

*Waiting for the Post:
some relations between modernity,
colonization, and writing*

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IN THE WEST no concept has been more entrenched than that of the “modern.” The West? The peculiar force of the idea of the modern is such that in this context one can qualify that clumsy, spatializing metonymy only by the adjective “modern” itself. Once again an equation that came effectively to propel European expansionism is spelled out: the West is modern, the modern is the West. By this logic, other societies can enter history, grasp the future, only at the price of their destruction. Today, however, the power of this logic is waning, and a new set of still hazy and abstract oppositions (including those between cultural and the post-cultural, the modern and postmodern) are coming into view. This essay aims to explore these remarks — though it begins with a distant event that occurred at the threshold of the modern idea of the “modern.”

In 1773 Dr. Johnson and James Boswell travel through the Hebrides, a poor country defeated by a metropolitan power in a brutal war thirty years before. They are not, in today’s sense, sightseers. Indeed their trip has no definite purpose: Boswell wants to see how Dr. Johnson, the famous man of letters, will respond to a country in a “state of grossness and ignorance” (Johnson 80). They both expect to find an example of an order that they call “patriarchy” but it is rare that Johnson can exclaim, as he does at Rasay, “this is truly the patriarchal life: this what we came to find!” Rare, because the people they meet surprise them. The English speakers have often read Johnson’s books, particularly his Dictionary; while the peasantry, speaking a declining language —

Erse — can barely be communicated with at all. Both kinds of “natives” (as the travellers call them) are, however, unwilling to submit themselves to an examination producing the kind of “truth” that Johnson wishes to find. Boswell laboriously keeps a journal mainly about his friend’s responses to the country, which Johnson corrects, admires and wishes were worth publishing. Encouragement enough for Boswell. Soon Johnson decides to publish his tour too, making his decision seated at a bank “such as a writer of Romance might have delighted to feign” (35) and remarking, wistfully, that he could have made a “very pretty book” of the Indians had he gone to America (Boswell 285). The purpose of the trip becomes clear: it is undertaken to be turned into writing. It is not a surprising decision, especially when we discover that Johnson only really enjoys the journey when he is close to roads along which he can post a stream of letters back to the capital.

What makes accounts of this tour worth publishing is the interplay between those who write and those who are written about. The Hebrides’ poverty, superstition and ignorance; its being controlled by genealogy, revenge and clans — to use terms that came easily to the travellers — are subject to observation by these models of modernity and learning. Boswell is the son of a man who helped deprive the Hebridean lairds of their private prisons and jurisdiction over their kin. As a lawyer himself, he fights cases he knows to be false, an activity he defends to the locals who, accustomed to a different kind of justice, remain suspicious of dissimulated advocacy. Further still from the customs and values of the Highlanders (as they are also, confusingly, called), Johnson is self-made, a man without ancestors whose thoughts turn into written words with incredible rapidity: the gap between the spoken and the written is narrower in him than in anyone. During his tour he argues incessantly — both with Boswell and the educated Highlanders, evincing “an uncommon desire to be right” (252). Where need be, he browbeats his opponents as, for instance, he defends literary copyright against those who, like Lord Monboddo, hankering for oral culture, believe that to learn a book by heart is to own it too, or as he attacks patronage, or as he declares that people are malleable, only education and training making them different from one another. Behind these enlightened views lies the urban

claim to reach his own opinion through discussion. Yet despite all this, he is sympathetic to those he considers ignorant precisely because he is anxious about his own enlightened modernity. He fears the loss of faith and certainty implicit in his own position, based on his disrespect for untested opinions. Thus he craves transcendental possibilities, signs of living hierarchies. He admires the genealogical "patriarchy" that he encounters in the Highland chiefs. He is authoritatively and arbitrarily open-minded towards an order he believes to be disappearing — approving of the Christian ministry's "extirpation" of folkloric beliefs ("sturdy fairies," and Greogach, the old man with the Long Beard) while refusing to discount the possibility of "second sight."

Johnson and Boswell's tour, neither simply an example of a larger formation nor an origin, can be read either as a moment in the development of cultural imperialism, or as a moment in the emergence of the tourist industry (Boswell pleads for more guide-books so that travellers in future will know what monuments to visit), or even as a threshold at which private travelling transmutes into a rudimentary ethnography (after all, Johnson is concerned to record and turn into truth the manners and customs of those he encounters). More to the point, however, the journey brings into view that crucial but extraordinarily elusive difference between what I am calling, skeptically, the modern and the non-modern. Skeptically because, as their tour shows, that difference is simultaneously undisplaceable and uncontainable: any attempt to fix it is doubtful. Here it is certainly not a difference between cultures for instance — Johnson and Boswell have no concept of "culture," so they can deplore the Highlanders' "ignorance" and "superstition" without relativist qualifications. Nor do they have any notion that the bodies of those they are visiting have a specific biology — the difference here is not racial. They do not have any evolutionary schema by which the Highlanders might be called "primitive" either. Nor do they regard the locals, however "archaic" they may think them, as existing in the proximity of a primordial nature. Nor, finally, do they have a strong political or economic sense of the difference: for Johnson and Boswell, the Hebrides' poverty is merely the result of its inhabitants' "laziness." The difference between the travellers and the locals functions more

as the product of a desire to maintain a past considered to be doomed. It is as if it were too much a commodity (a spur to publication), too important in constructing hierarchies, to disappear. The difference, however, is produced in the very act of its representation — to generalize about it is at once to be placed on the side of the modern. Which means that it does not belong to any single place or time — the Highlanders and the American Indians are joined in single dying order named “patriarchy.” Yet the modern does not simply cease where the non-modern begins. For the difference to be represented, a complex technological and infrastructural system must exist — transport routes, postal systems and legal edicts — most of which converge on the metropolis, London, and which, at least potentially, the locals are formed by too.

What can be found on one side can also be found on the other. As Johnson moves through the Highlands he engages in a particular discursive practice, characteristic of the articulation of enlightened knowledge. First he “accurately” inspects, then he “justly” represents (44). In doing so, however, he unknowingly finds himself imitating those whom he observes. After meeting a local who cannot give him the information he wants, despite the fact that the Highlander had lived in a period when “the mountains were yet unpenetrated, no inlet was opened to foreign novelties” (57) Johnson immediately declares: “In nations, where there is hardly the use of letters, what is once out of sight is lost for ever. They think but little, and of their few thoughts, none are wasted on the past . . .” (58). How does this stand beside his opinion recorded a few pages previously: “They who consider themselves as ennobled by their family, will think highly of their progenitors, and they who throughout successive generations live always together in the same place, will preserve local stories and hereditary prejudices. Thus every Highlander can talk of his ancestors . . .” (42) so that indeed “Everything in those countries has its history” (44). Nothing but history, and no history: two contradictory propositions side by side. Johnson incessantly complains that the Northerners are “at variance with themselves” (45), but his own truth procedures lead to similar contradictions. An effect of repetition has broken through the modernist difference — which also reproduces itself within the zones that it separates. For instance, Johnson’s

own authority is connected to his extraordinary capacity for boredom and consumption. With patriarchal *hauteur*, he demands food, drink, thoughts and events to discourse upon. Thus Boswell:

I must take some merit from my assiduous attention to him, and from my contriving that he shall be easy wherever he goes, that he shall not be asked twice to eat or drink any thing . . . and many such little things, which, if not attended to, would fret him. I also may be allowed to claim some merit in leading the conversation: I do not mean leading, as in an orchestra, by playing the first fiddle; but leading as one does in examining a witness, — starting topics, and making him pursue them. He appears to me like a great mill, into which a subject is thrown to be ground. It requires, indeed, fertile minds to furnish materials for this mill. I regret whenever I see it unemployed; but sometimes I feel myself quite barren, and having nothing to throw in. (338-39)

This highly metaphorical passage travels through a series of schematized analogies and displacements: it is as mobile as its authors' tour. First of all, Johnson's lordship is situated in his bodily appetites which are equivalent to his mind and its hunger for ratiocination. That capacity for analysis is also reified as a process of mechanical production, the Mill. From the other side, Boswell, as assiduous servant, provides for and leads his master so that his own fertility is constantly threatened with depletion. The image of a barren, deferential Boswell anthropomorphizes the desolated colonized country they are touring. The relations between these travelers, the way they fashion themselves, play out the difference they have come to inspect and represent.

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For a long time, to be modern was to be ordered by, to have access to, universals, to be *rational*. Dr. Johnson himself tried to shout down the universalisms that were already being given value around him; in fact his antagonism to them helped draw him to the Hebrides, where the local and the chiefly presided. Modern universalism takes many, and conflicting, forms — those theories of natural law, human and civil rights and the primordial social contract which variously support the revolutions of the late eighteenth century and continue to legitimate democracy; German idealist theories that place universal duty in a continuum leading

back to the formal pre-conditions of perception and understanding; Benthamite principles of utility which partially underpin statism in Britain and the imperial administration of India; theories of an invisible hand that orders a market without formal barriers to entry; even the humanist marxian critique of formalist universalisms is itself a universalism, for it anticipates a time when the substance of the individual, the productive being, will be drawn into a non-coercive legal and economic apparatus available to all.

In modernity, one concept in particular — culture — stands against these conflicting notions. Not that the concept originates in a struggle against rationality: indeed the great counter to universalisms begins in universalism. The notion of “culture” appeared in order to answer the question: “What customs are general to all communities?” This is too universalist a question for Johnson to pose in a systematic fashion, but his contemporary, Giambattista Vico does — and finds three: marriage contracts, burial and religion. Vico regards these as essential to human nature, not as necessary conditions for justice, order or knowledge. Gradually language, music, production of artifacts, rituals, and so on come to be similarly conceived of as expressions of human nature and, grouped together, are regarded as grounding *cultural* identities. The customs destroyed by modernity are no longer veiled (at best) in the haze of Gothic nostalgia: their loss appears tragic and irreversible. These relations are complex then: cultures are both vulnerable to enlightenment and specific to communities, though their specificity is an essential expression of a universal human nature; modernity decultures by universalizing and forgetting (so culturalists claim) that meanings, norms, values, ideals, only have substance in lived expressive practices. After Johnson the unnameable difference imposed by the death of the old order hardens into an opposition between enlightenment and culture. It would be tempting to say that “we” do not think — or live — in terms of this harsh opposition. It would be tempting to suppose that we belong either to the order of the “post-modern” with its suspicion of progressive narratives of history whose end is one universalism or another or to what can be called the “post-cultural” with its sense that “cultural” products are not essentially

bound to the life-world that produced them.¹ But in nations like New Zealand, Australia, Canada and South Africa (which should not, perhaps, be named in a single breath) it is especially difficult to place oneself in those "posts." Not all of the communities in our countries have passed through the threshold of modernity: some are maintained, some wish to maintain themselves, at the far side of the difference. Where colonizers continue to enrich themselves more or less indirectly by claiming modernity, the elusive difference is construed not so much as cultural but as racial — located in the body. Yet where the difference is most fetishized, the benefits of universal modernity seem most worth fighting for.

So it comes as no surprise that the most charismatic living figure of the enlightenment is a black South African: Nelson Mandela. In his essay "In Admiration of Nelson Mandela or the Laws of Reflection," Jacques Derrida suggests that Mandela attracts our admiration because of what Derrida calls "the force of reflection" (454). Derrida suggests that Mandela is admirable both because he himself admires so intensely — in the spirit of the Enlightenment he admires that universal Law which applies to all and which makes all equal — and because he is so careful, so reflective. He is reflective even in his advocacy of violence: for him violence stands in the place of those rights that are disallowed him so that Mandela's violence is more like discourse than terror. Derrida's admiration is a moment in a play of mirrors, as for both Derrida and Mandela, the universal Law has no ontological basis. Mandela sees what few others see, a long continuity threading the stories that the elders of his tribe in the Transkei told him about "the good old days, before the democratic rule of their kings and their *amapakati*" (149) to its "council variously called Imbizon, or Pitso, or Kgota [that] was so completely democratic that all members of the tribe could participate in its deliberations" (150). By mirroring and inverting, Mandela's memory attaches these strands of mythology to "the tales of wars fought by our ancestors in defence of the fatherland," "the acts of valor performed by generals and soldiers during those epic days" (149), and finally to the political struggle towards a state in which "all South Africans are entitled to live a free life on the basis of fullest equality of the rights and opportunities in every field, of full democratic

rights, with a direct say in the affairs of the government” (150). So Mandela is addressed by the Law almost as the Prophets were once addressed by God; others are not called in this way. His Law, when practiced, is unlike Boswell’s dissimulated advocacy, a force that makes it a duty for an “attorney worth his salt” (as Mandela puts it) to serve his people in defiance of the state’s legal apparatus. And not one but two laws: Mandela’s ideal law and that of the South African state. Thus in his speeches, two implied audiences: those present and those who will listen when the two laws are less far apart. Imprisoned, living at the borders of the West, Mandela reflects the West too in the sense that he has had to “interiorize the Occidental principle of interiority” (Derrida 465). As a man of the law deemed outside the law, the object of so much scrutiny and repression, he has had to hug the law to himself, to enter it not as a profession but as a vocation. He must enact it. For Derrida, the Law — with a capital L — exists in the circulation between Mandela’s imprisoned self and his ancestral past, the development of democratic structures, the European enlightenment and so on, all of which are far removed from his local situation and none of which themselves adequately express the Law. In this act of interiorization which keeps the law in circulation, Mandela becomes symbolic of the struggle for freedom, losing his individuality in his very individual toughness. But, as Derrida suggests, Mandela reflects the West most powerfully in that he shows how the universals that have come to operate as signifiers of, and laws for, occidental identity undo the boundaries of their place of origin; they do not simply belong to the West — or even to modernity. Not only can they not be spatialized or temporalized, they speak with greatest force to those, like Mandela, from whom the West withholds the Law. They *require* that some stand outside the Law. In sum: Mandela disrupts the unnameable difference, first by positing continuities from the pre-colonial/non-modern to the post-colonial/modern (reflecting the present lack on the past and vice versa), then by demonstrating that enlightenment fascinates and seduces by its very power of reflection and subjectification, its power to unsettle boundaries and given identities.

An enlightenment without a simple frame or ground, this is what Derrida finds in Mandela. Traditionally universalism has

come under attack because for it the local merely exists as a placeholder for a general right or responsibility. Both Derrida and Mandela turn that to their advantage. Universalisms are necessarily directed towards limits and identities that they cannot take account of. Arguments for democracy, for instance, cannot of themselves point to those who deserve democratic privileges. Not just everybody? But why just nationals of a particular state? Why those over 21? Why not those in prison or mental institutions? It is Derrida's particular contribution not to construe these limits as a crippling contradiction but as the condition of possibility for the articulation of a double-jointed universalism, one which is performed as much as obeyed and which, as we need no reminding, has real force in repressive conditions. Universalism can advance the struggle of the colonized against those who would limit access to the Law while it opens out to a deconstruction that would resist the closures of rationality. Yet the limits to enlightened universalism cannot simply be considered as aporias that enable most to admire it and some to live it out. Mandela himself belongs to social formations that have little connection with enlightenment. Although Derrida does not mention it, he belongs to the global imaginary, he is an excuse for a rock concert, an image bounced off satellites to all nations. It is true that he would not belong to this imaginary were he not also to embody enlightenment, but, on the other hand, he would not embody enlightenment if his image were not so often transmitted through the international communication networks. Derrida's complex play of reflection is also entwined within the flow of the imaginary. For the world outside his home country at least, Mandela is precisely a representation without an original. That the original is imprisoned and silenced, physically absent from the public sphere, is what propels him into the postmodern, permits him to exist as a charismatic and broadcasted image and name. This is worth saying because it is often assumed that there are no interactions between enlightened universalism and the order of the postmodern. But of course not everything does enter into relation with universals. Black South Africans can embrace the enlightenment all the more readily because, forming the national majority, democracy will help them control their own destiny. Their identity is consolidated by those oppressive apparatuses that,

using racist and culturalist discourse, discriminate against — and fix them — as black. The seductiveness — or necessity — of universals leads to problems of analysis: the “black consciousness” movement may be widely regarded as peripheral in South Africa, but is class or race to be the privileged term for thinking about its past and future? Currently the important question for those working in the liberation struggle is the degree to which the ANC will urge a programme of state socialism in order to prevent the market from executing apartheid’s work once the latter has been formally abolished. This problematic is much less relevant in countries in which the colonized form a minority, however large, to whom democracy offers little.

In such states a politics of identity replaces the politics of enlightenment. There the project of the colonized peoples becomes preservation of a cultural identity (supposedly) grounded in the era before the modern to which current needs and wants attach. And New Zealand, “exceptional in many ways” as Donald Deenon notes, stands as the paradigmatic instance of such states, because (for reasons that will be clarified) it is there that the border which divides and joins the politics of enlightenment to the politics of cultural identity is most fiercely contested (206). In her book *Maori Sovereignty*, Donna Awatere, a Maori activist, expresses such a programme thus:

The aim is to redesign the country’s institutions from a Maori point of view. The aim is to reclaim the land and work it from a Maori point of view. . . . To forge a distinct New Zealand identity from a Maori point of view. (32)

And she states the question of identity that she faces by appealing to the notion of time:

The Maori use of time differs from that of British culture. To the whites, the present and the future is all important. To the Maori, the past is the present is the future. Who I am and my relationship to everyone else depends on *Whakapapa* [genealogy], on my language, on those from whom I am descended. . . . (54)

These two passages lead in different directions but it is clear from her book as a whole that the Maori point of view is something only a Maori speaking the Maori language, living in Maori time, has access to. Indeed that follows from what a Maori, for Awatere, is.

She defines the Maori, not in racist or culturalist discourse, but by their possessing a *whakapapa*. For her, the relation between the past and the present is a matter of preserving the *mana* of one's ancestors and observing *tapus*. To describe what Johnson called one's "progenitors" negatively for instance, is impossible within Maori traditions because that would reduce ancestral *mana*. Thus even Pakeha historians who feel intense sympathy for Maoris, and who have desired to record their past in writing have come under increasing attack. ("Pakeha" is the received New Zealand word for whites.) The historian Michael King, for instance, recounts how he was asked by a member of the Ngata family to expunge references to his ancestor, Ropata Wahawaha, who, fighting with the British, had shot one hundred Maori prisoners then pushed their bodies over a cliff (153). Little dialogue is possible across the difference between the Maori and Pakeha when it is supposed that Maori identity is still grounded in the aura of a time which is not yet historical, still sacred. Nonetheless the loss of sacred, genealogical thinking and structures helped the whites to act extraordinarily unscrupulously and viciously even by their own values. No future generations would ever *fight* for their reputation; no ancestral spirit was judging them.

Post-colonial identity politics tend towards paradox and irresolution because, with the coming of Europeans, the narratives, signifiers and practices available to Maoris (for instance) to articulate their needs and wants are at once inscribed within Eurocentric modernity — and vice-versa. The moment of arrival opened out into a scene of forgetting and (mis)recognition. Forgetting: the crucial signifiers of pre-colonial Maori language began to lose their meaning until no consensus remains as to what certain words "mean." (Is "*atua*" to be translated as "god," "devil" or "spirit"?)² The reason for this is, of course, that their sense depended upon practices that European settlement disrupted. (Mis)recognition: the whites and their ships triggered an orgy of metaphoricization by the Maori. They were apparently recognized as "*tupua*" (a word sometimes translated as "gnomes"), "*atua*," whales, floating islands and so on in a linguistic mobility that is the obverse of these words' loss of "meaning" (Best 362-67). The locals, of course, were (mis)recognized as "cannibals," "savages."

In colonial history (at least, until the post-cultural moment) each side has, however, solidified *and* dismantled the other's image, disavowing *and* discovering — at different institutional and social sites — the rhetorical strategies, amnesia and misrecognitions by which identity is produced.³ Yet even the first moment of forgetting and misrecognition does not simply obey the modernist paradigm. When, for instance, the missionaries expressed their own quasi-sacred horror at Maori cannibalism they were drawn into a debate which, on utilitarian grounds, they could only lose (Wilson 136). After all, there are no “rational” reasons why warfare's victims should not be eaten — here the Maori is more “modern” than the Pakeha.

These not unfamiliar points require extensive exemplification. Identity construction begins to work at the level of the proper name: “Maori” is a metonymy — it was an adjective meaning something like “usual” before the Pakeha arrived — the locals having no identity as a group at all. The signifier “Pakeha” — by which New Zealand whites now know themselves — is most probably a transliteration into Maori of the English “Bugger you” as used by early whalers and sealers.⁴ So too the proper name “Aotearoa,” to which great pathos now attaches (it being regarded as the “original Maori” name for New Zealand) probably first named only the North Island (Taylor 125).⁵ Furthermore: the myths which today underpin Maori identity (above and against that of individual *whakapapas*) were articulated in complex interrelations with Pakehas that will never be unfolded in a scholarly true story.⁶ One of the most powerful such mythemes runs like this: the Maoris first arrived in Aotearoa in a fleet of seven canoes from a place called “Hawaiki”; they displaced an earlier race of inhabitants, each living tribe being descended from one of these canoes. This little narrative, whose central propositions are unhistorical but to whose elaborations Maori identity remains bound (it informs the discourse of the central character in Witi Ihimaera's novel *The Matriarch*, for instance), belongs neither to the Maori nor to the Pakeha. The story — which doubles that of European arrival — has been produced, unconsciously and over time, in exchanges and conflicts between both. To use a Derridean concept: it is counter-signed.

Nowhere is this effect of the counter-signature more apparent than in the text which is sometimes referred to as the origin of the legend: Sir George Grey's *Polynesian Mythology, and the Ancient Traditional History of the New Zealand Race, as furnished by their priests and chiefs* (1855) which first implies that seven canoes left Hawaiki at the same time (Orbell 41). Grey was the colony's Governor at the time he wrote his book — a compilation of Maori legends in the style of the contemporary “folk lore” movement. Its purpose was explicitly political. As a recent biographer has noted, Grey's administrative project was to replace Maori practices by British law, turn the Chiefs and their *mana* into a “form of salaried Government officials” as well as to make all territory available to surveys, military roads and so on (Rutherford 206). (The Maori resisted this project in the first of the various “New Zealand Wars”). When dealing with the resistant Maori (in Grey's words “the oldest, least civilized and most influential Chiefs in the Islands”), he noticed that their letters often referred to “an ancient system of mythology” that his interpreters could not understand and to which no current publication alluded (Grey, *Polynesian* ix-x). Thus “fully and entirely to comprehend their thoughts and intentions” so as to “control and conciliate” them, he began to learn Maori and, with the help of informants (the most important of whom was Wiremu Maihi Te Rangikaheke) he collected and wrote up their myths. Some of these, he claimed, were told to him only because of his own *mana*. Grey's political purpose falls back on three crucial theoretical and two historical presuppositions: first, that the enunciating subject of these narratives is the “Maori” rather than particular individuals or *iwi* (tribes); second (in the terminology of Austinian speech act theory), that the Chief's utterances were constative rather than illocutionary, and third, that their propositions referred to a coherent body of esoteric knowledge. Against the Colonial Office and the metropolitan Press of the time it also rested on the belief that the Maoris were *not* doomed to extinction as a race, that extreme form of the modernist paradigm. Finally, against both eighteenth-century opinion and recent ethnographical theorists (e.g. Jack Goody), it supposed that oral cultures, being static, reproduce their myths and genealogies without variation across time (Goody). Under demands driven by

these assumptions and under political/cultural pressure, Maori individuals began to turn both the discursive elements of their rituals and the more or less fragmentary and shifting narratives entangled around their genealogies, into “myths and legends.” Perhaps this process did help Grey “know” and “control” the Chiefs — to resist the project that Grey (and his predecessors) were carrying out, the Maoris crowned their own “King,” miming an imperialist institution. Grey’s compilations of Maori lore implicitly brand such a strategy as non-authentic. They framed the Maori as “pre-modern” in modern terms. These discursive moves, which freeze the Maori into a genuine pastness, continued after Grey: the major collection of myths — that of John White in six volumes — was financed and published by the government during the 1880s basically to provide information with a potential administrative use-value.⁷ And in the first decade of this century Elsdon Best compiled his more ethnographic and sympathetic work, *Tuhoe: Children of the Mist*, in explicit reaction against the political messianic movements which had falsified the “true” Maori heritage by hybridizing Christianity. He speaks contemptuously of “that ruffian Te Kooti” who, after the Kingite movement, had fought the British during the 1860s (and whom, as Best notes, the Tuhoe still believed to have been “protected by the Gods”). Te Kooti is the most important of those anti-settlement warriors who claimed to be prophets of the God of the Old Testament (for the earlier but connected Pai Marire cult, in the shape of the snake). But Best’s real scorn is directed at the active Rua, living and preaching against the Pakehas as he wrote; his sympathy and admiration for the “old” Maori, and his recording or reconstruction of their authentic mythology, is aimed against the major figure of their current struggle (Best 666).

By those who collected and published it, Polynesian lore is regarded as simply belonging to the Maori. Yet this limit is not absolute. In an academic paper delivered to the Ethnological Society in London in 1870, Sir George Grey found exact homologies between Polynesian myths and English poetry. This poetry was not the poetry of modern “civilization” but, very oddly, that of Edmund Spenser. “Spenser must have stolen his images and language from the New Zealand poets, or . . . they must have acted unfairly

by the English bard," he writes, anticipating a certain contemporary literary theoretical trope (Grey, "Inhabitants" 362). This bears the logic of the modernist paradigm: Spenser and the Maoris create in the era before modernity, their shared constraints are those of a bare "human imagination" as opposed to the boundless and developed power of civilization. (In the paper, Grey's transcription of a Maori narrative — told to him by a Christianized *tohunga* [spirit medium] — is obviously modernized: it contains pieces of information of anthropological interest only, its structure is that of a European romance.) The point of this strategy is clear enough: that the Maoris share Europe's past implies that they are fated not only to repeat the West's historical trajectory but to be absorbed by *its* Enlightenment. And, in Grey's case at least, the modernist paradigm can also encompass an affirmative interpretation of Maori resistance (like Mandela): he can appeal to their "ancient democracy" which European settlement at first destroyed, but will strengthen with the coming of the Law.

Almost immediately the early records of the Maori's past way of life are used as prescriptions for the staging of its continuity within the theatre of enlightened modernity. This process works on all forms of traditional Maori practice: for instance, in the 1860s (while war was being waged), a group of Maoris, led by the entrepreneurial William Jenkins, toured England to present their culture to the Mother Country. Their *hakas* (war dances) were checked for their genuineness against a book, probably Charles Davis's *Maori Mementos to Sir George Grey* (Mackrell 28). (Simultaneously, actual *hakas* were being directed at the British!) Similarly with carving: when, from the 1880s onward, pieces were produced for model villages, museums and collectors, the *whakuiro rakau* (ritual carvers), who had flourished with the coming of metal tools, came under pressure to omit those contemporary motifs that had developed since European contact (as well as to de-sexualize their work). A pseudo-traditional style, largely based on Hamilton's *Maori Art: the Art Workmanship of the Maori Race in New Zealand*, but with strong narrative pictorial elements was substituted for a quite informal and syncretic mode that had earlier evolved in work produced, almost indistinguishably, for Maori and Pakeha, meeting houses and the tourist trade (Neich).

The loop mechanisms that I have been describing were perhaps most fully acted out by Makereti, a member of the Tuhourangi *hapu* (sub-tribe) — who had been better known as Maggie Papanura, a name she had given herself when she worked as a guide at Whakarewarewa, a museumified Maori village in geyser country. The area had been touristified ever since the 1840s, though it had become prominent only after the Duke of Edinburgh visited it, largely to thank the Arawa people for fighting with the British against Te Kooti. The Tuhourangi, the *hapu* most involved in the tourist trade, were well known for their secularization, the incidence of prostitution and venereal diseases among them — and for their entrepreneurial skills, encouraged by the government. Thus in 1909 a model village was constructed, in a move that would culminate in the establishment of a state-backed school for Maori carving in 1927. So when, for instance, the filmmaker Gaston Méliès toured the world in 1912, in order, as he said, to “utilize the natives of regions travelled through [for] cinematography,” it was the Tuhourangi who “enacted” his dramas, and the pseudo-traditional model *pa* that provided some of his locations (9). As the author of *Maggie’s Guide to the Hot Lakes* and a member of the Arawa genealogy (i.e., of the *waka* constituted by those descended from members of the legendary Arawa canoe), Makereti had shown the Duke of York, later King George V, around the *pa* in 1901; had taken a model village to Crystal Palace for the 1910 Coronation Festival of Empire; had presented Maori songs, dress, artifacts and dance on the British Musical Hall circuit for a year in another “cultural entertainment” group; and finally, after marrying a member of the Oxfordshire gentry, began to study anthropology at Oxford. Her (unfinished) book, *The Old-time Maori*, was a draft of her B.Sc. thesis. It is not written in the ethnographic present but in the past tense of nostalgia. The book contains little sense of a tragic loss of identity in the passage to modern time, though it does not concede that its “old” era was that of colonial contact rather than of time immemorial. Addressed simultaneously to the Oxford anthropologists and to contemporary Maoris, it contains genealogies, accounts of rituals, precise descriptions of the sites at which her tribe cultivated *kumeras* (sweet potatoes) and so on. On the one hand, her sense of the importance

of lineage may well have been internalized from the theoretical biases of the anthropology of her time. (She does cite Grey and Richard Taylor as sources.) On the other hand, her writing did, potentially at least, break *tapu*, and at this point a confident affirmation of the text's syncretism begins to be less convincing. Makereti herself refused to translate the *karakia* (incantations) she included because to do so would be to commit sacrilege against her *tohunga* who alone had access to their "true" meaning (187). To refuse to translate is not sufficient to avoid transgression however: a book can be read and taken anywhere — where food is stored for instance — which matters because to consult a *karakia* in the proximity of stored food would be seriously to break *tapu*. The book may be called *The Old-Time Maori*, and written in the nostalgic past tense, but it was a present source of anxiety to its author. On her death bed, so its posthumous editor tells us, Makereti asked for two *karakia* to be removed, fearing that to publish them would be sacrilegious. As she moved from show-business to anthropology, from native informant to believer in *tapu*, did Makereti live in traditional Maori time, pseudo-traditional Maori time, modern Maori time or occidental time? On what side of these differences? Obviously on all — which means, a little, on none. (In this, of course, she was not alone: Jenkins's earlier touring party had been treated both as honoured state guests — they were introduced to the Queen — and as objects of display in a shabby entertainment.) She had to transgress as she had to act out the role of a genuine Maori caught on the wrong side of modernity, in order to preserve her past, which, in turn, was available only in an already touristified and anthropologized form.

The easiest notion with which to absorb and control the tensions that Makereti enacts is "post-culturalism." It is a term which, in my usage, refers variously to an event, a programme or a mode of analysis. When one accepts that the construction of a non-modern cultural identity is the result of interaction between colonizer and colonized; when one celebrates the productive energy of mutual misrecognitions and forgettings then one enters post-culturalism. It has its politics too. Somewhat in its spirit, a New Zealand identity can be constructed not simply from a Maori or a Pakeha viewpoint but by Maori-izing Pakeha formations and vice versa. This

is an immensely attractive social programme: it counters the Europeanization of the Maori by constructing a non-essentialist unity across a maintained difference. In New Zealand the programme is not utopian: the state has begun to sponsor it. There the Department of Education encourages the teaching of Maori in schools; Maori history is being taught, re-enacted in films, made the subject of television documentaries, so that New Zealanders of all races come to identify their home districts in terms of their pre-colonial tribal connections and the mythic narrative and events attached to them. The work of Sir George Grey, Elsdon Best, Percy Smith and their Maori collaborators, is now, more than ever, having effects of power as Maori and Pakeha art students rework traditional Maori crafts, visit *marae* (meeting places), take part in “newly traditional” ceremonies and festivities and — to take a last instance — as more Maori words are being added to New Zealand English and the anglicized pronunciation of Maori phonemes is disappearing. These reversals and displacements fill the rootlessness both of the heirs of the settlers and the urbanized Maoris.

Today various academic methods and theories assume and legitimize the post-cultural. One thinks here of studies like that of the Tshidi people by Jean Comaroff. Working between ethnography, sociology and narrative history, Comaroff analyzes the continuities and articulations between the pre-colonial and post-colonial (here, apartheid) conditions so that one can no longer assume a hard distinction between the “West” and its others.⁸ One also thinks of those more traditional historians who, rejecting the “fatal impact” ideologeme, write from the side of the colonized — for instance, James Belich in his *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict* or, in South Africa, Peter Delius’s account of Pedi resistance: *The Land Belongs to Us*. Belich, who takes up the old theme of Maori military skill, goes so far as to describe the colonial wars not as a (tragic) triumph for colonizing modernity, but as a stalemated struggle between two “tribal” forces: the British regiment as a “sub-culture” having more in common with their opponents than with the disciplined bodies of industrial factories, for instance. And, of course, the distance between the non-modern and the modern can be contested from the other direction: a book like Vincent Crapan-

zano's *Waiting: the Whites of South Africa* describes an Afrikaans rural town, using both direct quotations à la Studs Terkel and hermeneutically orientated ethnographical reflections so that the "white tribe of Africa" lose their status as citizens of the modern.

It is James Clifford, however, who is most directly concerned with the broad conceptual and historical shift within which these valuable and politically sensitive studies apply particular methods. In essays, most of which have been collected in his *The Predicament of Culture*, he reads the impact of modernity not as necessarily leading to the demoralization or "deculturation" of the colonized but as offering new opportunities for improvisatory and combinatory responses. Post-culture belongs to the "newly traditionally meaningful in the present-becoming-future" ("Salvage'" 127). Such abstract formulations, however, soon strike concrete difficulties. These are apparent as soon as one asks (as we have begun to): do Makereti and the Tuhourangi who entered the world of film, tourism, anthropology and cultural entertainment and who fought with the British, belong to this order? Or does Te Kooti who, insisting on his chiefly authority, appropriated the word of the Christian God against the Pakeha land grab? In citing these names, it is important to remind ourselves that the settlements of those Maori successors to Moses, Christ and Muhammed (of whom Te Kooti was only the most famous) looked quite different from the touristified Whakawerawera. Maungapohatu, in particular, constructed by the prophet Rua in the Ureweras, had a plan and architecture that amalgamated Pakeha and Maori styles in a quite unexpected way (Ward 228ff.). (Its meeting house used the playing card club as a symbol of the Trinity, and was decorated in yellow diamonds and blue clubs.) Against this, the Tuhourangi did not so much amalgamate Maori and European forms as take advantage of the separation between them. Indeed, even in New Zealand, Te Kooti's strategy survives: in the 1970s Eva Rickard gained the return of her ancestral land under the direction of what she called "Maori spooks," as "a person in touch with *wairua* — the spiritual world which is watched over by the *tupuna* — the ancestors" (Macdonald 136). Here what is "new" in the "newly traditional" is precisely a struggle against the injustice and loss which, in New Zealand as else-

where, continues into the post-cultural era mainly because inequities in employment, health and education continue to be linked to racial difference. Thus the "Maori culture" built by Maori and Pakeha together in co-operation and conflict, may be turned against the heirs of the colonizers at the very moment that it confines the Maori in an inauthentic authenticity.

Because the idea that the pre-colonial can never be torn free from the post-colonial is becoming an academic (if not quite a governmental or political) orthodoxy, it is important to insist that a post-cultural discourse may legitimize a programme of simultaneous de-politicization and de-sacrilization. The new and the traditional are synthesized when the violence, the power of *mana* and *tapu* can be localized and policed, when anxieties and ambivalences like Makereti's over her book can easily be contained. Although an activist like Eva Rickard, guided by her *tapuna*, can still be successful (and, as David Lan reminds us, Zimbabwe's guerrilla war depended on spirit mediums), under the dispensation of the "newly traditional" the sacred is more likely to figure in accounts like that of Carol O'Biso. She is the American woman who organized the exhibition of Maori carvings and sacred objects that toured America under the title *Te Maori*. This exhibition, which included what O'Biso unconvincingly claims to be "the most important symbol of Maori power and spirituality," was the focus of fierce struggles in the Maori community (75). Should these *taonga* (treasures) be museumified, taken out of the context in which they had had *mana* and a non-aesthetic function? Or should they be used to communicate Maori skills and traditions to a wider audience? These debates were the more intense because the Mobil Oil Company, the exhibition's sponsors, were hoping to sign contracts to construct a natural gas refinery with the New Zealand government. Clifford, who repeatedly mentions the exhibition to argue, for instance, that "museums shouldn't be destroyed," that there is "no way to escape these processes [of representation and appropriation] into some new non-violent, non-representational, non-hierarchical world," ignores the protests the show excited (Clifford, "Discussion" 150). Had he conceded their existence perhaps he could not so easily have organized his argument into global oppositions: either an absolute purity (of the

pre-modern traditions or of absolute justice) or the impure, decontextualized, but productive, world of the “newly traditional.” In O’Biso’s own account, the demonstrations and practical difficulties (how to insure an object whose value is more magical than economic?) merely form the background for her personal experiences. These mime those of Rickard and Makereti. She photographs a sacred object and the museum’s lights mysteriously go out. A communication from the *wairua*? Dr. Johnson, who believed in second sight and ghosts, might have thought so, but O’Biso shows no sign of recognizing the question’s profound conceptual and political force, the way it reneges on modernity. Quite the contrary: the incident becomes an item in the exhibition’s publicity: its very own “King Tut” effect. (As Billy Wilder showed long ago in his brilliant *Ace in the Hole* [a.k.a. *The Big Carnival*] little appeals to the media more than the uncanny execution of ancient curses.) Makereti, Eva Rickard and Carol O’Biso all operate in terms and in spaces that the post-cultural concept is especially able to recognize and theorize, yet to place them together under terms like the “newly traditional” is to pass over what distinguishes them: the personal and publicity; the conjunction of the sacred and political resistance; the impossible preservation of lost auras. From the distance of the American academy maybe these are easy distinctions to ignore.

To begin to put this in a wider perspective: once New Zealand citizens can each be both Maori and Pakeha then they live in a world in which simulacra replace what I am calling “the sacred.” Simulacra constitute a third (very early) order of modernity — not that of its necessary triumph over the pre-modern, or of its universalism, but of “a simultaneous irruption of the Same and the Other” as Foucault puts it in his essay on Pierre Klossowski (xxvi). The order of simulacra knows no origins, no facts anchored in a transparent description of the world, no anchored hierarchies, but rather circulations and aggregations of representations, a “realm of appearance in the explosion of time,” as Foucault characteristically phrases it. If one generalizes and historicizes Foucault’s exposition of Klossowski one can argue that simulacra come into existence along with a God who can communicate to humanity in a book — as soon as the sacred requires

“faith” (so that “conversion” is possible), that is, as soon as the sacred is no longer a horizon of the total social system. But simulacra only begin to be recognized as such when society begins to invent itself, when, refusing to be persuaded, it rejects the authority of what is inherited, framing the past rather than maintaining or obeying it. Then one can enquire, as Locke did in the seventeenth century: “if the strength of persuasion be the light that must guide us, I ask how shall anyone distinguish between the delusions of Satan and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost?” (703-04). The sacred here is separated from power; it no longer connects to the world iconically (in so-called “natural signs”), or indexically (as the hidden cause of actual effects) or allegorically (at an unknowable remove) but in a *logos* always open to interpretation. Locke can put his question because, though formally a “believer,” he is confident that “neither God nor Satan ever appear” in his world — another phrase by which Foucault defines the order of simulacra. Locke’s question can be updated. Are the sacred sanctions, the aura of chiefs and divines, of kings and classical philosophers, expressions of particular political interests for instance, or inspired by truth, God? Satanic or Divine? Is the God who uses Gabriel as a messenger to talk to Te Au (Te Kooti’s predecessor and the founder of Pai Marire) more “real” than the missionaries’ God? If Christianity were not already formed in simulacra, the prophets of the colonized could not appropriate it, though of course they are also drawn to it because this God is, strangely, already a God of the dispossessed. When Christianity arrives split by denominational squabbles its Being-as-simulacra is foregrounded. Then the relations between sects can duplicate the relation between the colonizer and the colonized as they did in New Zealand when, at a public debate, a Catholic asked a Protestant missionary to read from the Latin Vulgate (Wilson 137). The latter’s abashment repeated that of the Maoris themselves when they first faced print.

Locke’s question, particularly if embodied in a fiction, still has enormous force because the move from the sacred as a horizon of social practices to a faith involves the disavowal of the order of simulacrum. To take a recent example: think of the effects of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, a book that describes certain religious authenticities as if they were simulacra and, to rein-

force the message, narrativizes attempts to exit from the secular to the transcendental as if they were a form of suicide. No discourse on human rights or democracy could unleash the violence that Rushdie has: his work does not enter debate, it blasphemes. Rushdie imagines an order from which little can escape: the more the Ayatollah Khomeini insisted that he was acting in the spirit of God and the Prophet's Law as uttered in the Qur'an, the more he himself threatened the divine authority of that text. For Rushdie's novel already pictures such protestations as dissimulations, it shows that no human being in touch with the supernatural can tell whether they are being addressed by divine truth or the fallen order of political expediency. (It reminds us that Muhammed, the angel Gabriel's familiar, was a victim of such confusion himself at least at one point of his career.) Was the Ayatollah shoring up the Shi'ites' position? Did Satan whisper in his ear? By representing such possibilities the novel drags its targets into the era of the (post)modern. In its aftermath, the more violence that the Iranians threaten the more wedded to death they seem. Rushdie's novel knows that, from within the zone of simulacra, the only way that a ground can be located is by dealing out death. From the other side however: where simulacra do not exist, there can be no blasphemy — only transgression (like Makereti's) and mistakes. To elaborate on Wittgenstein (and, among others, Evans-Pritchard), outside the modern there can be no trickery or fraud in matters of the sacred. What appears as such now are the techniques for the production of sacred effects and events. Though, of course, these techniques can be applied on inappropriate occasions or by improper persons, and therefore unsuccessfully, anxiously, skeptically — just because the "proper" is in part and in a circle defined by the unpredictable success of these techniques (Wittgenstein; Evans-Pritchard 107-09).

* * *

Since the eighteenth century, literature has increasingly been drawn into the task of separating the political and the sacred and of controlling the disorder of representation that follows desacrilization. Fiction has drawn ghosts, second sight, brownies, magic into "nature" and "culture" on the one hand and described

them as trickery on the other. The non-modern becomes available for representation by a printed narrative “voice” whose authority absorbs that of the “supernatural.” This is quite explicit both in Fielding’s narrator and in the Gothic novelists whose ghosts turn out to have rational explanation and whose effect is merely a “sensation.” No doubt these fictions have a policing role — they help ensure that the aura of an other world cannot be used against modernity’s “law and order.” (Just as, from the other direction, frank admission of the order of simulacra threatens messianic fundamentalisms used for political purposes.) Today, when there has been a massive migration of third world nationals to the first world, when Europe and America are losing their economic dominance, when traditional universalist and secular supports are threatened for reasons as much economic as philosophical, then mimesis ceases either to control the play of the simulacra or to undo the connection between the sacred and the political. Violence, like that directed against Rushdie, can be sparked. Which is why I would like to end this paper by very briefly describing a work that, as its author notes in its Preface, “owes nothing to fiction” and which returns to the border at which modernity divides itself from its other, the point where the Law, simulacra and the sacred encounter one another in no hierarchy. In the post-cultural moment, the desire to return to this border is common enough — in New Zealand so as to (re)invent a national tradition, to rewrite civil war as “reassuring fratricide” (Benedict Anderson’s phrase), that is, to construct a past which has been post-cultural from the beginning.⁹ My return to this border works to slightly different ends, though not — quite — to reaffirm the compact between the “sacred” and the political.

Frederick Maning’s *Old New Zealand* was first published anonymously as “by a Pakeha Maori” in 1863. A popular book, in print locally for over a century, it has never been hailed as the national epic of which New Zealanders have often felt the lack. And yet no other book has been so often cited, cut and pasted by later historians and anthropologists. More than any other work, it materially articulates the nation-state’s existence as *text*. Maning was a Pakeha Maori, one of those whites welcomed into Maori communities to help them trade with passing Europeans before the

coming of the settlers. Many Pakeha Maoris, like Maning himself who lived with the Ngapuhi in the Bay of Islands, married women from their adopted tribe; they lived as close as possible to the threshold across which continuities and violence pass: they did not, like Johnson and Boswell, travel through it. Maning in particular did not write to and for the centre. For him, to write on and of this difference is to be driven back onto himself — into self-reflexivity:

A story-teller, like a poet or a pugilist, must be *born* and not *made*, and I begin to fancy I have not been born under a story-telling planet, for by no effort that I can make can I hold on to the thread of my story, and I am conscious the whole affair is fast becoming one great parenthesis. If I could only get clear of this *tapu* I would “try back.” (151)

The Maori signifier controls this passage. Maning is in the grip of a power he cannot control: he is writing about *tapu* and wants to move past the topic, but some force — some *tapu* as the pun in the last sentence permits us to say — moves his pen. We find here a contagion of the *tapu* that the Maoris attached to writing (for the “old” Maori, nothing was more contagious than *tapu*, and the power of writing to communicate across a distance is often given as a cause of Maori “conversion” to Christianity, in particular their sense that “the god of the white man is more powerful than the Maori Gods” [Best 362-63]). Maning finds it hard to make his tale more than a parenthesis because he cannot quite grasp what *tapu* is, how it works, from whence it derives its authority. The movement and energy of *tapu* is as uncontrollable as that of his writing; it does not take the form of a law. So, in Maning, writing comes to enact a continuity across the difference in the very attempt to represent that difference. The way that writing writes itself under the guidance (as it seems) of hidden forces keeps *tapu* alive where it ceases to be an agent of social order.

Maning lives in a state of ambivalence. A *tohunga* invokes a recently dead chief who, the first in his tribe to learn to write, has left behind a notebook full of valuable information. Maning attends the spirit ceremony and asks the Chief’s spirit where the book is. He is told, the book is retrieved; but when interrogated further about its contents, the spirit disappears. “The deception

was perfect. There was a dead silence — at last. A ventriloquist,” said I; “or — or *perhaps* — the devil” (146). The italics inclines his realization that the appearance of a spirit may be feigned back toward a structure in which the supernatural may act directly on the world now. And this inclination orientates his own self-deliverance to the techniques of writing. Writing, unlike speech, can always be revised and reconsidered — which means that its claim to presence is also a ventriloquist’s trick, an effort concealing effort. But Maning’s book is ventriloquist in a completely opposed sense: as he implies, it contains records preserved in the Chief’s gift from the grave. *Old New Zealand* is not wholly Maning’s work: the written-about, the off-stage, the dead also write it — from a past in which one could not be confident that Satan or God will never appear. It is as if the devil (*atua?*) slips through the space left open where the two ventriloquisms do not meet.

In respecting *tapu*, the book may possess *mana*.

If ever this talk about the good old times be printed and published, and everyone buy it, and read it, and quote it, and believe every word in it, as they ought, seeing that every word is true, then it will be a *puka puka whai mana*, a book of *mana*; and I shall have opinion of the good sense and good taste of the New Zealand public.

When the law of England is the law of New Zealand, and the Queen’s writ will run, then both the Queen and the law will have great *mana*; but I don’t think either will ever happen, and so neither will have any *mana* of consequence.

If the reader has not some faint notion of *mana* by this time I can’t help it; I can’t do any better for him. I must confess I have not pleased myself. Any European language can be translated easily enough into any other; but to translate Maori into English is much harder to do than is supposed by those who do it every day with ease, but who do not know their own language or any other but Maori perfectly. (208-09)

Tapu cannot be fixed because it is in the hands of powers that may or may not simulate and do not simply disappear, but *mana*, though it is bound to whatever has force, is merely an impossible word to translate into European languages across the colonial divide. The word cannot be translated but it can be repeated. Then it performs a trick: the Maori signifier acquires an aura, if not quite a signified. We might even say: in modernity *mana*

lives on — if nowhere else — whenever a sign floats between word and concept, between signifier and signified or — to put it another way — wherever the untranslatable flirts with meaning as it does as long as it is circulated. If this book that constantly “uses” the word without controlling it, is published, read, incorporated in other books, then *mana* will survive despite its being a sign of what is absent, an unravelled and displaced signifier. Yet more than mere duplication is required. *Mana* will survive in the book because the book is true, which does not mean that it tells truth. Working on the borders of simulacra, Maning cannot simply discover the truth as Johnson does. The book is true, no fiction, because it has delivered itself up simultaneously to the spell of the spirits, to sheer repetition and to the parenthesis of writing at the cost of feigning an absence of revision and care. It will survive because it disavows and repeats not because it inspects and represents.

Being a Maori Pakeha is impossible, for it demands that one speak in two voices that cancel each other. At the book’s end, registering his conflict, Maning can only await violence in a passage that breaks through its patriarchal, musty rebelliousness:

I get so confused, I feel just as if I were two different persons at the same time. . . . I belong to both parties, and I don’t care a straw which wins; but I am sure we shall have fighting. Men *must* fight; or else what are they made for? Twenty years ago when I heard military men talking of “marching through New Zealand with fifty men,” I was called a fool because I said they could not do it with five hundred. Now I am thought foolish by civilians because I say we can conquer New Zealand with our present available means, if we set the right way about it (which we won’t). So hurrah again for the Maori! We shall drive the *Pakeha* into the sea, and send the law after them! If we can do it, we are right; and if the *Pakeha* beat us, they will be right too. God save the Queen! So now, my Maori tribe, and also my *pakeha* countrymen, I shall conclude this book with good advice; and be sure you take notice; it is given to both parties. . . . “Be brave, that you may *live*.”

(211)

The Maoris will drive the Pakehas into the sea; the Pakehas will conquer New Zealand: whoever wins, wins *mana*. Maning seems at last to wish for a Maori victory as the defeat of the Law and universalism. As the writer that he is, he *must* take that side, be-

cause his writing effects a continuity with *mana* and *tapu* in opposition to the Law that maims the English. And the passage ends with another borrowing from the Maoris: "Be brave that you may live," translates a famous saying of Hongi Hika, "*Kei hea koutou kia toa*," repeated by Hongi Heke when he encouraged the Ngapuhi to fight the British. Maning seems also to have encouraged his people to resist the Pakeha, but in his book he himself is brave and lives because he faces and writes from the border where the tensions between simulacra, the Law and the old order of the Maoris are still active. He does not pretend that there will be no war between those separated by the difference where, as here, it divides a nation firmly in two. For him there is not even any way of finally judging whether the Pakehas or the Maoris *ought* to win. In sum: though he enters the struggle personally, insisting on bravery, his writing is not quite in its service, remaining, on one side its own tricky, multivocal order of practice and, on the other, impotent, *unzeitgemässig*. What Maning seems to know is that when the struggle is over, the difference will remain — at the very least in the unfixable relation between the dead past that is "Old New Zealand" and the traces of that past in *Old New Zealand* (and all the texts that cannibalize it). The book, like all writing, lives in a present which is not that of the "newly traditional" (as matter, it is always the same), nor does it belong to what Rushdie calls "the present moment of the past" (the book *does* try blindly to maintain the pastness of past) nor to "the first moment of the future" (it cannot foresee the future [535]). Between dissimulation, copying and delivering itself to language, it again and again performs the old, old trick of giving dead matter — letters, sounds — a little life and significance. That magic itself does not take or belong to time: there has been no recountable succession of events in which "*mana*" moved from meaninglessness to meaning — or vice versa. So it is writing that can form the border between different orders of time — not writing as such however: only that, like *Old New Zealand*, written at the right time in the right place and, perhaps even destined for channels of distribution that do not travel too far through the postal circuits. For such writing, hugged to the heart of a nation, may create a state as text and help prevent it ever simply from becoming "a poor country defeated in

a brutal war by a metropolitan power” or simply available for tours. Which is a florid way of saying that without Maning’s old book, New Zealand would have a different history, a different politics (a different resistance to the great powers), a different *mana*.¹⁰

NOTES

- ¹ This formulation is borrowed from Clifford. See, for instance, “On Collecting.”
- ² Compare the discussion of the word *atua* by Wilson 82-86 and F. Allan Hanson and Louise Hanson 40-49.
- ³ For a Maori account of Cook’s 1769 arrival see Hore-ta-te-taniwha’s narrative as transcribed by and in White 5.121-24.
- ⁴ For a quite early Maori record of this etymology see Makereti 110. For a modern assessment on its probability see Wilson 88.
- ⁵ Taylor, the first missionary to publish a book on the Maoris, has the name of the North Island as *Aotea roa*, and the name of New Zealand (as uttered by the mythical Kupe) *Aotea toa*.
- ⁶ The best de-mystifying accounts of the construction of Maori mythology is to be found in Sorrenson. See also Simmons, and Sharp’s pioneering monograph.
- ⁷ See Anderson for a description of White’s techniques of compilation. Many of the original compilers were in fact land surveyors also.
- ⁸ Comaroff’s difficulty is that (partly because the pre-colonial is only available in its textual representations) her story of colonial impact tends to take shape as a description of the transformation of, and continuities between, a formal ethnographic model (a contradiction between agnation and matrilinearity) and a somewhat less formal sociological one (a tension between the proletarianization of the Tshidi under apartheid and the symbolic resistance available in the hybridized rituals of the church of ‘Zion’).
- ⁹ Anderson used the phrase in a paper delivered at the University of Melbourne, August 1987.
- ¹⁰ Versions of this paper were delivered at the SAVAL conference, Potchefstroom, South Africa, in April 1989 and at the University of Auckland in October 1987. As part of the arrangements made during my visit to South Africa it has been made available to COSAW (Congress of South African Writers) to use as they may see fit.

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