

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 Tramberts 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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Nights in the Gardens of Spain, by Witi Ihimaera. Auckland: Secker & Warburg, 1995. ISBN 0-7900-0406-2, 304 pages. Cloth, NZ\$34.95; paper, NZ\$24.95.

In the introduction to *Te Ao Marama: Contemporary Maori 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.

As the book traces the contours of one Pākehā man's pains and pleasures, the focus on sexual orientation as an "other" country complicates issues of postcolonial relations. There are, apparently, more ways of dividing the world up (or of forming solidarities) than along "racial" or national lines, just as there are, implicitly, many more ways of choosing to be an "indigenous Pacific" novelist than that of writing from overtly traditionalist perspectives. At one level, *Gardens* describes the process of making such decisions, and presents the consequences of choices about narrative and life.

The idea of mainstream Pākehā life as a fabulously unreal "fairy tale" is established early on, when the narrator gives the following seriocomic synopsis and evaluation of his life:

Once upon a time there was a Handsome Prince called David who had everything that anybody could wish for: looks, money, prospects. Well loved by family and friends, he sought, wooed, competed for and won the hand of the beautiful Princess Annabelle. All the bells in the kingdom pealed out their wedding day. They loved each other and had two pretty daughters, Rebecca and Miranda. They were supposed to live Happily Ever After. (43)

In reality, David's model life amounts to a "desperate game of Happy Family" (45). Though he has successfully "cultivated" a heterosexual facade, he has long acknowledged to himself his sexual preference for men. Boarding school, with its compulsory, often brutal "masculinity," and then marriage, were supposed to take him "away from that Other Life," yet as the book opens David is visiting the

"Gardens of Spain," a steam parlor whose "cruisy atmosphere" represents for him delightful possibility. Eventually, David realizes that he cannot please both himself and his family. His desires betray theirs, for he finds that their love rests largely on his fulfilling their scripts for him. It gives away little to say that, after much internal conflict, argument, reconciliations, a series of painful coming-out conversations played against voluptuous descriptions of "nights in the gardens," and farewell scenes with gay friends dying of AIDS, David composes a "new emotional contract" with Annabelle, his parents, and his loving daughters, while recognizing that he and "his kind" must "claim a space and build it" (300).

For David, such a space does not yet exist, and the play on "fairy" tales gets part of its edge from his sense that to be gay in an intolerant, heteronormative society is to be consigned to the "unreal" margins. The clubs or "netherworlds" he frequents have "unmarked doors." The times he spent with Charles, "The Love of My Life," were "on an island outside reality." The gay Beach, where "mermen swim in the sparkling water," is in a "Forbidden Zone" on "the very edge of civilisation" (241). This sense of otherworldliness is internalized by characters like Chris, who says that being with David and his daughters on a family *outing*—away from the world of ballet, which functions partly as an image of time- and gravity-defying make-believe—feels like being "among real people for a change." In a world that, at least to David, shows little capacity for acceptance, the gay

way of being involves finding idioms of self-expression outside public discourse. In David's witty, private frame of reference—a splicing together of American pop culture and satirical takes on Commonwealth high culture—people, places, and things assume the names he bestows on them. The firm that will give him a proper “legal sawing through” is Farquar, Martin & Chuzzlewit; his university colleagues are rechristened Predator, All American, God's Gift To Woman; a well-endowed partner is Oh My Goodness; a favorite student, recalling Charleton Heston in *Planet of the Apes*, becomes Bright Eyes; his family home is a Ship of Dreams.

This calling-things-as-one-sees-them reflects a willful, wistful boyishness, tinged with a Peter Pan-ic of growing old. As David puts it: “I wanted to play truant. Not to grow up.” David experiences this desire as an epistemic predicament in which response-ability (promiscuity) is at odds with responsibility (monogamy). Formulating the choice this way troublesomely reinscribes superficial notions of gay obsessiveness (“We cannot change the compulsions that we have,” David writes). Like Annabelle, Chris and other partners want commitment, while David wants nothing binding but desire, which may be a euphemistic term for compulsion, and is certainly more than most will allow him. David's narrative does register an ambiguity over whether his “hedonistic impulses” are compulsive or expressive of “the bravery to be who you are.” If David's parents and the “Commonwealth values” they represent are selfish—locked into a self-serving set

of cultural constructs they present as “natural”—it is not clear that David is much less so.

Cultural divergences on this point are posited by a Māori gay-rights advocate and friend, whom David describes as a Noble Savage fresh “out of a Gauguin painting.” Had it been The Noble Savage's narrative, Ihi-maera might have explored problems faced by a gay Māori, such as how, within both the Māori and gay communities, on the *marae* or in urban centers, his sense of responsibility to perpetuating the *whakapapa*, or genealogical line, affects him. Or how *he* feels about David's claim that Māori “politics make him unavailable to whites.” Despite having two children, David asserts: “If we are the last of the line, ours is a choice of courage.” He chooses a wide solidarity of gay men and women, for a gay history that replaces genealogical lineage, one that sees ancestry in a history of struggle: “Our forbears have been arrested.” The Noble Savage cannot frame his choices this way. As he tells David, he must make “the choice not to be selfish, as your culture is”:

If I was to choose between being Maori or being gay I would have to choose to be Maori. That is how I was born and that is how my people will bury me. Not as a gay person. But as one of the iwi. I guess, when it comes to the crunch, my cultural registration is more important than my sexual registration after all. (234)

The function of such an apparently set-piece speech in a book narrated by a Pākehā is certainly complex, aside from the ways in which David does

not necessarily exemplify the values of “his culture.” Through *The Noble Savage*, David can be critiqued without quite critiquing himself. Certainly, his often essentializing idealizations of Polynesians, including *The Noble Savage*—“Polynesians, by virtue of their sensual natures, are the best”—invite an ironic reading and also suggest the dangers of attributing his viewpoints on genetic gayness or Māori to the slippery Ihimaera, or alternatively, of considering such viewpoints as simply a gamesome species of satire. Even the act of pointing to such ambiguities, or to Ihimaera’s choice of his first Pākehā narrator for this first “Pacific” gay novel, can make one feel duped into exposing residual dependence on categories of identity that the book dismantles.

Gardens is so clearly a departure for a writer whose previous work had a marked continuity, that it feels as if Ihimaera has posed narrative problems for himself, in part to see what (or whether) he could get out of them. His decisions lead to impoverishments of sorts, yet in many ways it is fitting and effective that the seams show, and the book skillfully ranges among rhetorics and dictions, from satire to declamation to erotica. The book is little

invested in suspense. Plot strands—a nuclear submarine blockade, the discovery of a cache of films—get tied up quickly, as though they were never the point. The book seems to have a double-tracking, to be written in a way that makes Ihimaera’s straight audience more aware of the physical and psychological effects of their attitudes, while impressing his gay readers as honest, pleasurable, and partisan in combatting shame and self-punishment. The two audiences seem to require two lines of action, two proeses. Though necessary, the domestic line’s conversations and flashbacks get repetitious, enervated; they do not seem to be the book’s real commitment. However, the book is, as suggested, partly about risking disruptive choices, and perhaps Ihimaera chooses to reserve the lyricism, generosity, and humor of his Māori-centered writings for the gay, erotic scenes. Here the language embraces its subject, asserting its desire to “succumb to the succulence and to the slow teasing,” to the “honey of mouth.”

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