



Postcolonial Pictures for Children: Gavin Bishop and the Folktale

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This essay considers how Gavin Bishop's picture books illuminate aspects of settler and postcolonial literature. I describe how Bishop, in keeping with the historical development of writing in colonial and postcolonial societies, first writes as a representative of new arrivals to create a sense of belonging and a Pakeha history in the new land, then as a colonist/settler uses the European tradition to establish 'story' in the new land.¹ Eventually, after excavating Maori myths to place alongside European tales, in an effort to create a national identity, he invents his own myths including the people of two cultures. When his work encompasses two cultures it reflects the tensions characteristic of postcolonial societies. Since Bishop himself is of mixed Maori and European ancestry, re-presenting New Zealand's past and creating a national identity is a peculiarly personal issue for him.

In postcolonial contexts artists and writers alike strive to record their place in a society, which by the nature of its founding, involves the indigenous people whose forebears resisted, fought and negotiated their way through colonisation and settlement, and the 'immigrants' whose forebears were the colonisers and the settlers. A general statement made by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin some thirteen years ago remains relevant:

A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special postcolonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place.

(Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989, p.9).

In New Zealand nineteenth century settlement may have been comparatively less destructive of Maori society than what occurred in Canada and Australia, and much early settlement in New Zealand until the 1860s was a matter of interaction and 'dual agency' rather than conflict and war, but it remains true that most *iwi* (Maori tribal groups) were left bereft of land (Monin 2001, p.3). Monin quotes Te Hira Te Tuiri:

*Of what use is the land after it is broken,
When the land is broken, the owner perishes...*

*This is my place, why do you seek after it.
It is only a small piece. Let it remain to me.*
(Te Hira Te Tuiri, in Monin, p.171)

The sense of loss (of *mana* rather than money) is lasting.² For settlers engaged in representation through writing and visual arts, Maori might be represented as 'warrior' and 'bereaved' (a difficult persona to live with) while for Maori the settler might be represented as rapacious land grabber (no neighbour by choice). The land loss expressed by Te Hira Te Tuiri was the source of a strong belief that 'only through kotahitanga (unity) or pan-tribal action could Maori hope to resist the singular might of the Pakeha' (Monin 2001 p.171). What followed was a history of legal and political fighting which has been continuing in the Treaty settlements of the 1990s and in the present century.

If we view Bishop first as a settler/colonist we highlight issues from New Zealand's cultural past. In the late nineteenth century Pakeha writers and artists were concerned about establishing themselves in the new place—in a different landscape. Their concerns were at first to do with a sense of place rather than with other people, namely Maori. But the presence of indigenous people (in New Zealand's case, the *tangaia whenua*, or people of the land) supplants the land as a central issue as the settler/colonist gradually becomes a nationalist. I show how Bishop reflects an historical journey first in the role of a settler who records and labels the land to claim it, then as a settler attempting to project a western metaethic through his visually rich use of European folktale pretexts, specifically in *Mr. Fox*. Nineteenth-century Pakeha writers and artists wrestled with questions of identity nationalism, questions which remain alive today. They are powerful motivators for Bishop who is impelled to begin drawing on Maori sources when he desires to create a 'we' inclusive of Maori and European traditions.

The paper shows Bishop's attempts to *establish* an inclusive metaethic, an overarching belief system which would be woven of Maori and Pakeha beliefs, myths and experiences. The discussion moves to his retold traditional Maori folktale, *Maui and the Goddess of Fire* and his invented myth *Hinepau*, where he has moved beyond simply a recall of European tradition branded with local

place, to an invention of a new myth for the purpose of affirming Maori beliefs and informing all children of the place from which they speak – their *turangawaewae*. *The House that Jack Built* is a postmodern historical pastiche of the impact of culture clash.

Bishop initially tells a story of estrangement from the land, an immigrant's story of a fascinated discomfort, which derives from the uncertainty of 'belonging' and of 'ownership' in New Zealand. From the 1890s, in what historian Peter Gibbons labeled 'the literature of occupation', colonial writers constructed a landscape which they had 'tamed'. It was 'theirs' not so much because they had negotiated ownership (or later gained it as war-spoils) but because they had made it productive in a Pakeha commercial sense. (Gibbons 1998). In other words they constructed a rightful ownership by 'making their mark on the land'. As late as 1936, the editor of a Children's Page reflects this early attitude constructing Maori as merely one among many immigrant groups. She asserts that Maori New Zealand has been transcended and now, 'much of its wild beauty has vanished, but a new beauty has taken its place. There is the beauty of a warm red farmhouse roof shining from a green valley in place of the scarlet rata of earlier years, and smoke curling from a brick chimney ... that speaks of peace' (*Junior Dominion* 29.2.36 quoted in Holt 2001, p.108). The indigenous Maori are placed firmly in the past, the settler Pakeha in the peaceful successful present. The transformation of 'wild beauty' to that of domestic production is a transformation that legitimises the presence of the settler. So too does the naming of indigenous plants and fauna. This editor instructs children to 'replace oak with kauri, use buttercups not blue bells' and states that 'regrettably' the word for woods is 'bush'. These requests indicate the long-lasting self-consciousness about *place* which writers and artists in any colonised society confront and which are echoed by Bishop's illustrations (Gibbons 1998, Thomas 1999, Holt 2001, Monin 2001).

Bishop's work is framed and constricted and eventually enriched not so much by 'colonial heritage' as by an awareness of the enunciative position of the artist, writer and narrator. He was unravelling his ideas, in the words of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, on 'place, displacement

and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity' (p.9). The settler myths were initially an attempt to label and establish a sense of place, and Bishop's first picture book, *Bidibidi*, (1982) represents such efforts. It is a highly individual original work firmly placed in the South Island mountain landscape—iconographically representative of New Zealand in the masculine tradition of the rugged Pakeha settler. *Bidibidi* is a sheep seeking 'something else' who moves from the lonely, threatening but beautiful mountains to a more socially oriented life on the plains - making rainbows. The beech forest and mountain grasses are accurately depicted as Bishop's paintings imply 'I know this place so well I belong here'. This wild mountain even has a past: it has been occupied. The derelict building the 'Leg o' Mutton Arms' attests to Pakeha settlers of long ago. In this early story Bishop portrays a land which may be people-less now but shows a history of Pakeha settlement. As Nicholas Thomas has noted, the settler who seeks to validate a place in the new land remains uneasy about the representation of their own and indigenous society. (Thomas 1999). In Bishop's *Bidibidi* Maori are invisible.

Another of Bishop's early books reveals a different landscape of the imagination. The violent *The Horror of Hickory Bay* (Bishop, 1986) portrays a literary and symbolic land and the insecure relationship between settlers and the land. In dark powerful swirls Bishop limns animated cliffs which possess cannibalistic possibilities. The New Zealand audience rejected the moving devouring cliffs, that is, the 'wild and untamed' landscape, which buttressed memories of uncontrollable volcanic violence and usurped the concept of 'taming'. The book, a surrealist picture of an untamable land, implied the 'settler' might never be settled, that this landscape would never be tamed, and perhaps that there was no 'place' for people at all.

Bishop's use of folktales in a bicultural setting drew him into an area of cultural production where sets of values readily clash. In their insightful *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture*, Stephens and McCallum, who coined the useful word *metaethic*, alert the reader to the 'particular challenge to anyone who desires to conserve or retell stories drawn from traditional sources'. Stephens and McCallum's

statement that 'the metanarratives of the traditional societies often incorporate world views antithetical to those preferred by many members of modern societies, and especially by those people keen to disseminate contemporary forms of humane values' (Stephens & McCallum 1998, p.201) drew my attention to contradictions evident in Bishop's work.

Bishop followed his early work on land and identity issues with numerous retellings of European traditional stories. His reversions are detailed domestic recreations resting in the landscape of the colonist's imagination. 'New Zealand' is evident only in the form of 'Kiwiana': in *Old Mother Hubbard* (1986) a carved Maori mask rests on a shelf, in *Mr Fox* (1982) the landscape, plants and iconic buildings of New Zealand are silently recorded. In these traditional (western) stories Bishop is successful in inserting his own ideas in the tales. *The Three Little Pigs* is an unconventional version and without altering the traditional structure of the tale he makes *Mr Fox* into a feminist text by creating four competent, independent women who show that girls can do anything.

In the early 1990s Bishop began to write Maori material. Stephens and McCallum remark that what a particular retelling 'always discloses is some aspect of the attitudes and ideologies pertaining at the cultural moment in which retelling is' (p.ix). From 1975, when the Waitangi Tribunal was set up, the New Zealand public saw a political and legal acknowledgment of past wrongful land seizure. Compensation for land seizure along with more representative parliamentary membership had the effect of highlighting Maori public and official agency. In Bishop's daily world indigenous issues could not be ignored—even in the South Island where there are few Maori. In the political context of burgeoning Maori public position and power, (commercial, legal and political) Bishop was impelled to look at Maori sources for his storytelling.

Against this background Bishop embarked on a personal investigation of his Maori antecedents in order to create 'story' for both Maori and Pakeha children, that is a cultural 'we'.³ He began with the story of an immigrant—his Maori great aunt, Katarina, who moved half the length of New Zealand to set up house with her Pakeha

husband. (Bishop 1990, *Katarina*). By remembering and recreating a past Bishop sought to contribute to a cultural future, a biculturalism embedded in Maori story. Empty landscapes would be peopled not by the nursery characters from England but by semi-gods and myths of indigenous traditions. His drawing from two sets of cultural values, in the books I now discuss, reveals intra-cultural contradictions and dissonance rather than complementary bicultural values.

In *Hinepau* (1993) Bishop brings his scholarship to bear on traditional Maori story, custom, and craft using the genre characteristics of a myth to create a work of art. In this story Hinepau shows some characteristics of the traditional Polynesian myth hero: she is different from birth, she has special domestic skills, she is rejected, she can call on magical powers and she has some godliness or godly powers. In Bishop's text Hinepau is a young woman cast out of her *iwi* because she *looks different* and because she weaves in reversed patterns.⁴ The total isolation arising from this rejection is broken once only when she upbraids young men for omitting the *karakia* (prayers) required before they cut a tree. They scorn her. Their insult to the gods is a transgression, which brings retribution from a volcano which covers the land with layers of black ash. The historical source for these paintings is the explosion of Mt. Tarawera in June 1886, a volcanic upheaval which destroyed mountains and lakes and covered 6000 acres with deadening black ash. Hinepau saves the *iwi* from destruction by flying on the back of a giant white owl (an extinct bird which has retained a place in Maori myth) and casting her weaving over the ash-covered land to re-establish life. As she journeys through the night she loses her *mauri* (spirit or life force) and the narrative ends with Hinepau now a benign spirit visible at sunset. Thus, despised for difference, rejected from society, she nevertheless sacrifices herself to save that very society.

This is visibly a Maori book. Some elements of traditional Maori belief systems are also central. They include the importance of the natural world as a source of life, the proximity of the spiritual world, of gods who must be appeased and rituals which must be performed. The attention to detail becomes a visual celebration of the



As the day ended, they came across a flax hut. It was Hinepau's house. She had been spared, too.

'Foolish young men! Listen to your kaumatua in future,' she scolded. 'Go back to your people now while I see what I can do.'

kaumatua/elders

Image from *Hinepau* by Gavin Bishop, published by Ashton Scholastic NZ Ltd, 1993; reproduced with permission.

richness of Maori domestic artefacts in the weaving of cloaks, mats, and *kete* (flax baskets). The *mere* (stone hand weapon), the gourd, the high caste topknot, the *pataka* (food huts), the fortifications, the *moko* (female tattoo) and the facial tattoo of the males are realistic. The place of *karakia* and its ritual use in traditional society is part of *Hinepau*. A rural Maori child brought up by grandparents could well find the detailed weaving patterns provide a poetic intertextuality as she may know the stories associated with each pattern and feel empowered by the respect for traditional Maori knowledge evident here. And for all Maori children, the idea that a female creates life (by covering the land with her weaving) would be in keeping with traditional belief. This particular audience may also identify with *Hinepau* as a strong woman—a position that would appear to offer the possibility of cross-cultural understandings. *Hinepau*'s strength is particularly proclaimed in two illustrations. In the first (cover), she dominates a double spread as she clutches her flax (a sign of her weaving skill) and gazes slightly down at the reader. The upward reverse diagonal (lower right to upper left) of the flax bundle (sign of her skill) ensures the reader cannot escape her challenge. In the second (p. 17), *Hinepau* commands the young men to listen to their respected elders. Her massive cloaked body towers over the landscape as, her back to the reader, she flings her right arm sideways, dwarfing the cowering young men. Her stance is one of dominance. The phrase with which she is introduced—'Hinepau lived alone'—also implies strength, so that these pictures work in harmony with parts of the text in their representation of a strong woman. *Hinepau*'s strength and knowledge are confirmed by her seeming power in the narrative—she restores life sources to humankind and becomes a spirit.

However *Hinepau*'s spiritualisation is won at the expense of her rejection from society. It is, in its replication of her earthly exclusion, a further dispossession. The implication is that there was no place for strong women in traditional Maori society, and that hierarchical intolerance of difference is supported. While the projection of strong women can be accommodated in both cultures the rejection and isolation of someone who is different, confirmed by her eventual exclusion, sits uncomfortably alongside 'humanist' values such as equality and tolerance. Bishop

has composed a narrative in which *Hinepau*'s expulsion from the village and eventual etherealisation may inscribe her spiritual nature (of a particular Maori character). But *Hinepau*'s God-like status involves the symbolic repetition of the physical and social discrimination exerted against her.

Thanks to Bishop's scholarship and art the audience is 'instructed' in the physical appearance of Maori traditional domestic items and positioned to value this knowledge. Bishop has also positioned the reader to 'learn' that traditional Maori society could not tolerate strong women (or difference). In traditional Maori society some groups of Maori would have challenged this, and today in both Pakeha and Maori worlds, it is not only feminist readers who would repudiate the social exclusion of women. And while the inescapable Christian tale of sacrifice is embedded in the story the reader is left with a lasting uneasiness about the story of a girl excluded from society.

The Maui stories, the best known of Maori myths and legends, were to provide the metanarratives for another strand in Bishop's work which 'incorporate[s] world views antithetical to ... contemporary forms of humane values' (Stephens & McCallum, 1988, p.201). In the Maui stories, Bishop accesses an archetypal Polynesian trickster-hero. Maui is half-man half-God. He is able to change form, is unpredictable, an upsetting force and in his trickster-hero exploits is also a benefactor whose feats are often related to domestic needs (Orbell, 1995 and MacDonald, 1977). Bishop explained in an endnote that he favoured versions most commonly owned by his *iwi* and but his crucial choice was the decision to make Maui a boy who would be an 'acceptable' role model for young children, the audience of his books. Bishop is interrogating nationalist assumptions about *what* myths belong to this land and his choice of the best known Maui legends is a decolonising decision in that it adds indigenous story to imported story.

Bishop's reversion of *Maui and the Goddess of Fire* (1997) exemplifies some of the difficulties of writing across cultures—specifically reversioning myths for children. This Maui is a trickster-hero whose grandmother is Mahuika the Goddess of Fire. In his attempt to get fire for the *iwi* he pulls out all Mahuika's fingernails and

toenails. Mahuika, enraged, causes an enormous fire which Maui escapes only by changing into a bird. Fire, near death and an arbitrary element to the story locates this tale in the land of myth, not families.

As the tale begins the introductory story-telling direct address of, 'Yes indeed, Maui was always playing tricks', warns the listener that we have an emphasis on the trickster rather than the hero but it is a trickster who is a child. Through the focalisation of Maui who is inscribed as a naughty child—he feels 'particularly mischievous', and the words 'mischievously,' 'trickery', 'wanted to see what would happen' reinforce this—the reader is positioned to continue to view him as a child. On his return without the fire he sought his mother who, speaking in the words of any mother, admonishes him for his trickery and says, 'Don't expect me to feel sorry for you.'

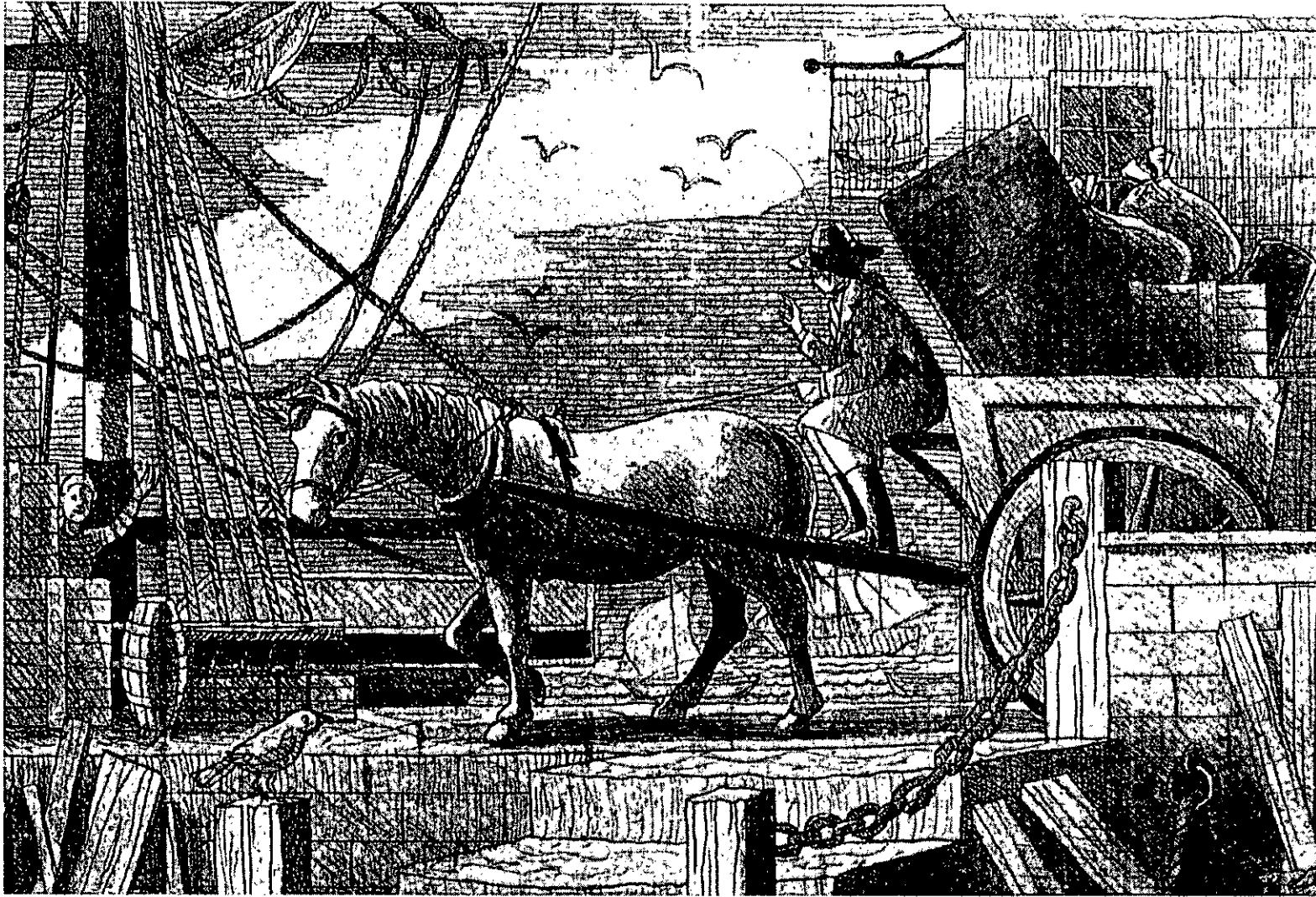
Maui's effrontery, his magical skills, his trickery are the stuff of the original folktale. However the basic action in this tale—Maui's pulling out of his grandmother's fingernails and toenails—constitutes torture. This heartlessness, which ill becomes a contemporary hero, in the original versions would have formed part of the formulaic trickery and archetypal quality of the mythical character who was not truly human. In this version of the myth, the hero's accomplishment (it involved trickery and strength) of stealing the fingernails for the provision of fire, is trivialised, and presented as a failure in 'correct' behaviour of a child in a family context. Since it is questionable in the western metaethic for *heroes* to be rude to mothers and to deceive and torture grandmothers, Bishop has stressed the childish aspect of this Maui. In the illustrative text he is a naughty boy, a child, at most a teenager, not a young man, who plays idly with his brothers before he embarks on repeated stealing of Mahuika's fingernails. Once Maui is positioned as a child with a grandmother, the trickster-hero image is weakened, the mythical is dispersed, and the reader invited to *judge* Maui rather than wonder at the myth. *This* Maui does present children with an opportunity for experiencing the emotional satisfaction of illicit behaviour, an emotion that is especially effective for those in positions without power. However, Maori children subjected to this textual pressure are indeed *themselves* ideologically constructed

as naughty.

The violence of this story is partially diminished by the simple method of reverting to a mythical distance and writing in the passive. Mahuika's defeat reads: 'Eventually the flames were doused and Mahuika was sapped of her power.' The effort to be true to the perceived Maori version of the myth with its disrespect and violence toward a grandmother, and yet present a Maori hero who has at least some qualities conforming to a western metaethic, motivates an ideological ambivalence. It positions *all* readers to question either the narrative (Maui is no hero) or mainstream Western values (it is acceptable to behave as Maui did). The myth's uncompromising quality is lost as Maui is made a boy in a family, Mahuika is humanised and the myth is 'domesticated' for child consumption.

The last story I discuss is a pictorial reversion of a nursery rhyme, *The House That Jack Built* (1999), reinterpreted as a culture contact narrative from early nineteenth century New Zealand. Bishop is investigating the colonists' relationship with the *tangata whenua*. Like Katarina, Bishop's great aunt in the book of that name, Jack is an immigrant, but unlike Katarina who calmly lives her homesick life hundreds of miles from her land and her people, Jack is the catalyst for destroying a whole Maori village, a settlement and perhaps also all of Maori society. In this tale Bishop develops the idea that adaptation to the land begins to seem superficial unless the legacies of colonialism can be expunged. Today's Pakehas may not think of themselves as recent arrivals but their construction of self is framed by their colonial past and Bishop here requires the reader to study this past.

Thus, *The House That Jack Built* is a postcolonial historical narrative, being the story of Jack, an immigrant from Hogarth's London to the wild colonial Pacific. Despite exploration of his own Maori ancestry, Bishop is indeed imposing a metaethic from outside. He illustrates the traditional rhyme as a colonial moral tale. The persuasive visual narrative depicts Jack leaving London in 1798, building a house, colonising the new land and finally standing with the remains of his house—his door only—as the new colony ends in a conflagration. The



Images taken from *The House that Jack Built* by Gavin Bishop, published by Scholastic NZ Ltd, 1999; reproduced with permission.

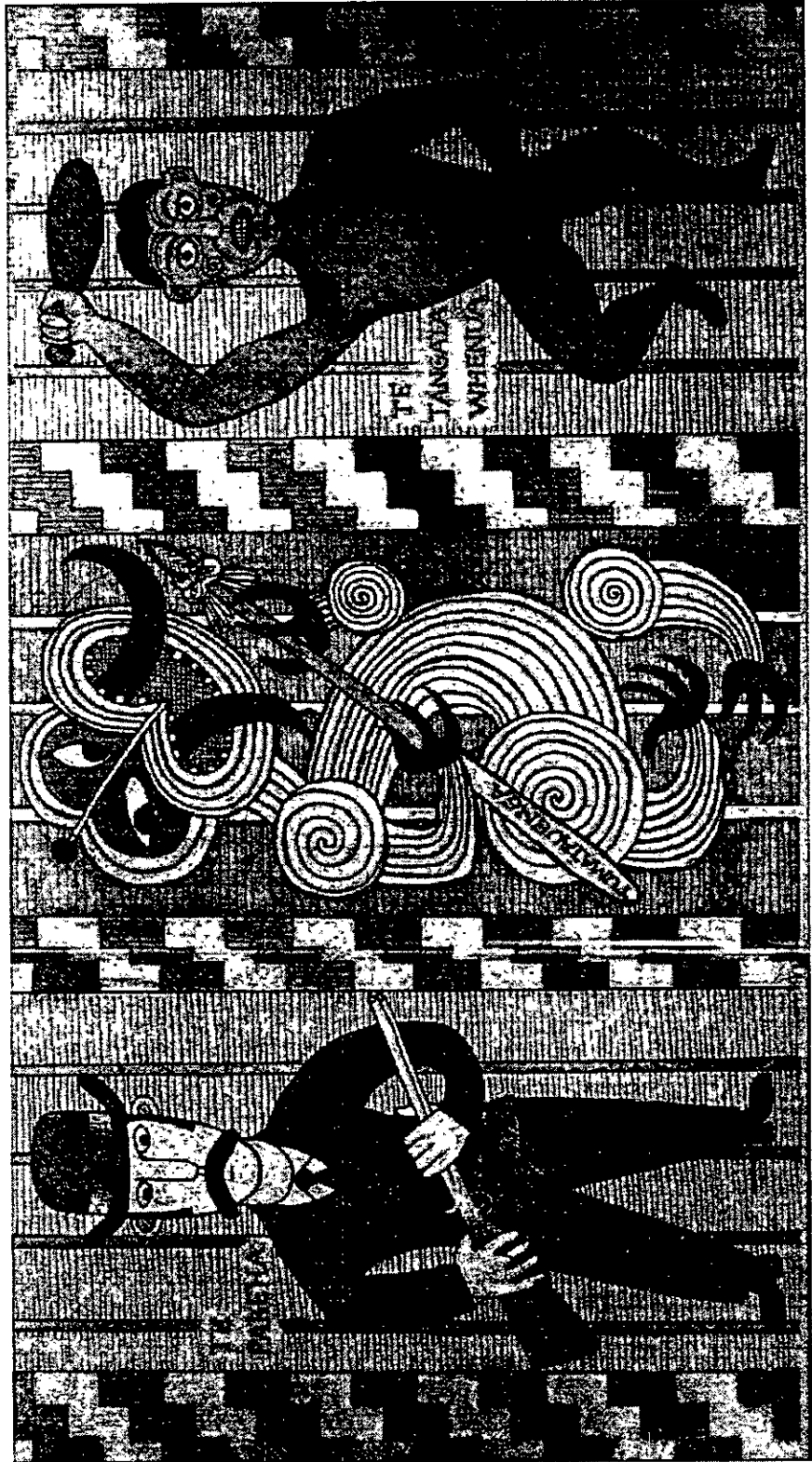
words of the cumulative traditional rhyme are unchanged and Bishop's illustrations are our guide to the ideology inherent in this text. Both Maori and Pakeha feature in this book, the two peoples are together.

However the tale is of two separate people, and the tension is over land. The book itself is about a 'house', or metonymically, a place to live, meaning the wider society which includes Maori and newly arrived Pakeha. But our narrator has in physical terms made it a house where Maori progressively have no place except as spiritual beings or literally and briefly as warriors. Jack arrives at a place where land and people are imbued with spirit and spirituality. Ensuing pages contain a central picture, usually a double-spread, showing the building of Jack's house, shops, port, and finally, town. Smaller pictures in the metaframe (which runs around the borders of the page) provide 'comments from a Maori perspective' according to Bishop's end note. Within the central pictorial narrative there are further stories which highlight colonisation as destruction. In multiple commentaries secondary to the foregrounded building and commercial activity, the colonists cut down trees, waste ferns, and carve up a whale on the beach. That is, Pakeha destroy the land, the sources of food and life itself. They clobber seals and they marry Maori women; one common Maori view is that this latter practice weakens the *tangata whenua*.

The borders, which the author states 'reflect a Maori viewpoint', first illustrate the creation myth, then a taniwha, but from then Maori are represented by eyes in the spiritual blue sky. The following metaframes reveal a collection of European household items, building tools, guns, potato plants and Pakeha faces painted in a naive style common in the 1840s. These conclude with herds of bullocks, horses, and wagons taking Pakeha everywhere. In these sections, it is as if Maori are assigned to observer status, without the right or place to act. The eighth and final framing is the war god Tumatauenga calling the *tangata whenua* to fight again and again and this heralds the final battle and conflagration. If these frames 'represent the Maori point of view' then there is no escaping the ideological construction of Maori as passive, as not engaged in the activity of the 'culture clash' period and indeed effaced as social participants. After two early

pictures of trading scenes in the central illustration they are confined to the sea and the sky, their numbers decreasing with each page: they do not act. While I do not suggest that a poetic work such as this should be historically correct, I do note that Bishop's *selection* of Maori life in the contact period portrays Maori as without agency. At this time Maori agricultural expansion was such that they had a larger economy than the Pakeha, raising pork, growing wheat, corn, kumara and potatoes, transporting and exporting food in their own ships and investing 'in capital assets like schooners and flour mills' (Monin, p.160). The indigenous Maori are awarded spirituality in the paintings but their numerical superiority, their high literacy rate and commercial ascendancy and their effective role in the early economy have been denied.⁵ While Bishop seeks to emphasise a spiritual element in Maori society, the young reader is positioned to construct Maori as not so much spiritual as passive. In so far as we can identify a shared metaethnic Maori and Pakeha may value a non-materialist position but neither takes pride in commercial ineptitude.

Features of the paratext contribute to the unresolved ideology. The end-papers invite a postcolonial reading as we begin with London, the corrupt heart of the Empire, and end with Pakeha and Maori side by side, heavily armed, not looking at each other, but rather challenging the reader. The frontispiece (p. 20) is created in the style of a Hogarth lithograph. The *Gin Lane* parallel is inescapable and the cross-hatching is typical not only of Hogarth's work but of 18th century lithographs generally. London is portrayed as a centre of low life where people crowd onto streets drunk with gin overlooked by a stone church. Jack is off to a better place, with the red door for the 'House that Jack Built' on his dray. The concluding end paper (p. 224) resembles the Maori historical paintings of the 1860s, for instance those to be seen in the Tutamure Meeting House. (Amoamo, Tupene, & Neich, 1984). Here two armed images of a Maori and of a settler engage the reader with their direct gaze. There is no interchange between the two figures, divided by the image of Tumatauenga the God of war. Paintings such as this, in their original site, are at the back of the meeting house since the back is the part which leads from the present to the future, just as the front speaks to the past of our



Images taken from *The House that Jack Built* by Gavin Bishop, published by Scholastic NZ Ltd, 1999; reproduced with permission.

forebears and protectors. It is felicitous that the end papers of Bishop's book echo this custom. Bishop does not, in his author's note 'About this Book', locate the source of his images any more than he explains the reference to Hogarth. In the context of this book the images of Maori as warrior rather than of Maori spirituality are those with lasting effect.

In his note on the last page Bishop says that the two cultures are now intertwined in the rich history that is *Aotearoa* (New Zealand) and that the end papers reflect this harmony. But in fact, Maori are visually and ideologically sidelined, although according to his own commentary this is not what Bishop intended. Maori are enjoined to fight and fight (by the Earth Mother) but are not 'intertwined in the rich history of Aotearoa' (Author's note) in that Bishop has chosen to portray them spiritually. In the ordinary social and commercial exchange they are voiceless, or invisible. If one interprets the book as a poetic attempt to create modern myth it suffers from the progressive removal of a Maori presence. The Maori narrative, which could be in the illustrative text, has vaporised into the pale blue 'spiritual' sky. Clare Bradford's view that the illustrations depict the colonisation where Maori 'experience alienation and degradation' (Bradford 2001, p.240), is one with which I entirely concur. Nevertheless this text's *silencing* of Maori is a more subtle and disturbing picture inviting the settler/viewer to construct Maori as 'absent' and passive. This immolation of Maori challenges a settler reading inscribing Maori as 'true' warriors. There are therefore echoes of the much earlier settler attempt to decry Maori as a weak dying race—one Pakeha did not have to consider in nation building. As Thomas, in his discussion on art and culture has noted, from early on Pakeha artists, such as Augustus Earle, recorded Maori images generously without sentimentality, so Bishop has access to a broad range of historical images and *chose* which he reinvented (Thomas, 1999).

A didactic purpose underpins all Bishop's work. Neither *Mr Fox* nor *The House That Jack Built* is for entertainment alone, and his reversions of tales and myths are intended to teach children of *all* ethnic groups their shared 'cultural heritage'. While his early picture books reflect a colonist's

grappling with 'place', the books with a Maori orientation are written for children from both cultures. *The House That Jack Built* constructs young readers' visions of early colonial New Zealand. This poetic rendering is one that explicitly presents Maori as overwhelmed, passive, spiritual and on a single occasion, war-like. The child viewer is subjected to a visual message that Maori are not of this world: they are withdrawn from social action except in war just as in *Hinepau* the protagonist is withdrawn from society and permitted a presence only spiritual. In drawing attention to some spiritual elements in traditional Maori beliefs and in ignoring the early Maori commercial success Bishop both undermines his narratives and disempowers contemporary Maori. The settler reader who seeks to validate a place in the new land remains uneasy about the representation of their own and Maori society. Despite the author's intention to create a shared past there is no place for the immigrant in this book and the Maori is rendered powerless in ordinary life. Bishop's erudition and paintings are superb but the ideological confusions expose the difficulties of writing across cultures.

In *Hinepau* a supposedly powerful protagonist is written out of the narrative and in *Maui and the Fire Goddess* the recasting of the traditional trickster-hero as a naughty child devalues the original myth. And in the creation of *The House that Jack Built* Maori are disempowered by their spirituality and the Pakeha morally destroyed as a result of their land occupation. Bishop demands that the child reader come to an understanding of myth and of 'real' history and through this embrace a New Zealand bicultural narrative heritage. However the material he has chosen results in an ambivalent story when he writes 'from a Maori perspective'.

Do not misinterpret this discussion for dismissal. These are remarkable books possessing immense value for young New Zealanders who are rarely honoured with the scholarship and artistic talent evidenced by Bishop. A critical eye, however, must temper appreciation of the arresting and enduring aesthetic qualities of these books.



NOTES

1. *Pakeha*, the Maori word for New Zealand Caucasians, remains a problematic word in some settings, but is routine in Northern New Zealand where the population of both groups is concentrated.
2. The term *mana* does not have an exact translation in English, but refers to a cluster of meanings including standing, prestige and (in association with other terms) leadership, authority and sovereignty.
3. In his end note Bishop refers to his Maori ancestry—Ngati Pukeko who are a sub-*iwi* of Ngati Awa from the East Coast—and the name Hinepau is associated with his forebears. The story itself is his invention.
4. She has red hair and green eyes, which in the playground lore of the almost totally Maori school I attended signified not merely strangeness but the power to deliver curses.
5. The first English language rendition of Maui stories in New Zealand was translated by Governor George Grey, who employed Wi Maihi te Rangi Kaheke to record mythology and traditional history (Grey 1895, 1995).
6. Maori thirst for reading and writing was almost insatiable. William Wade reported in his travels through the North island in 1838 that he was met frequently with a demand: 'Books, books, "Emate ana matou I te pukapuka kore," We are ill (or dead) for want of books' (Binney Bassett and Olssen, p.15). Although the missionaries were responsible for the reduction of spoken Maori dialects into a standardised written form, items published in Maori soon extended from the official government printed gazette to Maori newspapers.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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