

Alan Duff erupted onto the literary scene in New Zealand in 1990 with his first novel, Once Were Warriors. It sold thirty thousand copies in New Zealand and won a Goodman Fielder Wattie New Zealand Book Award (second prize) in 1991. When the University of Hawai'i Press chose Warriors for its Talanoa Series, Vilsoni Hereniko, the series editor, called the act of publication an honor “to a lone voice” because Duff had written from a politically incorrect position: he had challenged the widespread view that the Pâkehâ, the white former colonizers, were responsible for conditions in which Mâori people found themselves. He depicted a wife-beating, daughter-raping, unemployed Mâori father, Jake Heke, in a way that seemed to imply that Mâori themselves and their leaders were largely responsible for ruined Mâori lives. The outcry against Duff’s novel was immediate and deafening. Critics were incensed by Duff’s depiction of inner-city Mâori life.

In 1994, Duff published State Ward, a series of episodes originally written for national radio that detail the experiences of a thirteen-year-old Mâori schoolboy, Charlie Wilson, as a ward of the state in Riverton Boys Home, the same facility to which Jake’s son Boogie had been sent when Jake and his wife, Beth, failed to show up for their son’s magistrate’s hearing in Once Were Warriors. In its emphasis on action, its episodic structure, and the way the dialogue dominates the plot line, the series clearly shows that it was written for broadcast. The tone is sentimental and melodramatic. Moreover, the attitude toward responsibility for Mâori problems is softened: Charlie is portrayed as a victim of a state system that responds to his problems with violence.

Alan Duff’s latest book, What Becomes of the Broken-Hearted?, billed by Random House Australia as the “passionate and uncompromising sequel to Once Were Warriors,” came on the literary scene in 1996 not with a bang but a whimper. When Once Were Warriors was published, it became an instant best seller in New Zealand and exploded the myth of New Zealand’s pride in Mâori-Pâkehâ race relations. It uncovered to the world, in the words of Christina Thompson in her essay on Duff’s work, “In Whose Face?” in The Contemporary Pacific, the underbelly of New Zealand society, the unemployed, uneducated urban Maori whose lives pass in a fug of alcohol and brutality, whose capacity for feeling is so blunted that they can only oscillate between futility and rage. They are a landless, assetless, futureless people with no skills, no knowledge, and no ties. They are not Maori in the “traditional” cultural sense (they do not speak the language, they have never been to a marae, they have no tribal...
affiliation), nor are they at home in the world of the Pakeha. They have nothing to do, nowhere to go, and no hope of changing places. They are just out there wreaking havoc, largely on themselves. (1994, 400)

In *Broken-Hearted*, Duff picks up the stories of the characters who peopled Pine Block (the housing development setting of his first novel) six years after the events depicted in the first book. But none of the characters is recognizable. All have changed in the six years since the death of Grace, Jake's older daughter who committed suicide. Only their names remain the same.

In *Warriors*, Jake was defined by the physical:

Jake's world was physical; and he was aware it was physical. He assumed damn near the whole world was seeing the same. It was there when he woke each day (or night) in the canvas of his mind as physical. He saw people all over—but mostly men—they were engaged in physical combat, the subjects of combative consideration, their fighting potential, how fast they'd likely be, how good a hit they carried and was it in both hands or just a normal one. . . . He saw others in terms of their fighting potential first, before he saw anything. Even on the TV. . . . he always looked at some dude and wondered if the dude could fight or not . . . it never occurred to Jake that there might be something wrong with his outlook, perhaps his mind. It couldn't. (50–51)

In *Broken-Hearted* on page 1, Jake reflects on the past six years and his longing for Beth. He mulls over fine distinctions in feelings between “love” and “Love” and considers what Rita Bates, his current girlfriend, means when she refuses to see a man if he doesn't call first. Nothing in *Warriors* has prepared us for such reflection and emotional capacity in Jake. And nothing in *Broken-Hearted* allows us to participate in Jake’s transformation. From the first page of *Broken-Hearted*, we encounter a Jake already transformed into a thinking, feeling, even sensitive man, who is ripe for a good woman, for flowers in a vase to beautify his flat, and for manly friends with whom he can hunt, and fish, and play rugby. All this follows shortly. By the end of the novel, Jake is a hero. He saves the Tramberts, Pâkehâ landholders in whose garden Grace committed suicide, from a gang raid, and he thinks of himself as a good “citizen.” He established contact with and provides moral support and encouragement to his son Abe as Abe testifies in a gang murder case against a fellow Black Hawk, Apeman Montgomery.

The changes in Jake are too pat, too unmotivated to be believed. The mystery of Māori “unthinkingness” and of what might end the seemingly endless cycle of ruined Māori lives has been solved. Jake has been cured of his penchant for violence and his indifference to the finer things of life. He has personal relationships with Gordon Trambert, Rita Bates, and his rugby-playing friends, the Douglas brothers. He speaks in metaphors. He takes pride in his job and is promoted to chargehand. And he considers the tree on the Tramberts’ property where Grace hanged herself as “her shrine I had to look after” (245). Readers are left with all the loose ends tied up, all the questions answered, and a happy-ever-after ending. But Duff’s resolution does not
have the power of the original work. The answers he provides in *Broken-Hearted* do not speak the same language as the questions he raised in *Once Were Warriors*.

In *Warriors*, Duff created the illusion of lives lived within the confines of Pine Block. Readers lived through those experiences vicariously and shared the contradictions and uncertainties of real human behavior. It was an illusion, but it was whole and utterly riveting. In *Broken-Hearted*, Duff’s characters use the same expletive-ridden language as in the earlier work, but they use it to express insights and longings that would not be available to the person in question. For example, Jake ponders the significance of the demolition of McClutcheys Bar and sees that physical destruction as a metaphor of the inner workings of a defeated person (like himself). That perspective seems more likely to represent the author’s point of view than anything that Jake might actually think.

When Jake throws his roommate out of the flat in *Broken-Hearted*, he thinks aloud: “Why did they get so drunk, so out of it was wasted, . . . as he screwed his face in disgust at cleaning up their mess,” he was thinking “that this was a mirror of himself, or what he had been” (184). A little later in an imaginary talk with Beth, Jake says, “I’m alright. I done my time; it don’t have to be jail. Jail can be how you live on the outside in so-called freedom” (188). In both these instances, Duff’s voice overlays Jake’s and presents Jake as saying and thinking what Duff intends the reader to realize. In this way, Duff attributes to Jake an emotional depth and self-consciousness simply unavailable to the Jake we knew in *Once Were Warriors*.

Many of the other characters too are completely unbelievable. Brown Fist Mulla Rota (a new character in *Broken-Hearted*), who is right-hand man to gang leader Jimmy Bad Horse in prison, has spent more than half of his thirty-odd years behind bars, but he has a heart of gold. He takes pity on two children who are being neglected by their mother and gives them money to buy food. He thinks to himself that he doesn’t want the boy to grow up wanting to be a murderer. Mulla Rota too speaks metaphorically to himself: “lies fell out of a man like dropped lollies stolen in a lolly shop; lucky this young dumbarse wouldn’t know” (49).

At times, Duff’s voice seems to intrude and tell us explicitly what we should remember in connection with the present narrative. When Polly, Jake’s younger daughter, climbs the wall and looks into the Tramberts’ house, Duff describes her as “choosing Friday because that was the night Grace had done what she did. (I want to know what she might’ve seen that last night)” (176). When Abe awakens to overhear Apeman beating his girlfriend just before he kills her, Abe thinks of beatings Jake used to give Beth:

> Old memories, childhood ones, came trickling back. . . . This was a waking, as sharp as sleep is sweetly (usually) dull. . . . Of his ole man and ole lady and her, Beth (my mum) saying to Jake (The Arsehole): You go ‘head mista, Do your fucken worst, mista. That’s what she used to say, calledim mista, like Tarns was sneeringly calling her man,
Apeman. Heard her now: You go right ahead mista. . . . So then he hated his father for what he’d done to their growing up witness. But then he got the thought: What if Jake’s growing up had been that? Wouldn’t he, like, grow up and do the same? So where does it end? No, fuckim, No excuse. Someone’s gotta break the pattern, the cycle. . . . Alright, so it was like these questions and half answers were from God.

(215–216)

When Mulla Rota’s girlfriend tries to talk him into getting five thousand dollars for a down-payment on a house, she uses an expression of self-awareness that shows her recognizing her own failings and attributing the cause to “we jus’ don’t unnerstan’ how money works and to be, you know, responsible—” (173). In Duff’s narrative of these events, he includes an overt expression of what each one means and indicates clearly how readers should respond—as if he wanted to be sure that readers did not miss his point.

Duff’s What Becomes of the Broken-Hearted? seems to represent a planned response to criticism of Once Were Warriors. Duff was criticized for having Jake rape his own daughter in Warriors. In Broken-Hearted, he shifts responsibility for Grace’s rape away from Jake to another man. Duff was criticized for presenting the Tramberts as living ideal lives in Once Were Warriors (never mind that in Warriors it was always clear that the Trambers were described as ideal only from Grace’s perspective!); in Broken-Hearted, Duff presents the Tramberts as experiencing failures, bad investments, and loss of respect. In What Becomes of the Broken-Hearted? Duff has attempted to revise the futures of the Hekes and the prospects of Pine Blockers and Brown Fists and Black Hawks, but he has succeeded mainly in demonstrating that life does not have answers and people cannot be revised.

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In the introduction to Te Ao Marama: Contemporary Māori Writing (volume 3), a six-volume anthology of which Witi Ihimaera is principal editor, the authors assert: “We wish to look at things our way, from the inside out, not from the outside in.” This statement applies equally to Ihimaera’s own work before his new novel, Nights in the Gardens of Spain. In such novels as Tangi, The Matriarch, and The Whale Rider, Ihimaera accommodates Māori forms of storytelling to narratives that foreground Māori issues and advocate a critical “biculturalism,” in which a progressive future depends on achieving historical clarity and intercultural understanding.

In the ballsy Nights in the Gardens of Spain, however, Ihimaera takes an inside-out–outside-in look at another “we”—the “new tribe” of the gay community—by gazing through the lens of a Pākehā film professor who must choose, in the book’s often bitterly comic terms, among “fairy” tales.