

Potiki

a novel by Patricia Grace (1986)

Māhea Ahia



Reading Practices

analysis (not just reading for pleasure)

- meta-text: cover, artwork, layout, dedication, invocation/poem/quote, TOC, editor's note, prologue, afterward, chapters, how are sections delineated (art, symbol), glossary
 - aesthetic and political decisions. Who has power to decide?
- publishing practices - \$, distribution, placement, access, who publishes Pacific?
- genre(s) - novel = western standard of worthiness
 - women's literature, Indigenous, Indigenous women, Pacific Indigenous women
 - kuleana to community the work comes from and/or represents
- Author info

Patricia Grace

author

- Born in Wellington, NZ 1973
- European, Ngāti Toa, Ngāti Raukawa, Te Āti
- mother (7), teacher (elementary, HS), writer
- multi-award winner



Patricia Grace

From the Centre

A writer's life

Publishing of Maori literature

“development” of Maori writing through pakehā lens

- 19th century oral traditions written down by foreigners
- 20thc post WWII - Te Rangi Hīroa (Peter Buck) and Apirana Ngata - nonfiction (anthro)
- Witi Ihimaera - short stories *Pounamu Pounamu* (1972) and novel *Tangi* (1973) *Whanau* (1974), *The Whale Rider* (1987)
- Keri Hulme - novel *The Bone People* (1983)
- Patricia Grace - short stories *Waiariki* (1975) and novel *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps* about a mixed marriage (1978), *Potiki* (1986)
- HUIA Publishers (1991) established to promote Maori writers in English and te reo

Potiki

- 1987 New Zealand Fiction Award
- Grace writes about “everyday life”
- Began as short story of Roimata. “cut and paste” sections together to make a novel
- story: Māori community response to threats of capitalism
- political choices: no translation, no italics, no glossary

How to read *Potiki*

hermeneutics = interpretation (literary studies)

- first reading is usually for character arc (transformation through story's journey), plot (sequence of events), main themes, worlding discoveries, reader intimacy
 - character names (Dolman/Dollarman), placed-based knowledges
- second reading deepens HOW the theme unfolds through craft technique
 - precision of language, poetics, structure
- close reading of passages - a short selection reveals insights of the whole
- voice - style

How to read *Potiki*

Kanaka perspective - PIKO principles of story by Māheia Ahia

- PIKO Principles of Story:
 - Pilina/Relationality - relations of characters to the land, to humans, to non-human
 - 'Ike/Knowledge - worldview, knowledge systems, specialized knowledges
 - Kuleana - responsibilities, privileges, rights, accountability
 - to community post-project, to representing them accurately
 - 'Ōlelo/Language, literarcies (which languages? translations? glossaries?)

How to read *Potiki*

Kanaka perspective - meiwī (iwī = bones)

- What are the ancestral techniques that have passed down into contemporary literature?
 - Hiapo Perreira - meiwī in oral tradition
 - ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui - meiwī in literature/mo'olelo - *Voices of Fire*
 - Marie Alohani Brown - meiwī in lifewriting and mo'o studies
- genealogy at the forefront, sound connections (comes from chants), repetition, listing, dyads, asides talking to the audience
- connection to non-human, connection to land

How to read *Potiki*

Māori perspectives

- Spiral Time - not linear, unfolding and encircling, and spiraling around and around
- structure: **whaikorero** = oration, formal speech (**Grace Influences 72**)
 - chant, greeting, speech, “ka huri” to turn over to next speaker
 - “to give a circular shape suitable to the storytelling content of the book and to reflect the way that talk moves in a circular fashion inside the meeting house” (*Grace Influences 72*)
- multiple character points of view (not one single individual Main character, but the collective community story told through the many), Roimata, Toko, voice
- weaving encounters and confrontations of Māori and Pākehā worldviews
- written by, about, for Māori - cultural literacy needed

Pō

- pōtiki = youngest child
- Pō = darkness, night, place of departed spirits
- Hinenuitepō “Great Woman of Night” - welcomes after death
- Prologue - unfolding
- carving - wharenuui/meeting house
 - poupou/figures
- Toko associations: [‘e‘epa] - strange, dis/abled, connected to Pō
- Toko associations: god Maui
- Roimata returns in the dark - her body knows the way - and she bathes in sea renewal
- Maui Potiki invoked



Wharenuī - meeting house

- land
- entrance
- house with ancestor at the peak
- each of the pillars carved ancestor
- Maui tried to do to escape death by climbing back into mother womb
- structure of pōwhiri <https://teara.govt.nz/en/node/221363>
- gendered spaces
- order and permission to speak

Roimata

- introduces family and Tamihana lands
 - Hemi (husband) “Only Hemi could secure me, he being rooted to the earth as a tree is” (23)
 - children: James, Tangi, Manu
 - Mary (Hemi sister), compared to innocence & purity (Jesus tin)
 - Tokowaru-i-te-Marama (Mary biological son, son to Hemi & Roimata)
- 12 years away and she returns to funeral of Hemi mother
- Hemi loses job and gets to pursue his true desire to return and farm the land
- discuss colonial education

Toko

- Mary surprisingly gives birth to Toko in the sea (*Grace Influences 69-70*)
- strange, deformed (Hawaiians call them 'e'epa), gift of foresight
- modern Maui Potiki
- foreshadows the neighboring Te Ope peoples.
 - Mr. Dolman (Dollarman) developer urges to give up their land, move their meetinghouse
 - No Consent given, so Dollarman begins destroying lands behind meetinghouse. Community protests follow. So they burn down the meeting house.
 - Mary finds the Poupou in ashes and Te Ope build them a new meetinghouse with wheelchair ramp for Toko
 - Toko is killed and becomes immortalized as the remaining section of carving

Politics

land fights - relevant background

- 1953 Maori Affairs Act allowed the leasing of “unproductive” Māori land
 - [terra nullius imperial claims]
- 1967 Maori Affairs Amendment Act converted Māori freehold land with four or fewer owners into general land
- 1975 September beginning of 1000-km (621mi) march from Te Hapua to Wellington - Māori Land March
- Kohimarama (Bastion Point) 1977-78 Orakei Māori Action Committee protests, occupation, 5/28/1978 600 removed, 222 arrested

Relevance

Why do we read *Potiki* today?

- What in this story do you connect with most deeply or strongly?
- How do you encounter this story? curious, cautious, hungry, entitled, reverent
 - What kuleana do you have to it, now that you know it?
- Do the mythic elements make it less real or believable for you?
- writing from personal experience - land struggles, colonialism, education afar
 - historical fiction - real events, fictional characters