

Ōrotokare: Art, Story, Motion

Towards indigenous theatre and performing arts¹

Te Ahukaramū

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In the early 1980s, I became involved in two activities which have continued to hold resonance and importance for me since that time. The first concerned the establishment of a tribal college called Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa in which I was to become involved for over a decade. It was through Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa that I began to explore my Māori background and to immerse myself in the Māori language and the histories and traditions of my iwi. I was fortunate that members of my family had become involved in the establishment of our tribal college and this allowed me access to a range of elders and learning experiences which have proved invaluable.

At around about the same time, I also enrolled in a bachelor of music at Victoria University majoring in composition. During the first two years of the programme, I studied the classics, explored counterpoint and harmony, became bamboozled by acoustics and much more. Our weekly activities involved composing new music under the tutelage of our lecturers - David Farquhar, Jack Body and Ross Harris. Each Thursday afternoon we would meet in the old Hunter Building there to unleash our creativity into the world through weird and wonderful collaborations with performance students. The results were varying to say the least.

After two years of exploring, particularly the Second Darmstadt School (I was in the Boulez camp), I found myself drawn more and more toward finding some kind of musical expression that came from this land, from the peoples whose creativity arose from the very soil of these islands. I listened to what I was composing and found it to be far too derivative and empty

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somehow. So I set off in a musical exploration of New Zealand fired by a youthful zeal and enthusiasm. It was during this time that I discovered and became deeply immersed in *mōteatea* or traditional chanted song poetry. Luckily for me, at that time we still had about half dozen elders at our tribal college who were taught in a traditional manner and who were willing to teach others, myself included.

And so from around the middle of the 1980s through to 2002, I submerged myself into the Māori world – learning particularly the Māori language and *mōteatea*. It was my great fortune to work on a publication of these songs in the early 1990s and to collaborate with two expert elders who have subsequently passed away. Let us hear a little of these songs:

SONG EXTRACT, possibly *Nāku te whakarehu* , possibly *Poia atu taku poi*

By 1994 I had spent a good deal of time recording, writing, attending hui and composing new songs in this traditional form. At that time, I decided to take stock at what I had completed and noted that I had done little work on the performance aspects of *mōteatea*. Most of my work had focused upon the historical and literary aspects of the tradition – and even *mōteatea* as a phenomenon of crafted sound. I had not yet explored the performance aspects of this tradition in an holistic manner and so decided to explore traditional performance in the context of doctoral study, conducted again at the then Department of Theatre and Film at Victoria University.

So, again, I set off to explore the performance aspects of *mōteatea*. Slowly the study broadened to consider traditional performing generally in such forms as :

- *whaikōrero* (oratory)
- *haka* (dance)
- *taonga pūoro* (musical instruments)

- waiata (songs)
- kōrero (stories and storytelling)

and how these performing activities took place in a range of contexts, including of course the traditional marae.

During this time I discovered for myself a little known institution entitled *te whare tapere*. This is a traditional institution of pā society. Unfortunately, our knowledge of this institution is fragmentary, however, the things that we do know are worth exploring.

The Traditional Whare Tapere

Whare Tapere were pā based houses of entertainment, story telling and dance. Numerous activities took place in these 'houses' including all the items one would expect in an entertainment centre such as dance, storytelling and songs. There were other activities as well such as games and amusements like 'cats cradle', musical instruments, spinning tops, stilts, wrestling and much more.

The most important story or narrative in the whare tapere tradition is that pertaining to the death of Kae. It is a very old story as versions can be found throughout New Zealand and Polynesia. The story appears in Grey's *Nga Mahi a nga Tupuna* and it is named there as 'Te Patunga o Kae'³. This version is drawn from a manuscript dictated by our ancestor Te Rangihaeata of Ngāti Toarangatira and Ngāti Raukawa and written by Mātene Te Whiwhi.⁴ The action takes place in Hawaiki, the mythical homeland of Māori tradition.

The story tells of Tinirau and his wife Hine-te-iwaiwa. Upon the birth of their child, Tinirau sends for the *tohunga* Kae to perform the baptismal ceremonies. In payment, Tinirau allows Kae to use his pet whale Tutunui to

³ See *Nga Mahi a nga Tupuna* by George Grey, pp. 29 - 31. Third edition, Thomas Avery and Sons Ltd., 1928.

⁴ Manuscript by Mātene Te Whiwhi written at the dictation of Te Rangihaeata of Ngāti Toa 1852. Auckland Public Library, Grey Māori manuscripts, GNZMMSS 46.

transport Kae back to his home island, however, Tinirau is specific in his instructions to Kae. He explains that when the whale draws near to shore, it will shrug its back. At this point Kae is to disembark. Unfortunately, Kae is a difficult character and instead of disembarking, he drives the hapless whale to shore killing it. Kae then cuts up the whale and cooks the flesh whereupon the aroma is sent by the winds back to Tinirau on his island. Thus Tinirau learns that his whale has perished.

So Tinirau decides that he must seek retribution and he hatches a plan. He asks his wife Hine-te-iwaiwa to convene a troupe of women whose task is to seek out Kae and to entice him back to their island. And so the troupe of women is convened and it includes the deities of many of the performing arts of Māori tradition. This includes:

- Rau-kata-uri, the goddess of flute music
- Rau-kata-mea
- Itiiti
- Rekareka
- Kura-hau
- Pō-ruhiruhi
- Pō-roherohe
- Whakaaro-rangi
- Ruhi-i-te-rangi
- Hine-te-iwaiwa

Unfortunately, our knowledge of each of these women is incomplete, however, we can say that they are the deities of traditional Māori performing arts. The women performed with the following instruments

- pūtōrino, long flute
- kōauau, short flute
- tokere, castanet type instrument

- tī-ringaringa, hand game
- papaki hand game
- tī-rakau, hand game with sticks
- pakuru, chanting with sticks
- porotītī, spinning instrument

Additionally, the women also perform a number of dances, the titles of which are remembered. Unfortunately, again our knowledge of the dances themselves is incomplete. The dances include:

- waitoremi
- anaana
- puapua
- oni
- pōtēteke

Tradition records that these dances became progressively more erotic in nature as they were performed. Hence, this story acts as an important mythical narrative which found expression in traditional whare tapere in pre-contact Aotearoa. Further traditions include that of Tānerore, the son of the sun. Te Haka-a-Tānerore is the name for the shimmering of the air on a hot summer day. It is the mythical precursor for the *wiri* in dance and also of the poi:

(the) trembling of the hands was an imitation of the dancing of Tane-rore, son of Hine-Raumati... and Ra...Ra lived half of the year with one of his wives, Hine Takurua the Winter Maid and the other half with Hine Raumati, the Summer Maid. Hine Takurua's home is in the ocean and her main task is that of preserver of the food the ocean produces, while Hine Raumati's duty is to ripen the foods of the land so that as her hour of departure draws near her bounty may be harvested for the nourishment of the children of men...

*“The dancing of Tane-rore”, they would say. “See him tremble and quiver.”
Tane-rore, the paragon dancers.⁵*

Hence, Tānerore is established as the mythical ‘paragon’ of dancers and dancing, the one whom all impersonate.

Echoes and reflections of this tradition can still be found throughout New Zealand. For example, Mokoia Island in Lake Rotorua and Motutapu Island in the Waitematā Harbour are still referred to as *Te Motutapu-o-Tinirau*, the sacred isle of Tinirau, the locality in which the original Tinirau story took place. Other examples of whare tapere traditions in Aotearoa include numerous love stories where the protagonists have met in the whare tapere. Here, finally, is an example of performance in the whare tapere. This is a 19th century description of woman called Te Kahureremoa who lived in pre-contact times:

And so the woman rises to dance, as soon as she extends her arms exclamations of surprise and admiration can be heard it is as though her hands will leave her body, her fingers arch to touch the back of her hands; it is as though the suppleness of Paka’s daughter has come from constant training and massage, she is the epitome of feminine grace and beauty in the dance; there are many sayings concerning the nobility, the sound tawa has its qualities, the inferior tawa has its qualities so it is said of the high born when they rise to haka that they have their style and the low-born have theirs, their hands look awkward...⁶

19th Century European Descriptions

Of course, European arrivals also recorded much information about the people and the culture they encountered. Here are some examples.

In 1830, George Craik published a book entitled *The New Zealanders* where he describes his ‘marriage’ to two Māori sisters and the festivities that follow the ceremonies:

⁵ Whakatāne and District Historical Society *Historical Review*, Volume IX, No. 3, September 1961

⁶ Ibid. Translation by Timoti Kāretu. See *Haka, The Dance of a Noble People* by Timoti Kāretu 1993, p. 18.

...in the evening a great feast was given to the people by Aimy (sic). During the greater part of the night, the women kept dancing a dance which is called Kane Kane (sic)⁷, and is seldom performed except when large parties are met together. While dancing it, they stood all in a row, several of them holding muskets over their heads; and their movements were accompanied by the singing of several of the men; for they have no kind of music in this country...⁸

The Evening was spent as for the former in Dances, but on the Bank of the River and as a Grand Finale about 50 of the New Zealanders jumped into the Water with a tremendous splash. The Third and last day we had a scene very different, Eighty Women dancing a Slow Monotonous step, but graceful movements of the Arms. The Mats were round their Middles and the Upper part exposed all their Breasts &c but I never saw a finer set of Women or Girls in an Opera Ballet. They were in two divisions of Moyterra's (Moetara) tribe, and the Tribes about the Heads... Forty in each division, Ten in each row, two lines advancing about two inches at a time and two lines retrograding, Naked to the middle and using the Arms with slow but graceful Movements. The People on the Ground keeping up a Monotonous Chaunt in good time. The name of this Dance Jacky Marmont tolld me was Cunnu Cunnu (kanikani) and was Religious. All the Chiefs daughters danced it, and no Slave Girl was allowed to enter the Ranks. It lasted for hours; till the Sun set they must not eat; during the dance I found that Madle Awattie (?) was one and they had a master of ceremonies, and fogle Man to each division; they kept it up till sun Down, but the last few hours one Division sat down for half an hour, and they relieved each other; some of the women had flowers in their hair and even Combs as the European fashion of dressing the Hair is prevalent...⁹

Edward Treager, writing in *The Māori Race*¹⁰ offers three names for the whare tapere:

- whare tapere, a general term
- whare mātoro, entertainment for young people
- whare karioi, the travelling troupe

He writes as follows:

⁷ Craik footnotes this word with the correct "kanikani". However, he incorrectly describes it as a game.

⁸ From *The New Zealanders* by George Craik, Knight, London 1830, p. 197.

⁹ Ibid, p. 52.

¹⁰ From *The Maori Race* by Edward Tregear, Willis, Wanganui 1904, p. 60.

The place of the concert and ball room with us was taken among the Maoris by the House of Amusement (whare-tapere or whare-matoro or whare-karioi). These particular houses were set apart for the young people at night in order that the sports and games, often carried on till dawn, might not disturb the rest of the elders. Here went on the different dances, etc., natural to the youth all the world over, and herein also most the wooing took place that resulted in marriages of affection. Dancing (haka, kanikani, etc.) was not performed in the manner of European dances in which partners of opposite sexes swing or step together. It was altogether posture dancing, generally by a considerable number of persons, sometimes all of one sex, sometimes with both. The principal of these (haka) was in high estimation, and the whole night through relays of dancers might exhibit their skill and elegance in different varieties of the dance. The players usually stood in ranks, swinging their hands and bodies in a marvellous unison. The origin of the song-dance (haka) with its quiver of the dancer's fingers was said to have been an attempt to mimic the vibration of the air that heated by the summer sun rises from the soil, and the idea was carried on in the famous haka known as "The Dance of Summer". Young women played the graceful game of ball (poi). The players stood or were seated in a line, each having her ball fastened to a string about two or three feet long; they would strike the ball right, left, upwards etc., in time to a chorus (rangi poi), all the movements being performed at the same moment and in the same direction, with admirable precision and harmony of action. The balls were of some light substance, usually dried bulrush (raupo) and were ornamented with the white hair (awe) from the tail of the native dog. ¹¹

These extracts offer one a sense of the whare tapere in action. There are many, many more extracts and when brought together, one can construct an image and a theory about the role and activities of the traditional whare tapere.

The Abandonment of Pā

My thought is that the whare tapere fell into disuse following the abandonment of pā in the early decades of the 19th century. With my own people of Ngāti Raukawa in Ōtaki, this took place over a surprisingly brief period in 1846 to 1847 following the imprisonment of our chief Te Rauparaha. Our people moved from their pā at the mouth of the Ōtaki river to the new township of Hadfield town further inland (the precursor of the modern day Ōtaki township).

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 60 - 62

The movement from pā was not merely a movement from one living situation to another but it also signalled the movement from one worldview to another, from one culture to another. Whilst many items of pā culture were brought into the new setting, many were also abandoned or merely fell into disuse. One can not underestimate the significance of the movement away from pā to the internal and external expressions of the culture.

My sense is that many items of the traditional whare tapere were not brought into the new quasi urban setting but that many were not. Hence, we have echoes and reflections of these earlier performance forms in the concert party/kapa haka form which took root in the late 1890s and really came to the fore in the 1920s. What I am pleased to say, however, is that whilst our knowledge of the traditional whare tapere is fragmentary and incomplete, we nonetheless have an amount of information and knowledge about numerous and fascinating aspects of the whare tapere, much of which can form the basis of new 'indigenous theatre'.

Six Forms

Towards the end of the dissertation, I present a summary of the material gathered about the traditional whare tapere and arranged them into six forms, namely:

- Ngā Kōrero, storytelling, narratives
- Ngā Waiata, songs
- Ngā Haka, dance
- Ngā Taonga Pūoro, musical instruments
- Ngā Taonga-o-Wharawhara, adornments
- Ngā Tākaro, games and amusements

Within each of these forms is a number of categories and I would like to offer a sample of the kinds of activities captured within these six forms.

Ngā Kōrero

Like all oral cultures, traditional pre-contact Māori culture had a sophisticated array of story types which perform a wide range of functions in tradition society. For example there were frivolous stories (kōrero tara) as well as stories into which important lessons and perspectives on life were encapsulated (pūrākau). There were also expressions for types of storytellers such as the *kawau tataki* (the witty speaker) and *pūkōrero* (the orator). Additionally there were also expressions and, hence judgements, about the quality of performances.

Ngā Waiata

Similarly there were and are a vast array of songs composed for seemingly every aspect of life. There were songs for childbirth, for growing up, for falling in love, for warfare, for failed love, for lust, for... and the list goes on. Again these songs were performed in a variety of fashions, in a range of circumstances, by individuals or by groups and terminology exists pertaining to the quality of performances.

Ngā Haka

It is unfortunate that in New Zealand society today, most people think that *haka* means 'war dance', and that most people's view of haka is formed every winter by watching the All Blacks play. Haka is a generic term for dance and, as we have discovered, there were numerous types of haka. The Ngāti Porou authority, Arapeta Awatere, has written a classification of haka types and explains that there is only one type of 'war dance', that being the *peruperu*. With respect to the dance of the whare tapere, there are numerous aspects including the models presented in the stories pertaining to Tinirau, Tānerore, Hineruhi, Māui and more.

Ngā Taonga Pūoro

The recent renaissance in traditional Māori musical instruments has been led in the past decade or two by Richard Nunns and the late Dr Hirini Melbourne of Ngāi Tūhoe. Whilst Richard and Hirini have not been solely responsible, they nonetheless have come to represent the rediscovery of these instruments and their exploration, and much of the renewed interest and energy in these instruments can be attributed to Richard and Hirini. Many of the instruments are aerophones, being varieties of flutes, trumpets and other kinds of sounded shells. There were also a number of instruments that were beaten, swung and otherwise sounded through various means.

Ngā Taonga-o-Wharawhara

No performance tradition would be complete without getting dressed up and ready to perform. And so with the traditional whare tapere there were a range of makeups called *panipani*. These included *kōkōwai*, which was of a reddish hue whereas the *tākou* was blueish. There were also many kinds of feathers to adorn ones' hair, the most important being the *huia* (parson bird), the *toroa* (albatross) and the *kōtuku* (white heron). It is not well known that there were a range of perfumes and other kinds of fragrances including the *akerautangi*, *miro*, *kāretu*, *tangeo* and *raukawa*. Finally, there were a variety of clothing articles such the *paki whero* (red apron) and accoutrements such as items held in the hand (the *māipi* being an example).

Ngā Tākaro

Additionally, there were numerous games and amusements. Best collected a whole list of items from the Ngāti Porou leader Rōpata Wahawaha. A sample list goes as follows:

- Te Whai-a-Māui (cat's cradle)
- Perepere (darts)
- Karetao (puppets)

- Mamau (wrestling)
- Tū mātia (spear throwing)
- Whakahoro taratahi (kite flying)
- Moari (swinging from a tree)

Hence, one can see that there are a lot of items and forms that one can explore in traditional Māori performing arts. My doctoral study represents a starting point only as there is much more yet to discover. I would like to conclude now by briefly describing a new trust that is currently being established as a vehicle for exploring and advancing these forms.

Ōrotokare: Art, Story, Motion: Towards Indigenous Theatre and Performing Arts

The name of the trust is *Ōrotokare: Art, Story, Motion* and the purpose of the trust is explore and advance what I have termed as indigenous performing arts and indigenous theatre. Our trust deed provides the following note about as to the work of the trust:

The overall goal of the Trust is to rediscover, explore and renew traditional Māori performing arts forms - particularly those of the traditional *whare tapere* - by researching those forms, evolving them and giving expression to them in newly created performances. The Trust will be free to perform and evolve these forms either by performing them on their own and/or through encounter with performing arts and expressions from other traditions.

The Trust is to act as a forum for a new creativity, inspiration and vision with respect to indigenous performing arts (here referred to as *indigenous moving art*). In this regard, the Trust is encouraged to convene activities that are exploratory, radical and *avant garde* with respect to the Māori performing arts tradition. Further, the Trust is urged to seek excellence in its activities - in both the organisation and administration of its affairs and, particularly, in the performing arts activities which will be convened under its auspices.

The Trust is currently developing a programme of activities and will use the six forms discussed as its starting point. In addition to these six forms, three further activities are appended. They are:

Te Whare Tapere: An Emergent Theatre

The *Waituhi* Project: Use of Forms from other traditions
Special Projects
Communications and Publications

The Trust will explore each of the six forms individually and then consider what an indigenous 'theatre' might look like as they brought together to form a coherent whole. Additionally, we also propose to allow the Trust to explore and employ forms from other traditions as these may assist the work of the whare tapere. Finally, it will be important for the Trust to communicate its activities and its vision effectively and competently.

Let me conclude by saying that the Trust will be exploring and developing a philosophy of indigenous theatre and performing arts. Our starting point for this activity is what we know about the traditional whare tapere together with an exploration of deeper notions around indigeneity. Our thought is that we humans can not help but be an expression, an echo, a reflection of the environments in which we dwell. These environments are complex, multi-dimensional including linguistic, social, cultural, economic, spiritual and so on. Many aspects make up the environments in which we dwell and we are naturally and organically indigenous.

An indigenous culture, however, is one that is particular about its relationship to and with the natural environment and the natural world. An indigenous culture is one that, among other things, ritualises its relationship with the natural world on the basis that the world is imbued with wisdom and the trees, the mountains, the birds, the ocean and so on, are the best teachers. In traditional Māori culture, the transformation of humans into birds through

donning korowai, is but one way in which this relationship with the world is ritualised. Hence, our notion of an indigenous philosophy of theatre and performing arts is imbued with the idea of the natural world coming to expression through human creativity. We look forward to exploring this and many other ideas further.