

front and his initial training period in North Africa are not shown to facilitate political or personal allegiances between Māori and other racialized subjects of the European empires. In Tu's narrative of the war in Italy, he establishes some general connections to local Italians and maintains close allegiances to other soldiers of the Māori Battalion, but ultimately these characters remain sketchy. When his friends are killed in war (as most of them are, in the disastrous attempt to reclaim Monte Cassino from the Germans), their anecdotal presence in the novel does little to impart a full sense of loss of each life. This is where Grace's narrative restraint is the most honed, actively resisting the reader's desire to uncover some meaning from devastating loss, violence, and death. Tu learns of many of their deaths through hearsay, and others he witnesses, but most seem to enter the novel as quickly as they are murdered in war. Significantly more narrative scaffolding is provided for the loss of his elder brothers, but Tu's pursuit of the war and his return, at twenty years old, an aged and devastated man does little to convince the reader of the reward for his tremendous sacrifices.

This raises one of the central and most disturbing concerns of the novel—how to reassemble, through narrative form, those historic relationships and familial patterns that were created out of an initial sense of adventure and honor and yet became a family legacy of violence, miscommunication, silence, and erasure. Tu's father had returned deeply damaged and shell-shocked from the First World War, and, replicating a terrible spiral,

his sons pursue a similar pattern. While the novel foregrounds the ways in which whanau (family) is integral to ensuring the survival of these young men, their wives and children in particular pay a tremendous price in reassembling the fragments after war. Perhaps these legacies for the future represent the most important difference between one generation's war and the next, and they signal some hope for the process of healing and recovery. Tu's diaries and letters begin to uncover these family secrets and are directed to his brothers' two children; although their Pākehā mother is estranged from the family, signaling yet another alienation, the children's attempt to reassemble a relationship with their reclusive uncle suggests a regenerating movement in the spiral. Grace explains that this book was inspired by her own attempts to fill in the gaps left by her father's experience in the 28 (Māori) Battalion. The interstices of his wartime journal thus provide the space for the creative author to weave an imaginative fabric that attests to the bravery and, after sixty years, the unimaginable sacrifice.

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Voice Carried My Family, by Robert Sullivan. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2005. ISBN 1-86940-337-1; 66 pages, notes. Paper, NZ\$21.99.

The iridescent mother-of-pearl cover of Robert Sullivan's fifth poetry collection, *Voice Carried My Family*, mirrors its ephemeral motifs of move-

ment, shadow, voice, ocean, and fire. There is also the reappearance of the waka (a seafaring vehicle) as a leit-motif, a conceptual vehicle carrying not only genealogy but also Māori concepts of nature, time, space, and place. Here, it symbolizes the resurrection of Māori: their journeys, destinations, dreams, and achievements.

Divided into four parts, each conveying a movement, this new book by Sullivan, whose anthologized poems are often densely allusive, eases the reader in with simple five-lined textual islands floating in a sea of space, joined by a longer third poem, “Waka.” Physical movements are conveyed by bodies of water and chant; philosophical movements are delved into with discussion of love and politics—where “impossible/ leaps over the possible” (4); and eternal movements toward death and renewal are visited through feelings navigated with elemental images of fire, water, air, and energy.

We then head into larger seas and movements on a grander, more official, historical scale. But, as Sullivan shows, such territories are as intimate and as fickle as the emotional terrain previously traversed. “London Waka” remaps historical journeys as he reinvents mythologies, re-auditioning and recasting historical scenes. He incorporates a Wendtian (as in Albert Wendt) subversion where, in true flying-fox form, the world is viewed upside down, and back to front, as Māori colonize England, moving from plundering terrorism to paternalistic political correctness. Amid the constant renegotiation of histories with imaginative reconstructions of intimate conversations, yearnings, and

misgivings of canonical colonial figures, Captain Cook, Joseph Banks, and Māori navigators Tupaia, Te Weheru, and Mai, Sullivan’s ironic and sardonic humor is always reflected both in content and poetic context. His use of long couplets is a visual partnership teasing that alliance officially endorsed by the Treaty of Waitangi, but yet to be fully realized save for the politically correct tidbits of “limited self-government” and patronizing language restoration projects.

But this kind of anachronistic demythologizing also takes place in Maoridom serving to reenergize myths for a contemporary audience. In “Tāne retrieves the baskets of knowledge,” the persona shimmies up a vine “like a cord plugged into heaven” (8). There is energy in knowledge, a pathway upward, and a reference to the climbing Māori hero Tawhaki, in Sullivan’s *Pike Ake* (1993). Io, supreme deity, says to Tāne, “I liked your thought—maybe/ your descendants will find one too and also climb it” (9). The movement is upward, onward, and into the future by ideologically adhering to that universal Polynesian adage, “We face the future with our backs.”

The title poem, “Voice carried my family, their names and stories,” further conveys the double-edgedness of Sullivan’s poetry. There’s an astute cynical knowingness underplaying purportedly straightforward images. The poem pays homage to the spoken word and Māori orality but is embedded in irony. A deliberate omission of te reo (Māori language) and any specific Māori cultural references demonstrates both the overwhelming

effect written English has had on Māori oral traditions and culture, overwritten like a palimpsest and “frozen” beneath the stultifying rigidity of the English language. But the colonizer’s tool is also subverted by the notion of voice appropriation and representation. It forms one of those “shadows” that keep resurfacing and on which the second section, “II For Shadows,” focuses. Who has the right to speak for someone else?

In the context of these continual debates, there is turmoil as the persona wrangles with the individual poetic voice’s communal responsibility and accountability, and between the “enemies of the imagination” (28). Sullivan inserts a Māori presence in the history books as seen in the shift of perspective in “I/Eyes/Ae.” In the previous poem, “8 A Resolution,” the English language is described as “rude sounds” by Māori voyager Koa, yet he will “make music of them,” adopting, adapting, and transforming. We see history is being written over again, but this time with Māori eyes and mouths.

Such acts of reinscribing indigenous perception and meaning are exciting as we trace Sullivan’s poetic cartography, penned from Māori Irish ink and revealing his ability to stay afloat in the finicky seas of poetry writing and publication. This can partly be attributed to his ability to be both intensely personal and polemically political. The shadow that follows the tormented poet is Peter Pan-like: “this shadow annoys me / makes rude gestures when I want poetry / oh to sit with Plato’s shadows instead of that one” (19). We empathize with the elusive, often cheeky

nature of the muse in whatever shape or form. But there are more sinister shadows, those that threaten to “commit identity theft” in “Omanaia” (21)—the non-Māori historians, researchers, and poets who delve into Māori histories. In “Resolving the shadows of home,” Sullivan makes clear that such ephemeral shapes offer only shades of truth, as his poet’s pen adds to the stroke of voices moving onward and upward toward the third section, “For the Ocean of Kiwa.” Here rises a voice distinct from that in dominant Pākehā discourses of history. It is one that carries his family. In answer to the question posed in “1 The Great Hall,” that is, who is the poet to speak for other Māori (problematizing blood-quantum-based insider/outsider status), “2 Tupaia” answers: look to my genealogy. “3 Mai” argues that these historical records, in Sullivan’s easy reach as onetime librarian at the University of Auckland, are, as public record, open for certain appropriations. These historical conversation poems belie the fact that he is a researcher with tenacity for detail and fact. They also point to his keen eye for irony, for it is through such imaginative conversations that we are steered toward considering the subjective nature of all historical records.

The final section, “IV For Fires,” points to an ultimate destination and suggests where that voice is carrying his family: It is home. It finishes with another elemental image in the poem “Ahi Kā—the House of Ngā Puhī.” Sullivan demonstrates that, in the act of writing, he is keeping the home fires (ahi kā) burning, sustaining a place to which to return. Judging from the final poem, despite current

circumstances, home remains Aotearoa. It is a place Sullivan embraces despite the fact that there are no happy “Resolutions” (33), as Pākehā would have the world believe, and no idealistic colonial conclusions in this bicultural country. Nevertheless, the parties affected are bound by the child begotten by “mixed history and blood” (65)—not Aotearoa, the land, but New Zealand, the country, the ideological nation. Resolution then, is an ongoing process, one that is effectively reflected in the continual movement in the collection, and one that Sullivan seems to hope, will go onward, upward, and forward—by looking backward.

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Sing-song, by Anne Kennedy.
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Press, 2003. ISBN 1-86940-295-2;
128 pages. US\$14.95.

Anne Kennedy’s *Sing-song* (2004 winner of the highly prestigious Montana New Zealand Book Award for Poetry) is an account of a Māori/Pākehā family’s experiences with a baby girl’s eczema. Through eighty-two riveting poems, divided into three sections, *Sing-song* realizes the overdetermined ways that “The skin is the first port of call for a reaction to the world” (23). In one of the first poems, the poet (who throughout represents the perspective of the “eczema-mother” in third person) describes how the mother (here, not yet a mother) and her lover (not yet a father) use words to construct for themselves “a map,

useful, intricate, to the point/showing the long forgotten arterial routes/ instructions for the beating heart, leaping breath/and where to sleep, sleep in Grey Lynn” (5). This grounding metaphor for the relationships forged within and through language beautifully describes the work that *Sing-song* does for its readers. Set in Aotearoa New Zealand, *Sing-song* invites us into an intimate terrain as Kennedy maps with a poet’s precision and arresting imagery the particular places and domestic spaces that this family inhabits. The book’s power is in the layered ways that it attempts to make sense of an experience of illness; as the poet explains, “when all is not well with a child . . . you ravel the knitted/sleeve of how it all began” (51). Rather than arrive at singular answers for the causes of the daughter’s eczema, Kennedy seeks to understand how the abstractions of history, myth, race and racism, culture, karma, heredity, genealogy, colonialism, capitalism, gender roles, and medical institutions concretely converge and sometimes compete as explanations for why the daughter’s “itchy patch the size of two twenty-cent pieces” (34) transforms into an agonizing and “endless burning bush” (36).

Kennedy grounds the abstractions *Sing-song* explores through beautifully wrought domestic details that double as metaphors that are no less profound for the humor that often characterizes them. In “Newborn baby,” the older brother (at the time, age three) jokes about putting a stereo up his nose. Meeting with laughter from the adults, he ups the ante, inserting ever-larger objects up his nostrils, “until he got to the universe