments and completely breaks away from the pre-established Western dramaturgical conventions found earlier in the script. Kneubuhl foreshadows this transition by having the mother character run into an old friend with whom she reminisces about how they used to memorize Laurel & Hardy routines. This sets up – for audiences unaware of *fale aitu* or Pacific clowning traditions – a Western dramaturgical connection with vaudeville traditions and conventions. Kneubuhl is trying to open up the meaning of the play for all audience members, even those who may not have an extensive knowledge of clowning conventions in Oceania.

Much like the Rotuman *hän mane'āk su*, *fale aitu* is a form of ritual clowning in Oceania. In her groundbreaking study on Samoan clowning and *fale aitu* in particular, Caroline Sinavaiana describes the major components as follows:

Samoa's comedy sketches are satirical interludes, which are scripted orally, rehearsed, then performed in public with much improvisation by a small troupe of players [...] Plots are often marked by the humorous ridicule of authority figures who are dramatically epitomized through the use of caricature and parody. In the plays the normative status roles are reversed: the high made low, the world is temporarily turned upside down. (*Inside Out* 186)

This kind of connective-skit structure is very apparent in *Ka Wai Ola*. As was mentioned earlier, halfway through the play members of the Hawaiian rights group perform a series of short skits that explain the importance of water rights and the cultural and spiritual importance of working the *lo'i*. Throughout the various sketches, the performers become the historical figures E.K. Bull and Jorgen Jorgenson (two sugar cane barons out of Hawai'i's history). They also embody fish and plants that live in the *lo'i* and depend on the water for their survival (*Ka Wai Ola* 242-244, 250-256). These interludes showcase the same elements that Sinavaiana discusses in her work on *fale aitu*. The inclusion of Bull and Jorgenson show the audience a parody of authority figures from Hawai'i's recent past and, when Keanu is confronted by the little fish and animals that live in the *lo'i*, the audience is shown a world inverted, where the normal rules are turned upside down.

The term *fale aitu* can be translated as "spirit house" which makes the phrase seem more like a place than a clowning practice. This illustrates that the clowning is more than just a genre; the performance becomes the metaphorical (and metaphysical) house in which the spirits reside. As with the Rotuman clown, Samoan clowns are also connected to the spirit world.

In Samoan comic theater, called *Faleaitu*, or “spirit house,” the performers are absolved of any transgressions because they are understood to be like *aitu*, “spirits,” and their liminality places them in a different category from ordinary people [...] *Aitu*, spirits, are uncontrolled and outside of the social hierarchy [...] Polynesian clowns traditionally represented the spirits, and through that representation, clowns are granted license to invert the social order and ridicule and mock chiefs [...] clowns share some of the spirits’ unbound *mana*. (Georgina 89-91)

The message these performers present is not just meant for Keanu, but for the actor playing Keanu on stage and for an entire audience filled with children. The spirits of the ancestors, the environment, and the ancient gods are suddenly on stage imploring the audience to take an active role in the restoration of Hawaiian land rights, culture, and political discourse.⁴⁵ Through her use of a ritual performance, Kneubuhl has brought the spirit world on stage to reinforce the importance of fresh water rights on an island.

Another important spiritual aspect in the play – though not a ritual performance – is the inclusion of a talking *kalo* plant named Hāloa.⁴⁶ For native Hawaiians, the origin of the people of the islands is connected to Hāloa. Kneubuhl reinforces this connection in the play when she has Uncle Liko tell the story of the birth of the Hawaiian people to Keanu:

⁴⁵ “With the adoption of Christianity, the old Samoan gods were relegated to the world of ghosts and nature spirits, *aitu*” (Georgina 91)

⁴⁶ “The Gods – Wakea , the sky father, and Ho’ohokukalani , the star mother– gave birth to Haloa , the first born. Haloa was stillborn and placed in the earth outside the front door. Haloa grew into kalo, the first taro plant. The second-born of Wakea and Ho’ohokukalani was man, whose kuleana (responsibility) was to care for Haloa, his elder brother. Haloa, the kalo, became the staple food crop of the Hawaiian people. This kinship ties Hawaiians directly to nature and places upon us a spiritual obligation to malama (take care of and protect) our eldest brother. Haloa is also a metaphor for all living things in Hawai’i, as survival on little dots of land in the middle of the world’s largest ocean demands an intimate and reverent spiritual relationship with nature” (Ritte & Freese 11).

Liko: Look, see, the huli are planted. The first leaves are coming. Now we drain the lo'i, let the ground dry little bit so the young roots have a chance to grab on tight to the soil. *(pause)* The first human born was Hāloanaka. He died and was buried, and from his body, up grew kalo. Then another human was born. His name was Hāloa, the first person. We are the children, children born from Hāloa. But kalo, Hāloanaka, he will always be our older brother. *(Ka Wai Ola 233)*

Here we see that, in Hawaiian mythology, *kalo*, or taro, is the older brother of humanity. Consequently, having a giant talking *kalo* plant onstage explaining the importance of tending the *lo'i* would have another impact on an initiated audience member. Kneubuhl is using this element of Hawaiian mythology to reinforce the themes in the play. She presents these themes through the use of gods and ancestors by the performers onstage.

Within *Ka Wai Ola* we see a number of connections to ritual performance and mythology. Both the use of *fale aitu* and the inclusion of Hāloa out of Hawaiian mythology allow for an initiated audience to experience the work in a way that connects directly to an indigenous worldview. For those participants who are familiar with the mythology and ritual performance, this is not just a play about the importance of conserving and maintaining water rights. It is a plea from the ancestor spirits as well as the gods to maintain stewardship of the land and its rivers, streams, and lakes. Kneubuhl uses these connections to reinforce the themes in her play as well as to (re)acquaint the audience with the importance of tending to the land.

Comic Connections

The plays *Last Virgin in Paradise* and *Ka Wai Ola* both share a connection to indigenous ritual comedy in Oceania. The reason both of these plays were chosen for inclusion in this thesis is that they each use a different kind of comedy to achieve their respective aims. In *Last Virgin in Paradise* we see a singular ritual clown character take charge of the wedding ritual and poke fun at the bride, the groom, and the family for their respective roles in the organization of the marriage. The character of Male Clown serves as a stand-in for the Rotuman ritual clown in order to reinforce the values of the Marawan islanders – who at this point in the play think Hina is being taken advantage of and sold off by her family to a wealthy European. It is only later in the play, through another act of inversion, that we learn the truth: Hina is the one who is manipulating Helmut. *Last Virgin in Paradise* features one clown in one scene of the play, conversely *Ka Wai Ola* features a comedic performance style – with most of the cast joining in the skits. *Ka Wai Ola* does not just have one scene of ritual clowning; a good portion of the play is presented in the style of *fale aitu*. While each play uses a different form of ritual clowning, they utilize syncretic elements to reinforce the didactic messages within the respective works: marrying for love in *Last Virgin in Paradise* and stewardship of the land and waterways in *Ka Wai Ola*.

Not only does the ritual comedy serve to teach the participants about the “right ways of behavior,” but it also serves as a release valve of sorts. While the connection to ritual comedy and the release of societal pressures has already been mentioned, it is worth noting that an understanding of what is being “released” can inform outside observers of what is important – or particularly frustrating – to the individual postcolonial societies. In *Last Virgin in Paradise* we see frustration between the Marawans and the three “outsiders.” All of the outsiders argue over what is best for the indigenous population (and specifically Hina)

without ever taking into account the feelings or wishes of those selfsame individuals. The frustrating thing here is that it is the outsiders – all of whom Western or Westernized – that are trying to make decisions for the Marawans without ever asking what it is the Marawans want. In *Ka Wai Ola* we see frustration in the fact that Keanu, an indigenous Hawaiian teen, cares little for the family's struggle to regain their water rights and tend to the stream according to their custom. It is only after the ritual clowning performance that Keanu comes around to realize the importance of caring for the lakes, rivers, and streams in the customary Hawaiian fashion. Through understanding what frustrations are being released by the indigenous comic performances, we are allowed a window into what issues are bothering the respective postcolonial societies. Using the various ritual comedy constructs, the playwrights have crafted pieces that teach participants as well as entertain them with the comic antics of the ritual clowns and clowning styles.

Both *Last Virgin in Paradise* and *Ka Wai Ola* have structural connections to ritual performance in Oceania. The plays both use comedy to reinforce the values of their respective societies. While *Last Virgin in Paradise* tries to promote correct behavior and reinforce social order, *Ka Wai Ola* uses many of the same comedic techniques in ways that are more overtly didactic. Using ritual performance, both of these plays endeavor to pass on socio/cultural norms and methods of action and behavior. The passing on of cultural knowledge and the use of ritual performance also features heavily in the play *Frangipani Perfume* by Samoan playwright Makerita Urale.

Flaming Knives and *Frangipani Perfume*⁴⁷

One of the highlights of any tourist's trip to Hawai'i is often the participation in a "traditional" Hawaiian *luau*. The *luaus* that the hotels sponsor are only loosely related to the actual, culturally appropriate, Hawaiian event. Mostly what is found on the beaches of Waikiki is a tribute to the 1950's *hapa-haole* Hawaiiana.⁴⁸ Guests are treated to all you can drink (and extremely watered down) Mai Tai's, runny *poi*, over-salted pork, and a floorshow of mostly Tahitian dance (because it is more exciting than *hula*) with a show-stopping finale that features at least one smiling Samoan twirling a flaming baton in an exhibition of speed and skill. What most people do not realize is that this flaming showstopper is actually based on a traditional Samoan dance and has deep roots in the Samoan culture. This dichotomy between the tourist's ideal paradise and the reality is one of the main themes at work in Makerita Urale's play, *Frangipani Perfume*.

Frangipani Perfume is a play of images. Its episodic plot jumps from one visual cue to the next – not surprising since Urale is primarily a filmmaker. The play takes on a kind of cineastic dream journey that juxtaposes the stereotypes of Polynesian "dusky maidens" with the reality of the three sisters in the piece.⁴⁹ Just as in *Last Virgin in Paradise*, the playwright is openly combating the idea that women in Oceania have no power or agency and simply exist as "exotic, vulnerable maidens" (Tamaira 6). As David O'Donnell notes in his introduction to the play, "The opening images of *Frangipani Perfume* acknowledge this

⁴⁷ Frangipani is botanically known as *Plumeria rubra*, or simply plumeria.

⁴⁸ "hapa-haole, meaning 'half-white'" From: Linnekin, Jocelyn S. "Defining Tradition: Variations on the Hawaiian Identity" *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 10, No. 2. (May, 1983), pp. 241-252.

⁴⁹ Here the term "dusky maiden" is best described as: "the ubiquitous image of the sexually receptive and alluring Polynesian maiden [...] the tradition of sexualizing and eroticizing the Polynesian female form through titillating visual representations of bare-breasted, nubile Polynesian wāhine (women)" (Tamaira 1).

stereotype, as ‘Three Dusky Maidens’ dance with ‘sleepy sensuality’. The fantasy is immediately broken by [...] the reality of the sisters on hands and knees scrubbing a dirty floor” (iii). The audience is able to see these images side by side; the beautiful island maidens from the tourism bureau advertisements immediately transform into the women who work after hours scrubbing floors and plunging toilets. The play itself deals with the three sisters as they remember bits of their past when they were living in Samoa, the reality of their current lives in New Zealand, and the desire of the youngest sister (Pomu) to know how to make frangipani perfume. Pomu has very few memories of Samoa and the play keeps returning to her desire to connect to her homeland through the indigenous knowledge that her older sisters keep from her; the customary process by which frangipani perfume is made. In the final scene, the older sisters Tivi and Naiki describe the process of making frangipani perfume using contrasting mental images:

Tivi: [...] a shower of white white perfumed flowers falls from the sky all around us... we gather the Frangipani flowers into big brown baskets and take them to the women in our village. Our mother...

[...]

Naiki: Our mother made the oil of Frangipani Perfume from the white flesh of a coconut, dried brown into copra scattered on large brown mats laid out in the hot sun. The white scented flowers are soaked in the oil, and when the petals are brown and wilted, they are removed... leaving the fragrance of Frangipani Perfume. (34-35)

Again the audience is offered opposing mental images situated side-by-side: the white to brown emphasis of the ingredient colors is repeated again and again. In fact, the perfume

cannot be made until all the white elements become brown. This color transformation also connects to Pomu, the most Westernized of the sisters, who is always looking for the “formula” to make the perfume; Pomu must embrace the indigenous process of making the perfume if she hopes to recreate the scent.

While the process for making the perfume is not a ritual performance, it does contribute elements of ritual significance. The fact that the older sisters refuse to share the secret of perfume making with their younger sister implies that the information is somehow sacred and that Pomu must be prepared to inherit this knowledge. The transfer of indigenous knowledge in Samoa often had connections to the sacred. As Efi notes,

[...] the custodians of knowledge were normally of tulafale or orator status.

The Samoan term for someone who was selected to be a recipient of knowledge was often referred to as o e nainai, he or they who are specially selected for the transfer of knowledge. The knowledge of tulafale is sacred as is the transfer of this knowledge to the nainai. (63)

It is the transfer of this cultural knowledge that helps connect the sisters to the sacred. The two older sisters share in the responsibility of passing on this sacred knowledge to their younger sister. While sharing this knowledge is an important ritual and thematic element of the play, it is the use of Samoan dance as a ritual performance that opens up the play to the metaphysical realm.

Throughout *Frangipani Perfume*, Urale likes to play with opposites existing side-by-side, juxtaposing images and ideas, traditions and modern equivalencies. Urale’s use of dance throughout the play is another way that she juxtaposes the sacred with the profane.

Throughout the play, traditional Samoan dance is reinterpreted and modernized in order to

convey a meaning that is emotionally grounded in the lives of the three women. In Samoa, dances often have a connection to the spirit world of the ancestors. Efi notes that the primary purpose of Samoan ritual dance was communication: “The significance of the dance rituals and how dance was in itself a language or communication medium transferring knowledge and history between generations is underestimated” (62). The use of the various dances through the play serves to communicate an emotional reality for the three sisters.

One of the most dramatic (and dynamic) moments in the play is in Scene Sixteen: The Machete Dance. This is the scene during which the three sisters’ frustrations are transformed into a physicalization of “their anger and hate, illustrating the power struggles between the three sisters” (Urale 32). It is here that the ritual performance elements begin to come into play. Urale’s expressionistic scene has the sisters performing the Machete Dance towards the audience until each woman falls down exhausted. The Machete Dance is actually a colonial incarnation of a ritual dance in Samoa: the *'ailao*.⁵¹ The *'ailao* is also the dance that was mentioned at the start of this section – the postcolonial *luau* show-stopper: The Fire Knife Dance.⁵² By including this dance, Urale has once again created an amalgamation of the Polynesian stereotype and the reality. The traditional *'ailao* on which the Machete Dance is

⁵¹ “The ‘ailao probably traces its origins to the flourishes of wooden clubs common following victory in war, and dances with weapons featured in food homage presentations (ta’alolo) [...] This dance is performed without vocal accompaniment, with drumming on the pate or other drums. In the Uvean kailao, the dancers divide into two groups, which face and then approach each other, rhythmically twirling clubs [...] [There are] two kailaos, the kailao hele and kailao afi. In the kailao hele, a machete is used instead of a club or pole, accompanied by guitars and sometimes repetitive songs. The kailao afi is performed at night, twirling a baton with one or two ends lit with fire. The popular fire knife dance, performed mostly in cabarets and originally meant for a non-Samoan audience, is based on the ‘ailao” (Georgina 103).

⁵² Chief Letuli claims to be the originator of the Fire-Knife Dance during a Vaudeville performance in San Francisco California: “[When I arrived] I found a number of entertainers practicing their routines, including a Hindu man named Abe Singh, who was rehearsing his fire-eating routine. Nearby, a young girl practiced her baton twirling routine. [...] I stared at the fire eater, then the baton twirler. The baton twirler, then the fire eater. And just like that, I had an idea that would add ‘sizzle’ to my Samoan knife dance. [...] I grabbed my towel, cut it into strips and tied it to my knife. Then I borrowed some kerosene from Abe Singh. The first Samoan fire knife was born” (*Flaming Sword of Samoa*... 23).

based uses *nifo o'ti*, or the tooth of death – basically wooden Samoan war clubs with sharpened or beveled wooden teeth around the edge (Letuli 14-15, Martin 81). In her master's thesis on Samoan dance, Vicki Martin notes the following about the '*ailao*: “[it] was originally a dance to train warriors by conditioning both sides of their bodies equally in order that those engaged in battle could defend and attack successfully from either side of their bodies” (81). The '*ailao* is a war dance and is designed to show off a warrior's prowess. For Urale to make this the climax of the play not only shows that the sisters are challenging each other, but challenging the audience as well. The audience is being forced to confront the aggression and warrior prowess of these three women who, in the reality of the play, are scrubbing bathrooms and emptying trash bins in a high-rise office.

Many scholars have noted that the '*ailao* is traditionally a dance performed by men (Martin 81, Georgina 103), however there is some tantalizing evidence to the contrary that would enhance our understanding of Urale's work. In his 1883 work on the traditions and culture of Samoa, Augustin Krämer recorded this account:

Several sons and daughters of chiefs adorned with head ornaments and fine mats always dance ahead of such a crowd. With war clubs in their hands they race ahead of the procession, stop suddenly, throw the clubs or knives in the air, catch them cleverly often behind their backs and juggle them passing them under their arms and legs, in short perform all sorts of skillful manoeuvres.[sic] (377)

While he never gives these displays a name, his description sounds almost exactly like the '*ailao*. It is interesting to note that this dance is not just performed by the male warriors, but also by the daughters of chiefs. This suggests that these three sisters – these women who are

relegated to plunging toilets and scrubbing filthy floors – are the daughters of a Samoan chief. While the text never makes this explicit, the fact that they know how to perform and confidently use the *'ailao* as a form of expression allows initiated participants to realize that these women are of chiefly descent. As immigrants in New Zealand, their title and social ranking means nothing, but for an initiated audience that understands the implications of women performing this dance, suddenly these three sisters take on a higher social status and their situation becomes even more shocking. This also has connections to the idea of the “Dusky Maiden.” While the women seem relatively powerless in the scenes of reality, their power is regained in the scenes that rely more heavily on dance and poetry. The women become stronger as they come closer to the metaphysical. This counters the stereotype of the Dusky Maiden in that the women are removed from being vulnerable exotic beauties – dances like the *'ailao* show their strength and their connection to the divine. As Tamaira notes, “[...] all Polynesian women, whether they are from Hawai’i, Samoa, or elsewhere in Polynesia, may be seen as being imprinted with the same potent material as their respective goddesses – powerful entities who are reborn in each succeeding generation of women” (6). Through the ritual performance, along with the sharing of indigenous knowledge, the women share a greater connection to the divine.

The *'ailao* is a dance that is performed for the Samoan war goddess Nafanua who, “[...] according to legend, nearly singlehandedly defeated the enemies from the east” (Georgina 103). This is a dance that not only shows off a warrior’s prowess, but also has a direct link to the Samoan war goddess who drove the enemies of the Samoan people back into the sea. The *'ailao* is performed for her honor and immediately connects the sisters to this goddess of war. For a Samoan or informed audience member, this climax is more than just the sisters venting their frustrations through dance. It is a connection to the gods that

finally allows them to share the indigenous knowledge that they have been keeping from Pomu.

As has been seen in each of the plays examined in this chapter, *Frangipani Perfume* uses ritual performance to share indigenous knowledge and social practice. The sharing of cultural knowledge – even something as simple as the process for making frangipani perfume – takes on a ritual and spiritual significance for these women. This engagement with cultural knowledge through ritual performance can be found in all of the plays examined in this chapter.

Ritual Performance: A Summation

One of the main aspects that these plays share is that they use indigenous performance to help recapture indigenous ways of knowing and doing that have been lost or devalued over the years. In *Last Virgin in Paradise*, we see inversions of power dynamics that reinforce traditional indigenous value systems. *Ka Wai Ola* is perhaps the most blatantly didactic in its handling of Hawaiian water rights, using *fale aitu* to portray various scenes of life along and within the water. Finally, in *Frangipani Perfume*, ritual performance is used to challenge the dusky maiden stereotype. A visceral war dance performed by the women opens up a connection to the divine that allows the older sisters to share the secret (and personally sacred) knowledge with Pomu. All of these plays utilize indigenous ritual performance practices to access traditional indigenous knowledge and social norms that have resonance for initiated audience members. Houston Wood said it best:

Pacific Islands literature may be functioning in the Pacific region today like a Trojan horse. Literature may appear to be a benign notion left behind by

departed colonialists, but hidden within this cultural apparatus are agents that can be as transformative as colonialism itself. (*Inside Out* 381)

Each of the plays in this chapter has a social agenda and uses syncretic theatre to both highlight that agenda and give it more social significance. An initiated audience member would be able to recognize both the socio/cultural message that the play contains.

CHAPTER THREE:

Informal Ritual Action and Myth in *When Sun and Moon Collide* and *Te Maunga*

In the two chapters preceding this, analysis has focused on how the selected plays have utilized formal ritual action and ritual performance as syncretic theatre elements. Both formal ritual action and ritual performance offer a straightforward pathway to the spirit world; when a participant engages in a *kava* ritual or performs a *hula*, a window to the metaphysical is opened. Informal ritual action, while still providing the spiritual connection, is the farthest removed from the ritual action discussed in Chapters 1 & 2. As Ian McNiven notes in his study on spiritscapes, “Informal ritual engagements tend to be situations where people experience a spiritual presence/power while undertaking everyday acts” (335). The difference between informal ritual action and formal ritual action is that participants have a less active role in the summoning of the spirits or the metaphysical. While the plays being examined here all have connections to the spirit world, or to the mythological world of the gods and goddesses, there is no single ritual action or performance that opens the plays to the metaphysical realm.

The plays being examined here each have an element of informal ritual action. The two Māori plays both deal with Māori cultural knowledge and mythology. *When Sun and Moon Collide* is structurally based on the *maramataka* – the Māori moon calendar. While the *maramataka* is not a formal ritual action or performance designed to summon the spirits or open a door into the metaphysical world, its spiritual significance remains. This informal ritual action carries over into the second Māori play *Te Maunga*, which uses Māori mythology to engage with the world of the gods, while at the same time reimagining the mythology altogether.

The plays have been grouped together so that the two plays are discussed in concert with one another. Both plays deal with Māori mythology and the process of myth creation and repurposing. The plays also have imagistic similarities in that they both use the struggle between darkness and light to reinforce themes.

Thematically, these plays were chosen because all of them use informal ritual action to promote community healing. In *When Sun and Moon Collide* and *Te Maunga*, cultural healing can be found in the way each play reappropriates Māori mythology so that each set of characters is able to let go of the past and move into the future. Each play has a firm basis in mythology, but is not afraid to take those myths and repurpose them for the good of the respective characters. The Māori plays also deal with the concept of *utu* or balance. Both Māori plays feature a world that is broken and out of balance. By the end of each play, however, the world of the gods and spirits is accessed and balance is restored. The concept of *utu* informs the resolutions of both Māori plays. Each play uses informal ritual action to find a connection to the world of today. That connection is then used to promote healing within their respective communities and possibly in the communities outside of the world of the play as well.

New Moons & New Myths: *When Sun and Moon Collide* and *Te Maunga*

At first glance *When Sun and Moon Collide* by Briar Grace-Smith is a play that appears to be written in a traditional Aristotelian/Western manner; the play is mostly realism and boasts a plot structure complete with rising action, climax, and dénouement. There are elements of magic/poetic realism thrown into the mix, but nothing that is too far removed from the climactic plot structure. The reviews of the play reinforce this, calling the play “[...] a tension-packed, many-layered psychological thriller-cum-murder mystery” (Coleman

"Complex Tale but Every Minute Compelling"). This reviewer simply lumps the play into the category of a murder mystery thriller, completely ignoring the play's connection to Māori mythology and informal ritual action. The only element that would seem to directly reference Māori culture at all is one character's use of indigenous lunar calendars. Upon further exploration, however, it is apparent that the Western structure is nothing more than a shell for themes and characterizations that have deep roots within Māori and Polynesian culture. The use of the lunar calendar is not just a throwaway piece of stage business. As Alice Te Punga Somerville reveals in her Forward to the play, it is the key to unlocking the deeper meaning within the script itself (viii – xi). The play contains several elements that are not apparent to an audience/reader unless they have an understanding of *maramataka* (Māori lunar calendars) and Māori mythology. From a purely Western perspective, the play seems to have a climactic plot structure. When viewed with an eye toward Māori mythology and the *maramataka*, however, the play appears more cyclical in nature. *When Sun and Moon Collide* is about four characters and the secrets that connect them. Isaac is the milk-toast owner of a failing tearoom. He has had no customers since Café Astounding opened down the road, with the exception of an anorexic jogger named Francie who refuses to eat or drink anything but water. While Isaac desires Francie, she is too focused on her running to notice. Perhaps more accurately, Francie is too focused on the person from whom she is running to notice Isaac. Local policewoman, Travis, asks Isaac to supervise his childhood friend Declan who has recently been released on probation. Declan is haunted by his alter ego, "Jason," who comes out on *Mutuwhenua* to wreak havoc. Hanging over all of them is the stress of having two missing Danish backpackers and the ever-present personality of Vic (Francie's unseen (but often felt) "brother" who also happens to be Travis' lover). Later in the play, we learn that Vic is actually keeping Francie prisoner in an abusive sexual relationship and only pretends to be related to her. He is also revealed to be the murderer of the Danish backpackers.

Ultimately, Francie is able to manipulate Declan's alter ego, "Jason," into killing Vic. The mysterious relationships and questions of missing persons and domestic abuse appear to be the driving forces behind this play. These issues, however, are simply the plot-driven surface mysteries. In order to understand the play more completely, an analysis must be made with an understanding of Māori culture and mythology. This is exactly the level analysis that will be completed later in this chapter.

A similar analysis is necessary to create an informed understanding of Albert Belz's play *Te Maunga*. As with *When Sun and Moon Collide*, Māori mythology and created myth are both major components in this play. On the surface, Belz's play is about two brothers reconciling after their fathers death and it seems like a typical family drama. However, when the play is analyzed alongside Māori mythology, informal ritual action, and mythmaking in general, deeper themes reveal themselves. Belz's play centers around two brothers who were separated when they were seven years old, only to be reunited on the evening of the new millennium to travel from Auckland to Ruatoria for their father's funeral. The older brother, John (Hone), was raised by his Pākehā mother in Auckland. The younger brother, Piripi, stayed with their father and received an upbringing more completely in line with Māori values and worldview. As was discussed at the start of the thesis, the imagination does not need to be stretched far to see how these brothers represent the Māori community as a whole. While Piripi works as a traditional carver, John is an advertising executive with a German sports car and a beautiful English girlfriend named Liz who has come along to support him. These three travel together to the father's *tangi* (funeral rites)⁵³ and the brothers confront their past and present relationship along the way. Shared memories of the night their mother left their abusive father return throughout the trip and weigh down the car. As the brothers and Liz come to an uneasy accord, their car is stolen. Rather than sit around, the three

⁵³ See: Sinclair, Karen P. "Tangi: funeral rituals and the construction of Maori identity." *Cultural Identity And Ethnicity In The Pacific* (1990): 219-236.

characters decide to spend the night hiking Mt. Hikurangi so that they can experience the first light of the new millennium. They come to an area near the top of the mountain where Piripi had buried a scrapbook and a homemade comic from the boy's childhood. As mentioned at the opening of this thesis, the two men stand together against the howling wind and rain, each performing a *haka* of their own making until the light of dawn breaks. While Belz's play could almost be viewed as an allegory of modern Aotearoa New Zealand (or all of Oceania), it is his use of Māori mythology and mythmaking which add a dimension of the transcendental to his play.

As is true of *When Sun and Moon Collide*, *Te Maunga* is structurally beholden to Western dramaturgy, yet the themes and ideas present cannot be fully appreciated without an understanding of Māori mythology and astronomy. Both plays also engage in mythmaking. They acknowledge Māori mythology and then repurpose it to highlight themes and characterizations within each script; in the process, new myths for the 21st century are created. Analysis of the plays will focus on the mythological contextualization of indigenous knowledge within the plays and the use of informal ritual action(s) in order to have a greater understanding of the thematic and socio-cultural ramifications of the scripts.

***Maramataka* & Heavenly Bodies Collide**

There is little doubt that the Māori lunar calendar (*maramataka*) is at the heart of Briar Grace-Smith's play, *When Sun and Moon Collide*. Not only does one of the main characters, Declan Kopu, read from a *maramataka* throughout the play, but a number of the scenes include headings that directly correspond to the names of moon phases in a *maramataka*. We even know that the climax of the play must happen on *Mutuwhenua*, if it is to happen at all. *Maramataka*, simply put, are the Māori variations of the Polynesian lunar

calendar. These lunar calendars had a specific function related to food gathering and cultivation: “Monthly moon calendars are more specific than seasonal cycles in that they specify the actual days on which certain food related activities are or are not advised” (Roberts et al, 1). In his monograph, *The Māori Division of Time*, Elsdon Best not only analyzes Māori *maramataka*, but also looks at lunar calendars from other Polynesian islands and offers a comparison. While the lunar calendars are all very similar, suggesting a similar origin, each is unique to the island and location of the tribal group. Even within Māori tribes in New Zealand, there are discrepancies between the names, placement, and meaning of various moon nights. Each *maramataka* was unique to the area for which it was actively used.⁵⁴ It is important to remember that, while the *maramataka* had spiritual significance, it was ultimately a working document. For the *maramataka* to have any value, it had to speak directly to the area for which it was intended. While this lack of a unified structure and regional significance might seem like a road-block for analysis of *When Sun and Moon Collide*, there are enough pluralities between *maramataka* to offer a thorough analysis of the informal ritual actions and spiritual connections within the piece.

The play is structured around four nights within the lunar month. It is unknown whether these nights occur within the same lunar month, but it seems likely given the pace of the play and the fact that all the nights occur sequentially in the script. The four nights, in the order in which they occur in the script, are: *Mutuwhenua*, *Tamatea Kai Ariki*, *Korekore Te Rawea*, and *Mutuwhenua*.

⁵⁴ “Similarities as well as the differences between tribal (and hence geographical) areas are also of interest. For example, horticultural activities feature strongly among the northern tribes, sea fishing among coastal tribes, forest foods (birds and rats) among inland peoples, and freshwater fishes particularly tuna (eels) among others. Because the exact geographical location of each *maramataka* is seldom given it is difficult to undertake a detailed investigation of the relative influences of climate, available resources, and other biophysical and social variables on tribal similarities and differences.” (Roberts et al, 1-2)

Mutuwhenua is one of the nights of the new moon and is often the final night of the lunar month. In their study and comparison of forty-four *maramataka*, Roberts et al describe *Mutuwhenua* as “[...] a night when ‘*the moon has expired*’, or when ‘*the moon is overcome by the sun. It is carried away by the sun into darkness...*’ [...] Other tribal sources say this is when ‘*the world is in darkness*’ [...] or when the ‘*moon is dead*’” (11). In his work on Māori units of time, Elsdon Best includes a number of *maramataka* that describe *Mutuwhenua* as: “An exceedingly bad day. The moon has expired” (Best *The Maori Division of Time* 35); and “An undesirable day” (37). In the play, the character of Declan reads from his grandfather’s *maramataka*, stating: “*Mutuwhenua*. Thirteenth phase of the moon. Unproductive day for planting and fishing. Nights are equally as bleak. Kua mate te marama. The moon dies, and the world is left in total darkness” (Grace-Smith, 22). In his review of the play, Smythe notes: “The title *When Sun and Moon Collide*, refers to the approach of *Mutuwhenua*, which literally translates as the end of the world. More accurately, it equates to Armageddon: the final cataclysmic battle between good and evil” (Smythe “Plays Explore Guilt and Apply a Cathartic Cleansing” 20/10/00). What can be gleaned from all these sources is that *Mutuwhenua* is a bad day; it is a day that carries certain socio-cultural connotations for the Māori, which only serve to reinforce the actions taken by the characters in the play.

When the play opens, we learn that *Mutuwhenua* is just ending, it is almost dawn, and the character of Declan has – unbeknownst to him – beaten a man severely and destroyed the local church. Declan tells Isaac that he loses control on *Mutuwhenua*; he becomes someone else and has no memory of his actions.

DECLAN: Something happened, Isaac. It was him. He likes the darkness of *Mutuwhenua*. It makes him feel safe.

ISAAC (*confused*): *Mutuwhenua*?

DECLAN: It's a phase of the moon. When everything's black as. (*Pause*) He pulls at me from the inside till my ribcage opens and my flesh parts. Then he leaps out and takes control.

ISAAC: Stop it. Right now.

DECLAN: I turn into Jason, and he does stuff. Heavy stuff. Like with Mikey, when the gas station was hit. Sure the fulla looked like me, same shirt, same shoes, but there was someone else calling the shots. He had a knife to Mikey's face, man! A knife. (*Pleads*) I'd never hurt anything, Isaac. You know that. You know me, man. [...] (20-21)

In this first scene, we learn that Declan is ruled by the moon. When the moon is gone, when it “dies,” Declan “dies” as well, loosing himself to the Hyde-like part of his consciousness he calls Jason. When *Mutuwhenua* arrives again at the play's climax, we find Declan (as Jason) and Francie beating Vic to death with boards. The play uses Māori cultural knowledge to inform the actions of the characters; Declan is directly influenced by the Māori socio-cultural framework surrounding *Mutuwhenua*.

It is also interesting to note the mythological constructs *Mutuwhenua* possesses in Māori and Polynesian culture. According to a number of sources,⁵⁵ Māori and other Polynesians believe that when the moon disappears during the lunar month it is bathing in the *Te Waioira a Tane*. Best notes that many interpret this to mean “[...] ‘the water of life’ and ‘life-giving waters’ [...] the true meaning is ‘sunlight’” (Best *The Astronomical Knowledge...* 96). The moon is literally bathing in sunlight in order to heal itself. Andersen notes: “Here

⁵⁵ See: Best, Elsdon. *Maori Religion and Mythology: Being an Account of the Cosmogony, Anthropogeny, Religious Beliefs and Rites, Magic and Folk Lore of the Maori Folk of New Zealand. Part 1 & 2*. Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2005; Pomare, Maui, and James Cowan. *Legends of the Maori*. Vol. 1 & 2. New York: AMS, 1987.

Marama, the moon, when wasted in waning, bathed and gained new strength [...] From here the souls of new-born mortals descended to their earthly home” (417). The idea that *Mutuwhenua* allows for healing directly relates to both Declan and Francie at the end of the play. Both characters undergo a healing and restorative process once Vic is dead and *Mutuwhenua* is over. Francie even craves these healing waters and refuses to eat or drink anything but water throughout the play. It is not until Vic is dead and *Mutuwhenua* is over that Francie demands Isaac make her a huge meal (81). Declan too is looking for some kind of healing or rejuvenation asking, “What about me? Will I rise again after Mutuwhenua? Will I have another chance?” (50). As stated in the stage directions, Declan is literally asking the moon this question. Declan has spent years in prison and is ostracized from his family and community, because of Jason’s actions. He has now returned home and wants to start his life over again. Unfortunately, because of the appearance of Jason on *Mutuwhenua*, he finds it harder than anticipated.

In his book on Māori mythology and religion, Best states that the *Te Waioira a Tane* is actually sunlight (Best *Religion and Mythology Part 2* 96-97). Best also chronicles a Māori myth regarding the *Te Waioira a Tane* and the moon, stating: “The dark phase of the moon; it is being consumed by Rona, and when the moon is lost to view Rona and the moon are consuming each other. One assails the other; then they bathe in the *waiora a Tane*, and recover” (97). This myth can be directly related to the Declan/Jason relationship. Declan is constantly fighting to keep Jason from gaining control on *Mutuwhenua*. Again, if Declan is not a symbol of the moon itself, at the very least, he has a strong relationship to the Māori lunar mythology.

The second moon phase mentioned in the play is *Tamatea Kai Ariki*. As with all of the names of the moon phases, different *maramataka* have different recommendations/descriptions in regards to the fortunes of the night. Roberts et al state:

“[...] the three Tamatea nights as is suggested in several lists from Whanganui [...] are nights on which ‘*it rises higher still*’ and ‘*it grows larger*’ [...] in Tahiti on Tamatea night nine, ‘*the moon has begun to shine brightly*’” (9). The *maramataka* listed in Best’s work remark on *Tamatea Kai Ariki* in the following manner: “The weather improves” (*The Maori Division of Time* 35); and “An unlucky day. The sea is rough” (36). Grace-Smith describes *Tamatea Kai Ariki* in the play as: “[...] Sixth phase of the moon. A day for planting food. West winds prevail, pushing with them a fire only the rain will quell” (45). What can be gleaned from this is that, while *Tamatea Kai Ariki* is not a bad day (certainly not in the same category as *Mutuwhenua*) there is still a sense of unease connected to it. The connotations of the moon filling out, shining brighter, coupled with the winds and rough sea warnings, all relay a feeling of apprehension that carries over into the scene itself. Participants feel a sense of impending distress, a foreboding presence throughout the scene. While Declan and Travis discuss the moon, Francie prepares to fight the imposing presence of Vic. This is also the scene in which the voice and presence of Vic is heard for the first, and only, time.

Grace-Smith places the phase of the moon the Māori call *Korekore te Rawea* in the scene directly preceding the final *Mutuwhenua* scene. This is the scene in which Declan and Francie finally meet face-to-face and Francie discloses that she wants to hire Declan to help her kill Vic. Francie also reveals that Vic is not actually her brother but an abusive lover and murderer. Grace-Smith ends the scene with the following dialogue:

FRANCIE: I can’t hold on. I... I can’t wait. Nothing ever stays still for me.

It’s all falling away from under us. Even the earth’s shifting. Can you feel it?

DECLAN: Francie. Please. Look. Stand still and look.

DECLAN *gently takes FRANCIE in his arms and shifts her gaze so she’s again looking at the moon.*

FRANCIE: The sun. The sun is out with the moon.

DECLAN: Yeah. The sun is out with the moon. Korekore te Rawea. Twenty-third phase of the moon. Not a fruitful night. Food is scarce. (*He turns to her.*)
But await, my dear, the turn of the tide. The tide will turn. The tide will turn.
(67)

The idea that something is coming, and Declan's message that "the tide will turn," are reinforced by the playwright's decision to set the scene on *Korekore te Rawea*. As for *Korekore te Rawea*, Roberts et al have this to say: "Korekore Nights: These most commonly occur between nights 20-24 and the majority of maramataka contain three such nights. [...] Observations about the moon's appearance are lacking from Aotearoa, but Stimson [...] records that "*ore'ore means 'to be lacking, missing, be not'*" and these are the nights when the fish have disappeared" (10). In the *maramataka* Best has studied, *Korekore te Rawea* is considered "A bad day" (Best *The Maori Division of Time* 35); and "unpleasant days" (37). Again, with *Korekore te Rawea*, the playwright continues the pattern of choosing moon phases which relay a sense of foreboding. In the scene directly following this, Vic is killed on the second *Mutuwhenua* night in the play. Here again, we see how *When Sun and Moon Collide* provides an excellent example of indigenous cultural knowledge and informal ritual action being used to inform and heighten the structure of an otherwise traditionally constructed script.

Not only does the play build using a traditional Aristotelian/Western climactic structure, but the use of the specific phases of the moon relay this same sense of the increasing tension to a Māori audience familiar with *maramataka*. Traditional rising-action structure works in concert with indigenous astronomical knowledge to create a production that works on multiple levels for different audience/communities. By utilizing the moon

phases *Tamatea Kai Ariki* and *Korekore te Rawea*, and the connotations those nights carry with them, as a way to lead into the final *Mutuwhenua* night and climax of the play, Briar Grace-Smith creates an ingrained tension for Māori audiences and readers.

MYTHOLOGY MOONS AND MOUNTAINS

Along with the use of *maramataka*, mythology surrounding the sun, moon, and other astronomical phenomena plays a role in *When Sun and Moon Collide*. Although some myths, like the *Te Waiora a Tane*, have already been discussed, more analysis is needed if we wish to understand the full scope of Māori and Polynesian mythology within the development of characters and thematic undercurrents in the play. Belz's play, *Te Maunga*, owes various themes and characters to Māori mythology as well. While Belz's work does not formally reference any *maramataka* or moon phases, it does rely heavily on the image of moving from darkness into light, something that can also be seen in *When Sun and Moon Collide*. Belz even engages in myth creation and the repurposing of mythology as his two brother characters create the story of Captain Tumeke a Māori (space explorer) who has super powers provided by the sun and his arch nemesis: The Galactic Taniwha. This created myth is juxtaposed with the image of young Piripi reciting the story of Maui lassoing the sun and bringing light to the world (Belz 74-75). Belz's play places this contemporary mythology alongside the classical Māori mythology and gives both equal standing in the eyes of the two children, Boy and Boy 2. Neither the classical nor the created myth(s) are seen as being more or less valid.

The connection between mythology and the spirit world is often underestimated and overlooked. Mythology is often dismissed as the foundation for ritual or as the stories that justify ritual, but the myth itself lacks any kind of connection to the metaphysical. This is not

the case. In her study on the relationship between mythology and healing, Marlaine C. Smith makes the following points:

Myths are realizations that are expressed in symbolic form. Through an imaginative dance with the fantasies of myth we awaken to the essential nature of our being and relationship to the infinite. [...] We uncover knowledge that is both ancient and enduring, connecting us to all humankind past, present, and future. This form of knowing transcends time and space. Although the contexts of the stories differ, the themes abide. (2-3)

As Smith notes, myths connect the individual to the infinite. This is especially true in Oceania where, as has been mentioned before, individuals are able to trace their genealogies back to the gods and goddesses. For participants with this worldview, seeing these myths restaged in a modern context does not lessen their connection to the world of the gods and spirits. Rather, it reaffirms the belief that these supernatural beings “constitute actual ancestors, who are genealogically linked to their [...] descendants” (Tamaira 6). Seeing this mythology repurposed for a modern setting only serves to strengthen the connection the participants feel with the spirit world.

The mixed bag of mythology that Belz uses throughout *Te Maunga* may have its roots in traditional Māori mythology, but Belz also draws from Judeo/Christian and pop-culture mythology. Belz references Jesus, Darth Vader, Maui, and other classical and contemporary myths, heroes, and gods and then blends them together to create a mythology that is entirely unique to the play, yet completely recognizable to the participants. Even the ending of the plays is foreshadowed (or prophesied) earlier in the work:

BOY- They have one of those big battles. The cool ones like on Bonanza. When Little Joe gets shot and he says to Hoss, “Go on without me!” But he knows Hoss won’t leave him. Except it’s not Little Joe getting shot, it’s Captain Tumeke getting hit by the Taniwha’s breath. Giant blasts of wind from his mouth. Whoosh! (*he punches the palm of his hand with his fist*) Boom! And Captain Tumeke says to his brother, “Go on without me!” And the Taniwha keeps blasting at them with its hurricane breath, Whoosh! Boom! Whoosh! Boom! Aaaghh! (50)

This monologue from “Boy” is fairly close to what happens to the brothers at the climax of the play. Both men stand together against the wind – or the Taniwha’s breath – while they perform impromptu hakas until the first light of dawn touches them. There are also mythological connections to Mount Hikurangi. The title of the play itself implies a kind of sacredness; *Te Maunga*, translated “The Mountain,” seems to suggest there are no other mountains other than this one. Throughout Western religion and mythology, there are numerous accounts of heroes and holy men climbing mountains in order to commune with the gods and Belz uses this in his own myth creation. Historically, Mount Hikurangi was seen as a place of protection and refuge. In a compilation of history and mythology along the Taranaki Coast, there is the following account of Mount Hikurangi: “[...] At any rate the believers removed to Hikurangi mountain [...] Sure enough in the eighth month a great storm occurred, and the sea rose to an unprecedented height, and many people – the unbelievers – were drowned. None but those who fled to the hills were saved” (*History and Traditions of the Taranaki Coast* 199-200). Belz uses this traditional knowledge to root his new mythology in what came before. This same “rooting” in mythology can also be seen in *When Sun and Moon Collide*.

This restaging of myth is apparent in both plays. There is ample evidence to suggest that Briar Grace-Smith intended for the characters of Declan and Francie to represent the moon and sun respectively. The two characters do not appear together until one of the final scenes in the play. Throughout most of the show, they just miss each other on many occasions; one walks out of the room literally as the other walks in: “FRANCIE *flees the room and just misses* DECLAN, *who walks in half-asleep*” (Grace-Smith 59). They only meet for the first time in the scene entitled “A Collision of Planets” (62) and then, in the final scene entitled: “The Universe Is These Tearooms”, we learn that Declan and Francie are running the tearoom and engaging in a romantic relationship (85). In this, the playwright is affirming that Declan and Francie are immense entities living in the universe; they are the moon and sun. On the night of *Korekore te Rawea*, we are also given evidence of Declan and Francie’s symbolism. As this is the scene in which they first appear together, the repetition of the line “the sun is out with the moon” takes on great meaning and strongly suggests that the two are personified versions of the moon and sun.

Declan has a very obvious connection to the moon. He is ruled by the moon’s cycles and is also in some sense the moon’s agent. As he transforms into the character of Jason on *Mutuwhenua*, Declan is able to kill Vic and save both Francie and Travis (his foster sister) from Vic’s abuse and manipulations. Māori and Polynesian mythology cast the moon as a defender of women. As Best states, “[...] the being whom native women ever turned to in their hour of trouble was Hina-te-iwaiwa, or Hina, the latter being apparently more correct form, who is simply the female personification of the moon” (Best *Maori Religion and Mythology Part 2* 358). Duncan takes on this role of protector for both Travis and Francie when he embraces his transformation into Jason as a means to kill Vic. There is some ambiguity towards the moon’s gender in Polynesian and Māori mythology as well. While

Hina is more commonly known as the personification of the moon, there are a number of accounts that suggest that the moon is actually male.

Said an old Tuhoe native to the writer, “The moon is the real (or permanent) husband of all women. According to the wisdom of our ancestors, the mating of man with woman is a matter of secondary importance; the moon is the true husband” This confusion of sex in regard to the moon is peculiar. Hina and Hina-te-iwaiwa are female personifications of the moon, yet the moon under its common name of Rongo is spoken of as male. [...] In days of old, when the moon appeared, women would cry, “The husband of all women in the world has appeared.” (Best *The Astronomical Knowledge...* 26-27)

This idea that the moon is the husband of all women is demonstrated by Declan’s relationship with both Francie and Travis. By the end of the play Declan is able to love, and be loved, by both women – albeit in different ways. Once Declan, Travis, and Francie are able to accept each other and feel love for one another, they are able to regain control over their lives.

There is also suggestion that Declan and the moon somehow exert control over Francie’s menstrual cycle. While, scientifically speaking, the reason for Francie’s lack of menstruation is probably caused by her refusal to eat and her constant self-destructive exercise, it is not until Declan forces her to look at the moon that she regains her ability to menstruate. Initially Francie hesitates to even look at the moon:

FRANCIE: I’m sure you do, but I bet supermodels still get their periods.

DECLAN (*shrugs*): Depends if they take their time to look at the moon. And I don’t know that many supermodels are into astronomy.

FRANCIE: What are you talking about?

DECLAN: The moon controls the menstrual cycle of women.

FRANCIE *looks suspiciously up at the moon.*

FRANCIE: I never notice the sky or the sea. Don't have time.

(64)

Declan, as the moon's representative at the very least (and possibly as the husband of all women) seems to have control over Francie's ability to reproduce. Once Declan encourages her to take a moment and look at the moon, she regains her fertility. This also coincides with their engagement in a romantic relationship with each other, a fact that highlights the barrenness of her relationship with Vic. Francie's ability to reproduce is lost until Vic is dead. While the obvious reason for her regaining her menstrual cycle concerns her choice to eat again after Vic is killed, the playwright phrases the revelation as follows:

FRANCIE: [...] We stopped circling and came together and looked at the moon. Now I've stopped running, and I'm fat with periods, and Declan is loved and not so crazy. [...] (Grace-Smith 86)

It is the act of coming together with Declan to look at the moon that allows Francie to regain her ability to menstruate. Without Declan, and without his influence over her, it is suggested that she might still be running and still lack capacity for reproduction.

The mythological connections that Francie shares with the sun are also interesting to note. Along with her connection to *Te Waiora a Tane* mentioned earlier, there are other aspects in her relationship to Declan, and the role she plays within the script, that suggest she

is a symbolic representation for the sun.⁵⁶ In the play, it is Francie who holds the answers to all mysteries. Finally, in an attempt to get Declan to help her kill Vic, Francie reveals that it was Vic who killed the missing backpackers and that Vic is not her brother as everyone believes, but her lover who keeps her imprisoned with his threats, abuse, and manipulations. The fact that Francie knows all of these things draws a direct comparison to the Māori and Polynesian deity Tane. Best notes:

In one old myth the name of Hiringa is applied to the sun in connection with the singular belief that the sun represented knowledge – the higher kinds of knowledge. This name is evidently an abbreviated form of that of Tane-i-te-hiringa, who is the personified form of such knowledge. This is a very curious connection, but we must bear in mind that it was Tane, the personified form of the sun, who ascended to the uppermost of the twelve heavens in order to obtain from the Supreme Being the three *tapu* baskets of occult knowledge.
(Best *The Astronomical Knowledge...* 17)

⁵⁶ Tane's relationship to the sun is a bit more circuitous. Elsdon Best theorizes that Tane is the sun. While Māori mythology usually lists Tama-nui-te-ra as the sun god in the Māori pantheon; Best argues that this is just in the morning or at sunrise, and that it is actually Tane-te-po-tiwha who serves as the personification of the sun. For Best, Tane serves as "[...] the origin of light and the welfare that springs from it" (Best *Maori Religion and Mythology Part I* 97). Best also notes: "We now see why it is that the Māori has been said by many writers to have had no conception of a sun deity, that he practiced no form of sun-worship, that he showed no reverence for that important luminary. It is because he personified the sun in Tane; because he discarded, in this connection, the ordinary word denoting the sun, ra, and elevated it to a high place in the Māori pantheon under a different name" (97). The cultural/mythological connections between Tane, Francie, and the sun are too strong to simply be put down as mere coincidence. These connections would be apparent to anyone familiar with Māori and Polynesian mythology and would add a layer of comprehension to the piece that would be lost to an audience who did not possess this kind of cultural understanding.

Francie's connection to knowledge in the play is a direct parallel to Tane's connection to knowledge in Māori mythology. All of the major dramatic questions an audience member would be asking throughout the course of the play are answered by Francie in one short speech where she reveals the true nature of her relationship with Vic (Grace-Smith 77-78). Francie is also tasked with delivering the dénouement in Scene 11 when she wraps up any loose ends for the audience. Throughout the play, it is Francie who has the answers to all of the mysteries, but she can only reveal the truth to the other characters and the audience when she is in Declan's presence. Once Francie is able to share the knowledge she has stored, she is finally able to heal (85-86).

Darkness vs. Light: To Heal, To Harm.

The idea that the sun provides healing is also a strong theme in *Te Maunga*. Albert Belz makes no move to hide the fact that sunlight is a source of healing and rebirth. While *Te Maunga* does not follow the *maramataka* in the same way that *When Sun and Moon Collide* does, the mythology surrounding the sun as a healing source is something that is present in both plays. The children's created myth of Captain Tumeke versus the Galactic Taniwha depicts the ideas that the sun is a healing force. Captain Tumeke draws all of his power from the sunlight and the Galactic Taniwha does everything in its power to block the light and drag Captain Tumeke into the darkness where it can defeat him (Belz 4, 10, 77-78). Outside of the story of Captain Tumeke, there are also references to the traditional Māori myth of Maui slowing the sun and Maui stealing fire. Again, the created myth and the traditional myth are clearly paired within the play. In the script, Belz has the characters mention the healing power of the sun, or sunlight, or simply "warmth" every few pages. Further evidence of the sun's healing power in *Te Maunga* can also be found in the way Mama first starts to plan to

leave her husband. Mama states: “[...] watching the sun. Would I have felt its warm shine? Would it have made what is to come, easier? Would it have lit the path away from this mountain? Away from this place? Away...” (49). Again, the sun is used as an incarnation of healing and safety. Mama envisions the sun as somehow having the ability to show her how to escape and find safety. Later in the play, the character of Liz directly states her belief in the sun’s healing powers:

LIZ - No, that’s not all. The first glow, the first light, that first reflection off the ocean. That’s a silent promise. Like there are no regrets. Everything we’ve ever done is behind us, just a shadow in its baptism. It cleanses. It’s warm. And when it washes over the land, they’ll be no regrets. That’s the promise.
(56)

Liz describes the sun’s powers in Judeo/Christian terms as baptizing the land and the people, but this should not diminish the way the image corresponds with the traditional Māori mythology. This conglomeration of mythology can be found throughout the play, with pop-culture *Star Wars* myths sitting alongside (and sometimes combined with) traditional Māori mythology. Even more important to the play is the fact that there is a consistency of imagery and the fact of the sun provides healing to all people, regardless of their cultural beliefs. This is one of the central images of the play and corresponds with the traditional Māori myth. The abundance of examples in Belz’s work of the sun providing healing directly connects the characters and the plot to Māori mythology. Both Mama in *Te Maunga* and Francie in *When Sun and Moon Collide* battle the darkness and both women, in their own way, are able to escape the darkness that haunts them.

Francie's struggle against darkness in *When Sun and Moon Collide* is important to note. In his work on Māori religion, James Irwin states: "Tane took refuge in the forests and became god of trees and birds. He represents life, prosperity, welfare and sunlight [...]" (Irwin 14). Best also has information on Tane's relationship to light: "There is abundance of evidence that Tane represents light, and that his name of Tane-te-waiora represents him as the source of the sunlight, which is the welfare of all things" (Best *Maori Religion and Mythology Part 2* 95). As with Francie's refusal to consume anything but water, there is a similar connection to Tane's struggle against darkness. In one scene she even wears a helmet and brandishes a weapon in an effort to combat the shadows.

In her room, FRANCIE puts on DECLAN'S helmet and crouches behind an invisible barrier. She holds a weapon, a piece of wood, perhaps, out in front of her. She waits for her bedroom door to open.

FRANCIE: There's a crack under my door where the dark gets in. Doesn't matter what I stuff it with – socks, underwear or flannelette pyjamas. It bends backwards, low as a limbo dancer. [...] Then it squashes its flat boneless body and slithers its way inside. [...] Once it's in, there's no point in trying to fight it. It's not just that it's too big or scary. You can't escape darkness because it doesn't leave any gaps. (49)

On a literal level, Francie is arming herself in case Vic decides to enter her room and force himself on her. The thematic and imagistic ramifications, however, would not go unnoticed by an audience familiar with Māori and Polynesian mythology. Francie is taking on the role of someone who fights darkness; in Māori mythology, this is Tane. "*Whiro* [...] is the one who stands in opposition to *Tane*. *Tane* stands here for light and life, while *Whiro* represents

evil and death, is indicated in the name *Whiro-the-dark-one*” (Irwin 36). The relationship between Francie and Vic has mythological connections to that of Tane and Whiro. Again, we see Francie as a representative of sunlight, knowledge, and healing waters; a direct parallel to the elements that Tane represents in Māori mythology.

The light versus dark mythology is also evident in Belz’s *Te Maunga*. The character of Mama, when discussing her sons and husband, is constantly referring to them in terms of light and darkness. When discussing her abuse at the hands of her husband, she states: “All day he broods, then ... when it’s dark... it starts” (Belz 27) and: “The night comes again, and his anger returns, red, reeking and silent” (27-28). To offer contrast, when Mama is speaking about her two sons she uses words and phrases like “golden boys” (27) and directly states: “My sons, innocent as the new dawn. Till those beneath your glow destroy your warmth” (49). For Mama, her abusive husband is almost always described in terms of darkness or as lacking warmth, while her children are described as light, warm, golden, glowing, etcetera. Piripi’s impromptu haka against the wind on the slopes of Mount Hikurangi also speaks of the battle between light and darkness.

PIRIPI: Ka ka tonu taku ahi!

Kaore ahua e matakū I to atarangi!

Naku e tarai, kai pai to aho!

Ka ngaro ahau I roto to po taipa!

Pena to poko ite ra!

Ka tihae koe te ra I ahau!⁵⁷ (79)

⁵⁷ Translation by Belz: “My light still burns! / I no longer fear your shadow! / I tried to be your light! / You swallowed me in your dark silence! / Like you extinguished my sun! / You stole the sun from me!” (79).

The play climaxes with both Piripi and John performing their respective hakas into the wind. John's haka also centers around "Te haere nako nako mai i te po"⁵⁸ (80). Both brothers rally against the darkness, literally shouting into the night until the first rays of the new dawn touch their faces. Even in Belz's adapted/created mythology, the struggle between light and darkness still comes to the fore as one of the most powerful images in the play. This interplay between light and darkness within Māori mythology, has a direct connection to the Māori concept of *utu*; the world and characters in both *Te Maunga* and *When Sun and Moon Collide* are out of balance and this balance must be restored if the characters are to move forward.

Utu: The Struggle for Balance in When Sun and Moon Collide and Te Maunga

These two Māori plays depict characters and a world thrown off kilter. In both *Te Maunga* and *When Sun and Moon Collide*, the audience is shown a world that is out of balance. Each play at its core has an issue that the Māori would describe as being *take-utu-ea*. Tūpara defines *take-utu-ea* as "[...] an issue that requires resolution" (xv). Huffer and Rakuita define *take-utu-ea* as "[...] ethical markers which allow for careful consideration and deliberation of complicated matters" (14). Each definition offered here describes an issue that needs attention. Something has happened in these two plays that has caused the balance in the universe to shift and their respective worlds are out of alignment. This lack of balance is approached with the Māori idea of *utu*.

Utu has sometimes been translated to mean "revenge," but the concept is deeper than that (Petrie 1-2). While *utu* may require death or revenge in the Western sense, that is not the exclusive meaning of the term. Hazel Petrie makes the following observation about *utu*: "*Utu* could be glossed simply as 'to make a response', but a better definition might be 'to restore

⁵⁸ Translation by Belz: "The torturous journey from the dark" (80).

balance” (1). *Utu* also has a connection to the spirit world through indirect ritual action. The idea of restoring balance does not just apply to the physical realm, as Ahu, Hoare, and Stephens note:

Since their arrival in Aotearoa, Māori have developed complex relationships with the natural environment and the spiritual world. In a Māori worldview, these relationships can be influenced, affected and prescribed by human actions. At its most general level of understanding *utu* is a concept that describes the process of restoring these physical and spiritual relationships to an equal and harmonious state. (203)

Each play features characters and situations that are out of balance both physically and spiritually. As such, the plays connect directly with the idea of *utu* in Māori mythology. For the brothers in *Te Maunga*, balance was lost when the mother and father of the two boys were separated much as in the same way as when Rangi and Papa were separated.⁵⁹ In *When Sun and Moon Collide*, balance between light and darkness is constantly shifting, like the struggle between Tane and Whiro.⁶⁰ Both plays use Māori mythological connections and informal ritual action to create a world that is out of balance both physically and spiritually.

In *When Sun and Moon Collide*, balance is lost when the Danish hitchhikers go missing (and are presumed murdered). Both Francie and Isaac know what happened to the backpackers and who the killer is, but neither has the inclination (or ability) to voice this

⁵⁹ See: Tawhai, T. P. "9 Maori Religion." *The World's Religions: The Study of Religion, Traditional and New Religion* (2002): 96.; Hongi, Hare. "A Maori Cosmogony." *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 16.3 (63 (1907): 113-119.

⁶⁰ See: Haupapa-o-Tane, Te. "IO, THE SUPREME GOD, AND OTHER GODS OF THE MAORI." *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* (1920): 139-143.; Best, Elsdon. "Maori personifications. Anthropogeny, solar myths and phallic symbolism: as exemplified in the demiurgic concepts of Tane and Tiki." *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* (1923): 53-69.

knowledge. Declan is out of balance from past childhood trauma, as he notes on one occasion: “Mum’s friend’s brother gave me to a cousin who swapped me for a washing machine to ... to an aunty. She fed me Valiums. Told me they were jelly beans” (33). Francie’s imbalance is manifest in her loss of the ability (or the will) to eat; she can only consume water. The characters and the world of the play must restore balance to themselves and to their community at large. *Utu* must be observed. Once Vic is killed and exposed as the murderer, the town can begin to heal. Francie is able to eat and her fertility is restored. Declan no longer transforms into “Jason” on *Mutuwhenua*. Isaac – as a possible act of penance – leaves town and the tearoom and has not contacted his friends. It is possible that as Isaac’s transgression was the worst (knowing who the killer was but refusing to share that information), his punishment had to reflect that for *utu* to truly be restored. Just as the two backpackers lost their lives, so too did Vic (their killer). In a more metaphorical sense, Isaac’s life was also taken. Balance had to be restored to the community and to the characters for health and wellbeing to return.

This loss of balance is apparent in *Te Maunga* as well. The relationship between the two brothers has never healed since their mother left their father, separating the children with each caring for one. Even before that moment of separation, the brothers were pulled in different directions. When their father took them to the top of Mt. Hikurangi as children, John only saw the bright lights of the big city, while Piripi looked out and saw the rolling hills and forests of his ancestral homeland. The separation of the brothers on an ideological level and a physical level was instigated by their parents. It was Mother that physically separated the boys, while their father was the impetus for their ideological separation. The brothers’ relationship is out of balance and because of that they are unable to even ride together in the same car for a few hours at a time. It is not until they hike Mt. Hikurangi for the second time, through the battering wind and rain, that *utu* can be attained. For the brothers, each has to

offer a heartfelt and impromptu *haka* in the face of the blasting weather before the first rays of dawn can touch each of them – restoring their relationship and allowing each brother to accept the choices and lifestyle of the other and restoring balance to the world of the play.

In her study on Māori lexicon in the creation mythology, Anne Salmond noted the extreme importance of balance: “[...] the proliferation of juxtaposed opposites [in the language] is so marked that the creation and structuring of the world seems a creation of opposites and the institution of an intermediary zone of *utu*” (“Te Ao Tawhito” 25).

Salmond’s conclusion that world is a creation of opposites balanced in a zone of *utu* speaks to the importance of restoring balance in each of these plays. *Utu* in these plays is not just about catching a killer or restoring the relationship between brothers, it is an imperative for the health and well being of each play’s respective world. These plays do not just portray *utu* as something that would be nice to attain, but as an essential component for the health and well being of the entire world. The world must be in balance for life to flourish. As Salmond again notes when discussing the separation of Rangi and Papa, “In this symbolic act a number of opposites are established – *Rangi* ≠ *Papa*, *wahine* ≠ *tane* (‘female ≠ male’), *ao* ≠ *poo* (‘day, life ≠ night, under-world’); *runga* ≠ *raro* (‘up ≠ down’), and life can begin – *kia ora ai te tangata*” (“Te Ao Tawhito” 24). According to Salmond’s observations, these opposites must be present – the world must be in balance – for life to go on. The characters in *Te Maunga* and *When Sun and Moon Collide* must restore balance, they must find something that will heal them and restore *utu*, or their respective worlds are doomed.

Mythological Cycles within Climactic Constructs

Once the mythological connections are understood in *Te Maunga* and *When Sun and Moon Collide*, along with the importance of *utu* and restoring balance to the respective

worlds, the themes then take on an entirely different meaning. The themes of redemption, forgiveness, change, etcetera, are no longer limited to the characters in the play, but suddenly are transposed onto mythological constructs. We are no longer watching a linear plotline, we are watching a cycle of events that has been going on since the beginning of time. The playwright even hints at this cyclical nature within the dialogue of the play:

FRANCIE: Impossible. Nothing's still. Not even the planets. The earth circles the sun, and the moon circles the earth. We're all stalking or being stalked by something.

Coupled with the fact that the play is based structurally around the lunar cycle, we begin to see more and more of the cyclical nature of this play.

This cyclical structure within the climatic structure can also be seen in *Te Maunga*. While not as directly as in *When Sun and Moon Collide*, Belz's play still utilizes Māori mythology to add a sense of timelessness to the narrative. Belz uses the relationship between Mama and the father as a modern retelling of the Rangi and Papa creation myth.⁶¹ As was mentioned earlier in the chapter, Mama always describes the Boys in terms of light or warmth, while her relationship with the father is often described using imagery of darkness;

⁶¹ From: Best, Elsdon. "Maori personifications. Anthropogeny, solar myths and phallic symbolism: as exemplified in the demiurgic concepts of Tane and Tiki." *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* (1923): 53-69: "Now, when these children of the Earth Mother were born, earth and sky were not separated as they now are, but lay close together, the Sky Parent embracing the Earth Mother. Light was not, darkness prevailed, no glimmer of light reached the children of Papa, and this condition of primal darkness [...] One of the first acts performed by the liberated children was the separation of the Sky Father and Earth Mother in order to gain space to move about, so cramped were they in the confined area. This forcible separation, in which Tane took the leading part, is often spoken of as a rebellion of the children against their parents" (63-65). See also: Taylor, Richard. *Te Ika a Maui: Or, New Zealand and Its Inhabitants, Illustrating the Origin, Manners, Customs, Mythology, Religion, Rites, Songs, Proverbs, Fables, and Language of the Natives*. Cambridge University Press, 2010. & Salmond, Anne. "Te ao tawhito: A semantic approach to the traditional Maori cosmos." *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* (1978): 5-28.

“Now it’s cold and the smiles have gone [...] you and walked out, with the slam of a door, leaving me in the darkness” (49) or “[...] his cowboy hat that cast a shadow over his eyes [...] when it’s dark... it starts [...] the night comes again, and his anger returns” (27). The only light or warmth that is brought into the relationship is from the Boys. It is the children that bring the light. While the children do not literally force their parents apart, as they do in the creation myth, they are responsible for bringing and providing the light in the family, while the relationship between the parents is one of darkness. Belz does not name the characters in the scenes with Mama and the Boys. Even though we assume that Boy and Boy 2 are John and Piripi, Belz never calls the characters by name. This allows these scenes to possess a quality of timelessness; we are not simply watching scenes from the brothers’ past, but a scene that has played out again and again since the moment of creation. As was discussed in Chapter 3, many individuals within Oceania can trace their ancestry back to the gods themselves, so the idea that the creation myth is being reenacted by this family is not out of context culturally. Belz is calling back to the mythological past in order to create a piece that both adheres to a typical Western climactic plot and embodies the cyclical nature of the world of the gods and spirits.

Both *Te Maunga* and *When Sun and Moon Collide* use Māori mythology to add a depth and universality to their respective plots and characters. A lack of understanding of the plays’ relationship with Māori and Polynesian mythology leads to completely different interpretations of the plays’ climaxes. As noted in Smythe’s review of the 2004 remount of *When Sun and Moon Collide*,

While their lives start afresh with the next new moon, the moral universe has changed radically, yet the play does not acknowledge it. Because no world of consequence seems to exist beyond the people we’ve seen, instead of

engaging with them and the play's big questions, the audience has to struggle with working out what's happened and deciding whether they believe it.

(Smythe "Beware Sun-Moon Collision" 7/7/04)

Smythe's contention here seems to stem from the fact that he's taking the play at literal face value – from a purely Western dramaturgical perspective. Balance has been restored to the community. The backpackers were avenged and the parties responsible have either been killed (Vic) or banished from the community (Isaac). The "moral universe" has not changed radically, it has simply been restored. Once we view the play through the lens of Māori and Polynesian mythology, we begin to see the play as a kind of allegory; a passion play akin to those of medieval Europe. We are seeing Māori mythology played out for us on stage through the modern lives of these characters. When the mythological aspects of this play are taken into account, we see that the problems and situations these characters are confronting are not new. These characters are merely players themselves in a drama that has taken place since the creation of the world.

The elements of social and cultural healing, specifically the use of myth and myth creation, have been proven to bring fractured societies or social groups together. In his study of the relationship between mythology and psychotherapy, David Feinstein makes the following observation:

Myths, [...] are not stories, attitudes, or beliefs, although each of these may reflect a deeper mythology. Nor are myths properly judged as being true or false, right or wrong, but rather as more or less functional for the development of an individual or group – and even that evaluation is inevitably made according to the dictates of a larger myth. (510)

Here, Feinstein references the idea that myths have functionality. Myths contribute to the development of an individual or group. Belz and Grace-Smith, in repurposing and recreating Māori mythology, bring the myth into the modern world. By repurposing the mythology, they are able to keep one foot in the contemporary world and one foot in the mythological past. Both playwrights are allowing their respective participants to see ways in which the mythological and spiritual can still find relevance within contemporary life (and lifestyles).

When Sun and Moon Collide and *Te Maunga* are, at first glance, structured along the lines of climactic Western dramaturgy. Rising action, climax, and dénouement are all there and are all placed neatly within the plot in an Aristotelian/Western structure. Even the lunar phases Grace-Smith chooses to include in the play drive the action along this structural pattern. It is only once we have a deeper understanding of the mythology involved that we begin to learn – much like the characters in the play learn – that appearances are often deceiving. Māori culture and mythology are presented in such a way that even an audience who knows nothing about Māori culture or mythology will enjoy the plays. For those who do have an understanding of the Māori culture and mythology, the plays can be understood on an entirely new level. The linear plot lines become one loop in the cyclical retelling of Māori mythology; the realistic characters become allegorical personifications of Māori deities; the struggle between light and darkness has a significance even those unfamiliar with the mythology can appreciate; and the phases of the moon become less about keeping time and more about reinforcing timelessness. Both Albert Belz and Briar Grace-Smith use informal ritual action found in Māori culture and mythology to create two distinct and powerful plays that exists within both the physical and metaphysical realms without devaluing either.

Informal Ritual Action: A Summation

The plays examined here are both connected by their use of informal ritual action. While they have a connection to the metaphysical world, they do not have the direct link that formal ritual action and ritual performance possess. With *Te Maunga* and *When Sun and Moon Collide*, the connection to syncretic theatre is made through the retelling and repurposing of traditional Māori mythology. In addition to the use of informal ritual action, each of the plays also focuses on cultural healing. Participants are asked to continue to search for and find those elements of the infinite that exist within their own lives through each plays compilation of found/created mythology and traditional Māori mythology. Each of the Māori plays showcases the need to restore balance to a world that has been thrown out of joint.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters of this thesis, nine plays have been offered as representative pieces for three different areas in which indigenous rituals (formal ritual action, ritual performance, and informal ritual action) operate within Western dramaturgical frameworks. In each section, it has been shown that the representative plays (and playwrights) utilize indigenous ritual practice within Western dramaturgy both as a way toward adding another layer of meaning, much in the same way Hawaiian *mele* included *kaona*.⁶²

One of the major theatrical movements of the past century, and still today in some cases, is the re-ritualizing of Western theatre. Artaud, Brook, Genet, Grotowski, Schechner, and others have all sought, with varying degrees of success, to reform Western theatre into something closer to a religious experience. Oftentimes these theatre practitioners try to force indigenous performance rituals into the framework of Western dramaturgy, creating a piece that – while interesting – is ultimately disconnected from the ritual itself. Syncretic theatre, for the most part, avoids many of the pitfalls that have plagued those distinguished dramatists. Many modern plays from Oceania utilize Western writing techniques alongside indigenous ritual and performance forms. This amalgamation of stylistic elements forms the basis for syncretic dramaturgy.

I have used Christopher Balme's definition of syncretic theatre⁶⁴ from his essay "Between Separation and Integration: Intercultural Strategies in Contemporary Maori Theatre" which describes syncretic theatre as:

⁶² "hidden meaning in words" See: Beckwith *The Kumulipo*: "Under the surface meaning of the words lies the hidden meaning, or meanings, the *kaona*, as the Hawaiians say" (xiii).

⁶⁴ Further information on the nature of syncretic theatre can be found in Balme's book: *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatre Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.

... the amalgamation of indigenous performance forms with certain conventions and practices of the Euro-American theatrical tradition, to produce new theatrico-aesthetic principles. I define syncretic theatre as those theatrical products which result from the interplay between the Western theatrico-dramatic tradition and the indigenous performance forms of a postcolonial culture. (180)

Contemporary syncretic theatre in Oceania is a mechanism by which playwrights are redefining themselves and their culture in an increasingly homogenized world. As such, understanding how playwrights utilize traditional performance practices as dramatic elements will ultimately provide insight into how cultural practitioners are responding to this redefinition of both self and culture.

Syncretic theatre is constantly in flux, and it often marks a culture in transition. The theatrical syncretism found within many contemporary plays of Oceania allows playwrights to explore and to reconceptualize indigenous ritual, mythology, and other unique cultural practices and knowledge bases. Syncretic theatre is theatre at a crossroads; it is the theatre of change. Currently in Oceania, the theatre and new dramatic work serves as a way to examine shifting cultural engagement and empowerment; playwrights are contextualizing their colonization using new framework. While the concept of syncretic change is usually associated with religious studies, what is being studied is not the changing nature of ritual nor the religious experience, but rather the intersection of theatre and ritual.

In Chapter One we explored the use of Formal Ritual Actions within syncretic plays. These are the performative actions which connect the community and/or participants to the spirit world. The four plays analyzed in that chapter were John Broughton's play *Te Hokinga*

Mai (The Return Home), Sudesh Mishra's *Ferringhi*, Jo Nacola's *Gurudial and the Land*, and Briar Grace-Smith's *Ngā Pou Wāhine*. The two Fijian plays, *Ferringhi* and *Gurudial and the Land*, use the Fijian kava ceremony as a major structural component, while *Te Hokinga Mai (The Return Home)* and *Ngā Pou Wāhine* use Māori marae protocols to reinforce themes and ideas on stage. Each of these formal rituals also serves as a way to unite different cultural groups, which opens up the plays to further levels of interpretation. Chapter Two focused on the inclusion of Ritual Performance within contemporary syncretic plays. Three plays served as examples of how ritual performance connects to the metaphysical within Western dramaturgical constructs: Vilsoni Hereniko and Teresia Teaiwa's *Last Virgin in Paradise*, Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl's *Ka Wai Ola*, and Makerita Urale's *Frangipani Perfume*. We looked at clowning practices and ritualized comedic performance in *Last Virgin in Paradise* and *Ka Wai Ola*, whereas *Frangipani Perfume* features Samoan dance as a major storytelling convention. In addition to using indigenous ritual performance, all of these performance practices serve as a way to reinforce indigenous knowledge and social practices. Finally in Chapter Three we explored the use of Informal Ritual Action within a representative section of contemporary plays from Oceania. For this chapter, we analyzed Briar Grace-Smith's *When Sun and Moon Collide*, and Albert Belz' *Te Maunga*. The plays of Grace-Smith and Belz use Māori mythology and cultural knowledge to promote social and cultural healing. In all three chapters only a selection of plays were analyzed – this should by no means suggest that theses are the only plays within the canon of contemporary theatre in Oceania, merely those plays which best illuminated the overall analysis.

The playwrights who took the time to include the various ritual elements within their plays did so for a reason – and to ignore that removes a major thematic element from the work. While ritual change can take place naturally, it is often easy for individuals to access the various changes for political purposes, often to exclude a certain group and/or legitimize a

claim to power (Kreinath 276). These playwrights are accessing ritual change for their own agendas as well – as a way to utilize the ritual customs as an aesthetic and allow the element of indigenous performance to act as an equal participant in the onstage action. Their ability to access this connection to the indigenous aesthetic allows these plays to exist in both worlds and is what makes these plays so fascinating.

Where do we go from here?

This thesis has shown that syncretic theatre in Oceania is an important dramatic element. Each of the plays presented here have been shown to access some form of indigenous ritual. Understanding how that ritual operates can go a long way in helping to clarify the significance of the play and to transform many of the themes that can be found in the work. However, these are not the only playwrights in Oceania who are using syncretic theatre, nor are the nine plays mentioned here the only plays that utilize various indigenous rituals and ritual performance in the body of the text. There are a number of plays that utilize ritual practices in order to highlight themes and ideas that are directly relevant to indigenous populations. In addition to the many plays that currently exist, new syncretic works are coming out of Oceania every day that could benefit from analysis of this kind. Consequently, this study is one more step in the ongoing process of understanding the importance of syncretic theatre of Oceania.

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