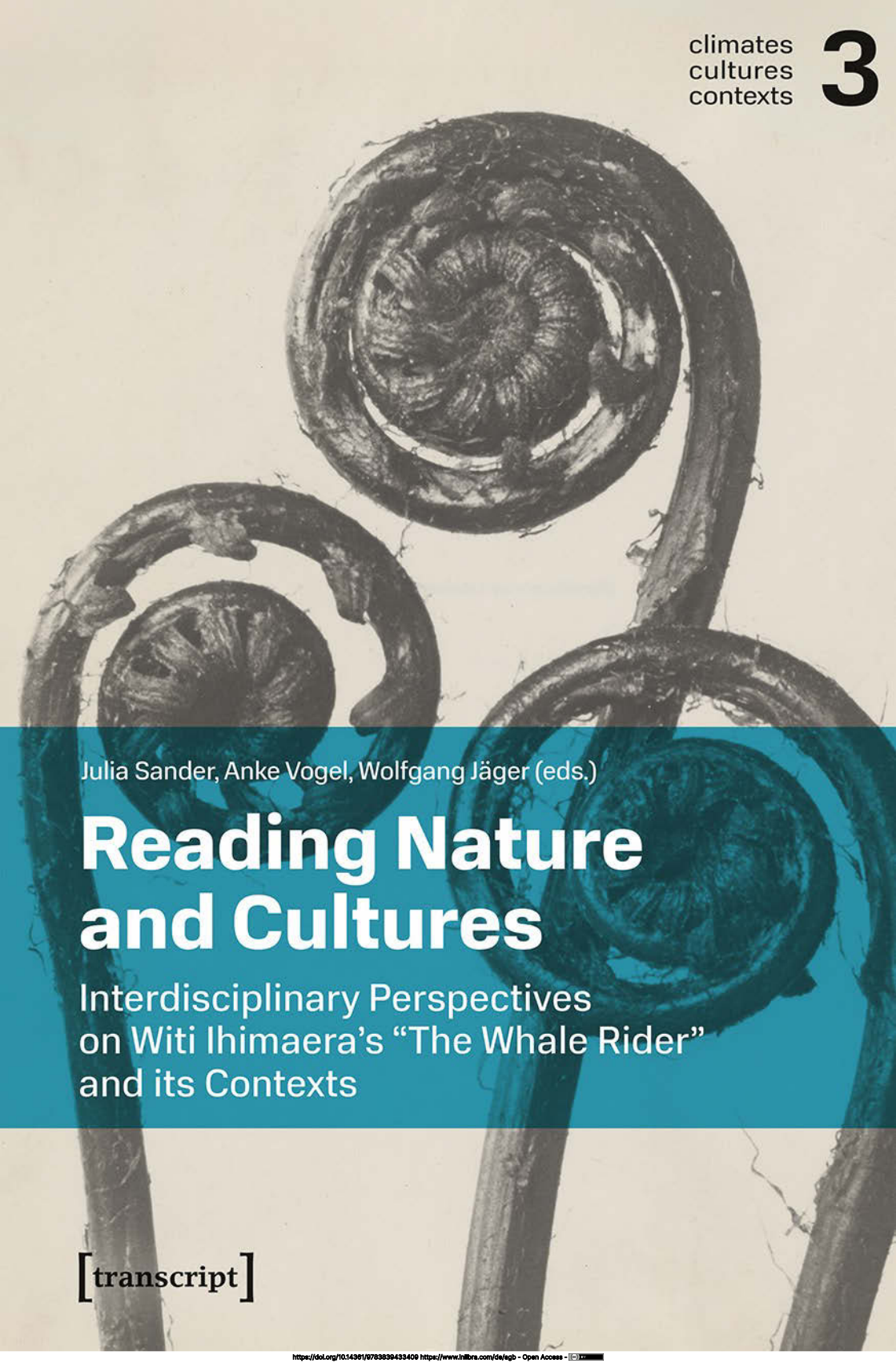
climates
cultures
contexts
3



Julia Sander, Anke Vogel, Wolfgang Jäger (eds.)

Reading Nature and Cultures

Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Witi Ihimaera's "The Whale Rider" and its Contexts

[transcript]

Julia Sander, Anke Vogel, Wolfgang Jäger (eds.)
Reading Nature and Cultures

Editorial

Climates – Cultures – Contexts was founded at the University of Kassel as part of the interdisciplinary research group *Climate Thinking*, which examines how the concept of climate is narrated as well as spoken and thought about from the perspective of the humanities. As such, this series aims to explore and understand the complex phenomenon 'climate' in terms of its cultural and contextual conditions, as well as its spatial, temporal, material, institutional, and semantic entanglements. This series is not intended to be a finite project. Instead, each new volume seeks to expand and complement culturally and contextually embedded approaches to climate in regard to their objects of analysis, relevant theories, and applied methods.
This series is edited by Felix Böhm, Martin Böhnert, Julia Drube, Maria Hornisch, Silvie Lang, Annika Rink, Murat Sezi, Jan Sinning, and Vanessa-Nadine Sternath.

Julia Sander (Dr.) is Professor of contemporary German literature specializing in reading and literature education at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. Her fields of research are children's and young adult media and their didactics, critical literacy, and reading promotion in all-day schools.
Anke Vogel (Dr.) is a research and teaching associate in the Book Studies Department at the Gutenberg Institute for World Literature and Written Media at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. Her research and teaching interests include book market research, especially digital transformation, communication, and sustainability, as well as reading and readers research and children's and young adult book studies.
Wolfgang Jäger is a teacher at a secondary school in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. His fields of research are children's and young adult media and their didactics, democracy education, and digitization in education.

Julia Sander, Anke Vogel, Wolfgang Jäger (eds.)

Reading Nature and Cultures

Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Witi Ihimaera's "The Whale Rider" and its Contexts

[transcript]

The publication was funded by the Publication Fund of JGU Mainz

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available online at https://dnb.dnb.de

transcript Verlag | Hermannstraße 26 | D-33602 Bielefeld | live@transcript-verlag.de

Cover design: Maria Arndt
Cover illustration: 320-308, Copyright: public domain, Courtesy Universität der Künste Berlin, Universitätsarchiv, in collaboration with Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur, Cologne
Printing: Elanders Waiblingen GmbH, Waiblingen
https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839433409
Print-ISBN: 978-3-8376-7919-9 | PDF-ISBN: 978-3-8394-3340-9
ISSN of series: 2944-7453 | eISSN of series: 2944-7461

Printed on permanent acid-free text paper.

Contents

Section III: Reading Cultures

Addendum

Climates – Cultures – Contexts
Foreword by the series editors

The climate is changing. While, for the time being, the classification of the Anthropocene as a geological era was rejected in a formal process, the complex phenomenon of climate defies such unambiguousness. This is already evident in the multitude of terms used to describe the phenomenon, all of which carry different connotations: global warming, climate change, climate crisis, climate catastrophe, or climate collapse, to name just a few.

This diversity of concepts influences the central areas of environment, society, and economy in a multidimensional and reciprocal manner, shaping both individual and collective constructions of reality as well as possibilities for action. Such interdependencies become apparent wherever the changing climate noticeably impacts human and more-than-human life and action – both locally and globally – and where, in turn, lifestyles and behaviors contribute to changes in climate. At the same time, the perception of climate change and its associated consequences are intertwined – for example, through knowledge cultures, cultural techniques, and linguistic-cultural approaches to the world. Following this perspective, the climate-changed environment is removed from its status as a passive backdrop – to be tamed or dominated, feared or admired, in short: reduced to a resource at our disposal.

Climates – Cultures – Contexts pursues the goal of exploring and understanding the complex phenomenon of 'climate' in terms of its cultural and contextual conditions. This opens up three approaches that cut across disciplinary lines: How are the changing climate and its circumstances talked about, narrated, and reflected upon? Within the series, these questions and approaches are not viewed as finished, but rather as negotiations of the complex phenomenon of climate, expanded and complemented with each volume from multiple perspectives, based on diverse analytical objects, relevant theories, and methodologies.

The present volume is designated 03 *Reading Nature and Cultures. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Witi Ihimaera's "The Whale Rider" and its Contexts* synthesizes transdisciplinary research with a production aesthetic perspective, thereby providing a voice for the author himself. Neither his own voice nor the contributions idealize the author's work or exoticize the Māori context. Rather, it critically reflects on the

author as a border figure between indigenous and "modern" epistemologies and as an activist of Māori identity politics. The international network established for this project facilitates the convergence of diverse academic disciplines, fostering a collaborative environment conducive to the exchange of interdisciplinary perspectives that question the commercialization of a particular novel, the coloniality of power in the book industry and translation but also inspects the text on the complex dynamics between the center and the periphery. This examination, in turn, underscores the necessity for a paradigm shift in our understanding of the climate crisis and its disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations. The sensitive handling of Māori cosmology and cultural contexts, enabled by intersectional, more-than-human approaches, facilitates the identification and location of agencies in the global crisis. This identification is rendered through texts that transcend eurocentric forms of scientific production, offering a novel visual representation of the crisis.

Felix Böhm
Martin Böhnert
Julia Drube
Maria Hornisch
Silvie Lang
Annika Rink
Murat Sezi
Jan Sinning
Vanessa-Nadine Sternath

Section I: *The Whale Rider*'s Global Reach and Impact

Reading Nature and Cultures: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on *The Whale Rider* and its Contexts

Julia Sander, Anke Vogel and Wolfgang Jäger

Abstract *The introduction emphasises the importance of books as essential tools for research and learning in universities and the need to promote reading among students, especially as reading levels decline. It examines the "One University – One Book" programme, through which Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz selected "The Whale Rider" (1987) by Witi Ihimaera to foster a shared reading experience and rebuild social connections post-pandemic. The novel, blending Māori mythology with contemporary themes, served as a tool for intercultural learning and interdisciplinary dialogue. The project collaborated with the author himself as well as the University of Otago and engaged various academic disciplines to deepen understanding of Māori literature. The resulting volume presents scholarly and personal analyses of "The Whale Rider" and its contexts, relating them to global challenges like decolonisation, environmental protection and cultural resilience.*

Keywords *Māori culture; intercultural learning; interdisciplinary dialogue; decolonisation; environmental protection; reading promotion*

Introducing *The Whale Rider* by Witi Ihimaera

The book chosen for the journey that Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU) undertook as their *One University – One Book* project was *The Whale Rider*, first published in 1987 and written by Witi Ihimaera (https://www.penguin.co.nz/authors/witi-ihimaera), who is considered to be the most important contemporary Māori author. Born in 1944 near Gisborne, New Zealand, he was the first Māori writer to publish both a short story collection and a novel. Among his notable works are *The Matriarch* (1986), *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (1995), and *The Whale Rider* (1987), the latter being the best known internationally also due to the success of its film adaptation. Ihimaera's achievements extend beyond writing short stories and novels, with contributions to opera and theatre, as well as editing multiple anthologies of contemporary Māori and Pacific literature. He has been recognised with numerous awards,

including the Māori arts award Te Tohutiketike a Te Waka Toi, the New Zealand Book Award and the New Zealand Order of Merit. He also worked as a diplomat before becoming a professor and creative fellow in Māori literature at the University of Auckland. Ihimaera's fiction combines the mythic and the ordinary, and he continually reinterprets Māori traditions and stories, including revising his own earlier works. His writing reflects his Māori heritage and addresses themes of Māori-Pākehā relationships and Māori identity in modern New Zealand related to broader social and political developments. This blending of Māori culture with broader narratives distinguishes Witi Ihimaera's unique and influential literary voice (Kennedy 2011; Moura-Koçoğlu 2011, 51–96; Hawkins 2023).

The novel *The Whale Rider* tells the story of Kahu, the daughter of a respected Māori family who traces her roots back to the mythical ancestor Paikea, who founded the country and possessed the ability to ride on a whale. For the grandfather, Koro Apirana, Kahu's birth is a bitter blow, since he has been longing for a male heir for a long time, a successor, according to Māori tradition, to whom he can pass the leadership of the tribe. In his desperate search, Koro overlooks both the unconditional love of his granddaughter and the signs of her being chosen. Only when an old bull whale threatens to beach itself off the coast of the village does the tide turn. While her grandfather already sees the end of his tribe in this ominous sign, Kahu mounts the whale and leads it back to the open sea.

The Whale Rider has been translated into more than 20 languages (German translation by Sabine Schulte). The German title of the book is *Whalerider. Die magische Geschichte vom Mädchen, das den Wal ritt* (2003, engl. *Whalerider. The magical story of the girl who rode the whale*). The current, seventh edition of the novel in German was published in 2013 by the Rowohlt-Verlag; it is part of the *repertoire* series, which aims at making long-out-of-print titles – "Literarische Schätze" [literary treasures] – available again. The text has also been produced as a radio play (2005, WDR) and adapted into a picture book and a film. Niki Caro's *Whale Rider* (D/NZ 2002) received multiple awards (Toronto International Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival [audience award], International Film Festival Rotterdam), and the lead actress Keisha Castle-Hughes was nominated for an Oscar in the category of Best Actress. While on the one hand this globally successful adaptation is praised for its "representations of gender empowerment and cultural preservation that reflect the events of the late 20th and early 21st centuries" (Zautner 2015, 21), it has also been criticised because its dramaturgy narrows the scope of the plot to Kahu as the main character and reshapes the material through a feminist lens that critics perceive as Eurocentric (see Fox in this volume).

The language of *The Whale Rider* – a rather slim literary volume (158 pages) – is comprehensible and it has a linear narrative style. Through the characters, the novel enables a variety of approaches for readers: the narrator is a young man in search of his cultural identity, the heroine is a young girl who desperately tries to win her

grandfather's love and recognition and who has a very special connection to the sea and its inhabitants. The grandfather, who gradually becomes more and more obsessed with the search for a successor, and the grandmother, who critically accompanies this search (she comes from another, matrilineally influenced tribe), are also key whanau actors (Māori for extended family). The setting New Zealand, 'land of the long white cloud', is a dream destination and place of longing for many. The text enables (European) readers to explore the unfamiliar and reflect on questions of individual and global significance. Unfamiliar is, for example, the linguistic surface with its mixture of Māori and English or German as well as the cyclical time structure of the story. The myths that the text invoke and the traditions that derive from them are new to many readers. The presence and perspective of whales, also in their intimate connection with people, is special and fascinating. The described effects of underwater nuclear tests, however, may be frightening, especially as they are told from the perspective of these whales.

With its unique approach, the novel also touches on universal themes like the search for identity and maturing, gender roles, tradition and transformation, exclusion and racism. Consequently, it invites personal reflections and artistic adaptations as well as interdisciplinary academic dialogue. This applies in particular to the relationship between nature and cultures that is framed in the novel in a specific way: The old whale bull, who has swum into the plot of the novel from mythical times, longs to be guided by a human. At the same time, Kahu is repeatedly drawn to the water and its inhabitants. Human and nature, the novel postulates, are fundamentally interdependent. In contrast, the realistic passages in the text describe in great detail the devastation that humans inflict on nature. The description of a pod of whales dying on the beach, which is also portrayed in the text as a media sensation, is particularly vivid and moving.

The novel appeals to and challenges readers in equal measure. The continuing topicality of *The Whale Rider* is aptly captured by the slogan of the Rowohlt publishing house – 'A look back ahead': The novel's themes relate to pressing questions and socio-political issues of our time, inviting reflection from individual, regional and global perspectives and encouraging exchange. This makes *The Whale Rider* a particularly fitting choice for a shared reading experience that seeks to inspire intercultural and interdisciplinary dialogue.

One University – One Book: a literary invitation to travel

The *Eine Uni – Ein Buch* (*One University – One Book*) programme, launched by Stifterverband and Klaus Tschira Foundation in co-operation with Zeit Verlag, states the goal of promoting reading at universities and a vibrant exchange: It aims at encouraging a book-related campus culture in which as many members of a university as possible

– so not only students – exchange ideas and opinions related to a chosen book and also share them with members of their local community. The text to read as well as the ways in which the book is dealt with can be determined by each university itself. While universities might make use of formats like reading circles and author readings, the book could also become the subject of academic teaching in seminars and lecture series and the starting point of creative approaches such as literature slams or film projects.

Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz applied successfully for the programme in 2023 and was one of ten universities to receive funding. This allowed the project team[1] to develop a specific approach to promoting reading at the university: A 'new space' was opened up between private and institutional use of literature, promoting reading and follow-up communication within an institutional setting but removed from classical (objectifiable) performance expectations (Scherf and Sander 2024, 403). At the same time, the project aimed to strengthen the university as a place of departure, community and exchange.

Universities are intended to be centres of learning and research and as such have been associated with books from the very beginning. Books have been the fundamental source of knowledge, forming the basis of higher education and intellectual progress. Almost every university has its own library, often with extensive collections of books, manuscripts and digital resources. They are important spaces of contact for students and researchers looking for information, inspiration and exchange. Reading in a university context is primarily a specific form of problem-solving for the purpose of information acquisition and generation. As a core activity of studying, teaching and researching, reading is therefore (still) the primary stimulus for academic achievements (Kuhn 2022, 327–328). And while libraries – in general – also fulfil a social function and democratic mandate (Schüller-Zwierlein 2023), reading is proving to be positive for the individual and society in many ways, as the authors of the *Ljubljana Reading Manifesto* (https://readingmanifesto.org/) on the importance of higher-level reading point out:

> Higher-level reading is our most powerful tool for analytic and critical thinking. It exercises metacognition and cognitive patience, expands our conceptual capac-

1 The group comprised Prof. Dr. Mita Banerjee (Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies), Prof. Dr. Christoph Bläsi (Gutenberg-Institut für Weltliteratur und schriftorientierte Medien, Buchwissenschaft), Jun.-Prof. Dr. Angela Kölling (FTSK, Anglophonie / Anglophone Literatures and Cultures), Prof. Dr. Birger Petersen (Hochschule für Musik Mainz), Kerstin Rüther (Dekanat FB 05, Studierendenberatung PHILIS), Prof. Dr. Julia Sander (Deutsches Institut, Lese- und Literaturdidaktik), Prof. Dr. Virginia Gail Toy (Institut für Geowissenschaften), Dr. Anke Vogel (Gutenberg-Institut für Weltliteratur und schriftorientierte Medien, Buchwissenschaft) and Dr. Svenja Völkel (Department of English and Linguistics, Language Typology).

> ities, trains cognitive empathy and perspective-taking […]. To participate as informed citizens in a democratic society we need higher-level reading skills and practices that go far beyond the mere decoding of texts. Reading is not only the main road to personal development, the foundation of life-long learning and the basis of so much of our information exchange, but it is also a central dimension of social interaction and participation. (Schüller-Zwierlein et al. 2022)

Since the ability to read and think critically as well as creatively and to adopt a social and intellectual perspective is linked to reading skills and practices, it is all the more alarming that reading levels are falling also at universities (Kuhn et al. 2022; Agarwala and Spiewak 2025). Reading promotion should therefore no longer exclusively be aimed at school children and young adults, but also focus on students in higher education in order to prevent a further erosion of the book and reading culture.

The idea behind the application for the *One University – One Book* programme, that aims to face the described challenge, was an invitation to go on a journey together. The semesters during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2023) and the related state of emergency had tied students and teachers as well as administrative staff of JGU to their desks. Everyone was suddenly confined to the closest circle at home, and those who could, worked and taught from there. Those who remained on site had to look after things in mostly abandoned buildings. The university, this vibrant network of individual and sometimes self-willed actors, was torn apart from one day to the next and had to be painstakingly rebuilt digitally. Of course, this was only partially successful: While some students quickly adapted to digital learning spaces and academics enjoyed connecting across countries and oceans with people in their specialist community, chance encounters on campus, informal exchanges with students from other disciplines, chats with colleagues from other fields, occasional meetings and hallway conversations with staff – all of this had largely disappeared during the pandemic. It seemed necessary – the project group determined – to create new meeting spaces: Related to a book, events were organised and follow-up communication initiated. The book was read together and discussed by many different members of the university, people engaged with the text – personally, academically and artistically. The possibilities of digital interaction were used just as much as face-to-face formats, like a student reading night and shared meals during New Zealand Week in the canteen, which had just become possible again at the time.

This addressed a problem that is fundamentally related to a lack of social interactions: if we only deal primarily with people with whom we are connected through our immediate familiar contexts, we all too easily settle into a comfort zone of established patterns of thought and action. What is missing are resistant encounters: the confrontation with different practices, contexts and aesthetics, with divergent perspectives and world views. Confrontation with the unfamiliar may be exhausting and uncomfortable at times – after all, it calls into question our patterns of percep-

tion, thought and action – but is precisely why it is indispensable as a driving force for individual and social development. Countless reports of journeys to other countries and communities bear witness to this influence. Therefore, the project group was not only trying to promote reading and bring different individuals and groups at university back into dialogue with each other, but to do so as part of a trip, a trip to a faraway place. Together, they considered where you would end up if you stuck a – very long – needle through the globe from Mainz, Germany: You emerge near New Zealand. And if you swim ashore from there, you enter a world that was considered completely inaccessible in antiquity and the Middle Ages, that of the antipodes. The worlds have come closer together in recent centuries, but they are anything but synchronised. When it is day here, it is night there; when it is summer here, it is winter there. An ideal destination for anyone who is prepared to turn their thinking upside down (cf. Rüther et al. 2022)

Engaging interdisciplinary perspectives

In the context of *The Whale Rider*-project, literature appeared as both a window to the world and a mirror: reading the novel together enabled new perspectives on the unfamiliar and the familiar, and invited discussion – both offered opportunities for experience and learning, not least from an intercultural perspective. The reading project at Mainz University opened up interdisciplinary exchange that promoted the exploration of literature as a form of cultural participation at university, in the city, and with the other side of the world.

Māori culture was the central element to this process. The programme aimed at enabling members of JGU to learn about and experience the history and present of New Zealand's Māori culture – through the book and beyond. Lecturers from the fields of human geography, linguistics and translation studies were involved, as were numerous colleagues from the University of Otago (Māori: Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka)[2] as well as the author Witi Ihimaera, who visited Mainz. Intercultural encounters should not only seek the familiar in the unfamiliar and not get lost in exotic settings but explore the personal and political dimensions of Māori culture in a sensitive and reflective way transcending narrow conceptions of 'self' and 'other'.

This volume is based on an interdisciplinary lecture series that formed a keystone of the project and brings together different perspectives as well as points of

2 The valuable and indispensable perspectives came from Prof. Dr. Jennifer Cattermole (Te Kāhui Tau/School of Performing Arts), Prof. Dr. Karyn Paringatai (Te Tumu/School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies), Prof. Dr. Susan Sandretto (Te Kura Ākau Taitoka/College of Education) and Prof. em. Dr. Alistair Fox (Te Reo Inarahi me te Mātai Wetereo/English and Linguistics).

reference for a (new) reading of *The Whale Rider* by Witi Ihimaera. The articles present both scholarly and personal approaches to the text and its themes. They can also be read as an attempt to initiate, accompany, and reflect on the intended intercultural encounters with Māori literature and culture. That this is a challenging and complex teaching/learning experience is evident, among other things, in the different ways in which the authors use Māori terms in their English lectures and how they attempt to articulate their own positions from which they speak about cultures and their interpretations of the novel. Each perspective contributes to a multi-dimensional understanding of the novel and account for its significance in times of debates about postcolonialism, decolonisation and environmental protection.

In the first section of the volume, *The Whale Rider*'s global reach and impact is put into contexts. Its literary and cinematic success, serving as both a cultural reclamation of Māori and Pacific sovereignty and a bridge between Indigenous narratives and international audiences, is related to local and global challenges. The novel's journey through global publication highlights the struggles and triumphs of Māori literature in a Pākehā-dominated industry, reinforcing its significance in broader literary and political developments. The book's international translations and adaptations, it is shown, have played a crucial role in promoting Māori culture, aligning with contemporary discussions on environmental and Indigenous rights.

In his contribution *Māori Novelist and Indigenous Envoy: Writing to the World*, **Witi Ihimaera** writes about his novel *The Whale Rider* as a seminal work that not only reclaims Māori cultural identity but also addresses broader geopolitical and environmental issues. Ihimaera's exploration of the Paikea myth – an ancestral figure who arrives in Aotearoa New Zealand on the back of a whale – serves as a vehicle for a commentary on Indigenous sovereignty and resilience: In his own words, the novel can be read as part of a practice of reclaiming Māori and Pacific sovereignty, drawing a circular narrative from the myth's origin in Raiātea (French Polynesia) to the geopolitical realities of New York in 1986, and back to the Pacific in 2024, where climate change and the region's security challenges are discussed. Through this cyclical storytelling, Ihimaera reflects the ongoing need for cultural preservation and a renewed focus on Indigenous resilience.

Anke Vogel traces the global journey of *The Whale Rider* through its publications, translations, and adaptations, noting that it has become New Zealand's most translated literary work. Vogel examines the book's creation in light of the Māori writers' struggle for recognition in a Pākehā-dominated publishing industry, highlighting how the novel's themes of Indigenous rights and environmentalism resonated on the global stage, particularly after the 2002 film adaptation.

Subsequently, **Christoph Bläsi** addresses the internationalisation of *The Whale Rider*, discussing the role of institutions in promoting literary works across national and linguistic boundaries. By focusing on the book's journey from New Zealand to Germany, Bläsi provides insights into the dynamics of book markets and how a text

like *The Whale Rider* travels, impacting diverse audiences and featuring the novel's universal themes of cultural identity.

Angela Kölling explores Ihimaera as a translator, discussing how his works, including *The Whale Rider*, function as acts of cultural translation. Kölling argues that Ihimaera's storytelling represents a form of problem construction, which requires attention to both content and political articulation. She examines how translations of the novel help to extend its themes of cultural reclamation, decolonisation, and the ongoing negotiation of Indigenous relationships with the world.

In the second section of the volume, literature is suggested as a lens through which humans interpret and engage with nature, inviting various perspectives such as education, law or evolutionary science to foster sustainability. An interrogation of *The Whale Rider* shows its connection to ecological discourse, for example how it anticipates legal and philosophical developments such as granting personhood to natural entities. The presence of whales in the narrative further allows the reflection of the relationship between nature and culture. The insights into the evolution of whales from land mammals to ocean giants just like their portrayal in contemporary literature and film reflect enduring human fascination and their significance. Through the different perspectives, reading nature becomes an act of both interpretation and transformation, shaping how individuals connect with the natural world.

The article by **Julia Sander** and **Wolfgang Jäger** examines the role of literature in advancing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Taking the UNESCO SDG Book Club initiative as an example, the authors assess literature's potential to enhance understanding of global challenges and promote transformative action. They propose critical literacy as a way of engaging with texts, suggesting that through critical literary conversations, learners can be encouraged to engage in democratic discourse and take action for sustainability.

In **Mita Banerjee**'s and **Dieter Dörr**'s contribution, *The Whale Rider* is situated within the contexts of legal scholarship and the emerging field of the Blue Humanities. They analyse the novel's anticipation of the legal recognition of natural entities, such as rivers, as legal persons in New Zealand, connecting Ihimaera's environmental themes with real-world legal developments regarding Indigenous and environmental rights.

Thomas Tütken, providing a fascinating backdrop to *The Whale Rider*, explores the evolutionary history of whales, tracing their transformation from small, land-dwelling mammals into the massive, fully aquatic species we know today. It highlights key morphological and physiological adaptations as well as the influence of geological and climatic shifts on their evolution, with fossil evidence from the Indo-Pakistan region providing crucial insights. The reconstruction of the paleontologist shows parallels to the literary scholar's endeavour to establish meaning from elements and contexts.

Bettina Wild explores the significance of whales in contemporary children's and young adult literature. The examination results in a systematisation in which other narratives such as *The Whale Rider* can be located. The author highlights the literary tradition of the whale as a mythical creature, showing how stories contribute to the preservation and transmission of myth.

Michaela Castellanos approaches *The Whale Rider* from the perspective of cultural and literary animal studies, analysing the symbolic role of whales in the novel. Her "cetopoetic reading" focuses on how the novel's treatment of whales reflects Māori cosmology, arguing that the presence of whales in the story is central to understanding the cultural and spiritual landscape of the text.

In the third section of the volume *The Whale Rider* serves as a rich site for exploring how literature navigates cultural identity and mythology. Across various perspectives, a common theme emerges: the novel functions as a bridge between past and present, myth and reality, Indigenous narratives and audiences around the globe. At its core, the novel reinforces Māori cultural identity through its retelling of the Paikea myth, highlighting the interconnectedness of people, nature, and spirituality. This connection is further deepened through Māori language, music, and oral traditions, which serve as cultural markers of resilience and continuity. Additionally, the novel lends itself to critical literacy, encouraging readers to engage with its themes: Whether through feminist readings, anthropological insights, or decolonial perspectives, *The Whale Rider* illustrates how literature not only reflects culture but actively shapes its ongoing negotiation within and beyond its original context.

In her article, **Svenja Völkel** provides an anthropological and linguistic contextualisation of *The Whale Rider*, examining the Māori social structures, their deep connections to the sea, and how Māori identity evolved after European contact. The author emphasises the importance of myth in the Māori worldview and how *The Whale Rider* encapsulates the process of reconnection with Māori values that were threatened by colonialism.

In **Jennifer Cattermole**'s article, the significance of whales in Māori instrumental music is explored, particularly through the taonga pūoro (traditional Māori instruments). Cattermole demonstrates how these instruments facilitate communication between Māori characters and whales, reinforcing the interconnectedness between humans, ancestors, and nature in the narrative of *The Whale Rider*.

In **Karyn Paringatai**'s contribution, the ongoing influence of Paikea's mythological legacy on his descendants is explored, reinforcing the idea that the story is not just fiction but an integral part of the spiritual and cultural life of Māori people today. Paringatai's analysis shows how the story of Paikea continues to shape and guide Māori identity in the modern world.

Susan Sandretto engages with *The Whale Rider* through the lens of critical literacy, reading it as a reconstruction of a traditional Māori story. She argues that

Ihimaera's novel invites readers to critically examine the Māori pūrākau of Paikea, highlighting the pedagogical value of the text in fostering a deeper understanding of Māori culture and identity.

Anton Escher examines the mythological aspects of *The Whale Rider*, arguing that myth plays a crucial role in preserving community and identity, not just for Māori but for all societies. Escher's interpretation challenges the notion that Māori escape into myth, instead asserting that their cultural survival hinges on the integration of myth with everyday life. He emphasises how *The Whale Rider* reveals the importance of collective identity through mythic storytelling.

Alistair Fox approaches the feminist readings of the 2002 film adaptation of *The Whale Rider*, noting that some Māori critics found the film's portrayal culturally offensive. Fox explores how Niki Caro's adaptation shifted the narrative, emphasising a more universal feminist message, and in doing so, potentially distorting the original Māori cultural context of the novel.

References

Agarwala, Anant and Martin Spiewak. "Lesekompetenz: Ein Buch lesen? Ganz?!" *Die Zeit*, 18, 30 April 2025, pp. 30–31.

Hawkins, Nicole Titihuia. "Witi Ihimaera: An icon and an inspiration." *The Spinoff*, 2023, https://thespinoff.co.nz/books/10-09-2023/witi-ihimaera-an-icon-and-an-inspiration#, accessed 05 April 2025.

Ihimaera, Witi. *Whalerider. Die magische Geschichte vom Mädchen, das den Wal ritt.* (German translation by Sabine Schulte). Rowohlt, 2013 [2003].

Ihimaera, Witi. *The Whale Rider.* Heinemann, 1987.

Kennedy, Melissa. *Striding Both Worlds: Witi Ihimaera and New Zealand's Literary Traditions*. Rodopi, 2011.

Kuhn, Axel et al. "Who gets lost? How digital academic reading impacts equal opportunity in higher education." *New Media & Society*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2022, pp. 1034–1055, https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211072306.

Kuhn, Axel. "Akademisches Lesen – ein unübersichtliches Forschungsfeld." *Akademisches Lesen: Medien, Praktiken, Bibliotheken*, edited by Stefan Alker-Windbichler, Axel Kuhn, Benedikt Lodes, and Günther Stocker, Vienna University Press, 2022, pp. 327–364.

Moura-Koçoğlu, Michaela. *Narrating Indigenous Modernities: Transcultural Dimensions in Contemporary Māori Literature*. Rodopi, 2011.

Rüther, Kerstin et al. "Antipoden? Eine literarische Erkundung Neuseelands", 21 January 2022, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, digitaler Antragstext für das "Eine Uni – Ein Buch"-Programm.

Scherf, Daniel, and Julia Sander. "Wie mindestens 172 'Literarische Gespräche' (Hoch-)Schule verändern (sollten). Literarisches Lesen und Lernen an der Hochschule als literaturdidaktisches Handlungsfeld." *Literarische Texte lesen – Texte literarisch lesen*, edited by Mark-Oliver Carl, Moritz Jörgens, and Tina Schulze, J.B. Metzler, 2024, pp. 391–407, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-662-67816-9_21, accessed 05 April 2025.

Schüller-Zwierlein, André, Anne Mangen, Miha Kovač, and Adriaan van der Weel. "Why higher-level reading is important." *First Monday*, vol. 27, no. 5, 2022, https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v27i5.12770.

Schüller-Zwierlein, André. "Bibliotheken und Demokratie – Ein erneuter Anlauf in gefährlichen Zeiten." *ZfBB*, vol. 70, no. 3, 2023, pp. 132–140, https://doi.org/10.3196/186429502070318.

Whale Rider. Niki Caro, New Zealand Film Commission, 2002.

Zautner, Alana. "Preserving Identity, Empowering Children: Whale Rider, Spirited Away, Frozen." *Global Honors Theses*, vol. 23, 2015, https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/gh_theses/23, accessed 05 April 2025.

Māori Novelist and Indigenous Envoy: Writing to the World

Witi Ihimaera

Abstract *Nga mihi. In this address, given on the 5th of July 2023 at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, I position "The Whale Rider" (1987) as an act of reclamation of Māori and Pacific sovereignty. My sixth book, I traverse the original purākau of Paikea who travelled on a whale from Hawaiki (Raiātea, French Polynesia) to Aotearoa, New Zealand. I then cut cyclically to the geopolitical context of 1986 in New York, USA, where I wrote "The Whale Rider". Te tōrino haere whakamua, whakamuri, I continue the circularity of my narrative by returning to the centre: New Zealand and the Pacific in 2024. I look at the security concerns of the region, the impacts of climate change and the continuing political, economic and cultural instabilities inflicted on the region by the larger, predominating countries, which define the future for everyone in the world of āpōpō – and the resilience required by a younger generation. Finally, I preview my next book, "Metura'a", a sequel to "The Whale Rider", returning to the original origin myth. Tēnā koutou katoa.*

Keywords *Nga mihi (greetings); purākau (origin myth); te tōrino haere whakamua; whakamuri (at the same time that we are going forward; we are returning); āpōpō (tomorrow); tēnā koutou katoa (greetings; again; to all)*

1.

Utaina mai hii! Utaina mai hii!
Utaina na mai nga waka o te motu
Ki runga Tiamana e tau nei!
A hikinuku e! A hiki Rangi e
A hikinuku e! A hiki Rangi e!
Ahaha!

And so, I begin with a canoe-hauling chant, pulling my waka of stories with me from Aotearoa, New Zealand, to Mainz.

I have been writing them for many years, ever since I published my first book, *Pounamu, Pounamu*, a collection of short stories, in 1972. Up until that time, Māori creative literature had been primarily an oral tradition.

I was a young man of 28, my brain was filled to the brim with listening to stories that Māori told of themselves and all I did was transfer them from the tongue to the pen. In doing so, my black marks leapt onto a page that had previously been white. And the following year they leapt again, and I became the first Māori novelist with my book *Tangi* (1973). At that time, New Zealand had been colonised for some 132 years by the British Government, and the relationship with the Māori people was set out in the Treaty of Waitangi, which was signed on 6 February 1840. The Treaty was broken, however, and the mid 19th century was notable for what became known as the Māori Wars, during which Māori tribes fought mainly British settlers. My own ancestors from the Waituhi Valley were among the war's most fierce combatants against Pākehā, and as a consequence, our land was confiscated as punishment. When I was a boy in the 1940s and 1950s, I lived within this colonised setting, having no land or culture. The reason why I turned to writing was that for me and all my kin, land and culture still existed in the memory.

Writing became an act of reclamation.

2.

Taku waiora nei, tupu taku kino nei e?
Aue te mataku e! Kare kare ka matau e
Kare kare ka matau e! Karu karu ka te hi au e
Karu karu ka te hi au e! Karu karu ka te hi au e!
Ka haere ki te ora mou -

I sing you a Cook Island fishing chant now because all my career and all I have ever done has been to go fishing in a huge sea of Pacific oral stories. All my work is propelled by whakapapa, by a genealogy that links Māori to this huge resource of pūrākau, of oceanic myth and history and of narratives that are still present today, a continuum of stories that Māori still live within. My job has always been to make manifest those stories and one of them was the narrative of Paikea, the whale rider.

The Whale Rider was the sixth time the black marks leapt onto the white page, and it was published in 1987. It is set in Whangara, a place that has profound importance for Māori of the East Coast of the North Island because it is where our eponymous ancestor, Paikea *The Whale Rider*, landed.

He was a Māori Ulysses, and the very idea of a man riding a whale from Hawaiki in the region of French Polynesia to New Zealand has all the stuff of an epic in it, it is breathtaking. He was a prince of Polynesia, highborn and firstborn son of Uenuku,

the greatest warrior king of Ra'iātea. But he had a half-brother, Ruatapu, the half-blooded son of all mythology, who was jealous of him. And Ruatapu realised he could never be heir to the kingdom when his father, after styling Paikea's topknot with a comb at the beginning of a great celebration, turned to Ruatapu, who had reached for the same comb, and stopped him.

"No," Uenuku said, "not that comb. That has already been used on the head of your brother."

Slighted, Ruatapu decided to kill not only Paikea, but also all the other legitimate heirs to the throne, so that he, the illegitimate one, could ascend to it and seat himself on it. He put his plan into action on that very day, when a new ceremonial canoe was to be launched and sailed only by all his father's sons. He punched a small hole in the new waka and, when it was far from land and nobody on shore could see his plan, he opened the hole. The canoe began to sink. As his brothers laughed in the shining sea he swam among them, killing them one by one with a sharp club and staining the water with their blood.

Only one more prince to go: Paikea. But at that moment, a giant tattooed whale surfaced, the sea split apart and the waves pushed Paikea away from his brother, who caught hold of one of the whale's pectoral fins, and it pulled him from the scene of the royal assassinations.

Lucky boy. However, the whale was on its migratory odyssey from French Polynesia to Antarctica. And so, instead of taking Paikea back to Ra'iātea, it took him forward to a surprising new destination: New Zealand. After many days and nights, the whale delivered Paikea to his new destiny. In Aotearoa he met Huturangi who became one of his wives. And from their union springs the people of the east coast that I have referred to earlier.

I was working as a New Zealand diplomat in New York in 1986 when I wrote the novel *The Whale Rider*, but that is another story. It was not sufficient for me to just repeat the ancient myth. In my case, my contemporary whale rider was not a young prince called Paikea but a young girl called Kahutia-te-rangi, and she was living in the modern rather than ancient world, where the leadership qualities of women within a patriarchal environment were yet to be recognised. When she rides the whale, she becomes Moby chick. In my novel Paikea, the original prince has, of course, died a long time ago, but the conceit of the story is that the original whale, who is now ten centuries old, still lives on. He arrives in Whangara in the 1980s and beaches himself. The villagers are faced with existential questions: is he real or unreal? Is this event natural or supernatural? What is the ancient whale's purpose in living for so long?

Well, one of the purposes is to ensure Kahutia-te-rangi's succession to tribal leadership. But the other is just as important: to remind the tribe of the kinship between humankind and whale-kind, of tangata with the Mysticeti whale species, and of the urgency that attends climate change as well as the environment. For just as

the Anthropocene Age appears to witness humankind hellbound on our extinction, so does it seem we are hellbent on taking all other animal and plant species with us, including the whales. In the book, the old whale arrives to tell us: don't.

Thus, there are two journeys and two destinies threaded through *The Whale Rider*: the human and the cetacean. And they came about through a whole set of circumstances that surrounded my writing of the book when I arrived in New York. It coincided with a dramatic event, the cloud of nuclear waste making its way down the Atlantic coast following the Chernobyl nuclear disaster on 26 April 1986, and I wrote the book two months later. Another circumstance was my job: I had arrived to safeguard New Zealand's relationship with the United States because of our nuclear-free policy, so a nuclear-free Pacific was very much on my mind, and in fact, New Zealand at the time was negotiating with Pacific nations a Nuclear Territorial Land, Sea and Air Space Free Zone, which was implemented the next year. At the same time, the Antarctic Treaty, of which New Zealand was one of twelve countries, was much under consideration at the United Nations, and, as you know, most of the world's fresh water is still sourced from Antarctica.

Saving cetacean whale species was also on my mind at the time. The International Whaling Commission met constantly during the 1980s to seek agreement for a moratorium on commercial whale hunting, but Iceland, Norway and Japan objected, and Japan still hunts whales for so-called research purposes. There was another threat on the horizon: the Soviet Union had begun harvesting huge amounts of krill in Antarctic waters, thereby affecting the food supplies for migratory species to Antarctica.

The *Te Māori* exhibition of Māori artefacts began in Los Angeles in the early 1980s and toured San Francisco, St Louis, New York, and Chicago, so indigenous sovereignty was also rising in my mind.

> A whale came down the Hudson River.
> My two daughters arrived for vacation.

You could say there was a confluence of factors or maybe my life was hijacked. Ah well, things are always darkest before they become totally black. I grabbed all those inspirations out of the air and, in a state of spontaneous combustion, the novel was written.

3.

Ko Witi Ihimaera tenei, I am Witi Ihimaera, ka nui te honore kua homai ki au.

The Māori people say that before you set forth on a journey, be sure to know your stars. Me matau i whetū i mua i te kokiri o te haere.

I pay my tribute to the whenua and iwi of the Rhineland Palatinate that is your place of departure, and I am so humbled that Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU) chose *The Whale Rider* as the book for the 2023 *One University – One Book* project. I thank Prof. Dr. Stephan Jolie, Vice President for Studies and Teaching, Prof. Dr. Christoph Bläsi for his incredible organisational acumen and for many JGU colleagues who have now become firm friends, including Anke Vogel, Julia Sander, Kerstin Rüther, Birger Petersen, Angela Kölling and Mita Banerjee, whom I met in Toronto, Canada many years ago. My warmest greetings also go to Svenja Völkel and her son Tim, whom I met in Auckland prior to travelling to Germany.

I would like to pay my respects to the rangatira tohunga, your Kaumatua Johannes Gutenberg. Māori took up his letterpress printing technology very quickly during the early years of colonisation in the 19th century as an act of decolonisation: by printing pamphlets, handbills, tracts, posters – you name it – in te reo, the Māori language, on their own printing presses – their notices of land alienations and cultural dispossession so that the iwi Māori would never forget. Indeed, we tell one particular story in New Zealand of two Māori warrior scholars, Wiremu Toetoe Tumohe and Te Hemara Rerehou, who, in the 1850s, made the long sea journey from Aotearoa to Vienna, became literate in the Austrian and German language and familiarised themselves with the printing press by working in the printers of Emperor Franz Joseph. They entranced the locals, and when the Emperor's brother Maximilian offered them a farewell present, they asked for a printing press. Returning with the press, the men used it to print one of the most influential of all Māori newspapers, known as Te Hokioi. The paper's nine issues during 1862–1863 appeared with a grateful thanks to the King of Austria.

Their early newspapers became the Alternative Discourse to the Main Discourse, and the early writers and printers wrote against it. And all that me and my contemporary colleagues in Aotearoa are doing today is only the continuation of this whakapapa, this genealogy.

Na reira e te rangatira tohunga, e te whare wananga mauria mai to ingoa ariki, ki o koutou tupuna, greetings to your ancestors, they are as the stars of heaven. Rātou, koutou, tatou, nga rangatira ma, kui ma, koro ma, iwi ma, greetings. Huri noa ahau ki te hunga ora, the audience tonight.

This year, in 2023, I celebrate my 50th anniversary as a novelist. I have learnt a lot about life, love and the whole universe, and I know I can write much better than

I currently do. I always aim for excellence. I own my role as a Māori writer, a Pacific writer and an indigenous writer. A special mention on my indigenous responsibility: there are estimated to be 476 million indigenous iwi in the world, including Māori, which is about 6 per cent of the global population. There are people such as the Wari in the Amazon rainforest or the Rohingya in Myanmar who are facing genocide. Man's inhumanity to man is one thing, man's inhumanity to indigenous man is another, which must be our special responsibility. They are certainly always on my conscience.

Turning back to the topic, I mentioned earlier that in all my work, I create new myths out of old to give them new currency – as you are all doing in Mainz, rewriting your history out of the social, geographical and historical ur-texts, contexts, pretexts, subtexts, intertexts and textualities of the Rhineland Palatinate. Over the past few days, I have been asking questions about Mainz, mainly, who the real people of this city are and who the thinkers among you are who will ensure that the public record of your history is not overwritten by those who currently oversee your future.

I have been impressed by the qualities of the answers I have been given in scholarly halls and coffee bars, the vigour, the clear concern, the passion and the astute thinking. It all reminds me of what our own younger generation are articulating as we face the future hanging on the horizon. That future has been shaped into new structures by world events, including of course the main driver for us who live in the Pacific: environmental survival.

New Zealand is a party to the COP Convention. We signed it in 1992. The Convention provides a structure for negotiating climate change agreements. We are gearing up to become kaitiaki, humanitarian, with a holistic approach to maintaining the Pacific environment.

There are now 450,000 Pacifica people living in New Zealand, comprising 30 distinct Pacific groups. They now make up 9 per cent of the New Zealand population. And so they are not out there, they are actually inside us, like all your immigrant population – a Pacific diaspora in our case – making more visible through their pain and tears the dilemmas of island nation kinship, generational trauma and loss from the increasing number of catastrophic climate events which have decimated islands and island ecosystems: tidal waves, earthquakes, rising sea levels, coastal erosion, flooding, tsunamis, loss of corals, and global emissions.

We know that we must have a plan for the resettlement of Pacific Islanders in New Zealand as they lose their island homes, and this is being worked on. The crisis is inevitable. We are preparing for climate-induced displacement. At the frontline is the small island nation of Tuvalu, which is predicted to disappear under the waves by 2050. The resettlement of Tuvaluan citizens is being planned for, but what about their physical artefacts of culture – their culture itself? Well, Tuvalu is pivoting online. As their land disappears, they have no choice but to become the world's first

digital nation, with their land, ocean and culture – the most precious assets of their people – being moved to the cloud.

Climate change has become a non-traditional security concern. Every New Zealander is part of the conversation just as they are here in Germany with your Climate Action Programme 2030. New Zealand children are involved through Schools Strike 4 Climate. They know it is important to tell their tale or someone else will – or won't. As your schoolchildren do.

As a nation of thinkers, we are trying to find technological and communication solutions through proactive, critical conversations in geosciences, terrestrial and marine research, or in metaverses, new frontiers in cyberspace for digital communication platforms to meet local, glocal and global needs. Here you are developing a crucial relationship with Biomed, which will offer worldwide solutions in medical diagnostics.

Through the growing relationship between Pākehā and Māori, we are also becoming more aware of the relationship between the seen and unseen worlds. That may very well become the main asset we can offer from our part of the globe as we all try to go back to basic humanitarian concepts, namely to maintain the tapu, mana, mauri, tika, pono, aroha of Ranginui above and Papatūānuku below so as to preserve the holistic space between that in which we live. That really is *The Whale Rider*'s message.

In the meantime, I am glad to see that we still survive, that we are still here as a species and that we can still hold hands together in optimism. Then we will ask the next question: how will we thrive in the survive of the survival?

This morning, a young, and beautiful German student said to me, "I am a Meenzer Maedsche." But what did she mean? Which Mainz was she referring to? I thought about her eagerness to learn and to go out into the world. And then I took a workshop in Kerstin Rüther's writing class and I thought again, how like young thinkers everywhere, all young people have such hopes, how will they survive, what can we offer them as their elders? How can we ensure their strong leadership? Who among them will speak for their generation? They are, after all, the future. After today, I have every confidence in them to rise to all the challenges that await them.

Kia kaha, kia manawanui koutou tamariki. Become your own Paikea. Become your own Kahutiaterangi. Always remember that when Paikea landed in Aotearoa New Zealand, that was not an end. It was just another beginning for the saga of the human odyssey which must go on and on.

Whakarongo ake au ki te tangi a te manu nei.
A te ma tui tui tuituia! Tuia i runga tuia i raro,
Tuia i waho, tuia i roto! Tuia te here tangata
Ka rongo te Ao, ka Rongo te Po,
Tuia i te kawae tangata i heke mai

I Hawaikinui, Hawaiki roa, Hawaiki pamamao,
Ki te hono i wairua ki te Whai Ao ki te Ao Mārama!

Listen to the voices from the past, for they are calling you to unite, to unite in humankind! Unite with the skies above, the earth below and the surrounding sea. Join together all your ancestral lines from the past with all the lines of your genealogy that you possess and twine them fast as you move into the future. You have your own truth, write it. You have your own truth, talk it. You have your own truth, walk it.

E nga rangatira ma, the future is here now. We all have to react faster, learn quicker and go further. As famed futurist Ray Kurzweil has said, our intuition about the future is linear. But the reality of information technology is exponential, and that makes a profound difference. If I take thirty steps linearly, I get to thirty. If I take thirty steps exponentially, I reach a billion.

I have truly been honoured to have been in Mainz at your eminent and leading international Gutenberg University. Here, I have truly found exponential thinkers, talkers and walkers.

Kia hora te marino, kia whakapapa pounamu te moana,
Kia tere te karohirohi i mua i tou huarahi.

May the calm be widespread, may the ocean glisten like greenstone
And may the shimmer of sunlight ever dance across your pathway.

Ka pine a koe au ki te pine o te aroha
Ki te pine e kore nei e waikura e!
Hoki hoki tonu mai te wairua o te tau
Ki te awhi rei nga ki tenei kiri e!

4. A Preview of the Sequel to *The Whale Rider*

Now a special surprise.

I am previewing for you my sequel novel to *The Whale Rider*. It is called *METURA'A*,[1] Methuselah, and it is about the very ancient whale that Kahu rode back out to sea in the original book to symbolically save her tribe and convince her grandfather that, despite being a girl, she could assume leadership.

1 The novel is eventually published with the title *Le Pacte des Baleines* by Au Vent Des Iles in 2025. The extracts previewed here have undergone significant changes for publication.

Metura'a, the new novel, is expected to come out in 2025 or 2026. It is based on the premise that the ancient whale is still alive today. He is over a thousand years old now. He is the living embodiment of the ancient contract from the beginning of Time between the two gods of humankind and the ocean, Tane and Tangaroa, and of our connectedness one species to the other.

At the beginning of the new novel, Metura'a feeds with his whale herd in Antarctica. But he is ailing. Will he be able to make the epic journey back from the Antarctic summer to the warm waters of the Pacific?

Three Māori waka are despatched to the Antarctic to help him. On board one of them is Kahu, the leader of the expedition, who is now a grandmother. She has brought her grandson, Wiremu, with her. Will they be in time? Or will this finally be the year when Metura'a dies?

Two sequences: first, a glimpse of Metura'a

Uia mai koe whakahuatia ake
Ko wai te wharenui e, Ko Te Kani,
Ko wai te tekoteko kei runga, ko Paikea, ko Paikea,
Whakakau Paikea, hii! Whakakau he tipua, hii! Whakakau he taniwha, hii!
Ka u Paikea kei runga ia o Metura'a

And then Metura'a, the pod's ancient leader, appeared.

The ice cracked, moaned, shivered and susurrated with rippling glissandi, a giant organ playing a titanic symphony:

He came to evidence the age when Gods had once communed among the leviathans. When Ta'aroa, Lord of the Sea, had created great creatures, real and unreal. Rumbling out of the eye of Time he was a whale of extraordinary appearance. To see him was to tremble because he was over ten centuries old. No other creature in the world had lived as long. When you were in the presence of Metura'a, you were privy to the extraordinary, the unbelievable, the incredible.

Forty metres long and weighing over 120 tons, Metura'a was also double the length and weight of any other whale living or dead. Already marked out by his immense size as a giant among giants, he was also distinguished by his breathtaking markings. For during the time of early humankind great artists had tattooed him from his nose to his giant caudal flukes. They had inscribed him with moko, emblems of his mana, whorls, chevrons, double and triple twists, spirals and other ancient figurations. What was the purpose? Why, to embody him as Ta'aroa incarnate. This was how humankind thought their god should look like. Otherworldly. Supernatural as well as natural.

Over the years the deep etched markings had gained further dramatic power and charisma by having been thickened by time, the skin gnarled and covered in ancient bruises and discolourations. His left side was slashed with huge wounds from

fights with other bull Mysticeti. His fins were scarred from protecting the herd from killer whales and sharks. And everywhere else were the cuts from the propellers of a thousand whaling ships and the pockmarks from a million harpoons hurled at him. Over the centuries, humankind had tried to hunt him down! He had truly earned his symbols of ari'i status. No other beast had faced such travail from the ravages and assaults of his world.

But he was arthritic now. Moving slower. As the pod's kaumatua he no longer possessed the flexibility to manoeuvre at speed. Half blind, he sometimes needed guidance, a nudge here, a delicate shove there, to keep him on track, Oops, sorry Koro. In his old age he sometimes had to be guided to his food, positioned in the middle of the krill eating field where all he had to do was open his mouth and swallow.

How could such a mammal like Metura'a confound time and still be living? Even he would not be able to tell you. Only, perhaps, to reply that this was what Ta'aroa had commanded. And as the god had commanded, so had he obeyed.

A pi'o i mua i te ari'i.
Bow down to the great chieftain.

The second glimpse: Kahu, the grandmother and her quest. Once Metura'a had helped her. Now, it was the time for her to help him.

Kokiri kokiri kokiri! Hei ha hei ha!
E Tangaroa e, Homai to aroha ki ahau e!
E Tawhirimatea, Homai to aroha ki ahau e!
Ko taku ahau he uri e o Tane ia e!
Help me to find him, Tangaroa, I entreat you,
Tawhirimatea, I entreat you,
Kokiri kokiri kokiri! Hei ha hei ha!

And they were three waka, only days away from their destination. Kahu looked at her grandson, Wiremu, and the girl who had come with them, Mareva. What had she done to bring these two young adolescents on such a perilous journey?

"Well, my eyes are heavy," she said to Wiremu. "Don't stay up too long, a busy day tomorrow."

Really she should keep an eye on him and Mareva but what could they get up to on a small waka like theirs!

Well…a lot…because Wiremu was already planning a move as Kahu left. However, Mareva was occupied in another thought. "Your Grandmother's up to something."

"Like what?" Wiremu asked, moving closer for the kiss.

"When plotting our coordinates tonight she told me not to lay our path on Sigma Octantis which is the pillar star for the south celestial pole, but to aim the fleet to the west of its pointer arm. Oh well, no good trying to second guess the boss. She will have her reasons."

At that moment, the heavens were suddenly illuminated by a shower of streaking, falling stars. And one of them flamed as it fell earthbound.

Thinking this was his chance, Wiremu went in for the kiss.

But Mareva moved away from him. "Wrong, romantic moment," she said. "That was one of the many satellites orbiting the earth. Chinese, Russian, American, who knows! All spying on each other. The sky is filled with as much junk as the ocean. And do you want our first kiss to be associated with rubbish!" She laughed "Try again tomorrow."

And then tomorrow came with the hourglass dolphins that had been escorting the three waka flipping and dancing with excitement.

Wiremu realised why his grandmother had ordered the fleet to sail west of Sigma Octantis. From the very beginning, she had plotted a course that would enable them to intersect with what was known as the humpback highway, the traditional, long-established route for whales returning from Antarctica to Oceania.

Ahead was an amazing sight. The surface of the sea was lumpy with the sliding shapes of hundreds of tohorā: sperm, humpback, southern right, rorqual, beaked, killer and sei – huge, long shapes and curving. The air above the highway drifted with puffs of spray as, first the crowns of heads and the convex, dimpled orifices of blowholes appeared. Then the lengths of the backs curved up and over to the erect, triangular dorsal fins far down the bodies, near the tails.

"Karanga ahau ki a koutou nga Mysticeti," Kahu cried.

She turned to Wiremu and Mareva. "Just imagine what the highway must have looked like in the old days," she said to them. "More birds in the sky, more marine creatures in the sea, more vivacity in the natural world, so much singing and joy. The whales were like other nations, as numerous as human tribes, the birds had their own many iwi. They were tuakana to us, our elders. The whales would help our travelling waka by shepherding them down from Oceania to Aotearoa."

Her words turned haunted and sad.

"Their mana was our power. Their mauri was also our life-giving force. We have abused it and the sea speaks to us of our guilt. The children stolen by overfishing. Poisoned by plastic. There are gouges in the sea's belly from marine dredging. The life-sustaining coral forests are dying because of the warming, acidifying polluted junk filled sea. And the whale's food source, krill, now has another eater: humankind, and he is gluttonous. Nuclear testing has been replaced by nuclear waste dumping. And as for slaughter: two million whales were killed between 1904 and 1986 in the Southern Ocean alone. These are the survivors. They carry on. Hoping. That we will remember."

For a while longer, the three waka stood away, taking in the procession. Then:

"Timata ano," Kahu said. She signalled to Wiremu:

"Lay the prow down the rori tohorā, Grandson," she said. "At the end of it the koroua, Metura'a, is waiting. So too, our destiny."

Kokiri kokiri kokiri hei ha hei ha

I thank you for being my hosts here while I have been in Germany.

I leave to go back to Aotearoa tomorrow. Nā reira, tenei taku poroporoaki:

Whakataka te hau ki te uru, whakataka te hau ki te tonga,
Kia makinakina ki uta, kia mataratara ki tai,
E hii ake ana te atakura, he tio, he huka, he hauhunga,
Tihei mauriora.

The Whale Rider Around the World – Publishers, Editions and Audiences

Anke Vogel

Abstract *Witi Ihimaera's "The Whale Rider" (1987) holds the distinction of being New Zealand's most translated literary work, garnering international recognition, particularly after its 2002 film adaptation. This article explores the book's production, publication, and dissemination, tracing its geographical and temporal reach, as well as its broader cultural influences. The piece begins by examining the novel's creation, noting Ihimaera's quick process, inspired by personal experiences and frustrations with patriarchal Māori structures. The article contextualises the book's success within the broader literary and political movements, including the struggles of Māori writers to gain recognition in a Pākehā-dominated publishing industry. Using Thomas Adams and Nicolas Barker's "New Model for the Study of the Book," the study highlights the collaborative forces of authors, publishers, and distributors in shaping the book's legacy. Furthermore, it delves into the novel's historical and political influences, such as New Zealand's nuclear-free stance and the global whaling moratorium, which align with the book's thematic exploration of environmental and Indigenous rights issues. By examining the book's reception through its numerous translations, adaptations, and popularity, the article illustrates "The Whale Rider"'s significant role in promoting Māori culture and its continuing relevance in global literary and cinematic spheres.*

Keywords *publishing history; film adaptation; translation history; international recognition; political influences in literature; environmentalism and nuclear policy; whaling history*

The journey begins – writing and publishing *The Whale Rider* in 1987

According to the online platform *Preply*, *The Whale Rider* by Witi Ihimarea is the most translated work from New Zealand (Fig. 1; cf. Ellis 2021). Harriet Allan from Penguin New Zealand informed me that the book has sold very well and to many countries[1]

1 *The Whale Rider* was published in Macedonia, Taiwan, Tahiti (French), Spain, Denmark, Italy, Estonia, Thailand, Ukraine, Brazil, Germany, the UK, the US and in a Māori edition (E-Mail from Harriet Allan, 17.04.2023).

over the years. This article provides a rough overview of the publication history of *The Whale Rider*, using some data to trace the book's temporal and geographical distribution and to show intermedial influences.

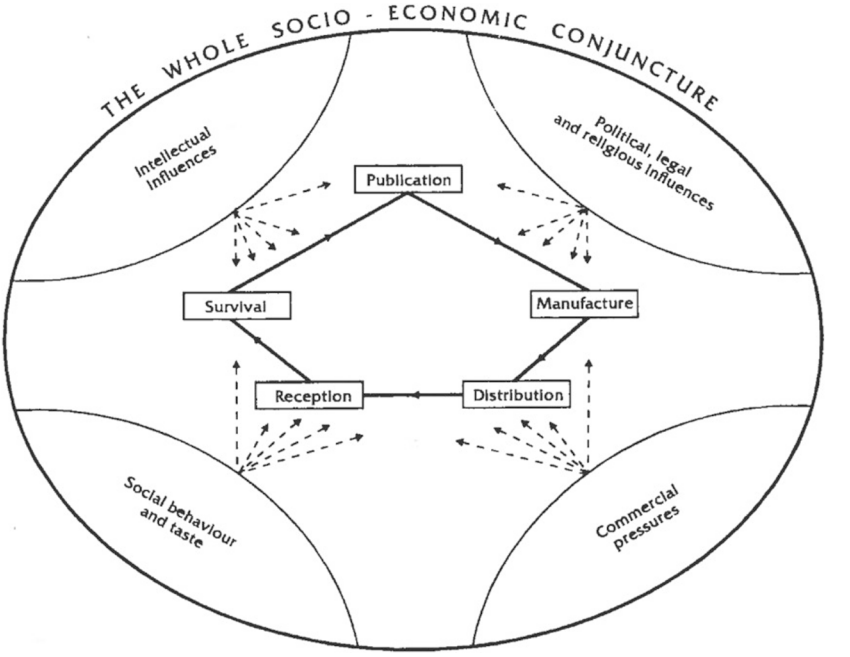
Fig. 1: The most translated books from Oceania

Source: Preply, https://static.preply.com/static/ssr/_next/static/images/oceania-full-97bf3d18f9cfc2a91568d05557368c16.webp?_ga=2.260712325.946040405.1678697330-1517361402.1654185240

First of all, the circumstances of the production of the book published in 1987 are examined. In order to analyse the creation, dissemination and reception of Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* and to place it in a broader context, it is worth taking a

look at the 'New Model for the Study of the Book' developed by Thomas Adams and Nicolas Barker:

Fig. 2: "A New Model for the Study of the Book"



Source: Adams and Barker 1993, 14

As David J. Gary summarises, Adams and Barker look at publishing as the initial decision to multiply a text or image for distribution.

> Four parties are involved: the author, patron, manufacturer, and distributor. They have four concerns: creation (to present the text in a particular form), communication (make it known to others), profit (make a return), and preservation (ensure survival through multiple copies). (Gary 2013)

Regarding the first publication of the short novel, Eckstein explains that Ihimaera wrote nearly 150 pages in just three weeks in 1987 in Cape Cod and New York, where he worked as a diplomat. He was apparently inspired by a whale that had become stranded in the Hudson River, as well as by his anger at the patriarchal structures in his Māori culture. According to Eckstein, *The Whale Rider* is not one of Ihimaera's most literarily sophisticated works, but it has always enjoyed great popularity, es-

pecially among Māori. After the adaptation into a film script and the publication of the film version by Niki Caro (2003), the novel leveraged Ihimaera – who, along with Patricia Grace, was considered the most famous Māori author in New Zealand – to achieve an unexpectedly high level of international fame. To this day, *Whale Rider* is New Zealand's most successful film and has won numerous international awards (Eckstein 2020).

In an interview with New Zealand poet, academic, and illustrator Selina Tusitala Marsh, Witi Ihimaera reflects on his difficulties that were connected with writing and publishing the story of the Māori in New Zealand in comparison with the Pākehā New Zealanders. He explains that there was neither a publishing industry in New Zealand in the 1960s nor the framework conditions to encourage it. The situation differed little from that of other Black or indigenous authors worldwide. From Ihimaera's point of view, it was not surprising that his first book was published by William Heinemann, since Heinemann Educational had been successful with its *African Writers' Series* and was keen to repeat that success. He attributes his ability to publish in New Zealand to international trends, as well as to influences within the literary scene and mentors such as the writers Bill Pearson and Noel Hilliard. He particularly emphasises the writer and linguist Ulli Beier, who was instrumental in promoting and developing literature, poetry and theatre, both in Nigeria and later in Papua New Guinea. Subsequently, the writer and scholar Albert Wendt, with his series of anthologies, and Ihimaera himself, with his Te Ao Marama series, have supported the continuation of Pacific literatures (Marsh 2010, 286–287):

> From the start getting published in New Zealand has been a huge dilemma. I think that our success has been in spite of New Zealand not because of it. Sometimes, frankly, I really wish that all industries supporting New Zealand culture would understand the difficulties involved for Maori artists and writers to get through the dominant system, a system which traditionally supports Pakeha literature but not Maori literature. This was the reason why, in 1974, as a member of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, I established the committee originally known as the Maori and South Pacific Arts Council (MASPAC) which eventually became Te Waka Toi and the Council for Pacific Arts. It was to enable Maori and Pacific writers and artists the opportunity of their own gateway without the necessity to compete on grounds which privileged Pakeha arts activity, and where we invariably lost. (Ihimaera in: Marsh 2010, 286–287)

The *African Writers' Series*, Ihimaera mentioned, is an English-language book series of works by African writers which was founded in 1962, spearheaded by Alan Hill and West Africa specialist Van Milne (Maja-Pearce 1992). The series was initially published by Heinemann Education Books, an offshoot of the British Heinemann Group, and was later acquired by Pearson. The series became an important forum

for writers in several African countries that had recently gained independence. The first editor of the series was Nigerian author Chinua Achebe (1930–2013), who would become one of Africa's most famous writers. Achebe served as its editor until 1972. In the year of the 30th anniversary, Heinemann was awarded the 1992 "The World Aware Williamson Tea Award for Social Progress". Inspired by the *African Writers' Series*, Leon Comber launched the Writing in Asia Series in 1966 from Singapore (Chan/Harris 1991). In 1970, the Caribbean Writers Series – modelled on the *African Writers' Series* – was launched by James Currey and others at Heinemann Education Books to republish work by major Caribbean writers (Heinemann Caribbean Writers Series 2010). So, in a way, these series prepared the ground for the publication of Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*. The importance of this is illustrated by a report by the German international broadcaster Deutsche Welle on the occasion of New Zealand's appearance as guest of honour at Frankfurt Book Fair 2012, which states:

> Only about five to ten percent of New Zealanders today still speak fluent Te Māori, the language of the indigenous population. Their storytelling tradition was an oral one; their stories and myths were passed down mainly by Christian missionaries. Only in the last 20 years or so have they been recorded in writing. (Sommer 2012)

Cultural journalist Andreas Platthaus also emphasised that the Māori language was not initially written down, and that is why there are fundamentally few books in this language. He estimated the number of people able to read Māori at around 200,000. Since the rich Māori narrative culture is not only expressed orally, but also through carving, textile art, tattooing, dance and painting, it was hardly surprising that the guest country appearance was designed to be transmedial and, in addition to workshops and exhibitions, also focused strongly on films that could spark interest in authors, Platthaus states (Platthaus 2012). On the occasion of New Zealand's appearance as guest of honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2012, 68 authors and around 100 artists were scheduled to travel to Frankfurt, including names such as Anthony McCarten, Paul Cleave, Alan Duff, Witi Ihimaera and Paddy Richardson. International newcomers such as Emily Perkins, Paula Morris, Kate de Goldi and Greg McGee, some of whose works were published in German for the first time this year, were also present. More than 40 publishers presented themselves at the collective stand of the New Zealand Publishers Association. A central component of the Frankfurt Guest of Honour appearance was a translation funding programme to make New Zealand literature accessible to a broad international reading public. It was set up by the Publishers Association of New Zealand (PANZ) and provided financial and organisational support to publishers from around the world who wanted to translate New Zealand authors into their respective national languages. Up to 50 per cent of the translation costs for individual titles were covered, up to a maximum of NZ$5,000 (around €3,000) (buchreport 2012). While an average of 10 New

Zealand titles were translated into German in other years, according to Kevin Chapman, President of the New Zealand Publishers Association PANZ, 83 translations had already been made by July 2012 (Börsenblatt 2015). Chapman saw the Frankfurt Book Fair as an opportunity to present New Zealand, a multicultural country of 4.4 million people with roots in Māori, in Europe and in Asia, as a centre of culture. Until then, the Germans had mainly perceived the island state as a tourist destination. Every year, around 60,000 to 70,000 Germans came to New Zealand, including many young people (Göpfert 2019).

Framework for the publication of *The Whale Rider*

The scope of this article does not allow to address all of the frameworks listed in Adams and Barker's model for the book *The Whale Rider*, but some intellectual and political influences will be briefly elaborated.

In 1951, the three countries Australia, the USA and New Zealand allied to form the ANZUS security pact in order to be able to jointly prevent future conflicts in view of the recently passed Second World War. Due to differences over New Zealand's anti-nuclear policy, the pact was suspended by the U.S. in a largely symbolic act in 1984. The "US Congress retaliated with the Broomfield Act, downgrading New Zealand's status from ally to friend. Labour Prime Minister David Lange responded that if the cost of New Zealand's nuclear-free status was the end of the ANZUS security alliance, this was a 'price we are prepared to pay'." (New Zealand goes nuclear-free). In connection with opposition to the French nuclear weapons programme in French Polynesia, the Greenpeace flagship Rainbow Warrior was sunk by French secret agents in Auckland Harbour in 1985. Two years later, New Zealand declared itself a nuclear-free zone. Alice Te Punga elaborates on the connection with Ihimaera's novel as follows.

> Although the narrative of *The Whale Rider* is deeply rooted in the oral traditions and territory of real tribal groups and a real town on the East Coast of Aotearoa, Ihimaera pushes the scope of the story beyond Whāngārā to Australia, Papua New Guinea, nuclear testing sites in the French Pacific, and, ultimately, Hawaiki. This locates very specific Māori-centric events and struggles within a wider regional framework: Pacific connections are reaffirmed when Māori recognize their links with other Pacific people through shared cultural concepts and similar colonial histories. The whale story that parallels the human story in the novel makes the issue of nuclear testing in the Pacific visible and prompts an orientation of political energy towards Pacific (rather than metropolitan) politics. (Somerville 2012, 63)

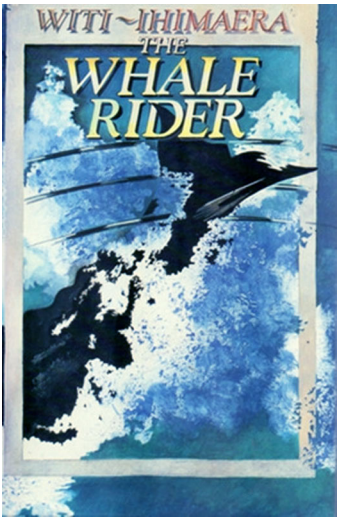
A year before the novel was published, the nuclear accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant had brought the dangers that radioactivity can pose to the attention of the world.

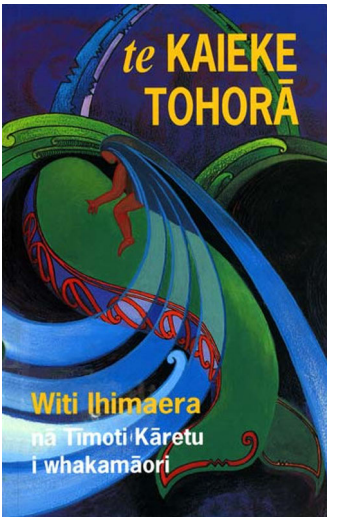
The whaling moratorium that came into effect in 1982 can be seen as another element of the contemporary historical background. In the 1930s, the populations of numerous whale species had declined to such an extent that the major whaling nations joined forces to ensure the sustainable management of the animals. On December 2, 1946, 42 nations signed the "International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling." The International Whaling Commission was established, and catch quotas were set, but hardly anyone adhered to them. Michael Dähne, curator for marine mammals at the German Oceanographic Museum in Stralsund, points out that various whale species, in particular large whales but also bowhead whales, were still hunted intensively, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. Whaling then gradually switched to the faster whale species, which were more difficult to hunt. In the 20th century alone, three million large whales fell victim to hunting. In the 1960s and 70s, calls for a complete ban on whaling grew louder. In addition, most whale products have now been replaced by plastics and fats based on petroleum or plants. In 1982, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) finally decided to ban commercial whaling and prepared a moratorium, but it did not come into effect until 1986. That was the first time that an industry, in this case commercial whaling, was actually stopped, which was a real milestone in international environmental legislation (Seynsche 2021). Similar to radioactivity, discussions about whale conservation were virulent at the time the novel *The Whale Rider* was published. And today, nuclear weapons and the protection of the oceans are still, or even increasingly, topics on society's agenda, which gives the novel an astonishing topicality even almost 40 years after it was first published.

Reception of *The Whale Rider*

The aspects of manufacturing and distribution addressed in Adams' and Barker's model will be skipped in this article, although they too provide ample material for more intensive analysis. But let us take a closer look at the reception of *The Whale Rider* – not on the basis of reviews or published commentaries, but based on the novel's popularity, measured by the number of new editions, adaptations and translations. From the union catalog WorldCat (2024), which lists the collections of tens of thousands of institutions (mostly libraries) in many countries, the following languages into which the novel has been translated can be identified, most with multiple editions: English (490), German (49), French (21), Māori (10), Italian (9), Spanish (8), Chinese (6), Korean (5), Slovenian (5), Japanese (4), Thai (3), Dutch (2), Finnish (2), Hungarian (2), Polish (2), Czech (1).

Fig. 3 and 4: First editions of "The Whale Rider" by Heinemann 1987 (left) and "Te Kaieke Tohorā" by Reed publishing 1995 (right)





Source: Heinemann – AbeBooks, Fair use, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=70718460 (left); Reed publishing, https://teara.govt.nz/en/ephemera/27625/te-kaieke-tohora (right)

After the novel was first published in English by the Heinemann publishing house in 1987 (Fig. 3), the New Zealand publisher Reed published a translation into Māori in 1995 under the title *Te Kaieke Tohorā* (Fig. 4). Sam Timoti Karetu served as a translator. No further translations were made until 2002, and it was not until the film adaptation and its great international success that the book finally achieved a worldwide breakthrough. Witi Ihimaera's novel was adapted into a film in 2002 as part of a New Zealand-German co-production. The production involved: South Pacific Pictures, the German ApolloMedia Film Management GmbH, Pandora Film, New Zealand Film Production Fund, New Zealand Film Commission, NZ On Air and the Film Foundation North Rhine-Westphalia from Germany. For New Zealander Niki Caro, born in 1967, *The Whale Rider* was only the second feature film that she directed, and it caused a sensation in New Zealand and beyond in the 2002 movie season. The production, which won a total of 33 festival and critics' awards and has been nominated for 68. At a cost of $3.5 million, it was also one of the country's most expensive productions. It ran in theatres for 26 weeks and grossed US$41 million worldwide. It advanced not only to become the most successful New Zealand film of all time, but also a worldwide audience favourite (Box Office Mojo 2024). Alistair Fox points out the great success both nationally and internationally:

> The most important New Zealand movie of 2003, Niki Caro's Whale Rider, first shown at the Toronto Film Festival in September 2002, where it was voted People's Choice, and released elsewhere the following year, was one of the most successful fiction films made in this country, winning twentynine international awards. Apart from being highly successful in New Zealand, with ticket sales of 752,941, making it the fourth most popular locally made movie to date, even more significantly, it was a huge hit internationally, with foreign box office earnings of $20,662,277. In addition, it was the first feature-length film to be adapted from a novel by Witi Ihimaera, the most prominent Māori writer of fiction, inaugurating several other adaptations based on his work […]. (Fox 2018, 221)

Subsequently, the book was repeatedly linked to the film through the cover design, for example, in a French edition: *Paï*. Paris: Thélès 2003, a Dutch edition: *Het walvismeisje: een Maori-vertelling*. Rijswijk: Elmar 2003, a Finnish edition: *Valasratsastaja*. Helsinki: Like 2003, a Spanish edition: *La leyenda de las ballenas*. Barcelona: Juventud 2004, a Slovenian edition: *Legenda o jezdecu kitov*. Domžalah: Miš 2004 and a Hungarian edition: *A bálnalovas*. Pécs: Alexandra 2004. The first German edition, *Whalerider: die magische Geschichte vom Mädchen, das den Wal ritt* (translated: *Whalerider: the magical story of the girl who rode the whale*), was published in 2003 by Rowohlt Verlag (Reinbek) in paperback. However, there are not only a number of translations that have been driven by the international success of the film adaptation, but also a number of other adaptations that suggest a wide reception of Ihimaera's novel. In 2004, *The Whale Rider* was published by Bolinda Audio Books, based in Tullamarine, Australia. The approximately 4.5-hour audiobook was narrated by the New Zealand-Australian actor Jay Laga'aia. In Germany, the novel was adapted as a radio play in 2005 by the public broadcasting station WDR in collaboration with the publisher Der Audio Verlag. Among the speakers were the well-known actress Monica Bleibtreu and the actor Andreas Pietschmann. A 50-minute stage version of the novel *The Whale Rider* from 2014 was performed again as children's theatre in Auckland from September to November 2022 by the Tim Bray Theatre Company. It shows that the text can be read both as children's literature and as literature for adults (*The Whale Rider – Live on Stage*).

In 2005, the New Zealand publishing house Reed in Auckland published an adaptation of *The Whale Rider* as a picture book, illustrated by Bruce Potter. The New Zealand Picture Book Collection by the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato suggests a number of activities for using this picture book in the classroom. These include both borrowed Māori words and the Māori myth of Paikea (cf. *The Whale Rider* Activities). In 2006, Storylines Children's Literature Charitable Trust put *The Whale Rider* on its list of notable books. The Storylines Trust

> promotes awareness of the importance of reading and books for all children and young adults; works to ensure children and young adults in New Zealand have access to high quality literature; and supports the writers and illustrators of literature for children and young adults in New Zealand. [It aims] to inspire children, young adults and their whanau to enjoy the magic of books and reading, especially reading books created for them by New Zealand writers and illustrators. (Storylines Children's Literature Charitable Trust of New Zealand)

In Germany, Ihimaera's novel has also found its way into the school textbook market, albeit with a slightly different objective, namely, to aid the acquisition of English as a foreign language. In 2006, the German textbook publisher Cornelsen published an annotated version of *The Whale Rider* in its Senior English Library. A year later, a teacher's manual was also published (Drebenstedt and Hüllmann-Passeick 2007).

A large print edition (16-point font) was published by ReadWhatYouWant, an Australian-based publishing company that produces accessible formats for people who have difficulty reading or cannot read standard print editions, to make it easier for people with visual impairments to read in 2012.

In 2022, *The Whale Rider* was selected for the "The Big Jubilee Read list" as part of the "The Big Jubilee Read" campaign, which was dedicated to promoting reading for pleasure and celebrating the platinum jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. A list of 70 books by Commonwealth authors, 10 from each decade of Elizabeth II's reign, was selected by a panel of experts and announced by the BBC and the Reading Agency on 18 April 2022. Organisers said the novels, anthologies, short stories and poems were "shared stories that define our social and cultural heritage" (Sherwood 2022).

Survival – the story does not end

To follow Adams and Barker's model to the last point, let us briefly address the book's survival. As explained before, numerous editions of the book have been produced over time in different languages and with different target audiences. The text has been adapted several times and has frequently won awards. Witi Ihimaera, a New Zealand writer, is often regarded as the most important living Māori author. He taught as a professor and Distinguished Creative Fellow in Māori literature at the University of Auckland. Today, Ihimaera's books can be found in numerous libraries worldwide and are also used in some classrooms. To this day, *The Whale Rider* continues to be reprinted and also celebrated, such as in the university-wide Big Read project at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz in 2023.

References

Börsenblatt. "Gastland Neuseeland zeigt kulturelle Vielfalt." July 2015, https://www.boersenblatt.net/archiv/548699.html, accessed 11 April 2025.

Box Office Mojo. "Whale Rider." 2024, https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/rl2155382273/, accessed 11 April 2025.

buchreport. "Frankfurter Buchmesse präsentiert neuseeländische Autoren in Leipzig." *buchreport.de*, March 2012, https://www.buchreport.de/news/frankfurter-buchmesse-praesentiert-neuseelaendische-autoren-in-leipzig/, accessed 11 April 2025.

Chan, Mimi, and Roy Harris, editors. *Asian Voices in English*. Hong Kong University Press, 1991, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jc064, accessed 11 April 2025.

Drebenstedt, Ingrid, and Maria Hüllmann-Passeick. *The Whale Rider. Teacher's manual*. Cornelsen, 2007.

Eckstein, Lars. "Ihimaera, Witi: The Whale Rider." *Kindlers Literatur Lexikon (KLL)*, edited by Heinz Ludwig Arnold, J.B. Metzler, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-05728-0_8797-1.

Ellis, Danika. "The Most Translated Books From Every Country in the World." *bookriot.com*, August 2021, https://bookriot.com/most-translated-books/, accessed 11 April 2025.

Fox, Alistair. *Coming-of-Age Cinema in New Zealand. Genre, Gender and Adaptation in a National Cinema*. Edinburgh University Press, 2018.

Gary, David J. "Summary of Adams and Barker, 'A New Model for the Study of the Book'." *Function Follows Forme. Musings on American History, Book History and Archive*, February 2013, https://davidjgary.wordpress.com/2013/02/05/summary-of-adams-and-barker-a-new-model-for-the-study-of-the-book/, accessed 11 April 2025.

Göpfert, Claus-Jürgen. "Neuseeland auf der Buchmesse." *fr.de*, January 2019, https://www.fr.de/kultur/literatur/neuseeland-buchmesse-11379801.html, accessed 11 April 2025.

"Heinemann Caribbean Writers Series." *The Oxford Companion to the Book*, edited by Michael F. Suarez, and H. R. Woudhuysen, Oxford University Press, 2010, https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780198606536.001.0001/acref-9780198606536-e-2228, accessed 28 April 2025.

Ihimaera, Witi. *The Whale Rider*. Cornelsen senior English library. Cornelsen, 2006.

Ihimaera, Witi. *The Whale Rider. Picturebook*. Illustrations by Bruce Potter, Reed New Zealand, 2005.

Maja-Pearce, Adewale. "In Pursuit of Excellence: Thirty Years of the Heinemann African Writers' Series." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 23, no. 4, 1992, pp. 125–132, http://www.jstor.com/stable/3820348, accessed 11 April 2025.

Marsh, Selina Tusitala. "Interview with Witi Ihimaera." *Words Chosen Carefully*, edited by Siobhan Harvey, Cape Catley Ltd, 2010, pp. 286–287.

"New Zealand goes nuclear-free." *New Zealand History*, edited by Manatū Taonga – Ministry for Culture and Heritage, June 1987, https://nzhistory.govt.nz/new-zealand-becomes-nuclear-free, accessed 11 April 2025.

Platthaus, Andreas. "Wen jucken denn noch Bücher?" *faz.net*, June 2012, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buchmessengast-neuseeland-wen-jucken-denn-noch-buecher-11790280.html, accessed 11 April 2025.

Seynsche, Monika. "Walfang-Moratorium vor 70 Jahren. Meilenstein der internationalen Umweltgesetzgebung." *Deutschlandfunk Kalenderblatt*, December 2021, https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/moratorium-walfang-100.html, accessed 11 April 2025.

Sherwood, Harriet. "The God of Small Things to Shuggie Bain: the Queen's jubilee book list." *The Guardian*, April 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/apr/18/the-god-of-small-things-to-shuggie-bain-the-queens-jubilee-book-list, accessed 11 April 2025.

Somerville, Alice Te Punga. *Once Were Pacific. Māori Connections to Oceania*. University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

"Storylines Children's Literature Charitable Trust of New Zealand. About us." https://www.storylines.org.nz/about/, accessed 11 April 2025.

"The Whale Rider Activities." *New Zealand Picture Book Collection*, edited by by the Faculty of Education, University of Waikato, https://www.picturebooks.co.nz/the-whale-rider/activities.html, accessed 11 April 2025.

"The Whale Rider – Live on Stage." *Hubsonville Hub*, August 2022, https://hail.to/hobsonville-school/publication/yiYuqFm/article/ChvA1y6, accessed 11 April 2025.

Why Books Travel: Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* and the Internationalisation of the Book Market

Christoph Bläsi

Abstract *The article describes which institutions pursue which goals to ensure that contents of books 'travel' from one language area to another and takes "The Whale Rider" (1987) by Witi Ihimaera as the point of departure. In addition, the journey of this literary work from New Zealand to Germany is taken as a motive to characterise the very different book markets of Germany and New Zealand comparatively and to describe where and how they get in contact. Both is embedded in a specific, Book and Publishing Studies view of the internationalisation of the book market that is based on the interests of the agents.*

Keywords *book market; internationalisation; publishing; licensing*

Introduction

The Whale Rider (1987) is a truly international book, or rather, when viewed as the result of the actions of various agents, an internationalised book. This article, based on a lecture given as part of the lecture series "One University – One Book: *The Whale Rider*. An Exploration of New Zealand with Witi Ihimaera's Novel" (summer semester 2023 at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz), centers following questions as a starting point: what interests and processes are involved in creating the conditions that allow a book to be published and read abroad? In other words, how does a book written in English in New Zealand come to be available as a German-language book in Germany? The contingent path that *The Whale Rider* took from Witi Ihimaera's manuscript to the hands of German readers – following the process template I am about to outline – is described in Anke Vogel's contribution in this volume.

The core process of 'travelling' books, which in short leads from authors via publishers in the markets of origin, with the important contribution of translators via publishers in target markets, and further via book wholesalers and retailers (which are not explicitly discussed here) to readers in the target markets is surrounded by

other agents, referred to in economics as indirect market participants. These contribute in the case of books often significantly to the distribution (and reception) of a text or a book, respectively. Specifically, they can play an important role for the fundamental decision to engage in the internationalisation of a text: the reaction of readers and literary critics in the market of origin can influence whether and how a publisher will start to actively present this text for licensing to other markets. These indirect participants of the literary market are also not discussed here.

The question addressed in this article is a specific Book and Publishing Studies one, in that it is not, as e.g. in typical literary studies discourses, related to what the text conveys as a book, what spaces of meaning it opens up, but rather asks how, by what means, with the help of which agents, etc. a text – made tangible and marketable as a book – is and can be made accessible, specifically across borders. This question is worth following up given that the text at the centre of this article is available in Germany in a German edition, even though it was originally published in English in distant New Zealand. Attention is paid here not so much to the processes and agents that in general make a text as a book 'happen', but rather to those that specifically contribute to this happening across borders, cultures and language areas. This constitutes a particularly visible part of the internationalisation of the book market. Towards the end of the article, I will briefly address the interesting aspect that these mediating steps, with all their underlying interests, but of course also coincidences, contribute to an understanding of the text as text; it is this thought, following which Book and Publishing Studies (understood as media studies of the book) can become productive, even indispensable, for the understanding of literature.

I begin the article by outlining the framework within which transnational transactions in the book industry can be systematically described and analysed – and which interest guide the agents of the internationalisation of the book market in general and the agents of the internationalisation, as it were, of *The Whale Rider* in particular. Subsequently, I attempt to compare the German and New Zealand book markets using a few suitable dimensions of analysis, and to identify the systematic points of contact of these two book markets.

The international book market or international book markets as a frame of reference for the 'journey' of books ("Why Books Travel")

The objective to make the book market describable and analysable from an international perspective is pursued here following two complementary approaches. The first approach – which could be called the plural approach: international book markets – examines different book markets from a global perspective, focusing on their specific differences and similarities. Here, we 'zoom out' from the German book market (as our obvious point of reference) and 'zoom in' on other book mar-

kets, e.g. the one of New Zealand. The other approach – the singular approach: the international book market – focuses on the fact that different national book markets interact on an international book market (singular) in the sense of manifesting demonstrable, significant connections of various kinds. As mentioned, the case of translated licensed editions of books is the most obvious among these connections. This second approach also takes into consideration convergences between different book markets, e.g. in the form of converging or even internationally standardised technical or administrative solutions (like the International Standard Book Number ISBN), as well as of overarching legal frameworks such as the ones for the protection of copyright across borders. This one international book market – which in a certain sense, of course, is a construct – is typically not noticed consciously by readers beyond the obvious fact that, if they think about it, someone must have made it possible for them to buy and read a book containing a text that was originally written in another language. In the business-to-business part of the book world, however, this one international book market is an extremely vibrant cultural and economic reality, manifesting itself overtly for example in the form of the (international) Frankfurt Book Fair or international publishing conglomerates such as Penguin Random House.

A number of commonly used key figures is employed to make important dimensions comparable and help to map the differences and similarities between book markets (we will start by taking the perspective of international book markets in the plural and focus on differences and similarities). Most of these key figures are typically normalised across countries according to certain parameters – often the number of inhabitants – because without such normalisation, a comparison between Germany and New Zealand, for example in terms of the number of people employed in the book industry, is not very meaningful. Among these key figures are the number of new book publications per year or the number of bookshops, publishers and libraries, but also — if available — corresponding data on the (book) purchasing and reading habits of the population. Moreover, the respective book policy measures in force, such as fixed book prices, reduced tax rates or direct support measures are among the dimensions used for comparisons.

There are various forms in which this one international book market manifests itself as a comprehensive, integrated sphere of activity, from the licensing of titles in other language areas to the outsourcing / offshoring of production activities to the Global South. I will develop them based on the motivations of the agents involved, insofar as these can be reconstructed methodically[1]. When book markets interact

1 Michael Bhaskar has convincingly illuminated the wider field of motivations for publishing books (independently of the specific aspect of internationalisation, however) with his concept of models; it complements the concepts of filtering, framing, and amplification briefly outlined below, but cannot be discussed further here.

with each other in whichever way (we are now taking the perspective of the international book market in the singular, focusing on connections and convergences) it should be possible to identify (typically: institutional, i.e., not individual!) driving forces that trigger and drive acts of internationalisation by the agents involved; it can be assumed that these forces are closely linked to their underlying interests.

Let's look at international, supranational organisations first. UNESCO, for example, commits the signatory states of the relevant declaration to promoting the international exchange of books (initially primarily just by not levying customs duties) because the free exchange of ideas, knowledge and self-development is seen as of great importance for the advancement of the intellectual process, intercultural understanding and ultimately the preservation of world peace (driving forces / interests). It has to be added that books were considered the medium through which this exchange primarily takes place (cf. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 1950). The EU emphasises in a resolution the essential role of books as "an invaluable source of knowledge, education, culture, information, and entertainment" and as "a fundamental means of preserving and disseminating the values, cultural and linguistic diversity, and cultural heritage of the EU" (European Parliament 2023). There is also reference to the understanding between nations, integration, inclusion, and deradicalisation, as well as to social and economic effects in this document.

Not a few national governments are also explicitly pursuing the internationalisation of the book market, albeit for very different reasons, as the comparison between New Zealand and Germany will make clear. From the perspective of the German Foreign Office, for example, the focus is on the understanding across language boundaries (see Auswärtiges Amt 2020), in a more nuanced manner also education, conflict prevention, freedom of publication and the preservation of the cultural heritage are mentioned. The Goethe Institute, an instrument of Germany's foreign cultural policy with a core focus on books and literature, refers to "cultural exchange, education, and social discourse" as well as the dissemination of "information worldwide about the cultural and social diversity of Germany […]" (Goethe Institut, n.d.). New Zealand's Ministry for Culture and Heritage (Māori: Manatū Taonga), on the other hand, emphasises the impact of a thriving culture on the well-being of (presumably primarily) New Zealand people and stresses: "Critical to that is the wellbeing benefits that culture provides, the connections people build with each other through cultural activities, and the clear economic benefit in the form of meaningful work." (Manatū Taonga 2023). The ministry also talks about "presenting a distinctive profile as a creative and diverse society with a unique contemporary culture" (ibid.). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade also cites "better job opportunities and incomes from trade, investment and other international connections" and the opportunity for New Zealanders "to live, do business, travel and communicate more safely at home and offshore" (New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.) as two of the

four top-level goals of foreign policy. This sounds noticeably less multilateral and more oriented towards immediate national interests than the corresponding German (and also EU) statements. Some of the world's most important and largest book markets have developed in free market economies (e.g., the US, UK and Germany); a political will to internationalise the book market (see above) is not able to achieve much on its own in such markets, because business decisions in these societies are made in companies, by entrepreneurs and executives, and government agencies are active in book production themselves at most to a minimal extent. Book companies must therefore have internal motivations to internationalise their business and participate in the international book market.

Only some of these corporate motivations are made explicit by the companies (for reasons of competition), others have to be extracted with methods of empirical social research. These motivations can be described very well using concepts from strategic management; strategic management is both a field of entrepreneurial activity as well as a subdiscipline of economics. According to these concepts, companies want to gain a competitive advantage over their competitors by, for example, purchasing supplies at lower prices and / or in better quality (including from abroad / other markets) or by selling their products at higher prices and / or to more customers (including abroad or in other markets) (Barney and Hesterly 2011, 334–336 [lower prices], 336–339 [better quality], 328–333 [new customers]). Internationalisation can therefore help companies achieve strategic goals such as growth or higher returns which are obvious top-level interests for companies. With regard to the aforementioned motivation to procure supplies, including services more cheaply or in better quality, it is particularly important to mention offshoring, which refers to procurement at conditions that are systematically more favorable for companies in countries with considerably different framework conditions (these can include lower wages as well as lower environmental standards, but also a particularly skilled workforce). Quite a few publishers use this approach for production tasks, e.g. for copy editing, typesetting, printing, binding, and, if necessary, packaging, i.e., the manual assembly of various components, such as in children's books with moving parts.

Based on this, the purchase of a license can be analysed as the purchase of intellectual property (manuscript, as a kind of supplier good) on better terms than would be possible on the domestic market, i.e., cheaper or of higher quality. In the case of book titles, a typical example would be a title considered to have a unique selling proposition or a degree of originality not available on the domestic market at the time. Selling a license to a foreign country – i.e., active international licensing – can be seen as a way to reach more customers than would be possible for the title and the intellectual property in the domestic market. Thus, both serve the purpose of the respective companies to grow and / or to increase their returns.

In addition to offshoring and licensing, (international) publishing conglomerates should not be forgotten as an obvious manifestation of the internationalisation of the book market. These typically come into existence through cross-border takeovers or mergers; such larger structures allow economies of scale to be exploited, not only to make back-end processes such as ICT, human resources management and even physical production (central printing and binding facilities for lower unit costs, etc.) more economical, but also – if this is beneficial to the specific business – in the form of the international management of brands.

Finally, international book fairs and international associations in the book industry are important points of contact between different book markets. Not only are fairs marketplaces where, for example, a large part of the license negotiations takes place, they also serve to represent common interests vis-à-vis supranational institutions (such as the EU). Most importantly, they serve as communication forums and are often the starting point for other types of cross-border cooperation, enabling networking and benchmarking – understood here as the sharing of best practices, i.e., effective solutions developed by one publisher that can be transferred to others across countries.

Coming back to our focus of licencing relations: the motivations / driving forces / interests attributed to cultural and political institutions and to publishing companies in the previous can help to explain why books generally are internationalised: ultimately as part of targeted business activities, possibly additionally incentivised by the supported of supranational or national cultural or political institutions. They do not explain, however, which book 'individuals' actually get selected and become the objects of licensing activities – it can be assumed that there is competition for corresponding attention, fought out by authors and responsible editors.

However, the analysis of such individual selection decisions lies beyond of what politics, political science, management and economics can reliably contribute to. It must be able to deal with aesthetic-epistemic value judgments as implicitly (and on social media also explicitly) made by book consumers and explicitly made by literary critics; the latter are usually trained in elaborate methods of hermeneutics and thus might trigger a broader and deeper discourse. Consolidated views of these value judgments, in the form of considerate individual assessments by the responsible employees involved and possibly reviewers in institutions and publishing houses are then important bases for the decision-makers in national, state-affiliated or supranational institutions, as well as by editors and other decision makers of publishing houses.

In other words and applied to the specific case of *The Whale Rider*: the above-described and often intertwined processes at publishing houses (to my knowledge not so much in cultural and political institutions) were set in motion because the assessment that this work deserves distribution beyond New Zealand and the English-speaking world has apparently prevailed in the discourse of relevant circles in

New Zealand. Tracing this discourse for a specific case, particularly *The Whale Rider*, would be a highly interesting project in its own right, with necessarily a historical-empirical focus. Economics and behavioural economics could potentially make methodological contributions to this, although hermeneutically oriented disciplines such as comparative literature would certainly have to take the lead here.

The book markets of New Zealand and Germany: differences, similarities and points of contact

The first question that arises in this context is what differences and similarities the two book markets of Germany and New Zealand actually show according to available data.

Looking at figures at the highest level of aggregation, it can be said that New Zealand has an annual book sales volume of USD 111.7 million, while Germany's is USD 9,945 million ("The Global Publishing Industry 2022" 2023, 8). According to Norrick-Rühl – using slightly older figures – this made New Zealand the ninth-largest English-speaking book market and the thirty-fourth-largest overall in the world at the end of the 2010s (Norrick-Rühl 2019, 62f.). Set into relation to the size of the population, book sales in New Zealand amount to just over USD 2 million per 100,000 inhabitants, while in Germany they exceed USD 11 million. New Zealand also has just over 50 new publications per 100,000 inhabitants and per year (Publishers Association of New Zealand 2022, 12) – compared to around 80 in Germany (Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels 2022, 81). Furthermore, only around 10 people per 100,000 inhabitants are employed in the book industry (Publishers Association of New Zealand 2022, 11), compared to around 37 in Germany (Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels 2024, 126); however, the specific criteria used to define employment in the book industry are not transparently disclosed in either case, which limits the comparability and overall significance of these figures. In terms of book policies, New Zealand has neither fixed book prices (Rønning and Slaatta 2020, 38–39) nor a reduced VAT rate for books (Rønning and Slaatta 2020, 42–44) – both of which are the case in Germany, where, in accordance with an EU directive, even e-books have been subject to fixed book prices since September 2016. It is interesting and worth further analysis that in New Zealand in 2021 approximately 12% of all new book publications were schoolbooks or educational titles (Publishers Association of New Zealand 2022, 9) and only 10% fiction titles, while in Germany the figures for 2021 were 5.6% (textbooks) and 21% (fiction titles) (Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels 2022, 83–85). The share of sales generated through physical bookstores in New Zealand is still as high as 64.2%, while online stores account for 7.7% (Publishers Association of New Zealand 2022, 8) – in Germany, these figures are 39.1% and 27.1% respectively (Buch und Buchhandel in Zahlen 2022, 8f.). For

New Zealand, the role of indigenous cultures is of particular importance; in 2021, 342 titles were published in New Zealand in two languages (i.e., in English and in the language of the Māori), 108 titles in the Māori language as translations from English, and 8 titles that were written in the Māori language; all of these figures have grown compared to previous years (Publishers Association of New Zealand 2022, 10).

The second question is where the German and New Zealand book markets get in contact with each other. With respect to the manifestations of an internationalised book market, we must exclude the above-mentioned topic of offshoring in the supply chain here – beyond anecdotal evidence in individual cases (which is additionally problematic to get in the case of distant New Zealand), it is obviously difficult to obtain essential information in a systematic manner: for understandable reasons, companies do not speak publicly about their approaches to gaining competitive advantages, if they do not have to.

As far as the extent of (international) corporate concentration in the book industry is concerned – a clear sign of the internationalisation of the book market –, this manifests for New Zealand by looking at the top publishers according to the national ranking already: Hachette (international, based in France), Scholastic (US), Penguin Random House (US / Germany) and Harper Collins (US); in Germany, Penguin Random House dominates the list by a clear margin, followed by Rowohlt, Droemer and Fischer (part of Holtzbrinck) and Ullstein and Piper (part of Bonnier from Sweden) among the top 10 publishing houses (Buchreport Express 2022, 17) – there seem to be no significant differences between the two countries in this respect. The flow of licenses between Germany and New Zealand is very modest indeed: in 2019, 12 licenses were sold from Germany to Australia and New Zealand (counted together) (Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels 2022, 111) – that is 0.2% of the licenses sold. It should be noted here, as an additional sobering comparison, that in the same year 117 licenses were sold from Germany to Slovakia and 104 to Slovenia (Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels 2022, 110) – where Slovakia and Slovenia are both small countries comparable to New Zealand. Unfortunately, no figures are available for the reverse licensing route from New Zealand to Germany.

As far as international book fairs and book industry associations are concerned, the Publishers Association of New Zealand is a member of the IPA (International Publishers Association [see International Publishers Association, n.d.]), where it meets the Börsenverein des deutschen Buchhandels (German Publishers and Booksellers Association); the New Zealand Booksellers Association (Booksellers Aotearoa) is a member of the EIBF (European and International Booksellers Federation [cf. European and International Booksellers Federation, n.d.]), where it also meets the Börsenverein des deutschen Buchhandels, because in Germany – unlike in most other countries, including New Zealand – publishers, book wholesalers, and booksellers have organised themselves into a joint association. New Zealand

publishers and associations also participate in the most important book fairs in Frankfurt, London, and Bologna, as do their German colleagues (see, for example, Frankfurter Buchmesse, n.d., for Frankfurt).

Conclusion

The fact that readers in Germany – as organisers of *The Whale Rider* project we are of course particularly grateful for that – have had access to a German edition of *The Whale Rider* for many years is the result of established professional processes of international book licensing that had been in place for decades (by the way: these established processes also ensure, for example, that English speakers have access to English-language editions of Jenny Erpenbeck's *Kairos*).

As I have shown in this article, these processes are a particularly evident manifestation of the broader internationalisation of the book market. This internationalisation, however, is not accidental: fundamental interests of the agents involved – I have concentrated on publishing houses and supranational, national and state-affiliated cultural and political institutions – let activities appear in the direction of internationalisation as obvious management options to grow and / or to increase the revenue (publishing houses) or to fulfil an institutions' mission, respectively. Here, I have focused exclusively on institutional interests, which is reductionist in the sense that literature also gets internationalised, because there are people inside and outside institutions that advocate the 'travelling' of books, for individual, cultural, political or philanthropic reasons and without looking at the mission statement or the accounting bottom line.

If this account has given the impression that these international licensing processes – though essential for access to texts in other language areas – are separable from the book content as a purely logistics layer, as it were, and have no effect on how we read such texts and attribute meaning to them, then this impression is misleading.

If we limit ourselves here to the role of publishers (i.e., not considering booksellers and other direct as well as indirect market participants), Michael Bhaskar's theory of publishing (Bhaskar 2013) lends itself to any systematic analysis of publishing and also for following up this particular issue. For Michael Bhaskar, the essential aspects of publishing are the decision as to which texts are published (which he calls filtering), the decision as to the format (in the broadest sense, from the physical to distribution channels) in which they are to be published (which he calls framing) and the decision on the measures to ensure that more books with the selected content in the chosen frames reach readers than would without taking measures – he calls this amplification. With Bhaskar, we can identify multiple instances of 'gatekeeping' (as mentioned, more comprehensively by Bhaskar: filtering) on the path from authors

to publishers in their language area of origin and then (after translation) to publishers in the target language area. There are people in these publishing houses who decide whether a text will be published at all and then (proactively or on request) possibly also licensed. And then publishers decide on the format, i.e., in which physical form, with which cover and layout, in which imprint, in which series, etc. the text appears. These decisions undoubtedly have an effect on the reception of this text (see Bläsi 2021; Squires 2007). As part of the amplification, the same applies to, for example, the content and the tonality of the addressing of the target groups in the process of marketing, which also have an effect on the reception – according to Squires, literature is 'made' not least by this. The window metaphor used in media studies for argumentation purposes, according to which a medium merely mediates like a window without contributing to the meaning, therefore does not adequately describe the role of publishers and other agents involved in transferring a text from one book market to another – what is being decided and done on this path plays a constitutive role in the reception of a book, even if not necessarily in a conscious manner in the case of an average reader.

Examining the paths that books take from one language area to another in a systematic manner, as demonstrated here, is instructive; it can, not least, be used as a structuring template to analyse the contingent way *The Whale Rider* has taken. It is one core original contribution of Book and Publishing Studies to stress that what has been presented here has bearings on the approach to the text, even if of course *The Whale Rider* opens up most enlightening layers of meaning also without explicitly taking it into account. This article has also shown that the internationalisation of the book market is by no means limited to licensing matters; these are embedded in a growing number of connections and convergences.

References

Auswärtiges Amt. "Deutsche Literatur in der Welt – Literaturförderung des Auswärtigen Amts." *Auswärtiges Amt*, 23 September 2020, https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/kultur-und-gesellschaft/kulturprogramme-node/literatur-node, accessed 05 September 2024.

Barney, Jay, and William Hesterly. *Strategic Management and Competetive Advantage*. Fourth Edition. Pearson, 2011.

Bhaskar, Michael. *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing From the Printing Press to the Digital Network*. Anthem Press, 2013.

Bläsi, Christoph. "Bhaskar's Theory of Publishing and Its Contribution to Theorizing (Evolving New Forms of) Educational Media." *Textbooks and Educational Media: Perspectives from Subject Education*, edited by Péter Bagoly-Simó and Zuzana Sikorová, Springer International, 2021, pp. 59–66.

Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels. *Buch und Buchhandel in Zahlen 2022*, edited by Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels, MVB, 2022.

Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels. *Buch und Buchhandel in Zahlen 2024*, edited by Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels, MVB, 2024.

Buchreport Express. "Die Bestsellermarken und -häuser." *Buchreport Express*, 2/2022, January 2022.

European and International Booksellers Federation. "Bookseller Associations." *eibf. The voice of booksellers*, https://europeanbooksellers.eu/bookseller-associations, accessed 05 September 2024.

Europäisches Parlament. "Entschließung des Europäischen Parlaments vom 14. September 2023 zur Zukunft der europäischen Buchbranche (2023/2053(INI))." *European Union*,14 September 2023, http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/1768/oj, accessed 05 September 2024.

Frankfurter Buchmesse. "Ausstellerverzeichnis 2024." *Frankfurter Buchmesse*, https://www.buchmesse.de/besuchen/ausstellerverzeichnis, accessed 05 September 2024.

Goethe Institut. "What we stand for. Sprache. Kultur. Deutschland." *Goethe Institut*, https://www.goethe.de/en/uun/auf.html, accessed 05 September 2024.

International Publishers Association. "IPA Membership." International Publishers Association, https://internationalpublishers.org/about/#ipamembership, accessed 05 September 2024.

Manatū Taonga. Ministry for Culture and Heritage. "Strategic Intentions 2021–2025." *Manatū Taonga*, 27 October 2023, https://www.mch.govt.nz/publications/strategic-intentions-2021-2025, accessed 05 September 2024.

New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. "MFAT Annual Report 2020–21." *New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/about-us/mfat-annual-reports/mfat-annual-report-2020-21/our-highlights, accessed 05 September 2024.

Norrick-Rühl, Corinna. *Internationaler Buchmarkt*. Bramann, 2019.

Publishers Association of New Zealand. *New Zealand Publishing Market Size Report 2021*. New Zealand 2022.

Rønning, Helge, and Tore Slaatta. *Ambitious Literary Policies. International Perspectives*. NPA, 2020.

Squires, Claire. *Marketing Literature. The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. "Agreement on the Importation of Educational, Scientific and Cultural Materials, with Annexes A to E and Protocol annexed." *UNESCO*, 17 June 1950, https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/agreement-importation-educational-scientific-and-cultural-materials-annexes-e-and-protocol-annexed, accessed 05 September 2024.

World Intellectual Property Organization. *The Global Publishing Industry 2022*, WIPO, 2023.

Witi Ihimaera as Translator: Reading *The Whale Rider* as Indigenous-led Translation

Angela Kölling

Abstract *This contribution focuses on the writer Witi Ihimaera as translator. It discusses the translation strategies employed in "The Whale Rider" (1987) as well as other writings and argues that translating is the process of continuously mending relations. A reading of Ihimaera's more recently published short-story "Der Traum" (2022) reveals a vision of Māori-German cooperation different from the one depicted in the film adaptation by Niki Caro (2002). Ihimaera's storytelling is a problem-constructing policy-making, "requiring attention to content and performance, to technical analysis and political articulation" (Fischer and Forester 1993, 6). A technical analysis of how translations of "The Whale Rider" for the European market continued or discontinued Ihimaera's practice of problem construction leads toward the closing thought of this chapter, namely that decolonial political articulation requires that we allow translation to unfold into plurivocal reciprocity.*

Keywords *Indigenous-led translation; policy-making; Der Traum; decolonisation; global reciprocity*

The writer as translator

Witi Ihimaera has described himself as a writer who is "living in two worlds": the Pākehā (New Zealander of European decent) world of success and the world of Māori resistance against Pākehā.[1] In other words, he positions himself in the field of translatorial operations. The location of translating is neither 'here' or 'there', nor confined by the post-structuralist, post-colonialist theories that still end up pointing to a "'romantic' 'elsewhere', an implausible 'in/between' space" (Aji 2022, 168). Translation necessarily takes sides because it is a means of transformation. It makes specific content and performance choices in order to alter a conversation between two or more parties stuck in dysfunctional communication patterns.

1 "Interview with Witi Ihimaera", n.p.

Ihimaera successfully transformed the New Zealand literary landscape, as is documented by the many literary awards and prizes he won. Notably, as an early literary member of the so-called Māori renaissance, he introduced te reo Māori (Māori language) to a national and international audience, and he did so by using linguistic translation strategies. In *The Whale Rider* (1987) his translations often materialise in a particular form of paraphrasing, for example, in passages like this one:

> Suddenly the sea was filled with awesome singing, a song with eternity in it, a karanga to the land:
> *You have called and I have come,*
> *bearing the gift of the Gods.*
> The dark shape rising, rising again. A taniwha, gigantic. A tipua. (2003 [1987], 12)

Ihimaera's paraphrasing is not simply a form of rewording the Māori expressions in the English language to achieve clarity, nor does the author "paraphrase using a related word" or "paraphrase using unrelated words" (Baker 2018, 38–40)[2]. Instead, his way of paraphrasing decentres equivalence in favour of creating a somatic language experience. 'Karanga' gains a sonic quality, as the meaning of the word extends from it into both directions of the flanking text, 'singing' and 'song' on one side and the two lines formatted in italics, indicating that these are the lyrics of the song, on the other side. In contrast, 'Taniwha' and 'tipua' are anticipated by the words 'awesome', 'eternity' and 'called', which not only qualify the particular type of the song that is mentioned here, but also the relationship between the singer, the song and the figure emerging from the ocean. The calling of the 'dark shape' becomes apparent as an ancient practice of infinite length, as indicated by the words 'rising, rising again', lending the event a cyclo-rhythmic quality as well as temporal depth. The descriptor 'gigantic' furthermore imparts material significance to the experience of time. Two Māori words frame the adjective, which adds size to the use of Māori, and to the sensation that both *taniwha* and *tipua* are "uncanny thing[s]" (Gudgeon 1909, 29). The last fragment, "A tipua.", ending on an open front unrounded vowel, supports the sense of witnessing an apparition in awe.

Ihimaera's paraphrasing is essentially a performative translation, as it focuses on producing an experiential encounter with te reo Māori as a means of understanding it. Recent experiential and experimental translation scholarship has begun to theorise performative translation acts (Lee 2022; Robert-Foley 2023; Grass 2023). They shift away from the customary focus on values and norms, behaviour and job-

2 Mona Baker distinguishes between these two forms of paraphrase strategy. They are two of many translation strategies that she discusses trying to address ethical challenges in pragmatic terms.

performance in favour of exploring the systems of relations in which translation is embedded. They also decentre equivalence and address linguistic and cultural idiosyncrasies in productive ways rather than seeing them as an obstacle to perfect translations:

> [A]n ever-changing geopolitical landscape driven by post-truth economic imperatives and climate change crises on a global scale, increasingly point to the need to understand how the embodied, co-creational intersemiotic process of experiential translation can contribute to glocal [sic] understanding and communication through socially-situated practice. (Campbell and Vidal 2024, 1)

Explorations of situatedness emphasise the fact that translation can never be neutral or completed. Moreover, they point out that diversity in language is not dictated by interlinguistic encounters. Translatorial meaning-making is always a work in progress negotiating a number of historical, cultural and material contexts within and across languages.

Mending relations, revision by revision

Another way of describing Ihimaera's writing in translatorial terms is through Lawrence Venuti's ambivalent pair of concepts, "foreignization" and "domestication". Lawrence Venuti ([1995] 2017) coined the term 'foreignization' to describe such linguistic insertions as, for example, leaving *foreign* terms untranslated. The counter-term to 'foreignization' is 'domestication' which is the act of rendering a translation void of foreign elements or the act of removing them. This also occurred with *The Whale Rider*, when the so-called 'global' edition was released after the novel's adaptation to film. A lot of the te reo Māori was removed.

Venuti's concepts have been at the centre of much discussion about translation in postcolonial contexts, favouring the practice that "assumes an ethics of foreignization" in terms of "locating the alien in a cultural other, pursuing cultural diversity, signalling linguistic and cultural differences and unsettling the hierarchies in the translating language" (Venuti 2017, 266). They are, however, very limited in terms of reflecting real-life translation practice. This is due to the fact that the translator cannot fully anticipate their readership: "[R]eaders are always plural in their levels of knowledge, whether in connection with the source or target text." (Anderson 2021, 255) For whom, for example, is te reo Māori foreign? Contemporary publications in Aotearoa, New Zealand, no longer italicise Māori to honour the fact that Māori is one of the three official national languages – the others are English and Signing –

and should not be treated in the same way as "unfamiliar foreign terms"[3]. Therefore, the merit of Venuti's terms lies in complicating traditional linguistic views, which value original over translation, text over other modes of translation (such as gesture, movement, setting, sound, design, emotion), and the commodifiable product over the particulars of socially situated meaning-making.

When it first came out, Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* negotiated its way as a foreign book into the literary market in New Zealand, just like his earlier books. In a review of the recently revised novel *Tangi* ([1973] 2023), Emma Hislop relates how Ihimaera described the pressures when he first started writing in a radio interview he gave in 2009:

> Everything was on Pākehā terms. When he was asked by his publisher who he was writing for, Ihimaera was told, "Māori don't read." Reviewers still complained, "we lose so much because we don't know the language." (*The Spin Off* n.p.)

When Ihimaera removed much of the Māori from *The Whale Rider* fifteen years later, he negotiated a global market, and the measure should not be how much he removed but how much he retained. Other writers, negotiating between major languages, such as French and English have shown far less interest in unsettling the hierarchies in the translating language (Kölling 2015).

Meanwhile, Ihimaera has found plenty of other avenues for troubling traditional views on translation. Re-reading and comparing the original 1973 and the edited 2023 version of *Tangi*, Hislop points out the re-inscription of the violence of the colonial past, that is not past:

> Original
> "Before Dad bought the farm at Waituhi we lived in a small wooden house on the other side of this town. It was old even before we moved in; but to my small boy's eyes it was a palace."
>
> Revised
> "My father, Rongo, was born in Waituhi on tribal land that provided only enough to put houses on. The rest belonged to Pākehā owners, confiscated and balloted to British soldiers who had come from overseas to fight the local rebel tribes of the district, including ours." (n.p.)

Hislop is a Māori writer herself and a witness to the fact that decolonisation is a "mammoth task" that engenders "getting used to the feeling like I'm getting

3 "How should I treat foreign terms in MLA style?" Ask the MLA, The MLA Style Center, accessed 8 November 2019. To honour this fact, Māori terms are not italicised in this contribution.

nowhere" (n.p.). She identifies both the stylistic and the ethical elements of the new edition as signs of decolonising the text and the writer:

> To me these revisions are an example of art-making that comes from a place of freedom, but more importantly, decolonisation. There are few public figures who model revision – of one's work and one's life – as openly and honestly as Ihimaera. (n.p.)

Although decolonisation is very local and personal, Ihimaera's model revisions are not reducible to his own biography or national Māori-Pākehā biculturality. This is particularly obvious through his decision to prioritise the publishing of anthologies of Māori writings, and such anthologies as *Black Marks on a White Page* (2017) and *A Kind of Shelter: Whakaruru-Taha* (2023) that bring together national and international artists reading our world in the first and second decade of this century. They look at decolonisation, indigeneity, climate change, digital entrepreneurship and other 'glocal' topics, which makes these works particularly open to intersectional discourse. The same is true for short stories and poems written by Ihimaera that have been selected for other anthologies, for example, the short story, *Der Traum*, which was first published in the online journal *newsroom* (2019) and three years later included in the volume *Indigenous Pacific Islander Eco-Literatures* (2022) and, in revised and updated form, in *Hiwa: Contemporary Māori Short Stories* (2023)[4].

Harakeke-dreaming as policy-making

Der Traum is a metafictional[5] narrative about the symbolic, social and material value of harakeke, a plant and fabric that has deep historical and contemporary significance for Indigenous Pacific cultures, which is set in Berlin:

> I need to explain a particular circumstance that makes the man's dream somewhat unusual.
> The man was in Berlin when he had the dream. He had flown seventeen hours from Auckland to Dubai and then six hours to Germany, with two stopovers of three hours each. […]
> […] as anybody who visits Berlin frequently would tell you, the city at any time was an utterly fragmenting experience: it forced you into personal encounters with a history characterised by constant reinvention. On previous visits, for instance, the man had considered the city to be in self-denial about its past, especially its Nazi

4 All quotations of *Der Traum* in this contribution are taken from the version in *Indigenous Pacific Islander Eco-Literatures*.

5 See Waugh 1984, 2.

> history and division into East and West Germany. But now he admired Berlin because, ever since the wall had fallen, it had gained great momentum. The most obliterated country of World War II was now the undoubted leader of the EU. (194)

Harakeke, which is translated as "flax" or "the New Zealand flax", immediately invokes iconic images of "Aotearoa New Zealand" nature and traditional cultural art and artefacts: placemats, clothes, baskets, and so on. These items are generally not part of German cultural practices and would find their way into German households only by way of leisurely travel and/or shopping. Connotations of the exotic are thus impending, but by giving his readers a European place and context for the story's setting, Ihimaera accentuates that harakeke also lives in two worlds. For the German reader in particular, the Berlin setting resists the exoticisation that might otherwise inform the reception of the subject matter.

Gabriele Dürbeck (2007, 2017) uses the term "Ozeanismus" (Oceanism), echoing Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1987), to describe the particular imaginary of the South Pacific, "die Südsee", represented in German culture and literature:

> [A] persistent system of ideas about Oceania, which are to a large extent informed by stereotypes reproduced over long periods of time and, in the light of new and dissonant experience, become reorganised and rearranged at best but not revised.[6]

It is almost as if Ihimaera entitled his short story *Der Traum* in response to "Ozeanismus", to oppose those views that see Pacific Island nations and its inhabitants as remote, isolated, underdeveloped places:

> Coming from islands of Oceania did not secure their safety; they were not immune to what was happening in the rest of the world. Their world was the international world. The global story was their story, the international marketplace their reality. (197)

In the story, Ihimaera creates a genealogy of words that interweaves German and Māori, translating 'Traum' first as 'dream', then as 'trauma', and further as an international political programme for a utopian vision. In its first appearance it is the dream of the narrator, the man. Then, as the man is awake, it serves as a concept for philosophical musing:

---

6 Original: Der Begriff Ozeanismus bezeichnet, dass sich in der deutschen Kultur und Literatur ein dauerhaftes System von Aussagen über Ozeanien rekonstruieren lässt, welches in hohem Maße durch Stereotype geprägt ist, die über lange Zeiträume hin reproduziert und im Lichte neuer, dissonanter Erfahrungen allenfalls re-organisiert und re-arrangiert, aber nicht revidiert wurden. (205–207, the English translation is mine)

> It was clear that the existential crisis had had a trickle-down effect, even to the man's dream world; moemoea had always been the place where he could figure out where he and – by extension – indigenous people existed in an international political, economic, and environmental bubble over which they had little control. (179)

In the dream, 'the man' intervenes in a disagreement between a weaver and a vendor that occurs at a metropolitan market. They quarrel over the "market price", until the weaver is taken into custody by the manager of the market.

> *She has offended us*, the manager said. *She asked if she could purchase our harakeke and is now objecting to the price. If you wish to have her freed so that she can rejoin you, it will cost 98 dollars.*
> The man looked at the tour director, expecting her to take charge of the situation. Instead, the young woman looked at him. At that point, not sure if he wanted to take responsibility, he had decided to wake up. (194)

The narrator could remain in the realm of the personal of his *traum*. Instead, Ihimaera chooses to graft a political analysis onto it, accentuating again that his living in two worlds is a conscious choice:

> After decades of promoting cooperation, the globalists were losing. And when they lost, so would indigenous [sic] people lose, for once the gates started to close again, they could be shut out of the political and economic endgame.
> Was this why the man had dreamt what the Germans would call his *traum*? (197)

Like Epeli Hau'ofa (1994) once used the "the hole in the doughnut"-metaphor (158) to advocate the Oceanian political narrative for the Pacific, Ihimaera's narrator uses *traum* and trauma to cast a utopian vision, a dream. This is a dream for an alliance which proposes that Germany, "[t]he most obliterated country of World War II [that] was now the undoubted leader of the EU", will stand with Pacific Indigenous peoples against those for whom "[i]n the place of shared approaches to societal problems – whether trade disputes, security or climate change – national interests had become primary." (197)

Ihimaera's implicit appeal to Germany echoes Tuvalu's explicit appeal for support that was recorded in an interview conducted between Anja Wehler-Schöck (AWS) and special envoy and former UN-Ambassador for Tuvalu (2017–2022), Samuelu Laloniu (SL):

> AWS: What can we do here (in Germany)?
> SL: We urgently need legal protection. The original maritime boundaries must be maintained according to the geographical coordinates in order to give countries

> like Tuvalu a certain planning security and perspective. Many countries are already supporting us in this initiative, and we hope that Germany will join us.[7]

Laloniu's appeal for legal protection refers to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea that was adopted in 1982.[8] The agreement did not anticipate the extent to which climate change would affect the maritime borders, which are calculated in relation to the coastline. Theoretically, if the insular land territories of Tuvalu were to be completely submerged by water, the state might lose sovereignty or any rights over the maritime areas it currently holds. In other words, by doing nothing to protect Tuvaluan rights, member states agree to the implicit 'ocean grabbing'.

I would add that, apart from supporting legal protection, what we can do here in Germany is to quit the "sinking islands" narrative that skews information coverage about the Pacific Island States, which is another instalment of *Ozeanismus* and reinvokes the hyperbolic rhetoric of the colonisers' fantasy of 'the disappearing native peoples' which led to the "salvage colonialism" and "salvage ethnography" (Steinmetz 2004, 264–265). Pacific Island Studies scholars have highlighted the negative consequences of such coverage for over a decade now. They have pointed out the discrepancies between narrative reality and practical reality of documentaries fabricated by the West (Farbotko 2005, 2010; Stratford et al. 2023) and that the canary in the coalmine approach has no real impact on how politicians or people in general understand climate change (Kench, Ford and Owen 2018). If natural erosion of the land, surface temperatures of the ocean rising, growing pollution, and increase in strength of storms and changes in other weather phenomena are the signs for living on disappearing territory, then we are all living on sinking islands.

At the same time that he offers a utopian vision, Ihimaera also questions the dystopian 'other' defined as (political) self-interest, which finds expression in the populist political theories such as 'America First':

> First, must all negotiations be based on political considerations, particularly self-interest – on notions of, say, America First, which is really Trump First? Or, second, on economic considerations – the trade deals, say, which have seen self-interest prevail, as witness Mr. Trump bypassing the World Trade Organisation (he calls the organisation a "disaster") with tariffs here and there? (198)

---

7 Original: AWS: Was kann hier [in Deutschland] getan werden? SL: Wir brauchen dringend rechtlichen Bestandsschutz. Die ursprünglichen Seegrenzen müssen nach den geografischen Koordinaten beibehalten werden, um Ländern wie Tuvalu eine gewisse Planungssicherheit und Perspektive zu geben. Viele Länder unterstützen uns bereits bei dieser Initiative und wir hoffen, dass Deutschland sich anschließt. (Wehler-Schöck, n.p., the English translation is mine)

8 See United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (imo.org).

Directing the German reader's view across the Atlantic, draws attention to the fact that every nation can become a character in somebody else's political story. In particular, this evokes previous narrations of "Berlin dreams", transposed in speeches such as, John F. Kennedy's "I am a Berliner" or songs such as David Hasselhoff's "I've been looking for freedom"[9].

The globalised *Whalerider*

The underlying issue of the "sinking islands" narrative and *Ozeanismus* is, that we hear more stories about the Pacific Islands than from Pacific Islanders (Haag 2013, 80). Although Witi Ihimaera is one of New Zealand's most celebrated prolific writers and editors, only two of his books have been published in German, *Zauberhaftes Neuseeland* (1998) and *The Whalerider: die magische Geschichte vom Mädchen, das den Wal ritt* (2003). Apart from this, only excerpts from his award-winning debut novel *Tangi* (1973) and his second book *Whanau* (1974) appeared in the short-story collection *Aroha: Maori Geschichten aus dem Jadeland* (1999) (Haag 2013, 83 and 84).

Oliver Haag's (2013) statistical evaluation suggests that there are a number of correlating factors that contribute to whether Oceanian literature is translated for the European market or not: "funding policies, the production of films, the awarding of literary prizes and European literary festivals, as well as a nexus between publishing policies, broader international events and the increasing visibility of Indigenous people in European media" (87; Haag 2017, 22; Prentice 2020). Particularly interesting is the role of broader international events, even those which do not have a literary focus. In the case of Māori and Pacific Island writers with connections to New Zealand publishing houses, such events include New Zealand hosting the America's Cup in 2003, the release of the *Lord of the Rings* film in 2003, and, more recently, New Zealand's "While you were sleeping – Bevor es bei Euch hell wird" presentation at the 2012 Frankfurt Book Fair as 'guest of honour' (Haag 2013, 85–86).

Although the book fair is a literature-specific event, it was marked by a strong emphasis on selling Aotearoa New Zealand as an experience[10] rather than selling books (Kölling 2014). While the event culture that is "selling" Aotearoa New Zealand

9 The former probably needs no explanation, but the latter is a song written by German music producer Jack White, originally released in 1978 by German singer Marc Seaberg, which was covered by David Hasselhoff in 1989 and became deeply associated with the pro-German unification movement.

10 A representation of this experience is still available through a film: "While you were sleeping – New Zealand Pavilion Frankfurt Book Fair 2012." Vimeo. Accessed 20 June 2024, https://vimeo.com/59695403.

to the world is heavily spiked with easily identifiable national markers, such as a silver fern logo[11] or a harakeke pattern, it "favours a distance from national branding" (Wilson 2020, 255) in terms of the literature itself. This distancing also became a feature of the global *Whale Rider* edition:

> [The *Whale Rider*'s] adaptation to a global market lay not only in repackaging to reflect the visual economy of the film, nor solely even in the removal of much of the Māori language, but also in removing those cultural referents and idioms that situated the original work in relation to an earlier rural society and agricultural economy. (Prentice 2020, 244)

The removal of some socio-economic markers supported a more metropolitan reading of the novel, which can also be read as a form of decolonisation because it overwrites the nostalgic imagery and tropes that dominated early Māori literature of the 'renaissance' period (Evans 2006, 16) with co-temporal ones constructed, for example, "out of the flotsam and jetsam of a consumer culture" (29).

The fact that Niki Caro's film adaptation *Whale Rider* (2002) prompted the publishing of a global edition of the book demonstrates that translation and publishing are embedded in other historical and current infrastructures, which causes continuous modular increments of mutual change and transformation (Kölling in print). Several scholars have pointed out that academia contributes in important and sustainable ways to these transformations. Janet Wilson (2020), for example, who describes the global status and reach of the Aotearoa New Zealand short story, argues that the boost of 'global capital' of the genre is due to the contributions made by leading Pacific writers and editors who are also university teachers and researchers:

> Of greatest influence on New Zealand writing over several decades has been Bill Manhire's creative writing MA at Victoria University of Wellington, known since 2000 as the International Institute of Modern Letters. Teachers include distinguished fiction writers: Damien Wilkins, Emily Perkins, Fiona Kidman and John Cranna. There is also the MA in creative writing at the University of Auckland, previously run by Witi Ihimaera and Albert Wendt, and now by Paula Morris and Pasifika poet Selina Tusitala Marsh, and the publishing programmes at Whitireia where writers like Tim Jones and Anna Taylor teach the short story. (Wilson 2020, 226)

The fact that volumes, such as *Black Marks on the White Page* (2017), edited by Witi Ihimaera and Tina Makereti, build on the globalised US models of creative writ-

11 See Wilson's discussion of the marketing of a Spanish anthology of translated New Zealand short stories. Next to the fern, the harakeke is one of the symbols that is often featured as recognisable national icon.

ing workshops of universities and higher educational institutes has been met with both criticism and praise (Wilson 2020, 226–227). Such criticism inflects traditional notions of authenticity as being disinterested in material wealth; despite the fact that scholars benefit from focussing on big literary brands (Koegler 2018). Indigenous writers, who are globally successful, very often face additional layers of accusations from their communities, such as being opportunists and traitors. Selina Tusitala Marsh articulated this in her Graphic Novel *Mophead Tu: The Queen's Poem* (2020), which draws out the trickster wayfaring that living in two or more postcolonial worlds entails: "[…] when a colleague calls her a 'sellout', Selina starts doubting herself. Can she stand with her people who struggled against the Queen … and still serve the Queen?" (text from book cover).

Dieter Riemenschneider (2020), who investigated which mechanisms influence the translation of Indigenous literature from New Zealand for the German market specifically, also stresses the role of academia:

> A comparison of the discourse about the commercial and cultural effect of the Frankfurt Book Fair on New Zealand in 2012 with the reception of the country's culture and literature in German academia over a brief period suggests that the latter has contributed to a more active and long-lasting intercultural exchange than marketing and selling the country's books even when highlighted and promoted at the Book Fair. (257)

This intercultural exchange based on recent scholarship[12], which grew out of the ethnology, ethnography and cultural anthropology dating back to the late 18th century, "is often combined with keen observation of cultural-political resistance movements in many parts of the world and of African American, Māori, Indigenous Australians, and Canadian First Nation communities" (Riemenschneider 2020, 255). Other supranational developments that influenced this exchange are the international movement of Indigenous peoples – also reflected in the term Indigenism (Niezen 2003) – and the growing alignment of academic infrastructures with broader socio-political trends such as environmentalism.

12 Riemenschneider refers in particular to the years between 2002 and 2012 drawing on data listed in ACOLIT, the ASNEL newsletter. ASNEL stands for German Association for the Study of the New English Literatures and Culture, which today is GAPS, the German Association for Postcolonial Studies. Haag's quantitative analysis, which refers to a corpus of Indigenous New Zealand literature translated between 1907 and 2009, reveals that from the mid-1980s translations for the European market have been continuous and systematic (84). This may also be due to academic influence but warrants further research.

All our future relations

The "Fridays for Future"-movement gave Germany's sensitisation for colonial and postcolonial environmental injustice another major push, evident in the establishment of the *Zukunftsmodul* and *Voices for Climate* lecture series[13] at the University of Mainz, and, of course, the contributions to the "Eine Uni – Ein Buch: *The Whale Rider*" lecture series compiled in this volume. With Pasifikafuturism[14] growing into a strong literary movement in Aotearoa New Zealand (Cole 2020), future intercultural hermeneutics might develop a stronger relationship with Critical Code Studies and Digital Literacy Studies. I anticipate interesting and fresh conversations between Indigenous scholars who call for resistance against treating the digital space as "Terra Nullius 4.0" (Whaanga and Mato 2020) and Western scholars who have begun to "trouble the myth of the digital native" (Sander, Vogel and Kölling 2025, Kölling in print). Recent agendas of inquiry are also moving from interdiscursive to more interdisciplinary scholarship due to the fact that resistance 'literature' in the digital realm can readily take multimodal forms, mixing language with drawing and music, blending dance with landscape and plants, and focussing on how nonhuman animate and inanimate become 'subjects of agency'. But even with those fresh efforts to push epistemological boundaries and consequently the decolonisation of Translation Studies further, problems remain: Who owns the knowledge travelling through translation?

In the lecture at CUNY Graduate Center that celebrated the 15th anniversary of her seminal work *Decolonising Methodology* (1999), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2013) identified translation as one site for "the struggle over the sense of ownership of knowledge":

> Interestingly, our universities feel they own the term legally: "University". That they feel that they own that term. Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiārangi […] call themselves indigenous-university. It's in lower case, and there's a dash, indigenous dash university, and most people would think, oh yeah, they're an indigenous university. Not the universities of New Zealand. The universities in New Zealand are appalled, in a sense, that this institution would want to use a term that they think they own. And it seems to me that captures most of what I'm talking about. That they own the term and that an indigenous institution, which works internationally, has to come up with another term. If you translate the word Te Whare

13 In particular, the conversation between Constantin Wagner and Lian Gogali as part of the "Bildung fängt mit Wandel an: Gemeinsam handeln!" (Education begins with change: acting together!).

14 Recent volumes edited by Ihimaera also reflect Pasifikafuturism including, for example, David Geary's "Rarohenga and the Reformation" in *Pūrākau* and and Nic Low's "Facebook Redux" in *Black Marks*.

> Wānanga o Awanuiārangi, it actually means the University of Awanuiarangi. Why, because if you translate my university, which is, our Māori name Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato, it means the University of Waikato. So, what that means is that that universities can use Māori terminology and translate themselves from English into Māori. But the Māori institution is not allowed to translate itself into English. (Smith 2013, 1:05:48–1:07:54)

These uneven rights, which Indigenous and non-Indigenous institutions possess with regard to translating themselves into Māori and English, respectively, signal "that the business of decolonisation is not over, that it just shifts ground" (Smith 2013, 1:08:05). Translation is always an indicator for where infrastructure negotiates power.

Another example of this is the Treaty Principles Bill, that intends "to enshrine what the Treaty [Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi] means into law" (Hanly 2024, n.n.) in order to limit its influence in terms of New Zealand's long-standing bi-cultural policy-making: "The [ACT[15]] party has long argued the original articles [of Te Tiriti] have been interpreted by the courts, the Waitangi Tribunal and successive governments—over decades—in a way that has amplified their significance and influence beyond the original intent" (Hanly 2024, n.n.). Unsurprisingly, the bill triggered opposition by various groups, "including lawyers, historians, translators and churches" (Hanly 2024, n.n.).

As Germany is "the undoubted leader of the EU", as Ihimaera writes, translations into the German language are an important factor in the decolonising process. Translations from 'peripheral' languages into 'central' languages of the supranational language and translation "poly-system" (Even-Zohar 1990) are a means of actively unsettling the translation power-imbalances: a) because a translation from Māori into German decentres English, b) because German is a language peripheral to the governing home poly-system in Aotearoa New Zealand. Meaning, Māori can to some extent dictate the terms of translation: "the very principles of selecting the works to be translated are determined by the situation governing the (home) poly-system: the texts are chosen according to their compatibility with the new approaches and the supposedly innovatory role they may assume within the target literature" (Even-Zohar 1990, 47). Moreover, the translation into German shifts the grounds for the decolonisation from the national to the supranational stage, and, in the majority of cases, from the Southern to the Northern Hemisphere, where most of the arenas for trade agreements, climate change agreements and national sovereignty are based.

15 The ACT Party is a conservative right-wing party, often expressing classical liberal or right-libertarian views.

Translating is honouring plurivocal reciprocity

Indigenous-led translations, that is, translations that honour the political articulations of Indigenous peoples, in return aid in decolonising postcolonial studies in Germany and elsewhere. German imperial and colonial presences in the Pacific and their consequences are still an understudied area as a result of traditional disciplinary language boundaries and disciplinary cultural boundaries that still govern the German academic system. Transpacific Studies, for example, does not nearly hold as much academic currency as Transatlantic Studies in Germany.[16] And while aware of, for example, the atrocities German imperial forces have committed in Africa, many are still completely unaware of the fact that Germany held territories in the Pacific because Anglophone (postcolonial) studies dominate the Pacific Studies discourse. Without translations, postcolonial studies continue the myth of the monolingual coloniser and the myth that decolonisation is only a national matter.

Translations of Māori and Pasifika literatures into German present particular linguistic and cultural problems: "All readers of translations potentially contribute to indigenous people regaining their voice, but only if these readers can decipher the messages in the original actions and discourses as they are transmitted into the target language" (Wohlfart 2018, 265). Oliver Haag and Danica Čerče (2015) compare the Dutch translation by Elise Spanjaard (2003) and the German translation by Sabine Schulte (2003) of *The Whale Rider*:

> [B]oth translators have produced stylistic and syntagmatic equivalence of the source text and original sentences have been reproduced as a whole without division into several different sentences. From a linguistic perspective, the target texts are indeed very fluent and professional. (258)

To illustrate the high quality of the translations, they read a passage from quite early in the book. At the same time that they appreciate the quality of these translations, they point out that they follow the original 1987 edition and the 'global' 2003 edition of *The Whale Rider* unevenly. This is the passage in question in the two English versions:

> In the old days, in the years that have gone before us, the land and sea felt a great emptiness, a yearning. The mountains were like the poutama, the stairway

16 However, the conference "Transcending Boundaries: Interdisciplinary Insights in Transpacific Studies" (https://www.obama-institute.com/feb-9-11-conference-transcending-boundaries-interdisciplinary-insights-in-transpacific-studies/) organised by the Transpacific Studies Network (TPSN) at the Johannes Gutenberg University in February 2024 indicates that transpacific studies are gaining traction.

> to heaven, and the lush green rainforest was a rippling kakahu of many colours. (Ihimaera 1987, 4)
>
> In the old days, in the years that have gone before us, the land and sea felt a great emptiness, a yearning. The mountains were like a stairway to heaven, and the lush green rainforest was a rippling cloak of many colors. (Ihimaera 2003, 3)

Haag and Čerče find that both translators use a mix of foreignising and domesticating strategies. In particular, they deal very differently with the Māori words in their respective translations of above passage. It becomes apparent that both Schulte and Spanjaard had different ideas about how the "translated text functions against the background of the target language and culture" (Haag and Čerče 2015, 252). While Spanjaard follows the 2003 edition by removing the Māori words 'poutama' and 'kakahu', Schulte retained them for the German translation:

> Heel vroeger, in de jaren die aan onze tijd voorafgingen, voelden het land en de zee een grote leegte, een verlangen. de bergen waren als een trap naar de hemel en het weelderige, groene regenwoud was een golvende mantel vol kleurschakeringen. (Spanjaard 11, as cited in Haag and Čerče 258)
>
> Long ago, in the years leading up to our time, the land and sea felt a great emptiness, a yearning. The mountains were like a stairway to heaven and the lush green rainforest was a rippled cloak full of color shading. (backtranslation Haag and Čerče 258)
>
> In alter Zeit, in den Jahren vor unserer Zeitrechnung, verspürten Land und Meer eine große Leere, eine Sehnsucht. Die Berge glichen damals einer *poutama*, einer Leiter, die den Himmel hinaufragte, und der üppige grüne Regenwald war ein wogender *kakahu*, ein farbenprächtiger Mantel. (Schulte 11, as cited in Haag and Čerče 259)
>
> In old times, in the years before our era, the land and sea felt a great emptiness, a yearning. The mountains then resembled a *poutama*, a ladder that towered up to the heaven and the green lush rainforest was a rippling *kakahu*, a colourful cloak. (Haag and Čerče 259)

Haag and Čerče argue that "given the lack of contextualization" (261), which is the result of using Māori "without providing an explanation for German-speaking readers" (260) the German translation exoticises the foreign language and fails to communicate "the claims to indigenous sovereignty" (261). I would argue to the contrary that such explanations deny Ihimaera 'Indigenous sovereignty' by overwriting the creative autonomy that is expressed in his experiential translatorial writing. Not

only "readers are always plural" as Anderson writes, but scholars also divert in "levels of knowledge", or rather focus, "whether in connection with the source or target text" (2021, 255).

In some instances, Haag and Čerče's interpretation of the German translation strategies is not only different from mine but wrong. They claim that the German translation does not provide an equivalent for the English explanations of Māori phrases to be found in the original text (261), and, specifically, that Schulte does not translate the words "*Hui e, haumi e, taiki e*", which appear at the end of several chapters (Haag and Čerče 261). The rhythmic Māori phrase is indeed followed four times by the German phrase "So soll es geschehen" (Schulte 15, 50, 147, 138). Only for the variant phrase, "*Haumi e, hui e, taiki e*.", Schulte does not provide the paraphrase (Schulte 65, 81, 104, 113, 153), except once (97). Schulte's translation thereby follows Ihimaera's immersive language learning approach. The rhythm of the phrase makes it easy to memorise it. By dispersing the paraphrase, the writing forces the readers to produce or retrieve the translation themselves. Both rhyme and omission are ancient and commonly used didactic devises for active language learning. In *The Whale Rider*, this technique allows the readers not only to learn this phrase (by heart), however, it also allows them eventually to attain a sense of community. They are the final words of *The Whale Rider*, and, in the same way that the song at the beginning, which calls the taniwha, qualifies the relationship between the singer, the song and the figure emerging from the ocean, the rhythmic phrase at the end qualifies the relationship between the narrator, the whales, and the reader:

> Mit leuchtenden Augen blickt Kahu Koro Apirana an.
> «Oh, Paka, hörst du sie nicht? Ich höre ihnen jetzt schon seit Ewigkeiten zu. Oh, Paka, und die Wale singen immer noch», sagte sie.
> *Haumi e, hui e, taiki e*. (153)

> Bright-eyed, Kahu looks at Koro Apirana.
> «Oh, Paka, can't you hear them? I've been listening to them for ages now. Oh, Paka, and the whales are still singing», she said.
> Haumi e, hui e, taiki e. (153, back-translation mine)

When the readers come to the end of the book and recognise the phrase and its meaning, they will belong to those who can hear the sacred ancestors, the whales, singing.

Further analysis shows that Haag and Čerče's criticism of Schulte's glossary is limited by the parameters they set for their reading, which is solely based on consulting the printed texts. They claim that by omitting certain terms, such as *Hawaiki* from the glossary, Schulte does not give enough cultural context to support an adequate culturally informed reading of the book: "The Dutch Glossary, reflecting Span-

jaard's less foreignizing strategy, includes more culturally relevant information, as when *Hawaiki* is explicated as 'the original home of the Māori people' (*traditioneel thuisland van het Maori-volk*)" (261).

Paraphrasing *Hawaiki* as the "original home of the Māori", however, could also be read as marking Māori as immigrants, not much different from Pākehā, and as an overwriting of the thousands of years of Māori guardianship of Aotearoa. The Dutch phrase in fact also uses the term 'traditioneel thuisland', which literally translates as 'traditional homeland' and thus includes the politically contested term 'traditional', which in critical Indigenous studies has been identified as a marker for when colonising forces attempt to authenticate and police Indigenous identities (Hokowhitu 2008, Lyons 2010).

The narrative context in which *Hawaiki* appears in *The Whale Rider*, supports a critical reading against Spanjaard's explanation in the glossary. At the beginning of chapter nine, the narrator shares the story of Paikea's transition from whale rider and founder of the family to *Tekoteko* figure carved out of wood sitting on the top of the gable of the *Marae*. Here (Schulte 63–65), we learn that the pod of whales abandoned their usual travelling route through the deep-see trench because of the nuclear testing in Moruroa: "Er [der Leitwal] hatte Angst vor der Kontamination, die sich von Moruroa her ausbreitete." (The contamination that spread from Moruroa scared him [the leading whale], back-translation mine.) Hawaiki is mentioned at the beginning of the section that describes the location of the pod of whales at the time: "*Der Tiefseegraben bei Hawaiki. Der Sitz der Götter. Die Heimat der Alten. Wie eine Flotte majestätischer Luftschiffe schwebte die Walherde in der vergoldeten See.*" (Schulte 63, italics in the original). In back-translation (mine) this section reads: "The deep-sea trench near Hawaiki. Seat of the gods. Homeland of the elders. The pod of whales hovered in the golden see like a fleet of majestic airships." From the passage itself it becomes clear that *Hawaiki* is a location identified in relation to the whale's genealogy, "der Ort, der paradoxerweise einst der Schoß der Welt gewesen war. […] Hier hatte er seine Kindheit verbracht, und hier war er mit seinem goldenen Meister zusammen gewesen." (*the place that, paradoxically, was once the womb of the world. […] Here he had spent his childhood, and here he had been with his golden master*, back-translation mine.) A glossary entry that suggests an authenticated geographical and anthropocentric reading of *Hawaiki* is inappropriate in this context in my view.

Overall, therefore, I disagree with Haag and Čerče who conclude that the inclusion of Māori language solely serves to authenticate the target text:

> The mere inclusion of Māori language does not achieve greater engagement with Māori culture through translated Māori literature. Instead, because of its non-translation and particularly the lacking contextualization, it hinders any such engagement. (266)

Schulte, however, not merely included Māori but honoured the original translatorial strategies employed by Ihimaera. I am confident in my reading also because of how Schulte describes her cooperation with Ihimaera. In the interview, I conducted with her as part of our "Eine Uni – Ein Buch" events in 2023, she explains that she consulted the author with regard to the inclusions of *te reo Māori* in the book. The glossary was also produced in close collaboration with Ihimaera, which she admits contains a number of contradictions: "Da gibt es berufene Menschen, die das vielleicht eines Tages mal auseinanderdröseln. Ich weiß nicht. Aber wahrscheinlich gibt es keine Neuauflage." (*There are qualified people who might one day resolve this. I don't know. But there probably won't be a new edition*, translation mine, 20:58–20:21)[17]. The crucial point is, however, that Schulte identifies Ihimaera as the translator whom she followed:

> In diesem Fall hatte ich den Eindruck, dass Witi Ihimaera selbst der Vermittler dieses kulturellen Hintergrundes ist. Und insofern hatte ich nicht viel Arbeit. Ich konnte ihm einfach folgen, indem ich das Buch übersetzte. (23:36–23:56)
>
> In this case, I had the impression that Witi Ihimaera himself was the mediator of this cultural background. And in that respect, I didn't have much work to do. I could just follow him by translating the book.

Twenty years ago, the author as cultural translator was an invaluable resource, in comparison to today (or even in 2015) when a lot of background research can be conducted online: "Heute guckt man ins Internet, das ist natürlich sehr komfortabel" (*Today we look up things on the Internet, which is of course very convenient*, translation mine, 27:22–27:24). And yet no translation or internet search can ever fully render a perfect linguistic or cultural translation. *The Whale Rider* is part of a complex global nexus of political friction that is and will be ongoing. Therefore, projects such as our communal "Eine Uni – Ein Buch" (re)reading of Witi Ihimaera's book are all the more important: a text should never just render one Indigenous voice but many, never just tell one version of colonial history for all time, but all the ones needed to keep the process of decolonisation going.

17 Schulte had been a translator for Rowohlt, the German publisher, for some time before she was commissioned with *The Whale Rider*. Thus, she was already quite familiar then with the publisher's norms and with negotiating the production of a translation under time-pressure, for which, she remembers, she was paid 1€ "Eilzuschlag" (express supplement) per page: "Es drängte." (It was urgent, translation mine, 18:59–19:04). Of course it was urgent, the translation had to be available in close temporal proximity to the film release to maximise possible event-based sales. Thus, many decisions were made in accordance with the American edition to save time.

Acknowledgements

As a *tauiwi* scholar my knowledge of Māori onto-epistemology is inherently limited. I don't consider the space from which I speak as authorial, nor do I want my results to be deemed as definitive. I hope that the flaws in my personal interpretations will be judged by the future conversations and research they might stimulate.

I would like to profess my profound gratitude to Dr. Marine Berthiot for her helpful comments and suggestions on the earlier version of the manuscript, and also Dr. Julia Sander and Dr. Anke Vogel for bringing this whaleriding volume together.

References

Aji, Aron. "Covalent Effect: Literary Translation Practice and the Pedagogy of the Multilingual Workshop." *Translation: Crafts, Contexts, Consequences*, edited by Jan Steyn, Cambridge University Press, 2022, pp. 162–178.

Anderson, Jean. "Digging Down to Bedrock: Some Reflections on Translating Indigenous Writing from Aotearoa/New Zealand." *Translating and Interpreting in Australia and New Zealand: Distance and Diversity*, edited by Judy Wakabayashi und O'Hagan, Routledge, 2021, pp. 251–267.

Baker, Mona. *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. Taylor & Francis Group, ProQuest Ebook Central, 2018, accessed 7 July 2024.

Campbell, Madeleine and Ricarda Vidal. *The Experience of Translation: Materiality and Play in Experiential Translation*, edited by Madeleine Campbell und Ricarda Vidal, Taylor & Francis Group, ProQuest Ebook Central, 2024, accessed 11 June 2024.

Dürbeck, Gabriele. *Stereotype Paradiese. Ozeanismus in der deutschen Südseeliteratur 1815–1914*. Niemeyer, 2007.

Dürbeck, Gabriele. "Ozeanismus." *Handbuch Postkolonialismus und Literatur*, edited by Dirk Göttsche, Axel Dunker und Gabriele Dürbeck, Metzler, 2017, pp. 205–207.

Evans, Patrick. "'Pakeha-Style Biculturalism' and the Maori Writer." *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2006, pp. 11–35, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20112414, accessed 23 April 2025.

Even-Zohar, Itamar. "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem." *Poetics Today*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1990, pp. 45–51, https://doi.org/10.2307/1772668.

Farbotko, Carol. "Tuvalu and Climate Change: Constructions of Environmental Displacement in *The Sydney Morning Herald*." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, vol. 87, no. 4, 2005, pp. 279–293, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0435-3684.2005.00199.x.

Farbotko, Carol. "'The global warming clock is ticking so see these places while you can': Voyeuristic tourism and model environmental citizens on Tuvalu's disap-

pearing islands." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2010, pp. 224–238, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9493.2010.00392.x.

Fischer, Frank and John Forester. "Editors' Introduction." *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*, edited by Frank Fischer und John Forester, Duke University Press, 1993, pp. 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822381815.

Geary, David. "Rarohenga and the Reformation." *Pūrākau: Māori Myths Retold by Māori Writers*, edited by Witi Ihimaera and Whiti Hereaka, Penguin, 2019, pp. 349–367.

Grass, Delphine. *Translation as Creative-Critical Practice*. Cambridge University Press, 2023.

Gudgeon, C.M.G. "The Tipua-Kura and Other Manifestations of The Spirit World." Original from The University of California: Printed for the Society by Whitcombe & Tombs Limited. *Journal of The Polynesian Society*, pp. 27–29.

Haag, Oliver and Danica Čerče. "Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* in Slovene, Dutch, and German Translation." *Antipodes*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2015, pp. 251–268, https://doi.org/10.13110/antipodes.29.2.0251.

Haag, Oliver. "A History of Indigenous New Zealand Books in European Translation." *The Journal of New Zealand Studies*, vol. 16, 2013, pp. 79–99, https://doi.org/10.26686/jnzs.v0i16.2027.

Haag, Oliver. "Oceanic Books in Translation. Towards a History of Indigenous Australian, New Zealand and Pacific Publishing in European Translation." *Zeitschrift für Australienstudien*, vol. 31, 2017, pp. 11–54, https://australienstudien.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/ZfA_31-2017_011-054_Haag.pdf, accessed 11 April 2025.

Hanly, Lillian. "Treaty Principles Bill: What you need to know." *RNZ*, 24 September 2024, https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/528821/treaty-principles-bill-what-you-need-to-know, accessed 11 April 2025.

Hau'ofa, Epeli. "Our Sea of Islands." *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1994, pp. 148–161, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23701593, accessed 11 April 2025.

Hislop, Emma. "The revolutionary act of rewriting: Witi Ihimaera's first and latest novel, Tangi." *The Spinoff*, 18 June 2023, https://thespinoff.co.nz/books/18-06-2023/the-revolutionary-act-of-rewriting-witi-ihimaeras-first-and-latest-novel-tangi, accessed 11 April 2025.

Hokowhitu, Brendan. "Authenticating Māori Physicality: Translations of 'Games' and 'Pastimes' by Early Travellers and Missionaries to New Zealand." *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 25, no. 10, 2008, pp. 1355–1373, https://doi.org/10.1080/09523360802212289.

Ihimaera, Witi Tame, and Holger Leue. *Zauberhaftes Neuseeland*. Text by Witi Ihimaera. Reed, 1998.

Ihimaera, Witi. *The Whale Rider*. Reed, 2003 [1987].

Ihimaera, Witi. *The Whale Rider*. Harcourt, 2003.

Ihimaera, Witi. *Whalerider. Die magische Geschichte vom Mädchen, das den Wal ritt*. Translated by Sabine Schulte, Rowohlt, 2003.

Ihimaera, Witi. Aroha. *Maori-Geschichten aus dem Jadeland*. [Aroha: Myths and Stories from Pounamu Country]. Translated by Maria von der Alie, Isele, 1998.

Ihimaera, Witi, and Tina Makereti. *Black Marks on the White Page*. Penguin, 2017.

Ihimaera, Witi. "Saturday Short Story: Der Traum, by Witi Ihimaera." *Newsroom*, 2 August 2019, https://newsroom.co.nz/2019/08/02/saturday-short-story-witi-ihimaera, accessed 11 April 2025.

Ihimaera, Witi. "Der Traum." *Indigenous Pacific Islander Eco-Literatures*, edited by Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, Leora Kava und Craig Santos Perez, de Gruyter, 2022, pp. 193–199, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824893514.

Ihimaera, Witi, and Michelle Elvy. *A Kind of Shelter Whakaruru-taha: An Anthology of New Writing for a Changed World*. Massey University Press, 2023.

Ihimaera, Witi. "Interview with Ihimaera." *National Library of New Zealand*, https://natlib.govt.nz/korero/interview-with-witi-ihimaera, accessed 11 April 2025.

Kench, Paul S., Murray R. Ford, and Susan D. Owen. "Patterns of island change and persistence offer alternate adaptation pathways for atoll nations." *Nature Communications*, vol. 9, no. 605, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-018-02954-1.

Koegler, Caroline. *Critical Branding: Postcolonial Studies and the Market*. Routledge, 2018.

Kölling, Angela, and Sabine Schulte. "*The Whale Rider* – die Übersetzung indigener Literatur aus Neuseeland ins Deutsche." FTSK, Johannes Gutenberg University in Germersheim. *YouTube*, 22 June 2023, https://www.youtube.com/live/n6ya_IXL9CQ?feature=shared, accessed 20 February 2025.

Kölling, Angela. "NZ@Frankfurt – Imagining New Zealand's Guest of Honour Presentation at the 2012 Frankfurt Book Fair from the Point of View of Literary Translation." *Imaginations. Journal of Cross-Cultural Image*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2014, pp. 81–99, https://doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE.periph.5-1.6.

Kölling, Angela. "The Translator as Community-Maker: Elements of Foreignisation in Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World*." *Translation, Transnationalism, World Literature – Essays in Translation Studies, 2010–2014*, edited by Francesca Benocci und Marco Sonzogni, Joker, 2015, pp. 167–182.

Lee, Tong King. *Translation as Experimentalism: Exploring Play in Poetics*. Cambridge Elements, 2022.

Low, Nic. "Facebook Redux." *Black Marks on the White Page*, edited by Witi Ihimaera und Tina Makereti, Penguin, 2017, pp. 283–294.

Lyons, Scott Richard. *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent*. University of Minnesota Press, ProQuest Ebook Central, accessed 2 July 2024.

Marsh, Selina Tusitala. *Mophead Tu: The Queen's Poem*. Auckland University Press, 2020.

Morris, Paula. *Hiwa: Contemporary Māori Short Stories*. Auckland University Press, 2023.

Niezen, Ronald. *The Origins of Indigenism: Human Rights and the Politics of Identity*. University of California Press, 2003, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppf7b, accessed 11 April 2025.

Prentice, Chris. "Articulating New Zealand and Literature in 'New Zealand Literature' Classes: Attending to the Parergon." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 56, no. 2, 2020, pp. 233–248, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2020.1729604.

Riemenschneider, Dieter. "On Sale: Aotearoa New Zealand Literature in Germany." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 56, no. 2, 2020, pp. 249–260, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2020.1728916.

Robert-Foley, Lily. *Experimental Translation: The Work of Translation in the Age of Algorithmic Production*. Goldsmiths Press, 2023.

Sander, Julia, Anke Vogel, and Angela Kölling. "Upload ertrinkender Staaten aus der Polykrise? *Cryptos* (2020) von Ursula Poznanski zur Förderung kritischen Lesens als Beitrag zur Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung im Deutschunterricht." *Literaturunterricht und Krise. Aktuelle Herausforderungen in Welt und Fach*, edited by Julia Stetter und Sebastian Susteck, J.B. Metzler, 2025, pp. 257–276.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books, 1999.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. "Decolonizing Methodology." *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIZXQC27tvg, accessed 17 June 2024.

Steinmetz, George. "The Uncontrollable Afterlives of Ethnography: Lessons from 'salvage colonialism' in the German overseas empire." *Ethnography*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2004, pp. 251–288, https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138104045657.

Stratford, Elaine, Carol Farbotko, Phillipa Watson, Taukiei Kitara, Juno Berthelsen, Maria Hnaraki, Ayano Ginoza, Christopher Cozier, and Julie Edel Hardenberg. "Islands, the Anthropocene, and Decolonisation." *Antipode*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2023, pp. 1255–1274, https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12924.

Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. Taylor & Francis, ProQuest Ebook Central, 2017.

Wagner, Constantin, and Lian Gogali. "Bildung fängt mit Wandel an: Gemeinsam handeln! Zukunftsmodul – Voices for Climate." Johannes Gutenberg University. *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/live/Cf9c5KEIaBg, accessed 20 February 2025.

Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction – The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. Routledge, 1984.

Wehler-Schöck, Anja. "‚Mein Land wird komplett im Wasser Versinken': Ist Tuvalu schon bald ein Staat ohne Territorium?" *Tagesspiegel*, 23 May 2023, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/internationales/in-einer-paar-jahrzehnten-wird-mein-land-komplett-vom-wasser-verschluckt-sein-ist-tuvalu-bald-ein-staat-ohne-territorium-9856268.html, accessed 4 June 2024.

Wilson, Janet M. "From National to Global: Writing and Translating the Aotearoa New Zealand Short Story." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 56, no. 2, 2020, pp. 217–232, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2020.1736421.

Wohlfart, Irmengard. "Investigating a double translation of culture: The English-Māori classic postcolonial text *Potiki* and its German translation." *Target Online*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2009, pp. 265–288, https://doi.org/10.1075/target.21.2.03woh.

Wohlfahrt, Irmengard. "Cultural Mediation in New Zealand Postcolonial Translation." *Lebende Sprachen*, vol. 63, no. 2, 2018, pp. 254–271, https://doi.org/10.1515/les-2018-0015.

Section II: Reading Nature

Reading to Make the World a Better Place? Critical Literacy and Education for Sustainable Development

Julia Sander and Wolfgang Jäger

Abstract *The article explores the role of literature in advancing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), examining its potential to enhance understanding of global challenges and to foster transformative action. After the framework of ESD is outlined, UNESCO's SDG Book Club initiative is taken as a starting point for an analysis of the opportunities, challenges and limitations of reading literature for sustainability education. The authors suggest critical literacy as a way of reading with and against texts, and the approach of critical literary conversations that encourages learners to engage in democratic discourse.*

Keywords *education for sustainable development; transformative reading; children's and young adult literature; critical literacy; dialogue*

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has developed historically from environmental education and has become an overarching concept of transformative education that describes a cross-cutting objective for all subjects and all stages (Wanning 2019, 300ff.). Its goal is to promote a globally just, ecologically sound and economically viable development that meets the needs of both present and future generations. ESD raises awareness of complex global challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation, poverty, inequality and digitalisation, teaches skills to actively address these challenges and make responsible decisions for a sustainable future. Learners should consider their actions in a global context, be encouraged to reflect on their own values and attitudes, and deal with uncertainties, conflicting goals and crises. They do so to actively participate in sustainable design processes and develop creative and innovative solutions. The concept of ESD thus integrates three central principles: global perspectives, an interdisciplinary approach and transformation (see Wanning 2019 on the historical development and the in-

terconnectedness of these principles). As challenges such as democratisation, environmental protection, economic prosperity and social justice are considered in their global interdependence, sustainable development requires thinking beyond (national) borders. To this end, knowledge and theories from different subject areas are integrated to grasp the complex interactions between agents, systems and processes. In addition to imparting knowledge, ESD is about promoting skills and encouraging people to engage in problem-solving, critical thinking, changing perspectives, teamwork and participation at all levels of action – micro, meso and macro (KMK and BMZ 2016, 35–53).

Development and establishment

The concept of Education for Sustainable Development originated in 1992 at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, where education was identified as a key to solving global challenges. It is based on the guiding idea of sustainable development, as formulated in the Brundtland Report (1987), and was globally embodied in the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – in particular Goal 4.7, which promotes quality education as the foundation (see BMBF and UNESCO for comprehensive introductions) – adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 (UNGA 2015).

UNESCO had already launched the UN World Decade (2005–2014), followed by the Global Action Programme (2015–2019), which promoted the structural implementation of ESD worldwide. In Germany, the National Action Plan for ESD was adopted in 2017, which further integrates it into educational institutions with 130 goals and 349 recommendations for action (BMBF 2017; on the evolution of the concept KMK and BMZ 2016, 26–33). In a UNESCO and Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace (MGIEP) guidebook[1] from 2017 all school subjects are called upon to contribute not only to their subject-specific content but also to a more social, ecological and peaceful world by promoting knowledge-based skills, values and attitudes towards sustainability.

The embedding of ESD in curricula, materials and training is advanced by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) and the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The 2007/2016 "Curriculum Framework Education for Sustainable Development" serves as an important basis for this goal. Here the core competencies to be achieved in education are conceptualised as *recognising*, *assessing* and *acting*. Complementarily, topic areas in learning contexts have been set to reflect the complexity of ESD's

1 The guidebook is targeted to "stakeholders in textbook development – education ministries, national curriculum authorities, textbook writers and publishers" (2017, 5).

guiding principles, take up globalisation and global development processes, and enable a personal connection and a global worldview at the same time (KMK/BMZ 2016, 86–97; KMK 2024).

The challenges of ambitious objectives

As emphasised above, UNESCO assigns a central role to education in implementing the programme: "Sustainable development requires changes in the way we think and act. Education plays a crucial role in bringing about this change" (UNGA 2014). It is assumed, according to Hoiß, that education can be an essential mediator of desirable attitudes, mindsets, values and also behaviours and is therefore extremely suitable as a means of implementing and enforcing political goals (2019, 33–34). The task that the political sphere is placing in the lap of education is an enormous one. Not least because the range of topics and global issues that ESD has to address is so diverse and complex (36). Teachers have consequently been identified as "change agents" (Wanning 2019, 309; Hoiß 2019, 21–22). The ESD programme thus formulates high expectations that not only call on institutions from politics, economy and society, but also on individuals to recognise and use their possibilities for action (Hoiß 2019, 33–34).

Hoiß points out that the idea of achieving ESD through cognitive-reflective educational programmes alone seems still widespread and criticises them as insufficient (2019, 90). In this context, it should be acknowledged that there is a substantial disparity between environmental knowledge and environmental action that Lawrence Buell has described already in 1995 with the term *environmental doublethink* (1995, 4).[2] This phenomenon can be seen as an example of the wider fundamental challenge that an increase in knowledge about global problems does not necessarily lead to a change in attitudes and active participation in solutions (Wanning 2023; Wanning 2019, 295–296; Niebert 2019). Reflecting a strong cognitive orientation, research has been increasingly emphasising the high relevance of emotional and aesthetic approaches, along with the importance of autonomy and dialogue (Hoiß 2019, 90; see also Wanning 2019, 308 on the newer take of connecting ESD more with empathy and emotion).

2 Niebert (2019) concludes from first studies on the impact of sustainability education that they "mainly confirm a positive cognitive effect" but show "that neither students' attitudes nor their behaviour and associated values are significantly affected by school programs for sustainability." And while adults in Europe show "a high level of environmental consciousness", "there is no – in the worst case even a negative – correlation between pro-environmental attitudes and pro-environmental behaviour. People with a high level of environmental awareness do not necessarily have a good personal ecological balance sheet." (ibid.)

With reference to the educational scientist Sascha Zinn (2013), Hoiß raises the issue of tension between individual learners' autonomy and the presetting of strong normative goals in terms of attitudes and actions. Education should enable autonomy and reflection without reducing learners to predetermined goals even those such as sustainable behaviour (see also Drerup 2021, 128). This, we argue, applies all the more with regard to the prohibition of indoctrination and the importance of democratic debate – didactic principles for political learning contexts defined in the 1970s in the "Beutelsbacher Konsens" (Wehling 1977). While, for example, the findings on climate change and the necessity of sustainability are not in dispute from a scientific perspective, the questions of which political assessments and actual responses are to be drawn from this remain legitimately controversial (Drerup 2021, 127–130). It seems possible to think of education and sustainability together only if the development of a sustainability ethos in the individual is thought of as an act of self-constitution. A credible ESD therefore requires transparency regarding the ethical foundations of the educational programme and their discursive negotiation (Hoiß 2019, 89–90). Dialogue, Zinn argues, is crucial, because experiencing plurality and difference enables people to make choices, which are a prerequisite for responsible action (2013, 369f.). Kurbacher (2008, 7), arguing from a philosophical point of view, states that the possibility of making a reflective judgment on what affects us and matters to us entails the freedom that is necessary to assume responsibility. Thus, educational processes must meet the claim of openness to the future (Anselm and Antony 2023, 225–228).

Reading literature for sustainable development

UNESCO (2014) has highlighted the productive relationship of literacy to sustainable development with the goal to facilitate change. Educators are advised "to use literature to enable learners to make informed decisions and take action as responsible global citizens" (UNESCO 2017, 172). The SDG Book Club initiative can be understood in this context.

The SDG Book Clubs

The SDG Book Club initiative was launched in 2019 by the UN in collaboration with various international organisations, including the International Publishers Association (IPA) and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). Aimed at children aged 6 to 12, the club promotes reading and encourages young readers to explore the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through a curated selection of books from around the world. Book lists corresponding to the

17 SDGs, selected by a committee of experts, were released in six official UN languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish; UN 2023). The UN invites communities to organise local book club meetings, providing compact technical guidance on how to do so on their website.

While there is neither comprehensive information on the criteria for book selection nor an outline of the didactic concepts the book clubs are supposed to be grounded on, the "Reading List Catalogue" gives some insight into conceptual ideas. Under the slogan "Join Read Act" the book club's goal is described as to

> take [the readers] on a journey around the world while they learn to see poverty, pollution and inequality through the eyes of their favourite characters. The stories will encourage them to take concrete actions to help others and make the world a better place for all. (UN 2023, 204)

In his foreword to the October 2023 Reading List Catalogue, Maher Nasser, Director of the Outreach Division in the UN Department for Global Communications formulates that the UN is

> excited to showcase stories from around the world that will fuel the imagination, trigger curiosity and raise awareness of new possibilities. Reading and learning are essential to children's growth and development, and the SDG Book Club reading lists aim to help them realize options others have taken to overcome challenges and to learn about the core purpose of the SDGs through age-appropriate stories and inspire them to make a difference where and when they can. (UN 2023, 2)

Literature is seen as a means to recognise new perspectives and learn about struggles and actions taken by others. Readers might develop empathy with relatable characters which are showcasing local possibilities and solutions for diverse global challenges, motivating them to make a difference which should ultimately lead to real-world impact.

On the website UNESCO offers a small sample of "actions that you can take beyond just reading the books" among which are common action- and production-oriented methods like creating a poster about a character or organising a reading scavenger hunt (https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sdgbookclub/). One recommended idea connects to the political sphere in a narrower sense: "Help your kids write a letter to the local government representative and tell them what you learned in the book and ask them what action(s) they are taking toward a specific Goal".

Additionally, the initiative encourages sharing the experiences and products online through social media:

> Reading is a great way to better understand what people from across the globe struggle with in their everyday lives, and it helps us reflect on our own situation. But reading is just the first step: now it's time to share your book club experiences and how you plan to take action. (https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sdgbookclub/)

While the idea of Book Clubs world wide that foster sustainable development is very appealing, the didactic concepts and the methodical implementation with regard to reading literature for sustainable development could be explored more thoroughly. Therefore, we will refer to the aforementioned UNESCO guidebook and elaborate on didactic research in this context.

Didactic perspectives on reading for sustainable development

With a focus on implementation, Wanning (2019) argues that it is becoming apparent that ESD teaching in the language and literature classrooms in particular is making a significant contribution in line with UNESCO's call for a global citizenship education. Literary didactic research explores the role of literature in ESD emphasising its diverse potentials to foster cognitive, emotional and action-oriented competencies that are necessary for sustainable development (Grimm and Wanning 2021). In the UNESCO guide for textbooks, written for a professional audience that is concerned with the creation of educational materials for different subjects, it is claimed that

> students can learn, through literature, to identify multiple perspectives on a subject as well as the perspectives and values needed for a sustainable world. Moreover, students can learn to develop empathy – to 'walk in another's shoes' – a necessary ability if human beings are to live well with each other, to respect and care for each other and the planet. Literature can be used in language textbooks to deepen students' understanding of their world and, in particular, the values needed to preserve it. (UNESCO 2017, 172)

As an understanding of local struggles in global developments is a fundamental goal, it is initially relevant that, according to Abraham (2021), literature, like any text, processes existing world knowledge it conveys and "sometimes represents knowledge that is or was unavailable in other ways" (38–39; see also Wanning 2023). Literary texts also allow readers to see the world from perspectives that they would otherwise not have access to (– including that of animals; see in this volume Castellanos and Wild on whales). For instance, there are many examples of children's literature that imparts factual knowledge about nature, environmental problems and inter-

relationships through characters and settings that represent endangered habitats (Wanning 2023). Texts may introduce perspectives, environments and developments that initially seem alien, far removed from the learners' knowledge and experience (see Kruse and Kanning 2023, 27). An expanded canon can include narratives "with a sustainability/environmental focus" which allow students "to explore themes in a holistic way so they are able to recognise the connections between the social, the economic, the political and the environmental" (UNESCO 2017, 173) as well as texts from around the globe that deal with multiple regional experiences, thus challenging abstract, generalising and possibly derogatory notions of the "Global South" (see Wintersteiner 2019 below).

At the same time, literature provides a comprehensible space of possibility in which young readers can discover, try out and reflect on options for action aiming for a sustainable future (Sippl 2020; Grimm and Wanning 2021):

> The literary text presents an imagined scenario and thus provides a playground for fictional action. The reader enters into the story and crosses the boundaries of their own lived experience without having to take any risks themselves. In their imagination, readers act out what is beyond their actual experience. Reading takes them into a state of 'trial action'; guided by the hand of a literary character, with whose identity they merge in various ways in the act of reading, they are in the middle of the book's events and at the same time with themselves. (Bertschi-Kaufmann 2000, 24)

Literature oscillates between imposition and encouragement when it opens a space for experiences that challenges readers to position themselves, but the aesthetic distance relieves them of immediate responsibility for their actions (Anselm and Antony 2023, 230, 237).

Literary works may also foster a closer connection between cognitive and emotional processes (Grimm and Wanning 2021). They open up imaginative spaces in which global issues can be experienced on a more personal level. This makes it easier to understand complex topics such as climate change or poverty not only rationally, but also emotionally thereby becoming more attentive. Empathy as a key competence can be strengthened: literary texts invite emotional bonds by allowing readers to identify with characters. This makes it possible to establish an affective connection between personal lives and global challenges, between one's own situation and feelings and those of others as well as animals (Wanning 2023; UNESCO 2017, 175).

When it comes to the application, as outlined in the recommendations of the SDG Book Club for example, Sippl (2020) points out the parallels to the action and production orientation of literary didactics (Spinner 2013). Action-oriented methods – students design posters, write letters, develop role plays or organise discussions – promote active engagement with texts: students should not only respond to

them in a receptive way, but also produce their own (creative) responses to them (Spinner 2013, 319). The creative and participatory tasks, combining text analysis with actual challenges which stimulate reflection and encourage activity, create a link between theory and practice that is supposed to support transformative educational processes and inspire genuine behavioural change (Sippl 2020).

While all of the above approaches can make a plausible contribution to ESD, the action- and production-oriented methods also with regard to acting, the question remains, what else literature classes could contribute to ESD in a subject-specific way: It cannot be a narrow skill-based approach, precisely because overarching educational goals are at stake. Using literature only as a thematic source does not correspond to its aesthetic potential. This also applies to using literature to initiate political activism which anyway could not be justified if it was dictated or if a situation arose in which social pressure demanded participation. What we are looking for are learning arrangements that meet subject-specific goals and ESD goals that can be systematically aimed at even in the narrow curricular and temporal constraints of the classroom. We argue that with regard to ESD literature classes can and should contribute to the development of critical literacy as a specific goal that also addresses the broader goal. In order to provide an approach that responds to the challenges identified above, we propose a didactic model of critical literature reading developed by Sander (2024) for sustainable education and the idea of participation in dialogue. The model is based on two approaches to political (literary) didactics: research on Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and critical literacy research. It understands critical reading as an actualisation of relations between reader, text and world with and against the text and within the backdrop of the core democratic principles of freedom, equality and solidarity in a global decolonial perspective (see Fig. 1; Sander 2024; Sander and Jäger 2024). Critical literary conversations are suggested as a way to implement critical literacy in the literature classroom to promote democratic discourse.

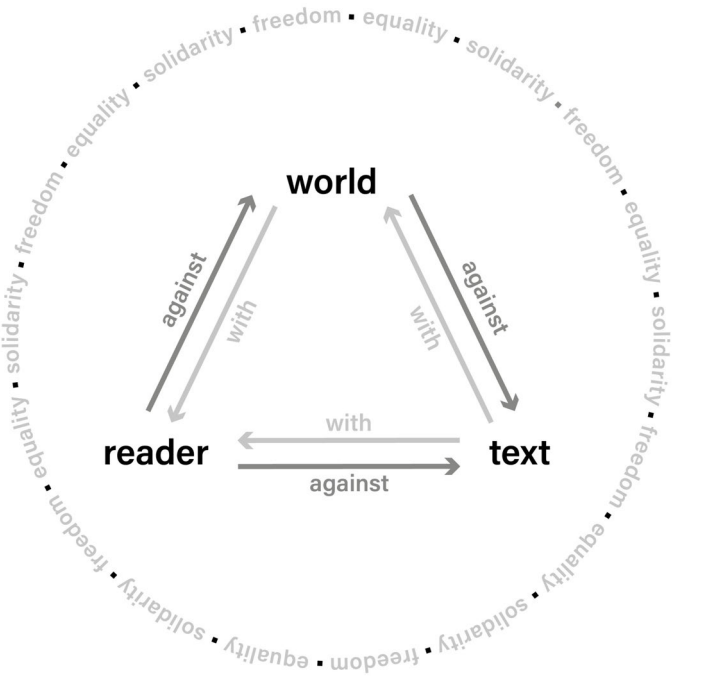
Critical literacy as reading with and against texts

It is a broadly shared assumption, that literary reading is a privileged field of (critical) self- and world-experience. Literature, according to Wintersteiner, slows down our perception and can make it easier to see through things, processes, structures and behaviors that we have previously regarded as natural, in their contrived and relative nature, in short – to recognise the world as changeable (Wintersteiner 2019, 493).

Both literature and reading processes, it is assumed, can explore alternatives, expand spaces of imagination, and make power and inequality, dominance and injustice perceptible and negotiable. But, just as they are able to question existing re-

lationships to the self and the world and to create perspectives of alternative possibilities, they can also be problematic, discriminatory and hurtful. With regard to the teaching of critical literary reading we see it as productive to think of the respective focus of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and critical literacy together as reading with and against the text (see also Janks 2019)[3].

Fig. 1: Didactic model of critical literary reading



Source: author, first published in German in Sander 2024, 187

In this way, critical literacy can be understood as a disposition and ability – "a way of being and doing" (Vasquez, Janks and Comber 2019, 300) – to realise relations,

3 Even though the formulation is not new (see Janks 2019), the didactic model we work with focusses more explicitly the reading with the text as critique. In critical literacy theory, a reading with the text seems generally to be conceptualised as understanding. Janks (2018, 96), for example, writes "Ideal readers read with the text; critical readers read against the text." Also in Critical Literature Pedagogy (CLP), reading with the text is assigned to "familiar approaches" and "traditional standards" of reading contexts (Borsheim-Black/Macaluso/Petrone 2014, 124).

- on the one hand, to adopt the perspective(s) of the text and, on the basis of literary constructions – i.e. with the text – to examine and disrupt certainties and to reflect on conditions, alternatives and thus possibilities of change of self and world, and
- on the other hand, to scrutinise texts as a whole, aesthetic forms, characters, their socio-political environments, also authors and their contexts on the basis of own and others' experiences and knowledge (Sander 2024, 194–195; Sander, Jäger and Wild 2024, 150).

Critical literacy in the context of sustainability education takes place in relations between reader, text and world (Fig. 1). These relations are realised with and against the text, since the objective is both: the use of the potentials that literary texts and their readings offer in their specific quality and effect for self-criticism and critique of the world and the deconstruction of power relations that are embodied in literature (ibid.).

On the potential of reading with the text

Literary works of art can encourage a critical examination of globalisation processes and how learners can relate themselves and their lives to local and global challenges, critically question themselves, open new perspectives and develop ideas of what is not, but could be. Global Citizenship Education asks learners to focus on the global in the here and now and "encourages students to develop a critical understanding of globalisation, to reflect on how they and their nations are involved in local and global issues, and to explore intercultural perspectives" (Pashby 2012, 9 cited in Wintersteiner 2019).

A focus can be on the role of literature in the acquisition and negotiation of values and responsibility (Sippl 2020; Anselm 2021). Literary texts can express and convey core global values like sustainability and social justice, raise environmental awareness, showcase a sustainable way of life or promote ethical reflection, for example by exploring the discrepancy between norms and reality, which is particularly relevant in the context of ESD. Through identification with certain characters, their attitudes and behaviour, values might be taken up, and a disposition be created to question existing patterns of thought and perception as well as values (Kruse and Kanning 2023; Grimm and Wanning 2021; Anselm and Antony 2023, 237).

In addition, literary texts are thought to encourage sustainable behaviour (Wanning 2023). The conative dimension of literary reception highlights the reader's disposition and intention to become active, which is based on motivation. Texts may offer literary role models, who actively address global problems, for imitation and thereby foster motivation to take action. Literature may also foster an understand-

ing of "futures as a variety of alternatives" (Bianchi et al. 2022, 23 cited in Sippl 2023, 125). So positive alternative (future) scenarios might provide an incentive for a sustainable behaviour (Sippl 2020). While futures literacy can be understood as a collaborative form of participation in the discourse of performing future design (Anselm and Antony 2023, 228), Sippl (2023, 219) argues more far-reaching that in the interplay between aesthetics and knowledge, future narratives emerge that lead from the formation of ideas to the "doing future" (Assmann 2022) of imagined futures.

Kruse and Kanning (2023) point out that the effects of children's literature are difficult to measure empirically. Changes in perception and behaviour and social transformation can hardly be attributed directly to reading. The effects are often subtle, individually different and long-term. It remains unclear, for example, whether a particular action – such as empathic interaction with others – actually results from a literary encounter or is due to other factors. At the same time, there is strong confidence in the impact of literature, which is based on its functions of individuation, socialisation and enculturation that have been thoroughly examined in literary didactics (Abraham and Kepser 2016, 26f.).

On the importance of also reading against texts

In addition to the preceding considerations, the basic assumption of critical literacy research that texts "are never neutral" (Vasquez, Janks and Comber 2019) must be taken into account. A literary text always represents a (selection of) perspective(s). Also in literature – broadly understood – there are possibly distortions, questionable and potentially harmful representations. In response to this diagnosis, critical literacy focuses analysis on power relations and aims to empower learners to understand and question the systems in which we live, and to make the world a more just place. Readers should learn to deconstruct texts and, in their critical engagement with (not only) literature and other media ask, whose stories are told and how, and whose stories are not told, and what interests a text might serve (Sandretto in this volume; see Sandretto and Klenner 2011 for a comprehensive introduction). The question is also raised as to how texts, images and practices can be revised, rewritten and (re)constructed to formulate different and more socially just messages that have an impact on people and their lives (Low et al. 2021, 311ff.; Vasquez, Janks and Comber 2019, 302). Guiding questions and criteria serve to support readers by directing their attention to the analysis of the text under aspects such as inclusion and exclusion, representations, multiple readings, power and interest, context, influence and author (Sandretto and Klenner 2011, 69ff.; Janks 2019, 561). Then characters and their socio-political environments, as well as authors and their contexts might be called into question based on their own and others' experiences and knowledge. The values on offer can be negotiated and might be opposed.

For learning settings that focus on reading against texts, a "reading against the grain" is suggested, which aims to develop "resistant readings" as strategies that "scrutinize the beliefs and attitudes that typically go unexamined in a text, drawing attention to the gaps, silences and contradictions" and "adds the experiences of less represented individuals and groups into the textual discourse" (Southern Poverty Law Center). Suggesting another approach, Wintersteiner (2023) points to Edward Said's "contrapuntal reading", which allows to unfold colonial and hegemonic structures within (canonical) texts and to develop alternative readings. To reveal that history is always polyphonic but often told from (only) one perspective, different works may be read alongside each other: "The imperialist power imbalance that silences the voices of the colonized is attempted to be reversed by placing the voices side by side on an equal footing" (Gatzweiler 2014) which is a fundamental goal in ESD when it comes to the representation of global developments and the discussion of possible solutions. Contrapuntal reading can also involve reading a text

> with an awareness of the simultaneity of the imperial experience on both sides of the empire [...] continuously undertaking a change of perspective, an inner movement, so to speak, to take into account the different points of view. This enables one to grasp the text and its narratives in a completely different way, especially that which is often silenced and forgotten from an imperialist perspective: the experience of the colonized (ibid.).

Critical literacy as participation in dialogue

For literature and reading education we would like to specify with a somewhat humble approach Niebert's (2019) claim that "effective sustainability education is political education": The realization of relations between reader, text, and world with and against the text can be understood as political participation in a constant struggle for democracy – not only as an existing system but as an ideal measured against global standards for a peaceful, just, and democratic world society (Wintersteiner 2014, 13). Drawing on interdisciplinary research, democratic theory identifies democracy's core principles – freedom, equality, and solidarity – as subjects of continuous negotiation in both formal politics and everyday life (Rajal, Maier and Landkammer 2020, 11–14; Marchart 2020, 23–25). Participation, from this perspective, extends beyond institutional mechanisms to encompass social interactions, including those in digital spaces and smaller communities. This broad view of participation highlights the growing influence of active citizens in shaping democracy – "a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey 1930, 101). Through critical reading and discussion of literature in learning contexts students engage

with democratic values by negotiating their meaning in relation to themselves and society (Sander, Jäger and Wild 2024).

The goal of critical engagement through dialogue with and about literature is for learners to experience reading and the political as something vital and meaningful (Wintersteiner 2019c, 8). Critical literacy practices with and against the text can create space for experiencing critique, despite all the challenges,[4] as an important and attractive task in the construction of democratic perspectives (Sander 2024). Developing critical literacy skills requires texts and characters with whom and about whom one can argue. It requires students who are willing to share their perspectives on a literary text and the political and to engage with other perspectives. It requires a setting and a teacher that promotes democratic debate.

Research on conversation-based literature teaching has emphasised the possibility of individual empowerment and social impact but offered only few ideas for a critical-participatory approach to literature in a political sense (Sander and Alt 2025). Critical literary conversations may offer just that. Dialogic Literary Gatherings (Flecha et al. 2024) and the Heidelberg Model of Literary Conversation (Steinbrenner and Wiprächtiger-Geppert 2010) are proposed here as a starting point for their conceptualisation – an open format that enables the exchange of reading experiences and interpretations without striving for fixed results. It emphasises a balance between self-refence, text reference, and the acknowledgement of others' perspectives. The teacher as a participating leader facilitates the discussion by providing impulses and contexts, setting boundaries to protect where necessary, and encouraging reflection on values. In the long term, students should take over the role of discussion leader in order to anchor participation as a goal and method.

Wintersteiner (2020) has already expanded the Heidelberg model to include a transcultural perspective emphasising the importance of conflict and how to deal with otherness and ambiguity. Critical literary conversations, which continue this line of thought, foster discussions about values such as freedom, equality and solidarity, as well as promote the practice of tolerating openness and dissent. Students engage in democratic debate when they interact with the text, exchange their perspectives and engage with different viewpoints. In such a setting, the text as a whole, along with its characters and other elements, serve as a counterpart, as a partner or as an opponent to the collective of learners. It can incorporate the perspectives of the

4 Grappling with core values is a challenging task for everyone involved, and conflicts can always pose a risk. In addition, McKenzie and Jarvie (2018, 298) have pointed out that critical literacy practices ask "readers to take up a detective-like orientation to literature, treating texts as suspects" and might "promote a specific set of affective orientations towards a text, asking readers to cultivate scepticism and vigilance". One can confidently object that "critical literacy is essential for citizenship" (Mackey 1993, 69) but must acknowledge the tension that can arise with regard to the general goal of promoting reading.

absent (Arendt 2012, 342), thereby enabling a broad range of (self-)reflective insights and democratic negotiation processes (see on critical literary conversations Sander, Jäger and Wild 2024; Alt and Sander 2025, Sander and Alt 2025).

Concluding remarks

Literature may provide (new and otherwise unavailable) knowledge and perspectives, relate them to emotions, convey values, encourage reflection and even create a disposition to act. Reading literary texts thus ideally makes an indispensable contribution to sustainable transformation. At the same time, texts are never neutral, present limited perspectives and may convey distortions, questionable and potentially harmful representations.

To promote reading literature to make the world a better place, we need to aim for critical literacy in learning contexts. Therefore, we suggest a didactic model of critical participatory reading that emphasises reading with and against texts in the form of reflections on self, text and world against the backdrop of the core principles of freedom, equality and solidarity (see Fig. 1 above). Critical literary conversations which we have referred to can be thought of as spaces of possibility for participation in the endless task of shaping social orders under conditions of uncertainty (Flügel-Martinsen 2020, 106).

When promoting critical literacy in the context of ESD, the focus is on texts that enable students to negotiate core democratic values, hold polyvalence and offer different perspectives. In this way, they provide a wide range of possibilities for reflection by addressing crucial developments and global challenges. It is vital to learn from Global Citizenship Education that literary canons need to be expanded or rewritten so they include narratives from all over the world that deal with multiple regional experiences – past and present: Literature from the "Global South" or generally texts without direct reference to European literature not only bring new content, different role models and world views to the literature classroom, but also alternative narrative styles. This challenges conventional concepts of literacy and creates space for irritation and discussion (Wintersteiner 2023, 65).

It is evidently relevant that books like Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* (1987) travel (see Vogel, Bläsi and Kölling in this volume). In the context of book selection, youth book publishers are said to also have the potential to act as agents of change (Vogel 2024). There are also numerous catalogues that recommend books to read like the *Kolibri* list from *Baobab Books*, a charitable association that suggests "books for children and youths, which give an insight into unknown worlds" and can be "the beginning of a dialogue" (https://www.baobabbooks.ch/en/kolibri).

It stands to reason that texts should matter to students (Kämper-van den Boogaart and Hamelmann 2013) and match their reading skills, so they have suffi-

cient capacities to engage in discourse. The political experiences and the knowledge that the selected texts evoke need to be relatable to learners. When the stories are relevant and accessible to readers, they also serve to build a positive reading self-concept, promote reading skills and foster literary learning which lays the foundation for any form of participation in a globalised world. For all the importance of critical reading, due emphasis should therefore also be placed on identificatory reading (Anselm and Antony 2023, 244).

References

Abraham, Ulf, and Matthis Kepser. *Literaturdidaktik Deutsch. Eine Einführung*. 4th ed., Schmidt, 2016.

Alt, Lucas, and Julia Sander. "Was kann Literaturunterricht für die Demokratiebildung leisten? Perspektiven für die Ausbildung angehender Lehrkräfte." *Demokratiebildung als Querschnittsaufgabe der Lehrer:innenbildung*, edited by Matthias Busch et al., Wochenschau (Wissenschaft), 2025, pp. 355–399.

Anselm, Sabine, and Lea Antony. "Bücher öffnen den Blick in zukünftige Welten. Ein deutschdidaktischer Beitrag zu Futures Literacy im Literaturunterricht." *Futures Literacy. Zukunft lernen und lehren*, edited by Carmen Sippl, Gerhard Brandhofer, and Erwin Rauscher, Studienverlag, 2023, pp. 225–246, https://doi.org/10.53349/oa.2022.a2.170.

Anselm, Sabine. "Literaturunterricht und gesellschaftliche Verantwortung. Normative Implikationen von Werteerziehung im Deutschunterricht." *Normativität. Sammelband zu Ehren von Harro Müller-Michaels*, edited by Leonie Funda, Judith Herzog, Ralph Köhnen and Björn Rothstein, Beltz, 2021, pp. 232–254.

Arendt, Hannah. *Zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft. Übungen im politischen Denken I*, 5th ed., edited by Ursula Ludz, Piper, 2012.

Bertschi-Kaufmann, Andrea. *Lesen und Schreiben in einer Medienumgebung. Die literalen Aktivitäten von Primarschulkindern*, Aarau, 2000.

BMBF. "National Action Plan on Education for Sustainable Development. The German contribution to the UNESCO Global Action Programme." 2017, https://www.bne-portal.de/bne/shareddocs/downloads/files/bmbf_nap_bne_en_screen_2.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=5, accessed 10 April 2025.

BMBF. "Was ist BNE?" https://www.bne-portal.de/bne/de/einstieg/was-ist-bne/was-ist-bne_node.html, accessed 10 April 2025.

Borsheim-Black, Carlin, Michael Macaluso, and Robert Petrone. "Critical Literature Pedagogy. Teaching Canonical Literature for Critical Literacy." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 58, no. 2, 2014, pp. 123–133.

Dewey, John. *Democracy and education. An introduction to the philosophy of education*, The MacMillan company, 1930.

Drerup, Johannes. *Kontroverse Themen im Unterricht. Konstruktiv streiten lernen*. Reclam, 2021.

Flecha, Ramon, Eva Schiffner, and Regina Egetenmeyer. "Dialogic Literary Gatherings. Dialogisch-literarische Begegnungen verändern Bildung, Wissenschaft und vieles mehr. Erwachsenenbildung." *Vierteljahresschrift für Theorie und Praxis*, vol. 70, no. 1, 2024, pp. 21–25, https://doi.org/10.13109/erbi-2024-700107.

Grimm, Sieglinde, and Berbeli Wanning. "Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung in und durch Sprache und Literatur." *Natur, Umwelt, Nachhaltigkeit – Perspektiven auf Sprache, Diskurs und Kultur*, edited by Carolin Schwegler, Anna Mattfeldt, and Berbeli Wanning. DeGruyter, 2021, pp. 85–100.

Janks, Hilary. "Critical literacy and the importance of reading with and against a text." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 62, no. 5, 2019, pp. 561–564.

Kämper-van den Boogaart, Michael, and Monique Hamelmann. "'Kritik am Privileg wird zum Privileg: so dialektisch ist der Weltlauf'. Einige Anmerkungen zur Crux kritischen Urteilens im Deutschunterricht." *Kritik und Kompetenz. Die Praxis des Literaturunterrichts im gesellschaftlichen Kontext*, edited by Christian Dawidowski, and Dieter Wrobel, Schneider Verlag Hohengehren, 2013, pp. 41–59.

KMK, and BMZ. "Curriculum Framework Education for Sustainable Development." 2nd ed., Cornelsen, 2016, https://www.globaleslernen.de/sites/default/files/files/link-elements/curriculum_framework_education_for_sustainable_development_barrierefrei.pdf, accessed 10 April 2025.

KMK, and DUK. "Empfehlung der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (KMK) und der Deutschen UNESCO-Kommission (DUK) vom 15.06.2007 zur 'Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung in der Schule'." 2007, http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2007/2007_06_15_Bildung_f_nachh_Entwicklung.pdf, accessed 10 April 2025.

KMK. "Empfehlung der Kultusministerkonferenz zur Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung in der Schule (Beschluss der Kultusministerkonferenz vom 13.06.2024)." 2024, https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2024/2024_06_13-BNE-Empfehlung.pdf, accessed 10 April 2025.

Kruse, Iris, and Julian Kanning. "'So viel Größenwahn muss sein!' Zur Einführung." *'So viel Größenwahn muss sein!' Kinderliteratur – Schule – Gesellschaft. Zum Bildungsauftrag des Literaturunterrichts in der Grundschule*, edited by Iris Kruse, and Julian Kanning, kopaed, 2023, pp. 7–12.

Kühnert, Theresa. "Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung – eine Einführung." 2019, *bpb*, https://www.bpb.de/lernen/digitale-bildung/werkstatt/296913/bildung-fuer-nachhaltige-entwicklung-eine-einfuehrung/, accessed 10 April 2025.

Kurbacher, Frauke Annegret. "Was ist Haltung? Überlegungen zu einer Theorie der Haltung im Hinblick auf Interindividualität." 2008, http://www.dgphil2008.de

/fileadmin/download/Sektionsbeitraege/03-2_Kurbacher.pdf, accessed 10 April 2025.

Low, David E., Anna Lyngfelt, Angela Thomas, and Vivian M. Vasquez. "Critical literacy and contemporary literatures." *The critical literacies handbook*, edited by Jessica Zacher Pandya, Alberto R. Mora, Jennifer Helen Alford, Noah Asher Golden, and Roberto Santiago de Roock, Routledge, 2021, pp. 308–316.

Mackey, Margaret. "The Many Faces of Resistant Reading." *The English Journal*, vol. 82, no. 5, 1993, pp. 69–74, https://doi.org/10.2307/820820.

Marchart, Oliver. "Demokratie im Alltag." *Making Democracy – Aushandlungen von Freiheit, Gleichheit und Solidarität im Alltag*, edited by Elke Rajal, trafo.K, Oliver Marchart, Nora Landkammer, and Carina Maier, transcript, 2020, pp. 23–31.

McKenzie, Cori, and Jarvie, Scott. "The Limits of Resistant Reading in Critical Literacy Practices." *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2018, pp. 298–309, https://doi.org/10.1108/ETPC-01-2018-0017.

Niebert, Kai. "Effective sustainability education is political education." *On Education. Journal for Research and Debate*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2019, https://doi.org/10.17899/on_ed.2019.4.5.

Rajal, Elke, Carina Maier, and Nora Landkammer. "Einleitung. Demokratie aushandeln." *Making Democracy – Aushandlungen von Freiheit, Gleichheit und Solidarität im Alltag*, edited by Elke Rajal, trafo.K, Oliver Marchart, Nora Landkammer, and Carina Maier, transcript, 2020, pp. 11–21.

Sander, Julia. "With and against the text – Zu einem didaktischen Modell kritischen Literaturlesens." *Einfach aussortieren? Anregungen für kritische Lektüren des Literaturkanons*, edited by Magdalena Kißling, and Johanna Tönsing, Frank und Timme, 2024, pp. 185–207, https://doi.org/10.57088/978-3-7329-8830-3_8.

Sander, Julia, Wolfgang Jäger, and Bettina Wild. "Kritisches Lesen als Partizipation in der Demokratie." *Politische und Ästhetische Bildung im Deutschunterricht. Kinder- und Jugendmedien aus der Perspektive einer Politischen Literatur- und Mediendidaktik (kjl&m24.X)*, edited by Ricarda Freudenberg, and Petra Josting, kopaed, 2024, pp. 147–162.

Sander, Julia, and Lucas Alt. "Kritische Literaturgespräche als Partizipation in der Demokratie." *Demokratiebildung in Theorie und Praxis: Synergien zwischen Schulforschung und Deutschdidaktik*, edited by Kristina Kocyba und Martina Kofer, Potsdamer Beiträge zur Lehrkräftebildung und Bildungsforschung, 2025, in print.

Sandretto, Susan, and Scott Klenner. *Planting seeds: Embedding critical literacy into your classroom programme*, NZCER, 2011.

Sippl, Carmen. "Anthropozän – zwischen Antizipation und Apokalypse. Zukünftebildung in der Primarstufe mit dem Bilderbuch." *Futures Literacy. Zukunft lernen und lehren*, edited by Carmen Sippl, Gerhard Brandhofer, and Erwin Rauscher, Studienverlag, 2023, pp. 207–223.

Sippl, Carmen. "Nachhaltigkeit literarisch lernen. Themenorientierte Literaturdidaktik im Anthropozän (am Beispiel des SDG Book Club)." *R&E-Source*, 2020, https://journal.ph-noe.ac.at/index.php/resource/article/view/789/938, accessed 10 April 2025.

Southern Poverty Law Center. "Teaching strategy: Reading against the grain." https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/teaching-strategies/close-and-critical-reading/reading-against-the-grain, accessed April 2025.

Spinner, Kaspar H. "Handlungs- und produktionsorientierter Literaturunterricht." *Literatur- und Mediendidaktik* 2, edited by Volker Frederking, Axel Krommer, and Christel Meier, 2nd ed., Schneider Verlag Hohengehren, 2013, pp. 319–333.

Steinbrenner, Marcus, and Maja Wiprächtiger-Geppert. "Verstehen und Nicht-Verstehen im Gespräch. Das Heidelberger Modell des Literarischen Unterrichtsgesprächs." *leseforum.ch*, 03, 2010, https://www.leseforum.ch/myUploadData/files/2010_3_steinbrenner_wipraechtiger.pdf, accessed 10 April 2025.

UNESCO, and MGIEP. *Textbooks for Sustainable Development: A Guide to Embedding*, 2017, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259932, accessed 10 April 2025.

UNESCO. "Literacy and education for sustainable development and women's empowerment." 2014, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000230162, accessed 10 April 2025.

UNESCO. "What you need to know about education for sustainable development." https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education/need-know, accessed 10 April 2025.

United Nations General Assembly. "Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development as follow-up to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development after 2014." 2014, https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n14/293/78/pdf/n1429378.pdf, accessed 10 April 2025.

United Nations General Assembly. "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." 2015, https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n15/291/89/pdf/n1529189.pdf, accessed 10 April 2025.

Vasquez, Vivian Maria, Hilary Janks, and Barabra Comber. "Critical Literacy as a Way of Being and Doing." *Language Arts*, vol. 96, no. 5, 2019, pp. 300–311.

Vogel, Anke. "Green Publishing – ökologische Nachhaltigkeit im Kinder- und Jugendbuch." *Handbuch der ökologischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Theorie – Themen – Didaktik*, edited by Jana Mikota, and Carmen Sippel, Studienverlag, 2024, pp. 181–189.

Wanning, Berbeli. "Bildungspolitik/Didaktik." *Nachhaltigkeit interdisziplinär. Konzepte, Diskurse, Praktiken. Ein Kompendium*, edited by Ursula Kluwick, and Evi Zemanek, Böhlau, 2019, pp. 295–311.

Wanning, Berbeli. "Kinderbücher for future: Der Beitrag ökologischer Kinderliteratur und ihrer Figuren zu einer umweltsensiblen Bildung." *'So viel Größenwahn*

muss sein!' Kinderliteratur – Schule – Gesellschaft. Zum Bildungsauftrag des Literaturunterrichts in der Grundschule, edited by Iris Kruse, and Julian Kanning, kopaed, 2023, pp. 197–224.

Wehling, Hans-Georg. "Konsens à la Beutelsbach? Nachlese zu einem Expertengespräch." *Das Konsensproblem in der politischen Bildung*, edited by Siegfried Schiele, and Herbert Schneider, Klett, 1977, pp. 173–184.

Wintersteiner, Werner, Heidi Grobbauer, Gertraud Diendorfer, and Susanne Reitmair-Juárez, editors. *Global Citizenship Education. Politische Bildung für die Weltgesellschaft*, Österreichische UNESCO-Kommission, 2014, https://www.unesco.at/fileadmin/Redaktion/Publikationen/Publikations-Dokumente/2014_GCED_Politische_Bildung_fuer_die_Weltgesellschaft.pdf, accessed 10 April 2025.

Wintersteiner, Werner. "Fremdheit – Konflikt – Dialog. Das literarische Unterrichtsgespräch aus transkultureller Perspektive." *Das Literarische Unterrichtsgespräch und der aktuelle literaturdidaktische Diskurs*, edited by Felix Heizmann, Johannes Mayer, and Marcus Steinbrenner, Schneider Verlag Hohengehren, 2020, pp. 95–112.

Wintersteiner, Werner. "Frieden und Literatur." *Handbuch Frieden*, edited by Hans-Joachim Gießmann, and Bernhard Rinke, 2nd ed., Springer, 2019, pp. 483–497.

Wintersteiner, Werner. "Global Citizenship Education – eine pädagogische Antwort auf die 'große Regression'?" *Zeitschrift für internationale Bildungsforschung und Entwicklungspädagogik*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2019b, pp. 21–25.

Wintersteiner, Werner. "Wie ein Stück Brot. Kinder- und Jugendliteratur und Politische Bildung." *kjl&m*, vol. 71, no. 2, 2019c, pp. 3–12.

Wintersteiner, Werner. "Global Citizenship Education als Perspektive für einen rassismuskritischen Deutschunterricht." *Rassismussensibler Literaturunterricht. Grundlagen, Dimensionen, Herausforderungen, Möglichkeiten*, edited by Karina Becker, and Michael Hofmann, Königshausen & Neumann, 2023, pp. 53–67.

Wintersteiner, Werner. *Poetik der Verschiedenheit. Literatur, Bildung, Globalisierung*. Drava, 2006.

A River with Personhood: Witi Ihimaera's Novel *The Whale Rider* in the Context of Legal Developments and the Blue Humanities

Mita Banerjee and Dieter Dörr

Abstract *In this article Witi Ihimaera's "The Whale Rider" (1987) is situated in two contexts in particular: in the methodology of law and literature studies and the emerging field of the so-called Blue Humanities. By connecting literary studies with legal scholarship, the aim is to re-read the novel to show that it anticipates some of the most important and urgent developments of our time. These developments, in turn, are both context-specific and globally relevant: In New Zealand, Māori and Pākehā communities continue to be in dialogue about the meaning of reconciliation, about how to come to terms with New Zealand's history as a former settler colonial state. This includes reconciling Māori and Pākehā epistemologies when it comes to environmental protection. This article looks at how in New Zealand, a recent court decision wrote Māori epistemology into law by giving the status of personhood to a river. The authors situate this court decision in the legal history pertaining to bodies of water and show how Ihimaera's novel can in fact be said to anticipate this decision.*

Keywords *personhood; Blue Humanities; New Zealand; Māori; legal humanities; gender roles; Whanganui River*

Witi Ihimaera's 1987 novel, *The Whale Rider*, is prophetic in many different ways and on many different levels. As the first novel ever being written by a Māori writer, it juxtaposed, from the very beginning, tradition and modernity; and it created a genre in which Māori and Western epistemologies were truly blended. Ihimaera proved that the form of the novel, based as it is in Western epistemology and a Western history of ideas, could be adapted to fit Māori knowledge, art, and epistemology. With the decision to write a Māori novel in English, Ihimaera also ensured that Māori epistemology would be transmitted and circulated both within Māori communities and worldwide. Today, *The Whale Rider* has become widely canonised; it has been a masterpiece and a central text not only for New Zealand literature, but also and especially for postcolonial literature (Prentice 2006). As we set out to argue in this paper,

however, *The Whale Rider* is a text that continues to evolve: With every new decade, critics find new angles from which the novel might be read; it is this dynamism and the many different facets of meaning that the text holds that make it a masterpiece. In the pages that follow, we would like to situate Ihimaera's award-winning novel in two contexts in particular: in the methodology of law and literature studies and the emerging field of the so-called "Blue Humanities" (Mentz 2022). The methodology of law and literature studies (Posner 2008) sets out to link literature and the law in complex ways, creating a dialogue in which literature not only reflects legal developments, but also comments on them, while also describing the cultural, social and historical contexts from which laws may arise. The Blue Humanities, in turn, are connected to one of the central themes of *The Whale Rider*: The notion of water, including the manifold life forms that inhabit different bodies of water.

By connecting literary studies with legal scholarship, our aim in this chapter is to re-read Ihimaera's groundbreaking novel to show that it anticipates some of the most important – and urgent – developments of our time. These developments, in turn, are both context-specific and globally relevant. In New Zealand, Māori and Pākehā communities continue to be in dialogue about the meaning of reconciliation, about how to come to terms with New Zealand's history as a former settler colonial state. In a global context, what is at stake is the urgent necessity to find ways for humanity to move forward in a way that is sustainable and that is able to safeguard our vulnerable "small blue planet" (Garrard 2011, 181). In the first section of this paper, we will look at how in New Zealand, a recent court decision wrote Māori epistemology into law; we will then situate this court decision in the legal history pertaining to bodies of water and will finally turn to Ihimaera's literary narrative in more detail.

1 A River with Personhood: Protecting the Future of the Whanganui River

In 2017, a New Zealand court took a remarkable decision: It granted the Whanganui River the status of personhood (Perry 2022). The court argued that it is only through this change in status that the rights of the river could be adequately protected. While different forms of property in the public domain are equally under protection, the court implied that such protection would be guaranteed only if the river in fact became a legal person.

From a Western vantage point, the granting of personhood to a river may at first seem bizarre. Yet, it is bizarre only as long as we base our reasoning on Western epistemologies. At the core of this epistemology, going all the way back to the Enlightenment, there is the separation between the animate and the inanimate world (Crocker 1983). A river, this distinction would hold, is an object, and hence has a fundamentally different status than a human being. It is important to note that New Zealand is a bicultural nation, symbolised by its two official languages, English and Māori,

and its dual name, New Zealand/Aotearoa. The decision to grant personhood to the Whanganui River is the most recent step in a crucial development of New Zealand as a nation: the attempt to make up for the wrongs of the past, the colonisation of New Zealand's Māori population. (This is a history that will be elaborated on in more detail below). At the core of this process of reconciliation, there is the intention to incorporate into New Zealand law not only two languages, but two epistemologies. To indigenous communities worldwide, Māori being among them, the distinction between animate and inanimate life, the objectification of nature, is itself bizarre. The granting of personhood to the Whanganui River (Te Awa Tupua) is thus part of an attempt to incorporate Māori epistemology into New Zealand law. As Gerrard Albert, who negotiated the settlement of Māori with the British Crown, observes, "When we were negotiating with the Crown, we said that we need an approximation, at law, to how we view and hold this river. And so legal personhood was the closest approximation we could find. We knew that saying that the river was both physical and spiritual wasn't going to be enough. We needed to define what that is" (*The River Is Me*). To Māori, the river is both a physical and a spiritual being; it is this idea that, the court now ruled, can be approximated only through the status of personhood. As the Deed of Settlement holds, there is an

> indivisible and living whole comprising the Whanganui River from the mountains to the sea, incorporating its tributaries and its physical and metaphysical elements ...
> Te Awa Tupua will also be recognised as a legal person. Reflecting the view of the river as a living and integrated whole, Te Awa Tupua will have its own legal personality with all the corresponding rights, duties and liabilities of a legal person. (Te Awa Tupua Act)

In this paper, we argue that Witi Ihimaera's literary masterpiece, *The Whale Rider*, is prophetic in that it anticipates a development that leads all the way up to the granting of personhood to the Whanganui River. The law, it must be noted, is not outside culture but it is intimately bound up with it (López 1996). The law hence arises from cultural contexts and social negotiations that it then translates into binding legal conventions. In literary studies, the approach of law and literature studies looks at the intersection between literature and the law. As Richard Posner notes,

> "Law and literature" brings together two overlapping bodies of thought, the legal and the literary, that have much in common, including an emphasis on rhetoric. . . . Law itself is formulated and announced in writings, such as statutes, the Constitution, and judicial opinions that sometimes exhibit a density, complexity, and open-endedness comparable to what one finds in literary works. (1)

In this paper, we suggest that Ihimaera's novel describes the complexities of Māori culture, especially its views of nature as a living and spiritual entity. Seen in this way, *The Whale Rider*, a 1987 novel, can help us understand the 2017 law that granted personhood to the Whanganui River. Before we turn to the novel, however, we would like to delve more deeply into legal aspects both of the "ownership" of bodies of water and of reconciliation in New Zealand/Aotearoa.

2 Rivers as Legal Persons: Legal Aspects in Bicultural New Zealand/Aotearoa

At the intersection of law and literature studies and the Blue Humanities, it would be important to situate the court settlement about the Whanganui River not just in a cultural context, but also in legal history. It is not unusual that streams or rivers have a great importance for the law and its further development. To name only one example from Germany: the case of "Wassermüller Arnold" was crucial for the development of judicial independence. In 1779, the judges at the Berlin *Kammergericht*, Prussia's highest court, refused to correct a verdict in favor of Wassermüller Arnold that Prussian King Frederick the Great considered unjust, even when he not only threatened them with fortress imprisonment but actually had them imprisoned. This gave rise to the demand for the fundamental inadmissibility of royal power decisions, which was to be enshrined in law only five years later in the draft of the General Prussian Land Law. This paved the way for the independence that was achieved in the 19th century. This whole development finally led to the famous French saying to the king: "Il y a des juges à Berlin (There are still judges in Berlin)."

The special status of the Whanganui River, like judicial independence in Germany, has a long history. Since the Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act came into effect, the Whanganui River became the first river in the world to be considered a legal person. New Zealand's third-longest river could now be represented in court and had two guardians appointed to speak on its behalf. But we are sure this is not the end of the struggle to uphold Māori rights to the river. For hundreds of years, Māori lived in settlements along the Whanganui River. To Māori, the river was a single and indivisible entity and not something that could be owned. Although the river's resources could be used, only people who contributed to the community had the right to benefit. Local Māori even had a proverb they used to describe this: "The river flows from the mountains to the see. I am the river, and the river is me" (*The River Is Me*: 00:20–0:00:21).

Following the so-called "great discoveries," the range of action of the Europeans rapidly expanded to cover the entire globe. The period of European expansion overseas began. In the 1800s, British colonisers began settling all over New Zealand, including Whanganui. As they gained territory, the newcomers imposed new rules

over the land and sea. Under English law, the river was not seen as one entity. It was seen as a patchwork of legally separate parts – water and riverbeds and air space above the water – all controlled by different laws. The parts of the river that were navigable, for instance, were legally separate from the parts that were not.

This necessarily raises the question as to which legal rules should apply to the relations between the overseas communities and the European states. The first problem arising here is whether these relations are relations governed by international law. The doctrine of discovery, developed by the US Supreme Court in the famous Marshall trilogy between 1821 and 1832, denied that the overseas communities could be recognised as entities in international law because of their lack of civilisation and described these entities as "domestic dependent nations." The Marshall decisions had and still have an enormous influence not only in the US but even in Canada, New Zealand and in some respect, in Australia.

But Marshall missed the historical practice of the European states and later the US, which is a central and decisive factor in international law. He stated that the European discoverers considered themselves empowered to grant lands still in possession of the indigenous people. But the practice of the European states and the US of signing treaties with non-European communities represents a remarkable contradiction to the theory of discovery. Even today, the existence of these treaties is acknowledged only in individual cases in the European international law literature.

A study of these treaties clearly shows that the United States alone concluded nearly 370 treaties with the so-called Indian Nations and Tribes. The same picture emerges in Africa. Belgium, France, Germany and Britain dealt with the African tribes on the basis of treaties and attempted to acquire contractual title to the land. In the same manner, both the United Kingdom and the Netherlands signed numerous treaties with various communities in South-East Asia, particularly concerned with the cession of land.

In New Zealand the Treaty of Waitangi from February 6, 1840, is essential. This treaty is remarkable in various aspects. It is the only treaty between the Crown and Māori. The treaty includes only three articles. The treaty is written down in two language versions, which differ substantially. In the English version, the waiving of sovereignty by Māori is unambiguous; in the Māori version, it is doubtful (Tiemann 1999). The differences are so great that one can certainly speak of two different treaties. Another major difference in comparing the US to New Zealand is that in the US, the existing treaties were repeatedly amended by new treaties with which the indigenous communities gave up further rights, whereas the Treaty of Waitangi has remained unchanged until today. In addition, the importance of this treaty not only continues to this day but has increased considerably since the 1970s. Thus, it is now considered by many to be the founding document of the New Zealand nation and the Māori Magna Charta. It is also significant for the status of the Whanganui River.

The Waitangi Tribunal, established by the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975, has made a decisive contribution to this. The Waitangi Tribunal has the effect, as we will show below, that the Treaty continues to be a "living document" for the coexistence of all New Zealanders. However, this was by no means the case from the beginning. Rather, the Waitangi Tribunal was initially only a "toothless tiger" (Tiemann 1999). Yet, this changed decisively with the 1985 and 1988 Amendment Acts. Since then, the tribunal has been allowed to deal with all Māori claims if they believe that the government or parliament has violated the Treaty of Waitangi since it was signed on February 6, 1840. The entire period since the treaty came into force is therefore covered.

Despite these changes, expectations of the tribunal were initially low, especially among Māori. This was due to the fact that, even after the amending laws, the tribunal can only make recommendations on how claims are to be satisfied and how breaches of contract are to be compensated, following appropriate hearings. However, these recommendations are not legally binding. In addition, the tribunal has the task of reviewing all laws for their compatibility with the Treaty of Waitangi. In this respect, too, it may not make any legally binding decisions. It is therefore not a court, one of whose indispensable characteristics is that it can make legally binding decisions. However, this widespread skepticism about the Waitangi Tribunal was, as would become apparent, unjustified. Various circumstances contributed to this. First, the tribunal consists of the Chief Judge and two assessors, the second of whom must be Māori, appointed by the Governor General on the recommendation of the Minister of Māori Affairs. However, this did not change the fact that in the Waitangi Tribunal two legal systems initially clashed, namely that of the white settlers or Pākehā, who had initially secured their land acquisition by signing a treaty with the indigenous people, but had then broken the treaty many times; and that of Māori, who had long since lost faith in the legal system of the Pākehā, not only because of the Crown's breach of treaty, and who thus expected very little from the Waitangi Tribunal. Moreover, even the original venue for the trial was poorly chosen: The Waitangi Tribunal initially met in a room at the Intercontinental Hotel in Auckland. At such a venue, which hardly seemed appropriate for a tribunal that had to decide on the legal basis for the reconciliation of two essential population groups and thus on the future of New Zealand as a nation, Māori plaintiffs felt somewhat out of place.

This changed decisively when, in 1981, Chief Judge Edward Durie became the first Māori to preside over the tribunal. Understanding the Waitangi Tribunal as an institution of reconciliation, Judge Durie set about reconfiguring the parameters of this institution when he took office. He first changed the venue of the Waitangi Tribunal by moving it from the Intercontinental Hotel to a marae, the traditional Māori meeting place. What at first appeared to be a trivial change in the 'setting' of the Waitangi Tribunal, had far-reaching consequences that Judge Durie had well anticipated: Because the moment the place of the hearing changed from the hotel to the

marae, not only the applicant Māori, but also the respondents, the entire tribunal had to follow the so-called Māori protocol, the Māori code of appropriate behavior. As a result, the courtroom atmosphere disappeared. Māori were free to speak out on their claims. The tribunal also changed its hearing protocol. It adjusted to the customs of the claimants and adapted them to the protocol in place at the particular marae. Claimants could now speak in Te reo Māori if they wished, in the Māori language. The speech was not translated until the claimant had finished. This is because simultaneous translation would involve interrupting the speaker, which is considered impolite according to Māori custom. The marae, in turn, became a place where law and religion, jurisprudence and cultural significance merged during the tribunal's hearings. It was an essential task of the tribunal to culturally substantiate Māori legal claims for reparations. This was already made clear by the 1982 Motunui-Waitara Claim hearing. The Te Atiawa tribe complained about the pollution of the Waitara River, which they use for fishing, by the Waitara sewage treatment plant and the planned discharge of industrial effluent. This complaint was unfounded from the point of view of the Pākehā defendants, because the effluents were discharged only after they had been treated. Nevertheless, the Te Atiawa were able to make it clear that the chemical process of purification was irrelevant to their religiously and culturally conditioned conception of the clarity of water, because the pollution that preceded the purification had irrevocably imposed a tapu, a taboo, on the water. It is most remarkable that the Tribunal endorsed the Te Atiawa view that water should be considered 'polluted' even in its clarified state. It placed great emphasis on the spiritual and cultural values that the tribe associates with fishing and the sea. Ultimately, Parliament and the government have regularly followed the Tribunal's proposals, even if they are not legally binding. As a result, skepticism toward the tribunal has decreased quite considerably; the institution has earned a high level of recognition.

With the Waitara River example, we are already approaching the status of the Whanganui River. For a long time, Māori fought to have their own view of the river recognised. Back in 1870, Māori began petitioning the colonial government, asking them to uphold their rights. In the decades that followed, a steady stream of petitions was made to the government in New Zealand's capital Wellington. By the time the Waitangi Tribunal came to Whanganui in the 1990s, people there had already been fighting for their rights for more than 100 years. The long standing grievance was brought before the Waitangi Tribunal. In 1999, the Tribunal concluded that the river was a treasure – or taonga – to Whanganui Māori and urged redress. But negotiations on New Zealand's longest running litigation stalled, and Whanganui Māori still didn't have legal rights over the river.

In 2008 Māori launched a new settlement process, but this time they wanted to create their own legal framework – something that truly represented what the river meant to Māori. They began talking about treating the river as a single indivis-

ible being that had rights, just like a person. In short, the way Māori had seen it all along. The timing was good. In 2008, New Zealand's center-right National Party won an election. Incoming Minister for Treaty Negotiations Chris Finlayson felt things had "languished" under the previous government's nine years in power and was keen to get progress on land settlements underway. But in the halls of Parliament, other politicians weren't paying attention to the ground-breaking legal agreement being negotiated in their midst. Finlayson argued that it is not absurd to look at a river as a single holistic entity from where it's formed out to the sea.

Under the 2017 law, as noted above, Te Awa Tupua was recognised as an "indivisible and living whole, comprising the Whanganui River from the mountains to the sea, incorporating all its physical and metaphysical elements." Two guardians were appointed by local Māori to speak on the river's behalf. As Chris Finlayson puts it, "Obviously, the river itself wouldn't go into court, it is represented by a number of people. The key thing is the legislation settles all the historical claims that had been brought against the Crown going back over a hundred years" (*The River Is Me*). Other countries have followed Whanganui's lead: two rivers in India have been declared legal entities (Magallanes 2018), and in 2019, Bangladesh gave all its rivers legal rights (Willems et al. 2021). Environmental law experts see the Whanganui River decision as a shift – not only for the people who live along the river, but possibly further afield. Perhaps the Whanganui River's personhood is a start towards valuing Māori and their world view.

3 From Law to Literature: Waters and Whales in Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*

How, then, would we re-read Ihimaera's novel in the context of both the Blue Humanities and law and literature studies? The prophetic quality of Ihimaera's novel, we would argue, is itself based on the intersection between postcolonial and environmental aspects. The book resists the colonisation of Māori communities by Pākehā New Zealanders; it hence critiques the ongoing legacy of settler colonialism in New Zealand, and explores the idea of a loss of tradition with regard to the very bond between animate and inanimate nature. To be sure, in the Enlightenment distinction between animate and inanimate nature, animals would range somewhere in between; this is a long-standing debate in both philosophy and theology that we cannot go into here. Yet, what *The Whale Rider* starts with is a world in which both Māori and Pākehā communities have severed their bonds with nature. Māori, too, have forgotten how to communicate with whales.

At the core of the novel, there is the question of cultural change. Because of the ongoing legacy of settler colonialism, Māori have become estranged from their own cultural premises; this is why Koro Apirana, one of the novel's protagonists, is des-

perately looking for an heir. According to Māori custom, however, this heir needs to be male; even as Koro's granddaughter, Kahu, seems to be endowed with special gifts, she cannot be the one whom Koro is looking for, or so he believes.

At the core of Ihimaera's narrative, there is a central question. How can Māori heritage and tradition be carried into the future? How can it be sustained in a settler-colonial context? Koro Apirana's dilemma is the notion of hybridity. Any change in protocol, any altering and rendering hybrid of the traditional notions and concepts may lead to their disappearance. Yet, as we have already noted at the beginning of this paper, this is a question that is being asked inside a work of art that is itself hybrid: a Māori novel written in English. In a way, then, the genre that the narrative is framed by (a novel which conveys the beliefs and cultural knowledge of a community based in oral tradition) may already be said to imply the answer: Tradition can ultimately be upheld, can survive into the future only if it can accommodate a degree of hybridity.

Even when she is still a baby, Kahu, Koro Apirana's granddaughter, adores her grandfather. She craves his affection, and is devastated when he fails to notice her in his desperate search for a male heir:

> 'A *girl*,' Koro Apirana said, disgusted. 'I will have nothing to do with her. She has broken the male line of descent in our tribe.' He shoved the telephone at our grandmother, Nanny Flowers, saying, 'Here. It's your fault. Your female side was too strong.' (10)

> Under these conditions, the love which Kahu received from Koro Apirana was the sort that dropped off the edge of the table, like breadcrumbs after everybody else has had a big feed. But Kahu didn't seem to mind. She ran into Koro Apirana's arms whenever he had time for her and took whatever he was able to give. If he had told her he loved dogs I'm sure she would have barked, 'Woof woof'. That's how much she loved him. (36)

When at school, Kahu enrolls in an essay-writing contest and ends up being its winner, she dedicates the prize to her grandfather. In the speech she gives at the school gathering, she recites the award-winning essay; it is a speech she has dedicated to Koro Apirana, the grandfather whose acceptance she can never quite win, even as she has his affection. In the film adaptation of *The Whale Rider*, Kahu goes up on stage, desperately hoping that her grandfather will be there for the recital; when she realises that he will not be coming, she is in tears. The same is true of the description Kahu's delivering her award-winning essay as it is described in Ihimaera's novel:

> What was remarkable, [the headmaster] said, was that the student had given it entirely in her own tongue, the Māori language. He called for Kahutia Te Rangi to come forward. (68)

> There were stars in her eyes, like sparkling tears. 'Distinguished guests, members of the audience, my speech is a speech of love for my grandfather, Koro Apirana.' Nanny Flowers gave a sob, and tears began to flow down her cheeks. Kahu's voice was clear and warm as she told of her love for her grandfather and her respect for him. Her tones rang with pride as she recited his whakapapa and ours. She conveyed how grateful she was to live in Whangara and that her main aim in life was to fulfil the wishes of her grandfather and of the tribe. (69)
>
> The sadness and the joy swept us all away in acknowledging Kahu, but we knew that her heart was aching for Koro Apirana. (69)

In the novel and unlike in the film adaptation, where it has been translated into English (Caro 2002), the speech given by Kahu is held entirely in the Māori language. What this means is that the audience and especially its Pākehā members have to listen to an entire speech whose meaning they do not understand. How, we would like to ask here, might this passage be re-read through the framework of law and literature studies? As we noted above, the role of the Waitangi Tribunal changed significantly when Judge Durie came to preside over the tribunal as its Chief Judge (Byrnes 2005). The landslide shift that Judge Durie was able to bring about occurred both through a change in setting (moving the hearings from a hotel room, which Māori claimants felt to be culturally inappropriate, to a marae) and a change in language. From now on, Durie decreed, Māori claimants could express their grievances in Te reo Māori, in their native language. Durie's changing the framework of the Waitangi Tribunal can be read as the expression of a highly sophisticated knowledge of the workings of language and of translation. As Durie was well aware, in the English language, the language of the coloniser, Māori claimants might be intimidated; moreover, many of the concepts that they could have fully expressed in Te reo Māori would not be expressible in English. Language not only conveys the meaning of words, but it also contains epistemologies. This is also true of the Whanganui River: To Māori, a "river" is, as the court settlement has it, "an indivisible entity"; in English and to Pākehā New Zealanders, a river is seen as an inanimate entity and comprises only a body of water, not its surroundings or the life forms within it. In delivering a claim in Te reo Māori, Māori claimants addressing the Waitangi Tribunal conveyed meaning on both a literal and an epistemological level, just as Kahu recites her essay fully in the Māori language to an audience that may not understand her. Another aspect that Sir Edward Durie (who received the Knight Companion of New Zealand Order of Merit in 2009 for his achievements in the Waitangi Tribunal) changed about the procedure of the Waitangi Tribunal hearings was that – especially since the hearings had now been re-located to the marae –, they had to follow Māori protocol (Tiemann 1999). As noted above, this also meant that claimants could not be interrupted as they made their statement, even if this statement went on for days. This framework in

which claims could be pronounced now honored Māori tradition, the so-called Māori protocol (Frame 2002); and it often left Pākehā listeners insecure, since they might find themselves listening for many hours and sometimes for days, to a speech of which they did not understand one word. Crucially, with this change in protocol, Sir Edward Durie transformed the Waitangi Tribunal in a way that could be seen as a form of postcolonial revenge. As noted above, the state of New Zealand as a settler-colonial nation-state was founded on what can be seen as a deliberate mistranslation: In the Māori version of the Treaty of Waitangi, the treaty document held that Māori would retain full sovereignty over their territories; in the English "translation," it said that they *ceded* their sovereignty to the British crown. Historically, Māori were literally signing a document which they did not understand, as they were unaware of the differences between the two versions of the Treaty of Waitangi. This situation, it could be argued, now recurs in *The Whale Rider*: In a manner of speaking, the audience has to applaud an award-winning essay whose meaning they do not comprehend.

This idea, we would argue, is also at the heart of the recent court settlement about the Whanganui River. What the court emphasises in this settlement is that Pākehā New Zealanders may not understand why a river would be given the status of personhood, and they may not understand the epistemology which underlies the court settlement. As Chris Finlayson, the Former Attorney General who negotiated the settlement with his Māori colleagues, puts it in the film *The River Is Me*, "Section 12, the Recognition of the River: 'The river is an indivisible and living whole, incorporating all its physical and metaphysical elements.' And so, people may well look at that and say, what planet are these new Zealanders living on?" (*The River Is Me*). Just as Kahu's audience has to sit through a speech that it does not understand, Pākehā New Zealanders have to observe a law whose epistemological underpinnings they may fail to comprehend, let alone subscribe to.

Ihimaera's novel *The Whale Rider*, the workings of the Waitangi Tribunal, the settlement case of the Whanganui River and the Blue Humanities can thus be seen as being closely interconnected. The granting of personhood to the Whanganui River in 2017 puts into law what Ihimaera had written about thirty years earlier, in 1987. In a way, the court settlement puts literature into law: What Ihimaera described so eloquently, what his novel translated into English and conveyed to a non-indigenous audience, was precisely what the court ruling enacted: a river, according to Māori epistemology, is an indivisible being. Ihimaera thus envisions, and the court settlement enacts, what Karen Amimoto Ingersoll has called "waves of knowing" (Ingersoll 2016). With this memorable expression, Ingersoll not only refers to the "ways" in which we, in a Western context, refer to bodies of water such as a river or an ocean. Rather, she argues that these "ways" of reference are themselves bound up in specific epistemologies, which assume these bodies of water to be divisible entities rather than indivisible ones: "In *Waves of Knowing* Karin Amimoto Ingersoll marks a criti-

cal turn away from land-based geographies to center the ocean as place. Developing the concept of seascape epistemology, she articulates an indigenous Hawaiian way of knowing founded on a sensorial, intellectual, and embodied literacy of the ocean" (dustjacket). As Ingersoll goes on to suggest, indigenous knowledge has historically been dismissed as mere "folklore"; it was not recognised as knowledge in its own right. What is so central about the Whanganui River court settlement, on the other hand, is that it recognises Māori epistemology as knowledge; and it proceeds to turn this knowledge, this "wave of knowing," into law. The court settlement is thus part of a profound change with regard to different bodies of knowledge. As the climate crisis is exacerbating, indigenous knowledges are being rediscovered; and, perhaps for the first time since the onset of settler colonialism, they are being valued *as* knowledge. As Ingersoll puts it, "Seascape epistemology also allows us to produce our own bodies of scholarship in a colonial reality that has rendered Native Hawaiian knowledge 'cultural' rather than intellectual or academic" (Ingersoll 2016, 6).

Witi Ihimaera's novel *The Whale Rider* eloquently conveys precisely such "waves of knowing." Unaccountably, whales are found to be stranded on the beach; Māori and Pākehā alike struggle to get the giants back into the water. Here, in a novel published in 1987, Ihimaera anticipates our contemporary concerns about climate grief (Head 2016**)** and the loss of biodiversity. In order to prevent ecological catastrophes such as the stranding of whales, Ihimaera implies, humans have to restore the bond with nature. It is at this point that Koro acknowledges that Kahu is, after all, his true heir. It is she who can talk to whales; she is the whale rider: "She was the whale rider. Astride the whale she felt the sting of the surf and rain upon her face. On either side the younger whales were escorting their leader through the surf" (106). In the end, Koro recognises that his holding on to tradition and the notion that the role of the heir can only be passed on to a male grandchild kept him from recognising that it was Kahu who was destined to be his successor. What this implies is that tradition and modernity can coexist; that Māori traditions can be moved into the future only by retaining their dynamism and by constantly questioning cultural certainties. Ultimately, *The Whale Rider* is thus in conversation with the notion of alternative modernities. As Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar has observed, ours is a "time when non-Western people everywhere begin to engage critically in their own hybrid modernities" (Gaonkar 2011, 14). As Gaonkar argues, the notion of the alternative modernities of non-Western societies and cultural spaces does not mean simply to abandon Western modernity, with the burden of colonialism and imperialism it carries (Gaonkar 14). Rather, it is to "think with and also against" Western modernity (Gaonkar 16) and to go on to explore the hybrid spaces, cultural practices and trajectories that such modernity has enabled in the non-Western world. In Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*, such a critical engagement with (Western) modernity is at the heart of the novel. In the end, modernity and tradition are reconciled; a new, hybrid space has emerged in which Koro Apirana has finally found an heir (Hokowithu

2008). As he tells his granddaughter Kahu, "'You're the best grandchild in the whole wide world,' he said. 'Boy or girl, it doesn't matter'" (120).

It is at this point, we would propose, that we have come full circle. The 2017 New Zealand court decision may not be about talking to whales, but it is about granting the status of personhood to a river. It incorporates Māori epistemology into New Zealand law, and it defies Western epistemologies, which hold that nature is inanimate. It is this court ruling that Witi Ihimaera anticipates, and in which his novel is more current than ever.

References

Byrnes, Giselle. "Nation and identity in the Waitangi Tribunal reports." *New Zealand identities: Departures and destinations*, edited by James H. Liu, Tim McCreanor, Tracey McIntosh and Teresia Teaiwa, Victoria University Press, 2005, pp. 88–103.

Whale Rider. Niki Caro. New Zealand Film Commission, 2002.

Crocker, Lester G. "The Idea of a "Neutral" Universe in the French Enlightenment." *Diderot Studies*, vol. 21, 1983, pp. 45–76.

Ehrmann, Markus. "The Status and Rights of Indigenous Peoples in New Zealand." *Zeitschrift für ausländisches öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht*, vol. 59, no. 2, 1999, pp. 463–496.

Frame, Alex. *Grey and Iwikau: A Journey into Custom – Kerei Raua Ko Iwikau: Te Haerenga me nga Tikanga*. Victoria University Press, 2002.

Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar. *Alternative modernities*, edited by Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, vol. 1, Duke University Press, 2001.

Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. Routledge, 2011.

Head, Lesley. "Grief, Loss and the Cultural Politics of Climate Change." *Towards a Cultural Politics of Climate Change: Devices, Desires and Dissent*, 2016, pp. 81–93.

Hokowhitu, Brendan. "The Death of Koro Paka: "Traditional" Māori Patriarchy." *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2008, pp. 115–41.

Ihimaera, Witi. *The Whale Rider*. Kindle edition. Raupo, 1987.

Ingersoll, Karin Amimoto. *Waves of Knowing: A Seascape Epistemology*. Duke University Press, 2016.

López, Ian Haney. *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Whiteness*. NYU Press, 1996.

Magallanes, Catherine Iorns. "From Rights to Responsibilities Using Legal Personhood and Guardianship for Rivers." *ResponsAbility*, 2018, pp. 216–239.

McHugh, Paul. *The Māori Magna Carta – New Zealand Law and the Treaty of Waitangi*. Oxford University Press, 1991.

Mentz, Steve. "Blue Humanities." *Palgrave Handbook of Critical Posthumanism*, edited by Stefan Herbrechter, Ivan Callus, Manuela Rossini, Marija Grech, Megen de Bruin-Molé and Christopher John Müller, Springer Nature, 2022, pp. 949–969.

Perry, Nick. "New Zealand River's Personhood Status Offers Hope to Māori." AP, August 2022, https://apnews.com/article/abridged-content-10702552336b34f258f91b0e7ccb93d5, accessed 14 April 2025.

Posner, Richard. *Law and Literature.* Harvard University Press, 2008.

Prentice, Chris. "Riding the Whale?: Postcolonialism and Globalization in *Whale Rider*." *Global Fissures*, edited by Clara A.B. Joseph, Brill, 2006, pp. 247–267.

The River is Me. David Freid. Films for the Earth, 2018.

Tiemann, Ulf. *Rechte der Ureinwohner Neuseelands aus dem Vertrag von Waitangi*. LIT, 1999.

New Zealand Legislation. Parliamentary Counsel Office. "Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017." *legislation.govt.nz*, 2017, https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2017/0007/latest/whole.html, accessed 14 April 2025.

Willems, M., T. Lambooy, and S. Begum. "New governance ways aimed at protecting nature for future generations: The cases of Bangladesh, India and New Zealand: Granting legal personhood to rivers." *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, vol. 690, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1–14, https://doi:10.1088/1755-1315/690/1/012059.

Winter, Stephen. "Towards a Unified Theory of Transitional Justice." *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2013, pp. 224–244, https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijt004.

Whales: From Land-Dwelling Ungulates to Giants of the Seas

Thomas Tütken

Abstract *This lecture, held on June 21, 2023, as part of the lecture series "Eine Uni – Ein Buch: 'The Whale Rider'. Eine Erkundung Neuseelands mit Witi Ihimaeras Roman", is about whales (Cetacea), which are an order of aquatic mammals that have secondarily shifted their habitat from the mainland back into the sea. In the Paleogene period, more precisely in the Eocene epoch, over 50 million years ago, the evolution of whales began from small, land-living ungulates about the size of a larger dog to today's giants of the seas weighing up to 200 tons. This development took place on the coasts of the Tethys Ocean, which at that time still lay between India and Asia, and is clearly supported by both morphological and genetic evidence. The land-sea transition is excellently documented by fossils from the Paleogene sedimentary deposits that are now exposed in the Indo-Pakistan region. Herein I will explain this evolution of whales and the complex morphological (reduction and transformation of limbs to fins, changes in bone structure) and physiological adaptations (inner ear modification for underwater hearing, modified lung breathing with blowhole, insulating fat layer and cardiovascular blood circulation system to minimise heat loss) that were necessary for this fundamental habitat change. I will also discuss how the evolution of whales is closely linked to plate tectonic, climatic and oceanographic changes through time. The first archaic whales still had fur and four limbs, and although they had a semiaquatic lifestyle, they were still able to walk on land. Modern whales evolved from these archaic whales, first the toothed whales and then the plankton-eating baleen whales, which produced the largest animals that have ever lived on our planet.*

Keywords *Cetacea; ungulates; toothed whales; baleen whales; evolution; fossil bones*

This lecture is about the evolutionary history of whales. Whales are mammals, and their ancestors once stood on solid ground, just as we do today. But that was over 50 million years ago, and herein I would like to explain the evolution of whales from land-dwelling ungulates to giants of the seas.

The entire lecture series is about the book *The Whale Rider* (1987) by Witi Ihimaera and perspectives from different scientific disciplines on the content of the book. As

a geoscientist and paleontologist, I have a natural science perspective on the whole story: a whale rider can only exist if there are whales, because the whale is needed as a means of transportation for the whale rider. Whales themselves have a very long history and lived many millions of years before the Māori. According to Māori legend, without the whale, *Paikea*, the ancestor of the Māori, would not have come ashore in New Zealand on the back of a whale. The whale that *Paikea* presumably rode was probably a southern humpback whale. This is the simple connection to *The Whale Rider*: without whales, there would be no whale riding, and thus, according to Māori tradition, the settlement of New Zealand would not have been possible.

How did we find the whale, or rather, how did the whale get to us? Whales (Cetacea) are an order of aquatic mammals that have shifted their habitat from the mainland back to the sea. The evolutionary path to this point is long and complex. Since their development in the Cambrian period over 520 million years ago, vertebrates lived exclusively in the oceans until the Devonian period. Then, about 380 million years ago, in the Middle Devonian epoch, vertebrates made their way onto land and conquered the mainland as their new habitat. Aquatic fish first evolved into semi-aquatic amphibians, then into land-dwelling amniotes, a clade of four-legged animals including reptiles, birds and mammals, which can reproduce independent of water, some of which, however, later returned to the sea in several evolutionary lineages, including whales. However, whales were not the first. There were a whole series of vertebrates that returned to the sea from land as secondary aquatic amniotes. The transition of vertebrates to land required major morphological and physiological changes: breathing air through lungs instead of gills, moving on land using front and hind limbs that had been transformed from fins, supporting body weight against gravity, and other adaptations. On the way back from land to sea, many of these changes had to be reversed. For instance, after the largest mass extinction in Earth's history, 252 million years ago at the end of the Permian period, land-dwelling reptiles returned to the sea and evolved into marine reptiles such as ichthyosaurs. In the early Mesozoic era, long before whales, the oceans looked something like this: Ichthyosaurs and other marine reptiles such as plesiosaurs were top predators in the sea and fed mainly on ammonites and other cephalopods. The ichthyosaurs grew to gigantic sizes of up to 20 meters in length quite quickly in the early Triassic, within 3 million years after the end-Permian mass extinction (Sander et al. 2021). The whales, on the other hand, took almost 50 million years to reach such sizes in the Pliocene-Pleistocene after their first occurrence in the early Eocene (Sander et al. 2021). In the course of Earth's history, terrestrial vertebrates have returned to the sea several times independently of each other, such as sea turtles and whales – we will discuss this for the latter in more detail later – as well as other mammal groups such as seals and sea cows, but also birds such as penguins (Kelley and Peynson 2019). Whales evolved in the early Paleogene period, about 10 million years after the mass extinction 66 million years ago caused by the

Chicxulub meteorite impact, which wiped out the dinosaurs on land at the end of the Cretaceous period, but also the large marine reptiles in the oceans. This freed up ecological niches of apex predators in the sea, which were later occupied by whales.

How did whales return from land to the sea and become such giants, the largest animals ever on planet Earth? The evolution of whales began around 54 million years ago in the early Eocene. As geoscientists, we have a long timeline stretching back to the formation of the Earth 4.56 billion years ago and are comfortable dealing with such geological time scales. However, most people find it difficult to imagine. They may be able to calculate in human generations (30 years = one generation), but 54 million years is a very, very long time. Humans did not even exist then; our species has only been around for about 300,000 years, and the oldest hominids for a maximum of 7 million years.

In the Eocene epoch 54 million years ago, the first archaic whales began to develop, and in the Oligocene epoch about 34 million years ago, these evolved into the whales we know today, the toothed whales (Odontoceti) and the baleen whales (Mysticeti), which gave rise to the giants of the seas such as the fin whale and blue whale (Fordyce 1980; Thewissen and Williams 2002; Goldbogen et al. 2019). Here, I want to present what we know about the evolution of whales and how researchers have arrived at these conclusions. Very early on, it was assumed, including by Charles Darwin, that whales might have descended from land animals, since almost all other mammals live on land. The first mammals developed in the Upper Triassic epoch over 200 million years ago, but at that time they were still very small, about the size of rats, and lived in the shadow of the dinosaurs. It was only after the extinction of the dinosaurs at the end of the Cretaceous period, 66 million years ago, that mammals underwent a size increase and strong radiation into different orders, including whales, and for the first time, land-dwelling mammals reached hippopotamus size in the Eocene. Whales, along with sea cows, seals and sea otters, are the only group of secondary aquatic mammals that have returned to the sea (Kelley and Peynson 2019). All other mammals are land animals. This led to the assumption that whales may have descended from land animals, but until a few decades ago, this had not been well proven by fossils.

There is now a very good fossil record for the evolution of whales, which clearly shows that whales are descended from land-dwelling ungulates (Thewissen 1998; Zimmer 1999; Thewissen and Williams 2002; Gingerich 2012). Based on these fossil finds, it is possible to reconstruct an early ancestor of whales, *Indohyus*, and how it might have looked like (Thewissen et al. 2007; Fig. 1). Whales are descended from ungulates, however, not from perissodactyls (odd-toed ungulate) but rather from artiodactyls (even-toed ungulates) (Gingerich et al. 2001; Thewissen et al. 2001).

Fig. 1: Whales are descended from land-living, quadruped, wolf-sized, even-toed ungulates. Photo simulation of Indohyus, *an early land-dwelling hoofed ancestor that lived in the Indian region in the Eocene around 54 million years ago.*

Source: credit Roman Uchytel, https://uchytel.com/Indohius

It is fascinating that whales still lived on land over 54 million years ago. Based on fossil finds of early whales made in the Indo-Pakistan as well as Egyptian region, paleontologists have been able to trace and document the transition from land-dwelling ungulates to sea-dwelling whales (Thewissen 1998; Zimmer 1999; Gingerich et al. 1983 and 2001; Thewissen et al. 2001 and 2007; Thewissen and Williams 2002). The morphology of the limb bones, especially the astragalus or double-pulley ankle bone, which is part of the ankle joint and characteristic of hoofed animals, shows that whales were indeed originally hoofed animals. This becomes apparent when comparing the morphology of the astragalus of a modern antelope, a pronghorn, and fossil astragalus bones of early whales (Fig. 2).

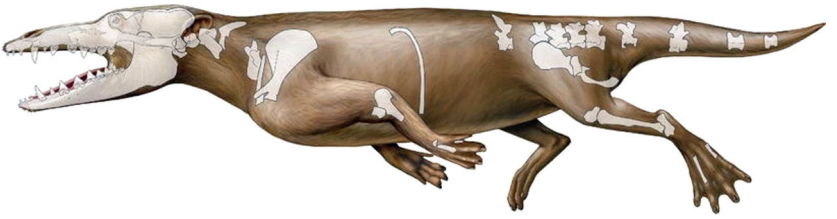
The characteristic feature of the astragalus is that it has joints at both ends of the ankle bone, which is unique to ungulates. This allows the joint surfaces of the foot and lower leg to move against each other during running movements. Early whales, such as the *Pakicetus* from the middle Eocene, also had such a double-pulley astragalus, which proves their relationship to ungulates (Gingerich et al. 2001; Fig. 3).

Pakicetus (Fig. 3) is named after Pakistan, where it was found and where this early whale lived as a semi-aquatic, probably foot-powered swimmer between 54 and 48 million years ago (Gingerich et al. 1983 and 2001; Gingerich 2012). However, it is not only the presence of a double-pulley astragalus that confirms the hoofed animal relationship of whales; this is also confirmed independently by genetic studies of modern whales and hoofed animals, which also prove a close phylogenetic relationship (Gatesy et al. 2013). This means that we have clear evidence, both genetically and morphologically, that whales are descended from land-dwelling even-toed ungulates.

Fig. 2: Photos of two fossil astragalus bones of early primitive whales from the middle Eocene, Rodhocetus balochistanensis *(left) and* Artiocetus clavis *(right), compared to the astragalus bone of a modern pronghorn (center). All three bones have the joint characteristic of ungulates at both ends of the ankle bone, thus a double-pulley ankle bone. Scale in cm.*

Source: Gingerich 2012, Fig. 10, p. 319

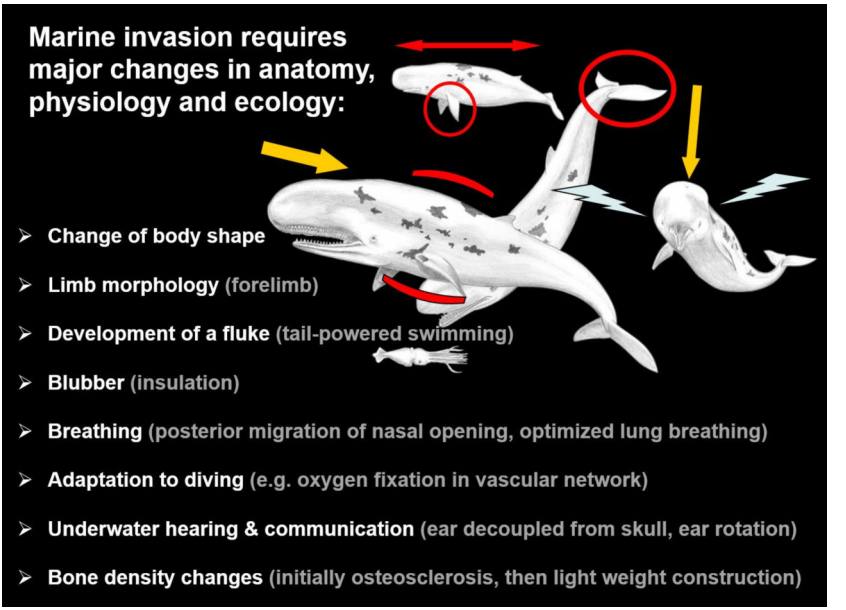
Fig. 3: Reconstruction of the first true whale, Pakicetus, *which lived about 50 million years ago in the Tethys Sea in an area that is now India and Pakistan*



Source: by John Klausmeyer of the University of Michigan Exhibit Museum in Gingerich 2012, Fig. 5, p. 314

How did a hoofed animal living on land return to the sea? This required a whole series of morphological, physiological, and ecological changes to be able to live permanently in water (Fig. 4). The body shape must be adapted, and the front limbs must be transformed into flippers, while the tail is converted into a tail fin, or fluke, to enable energy-efficient swimming to propel themselves forward. Furthermore, the skull shape changed, which was mainly controlled by diet and echolocation or filter feeding. As warm-blooded animals, whales have a body temperature of 36 °C, plus or minus two degrees, which they maintain through a layer of fat that insulates their bodies so that they do not cool down in the water. In addition, they have developed a sophisticated cardiovascular blood circulation system to minimise heat loss to the surrounding water. Since the limbs are cooler than the core of the body due to their large surface area, body heat is partially recovered via counter-flow blood circulation patterns and pathways, and heat loss is reduced by reducing blood flow to the limbs. They needed to develop an osmoregulatory system to deal with the excess salt load ingested from ambient seawater. Breathing must also be adapted. As lung breathers, whales must repeatedly surface to breathe, expelling used air at high pressure through the nostril located on the top of their head, the blowhole, and quickly inhaling fresh air. In addition, the whale's body must also withstand the hydrostatic pressure of the surrounding water, and oxygen must be kept dissolved in the blood, as whales can dive very deep. The record holder is the sperm whale, which can dive up to 3,000 meters deep and stay underwater for up to 45 minutes without breathing while hunting mainly giant squids and other deep-sea fish. Another very important adaptation to life in water is the development of underwater hearing, as sound waves travel almost five times faster underwater than in air. To achieve this, the inner ear of whales has adapted morphologically and is decoupled from the skull to enable oriented hearing underwater. This allows whales to locate their prey and orient themselves underwater. The corresponding inner ear morphology is a characteristic feature of whales.

Fig. 4: Adaptations in the body plan and metabolism of whales that are necessary for the transition from life on land to life in water



Source: modified, personal communication with Oliver Hampe

The skeleton of whales has also been adapted to life in water, and bone density has been reduced. Today's whales have relatively spongy bones, which means they are lightweight, unlike land animals, they do not have to carry their own body weight against gravity due to buoyancy in water. This is why whales suffocate agonisingly after beaching themselves on the coast, as their body weight compresses their lungs. However, the ancestor of the primitive whales that entered the water often had rather heavy limb bones because, like today's hippopotamuses, it walked on the bottom of the water (Thewissen et al. 2007). This required dense and heavy bones with a thick bone cortex, which enabled them to stay underwater in an energy-efficient manner. Thus, numerous morphological and biological adaptations are essential for survival in aquatic environments.

Where did the evolution of early whales take place? This was linked to the right environmental setting, which was controlled by plate tectonics. India, as a continent, split off from the large southern continent of Gondwana and drifted northward across the equator over many millions of years before it collided with Asia, closing the Tethys Ocean and forming the Himalayas. Just before this continent-continent collision occurred, the evolution of early whales took place between 54 and 40 million years ago in the coastal and marine areas of the Tethys Sea between India

and Asia. There were various aquatic habitats, such as rivers, estuaries, and shallow shelf sea areas, where the archaic whales developed. During the Eocene epoch, whales migrated from the mainland back to the sea.

Fossil finds of early whales, such as *Pakicetus* and *Ambulocetus*, come from the Indo-Pakistan region (Gingerich et al. 1983; Thewissen et al. 1994). These early whales (Archaeoceti) provide excellent evidence of the evolution from four-legged, land-dwelling, even-toed ungulates to whales that are completely adapted to life in the sea. The front limbs are transformed into fins, the hind limbs, which are no longer needed, are reduced, and the tail is transformed into a tail fin, the fluke, which enables energy-efficient propulsion. These changes in the whales' body plan took place in a geologically short period of 10 to 15 million years, over a few tens of thousands of generations. Today's whales have only rudimentary hind limbs, while the primitive whales still had small legs with the characteristic ankle bone, which proves their ancestry from hoofed animals.

The body structure and way of life of these early whales or whale ancestors are reconstructed on the basis of fossil finds. *Indohyus*, named after India, is not yet a true whale, but represents an extinct sister group of whales (Fig. 1). It was a semi-aquatic animal that walked or waded at the bottom of water bodies, probably in the fresh water of lakes or rivers (Thewissen et al. 2007). The fossil skull of *Indohyus* has a characteristic inner ear with a relatively massive bone covering, but it is not yet completely isolated from the skull, as is typical for true whales. Only in true whales is the inner ear completely separated from the skull and connected to it only by soft tissue structures. This enables whales to hear while orienting themselves in the water. Land-dwelling vertebrates cannot do this because sound is reflected by the skull bone and causes it to vibrate. You can notice this when you cover your ears; you can still hear yourself when you speak. Another adaptation to the aquatic lifestyle of early whales can be seen in the bone microstructure of the bone wall of long bones, which is much thicker than that of land-dwelling vertebrates (Thewissen et al. 2007). This is called pachyostosis, where the bone is made denser so that the animals can stay underwater with little energy expenditure, similar to how a diver's lead belt allows them to dive easily. Sea cows also have this, but in their ribs.

To characterise the lifestyle and habitat of early whales, the chemical composition, especially the oxygen isotope composition, of their bones and teeth can be analyzed (Roe et al. 1998; Clementz et al. 2006; Thewissen et al. 2007). These contain characteristic isotope signatures from their lifetime, which allow us to reconstruct whether the whales lived in fresh water or seawater from their fossilised skeletal remains. Low ratios of the heavy oxygen isotope ^{18}O to the light oxygen isotope ^{16}O are characteristic of freshwater and less evaporation stress, to which animals living in water are less exposed than animals living on land (Roe et al. 1998; Clementz and Koch 2001). Land animals sweat and therefore lose relatively more light oxygen than heavy oxygen via water vapour. In addition, their oxygen isotopes vary

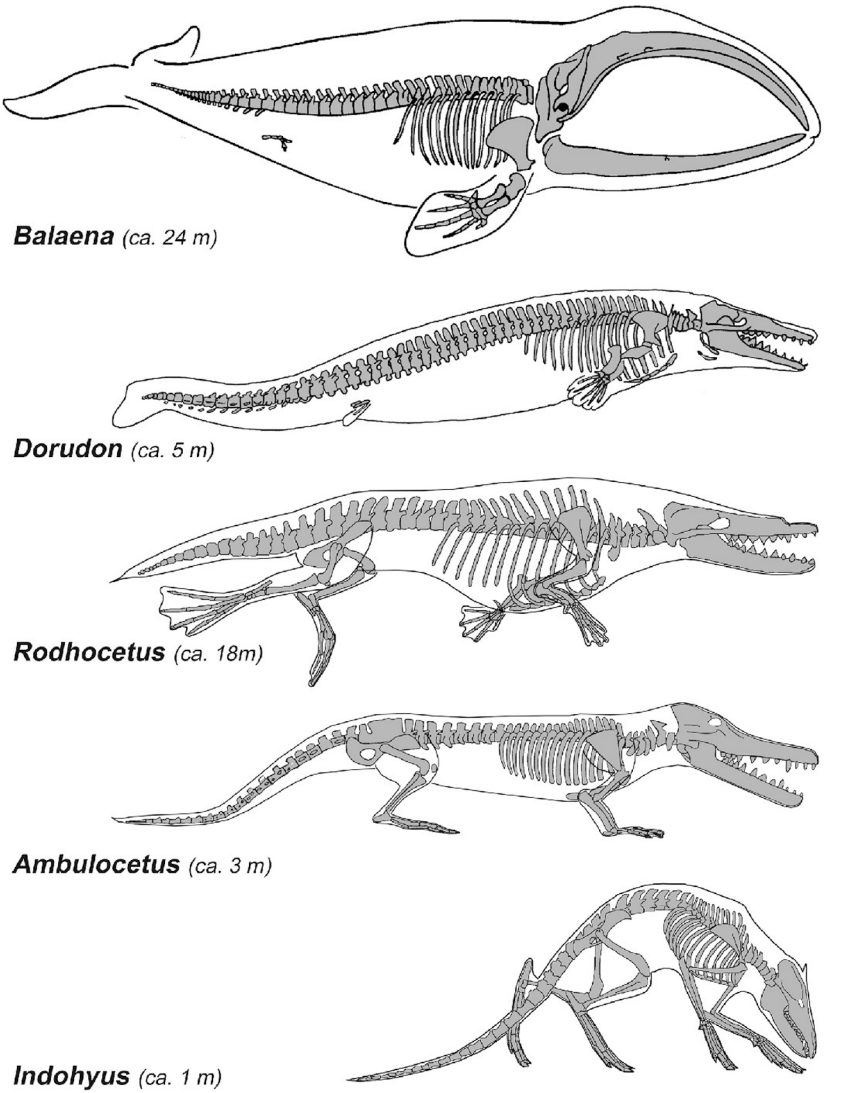
more than those of aquatic vertebrates because they are more exposed to evaporation stress (Clementz and Koch 2001). In addition, the carbon isotopes in teeth provide information about the diet of whales, e.g., whether they ate mainly land or aquatic plants. It appears that early whales ate different food than their sister group, *Indohyus* (Thewissen et al. 2007). Overall, the stable isotope data indicate an aquatic lifestyle for this early whale sister taxon, but it may still have obtained its food on land, while whales originated from an *Indohyus*-like ancestor, and these early whales consumed a diet of aquatic prey (Clementz et al. 2006; Thewissen et al. 2007).

Then came the evolutionary step to the first whales. *Pakicetus* is considered the first true whale and lived in the early to middle Eocene (Gingerich et al. 1983). Fossils of various individuals, such as skulls, teeth, and bones, have been found. *Pakicetus* still had fur, massive leg bones and, most importantly, an inner ear that was separated from the skull. This shows that it was able to hear underwater. However, it used paddle-like swimming and retained the ability to walk on land.

Over the course of evolution, the archaic whale *Pakicetus* developed into larger forms that were even more adapted to aquatic life, such as the three- to four-meter-long *Ambulocetus* (Fig. 5; Thewissen et al. 1994). *Ambulocetus* was an ambush hunter preying on other land-dwelling animals in the coastal region of Indo-Pakistan approximately 48 million years ago. However, as an aquatic carnivore, it also preyed upon fish.

The first fully marine whales, which were already more similar to today's whales, developed in the late Eocene. Fossil remains have been found in the El Fayoum Oasis in Egypt, where whales are found in the desert today. One such early toothed whale was *Dorudon*, which had already developed a fluke and whose hind limbs were severely stunted because they were no longer used (Fig. 5). These Dorudontidae were up to five meters long and belonged to the Basilosauridae family, from which modern whales later evolved. These basilosaurids never returned to land, were fish eaters, and had strong serrated teeth. Forty million years ago, they evolved into the first very large whales, up to 20 meters in length, such as *Basilosaurus isis*, the largest representative from Egypt (Voss et al. 2019; Fig. 5). Those who are linguistically inclined will surely wonder why *-saurus* (Greek *sauros*), meaning lizard, appears at the end of the name *Basilosaurus*. This was a taxonomic misidentification when this ancient whale was first named; it was previously mistakenly interpreted as a sea snake, hence the name *Basilosaurus*. Of course, it is a mammal, but the original name takes precedence in nomenclature and therefore remains in use. *Basilosaurus* and *Dorudon* were the top predators in the Eocene ocean and took on the role of marine reptiles that became extinct at the end of the Cretaceous period.

Fig. 5: Evolution of the skeleton and bauplan of early whales starting from the sister taxon Indohyus *via the first true whale,* Pakicetus *(not shown here but see Fig. 3),* Ambulocetus *and* Rodhocetus, *which could still walk on land, to fully marine whales with greatly reduced hind limbs, such as* Dorudon. *From the latter modern toothed and baleen whales descended. Fossils of the first three taxa were found in the Indo-Pakistan realm, whereas* Dorudon *was found in the Fayoum area of Egypt.*



Source: by S. Gemballa in Moormann and Scheersoi 2024, Fig. 29.4, p. 523

Fig. 6: Bizarre Eocene sandstone rocks shaped by wind and water erosion in the desert with tafoni weathering structures on their surface, UNESCO World Heritage Site Wadi Al-Hitan, Valley of the Whales, El-Fayoum Oasis, Egypt

Source: own photograph

The evolution of these early full marine whales is ironically well documented by whale fossils found in the desert in Egypt, UNESCO World Heritage Site Wadi Al-Hitan, the Valley of Whales (Helmy et al. 2023; Ibrahim et al. 2025). This is a fantastic landscape and a unique geological setting near the El-Fayoum Oasis in the northeastern Sahara. Around 40 million years ago, the archaic whales *Dorudon* and *Basilosaurus* lived alongside many other marine organisms in the Tethys Sea. But how did these whales get into the desert? Plate tectonics, sea level fluctuations, climate changes, and erosion processes all played or still do play a role. In the Eocene epoch, 40 million years ago, northern Africa was flooded by a tropical, shallow epicontinental sea, part of the Tethys, the precursor to the Mediterranean Sea. These archaic whales swam around there, and their carcasses washed up in shallow lagoons/coastal areas (Ibrahim et al. 2025). Later, the sea receded, and the marine sands and whale bones solidified to fossil-bearing sandstone layers that were later uplifted by tectonic processes, exposing the whale bones through erosion by wind and water. Today, they can thus be found in the dry desert. Bizarre weathering forms of the Eocene sandstone formations characterise this magnificent landscape (Fig. 6), which contains many significant fossils of early whales, including hundreds of whale skeletons, which is why this region has been designated a World Heritage Site. The

presence of trace fossils such as fossilised traces of burrows from bivalves and crustaceans (Fig. 7; Gee et al. 2019) indicates that there used to be very shallow seawater in the coastal area of a tropical sea where the whale carcasses were beached (Ibrahim et al. 2025). Today, the fossil bones and skeletons of these whales, which have been exposed by erosion from the marine sandstone rock, can be found in the desert sand because the sea retreated and the climate in the Sahara area has become much drier in recent Earth history, forming this vast desert. Thus, now many whale fossils can be found on the surface in the desert exposed by erosion such as the vertebral spine of a *Basilosaurus* with all its vertebrae or tooth impressions of these large, ancient toothed whales, such as *Dorudon* and *Basilosaurus* (Fig. 8). There are also entire skeletons in excellent condition and some even with stomach contents, indicating that *Basilosaurus isis* fed on sympatric smaller whales such as juvenile *Dorudon atrox* and large fishes (Voss et al. 2019).

Fig. 7: Middle Eocene bioturbated sandstone rocks with trace fossils of fossilised crustacean or bivalve burrows (Gee et al. 2019), UNESCO World Heritage Site Wadi Al-Hitan, Valley of the Whales, El-Fayoum Oasis, Egypt

Source: own photograph

Important representatives of various early whales are shown in Fig. 9 together in a 'family portrait'. The first true whale was *Pakicetus*, which lived in freshwater, was semi-aquatic, but also still land-based (Gingerich et al. 1983; Thewissen et al. 2001).

The following primitive whales, such as *Kutchicetus*, *Ambulocetus*, and *Rodhocetus*, lived increasingly aquatic and marine lives. *Dorudon*, depicted like a seal on land (Fig. 9), was one of the first fully marine whales that no longer came ashore (Thewissen and Williams 2002). These basilosaurids were fully adapted to an aquatic lifestyle, but for educational purposes, they are shown together with the other primitive whales. The transition from a land-dwelling hoofed animal to a fully aquatic marine whale took place very quickly in geological terms, within about 10 to 15 million years (Thewissen 1998; Thewissen and Williams 2002). Today's closest living relatives of whales would be hippopotamuses, while the *Indohyus*, which is not yet a true whale and therefore does not belong to the Cetacea, represents the extinct sister group of whales (Thewissen et al., 2007). All the representatives of the primitive whales or Archaeoceti up to the fully marine-adapted *Dorudon* are shown here together (Fig. 9). The subfamily Dorudontidae then gave rise to the modern whales that you know today, i.e., the toothed whales, the Odontoceti, and the baleen whales, the Mysticeti.

Fig. 8: Fossilized skeletons of basilosaurids from the middle Eocene (ca. 40 to 37 million years ago), UNESCO World Heritage Site Valley of the Whales, El-Fayoum Oasis, Egypt. The top two photographs show articulated vertebrae of Basilosaurus, a different view of the same complete skeleton. The bottom ones show impressions of teeth from Basilosaurus in the sandstone and teeth in a lower jaw.

Source: own photographs

During their evolution, whales had to undergo a wide range of morphological and physiological adaptations. These included changes in skull shape related to different feeding modes and prey sizes, as well as shifts in the position of the nose, which moved upward on the skull and became the blowhole in modern whales. Another important innovation, which only appeared in modern toothed whales, was echolocation for locating prey, which, of course, requires not only the ability to hear but also the emission of sound waves. These sound waves emitted by whales are focused by the melon, a special organ made of fat and connective tissue in the head of toothed whales, and their reflection is heard via the lower jaw. Later, baleen whales also developed intraspecific infrasonic communication. Whales have thus developed very complex adaptations for underwater hearing and communication.

Fig. 9: Paleoartistic reconstruction of early Eocene whales (Archaeocetes) that are to different degrees adapted to an aquatic lifestyle. The first fully marine archaeocete, Dorudon, *then gave rise to the modern toothed and baleen whales.*

Source: Thewissen et al. 2009, Fig. 27, p. 286, licensed under CC BY 2.0

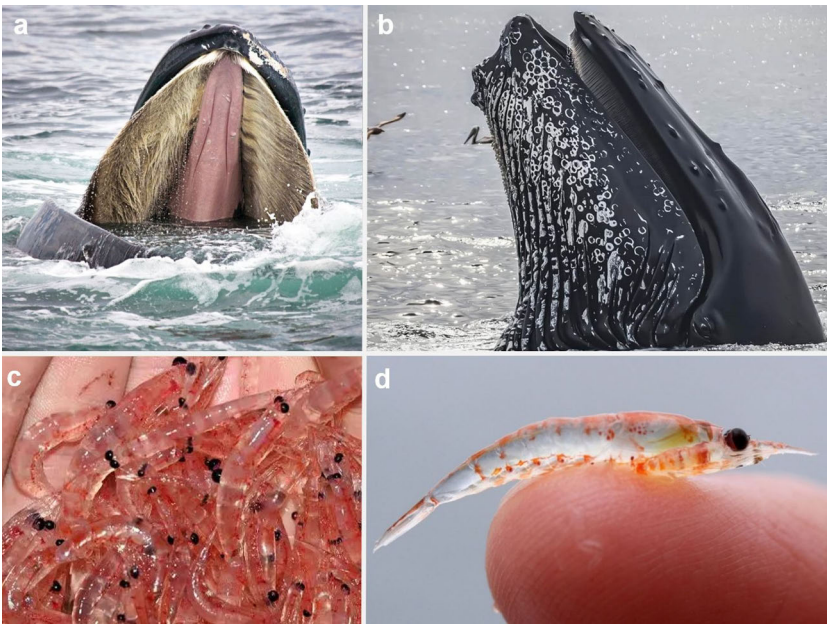
Finally, we come to the evolution of today's modern whales, which was also influenced by plate tectonic and geological processes. It is no coincidence that modern whales emerged around 35 million years ago, as their emergence is linked to the movement of continental plates and the formation of sea connections and currents (Fordyce 1980; Marx and Fordyce 2015). Both poles were ice-free throughout

the Mesozoic era because there was a lot of CO_2 in the atmosphere that had been released from the Earth's mantle through volcanic activity; as a result, it was very warm, and no inland ice could form there. Today, we have reached a man-made level of 430 ppmv (National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration). Before the industrial era, the CO_2 concentration in the atmosphere was around 280 ppmv, and this concentration has varied only a little over the last 20 million years (DeConto et al. 2008), for instance, between ice ages and interglacials. Before that, the CO_2 content in the Earth's history was significantly higher, and the climate was correspondingly warmer. Climate models show that only when the CO_2 concentration in the atmosphere falls below 750 ppmv can winter snow on continents in polar regions build up into inland ice (DeConto et al. 2008). In addition, the initially only partial glaciation of Antarctica at the beginning of the Oligocene, 34 million years ago, was initiated by the formation of the cold Antarctic Circumpolar Current. The opening of two marine straits, the Tasman Strait and the Drake Passage, separated Antarctica from Australia and South America, respectively, and the cold Antarctic Circumpolar Current thermally isolated Antarctica, preventing warm water from the tropics from reaching Antarctica (Stanley 2005). Together with the low CO_2 concentration in the atmosphere, this led to the formation of inland ice and initially only to a partial glaciation of Antarctica. Later, during the Miocene, Antarctica became completely glaciated (Stanley 2005; DeConto et al. 2008). The glaciation at the Eocene/Oligocene boundary caused cold, nutrient-rich water (minerals and nutrients brought in by glacial erosion from Antarctica) to spread around Antarctica via the polar current. This nutrient-rich, cold water provided a rich source of food for whales, namely (zoo)plankton, which flourished there. This plankton prompted a group of whales, the baleen whales, or Mysticeti, to reduce and eventually lose their teeth and instead develop baleen plates made of keratin to filter the abundant krill from the water and thus become plankton eaters (Marx and Fordyce 2015; Fig. 10).

Among modern whales, toothed whales, Odontoceti, first developed. They had teeth like orcas. From toothed whales, then baleen whales evolved, which in transitional forms still had some teeth (Geisler et al. 2017; Tsai et al. 2024) but had already developed baleen to filter-feed large quantities of plankton. Early representatives of baleen whales, which lived 30 million years ago, still had teeth in the front of their jaws, which were still developed as grasping teeth, but at the back of the jaw, they were serrated and may have already functioned a little like fish traps (Geisler et al. 2017). Early baleen whales have been found at the Eocene/Oligocene boundary, i.e., during the period when the nutrient-rich, cold Antarctic Circumpolar Current formed (Fordyce 1980; Marx and Fordyce 2015). Baleen is made of keratin, just like our hair and fingernails and arranged in baleen plates which are fibrous at the ends (Fig. 10, a and b). These baleen plates are used to filter large quantities of small krill crustaceans from the seawater (Fig. 10, c and d). Krill swarms several football fields in size live in the nutrient-rich cold polar seas, which is why whales migrate

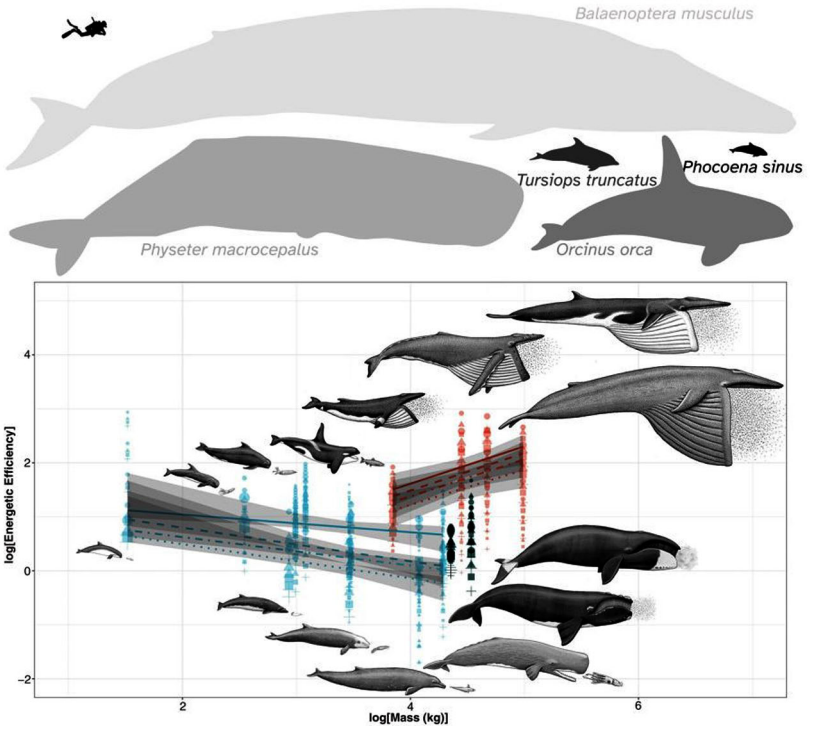
there today to feed abundantly during the polar summer. With their baleen, large baleen whales can filter enormous amounts of water in record time; a fin whale, for example, can enclose around 70,000 litres in a few seconds and filter it in less than a minute through its baleen to retain only the prey. That is a volume of water heavier than the whale itself, from which it extracts around 10 kilograms of krill, depending on krill density in the water (https://baleinesendirect.org/en/une-video-inedite-du-comportement-alimentaire-de-rorquals-communs/).

Fig. 10: Humpback whale mouth with keratinous baleen plates (a). Side view of a humpback whale head (b). Krill, small marine crustaceans, form protein-rich, high-energy food for baleen whales (c). Single krill animal on a fingertip (d).



Source: (a) credit John Tunney, Shutterstock, https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/humpback-whale-opens-mouth-wide-show-120146803; (b) https://www.peta.de/themen/wale/; (c) credit Dan Costa, https://www.nsf.gov/science-matters/antarctic-krill-superheroes-southern-ocean#image-caption-credit-block; (d) credit Sophie Webb/NOAA, https://utopia.de/news/krill-fang-in-der-antarktis-grund-dafuer-ist-das-verrueckteste-der-geschichte_660685/

*Fig. 11: Size comparison of silhouettes of the blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*), the largest animal that ever lived on Earth, with other large, toothed whales such as the sperm whale (*Physeter catodon*; the largest toothed whale), killer whale (*Orcinus orca*) and two species of dolphin with a diver for scale (top). The bottom graph shows the relation between energy efficiency (related to feeding) and body mass, both on a log scale. Only filter-feeding enables the sustenance of the giant body size of baleen whales.*



Source: cutout of Burin et al. 2023, Fig. 1, p. 1788, licensed under CC BY 4.0 (top) and Goldbogen et al. 2019, Fig. 4, p. 1371 (bottom)

This 'bulk feeding' on zooplankton has led to these gigantic forms, especially among baleen whales (Goldbogen et al. 2019), particularly since three million years ago in the Pliocene-Pleistocene epoch, when the north pole also became ice-covered. The Arctic also had corresponding krill swarms and nutrient-rich waters from continental runoff, providing additional feeding grounds for baleen whales. The evolution of whales ultimately produced the largest animal that has ever lived on our planet, namely the blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*) (Fig. 11). They have been recorded as measuring up to 32 meters in length, weighing up to 200 tons, and living to a maximum age of at least 100 years. Other whales, such as the bowhead whale, even live

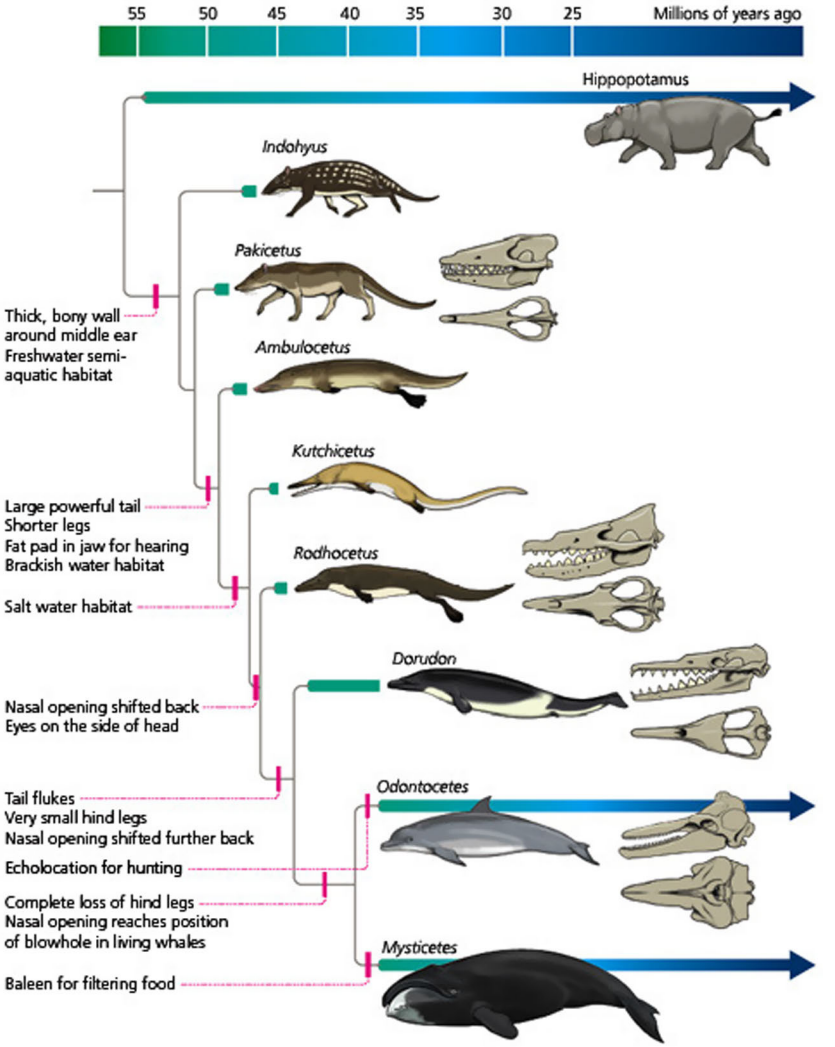
up to 200 years old. Baleen whales migrate huge distances, thousands of kilometres from the equator to both polar regions, to feed on krill and other plankton with their baleen plates (Fig. 10). The record holder is the gray whale, with a migration distance of over 16,000 km for its round trip from pole to pole. Unfortunately, whales, especially the giants of the seas, are threatened in many ways by human hunting, pollution, ship traffic, fishing and climate change (Hersh et al. 2025).

Toothed whales can also grow quite large, such as the sperm whale, the largest odontocete, which can reach lengths of over 20 meters. It also holds the record for deep diving. It can dive over 3,000 meters in three-quarters of an hour to hunt its preferred prey, giant squid, in the deep sea. Finally, a comparison of the largest animals in Earth's history highlights both the relative smallness of humans and the immense size of the largest animal ever known: the blue whale – surpassing all dinosaurs and every other known animal in size (Fig. 11).

The baleen whales have produced the true giants of the seas. Filtering protein-rich zooplankton food such as krill (Fig. 10) has proven successful in facilitating gigantism in baleen whales (Goldbogen et al. 2019). First filter-feeding probably already evolved in the Oligocene (Geisler et al. 2017; Tsai et al. 2024) and has later led to gigantic forms in baleen whales (Marx and Fordyce 2015). But also, echolocating toothed whales evolved a wealth of behavioral diversity in foraging tactics to capture their prey that can even be culturally transmitted by social learning (Hersh et al. 2025).

Key steps in whale evolution from terrestrial, even-toed ungulates to secondary aquatic marine mammals since ca. 54 Ma in the Eocene (Fig. 12) were body plan changes (hind limb loss, fluke formation, forelimb modification to flippers, snout shape, nostril position, blubber), modifications of ear morphology (directional under water hearing) and feeding ecology (filter-feeding with baleen, search for prey using echolocation in toothed whales) (Thewissen 1998; Zimmer 1999; Thewissen and Williams 2002). Whales have an excellent fossil record that documents the transition from land-dwelling ungulates to sea-dwelling whales very well. Plate tectonics and other geological processes influenced the evolution of continents, climate, ocean currents, sea level changes, and ultimately whales. The transition from land to sea took place in coastal habitats, which also served as deposition sites for the skeletal remains of early whales. Whales live in water, die in water, and are quickly embedded in marine sediments, where they can be preserved as fossils. These fossil specimens allow paleontologists to reconstruct the evolution of whales. Fossils of archaic whales have been preserved in Eocene aquatic/marine sedimentary rocks in Indo-Pakistan, but also in Egypt, and provide evidence of the early evolution of whales from land-dwelling ungulates to fully marine whales.

Fig. 12: From hoofed land-mammals to giants of the sea. Phylogenetic evolution of whales from the sister taxon Indohyus *through the first true archaic whale* Pakicetus *to the fully marine* Dorudon*, from which the modern toothed whales (Odontocetes) and baleen whales (Mysticetes) eventually developed.*



Source: Zimmer 2013, Fig. 1.7, p. 358

Today, 89 different species and 13 families of whales still exist, mainly toothed whales, but also some baleen whales, which, as giants of the seas, are among the largest animals that have ever lived on our planet (Fig. 11; Burin et al. 2023), have important ecosystem functions as apex predators and nutrient distributors but may also help to sequester CO_2 (Pearson et al. 2023). Thus, whales were, are and will remain true giants of the sea in many aspects.

References

Burin, Gustavo, Travis Park, Tamara D. James, Graham J. Slater, and Natalie Cooper. "The dynamic adaptive landscape of cetacean body size." *Current Biology*, vol. 33, no. 9, 2023, pp. 1787–1794, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2023.03.014.

Clementz, M.T. and Paul L. Koch. "Differentiating aquatic mammal habitat and foraging ecology with stable isotopes in tooth enamel." *Oecologia*, vol. 129, 2001, pp. 461–472, https://doi.org/10.1007/s004420100745.

Clementz, M.T., Anjali Goswami, Philip D. Gingerich, and Paul L. Koch. "Isotopic records from early whales and sea cows: contrasting patterns of ecological transition." *Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2006, pp. 355–370, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4524575.

DeConto, Robert M., David Pollard, Paul A. Wilson, Heiko Pälike, Caroline H. Lear, and Mark Pagani. "Thresholds for Cenozoic bipolar glaciation." *Nature*, vol. 455, no. 7213, 2008, pp. 652–656, https://doi.org/10.1038/nature07337.

Fordyce, R. Ewan. "Whale Evolution and Oligocene Southern Ocean Environments." *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology*, vol. 31, pp. 319–336, https://doi.org/10.1016/0031-0182(80)90024-3.

Gatesy, John, Jonathan H. Geisler, Joseph Chang, Carl Buell, Annalisa Berta, Robert W. Meredith, Mark S. Springer, and Michael R. McGowen. "A phylogenetic blueprint for a modern whale." *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2013, pp. 479–506, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ympev.2012.10.012.

Gee, Carole T., Sander, P. Martin, Peters, Shanan E., El-Hennawy, Mohamed Talaat Mohammed, Antar, Sameh M., Zalmout, Iyad S., Gingerich, Philip D. "Fossil burrow assemblage, not mangrove roots: reinterpretation of the main whale-bearing layer in the late Eocene of Wadi Al-Hitan, Egypt." *Palaeobiodiversity and Palaeoenvironments*, vol. 99, 2019, pp. 143–158, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12549-018-0337-0.

Geisler, Jonathan H., Robert W. Boessenecker, Mace Brown, and Brian L. Beatty. "The origin of filter feeding in whales." *Current Biology*, vol. 27, 2017, pp. 2036–2042, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2017.06.003.

Gingerich, P.D., N.A. Wells, D.E. Russell, and S.M.I. Shah. "Origin of whales in epicontinental remnant seas: New evidence from the early Eocene of Pakistan." *Sci-*

ence, vol. 220, no. 4595, 1983, pp. 403–406, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.220.4595.403.

Gingerich, Philip D., Munir Ul Haq, Ilyad S. Zalmout, Intizar Hussain Khan, and M. Sadiq Malkani. "Origin of whales from early artiodactyls: Hands and feet of Eocene Protocetidae from Pakistan." *Science*, vol. 293, no. 5538, 2001, pp. 2239–2242, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1063902.

Gingerich, Philip D. "Evolution of Whales from Land to Sea." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 156, no. 3, 2012, pp. 309–323. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23558092.

Goldbogen, J.A., D.A. Cade, D.M. Wisniewska, J. Potvin, P.S. Segre, M.S. Savoca, E.L. Hazen, M.F. Czapanskiy, S.R. Kahane-Rapport, S.L. DeRuiter, S. Gero, P. Tønnesen, W.T. Gough, M.B. Hanson, M.M. Holt, F.H. Jensen, M. Simon, A.K. Stimpert, P. Arranz, D.W. Johnston, D.P. Nowacek, S.E. Parks, F. Visser, A.S. Friedlaender, P.L. Tyack, P.T. Madsen, and N.D. Pyenson. "Why whales are big but not bigger: Physiological drivers and ecological limits in the age of ocean giants." *Science*, vol. 366, no. 6471, 2019, pp. 1367–1372, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aax9044.

Helmy, Hassan M., Thomas Tütken, and Hamza Lotfy. "Valley of Whales, Fayum Oasis, Egypt: an Eocene window in the evolution of Cetaceans." *International Journal of Earth Sciences (Geologische Rundschau)*, vol. 112, 2023, pp. 1499–1501, https://doi.org/10.1007/s00531-023-02304-7.

Hersh, Taylor A., Daiane S. Marcondes, Gabriel F. Fonseca, João V. S. Valle-Pereira, Michaela A. Kratofil, Alexandre M. S. Machado, Shanan Atkins, Kyra R. Bankhead, Kiera McGarvey, Muhammad Mahmudur Rahman, Stephane P. G. de Moura, Fernanda Fecci, and Mauricio Cantor. "Ecology and conservation of socially learned foraging tactics in odontocetes." *Philosophical Transactions Royal Society B*, vol. 380, 20240134, 2025, https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2024.0134.

Ibrahim, Esraa S., Magdy M. El Hedeny, Ahmed M. El-Sabbagh, Gebely A. Abu El-Kheir, Alaa G. Osman, Aldoushy Mahdy, and Enas A. Ahmed. "Shallow-water whale-fall communities: Evidence from the middle–late Eocene basilosaurid whale bones, Wadi El-Hitan, Fayum, Egypt." *Palaeoworld*, vol. 34, no. 1, 100863, 2025, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.palwor.2024.06.006.

Kelley, Neil P. and Nicholas D. Pyenson. "Evolutionary innovation and ecology in marine tetrapods from the Triassic to the Anthropocene." *Science*, vol. 348, no. 6232, aaa3716, 2015, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aaa3716.

Marx, Felix G. and R. Ewan Fordyce. "Baleen boom and bust: a synthesis of mysticete phylogeny, diversity and disparity." *Royal Society Open Science*, vol. 2, 140434, 2015, http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rsos.140434.

Moormann, Alexandra and Annette Scheersoi. "Evolutionsbiologie im Naturkundemuseum." *Didaktik der Evolutionsbiologie*, edited by Gemballa, S. and Kattmann,

U., Springer Spektrum, Berlin, Heidelberg, 2024, pp 513–528, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-69030-7_29.

Pearson, Heidi C., Matthew S. Savoca, Daniel P. Costa, Michael W. Lomas, Renato Molina, Andrew J. Pershing, Craig R. Smith, Juan Carlos Villaseñor-Derbez, Stephen R. Wing, and Joe Roman. "Whales in the carbon cycle: can recovery remove carbon dioxide?" *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tree.2022.10.012.

Roe, L.J., J.G.M. Thewissen, Jay Quade, James R. O'Neil, Sunil Bajpai, Ashok Sahni, and S. Taseer Hussain. "Isotopic Approaches to Understanding the Terrestrial-to-Marine Transition of the Earliest Cetaceans." *The Emergence of Whales: Evolutionary Patterns in the Origin of Cetacea*, edited by Thewissen, J. G. M., Plenum, New York, 1998, pp. 399–422.

Sander, P. Martin, Eva Maria Griebeler, Nicole Klein, Jorge Velez Juarbe, Tanja Wintrich, Liam J. Revell, and Lars Schmitz. "Early giant reveals faster evolution of large body size in ichthyosaurs than in cetaceans." *Science*, vol. 374, no. 6575, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abf5787.

Stanley, Steven M., Earth System History, 2nd rev. ed., W. H. Freeman & Co Ltd, 2005.

Thewissen, J.G.M., S.T. Hussain, and M. Arif. "Fossil evidence for the origin of aquatic locomotion in archaeocete whales." *Science*, vol. 263, no. 5144, 1994, pp. 210–212, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.263.5144.210.

Thewissen, J.G.M. *The Emergence of Whales: Evolutionary Patterns in the Origin of Cetacea*. Plenum Press, 1998.

Thewissen, J.G.M., Elsie M. Williams, Lois J. Roe, and S. Taseer Hussain. "Skeletons of terrestrial cetaceans and the relationship of whales to artiodactyls." *Nature*, vol. 413, no. 6853, 2001, pp. 277–281, https://doi.org/10.1038/35095005.

Thewissen, J.G.M., and Elsie M. Williams. "The early radiation of Cetacea (Mammalia): Evolutionary pattern and developmental correlation." *Annual Review of Ecology, Evolution, and Systematics*, vol. 33, 2002, pp. 73–90, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.ecolsys.33.020602.095426.

Thewissen, J.G.M., Lisa Noelle Cooper, Mark T. Clementz, Sunil Bajpai, and B.N. Tiwari. "Whales originated from aquatic artiodactyls in the Eocene epoch of India." *Nature*, vol. 450, 2007, pp. 1190–1194, https://doi:10.1038/nature06343.

Thewissen, J.G.M., Cooper, L.N., George, J.C. et al. "From Land to Water: the Origin of Whales, Dolphins, and Porpoises." *Evo Edu Outreach*, vol. 2, 2009, pp. 272–288, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12052-009-0135-2.

"Trends in Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide (CO_2), Mauna Loa, Hawaii." *Global Monitoring Laboratory*, National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, 5 Nov. 2024, gml.noaa.gov/ccgg/trends/weekly.html, accessed 11 Aug. 2025.

Tsai, Cheng-Hsiu, James L. Goedert, and Robert W. Boessenecker. "The Oldest Mysticete in the Northern Hemisphere." *Current Biology*, vol. 34, no. 8, 2024, pp. 1794–1800, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2024.03.011.

Vachon, François. "Never before Seen Footage of Fin Whale Feeding Behavior." *Baleines En Direct*, 25 Apr. 2018, baleinesendirect.org/en/une-video-inedite-du-comportement-alimentaire-de-rorquals-communs/, accessed 16 Aug. 2025.

Voss, Manja, Mohammed Sameh M. Antar, Ilyad S. Zalmout, and Philip D. Gingerich. "Stomach contents of the archaeocete *Basilosaurus isis*: Apex predator in oceans of the late Eocene." *PLoS ONE*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0209021.

Zimmer, Carl. *At the Water's Edge: Fish with Fingers, Whales with Legs, and how Life Came Ashore but Then Went Back to the Sea*. Free Press, 1999.

Zimmer, Carl. *The Tangled Bank. An Introduction To Evolution*. 2nd ed., W. H. Freeman, 2013.

Whale Myths in Children's and Young Adult Literature

Bettina Wild

Abstract *For many, the whale is as much a mythical as a real animal, as our ideas about this largest marine mammal are shaped equally by mythological-religious as well as literary tradition and by zoological facts. The article aims to show how the literary traditions of the whale myth are taken up and continued in current children's and young adult literature.*

Keywords *whales; literary myth; children's and young adult literature; anthropomorphism*

Preliminary remarks on the origin of this article

The idea to explore "Whale myths in children's and young adult literature" is closely linked to the *One University – One Book* project and the university-wide reading of *The Whale Rider* (1987) by Witi Ihimaera in the summer semester of 2023 at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz.[1] While other colleagues and students were enthusiastic about the numerous possibilities for virtual and fictional trips to New Zealand, I was fascinated by the literary representation of whales. So my spontaneous idea was to search for whales in children's and young adult literature and offer a seminar on the topic of "the myth of whales in children's and young adult literature."[2]

1 I have deliberately chosen not to discuss the novel *The Whale Rider* here. This article focuses exclusively on children's and young adult literature; and although Witi Ihimaera's novel has elements of a coming-of-age story and certainly appeals to young adult readers, it is not a (specific) young adult book. Furthermore, this article focuses on myths handed down in contemporary children's and young adult literature; *The Whale Rider* follows another mythological tradition with the myths of the Māori, which invites comparison but would go beyond the scope of this article. For a contextualisation of Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* in contemporary literary and media representations of the whale, see Michaela Castellanos' contribution in this volume.

2 At this point, I would like to express my gratitude to the seminar participants who supported me in my research on whales in contemporary children's and young adult literature, which ultimately provided me with the text corpus of five literary whales for this article. It should also be mentioned here that we naturally came across numerous non-fiction books on whales and the sea and oceans in general during our research, but these books would be the subject

This allowed me to build on an essay I had written together with Melanie Wigbers on animal characters in the work of children's and young adult author Nina Weger, in which we also examined the young adult novel *Als mein Bruder ein Wal wurde* (*When My Brother Became a Whale*, 2019). However, anyone who thinks the title refers to a wondrous or fantastical adventure story with human-animal heroes in whale form will be disappointed. In fact, *Als mein Bruder ein Wal wurde* depicts in a mostly realistic and at times surrealistic way how the protagonist Bela copes with the distressing situation of his brother Julius being in a coma for quite some time. To cope, Bela repeatedly imagines his brother as a whale swimming alone in the ocean. In this young adult novel, the whale appears 'only' as a metaphor.[3] Like the child protagonists in the novel (*Als mein Bruder ein Wal wurde*, 169–175), we discussed at length whether this is a fitting metaphor (Wigbers and Wild in print) and, in this context, asked ourselves what literary and cultural topoi are associated with whales.

The whale is at the center of significant, partly ancient, partly modern cultural images, starting with the biblical story of Jonah in the belly of the whale (which many children should be familiar with from Carlo Collodi's adaptation *Pinocchio*; 1881), through Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) – which has also been adapted many times for children's literature – and the film *Free Willy* (1993), to numerous YouTube videos in which whale songs are offered for relaxation. The human view of the largest living mammal is always characterised by a feeling of awe; the whale appears as a powerful animal endangered (by humans) that radiates both threat and security.[4] Measured against this 'cultural idea' of 'whale', Bela's metaphor gains coherence by referring equally to the life-threatening reality and to Julius' desire for a pain-free and secure existence. Whether other examples of children's literature follow this cultural idea of the whale will be shown below.

Key aspects of analysis and interpretation and an attempt at systematisation

But first, I will briefly outline the fundamental aspects of the analysis and interpretation of whale representations in children's and young adult literature.

---

of another article, as would the astonishingly large number of picture books featuring more or less humanised whales.

3 The same applies to the classic *Insel der blauen Delphine* (1962; original *The Island of the Blue Dolphins* 1960) by Scott O'Dell, an early example of children's literature depicting the whale, if one counts dolphins as whales. Here, too, the dolphins are little more than a symbol of the protagonist's close connection to nature or a metaphor for her development.

4 On the whale as a "literarisches Artefakt" ([literary artifact] with merely a symbolic function in literary history, see Hoiß 2023, 29–30.

As with any literary representation of animals, the question of the degree of anthropomorphism arises in the case of the literary whale.[5] This can tend towards zero. An example from classic children's and young adult literature is the cinematic heroine Lassie, who is an extremely intelligent and people-oriented dog, but always remains a dog. Or it can be so high that one can speak of an animal in human form. This tends to happen in classic fables, although there is always a clear orientation toward topical attributions to the animal, which may also be based on zoological facts. It occurs in an extreme form in many picture books and, of course, in comics, when Donald Duck appears as a human in duck form.

In children's and young adult literature, which from a modern perspective is primarily intended to entertain, the question of the degree of instruction for the young reader always arises. Depending on the degree of anthropomorphism, the aim of the instruction may be zoological and/or animal ethical, but also of a general human nature (Schmideler 2016). It should be noted here that all the texts examined have in common that they provide factual information about whales; this can be done explicitly in the form of educational inserts or implicitly in a poetic or aesthetic manner.

Closely linked to the question of the degree of anthropomorphisation and instruction is the representation of the relationship between humans and animals. In the whale depictions, the portrayal of this relationship is often linked to the different perspectives of the whale living in the water and the humans living on the shore, and the different worldviews that come with them. The whale depictions discussed here share the common feature that the whale is characterised as a marine mammal that cannot live without water – but also cannot live without air. Similarly, some of the whale depictions presented here play with contrasting shifts in perspective between humans living on land and whales living in water, which is also impressively reflected in some of the illustrations (see, for example, the cover of Patrick Ness's *And the Ocean Was Our Sky* 2018/2020).

In an attempt to systematise the five whale depictions, which range from picture books to all-age novels, I was able to identify two groups: The starting point of the narrative is either a real (or at least realistically drawn) whale or a – or rather *the one* – mythical whale.

5 For variations of anthropomorphisation in the depiction of animals in children's and young adult literature and possible classifications, see Schmideler 2016, 3–4 and Bonacker 2016, 73–74.

Real or realistically drawn whales in children's and young adult literature

The group of 'real' whales in my text corpus can be subdivided into

- the type of realistically drawn, non-anthropomorphised whale (Katherine Scholes: *Sams Wal* 1985/1990) and
- the type of real but anthropomorphised whale (Corinna Ruhl: *Der weiße Wal vom Rhein* 2020 and Martin Baltscheit: *Der einsamste Wal der Welt* 2018).

While Scholes' depiction of a whale stranded on the shore and fighting for its life is based on a realistic scenario that unfortunately occurs time and again, the starting point for Ruhl's short story and Baltscheit's picture book is the actual fate of a whale.

Sams Wal, published in 1985 under the title *The Boy and the Whale* and translated into German in 1990, is set in Australia; after 30 years of tradition, including as a successful school reading book, the children's book by the Tasmanian author has now achieved classic status (Hildebrand 2017/2022). It is a short, children's hero tale about the adventures of a boy named Sam who, with the help of various characters and despite threats from his enemies, helps a stranded whale back into the sea. After discovering the whale on the beach, Sam quickly realises that the whale's only chance of survival is to get back into the water, so he begins to wet it. Through this initially hesitant contact, an evocatively described relationship develops between Sam and the whale, although the whale is not humanised; feelings such as fear or anger are attributed to the whale, but this attribution is made by Sam, who interprets the whale's movements accordingly. Furthermore, the whale's eye, through which the young rescuer's activities are observed, is used as a leitmotif; there is no description of the whale's feelings during these observations. This culminates in the touching farewell scene: "Der Wal hob seinen großen Kopf aus den Wellen und sah Sam mit einem ruhigen, warmen Blick aus seinem dunkel glänzenden Auge an. Die Spitze der Schwanzflosse strich leicht an Sams Arm entlang." ([The whale lifted its large head out of the waves and looked at Sam with a calm, warm gaze from its dark, shining eye. The tip of its tail fin brushed lightly against Sam's arm.] *Sams Wal*, 59) The possible interpretation of the whale's gesture as a farewell remains open to the reader.

While *Sams Wal* is consistently told from a human perspective, Ruhl uses the stylistic device of perspective shifts in *Der weiße Wal vom Rhein* from 2020 to tell the story from both a human and an animal point of view. The short story is based on the true story of a beluga whale that swam in the Rhine for four weeks in 1966 and became an icon of early environmental movements. The author sticks strictly to the facts, which can be read in an online article in *Der Spiegel* (Michaelis 2016), for example – were it not for the passages that 'report' on the friendship between the seagull

Hannes and the whale, who 'in reality' was called Eugie (pronounced 'Judschie') and not Moby at all. The story thus oscillates between three poles:

(1) the detailed recounting of a historical event (the story also tells of human ruthlessness, especially on the part of the zoo director, and capitalist greed, but also of human compassion for the suffering creature and the dawning of ecological awareness, as well as the history of the Rhine and its industrial pollution),
(2) the imparting of factual knowledge about whales and, finally,
(3) the careful humanisation of the whale (and the seagull), adapted to the needs of child readers, with the themes of friendship and family in the foreground.

Baltscheit also deals with a supposedly deeply human theme in his picture book *Der einsamste Wal der Welt* (2018) – and he too portrays a real whale. The Wikipedia article introduces the "52-hertz whale," named after the frequency at which it sings, which is much higher than the usual frequency of whale songs; in reporting on it, it has been characterised as "the loneliest whale in the world" (ibid.). The picture book initially presents the story from the perspective of the soldier who first heard "52 Hertz" with his hydrophone, and later, or so it seems, from the perspective of the whale. The picture book follows an artful narrative structure, drawing the reader deeper and deeper into the soldier's thoughts. Until about the middle of the book, the soldier, who can be seen in the picture in his radio cabin, reports from a human researcher's perspective, characterised by both distance and empathy, about his ideas of what the whale's life might have been like: "Manchmal stelle ich mir vor, wie dieser Wal geboren wurde" ([Sometimes I imagine how this whale was born] Baltscheit 2018). The change of perspective in the middle of the book is symbolically marked by the fact that the soldier is now seen lying in bed; the rather matter-of-fact account of the whale's imagined fate turns into a fantastical tale of a wondrous encounter between humans and animals: "Manchmal wache ich in der Nacht auf, weil eine Flosse an mein Fenster klopft. Dann schaue ich hinaus und die Himmelsmakrelen flüstern: 'Geh und finde den Wal. Denn du bist sein Freund. Finde den Wal und er wird nicht mehr einsam sein.'" ([Sometimes I wake up in the night because a fin is tapping on my window. Then I look out and the skylarks whisper: 'Go and find the whale. For you are his friend. Find the whale and he will no longer be lonely.'] ibid.) And indeed, the soldier finds the whale. Of course, the episode of the encounter with the whale is presented as a dream of the soldier, which is ultimately told from the whale's perspective, albeit only conveyed through the depiction of his words and thoughts in speech bubbles. The whale recognises the soldier – whom he unfortunately cannot understand – as the "einsamsten Blasenfisch der Welt" ([the loneliest bubble fish in the world] ibid.) and comforts him by saying that he will find someone.

Scholes', Ruhl's and Baltscheit's whale stories are (primarily) aimed at child readers and therefore also deal with typical themes of children's literature such as fam-

ily, friendship, loyalty to others, abandonment and being abandoned, as well as saying goodbye and letting go. In the spirit of educating children, *Sams Wals* and *Der weiße Wal vom Rhein* also address ecological issues such as threats to animal habitats, species protection, and environmental pollution. They are therefore also appeals. The whale is presented more or less as a vulnerable creature that needs the help of others. The moment of grandeur and also the moment of danger emanating from the whale, which otherwise contributes to the myth of the whale, is largely ignored, yet again in keeping with the conventions of children's books. In the fictional story of *Sams Wal*, which is not based on a real event, the whale is rescued by a human being. In the highly anthropomorphic story of *Der weiße Wal vom Rhein* however, the helper figure is also an animal that has been humanised; humans appear more as a threat. In the picture book about the "loneliest whale in the world", in which anthropomorphism, according to my reading, only occurs within the fiction of the soldier's dream, rescue by humans and other animals is only hinted at – perhaps it is not even necessary. "[…] darum ist eine Geschichte, die wir über andere Tiere erzählen, immer auch eine Geschichte von uns selbst" reads the opening sentence of the picture book ([that is why a story we tell about other animals is always also a story about ourselves] Baltscheit 2018). Before that, the question is raised as to whether the whale "52 Hertz" is really lonely – or whether this is instead a deeply human view of the animal. Or, to put it another way, whether myths always arise when literature tells stories about (real) animals.

The mythical whale

This is what happened in the creation of what is probably the world's best-known literary depiction of a whale, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* from 1851. For Moby Dick also had a real-life model: a male sperm whale that attracted attention around 1810 near the island of Mocha off the Chilean coast due to its unusually aggressive behavior and is credited with sinking the "Essex" portrayed in *Moby Dick*.

In 2018, Chilean author Luis Sepúlveda set himself the task of telling the story of "Mocha Dick," as he was originally named, from the whale's perspective. The story weaves in whale myths of the Lafkenche, an Indigenous people who lived off the coast of present-day Chile. Embedded in a realistic framework narrative that recounts the death of a stranded whale, the inner narrative – despite numerous zoological facts – is characterised by a strong degree of anthropomorphism of the whale (Hoiß 2023, 35, esp. note 18); it is marked by the depiction of the whale's emotional world, which also reflects on its own actions.[6] *Der weiße Wal erzählt seine Geschichte*

6 The shift in perspective from the human narrator Ishmael to the animal narrator, who is only referred to as "Mocha Dick" by humans, is the starting point for Christian Hoiß's interpreta-

(2020; original *Historia de una ballena blanca* 2018) thrives on a clichéd opposition between an animal world described as peaceful and non-violent and a human world described as warlike and violent. The white whale is not aggressive; it is *made* aggressive by humans. The sea also appears as a peaceful place; it is humans who bring evil to the sea. As an appeal for the protection of nature and whales in particular, the story is certainly not a counter-story to Melville's classic, but rather focuses on one of the many interpretations of the multi-layered novel.

Patrick Ness also presented a free adaptation of *Moby Dick* in 2018 with *Und der Ozean war unser Himmel* (2020; original *And the Ocean Was Our Sky* 2018), which is certainly not only aimed at younger readers. Ness turns the story on its head: here, it is the whales that hunt humans. Like Melville's Ahab in his quest for Moby Dick, Ness's whale captain Alexandra is obsessed with the search for the white monster Toby Wick. The numerous allusions to Melville's novel are obvious. A prime example is the first sentence, "Nennt mich Bathseba" [Call me Bathsheba]; with the second sentence, "So heiße ich nicht" [That's not my name], Ness reveals his lower literary quality than his role model. The novel follows an unusual form of anthropomorphism which, unlike Selpúveda's, is not limited to the inner world of the narrating whale. Instead, Ness creates his own technologised whale world geared toward warfare, complete with whale fleets, which remains strangely vague, however. At its core, the novel is an allegory of the causes and consequences of human warmongering, drawing on motifs from Melville's classic. And even if zoological facts are played with here and there, the choice of a whale as protagonist and narrator is nothing more than an intertextual game.

Sepúlveda and Ness both tell more than 'just' the story of a whale. They use the myth of Moby Dick as a call for sustainable behavior, as an appeal against war and for peace as well as universal understanding.

Outlook

The aim of this article was to provide an organising and classifying overview of representations of whales in contemporary children's literature and to offer an initial interpretation with a focus on anthropomorphism and the instruction of child readers. This initial interpretation raises further research questions that would certainly be worth pursuing:

(1) What does a detailed comparison of the texts with their literary models offer? What can we learn about the texts by conducting a detailed investigation of in-

tion of the children's book as an "ökokritische Antwort auf Melvilles Klassiker" ([ecocritical response to Melville's classic] Hoiß 2023, 39).

tertextual references to Moby Dick, but also to myths from the Bible, antiquity, and Indigenous peoples?

(2) What does the respective (tense) relationship between anthropomorphisation and the presentation of facts mean for children's and young adult literature? What effect does it have on child and young adult readers?

(3) From a genuinely didactic perspective, the question ultimately arises as to whether and to what extent the facts about whales presented in fiction can withstand scrutiny by whale researchers. How useful, then, can these books be in interdisciplinary approaches that brings together literature and biology education?

References

"52-hertz whale." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/52-hertz_whale, accessed 22 January 2025.

Baltscheit, Martin. *Der einsamste Wal der Welt*. Carlsen, 2018.

Bonacker, Maren. "Eine wundersame Menagerie. Zur Vielgestaltigkeit von Tieren in der phantastischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur." *kids + media. Zeitschrift für Kinder- und Jugendmedienforschung*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2016, pp. 74–96, https://doi.org/10.54717/kidsmedia.6.1.2016.4.

Hildebrand, Sindy. "Sams Wal." *KinderundJugendmedien.de. Wissenschaftliches Portal für Kindermedien und Jugendmedien*, 8 April 2017 [updated 17 April 2022], https://www.kinderundjugendmedien.de/kritik/kinderroman/1941-scholes-katherine-sams-wal, accessed 11 April 2024.

Hoiß, Christian. "Vom literarischen Wissen über Wale. Luis Sepúlvedas *Der weiße Wal erzählt seine Geschichte* als ökokritische Antwort auf Herman Melvilles *Moby-Dick*." *Tierstudien*, Themenheft Ozean, edited by Jessica Ullrich, vol. 23, 2023, pp. 28–39.

Michaelis, Simon. "Das weiße Wunder vom Rhein." *Spiegel Geschichte*, 18 May 2016, https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/beluga-wal-von-1966-moby-dick-vom-rhein-a-1092621.html, accessed 11 April 2024.

Ness, Patrick. *Und der Ozean war unser Himmel*. Illustrated by Rovina Cai, translated by Bettina Abarbanell. cbj, 2021 [English original *And the Ocean Was Our Sky* 2018].

Ruhl, Corinna. *Der weiße Wal vom Rhein*. Median-Verlag, 2020.

Schmideler, Sebastian. "Naturgeschichte(n) – ästhetische Repräsentation von Tieren in der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts." *kids + media. Zeitschrift für Kinder- und Jugendmedienforschung*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2016, pp. 2–26, https://doi.org/10.54717/kidsmedia.6.1.2016.1.

Scholes, Katherine. *Sams Wal*. With pictures by Quint Buchholz, translated by Ulli and Herbert Günther. Ravensburger, 1996 [German original 1990, English original *The Boy and the Whale* 1985].

Sepúlveda, Luis. *Der weiße Wal erzählt seine Geschichte*. Illustrated by Simona Mulazzani, translated by Willi Zurbrüggen. Fischer Sauerländer, 2020 [Spanish original *Historia de una ballena blanca* 2018].

Weger, Nina. *Als mein Bruder ein Wal wurde*. Oetinger, 2019.

Wigbers, Melanie, and Bettina Wild. "Die Tiere unter die Lupe genommen. Tierfiguren und -motive bei Nina Weger und ihr Potenzial für das literarische Lernen." *Nina Weger. Didaktische Zugänge zur Kinder- und Jugendliteratur im Netz*, edited by Jana Mikota, Nadine J. Schmidt and Bettina Oeste, forthcoming.

Whales in Contemporary Anglophone Literature and Film: A Cetopoetic Reading of Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*

Michaela Castellanos

Abstract *That whales are integral to "The Whale Rider"'s plot is readily apparent from the novel's title. But how is one to read these whales, and what is their significance to this literary text? In this essay, I approach Witi Ihimaera's 1987 novel "The Whale Rider" from the perspective of cultural and literary animal studies. After a brief theoretical discussion, I situate the novel in the context of other contemporary anglophone literature and film in which whales are prominently featured. I then analyse what I call "The Whale Rider"'s cetopoetic elements and argue that it is through these elements that the novel performs Māori cosmology.*

Keywords *cultural and literary animal studies; zoopoetics; cetopoetics; Māori cosmology*

In Witi Ihimaera's novel *The Whale Rider* (1987), a Māori myth serves as the spring board for a thorough exploration of Māori identity in postcolonial Aotearoa. Ihimaera retells the myth of Paikea, the whale rider, who founded the coastal town Whangara in New Zealand. In lustrous language, Ihimaera describes how the sea and land yearn to be discovered as an old bull whale carries his rider across the Pacific, and how Paikea throws spears across time and space that are to become leaders wherever they are planted in order to ensure his descendants' future. However, when the novel shifts its focus to present-day Whangara, it reveals a moment of crisis for Paikea's lineage: The aging current chief, Koro Apirana, is growing increasingly desperate to identify a new leader among the younger generations. His grandson Rawiri is not willing to become his successor, and his great-granddaughter Kahu, despite her keen interest, is not considered for this role traditionally filled by men. It is not until a peculiar whale strands itself on Whangara's beach that Kahu nevertheless emerges as the new leader by becoming the whale rider.

Ihimaera's exploration of the pressures on Māori traditions and culture in late twentieth-century New Zealand, I propose in this essay, is a zoopoetic endeavor, i.e. it is characterised by an "undeniabl[e] … affinity between 'poetic thinking' and 'an-

imal thinking'" (Driscoll and Hoffmann 2018, 2). More precisely, *The Whale Rider* is a *cetopoetic* text, i.e. a zoopoetic text whose poetic thinking proceeds specifically via cetaceans, as whales, dolphins and porpoises are commonly referred to[1]. How Ihimaera writes whales and writes with whales in *The Whale Rider*, I propose, facilitates the specific cultural work of opening up a crisis of Māori identity for critical reflection.

By situating *The Whale Rider* in the context of other contemporary anglophone texts in which whales are prominently featured, I first aim to establish the semantic connotations of cetaceans at the current historical moment in anglophone literature. These connotations inform my subsequent analysis of cetaceans' metonymic function in *The Whale Rider*. However, the whales in Ihimaera's novel resist any singular interpretation. They drive the plot, which demands that they are read as actual living beings in the diegesis, or story-world; at the same time, they are ascribed figurative meanings by characters in the diegesis. As literary scholar Colleen Boggs points out, literary representations of animals always present a particular challenge to readers, because they raise the question "whether the animal is to be taken literally or figuratively." Thereby, they "crucially confront readers with the complex terrain of epistemology and ontology, of representation and symbolization" (Boggs 2013, 33). The whales in *The Whale Rider,* too, exist in this productive textual tension, which makes them indispensable to the novel's critique of the displacement of Māori beliefs. Finally, I examine the inclusion of a cetacean perspective in the story-telling as a performance of Māori cosmology.

Whales in Contemporary Anglophone Literature and Film: "Icons of Endangerment"

In contemporary anglophone literature and film, cetaceans are closely associated with the idea that nature, on a planetary scale, is at risk of being destroyed by human activities. Industrial whaling had such a devastating impact on whale populations that many species were so drastically reduced that they are now in danger of becoming extinct. The whaling days of the past continue to be a topic in contemporary fiction and nonfiction. For example, Nathaniel Philbrick's nonfictional account *In the Heart of the Sea* (2000) retells how a whaling ship named *The Essex* was reportedly rammed by a sperm whale in 1820 and so severely damaged that it sank[2]. In

1 The term cetaceans and the prefix "ceto" derive from *cetacea*, the Latin name for the taxonomic suborder to which these groups of animals belong.

2 The film *In the Heart of the Sea*, released in 2015, also connects the survivor of this event to Herman Melville, whose novel *Moby-Dick* was in fact inspired by, among other things, the fate of *The Essex*.

2015, a motion picture with the same title presented a fictionalised version of this historical event. The history of whaling, ecocritic Lawrence Buell concludes, has effectively made cetaceans in general and large whales in particular legible as "icons of endangerment" (2001, 201).

The semantic association of whales with overexploitation of resources and environmental destruction is further instrumentalised in contemporary literature and film to raise the specter of potential human extinction. For example, the 1986 science fiction film *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* links the imagined extinction of humpback whales to a crisis for all life on Earth. Scientists discover an alien probe hovering over the ocean which is rapidly evaporating water and thus threatening to induce catastrophic climate change. It appears that the probe wants to communicate, but the emitted messages prove difficult to decode. Eventually, it is determined that the messages are intended for humpback whales. Since this whale species no longer exists, however, the destruction of the earth seems inevitable. Whales, through this connection to the probe, represent the unintended consequences of environmental destruction.

Simultaneously, they represent the only solution. The ingenious *Star Trek* crew travels back in time and succeeds in bringing a pair of humpback whales back with them, and this de-extinction saves the planet and all of its inhabitants. As Graham Huggan aptly puts it, representations of whales are often "symbols of guilt as well as an opportunity for atonement, and while they register concern for the future, they also offer painful reminders of a violent past" (2018, iv). This cetacean symbolism also comes into play in *The Whale Rider*.

Cetopoetic Elements of *The Whale Rider*

In *The Whale Rider*, the connotations of endangerment and possible redemption are extended to the local Māori community. Many local Māori gather on the beach when a small group of whales strands themselves, a few days after a much larger stranding in a different area. Before the helpers begin their rescue efforts, Koro Apirana addresses them to stress the stranding's deeper significance.

> The whale is a *sign*. . . . If we are able to return it to the sea, then that will be proof that the oneness is still with us. If we are not able to return it, then this is because we have become weak. If it lives, we live. If it dies, we die. Not only its *salvation* but ours is waiting out there. (Ihimaera 1987, 94; emphases mine)

The character dialogue links the whales and the local community semantically, equating the physical survival of the stranded whales with the figurative survival of the local Māori. The particular whales in the diegesis are inextricably linked to the

particular local Māori community (for whom the myth of the whale rider constitutes a shared legacy), and the connotation of extinction is extended from the whales to the Māori.

Another cetopoetic element in *The Whale Rider* is the explicit questioning of the nature of the whales. The chief invites the helpers to ponder the nature of the whale:

> You have all seen the whale. You have all seen the sacred sign tattooed on its head. Is the tattoo there by accident or by design? . . . Does it belong in the real world or the unreal world? Is it natural or supernatural? (Ihimaera 1987, 94)

These questions get to the heart of a deeper crisis by provoking a reflection on how individuals make sense of the world and their place in it. With each question Koro Apirana poses, he includes a pair of hypothetical answers. These answers consist of pairs of binary opposites, which are seemingly mutually exclusive. Within this heuristic framework, the whales are considered to be *either* real *or* unreal, *either* natural *or* unnatural. Māori beliefs, the chief points out, are often rejected because they are considered to be "irrational" as opposed to Western beliefs, which pride themselves on being "rational" (Ihimaera 1987, 93). The displacement of Māori beliefs is thus presented as a consequence of binary thinking, which dictates that selecting one option necessitates rejecting the other.

According to the chief, the current crisis results from the reductiveness of binary either/or-thinking. The states of "communion" and "oneness" reflected in the ancient myths have been disrupted.

> [M]an, beasts, and Gods lived in close communion with one another. . . . But then, . . . man . . . started to drive a wedge through the original oneness of the world. [Man] divided the world into that half that he could believe in and that half he could not believe in. The real and the unreal. The natural and the supernatural. The present and the past. The scientific and the fantastic. (Ihimaera 1987, 93–94)

As the question how to interpret the whale is explicitly raised in character dialogue and then explored in the context of different worldviews, readers are vicariously taught about Māori cosmology and how it has been impacted by colonialism. The contiguity of endangerment is further extended from the whales to Māori identity and ultimately to the very cosmology in which the latter is rooted.

Likewise, the possibility of redemption that first extended from the whales to Māori identity ultimately extends to Māori cosmology. Rescuing the whales is contingent upon overcoming binary thinking by embracing that

> the [whale] is *both*. It is a *reminder of the oneness* which the world once had. It is the *birth cord joining* past and present, reality and fantasy. . . . It is *both*. It is *both*,

> . . . [a]nd if we have forgotten *the communion* then we have ceased to be Māori. (Ihimaera 1987, 94; emphases mine)

By embracing both/and-thinking, the community can validate Māori cosmology and thereby affirm their identity.

Challenged to become aware of our own reading practices and the heuristics that undergird them, readers, too, are encouraged to embrace both/and-thinking when they grapple with how to read the whales in *The Whale Rider*. We, too, have "seen the whale" with the "sacred sign tattooed on its head" (Ihimaera 1987, 94) in our minds' eye and followed it throughout many chapters in the novel. Thusly positioned, we are able to read the stranded whale on the beach in Whangara as the same ancient bull whale that carried the original whale rider.

Multiplicity of Perspectives: Performing Communion, Separation, and Coming Together

In *The Whale Rider,* whales participate in the story-telling. Several full chapters are rendered from a cetacean perspective (chapters *two*, *five*, and *nineteen*). This perspective is set apart visually through the use of italics from Rawiri's perspective, which is the only perspective that appears in the majority of chapters (three, four, six, seven, eight, ten through thirteen, and fifteen through sixteen). By including a cetacean perspective, which might appear irrational or supernatural to readers, *The Whale Rider* affirms Māori cosmology. What is more, the strict separation of perspectives dissipates throughout the novel as several chapters (ni*ne*, four*teen*, and twen*ty*) contain both Rawiri's perspective and a cetacean perspective (indicated by italics). The changes in perspective throughout *The Whale Rider*, I propose, perform the separation causing the moment of crisis as well as an eventual movement towards a new "communion."

Table. 1: Perspective(s) in the chapters of "The Whale Rider" (Source: author)

Section Title	Chapters	Perspective(s)
PROLOGUE The Whale Rider	***One***	***communion***
SPRING The Force of Destiny	*Two* Three Four	*whales* Rawiri Rawiri

Section Title	Chapters	Perspective(s)
SUMMER Halcyon's Flight	*Five* Six Seven Eight	*whales* Rawiri Rawiri Rawiri
AUTUMN Season of the Sounding Whale	Ni*ne* Ten Eleven Twelve Thirteen	Rawiri, *whales* Rawiri Rawiri Rawiri Rawiri
WINTER Whale Song, Whale Rider	Four*teen* Fifteen Sixteen **Seventeen** **Eighteen**	Rawiri, *whales* Rawiri Rawiri **blended** **blended**
EPILOGUE The Girl from the Sea	*Nineteen* Twen*ty* ***Twenty-One***	*Whales* Rawiri, *whales* Rawiri, *whales*, ***communion***

In the prologue, the narration performs the "original oneness" of the world. The myth of the whale rider, retold in chapter one, is rendered from a single, all-encompassing perspective that represents a state of communion. The omniscient narrator is privy to the cognitions and emotional states of more than the human protagonist. In this mythological view, many perspectives are acknowledged, including those of animals: "Suddenly, looking up at the surface, the fish began to see the dark bellies of the canoes from the east" (Ihimaera 1987, 3). Moreover, feelings and desires are ascribed to the natural world: "The land and the sea sighed with gladness: '*We have been found*.'" (Ihimaera 19887, 3; italics original). Within this panoramic view, two perspectives become discernible: that of the whale and that of the whale rider. Yet, the human is rendered as part of, not apart from, the natural world.

The setting then changes to the novel's present time, and the narration performs the separation addressed in the character dialogue. Each individual chapter contained in the Spring, Summer, and Autumn sections follows *either* the Māori protagonists *or* the whales. For example, the Spring section begins with a chapter that reflects a cetacean perspective (chapter *two*). Here, the narration is focalised through the minds of the bull whale and his herd, reflecting their emotions, memories, and thoughts.

> *As the years had burgeoned the happiness of those days was like a siren call to the ancient bull whale. But his elderly females were fearful; for them, that rhapsody of adolescence, that song of the flute, seemed only to signify that their leader was turning his thoughts to the dangerous islands to the southwest.* (Ihimaera 1987, 9)

By contrast, the two following chapters (three and four) reflect Rawiri's perspective.

> I suppose if this story has a beginning it is with Kahu. After all, it was Kahu who was there at the end, and it was Kahu's intervention which perhaps saved us all. We always knew there would be such a child, but when Kahu was born, well, we were looking the other way, really. (Ihimaera 1987, 10)

The summer and autumn sections maintain this separation, with each individual chapter containing *either* a cetacean perspective *or* Rawiri's.

However, as the plot approaches the climax, the two separate perspectives begin to intermix. The individual chapters in the Autumn and Winter section (chapters ni*ne*, four*teen*, and twen*ty*) contain more than one perspective. For example, chapters ni*ne* and four*teen* open with Rawiri's perspective and conclude from the whales' point of view (with the text on the printed page again set apart visually by the use of italics for the latter). In chapters **seventeen** and **nineteen**, the two separate narrative strands converge: The whales have concluded their journey to Whangara, where the ancient bull whale has sacrificed himself by "propell[ing] itself forcefully onto the beach" (Ihimaera 1987, 91–92). Paikea's descendants have come to the rescue, and Kahu sacrifices herself by "climbing the side of the whale" (Ihimaera 1987, 103) and riding it back "into the deep ocean" (Ihimaera 1987, 104). In these two chapters, the perspectives of the whales and people on the beach become intertwined. It is as if the omniscient narrator has insight into both Kahu and the whales, and only the direct thoughts of the stranded bull whale, "*It is my lord, the whale rider*," are rendered in italics (Ihimaera 1987, 103).

Finally, the epilogue contains the reflections of both the whales and the Māori on the event that ensured their joint salvation. Although the voices of both the whales and the Māori are discernible, they are rendered from a consciousness that has access to both. At the end of the final chapter, different times and forms of consciousness converge. When Kahu hears the voice of "the old mother whale" asking her to return to her people who need her, she answers "Haumi e, hui e, *taiki e*. Let it be done" (Ihimaera 1987, 122). The change of perspectives throughout the novel, together with the section titles in the novel, which bear the names of the four seasons, indicate a cyclical development from a mythical oneness through a period of separation to the perspectives coming together once again. The "salvation" to which Koro Apirana alludes lies in a return to Māori cosmology, which has become marginalised by the now predominant worldview in postcolonial Aotearoa and the binary oppositions

upon which it is built. Kahu's agency is not the only agency in play: The whale, too, willingly sacrifices himself. Together, they carry what it means to be Māori into an uncertain future.

The Whale Rider projects a sense of hope that the past will be able to be carried on into the future, and that a mending of the rift in the oneness might be possible. The novel itself can be understood as a major contribution to this task. Ihimaera's retelling of the myth in writing adapts Māori oral tradition in a way that records the myth of the whale rider for future generations. Committing the myth to writing necessitates some adaptation, but Ihimaera nonetheless captures not only the myth itself but a way of story-telling that is rooted in a culturally specific, nonanthropocentric way of seeing the world. The form of the novel in particular, due to its popularity in anglophone contexts, offers readers of all cultural backgrounds a glimpse of Māori cosmology. Marking the first time a Māori myth was published in writing, *The Whale Rider* constitutes a milestone in literary history. It might, at first glance, appear irrelevant, if not irreverent, to focus on the importance of whales to this literary text. However, cetopoetics is inextricably linked to how *The Whale Rider* facilitates cultural work.

References

Boggs, Colleen Glenney. *Animalia Americana: Animal Representations and Biopolitical Subjectivity*. Columbia University Press, 2013.

Buell, Lawrence. *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*. Harvard University Press, 2001.

Driscoll, Kari, and Eva Hoffman. *What Is Zoopoetics? Texts, Bodies, Entanglement*. Palgrave McMillan, 2018.

Huggan, Graham. *Colonialism, Culture, Whales: The Cetacean Quartet*. Bloomsbury, 2018.

Ihimaera, Witi. *The Whale Rider*. Heinemann, 1987.

In the Heart of the Sea. Ron Howard, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2015.

Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick*, edited by John Bryant and Haskell Springer, Pearson Longman, 2007.

Philbrick, Nathaniel. *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex*. Penguin Books, 2000.

Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home. Leonard Nimoy, Paramount Pictures, 1986.

Section III: Reading Cultures

Anthropological and Linguistic Contextualisation of *The Whale Rider*: Māori Origin, Social Relatedness and Cultural Identity

Svenja Völkel

Abstract *This article discusses the story of "The Whale Rider", published by Witi Ihimaera in 1987, in the context of Māori culture and history. The focus lies on Māori origin and the settlement of the Pacific region, on social relatedness of people to each other, to the gods and to the natural environment, and on cultural identity after European contact – three aspects that are closely linked. The societal structure and the connectedness with the sea and its creatures are deeply rooted in the history of settlement and the mythology of origin. As a result of European contact, these core values of Māori identity came under serious threat, and "The Whale Rider" tells the story of reconnection and realignment. This entire development is also reflected in the history of Te Reo Māori (the Māori language), its emergence, endangerment, and reclamation.*

Keywords *Oceania; Austronesian languages; settlement of Polynesia; genealogical bonds; kin groups; chiefly rank; divine ancestors; connectedness; Māori language; indigenous concepts; language contact*

1 Introduction

The novel "The Whale Rider" (1987) by Witi Ihimaera tells the story of a Māori chief called Koro Apirana, his family and their whale-riding ancestor Paikea. This deep connection between the people and the whales is rooted in the worldview of Māori descent, as expressed in origin myths and genealogies. This worldview becomes particularly understandable in the context of its development, the settlement of the Pacific by the Polynesian voyagers who travelled great distances by their boats in the search for new land. This required close social bonds and mutual support under strong leadership, and it explains the people's strong connectedness with the sea and its creatures as well as the great importance of land and its life forms. The novel also addresses conflicts resulting from the colonial history and adaptations to modern life in contemporary New Zealand society. The stranded whales are a sign of losing

the connection to the ancestors and the chief struggles to find a male successor with *mana* and leadership qualities. To avoid the loss of cultural identity and belonging, he fights for the transmission of traditional knowledge, values, and customs as well as for Māori language classes. However, he does not accept his granddaughter Kahu, who is of senior descent, as a future leader, because she is a girl. Thus, the people's future is also at risk until Kahu saves the whales by riding the leading bull back into deep water. As a new whale rider, she restores the connection with the ancestors and her grandfather finally recognises her leadership qualities.

The author Witi Tame Ihimaera-Smiler, son of a mother of Māori descent and a father of Anglo-Saxon origins, is well-known for his extensive literary work on topics of Māori customs, history and identity, particularly conflicts between cultural traditions and contemporary life in New Zealand society. He published numerous short stories and novels including "The Whale Rider" in 1987, which he wrote while living as a diplomat in New York. Inspired by the true incident of a whale getting lost in the Hudson river, the author tells the story of Māori people with a whale-riding ancestor and their deep connection to whales (see Fig. 1).

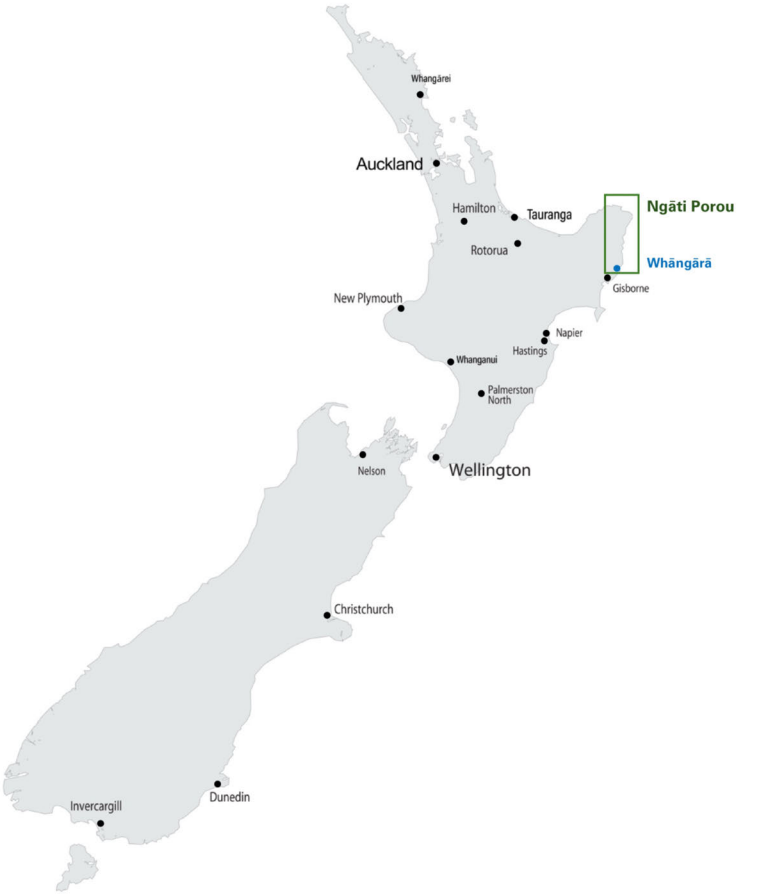
Fig. 1: Carved figure of Paikea in Whāngārā

Source: with kind permission of New Zealand Embassy The Hague, https://www.facebook.com/NZthehague/photos/a.1492231187732277/2068676560087734/?type=3

The story plays in a small village called Whāngārā which is located on the North Island at the coast of the East Cape region, north of Gisborne where the author was born (see Fig. 2). The novel is one of his most famous works. It was made into a film by Niki Caro in 2002. Furthermore, a children's theatre play, a musical, and a children's picture book were created based on the story. Until now the novel has been

translated into more than 20 languages, among others 1995 into Māori language by Tīmoti Kāretu and 2003 into German by Sabine Schulte.

Fig. 2: Map of New Zealand



Source: author

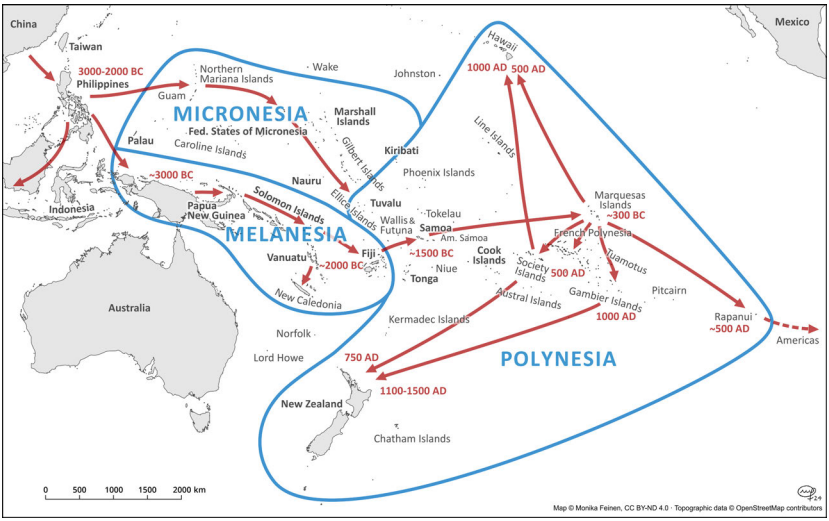
This paper aims at an anthropological and linguistic contextualisation of the book. Using text passages from the novel, fundamental aspects of Māori origin and the settlement of New Zealand (Section 2), social structure based on relatedness with the gods and the natural environment (Section 3), and the impact of European con-

tact on language and cultural values (Section 4) are discussed. Some concluding remarks follow in Section 5.

2 The Pacific region, Māori origins and the settlement of Aotearoa

The Pacific region is also known as the cultural region of Oceania which is divided into Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia (Mückler 2009, 14–20; see Fig. 3, areas indicated in blue).

Fig. 3: Oceania – cultural regions and settlement



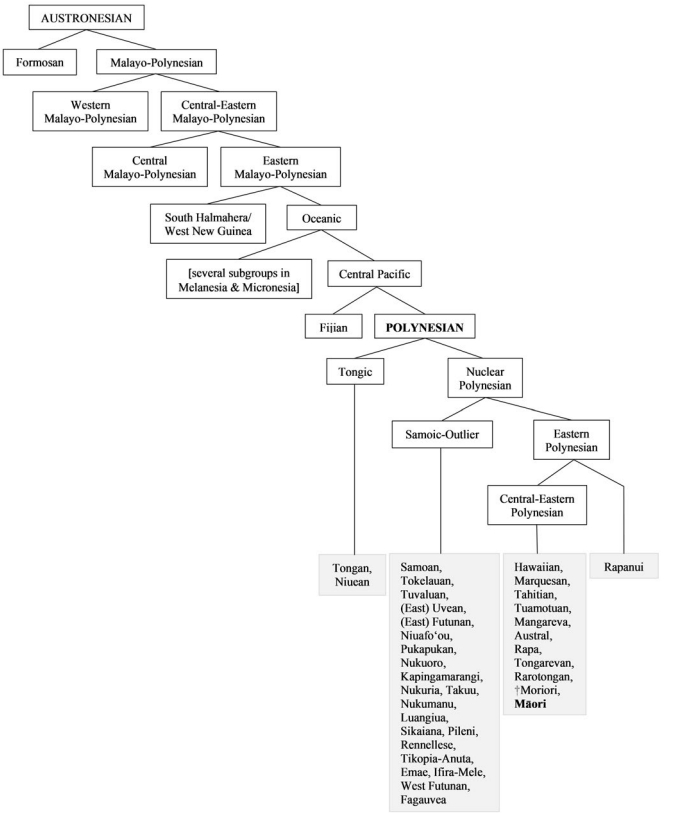
Source: Open Street Map, adapted by Monika Feinen for author

Māori people culturally belong to the chiefly societies of Polynesia, more precisely to the East Polynesian cultural area. The Polynesian triangle is the largest area of Oceania, covering the Pacific region between Hawaii, New Zealand (also called Aotearoa), and Easter Island (also called Rapanui). The name Aotearoa literally means 'land of the long white cloud' in Māori (*ao* 'world, cloud' + *tea* 'white' + *roa* 'long'). According to a story, it was named after the first sign the early settlers saw when they reached the islands—a long white cloud on the horizon (see Stafford 2002, 15). The Western Polynesian cultural area includes Tonga, Niue, Samoa, several Polynesian Outliers (which are situated outside the Polynesian Triangle to the west in the regions of Micronesia and Melanesia), and part of Fiji (in particular

the Lau archipelago). Apart from the Māori in Aotearoa, the Cook Islands, French Polynesia (Tahiti, the Tuamotus, and the Marquesas), Hawaii, and Rapanui also belong to the Eastern Polynesian cultural area (see Fig. 3).

As compared to Melanesia (Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and part of Fiji) and Micronesia (the Mariana Islands including Guam, the Caroline Islands including Palau, the Marshall Islands, Nauru and Kiribati), Polynesia is relatively homogeneous in terms of traditional social systems and ritual-religious ideas (see Section 3) as well as languages. Linguistically, all languages spoken in the Polynesian Triangle plus the Outliers are classified as Polynesian languages, which belong to the Oceanic branch of the Austronesian language family (see Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: Austronesian language family



Source: author

Te reo Māori (lit. 'the language Māori'), is one of the 35 Polynesian languages (Lynch 1998, 27, 50f.). With around 1,250 languages, the Austronesian language family is one of the largest language families in the world. It extends over a huge geographic area, from Madagascar in the west to Easter Island in the east and from Taiwan and Hawaii in the north to New Zealand in the south. This region essentially includes the island states of Southeast Asia (including Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia), Melanesia (only Papua New Guinea's coastal region, while all other languages spoken in Papua New Guinea belong to the Papuan language family), Micronesia and Polynesia. The Pacific region consists of a relatively large area of water compared to the insular land area. Polynesia extends over a marine area of around 50 million km^2 with a land area of just around 312,200 km^2 of which New Zealand makes up the largest part (269,650 km^2). New Zealand consists of two large islands (North Island and South Island) and around 700 small islands (see Fig. 2). As will be shown, the unique geography of Oceania has been a crucial factor in shaping both the settlement history and the dispersal patterns of the Austronesian languages. The relative homogeneity of Polynesia as a cultural and linguistic area also results from the late settlement of this remote region (see Section 2), and thus, the relatively little time for diversification. However, due to the colder climate in New Zealand as compared to the other Polynesian islands, adaptations took place, e.g., with regard to food crops and clothing.

The Pacific region has long been uninhabited and the fundamental question in science has been where the people who reached these remote islands came from and how this settlement took place given their widely dispersed location in the vast ocean area. Especially the origin of the first settlers in Polynesia was highly debated. While Thor Heyerdahl (1914–2002) proposed settlement from the Americas, Robert von Heine-Geldern (1885–1968) and others argued for settlement from South/Southeast Asia. The prevailing wind direction in the Pacific (from the southeast) and the presence of the sweet potato (an import from the Americas) seemed to support Thor Heyerdahl's theory, which he tried to prove with his trip on the Kon Tiki. This was a raft made of balsa wood, with which he sailed from Peru to French Polynesia in 1947. However, this theory is now considered disproven and the settlement of the Pacific from the opposite direction in several waves of migration is widely accepted (see Fig. 3, red-coloured migration marking). There is a combination of evidence from various disciplines including archaeological finds (Lapita pottery), genetic engineering and blood group analyses, climate science findings (frequent El Niño phenomena, i.e., strong winds from the west, during the settlement period), and linguistic evidence about genealogical relatedness. As Figure 4 shows, it can be assumed that the origin of the Austronesian language family lies in the area of Taiwan, where the Formosan languages are native. From there the language family developed in an easterly direction, as its right-branching structure indicates. According to archaeologist Peter Bellwood (1978), the Austrone-

sians started migrating from the Southeast Asian mainland towards Taiwan and the Philippines around 5000 BC, from where they left around 1500 BC towards Malaysia, Indonesia and then further advanced into the coastal regions of Papua New Guinea and also Madagascar. In a next migration wave, the speakers of Proto-Oceanic reached the islands of Melanesia up to Fiji, what required an advanced technology in boat building and navigation skills. From there, they finally started around 1000 BC with even more sophisticated seafaring knowledge to settle Polynesia, first the islands of Tonga and Samoa, then the area of French Polynesia and the Cook Islands, and finally the remote islands of Hawaii, Easter Island, and New Zealand. Despite the main direction of migration, travel in the opposite direction also occurred, for example from the Americas to Polynesia (explaining the presence of the sweet potato in the Pacific region) and from Polynesia to Micronesia (explaining the Polynesian Outliers as a result of back-migration). However, these contacts with Micronesia and the Americas had no serious impact on Polynesian societies. For more detailed information on the first settlement of Oceania, see Bellwood (1978, 1987) and Kirch (1984, 1997), while Mückler (2009, 31–42) provides a great summary of the different theories and academic approaches that have dealt with the history of settlement.

The first Polynesian settlers only arrived in New Zealand/Aotearoa between 800 and 1350 AD (depending on the respective research approach). Their arrival is described in the following text passage (1) from "The Whale Rider". It refers to the place of origin, the direction of origin, the way of travelling, and the settlement of the new land uninhabited by humans.

> (1) In the old days, in the years that have gone before us, the land and sea felt a great emptiness, a yearning. […] This is not to say that the land and sea were without life, without vivacity. […] Suddenly, looking up at the surface, the fish began to see the dark bellies of the canoes from the east. The first of the Ancients were coming, journeying from their island kingdom beyond the horizon. (Ihimaera 2002 [1987], 10–11)

The place of origin is described as the 'island kingdom beyond the horizon' in the (north)east. This corresponds to the above described theory that the Māori ancestors have reached the previously unsettled islands coming from Central Polynesia, more precisely from the Society Islands and Mangareva (see Fig. 3). Many Māori narratives speak of a mythological place of origin, called Hawaiki, such as in text excerpt (2) from "The Whale Rider". It refers to an ancestral homeland, the place of the divine ancestors. The designation and its cognates are widespread across Polynesia

and many islands bear that name, e.g. Savai'i (island in Samoa) and Hawai'i (island in the archipelago of the same name).[1]

> (2) Far beyond the horizon is Hawaiki, our ancestral island homeland, the place of the Ancients and the Gods, and the other side of the world. (Ihimaera 2002 [1987], 32–33)

The first settlers had travelled across the Pacific by their great canoes, called *waka*. Overcoming such a great distance by sea also explains the strong connection with the sea and its creatures, the great importance of land that Polynesians hoped to find through their voyages, and the need for mutual support and reliable social ties (see Section 3). Māori people still trace their ancestry to the first *waka*, on which their ancestors reached the shores of Aotearoa. This social connection is passed down from generation to generation through oral tradition (Williams 2004, 27f.; see also Section 3).

3 Societal structure and social relatedness in traditional society

Polynesia is known for their highly stratified chiefly societies with a class-like social structure, inherited titles, and the ideas of *mana* (supernatural power/energy of life) and *tapu* (restrictions/taboos and sacredness related to people and other entities of higher *mana*).[2]

The social units of interaction in Māori society are the following three kin groups: the *whānau* (extended family), the *hapū* (sub-tribe/clan), and *iwi* (tribe). The *whānau* describes the extended family living together (mostly three generations). In simple terms, a *hapū* consists of several *whānau*, and an *iwi* consists of several *hapū*. These larger social units of *whānau* related through a common ancestor are under the leadership of a common chief (*rangatira* or *ariki*). The characters of "The Whale rider" story belong to a big tribe called Ngāti Porou at the East Cape in the region of Gisborne (North Island). The name Ngāti Porou derives from their ancestor Porourangi who descended from the epic key ancestor Paikea (see text passage 3). Their tribal song tells the story of Paikea's journey to Aotearoa on the back of a whale (audio file

1 Taumoefolau (1996) describes a plausible linguistic origin of the name, having developed in Tongan and being retained in *hou'eiki* ('chiefly, higher ranked').

2 The English word 'taboo' is a Polynesian loanword that is derived from *tapu*. However, it has lost part of its original meaning. In English it only means 'forbidden/prohibited' but not 'sacred/holy' any more. For more information on the concepts of *mana* and *tapu* see, for instance, Greschat (1980) and Shore (1989). As fundamental concepts, they shape cultural practices as well as linguistic structures such as the honorific registers in the languages of Western Polynesia (Völkel 2021).

in Muturangi Reedy n.d.; see also stories on Nati, the *iwi*'s website). Witi Ihimaera, the author of the novel "The Whale Rider", is related to the Ngāti Porou through his mother (personal communication, 24 April 2023) and Karyn Paringatai, a colleague at the University of Otago who also participated in the Mainz–Dunedin lecture series, traces a descent line to this *iwi*, too.

Apart from the kin groups, people trace relationships to the *waka*, the boats of the first Polynesian settlers who reached the shores of Aotearoa (see Section 2). Thus, *waka* does not only refer to the canoes but also to a social group, the descendants of the first settlers.

> (3) Our whakapapa, of course, is the genealogy of the people of Te Rawhiti, the people of the East Coast; […], our ancestor was Kahutia Te Rangi, who was a high chief in Hawaiki […] and […] who travelled here on the back of a whale. […], astride his tipua, […] Four generations after Paikea [i.e. Kahutia Te Rangi[3]], was born the great ancestor Porourangi, after whom my eldest brother is named. Under his leadership the descent lines of all the people of Te Tai Rawhiti were united […] Many centuries later, the chieftainship was passed to Koro Apirana and, from him, to my brother Porourangi. Then Porourangi had a daughter whom he named Kahu. (Ihimaera 2002 [1987], 32–34)

Traditional Māori society consisted of the following fundamental classes with different rank: *manahune* (population engaged in land cultivation), *rangatira* (chiefs), and *ariki* (paramount chief) (Mückler 2009, 150–152). The higher a person's status, the more *mana* they possess and the more *tapu* they are (Greschat 1980, Shore 1989). Māori chiefs were mediators to the ancestors and they have a direct line of descent all the way back to the gods. Rank and *mana* were determined by birth order: *tuakana* 'elder same-sex siblings' who constitute the senior line vs. *teina* 'younger same-sex siblings' who constitute senior lines. Chiefly titles were passed on to senior kin of a chief (patrilineal primogeniture succession), preferably to a man but not necessarily. Leadership qualities such as economic skills, warrior skills, kindness and the ability to care for the people were also required. Thus, firstborn women retained their chiefly status, but the active political leadership role was often carried out by their husbands (Ka'ai and Reilly 2004, 91–93).

---

3 Traditionally, name changes are very common in Polynesia. Traditional names given at birth derive from lexemes or lexical phrases which refer to personal characteristics, circumstances at birth, or good wishes, but during life people could get a new name which generally points to a remarkable event having triggered the name change (Völkel 2023b). In the story of "The Whale Rider" the new name (Kahutia Te Rangi, lit. 'close to the sky') coincides with the landing in New Zealand, as the following text passage shows: (3') "And Paikea, you landed at Ahuahu. You changed into Kahutia Te Rangi, aue. You gave your embrace to the daughter of Te Whironui, aue, who sat in the stern of the canoe." (Ihimaera 2002 [1987], 58)

> (4) The trouble was that Koro Apirana could not reconcile his traditional beliefs about Maori leadership and mana with Kahu's birth. By Maori custom, leadership was hereditary and normally the mantle of mana fell from the eldest son to the eldest son. Except that in this case, there was an eldest daughter. (Ihimaera 2002 [1987], 20)

The book's character, Koro Apirana, who is the current leader in the story, searches for a male successor, but his eldest son has a daughter: Kahu (see text passage 4). However, she is genealogically senior (the eldest child of the eldest son; see text passage 3) and ultimately accepted by Koro Apirana when he realises that she has demonstrated leadership qualities (comparable to Muriwai in text passage 5). While tasks and social roles are highly gender-specific in Polynesian societies (e.g., fishing is a male task), gender assignment is not fixed. There are basically four genders (women, men, men behaving like women, women behaving like men; see for instance Besnier 1993), and in text passage (5) Muriwai becomes *whakatane* (*whaka-* 'be like' + *tane* 'male') and performs a men's task (commanding a *waka* crew).

> (5) Even though she [i.e. Nanny Flowers] had married into our tribe she always made constant reference to her ancestor, Muriwai, who had come to New Zealand on the Maataatua canoe. When the canoe approached Whakatane, which is a long way from our village, Muriwai's chieftainly brothers, led by Toroa, went to investigate the land. While they were away, however, the sea began to rise and the current carried the canoe so close to the rocks that Muriwai knew all on board would surely perish. So she chanted special prayers, asking the gods to give her the right and open the way for her to take charge. Then she cried, 'E-i! Tena, kia whakatane ake au i ahau!' *Now I shall make myself a man.* She called out to the crew and ordered them to start paddling quickly, and the canoe was saved in the nick of time. (Ihimaera 2002 [1987], 24)

Genealogical bonds (*whakapapa*) and kinship ties play a central role in Māori society. People trace genealogical relationships with their kin back over generations. Text passage (3) from "The Whale Rider" describes Kahus relatedness all the way back to the divine ancestors in Hawaiki, the mythological place of origin (see Section 2). Thus, genealogies even go beyond human kin and include relatedness with the *taiao* (the natural environment) and *atua* (the gods) (Ka'ai and Higgins 2004, 14). The creation narratives describe genealogical connections between the creative beings such as Rangi (the sky), Papa-tūā-nuku (the earth) and their offspring, the gods of the people, the wind and the elements, the forest and the birds, the fish and the reptiles, the sweet potato, and the fernroot (Reilly 2004b). Thus, the people are descendants of the senior line of Father Sky and Mother Earth. Several *iwi* ('tribe', see below) trace genealogical bonds to whales (see text passage 6) and whale-riding ancestors such as Paikea (see text passage 3; see also Lythberg and Nagata 2022).

> (6) The whale has always held a special place in the order of things, even […] way back, after the Sky Father and Earth Mother had been separated, when the God children of both parents divided up between themselves the various Kingdoms of the Earth. It was the Lord Tangaroa who took the Kingdom of the Ocean; he was second in rank only to the Lord Tane, the Father of Man and the Forests, and so was established by them the close kinship of man with the inhabitants of the ocean, and of land with sea. This was the first communion. […] (Ihimaera 2002 [1987]: 42)

This worldview of relatedness explains the deep inner connection between the people, the spiritual world and the natural world, as in the epilogue of "The Whale Rider" that describes the intertwined fates of the whales (the *tipua* 'guardian spirits') and the people. People also trace genealogical connections with the land, particularly *maunga* (mountains) and *awa* (rivers), as the heading on the website *Ngāti Porou* shows: "Ko Hikurangi te maunga, ko Waiapu te awa, ko Ngati Porou te iwi!" (lit. 'The mountain is Hikurangi, the river is Waiapu, the tribe is Ngati Porou!'). They are perceived as living entities and even given legal rights (e.g., Hutchison 2014 on the legal status of the Whanganui river). The connectedness with the natural world is also described by Salmond (2015) and Salmond, Hikuroa and Robertson (2023) in relation to the protection of the ocean and maritime creatures. In "The Whale Rider" Ihimaera describes the consciousness of being connected to all beings as 'oneness' (see text passage 7). Even things like *whare tipuna* (meeting houses) or *tekoteko* (carved ancestor figure on the gable of a meeting house, see Fig. 1) are ascribed *mana* and spiritual identity, as they represent the ancestors themselves (see Higgins and Moorfield 2004 for a description of the *whare tipuna* as an analogy of the ancestor's body). The *tekoteko* of Paikea at the American Museum of Natural History in New York was also treated as a legal person, the registered owner of a gift from the descent group (see Lythberg, Ngata and Salmond 2019; Lythberg and Nagata 2022).

> (7) Kahutia Te Rangi […] brought with him the mauri, the life-giving forces which would enable us to live in close communion with the world. The mauri that he brought […] were the gifts of those houses in Hawaiki to the new land. They were special because among other things, they gave instructions on how man might korero with the beasts and creatures of the sea so that all could live in helpful partnership. They taught *oneness*. (Ihimaera 2002 [1987], 33)

Social relationships of any kind (e.g., between kin or between chiefs and the people of lower descent lines) are reciprocal in nature and characterised by mutual support. *Manaaki* (solidarity, care) and *aroha* (love, affection) are important concepts to honour relatives, establish social bonds, strengthen the community, and maintain *mana* (Reilly 2004a, 67f). Social care through mutual support and love/affection are

core values of kinship bonds across Polynesia which are, among others, expressed by gift exchange (Evans 2001 and Völkel 2010, 77 ff. on Tongan). Text passage (8) from "The Whale Rider" shows that the fundamental concepts of mutual support, respect, and reciprocity also shape the idea of relationships between humans and gods or the natural environment.

> (8) 'In our village,' Koro Apirana told us, 'we have always endeavoured to live in harmony with Tangaroa's kingdom and the guardians therein. We have made offerings to the sea god to thank him and when we need his favour, and we have called upon our guardians whenever we are in need of help. We have blessed every new net and new line to Tangaroa. We have tried not to take food with us in our boats when we fish because of the tapu nature of our task.' (Ihimaera 2002 [1987], 50–51)

In Māori society any type of event, particularly formal gatherings, begins with a *mihi* or *mihimihi*, an introductory speech of greeting in which people provide information about who they are (their name) and where they come from (their genealogical descent and place of origin). This serves to connect oneself with the ancestors and the natural environment, and to create social connections with other people as foundation for interaction.

4 Language endangerment, the struggle for cultural identity, and the risk of social dis-connectedness

The European discovery of Oceania took place in the 18th century. The explorers were followed by traders and missionaries, and by the early 19th century, the region was divided between the colonial powers Germany, Great Britain, the United States of America and France, and later also New Zealand. With the arrival of the Europeans in New Zealand about 400 years after the arrival of the first Polynesian settlers (see Section 2), a period of severe language and culture contact started. Colonisation and missionisation changed the ideas, customs, and lifestyles of the Pacific people. Major issues arose about land ownership. Traditionally, land was claimed by social groups and it was inherited in a line of descent from the Polynesian ancestors who first occupied it, or it was conquered in tribal conflicts over territorial rights. European land tenure and private sales of land resulted in major conflicts/disputes.[4]

4 The situation was thought to be resolved by the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 (an agreement between the British Crown and numerous Māori chiefs to acknowledge British sovereignty in return for civil rights and the allowance to keep their lands). See Salmond (2010) for an analysis of discrepancies between the English and the Māori version of the document which

This was a clash of different cultural attitudes to land and dealing with land tenure (relatedness to land through ancestors vs. land as a commodity; see Section 3).

Another major impact of European contact concerns *Te reo Māori* (Māori language). Māori was an oral language without writing prior to the arrival of the Europeans. Writing was introduced by the missionaries in the early 19th century. Traditional genres are orally transmitted texts, such as poems, songs, and prose stories on local history, genealogies or cosmologies, and other social values. Genres at a *pōwhiri* (formal welcome ceremony onto the *marae*, the ceremonial meeting space of a community) are *karanga* (call of welcome, generally performed by women, e.g., in text passage 11), *whaikōrero* (oratory, i.e. highly formulaic speeches), and *waiata* ([traditional] songs) and dances (e.g. *haka*) (Higgins and Moorfield 2004). Thus, oral texts are to be understood in a broader sense in Māori, including the interplay of language and performance. In this sense, carvings and tattoo patterns (*moko*) can be regarded as traditional written records, telling stories about tribal history, ancestry and family affiliation. The first books were collections of written oral genres. Over time, genres like newspaper texts, children's literature, textbooks and novels were also adopted. The first novel published by a Māori author was 'Tangi' by Witi Ihimaera in 1973.

> (9) […] he was a good fighter for the Maori people. […] The hui that Koro Apirana had attended was about the establishment of Kohanga Reo, or language nests, where young children could learn the reo. The adult version was the wananga, the regular instruction [on history and customs] of the kind which Koro Apirana had established a year before in Whangara. (Ihimaera 2002 [1987], 41)

The dominance of English language also resulted in the severe endangerment of *Te reo Māori*. Māori and Moriori (an extinct Polynesian language, formerly spoken on the Chatham Islands) were the only languages of the early Polynesian settlers in New Zealand until the end of the 18th century. Then, in the 19th century, Māori became severely endangered and was on its way to extinction through bilingualism and the shift to English, the language of the colonial powers. Finally, towards the end of the 20th century, reclamation efforts arose (see Benton 1996; Moorfield and Johnston 2004; Rewi and Rātima 2021 for details on these developments). *Tikanga* (Māori values and customs) and *Te reo Māori* (Māori language) which play a central role for social identity were reclaimed. Māori was granted official language status through the Māori Language Act of 1987. It also became a language of instruction in some schools and is now used in the media, for example on the TV channel MĀORI+. However, its future is still unsure and dependent on further efforts, as it is mostly

---

reflect a lack of linguistic translation skills as well as the poor communication of cultural concepts, understandings, and interests.

a secondary language and even though it is used extensively in formal contexts, the majority of people claiming Māori descent are not able to have an everyday conversation in *Te reo Māori* (Harlow 2006, 10 ff.). For additional measures aimed at preserving the language, see King (2018). The book "The Whale Rider" was written in 1987, at a time when attempts were being started to re-establish the Māori heritage: education (*mātauranga*) in *tikanga* (customs, traditional values) and *te reo* (language). It was a context of tension between tradition and modernity – the effort to find a way for Māori society and life within Western contexts. Text passage (9) shows the efforts of the character Koro Apirana in teaching cultural knowledge and language skills not only to the younger generation but also to older generations. The aim is to prevent social dis-connection from their origin (as expressed in text passage 10). On the other hand, he is stuck in his traditional view of finding a future male leader and does not perceive his granddaughter's *mana* (see text excerpt 4).

> (10) '[…] But I do know the old man had the power to talk to the beasts and creatures of the sea. Aue, we have lost that power now. […]' (Ihimaera 2002 [1987], 38)

With his work, Witi Ihimaera is a great ambassador of the Māori world. At the age of 80, he now plans to attend *Te Wānanga Takiura* (immersion schools in New Zealand which aim at the revitalisation and training of Māori language and cultural knowledge) to become a fluent Māori speaker and then to write his first novel in *Te reo Māori* (personal communication, 24.4.2023). Although "The Whale Rider" was written in English and only translated into *Te reo Māori* in 1995 (see Section 1), the English original includes a lot of Māori terms for key cultural concepts, as the text passages illustrate. They are usually not translated but their meaning can be inferred from the co-text. As a result of language contact, not only has Māori borrowed many words from English, but many of the Māori terms used in the book have also become loanwords in contemporary New Zealand English (e.g. *iwi*, *mana*, *mihi*, and *waka*; see also Note 2).

Indigenous languages are not only a way to express cultural identity but also to transmit cultural ideas and concepts. *Rangi*, for instance, is not just the 'sky' (as translated in the glossary of the 2002 edition) but a forefather of the physical world, just as *mana* is not simply 'prestige', but a spiritual power passed down through senior descent lines.[5] Furthermore, linguistic practices have social functions, e.g.,

5 Another example for the different meanings expressed by different languages is the book's title. "The Whale Rider" as well as the Māori title, translated as "Te kaieke tohorā" (*te* ARTICLE, *kai-* HUMAN AGENT + *eke* 'get on/ride', *tohorā* 'whale'; lit. 'the whale rider'), do not include a gender distinction, and thus, they refer equally to the male ancestor Kahutia Te Rangi who was a high chief in Hawaiki, the mythological place of origin, as well as to the girl named Kahu, Koro Apirana'a granddaughter. The German translator, Sabine Schulte (personal communication, 22 June 2023), therefore retained the English main title in the German transla-

the *mihi* (introductory speech; see Section 3) is a cultural ritual to establish social bonds and to get connected with the ancestors. This is expressed in excerpt (11) which appears repeatedly throughout the book in Māori words (in both the English and German editions); it can be translated as 'Let's unite, let's gather, let's support each other'.

(11) Haumi e, hui e, *taiki e*. (Ihimaera 2002 [1987], 97, 148)

5 Conclusion

The story of "The Whale Rider" is deeply rooted in Māori tradition and worldview as well as its time. It tells about the origin of the ancestors, the mythological homeland Hawaiki, somewhere located in the region of French Polynesia, from where the first Polynesian settlers arrived in their great canoes (*waka*) in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Hawaiki is the land of the divine ancestors to which Māori people trace their genealogical relationship (*whakapapapa*). The descent line goes back to the *waka* of the first Polynesian settlers and beyond human kin to the divine ancestors from which humans descended, being the offspring of Rangi (Father Sky) and Papa-tuā-nuku (Mother Earth) and the siblings of the elements, the forest, fish and reptiles, and multiple other natural entities. This worldview of relatedness explains the deep inner connection between the people, the spiritual world (*atua*) and the natural environment (*taiao*). The importance of social connection becomes evident in numerous oral narratives and songs about genealogies and in the *mihi* practice, a way of expressing affiliation and creating social bonds at the beginning of formal gatherings.

The story's characters trace their ancestry back to Paikea, a whale-riding ancestor. As all chiefs, Koro Apirana derives his *mana* (spirtitual power) from his senior descent line and his leadership qualities. In times of severe endangerment, marked by impending language loss and dwindling cultural identity as a result of European contact, he tries to lead his people into a promising future. He fights for maintaining the connection through the transmission of traditional knowledge, values, and customs as well as Māori language skills. However, he struggles to find a future leader, as he does not accept his granddaughter Kahu, who is of senior descent, because she is a girl. The stranding of the whales is a sign that the connection to the ancestors is at risk. Finally, when Kahu saves the whales by riding the leading bull back into deep water, her grandfather recognises her leadership qualities. She has restored the connection with the ancestors and is the bond to the future.

---

tion of the book in order to avoid the necessary gender distinction in German (*der Walreiter/die Walreiterin*; *der/die* MALE/FEMALE ARTICLE, *-in* FEMALE PERSON).

Acknowledgements

It was a great experience to be part of this wonderful and highly inspiring project, bringing together scholars from New Zealand and Germany and engaging in cross-disciplinary exchange around topics of the book (https://eine-uni-ein-buch.uni-mainz.de/, accessed 22 March 2024). So I like to express my gratitude to the colleagues at the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, Germany who put together this enormous project with great commitment and collegiality, to the Mainz university management for their great and generous support, and last but not least to the author Witi Ihimaera and the colleagues at the University of Otago in Dunedin/NZ, in particular Karyn Paringatai, Simon Overall and Telesia Kalavite, who welcomed me in New Zealand/Aotearoa with great hospitality and *aroha* – it was a pleasure and honour to work with all of you.

Special thanks also go to Witi Ihimaera for his valuable and helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper and to Angela Kölling for the inspiring conversations on Polynesian topics in the preparation of our joint presentation.

References

Bauer, Winifred. *Maori*. Routledge, 1993.

Bauer, Winifred. *The Reed Reference Grammar of Māori*. Reed, 1997.

Bellwood, Peter. *Man's Conquest of the Pacific. The Prehistory of Southeast Asia and Oceania*. Oxford University Press, 1978.

Bellwood, Peter. *The Polynesians. Prehistory of an Island People*. Thames & Hudson, 1987.

Benton, Richard. "The Māori Language in New Zealand Education and Society." *Pacific Languages in Education*, edited by France Mugler and Johny Lynch, Institute of Pacific Studies, 1996, pp. 209–228.

Besnier, Niko. "Polynesian Gender Liminality Through Time and Space." *Third Sex, Third Gender. Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, edited by Gilbert Herdt, Zone, 1993, pp. 285–328.

Besnier, Niko. "Polynesian Languages." *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics*, vol. 3, edited by William Bright, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 245–251.

Clark, Ross. *Aspects of Proto-Polynesian Syntax*. Linguistic Society of New Zealand, 1976.

Crowley, Terry. "Common Noun Phrase Marking in Proto-Oceanic." *Oceanic Linguistics*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1985, pp. 135–193, https://doi.org/10.2307/3623065.

Evans, Mike. *Persistence of the Gift. Tongan Tradition in Transnational Context*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001.

Greschat, Hans-Jürgen. *Mana und Tapu: Die Religion der Maori auf Neuseeland*. Reimer, 1980.

Harlow, Ray. *A Māori Reference Grammar*. Pearson Education, 2001.

Harlow, Ray. *Māori. A Linguistic Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Higgins, Rawinia, and John C. Moorfield. "Ngā tikanga o te marae. Marae practices." *Ki te whaiao. An Introduction to Māori Culture and Society*, edited by Tānia Ka'ai, John Moorfield, Michael Reilly and Sharon Mosley, Pearson Longman, 2004, pp. 73–84.

Hutchison, Abigail. "The Whanganui River as a Legal Person." *Alternative Law Journal*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2014, pp. 179–182, https://doi.org/10.1177/1037969X1403900309.

Ihimaera, Witi. *The Whale Rider*. Reed, 2002 [1987].

Ihimaera, Witi. *Te kaieke tohorā*. Translated by Tīmoti Kāretu. Reed, 2020 [1995].

Ihimaera, Witi. *Whalerider. Die magische Geschichte vom Mädchen, das den Wal ritt.* Translated by Sabine Schulte. Rowohlt, 2013 [2003].

Ka'ai, Tānia, and Michael Reilly. "Rangatiratanga: Traditional and contemporary leadership." *Ki te whaiao. An Introduction to Māori Culture and Society*, edited by Tānia Ka'ai, John Moorfield, Michael Reilly and Sharon Mosley, Pearson Longman, 2004, pp. 91–102.

Ka'ai, Tānia, and Rawinia Higgins. "Tea o Māori. Māori World-View." *Ki te whaiao. An Introduction to Māori Culture and Society*, edited by Tānia Ka'ai, John Moorfield, Michael Reilly and Sharon Mosley, Pearson Longman, 2004, pp. 13–25.

King, Jeanette. "Māori. Revitalisation of an Endangered Language." *The Oxford Handbook of Endangered Languages*, edited by Kenneth L. Rehg and Lyle Campell, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 592–612.

Kirch, Patrick. *The Evolution of the Polynesian Chiefdoms*. Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Kirch, Patrick. *The Lapita Peoples. Ancestors of the Oceanic World*. Blackwell, 1997.

Krupa, Viktor. *The Polynesian Languages. A Guide*. Routledge / Kegan Paul, 1982.

Lynch, John. *Pacific Languages. An Introduction*. University of Hawai'i Press, 1998.

Lynch, John, Malcolm Ross, and Terry Crowley. *The Oceanic Languages*. Curzon, 2002.

Lythberg, Billie, and Wayne Ngata. "Heeding the Call of Paikea. A *whakapapa* Approach to Whaling and Whale People in Aotearoa–New Zealand." *Across Species and Cultures. Whales, Humans, and Pacific Worlds*, edited by Ryan Tucker Jones and Angela Wanhalla, University of Hawai'i Press, 2022, pp. 245–274.

Lythberg, Billie, Wayne Ngata, and Amiria Salmond. "Curating the Uncommons. Taking Care of Difference in Museums." *Curatopia. Museums and the Future of Curatorship*, edited by Philipp Schorch and Conal McCarthy, Manchester University Press, 2019, pp. 227–243.

Mead, Hirini Moko. *Tikanga Māori: Living by Māori Values*. Huia Publishers, 2022.

Moorfield, John, and Lorraine Johnston. "Te reo Māori. Origins and Development of the Māori Language." *Ki te whaiao. An Introduction to Māori Culture and Society*, edited by Tānia Ka'ai, John Moorfield, Michael Reilly and Sharon Mosley, Pearson Longman, 2004, pp. 36–49.

Mückler, Hermann. *Einführung in die Ethnologie Ozeaniens*. Facultas, 2009.

"Ngāti Porou." *Ngāti Porou*, https://www.ngatiporou.com/, accessed 19 March 2024.

Reedy, Tamati Muturangi. "Ngāti Porou – Ancestors." *Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/music/643/paikea, accessed 19 March 2024.

Reilly, Michael. "Whanaungatanga. Kinship." *Ki te whaiao. An Introduction to Māori Culture and Society*, edited by Tānia Ka'ai, John Moorfield, Michael Reilly and Sharon Mosley, Pearson Longman, 2004a, pp. 61–72.

Reilly, Michael. "Te tīmatanga mai o ngā atua. Creation Narratives." *Ki te whaiao. An Introduction to Māori Culture and Society*, edited by Tānia Ka'ai, John Moorfield, Michael Reilly and Sharon Mosley, Pearson Longman, 2004b, pp. 1–12.

Reilly, Michael, Suzanne Duncan, Gianna Leoni, Lachy Paterson, Lyn Carter, Matiu Rātima, and Poia Rewi. *Te kōparapara. An Introduction to the Māori World*. Auckland University Press, 2021.

Rewi, Tangiwai, and Matiu Rātima. "Ngā hurihanga o te reo Māori i te mātauranga. Changes in Māori Language Education." *Te kōparapara. An Introduction to the Māori World*, edited by Michael Reilly, Suzanne Duncan, Gianna Leoni, Lachy Paterson, Lyn Carter, Matiu Rātima and Poia Rewi, Auckland University Press, 2021, pp. 304–323.

Salmond, Anne. "The Fountain of Fish. Ontological Collisions at Sea." *Patterns of Commoning*, edited by David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, The Common Strategies Group, 2025, pp. 309–329.

Salmond, Anne, Dan Hikuroa, and Natalie Robertson. "Think Like a Fish. New Oceanic Histories." *New Earth Histories. Geo-Cosmologies and the Making of the Modern World*, edited by Alison Bashford, Emily Kern and Adam Bobbette, The University of Chicago Press, 2023, pp. 70–89.

Shore, Bradd. "Mana and Tapu." *Developments in Polynesian Ethnology*, edited by Alan Howard and Robert Borofsky, University of Hawai'i Press, 1989, pp. 137–173.

Stafford, Don. *Introducing Māori Culture.* Reed, 2002.

Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, https://teara.govt.nz/en/east-coast-region/page-4#: :text=The%20East%20Coast%20region%20is,previously%20known%20as%20Ngāi%20Tahupō, accessed 15 February 2023.

Völkel, Svenja. *Social Structure, Space and Possession in Tongan Culture and Language. An Ethnolinguistic Study*. Benjamins, 2010.

Völkel, Svenja. "Tongan Honorifics and Their Underlying Concepts of Mana and Tapu – A Verbal Taboo in Its Emic Sense." *Pragmatics & Cognition*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2021, pp. 25–56.

Völkel, Svenja. "Ein großes Sprachengebiet mit vielen Sprachen und meist wenig Sprechern. Die austronesische Sprachfamilie und die Besiedlungshistorie des Pazifiks." *Antike Welt. Zeitschrift für Archeologie und Kulturgeschichte*, vol. 2, no. 23. 2023a, pp. 6–7.

Völkel, Svenja. "Personal Names and Naming in Tongan Language and Culture." *Personal Names and Naming from an Anthropological-Linguistic Perspective*, edited by Sambulo Ndlovu, de Gruyter, 2023b, pp. 301–321.

Walworth, Mary. "Eastern Polynesian. The Linguistic Evidence Revisited." *Oceanic Linguistics*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2014, pp. 256–272.

"Austronesian languages." *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austronesian_languages, accessed 7 March 2024.

Williams, Jim. 2004. "Ngā hekenga waka. Canoe Migrations." *Ki te whaiao. An Introduction to Māori Culture and Society*, edited by Tānia Kaʻai, John Moorfield, Michael Reilly and Sharon Mosley, Pearson Longman, 2004, pp. 26–35.

Whale Song: The Significance of Whales in Māori Instrumental Music

Jennifer Cattermole

Abstract *Taonga pūoro (Māori musical instruments) play a key role in Witi Ihimaera's novel "The Whale Rider" (1987). Their voices enable the Māori characters to communicate and commune (or 'interlock' to use Ihimaera's term) with whales, and by extension with ancestors and deities – particularly with Tangaroa, God of the Ocean. This contribution explains some of the uses and meanings of taonga pūoro in connection with whales, which helps contextualise and deepen understanding of how they are discussed in Ihimaera's classic novel.*

Keywords *taonga pūoro; musical instruments; whale song; whale bone*

Introduction

Tēnā koutou kātoa. Kō Jennifer Cattermole toku ingoa. Greetings. My name's Jennifer Cattermole, and I'm a lecturer in ethnomusicology at the University of Otago. I'm Pākēka (New Zealand European), but today I'll do my best to represent Māori cultural perspectives on the significance of whales in Māori instrumental music. My aim is to deepen understandings of some of the content presented in the text of *The Whale Rider* (1987).

Communicating and communing with whales using taonga pūoro

My first encounter with *taonga pūoro* (traditional Māori musical instruments) was in 1998 when revivalist Richard Nunns gave a class for a paper I was taking as an undergraduate studying at Otago University. I vividly remember him standing at the front of the classroom before a table covered with a black velvet cloth, upon which rested several *taonga*. He joined his breath with those instruments, demonstrating their voices for us. He also shared stories – one of which so fascinated me and captured

my imagination that it led me to tread *te ara pūoro* (the pathway of sound), taking me on a journey of exploration of *taonga pūoro*.

Nunns spoke of an experience he had while attending a world music festival in Patagonia. There was a beach just across the road from the hotel where he was staying. He spoke of getting into a boat, voyaging a short distance out to sea (the seabed plummeted to a great depth a short distance offshore), and playing a flute (a *pūtōrino*, if I remember correctly). Three whales swam up to the boat, and remained poised with their heads out of the water, listening to him play. Only when Nunns ceased playing did the whales sink beneath the waves, and continue gently on their journeys. Upon hearing that story, there was nothing I wanted more than to have an experience like that! I longed to be able to communicate with whales in the same way he had, and to speak their language.

This story resonates strongly with Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*, which – in a curious coincidence – contains a narrative set in the same place, and which similarly describes a musician communicating to a whale by playing musical instruments:

> The Valdes Peninsula, Patagonia. Te Whiti Te Ra. The nursery, the cetacean crib … the ancient bull whale was swept up in memories of its own birthing. His mother had been savaged by sharks three months later; crying over her in the shallows of Hawaiki, he had been succoured by the golden human who became his master [i.e. Paikea]. The human had heard the young whale's distress and had come into the sea, playing a flute. The sound was plangent and sad as he tried to communicate his oneness with the young whale's mourning. Quite without the musician knowing it, the melodic patterns of the flute's phrases imitated the whalesong of comfort. The young whale drew nearer to the human, who cradled him and pressed noses with the orphan in greeting. When the herd travelled onward, the young whale remained and grew under the tutelage of his master … In the early days his master would play the flute and the whale would come to the call. (Ihimaera 2003, 22–23)

> Once, he had a golden master who had wooed him with flute song. Then his master had used a conch shell to bray his commands to the whale over long distances. As their communication grew so did their understanding and love of each other. (36)

The reference in this excerpt to using "a conch shell trumpet to bray … commands" finds support in other stories concerning this kind of instrument (*pūtātara* or *pū moana*). For example:

> A southern informant has spoken of the onomatopoeic sound of the *pūtātara* as 'oaro – oaro – oaro', giving rise to the placename Oaro, on the east coast of the South Island [nearby Kaikōura is famous for its whale watching], where the shell

> trumpet was said to have been used to call whales. It should be noted however that *kaumātua* and *tohunga* Bill Solomon of Kaikōura had not heard this story, so it might be apocryphal. (Nunns and Thomas 2014, 94)

I heard a similar story recently, however, when attending a *taonga pūoro* workshop connected with the opening of an exhibition at the Otago Museum called Ngā Hau Ngākau – so perhaps the above story was not apocryphal after all. Robin Slow, who created the paintings for this exhibition, spoke about walking with Brian Flintoff, Richard Nunns, Hirini Melbourne, and local *mana whenua* along Onetahua (Farewell spit) – a site renowned for whale strandings. The locals wanted them to play to the whale trails, and so Hirini played *pūtātara* (conch trumpet). Five days later, three sperm whales stranded and died – an event deemed by local Māori to have been a direct result of his call. For Māori, "[b]eached whales are respected as gifts from Tangaroa, the god of the sea – a *taonga* and literal body of resources that should be used from tip to tail" (Lythberg and Ngata 2022, 246–47) – and that was indeed the fate of these particular whales. Hirini grieved their death, his grief mirroring that of the character Kahu in *The Whale Rider* when she learns about whaling (Ihimaera 2003, 52, 59–60).

In *The Whale Rider* story, Ihimaera (39) describes how the first Kahutia Te Rangi (subsequently called Paikea) brought from Hawaiki life-giving forces in the form of spears. One of these instructed humankind in how to speak with creatures of the ocean, "so that all could live in helpful partnership. They taught *oneness*." The ability to speak with whales (or to 'interlock', using Ihimaera's (49) term is not just about communication but *communion*. In *Whale Rider*, Ihimaera indicates that this 'oneness' can result from communication in the form of human speech; human vocalisation (descriptions of Kahu making a mewling sound; or making eerie sounds in her throat and lamenting sighs; Ihimaera 2003, 63, 112, 120); as well as the voices of musical instruments. It is particularly noted as an ability of people like Paikea who, "[i]n various versions of his story … is described as a whale (*he tohorā*), and as being matrilineally descended from whales. His transformation chant, *Te karakia whakakau a Paikea*, describes the mutuality of his breath and that of his whale ancestors – "Ko tō manawa, ko tōku manawa"; "Tis your breath, and mine also" (Lythberg and Ngata 2022, 248–249). This refers to the *hongi* (the pressing of noses in greeting) described in the above excerpt from *Whale Rider*, which involves the exchange of *ha* (the breath of life) and *wairua* (spirit). While there are special individuals descended from whales and whale-riders who have the ability to 'interlock' (or act as interlocuter) with whales, this kinship also extends to all humankind – as indicated in the lines, during the first mass stranding event in *The Whale Rider*: "the word went down the line of helpers. *Talk to the whales. They understand. They understand*" (Ihimaera, 2003, 109).

According to Māori creation narratives, humans are kin with all beings; moreover, as the last beings to be created, we are responsible for nurturing and looking after our *tuakana* (older relatives). At the heart of *The Whale Rider* is the idea of balance and complementarity, which is a core philosophy in Māori culture. Ihimaera's book emphasises the need to recognise our shared kinship, our oneness, with whales (and, by extension, all of creation); and to re-forge relationships based on love, care, respect and gratitude. We must be *kaitiaki* (guardians) of Tangaroa's progeny. If we are greedy and arrogant (like the men with chainsaws ruthlessly butchering stranded live whales for their prized jawbones), then we commit a *hara* (a transgression of *tapu*) that must be redressed. One of the key messages of *The Whale Rider* is: when all of creation is in balance, all life thrives: "*The ocean was alive with noises: dolphin chatter, krill hiss, squid thresh, shark swirl, shrimp click, and, ever present, the strong swelling chords of the sea's constant rise and fall*" (Ihimaera 2003, 142). When there is a state of imbalance, "*listen how empty our sea has become* [italics in original]" (58).

The spiritual importance of whalesong in Māori instrumental music

The whistle-/flute-like sounds of whalesong are important to Māori in a spiritual sense, and to explain why we need to understand the meanings attributed to whistling sounds in general. As ethnologist Augustus Hamilton (1972) states:

> Maori [sic] rarely or never whistled, and generally objected to Europeans whistling when in their company. Maoris [sic] of the older generation always felt uncomfortable at hearing Europeans, boys and men, whistling. Possibly this aversion to the sound was connected with the idea that a demon or *atua* manifested his presence by a sound somewhat resembling a long drawn whistle. (388)

Kaipara people associated whistling sounds with *atua*, while *whiowhio* was a term that meant "to speak in the whistling voice used by a priest when the medium of a deity; ventriloquial" (Hamilton 1972, 405; see also Komene 2009, 34, 110–111). Communications from *ngā atua* are sometimes described as half whistling, half whispering; or as a low-pitched whistle (Ngata 2014, 84–85).

As *taonga pūoro* scholar Jo'el Komene (2009) notes, Māori always listened out for such sounds in the world around them:

> People listened carefully to the many sounds in everyday life to discern the presence of *atua*, which might be conveyed through forest noises, the calls of birds, sounds that result from changes in the weather, including sounds created by the blowing of the wind, especially whistling sounds. (110)

Other such natural sounds include *kurī* (dogs) howling, kauri snails angling their shells into the wind, marine molluscs being frightened and suddenly withdrawing into their shells, and the captivating melodies of whalesong. Whalesong, therefore, is associated with the voices of deities and ancestral spirits; as Ihimaera (2013, 18) describes, it is "a song with eternity in it". Those musical instruments (such as flutes and conch shell trumpets) whose voices resemble whalesong play an important role in relaying communications between living people and supernatural beings such as *ngā atua* and the spirits of *tupuna* (ancestors).

In *The Whale Rider*, the character Koro Apirana makes a speech about the both/and versus either/or nature of the supernatural and natural worlds (*he ira atua* and *he ira tangata*). That essential unity, and the way these worlds interpenetrate (see Irwin 1984, 10, 17), is represented metaphorically by the umbilical cord (*pito*) (Ihimaera 2003, 121). Applying this metaphor to *taonga pūoro*, the voices of these instruments are the *pito* that links or bridges the entire span of creation, from Te Kore (the realm of unlimited potentiality) to te Ao mārama (the world of light).

Readers can find a video online, showing myself playing a nguru (a type of flute) made from a sperm whale tooth (niho parāoa), so you can hear the kinds of sounds that have been described [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OWFiPpNZSU].

The spiritual significance of using whale bone and teeth to make instruments

A variety of instruments are made from whale skeletal remains, which are invested with the *mana* (efficacy) and *iho* (essence) of Tangaroa. Sperm whale teeth (*niho parāoa* or *rei*) are highly prized, and associated with strength, endurance and chiefly qualities (Lythberg and Ngata 2022, 265). *Nguru* (a type of flute) made from whale teeth (especially the curved front teeth) are often worn around the neck by high-ranking people. Whalebone (*parāoa*) – particularly rib bone – is used to make a variety of instruments, including: flutes (*kōauau*), swung and spun instruments (*porotiti, pūrerehua*), the mouthpieces of a type of trumpet (*pūkaea-iwi*), and percussion instruments (*pakuru,* strikers for *pahu* or *pakuru*, *tōkere*). *Kauwae upokohue* (pilot whale jawbones) are used as *tumutumu*, and slivers of jawbone to make a type of mouth percussion instrument called *rōria*.

Māori regard skeletal remains as particularly sacred, and as being important for giving strength and form – both physically and spiritually. An instrument made from the bone of a deceased individual provides a spiritual as well as a physical link to them, resulting in increased mental and physical strength and endurance for those that hear its voice and thus playing an important role in healing (Best 1925, 141, 143; Komene 2009, 103–105; Nunns and Thomas 2014, 58–60). From a Māori perspective, being is about belonging, hence the use of the word *iwi* for both 'tribe' and 'bones'

(*kōiwi*), and the importance placed on *whakapapa* as a way to understand the universe and the place of Māori within it.[1] Whalebones and teeth are thought of in this way, as Maia Nuku, Māori curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Arts (cited in Lythberg and Ngata 2022, 266) explains: "the bones of one were also deemed to be the bones of all … work[ing] metonymically to index the entire lineage and all its members."

Historian Billie Lythberg and educator Wayne Ngata (2022, 245) state:

> In Aotearoa-New Zealand, whales are revered by Māori in *whakapapa* relationships of kinship and affinity and through carvings, songs and oratory that instantiate these ties. These connections span deep ancestral time to the present, with many *iwi* (tribal groups) celebrating descent from whales and whale-riding ancestors who brought people to Aotearoa from the Māori homeland of Hawaiki

– ancestors such as Paikea, who is central to Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*. Instruments made from whale bone are one way of instantiating such *whakapapa* relationships. Those kinship relationships are affirmed in *whakairo* (carvings) that decorate musical instruments, such as examples carved by master carver Brian Flintoff (2004, 121) that feature instruments carved in the shape of whales, but where the pectoral fins depict human hands – including fingers and fingernails.

Conclusion

I hope you've enjoyed this contribution, and perhaps gleaned a deeper understanding into the spiritual and material importance of *taonga pūoro* in connection to whales as presented in Ihimaera's book *The Whale Rider*. While not everyone can 'interlock' with whales – that being a privilege granted to few (such as the fictional Kahu in Ihimaera's novel) – those who can are able to communicate and commune with their whale kin. For those who have not been so blessed, whales can listen to and understand us at least, and instruments and other *taonga* made from their physical remains provide a means of spiritually connecting with them as well as with their ancestors. The gifts afforded by whales who sacrifice their lives when they strand are counterbalanced by the grief we experience at their passing and the duty we have to care for and protect their species.

1 See Whakapapa. n.d. Online: https://www.otago.ac.nz/maori/world/tikanga/whakapapa/.

References

Best, Elsdon. *Games and Pastimes of the Maori.* Whitcombe & Tombs, 1925.

Flintoff, Brian. *Taonga Pūoro: Singing Treasures*. Craig Potton Publishing, 2004.

Hamilton, Augustus. *Maori Art.* Holland Press, 1972.

Ihimaera, Witi. *The Whale Rider. The Anniversary Collection.* Reed, 2003.

Irwin, James. *An Introduction to Maori Religion.* Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1984.

Komene, Jo'el. *Kōauau auē, e auau tō au e: The kōauau in Te Ao Māori*. MA Thesis, University of Waikato, 2009.

Lythberg, Billie, and Wayne Ngata. "Heeding the call of Paikea: A Whakapapa Approach to Whaling and Whale People in Aotearoa-New Zealand." *Across Species and Cultures: Whales, Humans, and Pacific Worlds*, edited by Ryan Tucker Jones und Angella Wanhalla, University of Hawaii Press, 2022, pp. 245–274.

Ngata, Ronald Spencer. *Understanding matakite: A kaupapa Māori study on the impact of matakite/intuitive experiences on wellbeing*. PhD Thesis, Massey University, Aotearoa, 2014.

Nunns, Richards, and Allan Thomas. *Te Ara Puoro: A Journey Into the World of Māori Music.* Craig Potton Publishing, 2014.

Paikea: he ariki, he tipua, he tangata / the legend, the ancient being, the person

Karyn Paringatai

Abstract *"The Whale Rider" (1987) is described as a novel that retells the 'myth' of Paikea, the East Coast ancestor famed for arriving to the shores of Aotearoa-New Zealand on the back of a whale. What may appear as a work of fiction to some, to the descendants of Paikea he teaches us how to avoid impending death through an utter belief in our intangible connection with the spiritual world. This article looks at the ongoing influence the exploits of Paikea have on his descendants today.*

Keywords *Paikea; East Coast; Tangaroa; atua; whakapapa*

Uia mai koia, whakahuatia ake – you ask for elucidation

I hail from Te Tai Rāwhiti, the East Coast of the North Island of Aotearoa (New Zealand). Our marae (complex of buildings of ancestral and cultural significance), and our family home located right beside it, gaze directly out to the sea and bear witness to the turbulent waters that brought Paikea to these shores. I am not from Whāngārā-mai-Tawhiti, the place where Paikea eventually settled and called home. But I am a descendant of Paikea. His arrival on the East Coast signalled his permanent residency in Aotearoa. His subsequent offspring dispersed themselves throughout the East Coast region and it is through them that we are all able to claim descent from Paikea.

Ko Ngāti Porou te iwi
My tribe is Ngāti Porou
Ko Te Whānau-a-Hunaara te hapū
My sub-tribe is Te Whānau-a-Hunaara
Ko Karyn Paringatai tōku ingoa
My name is Karyn Paringatai

An important aspect of Māori society is whakapapa; the framework upon which relationships between the spiritual and physical worlds are created and enacted. Whakapapa is an intersecting network of multiple streams of genealogical knowledge handed down from one generation to the next. There are multiple lines of descent that I can trace my lineage from Paikea, one of which indicates at least 24 generations between me and this illustrious ancestor. Paikea is an ancestor of Porourangi, who is the eponymous ancestor after whom my iwi (tribe) is named – Ngāti Porou. Several generations down from Porourangi is Hunaara, who is the ancestor after whom my hapū (sub-tribe) is named – Te Whānau-a-Hunaara. Therefore, all descent lines from across the entire East Coast region and beyond, can claim Paikea as a founding ancestor in this country.

Within my iwi we often sing about Paikea. The words found at the beginning of most chapters in *The Whale Rider* are the lyrics of a haka (chanted form of oral expression) that we perform whenever the occasion arises to demonstrate our affiliation to Ngāti Porou. This haka is also often performed as a waiata (sung form of oral expression).

Uia mai koia, whakahuatia ake	*Ask and you will be told*
Ko wai te whare nei e?	*What is the name of this house?*
Ko Te Kani	*It is Te Kani*
Ko wai te tekoteko kei runga?	*Who is the sentinel on top?*
Ko Paikea! Ko Paikea!	*It is Paikea! It is Paikea*
Whakakau Paikea hī!	*Paikea who transformed*
Whakakau he tipua hī!	*Into an ancient being of the sea*
Whakakau he taniwha hī!	*Into the great denizen of the deep*
Ka ū Paikea ki Ahuahu	*And came to shore at Ahuahu*
Kei te whitia koe	*He is not one and the same as*
ko Kahutiaterangi	*Kahutiaterangi*
E ai tō ure ki te tamāhine	*And he did marry the daughter*
A Te Whironui	*Of Te Whironui*
Nāna i noho Te Rototahe	*Who lived at Te Rototahe*
Aue, aue, he koruru koe, e koro e	*You are now a figurehead, old one*

(Lythberg and Ngata 2022, 249–250)

The use of waiata and haka as a pedagogical tool for teaching and learning is important in all oral cultures to ensure the continuation of our knowledge from one

generation to the next (Whitinui 2010). Whatever the style of performance, singing or chanting about Paikea over successive generations ensures the accurate and continual transmission of his exploits.

We use several terms to describe Paikea in this waiata/haka. The title of this article, *Paikea: he ariki, he tipua, he tangata* incorporates three of those terms. They represent different states of being, each of which are underpinned by certain Māori cultural concepts and processes, which I will elaborate on as I describe Paikea as an ariki, a tipua and a tangata.

I acknowledge that there are many different versions of the story of Paikea. For this article I have used the story as it is acknowledged widely by my tribe of Ngāti Porou. I am by no means an authority on Paikea or his many exploits, but I am able to elaborate on the ongoing influence he has left on us and some of the learnings we can take away from him in each of these states of being as it pertains to the book, *The Whale Rider*.

Tangaroa

Māori creation stories are richly endowed with personifications, guardians and spiritual entities of many kinds. From a Māori perspective our world began with the separation of our sky father, Ranginui, and our earth mother, Papatūānuku, who clung to each other in a tight embrace. Ensconced between them were their numerous offspring, each of them representing a different part of the natural environment. These children soon grew tired of living in darkness and planned a way to separate their parents forever, and in doing so would finally be living in a world of light they so desperately craved (Reilly 2018).

The separation caused a rift amongst some of the siblings, and each retreated to their own domain. One of the children, Tangaroa, the atua (spiritual ancestor of ongoing influence) associated with the ocean and all things that dwell within, is particularly pertinent to *The Whale Rider*. In some traditions Tangaroa was the husband of Papatūānuku and supposedly had authority over the land and the sea (Jackson, Mita and Hakopa 2017). Which provides further explanation for the inter-reliance one domain has on the other. Tangaroa's offspring inhabit both spaces, as the marine life within the sea, but also the many lizards on land (Meredith 2006). One of Tangaroa's personifications, Tangaroa-whakamau-tai, also recognises Tangaroa as a controller of tides. He has a close relationship with the moon and is said to surface twice a day to breathe that causes the ebb and flow of the tides (Hanara 2019).

Māori have an innate connection with all atua for we are born of them, through them and for them. Every aspect of traditional Māori life was a careful balancing act, walking a fine line between the physical and spiritual worlds to ensure that no offense towards the atua occurred, lest they exact revenge on those who had trans-

gressed. Natural order needed to prevail for a subsistent lifestyle to be maintained. Ritual blessings were often recited to appease the atua, to ensure a bountiful season of food supplies, and to protect the health and wellbeing of the people (Murphy 2011). Tangaroa was, and still is, an essential atua as a source of life.

Tangaroa can be calm, Tangaroa can be life-giving, Tangaroa can be dangerous, Tangaroa can be destructive. It is within this realm that Paikea faces imminent death.

Paikea: He ariki

Paikea's origins take us back in time to far off Hawaiki, the homeland from whence Māori originally came before making the journey across Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa (the Pacific Ocean). Paikea, whose original name in Hawaiki was Kahutiaterangi, was the son of the great chief, Uenuku. Uenuku was the ultimate authority of Hawaiki in his time and he dared anyone to challenge his authority, although doing so would come with serious consequence. Uenuku had many wives, as was common practice amongst chiefs of high status, and a privilege afforded to very few (Heuer 1968).

A fundamental purpose of existing was to have as many children as possible; to avenge deaths, to lay the platform for peace through marriage and to maintain continued occupation of geographical areas – but ultimately to ensure the continued legacy of those that have come before keeping intact chiefly descent lines. Claiming direct descent or highest descent from the atua is a proud claim to make in the whakapapa of high-born chiefs.

Kahutiaterangi/Paikea was the first-born from Uenuku's relationship with his most senior wife, who herself was also of chiefly descent. He was conceived and born on the takapau wharanui, the chiefly marriage mat.

And thus Kahutiaterangi/Paikea's status as an ariki was confirmed.

Paikea: He tipua

Ranginui and Papatūānuku, are the original sources of mana (personal authority, power, charisma) and tapu (divine restriction, sacredness). Therefore, their children, the atua of different domains, are imbued with mana and tapu of the highest levels.

> A person is imbued with different types of mana according to their social standing or position within the community. It is accrued through occupation in the geographical area where one can claim continued genealogical descent (mana whe-

> nua), through descent from certain high-ranking genealogical lines (mana tangata), and through descent from the gods (mana atua) (Marsden 2003).
>
> The source of tapu, as with mana, can be traced back to Ranginui and Papatūānuku, and as such is an authority divinely bestowed upon us as descendants of those original sources. Tapu is a state of being that restricts certain actions from being undertaken. One purpose, amongst many, for these restrictions is to guide behaviour and provide navigational pathways to protect one's personal wellbeing from harm (Taani and Paringatai 2024).

Because ariki can claim descent directly from the atua, they were imbued with more tapu and mana than others. They were highly esteemed leaders, their actions righteous, and their word accepted as law. Kahutia-te-rangi/Paikea, as the first-born son of Uenuku, inherited all of these traits, rights and responsibilities.

Younger siblings, whilst still afforded certain special privileges as children of an ariki, played a lesser role in leadership. Of even lesser consequence are children born of servant wives. Ruatapu, Paikea's younger brother, was one such child. Ruatapu was continuously ill-treated by Uenuku, not physically, but verbally through insulting remarks that reminded him of his low-birth status and that he would never be destined for ariki status. Unlike Paikea.

Outraged at being treated so badly by his father, Ruatapu spitefully schemed a plot to kill Paikea and the rest of his higher born brothers in revenge of the shame he was caused to feel, knowing that this act of treachery would cause the most pain to Uenuku. Doing so would also mean that Ruatapu would be elevated in rank.

Ruatapu organised a fishing expedition with all of his brothers and put himself at the bow of the canoe, concealing a hole with the heel of his foot. Once out of sight of land, Ruatapu released his foot thereby flooding the waka. In the panic that followed, he systematically clubbed each of his brothers to death with one of his paddles. All except Paikea.

While Ruatapu was preoccupied with the slaughter of his brothers, Paikea performed a karakia (spiritual incantation) that his life might be spared. His karakia to Tangaroa was acknowledged in the appearance of the whale, paikea.

Ka hura, ka hura te moana uha	Revealed so is the matrilineal breath
Ka hura, ka hura te manawa pore	Revealed so is the simmering breath
Ko tō manawa, ko tōku manawa	Tis your breath, and mine also
Ko Houtina, ko Houmōata	Firm and fresh
Ki te ripia rei ana	Cutting and saturated by
Whakahotunuku, whakahoturangi	The swelling tides below and above

He rokihau, he taketake, he hurumanu te moana i rohia	Calm then the restless sea
Hoatu tō kauhau taniwha ki uta[1]	So that we may reach the shore

(Lythberg and Ngata 2022, 249)

Only someone of significant status, of ariki descent, of super human qualities, was worthy of Tangaroa's attention in such a manner.

And thus Paikea's status as a tipua was confirmed.

Paikea: He tangata

Paikea was transported safely to shore, landing at Ahuahu, an island in the Bay of Plenty area. He made a slow journey down the eastern coastline in search of a home. Along the way he engaged in relations with several women and there are many along this coastline who can claim descent from Paikea because of these fleeting relationships.

When he arrived at a place which resembled his former home he decided to settle, with his wife Huturangi, the daughter of Te Whironui. He named this place Whāngārā-mai-Tawhiti – Whāngārā from afar, a place name that was also found in Hawaiki. Naming new locations in memory of those in Hawaiki was common practice amongst early Māori ancestors upon their arrival in Aotearoa (Carter 2005).

There Paikea toiled away his days, raising his family, teaching in the house of esoteric learning that he established, Whitireia, until his death. The island that rises from the sea to the right of the bay is said to be the whale that saved his life in a petrified form, and it is in a cave on this island that Paikea was laid to rest.

Paikea's influence on the people of the East Coast was substantial, but more so for the people of Whāngārā. His legendary exploits provide a framework of understanding the spiritual bond between the human and natural worlds, and the potential revealed when nature is respected rather than exploited.

Ancestors of significant influence continue to fulfil guardian roles long after their passing. Tekoteko or koruru are carved figures that grace the top of our whare nui (meeting houses), are one way in which these people are immortalised. A position most commonly afforded to those whose influence is based in Aotearoa.

1 Karakia are not generally translated into English. The following is a recording of the karakia being chanted to help the reader feel the spiritual essence of this karakia: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tqIFWl53IE

Paikea sits proudly atop his whale at the apex of the whare nui in Whāngārā, watching carefully over those who reside there.

And thus Paikea's status as a tangata was confirmed.

He koruru koe, koro e – you are a figurehead for us all

The story of Paikea has left an indelible mark on the people of the East Coast. *The Whale Rider* may be considered a mythological fantasy, but to us as Paikea's descendants, at its very core it is a record of our whakapapa. Whakapapa, in its simplest form can be described as the layering of names on a family tree in order of descent. It is a genealogical framework upon which knowledge is situated; it is not of itself 'knowledge,' but the repository of information about the world. Therefore, every narrative that is attached to this framework is instructive, providing guidance and advice on how to overcome adversity.

Paikea as an ariki: *The Whale Rider* deals with issues of male masculinity. Ironically, the narrative is located within an iwi where women are afforded a chiefly status equal to that of males. Many of our senior lines of descent bear female names, many hapū and the majority of our marae are named after women. Koro Paka seems to forget this. In Ngāti Porou, mana and tapu imbued from the atua to those of senior descent do not know gender.

Paikea as a tipua: *The Whale Rider* focuses specifically on one character. Whales feature strongly in many tribal narratives all around the country and there are many other whale riders. But none are afforded legendary tipua status as one sees in Paikea. The changing of Kahutia-te-rangi's name to Paikea reminds us of the debt that we owe to this magnificent creature of the deep. But also serves as a reminder of the power of Tangaroa. The respect we must show this atua when interacting in his domains.

Paikea as a tangata: Paikea existed in a time and place when atua reigned supreme, when ariki lines were fiercely protected and their influence was controlling but necessary for the protection and survival of their people, and when the supernatural abilities of some were highly sought after and went unquestioned. Everything was in balance.

The Whale Rider teaches us of the need to be more deliberate in our actions to protect our environment, our knowledge, and our communities. The time and place that the character Kahu lives in is one characterised by deliberate and strategic government policies aimed at disconnecting Māori from all of these things. Her birth signals a change. She is also Paikea, the ariki, the tipua, the tangata.

References

Carter, Lyn. "Naming to Own: Place Names as Indicators of Human Interaction with the Environment." *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2005, pp. 6–24.

Hanara, Benjamin Dimitrious, and Anne-Marie Jackson. *Tangaroa Ara Rau: Tangaroa the Atua of Human Movement*. Report for Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Summer Internship, 2019.

Heuer, Berys. "Maori Women in Traditional Family and Tribal Life." *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, vol. 78, no. 4, 1969, pp. 448–494.

Jackson, Anne-Marie, Mita, Ngahuia, and Hauiti Hakopa. "Hui-te-ana-nui: Understanding Kaitiakitanga in Our Marine Environment." *Report for Sustainable Seas National Sciences Challenge*, July 2017.

Lythberg, Billie, and Wayne Ngata. "Heeding the Call of Paikea: A *Whakapapa* Approach to Whaling and Whale People in Aotearoa-New Zealand." *Across Species and Cultures: Whales, Humans, and Pacific Worlds*, edited by Ryan Tucker Jones und Angela Wanhalla, University of Hawai'i Press, 2022, pp. 245–274.

Meredith, Paul. "Te hī ika – Māori fishing – Tangaroa, God of the Sea." *Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, 12. June 2006, http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/te-hi-ika-maori-fishing/page-1, accessed 23 January 2025.

Murphy, Ēnoka. "He titiro ki ētahi o ngā rerekētanga me ngā ritenga o te karakia tūturu Māori me ngā karakia karaitiana Māori." *Te Kōtihitihi*, no. 1, 2011, pp. 27–37.

Reilly, Michael. "Te Tīmatanga mai o te Ao: The Beginning of the World." *Te Kōparapara: An Introduction to the Māori World*, edited by Michael Reilly et al., Auckland University Press, 2018, pp. 12–29.

Taani, Paia, and Karyn Paringatai. "Kua tau tōku mauri – The Balance between Māori Language Teacher Cultural Identity and Wellbeing." *Language Teacher Identity and Wellbeing*, edited by Anne Feryok, Multilingual Matters, pp. 11–27.

Whitinui, Paul. "Kapa Haka 'Voices': Exploring the Educational Benefits of a Culturally Responsive Learning Environment in Four New Zealand Mainstream Secondary Schools." *Learning Communities International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts: Australia*, no. 1, 2010, pp. 19–43.

A Critical Literacy Engagement with *The Whale Rider*

Susan Sandretto

Abstract *In this brief contribution, I present what I mean by critical literacy and why I think it is important. I argue that in the novel "The Whale Rider" (1987), Witi Ihimaera has gifted us with a (re)constructed text that can be viewed as an outcome of his critical literacy readings of the pūrākau[1] [story] of Paikea.*

Keywords *agency; critical literacy; power; praxis; text*

Introduction

I first met critical literacy when I was completing my teacher education course at California State University Sacramento, preparing to become a bilingual (Spanish and English) primary school teacher. After completing my doctorate 14 years later, here, at the University of Otago, I returned to critical literacy and have not stopped researching and teaching about it. In an age of misinformation, climate crisis, rapidly changing technologies and a pedagogical pendulum swing emphasising traditional literacies, I firmly believe that this work is more vital than ever.

Critical literacy: Mandate and definition

I think we can probably all agree that we are inundated with information. Sadly, the pandemic has taught us that we are not immune to mis- and disinformation here in Aotearoa New Zealand. As our former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern explained in a commencement address:

> In a disinformation age, we need to learn to analyse and critique information. That doesn't mean teaching 'mistrust' but rather as my old history teacher Mr Fountain

1 I use quite a few kupu [or te reo Māori vocabulary] in this contribution. I define the kupu the first time I use it and there is a glossary at the end.

> extolled: 'to understand the limitations of a single piece of information, and that there is always a range of perspectives on events and decisions.' (Ardern 2022)

In other words, we have an imperative to critically engage with texts and consider a range of perspectives.

Simply put, critical literacy represents a critical stance towards texts. We take a critical stance towards the texts we construct and the texts constructed by others. I want to take a moment to unpack the term 'critical'. As we have written elsewhere, "the term *critical* has a number of different meanings that can have positive or negative connotations. It can be used to mean fault finding… [it] can be used to mean extremely important… It can also mean indispensable or vital" (Sandretto and Klenner 2011, 10). Importantly, critical analysis is not necessarily about being negative.

When I facilitate professional development workshops with *kaiako* [teachers], I can meet the 'but we are already doing this' body posture. The current New Zealand curriculum (Ministry of Education 2007) does not explicitly mandate the teaching of critical literacy. It does, however, direct kaiako to support *ākonga* [students] to think critically about texts. These are not the same thing.

Critical thinking with texts can involve inferring meaning, justifying an opinion, or comparing and contrasting different viewpoints – what we might call higher-order thinking skills. According to McLaren (1998), we need to be cautious because these skills can be practised without attention to the cultural, historical, political or social context. In other words, kaiako and their ākonga can engage in critical thinking about a text without attending to the *power* of texts to shape their understandings of themselves or others.

But what do I mean by the term text? I use the term text in the broadest sense. A text can be constructed using multiple modes of meaning: oral language or written language, as well as audio, gestural, spatial, tactile or visual modes as described by Cope and Kalantzis (2009). The term text has a Latin whakapapa [heritage] coming from the Latin terms textus meaning tissue and texere meaning weave. For Bull and Anstey (2010) the term text captures the idea of "weaving a tissue of meaning" (8). This broad understanding of what constitutes a text means that we can critically analyse just about anything: from a newspaper article, movie, picture, advertising, speech, to *tukutuku* panels [weavings] and *whakairo* [carvings].

Critical literacy involves the understanding that texts are not neutral. The term neutral evokes images of beige, bland or inoffensive texts. But if we understand texts as typically constructed by someone to convey something, we know that the author's worldview is woven into the fabric of that text. When teaching about critical literacy, I often set a homework task that asks *ākonga* to bring in a neutral text for us to analyse. They find it very difficult to find one.

Authors construct texts for many different purposes. According to the author George Orwell (2004), the purpose could be encompassed by sheer egoism, aesthetic

enthusiasm, historical impulse or political purpose. In the author notes for the 20th anniversary of *The Whale Rider,* Witi Ihimaera explained he wrote the novel for his daughters who were tired of boys always being cast as heroes. It is rare, however, to have such insight into the author's purpose for constructing a particular text. Authors construct texts at particular cultural, historical, political and social moments. Some texts that may have been (somewhat) acceptable at a particular moment in time can be critically analysed today and (re)constructed. So rather than focus on the author's motivations, which we cannot always know, we can focus on the power or effects of texts.

Regardless of the author's purpose, authors make choices when constructing texts, meaning that all texts have gaps, silences, and particular representations within them. I often talk about the weight of representation. I suggest to *kaiako* that the one-off text that has a sexist, racist, or ableist representation, for instance, is possibly not as problematic as a multitude of texts that represent particular groups in particular ways. That is, when a group finds themselves marginalised or represented unfairly on a regular basis. Or alternatively, when our *ākonga* cannot find themselves or their *whānau* [family] in the texts at school. Please don't get me wrong, I am not saying that *all* texts are not worthy of a critical literacy analysis. But I am saying that the weight of representation can be very heavy.

So what is the purpose of critical literacy? In our research, we suggest the purpose of critical literacy is "to help students focus on uncovering the perspectives and positions that underpin texts, and to ask and judge what these perspectives might mean in terms of the social construction of their world" (Sandretto and Klenner 2011, 14). A critical literacy engagement with texts encourages us to consider the effects of texts.

A primary purpose of critical literacy is agency. I use the term agency to capture "the idea that a reader can have power, through analysis, to agree or disagree with the constructions and representations found in a particular text" (Sandretto and Klenner 2011, 237). Analysis of texts can lead us to decide to affirm or resist them, to use them or (re)design them. In other words, the language of critique can lead us to the language of possibility (Giroux 1988).

Critical literacy is necessarily deeply ethical work. In my work with *kaiako*, we have likened a critical literacy lesson to "opening up Pandora's box" (Sandretto and Klenner 2011, 55). Everyone has different knowledge and experiences that they bring to texts and makes sense of texts differently. The concept of multiple readings acknowledges that we can celebrate our differences and that there is no one correct critical literacy reading of a text. This means that *kaiako* do not know what contributions *ākonga* will make and will have to navigate tricky normative ground. In one meeting *kaiako* explained:

> That's where you get into that shaky ground. So you're busy listening to all these kids' ideas and their multiple readings and you're telling them you know, 'there's no wrong answer'. But then a kid says 'oh you know all women should be in the kitchen'. [And that causes you to question]. Then you go, well hang on, are we actually valuing all of their readings [the same]? (Sandretto and Klenner 2011, 211)

After much discussion, the research group came to the decision that we could not in good conscience value all readings equally. We had a duty to *all ākonga* and as such we had an ethical bottom line, or normative ground: "Our normative ground: free thinking within a parameter. For us, the parameter is that we would not allow students to maintain readings that might be harmful to others" (Sandretto and Klenner 2011, 225). This would require a critical literacy reading of the text the *ākonga* has just contributed: Who might be privileged or disadvantaged by the view they have just shared?

When unpacking the term critical earlier, I noted that power is an important consideration for critical literacy. All texts have effects. Texts have consequences for how we make sense of ourselves, others and the world. Critical literacy is focused on the power of texts and the need for *kaiako* to support *ākonga* to affirm or resist particular positions and representations in texts. Ultimately, it's about agency so that *ākonga* have power over texts, rather than texts having power over *ākonga*. As my colleagues and I have written elsewhere,

> Critical literacy involves navigating the workings of power as captured in texts, critical consideration of the consequences of texts, and ultimately social action… Action can be in the form of (re)constructing a new text to speak back to an unjust or inequitable text or challenging one's thinking. (Sandretto et al. 2021, 117)

Critical literacy practice reminds us that we cannot take texts at face value.

A critical literacy engagement with *The Whale Rider*

In the author notes, Witi explained, "patriarchy and I are old opponents" (Ihimaera 2007, 184). In this short contribution, I argue that *The Whale Rider* is the outcome of a critical literacy analysis by Witi. It can be viewed as the *re*construction of Paikea, where Witi places the granddaughter Kahu as the heir to take up the position of Kahutia Te Rangi, or Paikea.

Witi elaborated on his deconstruction of patriarchy and other inequities in the author notes:

> It has been a major theme in all my work: issues of race, nation, class, gender and sexuality should not delimit the right of all human beings to equity, equality and justice, whatever world they live in. Traditional frameworks must change, to enable leaders to come forward; and a person's qualities should not be subordinated to traditional roles and expectations. (184)

Given this purpose, it is not surprising that Witi wrote *The Whale Rider*.

There are multiple instances in the book where Witi *re*constructs cultural traditions to speak back to patriarchy. In education, we know that culture is not set in stone, a fossil to be placed in a museum. Culture is productive and creative, morphing, evolving, and changing to provide a guide to acting, feeling, and thinking (Campbell 2000). We meet this productive and creative version of culture early on in *The Whale Rider*:

> The trouble was that Koro Apirana could not reconcile his traditional beliefs about Māori leadership and rights with Kahu's birth. By Māori custom, leadership was hereditary and normally the mantle of *mana* [prestige] fell from the eldest son to the eldest son. Except that in this case, there was an eldest daughter. (25–26)

And again, with regard to Kahu's name, the narrator explains:

> I could understand, however, why the old man was so against the idea. Not only was Kahutia Te Rangi a man's name but it was also the name of the ancestor of our village. Koro Apirana felt that naming a girl-child after the founder of our tribe was belittling Kahutia Te Rangi's prestige. From that time onward, whenever Koro Apirana went past the meeting house, he would look up at the figure of Kahutia Te Rangi on the whale and shake his head sorrowfully. (30)

Another example in the novel takes place when Koro Apirana begins a school of learning, but it is just for the boys. He was intent on developing and identifying a leader. Kahu was desperate to attend, and Nanny Flowers did not discourage her.

> Ever since the school had started, Nanny Flowers had been chucking off at Koro Apirana. While she agreed that the instruction should take place, she couldn't help feeling affronted about the exclusion of women. 'Them's the rules,' Koro Apirana had told her. 'I know, but rules are made to be broken,' she had replied in a huff. (53)

I noted before that we need to take a critical literacy lens to the texts we construct as well as the texts constructed by others. I have also noted the tricky ethical ground involved in critical literacy work, and probably no more so than when engaging with a text where we may not have the cultural knowledge to develop an informed criti-

cal literacy analysis. While many have celebrated both, the novel and the movie *The Whale Rider*, it is not without its critics. Māori scholars Brendan Hokowhitu (2007) and Tania Ka'ai (2005), for instance, found the movie problematic, as highlighted in the article by Emeritus Professor Alistair Fox. These critical readings remind us that the work of critical literacy analysis will never be complete.

Earlier I explained that the New Zealand curriculum at the time of my lecture did not provide a policy mandate for kaiako to support their ākonga to grow the practices of critical literacy. However, the curriculum has been undergoing a refresh. The English Learning area for Years 0–6 (ages 5–11) (Ministry of Education 2024) names *Critical analysis* as an important practice for all *ākonga* to develop. It is defined as

> Critical analysis involves close reading, viewing, and listening to texts in order to interpret, appreciate, and challenge them. It enables us to make connections within, across, and beyond texts by analysing the relationships between language and ideas in the texts. When we consider and respectfully discuss different perspectives on texts with others, we develop new insights. (17)

In my view, unfortunately, this description more closely aligns to critical thinking than it does to the practice of critical literacy, lacking explicit attention to power. I remain hopeful, however, that *kaiako* and *ākonga* will leverage the possibilities that may arise through the practices of critical analysis and develop the practices of critical literacy in deliberate and sustained ways.

Conclusion

Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua.

This whakataukī [proverb] aptly captures Māori conceptualisations of time. It means: I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past. In Western understandings of time, the past is behind us and the future is in front. Ranginui Walker (1996) explains:

> In Māori philosophy, there were only two dimensions to time – past and future. The past was designated mua, and the future termed muri. Both had double meanings. Mua also meant 'in front of' or 'ahead'. This means that the past is conceived of as being in front of human consciousness, because only the present and the past are knowable. Muri, designating the future, also means 'behind', because the future cannot be seen. Thus, the individual is conceptualised as travelling backwards in time to the future, with the present unfolding in front as a continuum into the past. (13–14)

I am suggesting that we need to keep the past and future at play as we critically analyse texts in the present.

Praxis, from the work of Brazilian literacy educator Paulo Freire (1999, 33), captures the connections between text and context, it is "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (33). In *The Whale Rider*, Witi has engaged in praxis, in critically reflecting, and rewriting; showing us what is possible.

Glossary

ākonga	student
kaiako	teacher
kupu	word, vocabulary
mana	prestige, influence
mua	past, in front of, ahead
muri	future, behind,
pepeha	introduction
pūrākau	story
tukutuku	weaving
whakairo	carving
whakapapa	heritage
whakataukī	proverb
whānau	family

References

Ardern, Jacinda. "Harvard commencement speech – Democracy, Disinformation and Kindness." *Beehive.govt.nz, New Zealand Government*, 27 May 2022, https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/harvard-commencement-speech-democracy-disinformation-and-kindness, accessed 27 January 2025.

Bull, Geoff, and Michèle Anstey. *Evolving Pedagogies: Reading and Writing in a Multimodal World*. Curriculum Press, 2010.

Campbell, Duane E. *Choosing Democracy: A Practical Guide to Multicultural Education*. 2nd ed., Merrill, 2000.

Cope, Bill, and Mary Kalantzis. "A Grammar of Multimodality." *International Journal of Learning*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2009, pp. 361–425, https://doi.org/10.18848/1447-9494/CGP/v16i02/46137.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra B. Ramos, Continuum, 1999.

Giroux, Henry A. "Literacy and the Pedagogy of Voice and Political Empowerment." *Educational Theory*, vol. 38, no. 1, 1988, pp. 61–75, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.1988.00061.x.

Hokowithu, Brendan. "Understanding Whangara: Whale Rider as simulacrum." *New Zealand Journal of Medina Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2007, pp. 22–30.

Ihimaera, Witi. *The Whale Rider*. Reed Books, 2007.

Ka'ai, Tania Marie. "Te kauae maro o Muri-ranga-whenua (The jawbone of Muri-ranga-whenua): Globalising Local Indigenous Culture – Māori Leadership, Gender and Cultural Knowledge Transmission as Represented in the Film *Whale Rider*." *Portal: Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2005, pp. 1–15, https://doi.org/10.5130/portal.v2i2.92.

McLaren, Peter. *Life in Schools. An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education*. 3rd ed., Longman, 1998.

Ministry of Education. *The New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium Teaching and Learning in Years 1–13*. 2007, https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/content/download/1108/11989/file/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum.pdf, accessed 27 January 2025.

Ministry of Education. (2024, October), *Te Mātaiaho – The New Zealand Curriculum. English Years 0–6*. https://mapaoch00pr-search.azurewebsites.net/api/URLShortnerAPI?PartitionKey=66829054-dea0-4740-a909-190f0208226e&RowKey=6dae538f-bfc6-420b-9e7c-134f64a8fdbc, accessed 27 April 2025.

Orwell, George. *Why I write*. Penguin, 2004.

Sandretto, Susan, and Scott Klenner. *Planting Seeds: Embedding Critical Literacy Into Your Classroom Programme*. NZCER Press, 2011.

Sandretto, Susan, Jane Tilson, and Derek Shafer. "Critical literacy praxis in Aotearoa New Zealand." *The Handbook of Critical Literacies*, edited by Jessica Zacher Pandya, Raúl Alberto Mora, Jennifer Helen Alford, Noah Asher Golden and Roberto Santiago de Roock, Routledge, 2021, pp. 117–124.

Walker, Ranginiu. *Nga pepa a Ranginui: The Walker Papers*. Penguin, 1996.

Escape into Myth or Strategy for Community and Identity? *The Whale Rider* by Witi Ihimaera

Anton Escher

Abstract *This article aims to show that in a 'Western' reading of Witi Ihimaera's book, "The Whale Rider" (1987), myth is of overarching importance to all societies in the world for the preservation of community and identity. In the world of the Whangara myth, three aspects are of importance to the reading of the narrative: the Leviathan, the Whale Rider and the reflection of the real world in the mythical world. The narrative shows that Māori do not flee into myth, but that the integration of myth and the everyday reference to myth is what enables Māori to exist and continue to exist as Māori, because Māori define themselves as Māori through myth. Ultimately, the message of the narrative to preserve and build a community and identity not only for the Whangara community but for all societies around the world is: "Haumi e, hui e, taiki e": Let us unite, come together and stand by each other!*

Keywords *myth; Leviathan; interpretation; whale; community*

0 Prologue

In recent years, the author of the following text has made several work trips to New Zealand with students and colleagues from Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz. When meeting Indigenous people, my experiences and communication always had a touristy, exotic feel to them. After I had deciphered Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* (1987) using the interpretation presented below, this feeling and perception disappeared like a picture puzzle. I had lost the emotional and 'Western-reflective' distance to the people of New Zealand.

1 Introduction

The book *The Whale Rider* (1987) has been translated into more than 20 languages and is a worldwide bestseller. Typologically, the novel can be read as a "New Zealand vari-

ation on South American magical realism, in which both the discourse of the real and the discourse of the magical make ontological claims" (Eckstein 2020). Born in New Zealand in 1944, author Witi Ihimaera stands between cultural worlds, as the Māori Witi Tame Ihimaera-Smiler "has Lowland Scots ancestry on both sides of his family" (Keown 2013, 66). His cultural literacy is remarkable, not only because of his family background, but also because of his professional career, which included diplomatic posts for the New Zealand government in numerous countries around the world. The novel was written in English and was therefore initially aimed at an English-speaking, Western audience. It was not until 1995 that the novel, published in 1987, was translated into the Māori language. Due to the fact that the narrative addresses almost the entire world in the course of its reception, the following questions arise: What is the possible central message of the novel from the perspective of a Western-oriented audience? Given the classification of the narrative as magical realism, the following question further arises: Does the novel describe the Māori's escape from their endangered world into myth, or does the story show a strategy to preserve Māori community and identity through the integration of myth and reality? The book is "about belief as much as about fantasy, and evolves around a rural community, its cultural rituals, and the quest for an affirmative syncretistic identity in times of cultural crisis" (Eckstein 2010, 94). The content can be summarised briefly:

> [T]he narrator is a young man in search of his cultural identity, the heroine is a young girl who desperately tries to win her grandfather's love and recognition and who has a very special connection to the sea and its inhabitants. The grandfather, who gradually becomes more and more obsessed with the search for a successor, and the grandmother, who critically accompanies this search […], are also key whanau actors (Māori for extended family). (JGU 2023)

Niki Caro's successful 2002 film adaptation, which made the novel famous, has come to dominate interpretations of the novel, as numerous examples show (Prentice 2006; Hokowhitu 2007; Visser 2008; Dodd 2012 and Rein 2015). As Eckstein (2010) demonstrates, modifications to the text in different editions play a negligible role in subsequent interpretations.

2 *The Whale Rider* from a broken perspective behind the scenes

Based on the brief summary, the meanings of the structuring characters Rawiri (narrator), Koro Apirana and Nanny Flowers (makers) and Kahu (heroine) are outlined from a broken perspective behind the scenes of the narrative. The formal structure of the narrative comprises 21 sections, divided into the four seasons. They

are framed by a prologue 'The Coming of Kahutia Te Rangi' and an epilogue 'The Girl From the Sea'. The framing deals predominantly with the world of the Māori myth of Whangara. Therefore, the interpretation begins with the myth, which is at the center of the narrative.

2.1 The myth of the Whangara Māori

In the world of the Whangara myth, three aspects are of paramount importance for a Western-centric reading of the narrative: the Leviathan, the Whale Rider, and the reflection of the real world in the mythical world. At the beginning and end of the narrative, the central figure of the myth is referred to as Leviathan: "A dark shape rising from the greenstone depths of the ocean, awesome, leviathan, …" (Ihimaera 1987, 5) and "Leviathan. Climbing through the pounamu depths" (93). The author thus draws on a mythical figure of Hebrew origin, which Thomas Hobbes uses as a symbol for the power of state organisation. The Leviathan symbolises the mortal god (Hobbes 1996, 145) and the organisational form of humans, who themselves created the monster in reality and in their imagination.

Important for the interpretation of the story is, that the appearance of the Leviathan, the "taniwha" (mythical creature) and "tipua" (guardian spirit) (Ihimaera 1987, 93) is accompanied by "awesome singing" (5 and 93) on both occasions. The connection to the mythical world is symbolised by the Whale Rider, who is the forefather, creator, and bringer of life force (*mauri*) for the creation of the community. The Whale Rider is identified as the human and sea god Kahutia Te Rangi of the Whangara: "He came riding through the sea, our sea god Kahutia Te Rangi, astride his tipua, and he brought with him the mauri, the life-giving forces which would enable us to live in close communion with the world" (27). The world of myth is reflected in the everyday world of the Māori. Not only are the actions and behaviour of the married couple Koro and Nanny reflected in the pair of whale bull and whale cow that 'rule' the whale herd, but multiple references in the text also show this connection, such as "Our Koro was like an old whale stranded in an alien present, …" (59). The threat posed by industry and nuclear testing affects both worlds. This mirroring shows the interdependence and mutual conditionality of the worlds.

2.2 Rawiri, the 'Māori storyteller'

In the narrative within the novel, the author is represented by Rawiri. The narrator Rawiri is the brother of Porourangi and grandson of Koro Apirana, as well as the uncle of Kahu, Porourangi's daughter. Three aspects of Rawiri's stories demonstrate his enlightened character, his Western education, and his reflective intellect: self-realisation, mythological competence, and dream narration. Rawiri seeks self-realisation outside New Zealand in Australia and New Guinea. There he discovers that

Māori from his village live "the way they wanted to" (51). He realises that these people could not behave as they wished in their home village because they would have been expelled from the community: "They weren't embarrassed, but hiding the way they lived was one way of maintaining the respect" (52) and remain relatives. The community in New Zealand functions according to traditional norms, which the narrator Rawiri has left behind. The narrator shows that he is familiar not only with Māori mythology, but also with European myths: the reference to their "hedonistic life of the lotus eater" (52) quotes Homer's Odyssey, where an island people consume the intoxicating fruit of the lotus tree. Another example is the metaphor "to pull the sword out of the stone" (58) from the Arthurian legend about the sword Excalibur. These are mythical references that are certainly not taken from the treasure trove of legends of the Māori of Whangara.

Time and again, the narrator Rawiri makes it clear that the world of myth has something to do with dreams, i.e., as soon as the real world intersects with the world of talking whales or communicating dolphins, there is a reference to dreams: "The dolphins were like silver dreams as they disappeared" (74), "Time passed, time passed like a dream" (80), "But there were no television cameras nor radio newsmen to see what occurred in Whangara the following night. Perhaps it was just as well, because even now it all seems like a dream" (90). In almost ingenious passages and ambiguous formulations, the author weaves together the worlds of reality and dreams.

2.3 Koro Apirana and Nanny Flowers, the 'Māori makers'

In my view, although they argue constantly, the married couple Koro Apirana and Nanny Flowers act as a unit with regard to the existence and future of the Whangara tribe. The first names of the two spouses reflect their roles in the story: Koro Apirana is the 'grandfather of the Whangara' and Nanny Flowers is the 'educator of the Whangara'. The couple acts as guardians, shapers, and educators of tradition for the community. Ultimately, it is the eldest who preserves and passes on the tribe's traditions based on their knowledge. The question arises as to how the Māori deal with the modern world that is forcing its way into their community. This concerns not only the dynamics of the Pākehā (white New Zealanders) in the country and the migration of the Māori, but also the physical changes brought about by industry and global politics. This raises the question for the Māori: "And will they still be Maori?" (59). Preserving tradition means preserving the identity of the community, the identity as Māori that the grandfather strives for as the leader of the tribe. "In this respect we both recognised that the answer lay in Koro Apirana's persistence with the wananga sessions, for he was one of the very few who could pass on the knowledge, the sacred kumara, to us" (59). When it comes to preserving tradition, Nanny Flowers acts without regard for the rules handed down: "She had telephoned Porourangi and said that the baby could be named Kahu, after Kahutia Te Rangi" (16). With the

naming Nanny defines Kahu's ancestry and helps determine the girl's identity. "Not only was Kahutia Te Rangi a man's name but it was also the name of the ancestor of our village" (16). In addition, she arranges for Kahu's umbilical cord (*pito*) to be buried in the community's meeting place (*marae*). Nanny also keeps the stone that was retrieved from the bottom of the sea as proof of Kahu's competence, to give just one more example. With her actions, she places the girl in the line of succession of the original ancestor. Grandfather Koro, in turn, explains to the members of the village that the world is divided into two parts: "The real and the unreal. The natural and the supernatural. The present and the past. The scientific and fantastic" (96). He goes on to criticise enlightened, modern society: "He put a barrier between both worlds and everything on his side was called rational and everything on the other side was called irrational" (96). Grandfather Koro Apiriana explains that the myth represented by the whale belongs to both worlds: "It is a reminder us of the oneness which the world once had. It is the pito joining past and present, reality and fantasy. It is both" (96). He then explains the importance of the unity of the world and myth for the existence of the Māori: "and if we have forgotten the communion then we have ceased to be Maori" (96).

2.4 Kahu, the 'Māori heroine'

The central character of the story is without doubt the girl Kahu. Her actions are driven by her desire to earn the respect and recognition of her grandfather. Depending on one's perspective and interpretation, Kahu is the heroine of the story, the successor to the Whale Rider, and the mediator between the worlds of everyday life and Māori mythology. The original rule that only a male firstborn can succeed is overcome, and a young girl takes the place and function of a firstborn for the Māori of Whangara. In doing so, a character in the novel undergoes a dynamic change that, on the one hand, corresponds to the current social norms of European societies and, on the other hand, preserves the community and identity of the Māori. It is not about man or woman, it is about establishing a connection with the myth. The girl Kahu risks her life to be the Whale Rider, which she succeeds in doing in imagination: "SHE WAS the whale rider" (107), "She was Paikea" (107) and "She was Kahutia Te Rangi. She was Paikea. She was the whale rider" (108). Kahu expresses herself completely differently after being rescued from the sea in the real world: "I fell off the whale" (121). This shows that it is not the action with the whale that determines her succession in the real world, but rather the recognition of her succession by the guardians of tradition, by Koro Apirana and Nanny Flowers, and by the Whangara community. The story demonstrates that Kahu has followed in the footsteps of the founder of the Kahutia Te Rangi tribe for generations by risking her life. "Oh, *Paka*, can't you hear them? I've been listening to them for ages now. Oh *Paka*, and the whales are still singing" (122), Kahu says to her grandfather at the end of the

story. This statement manifests the integration of myth and the real world, for the song of the whales always accompanies the appearance of the Leviathan. Kahu fulfils her destiny and connects the 'unreal world' of myth with the 'real world' of the Māori. In order for the unity of the two worlds to be possible for the Māori community as Māori, they must comply with the guardian spirit's request: "Haumi e, hui e, taiki e."

3 The central message of the Māori narrative

It has been shown that the Māori writer formulates a message for the world using the example of the Māori narrative. The protagonists appear to act and argue to a large extent with a Western intellectual background and are therefore also comprehensible to a Western audience. The interspersed Māori words embellish the story and reinforce its authenticity. The Whale Rider's destiny is to spark a dynamic that creates worlds, brings them together, and makes them complement each other, because all worlds are created by the gods and humans. This dynamic can be summed up in the message "Haumi e, hui e, taiki e" [Let's unite, come together, and support each other]! The appeal applies to all Māori who identify as Māori and to the Māori myth that they live by every day. The narrator conveys that the dominance of this mission in Māori life is also evident in the fact that ten of the 21 sections of the story end with this appeal. Witi Ihimaera succeeds masterfully in uniting the worlds of reality and myth, as Lars Eckstein (2020) puts it. Ultimately, the message of the story is about preserving and shaping community and identity: "Haumi e, hui e, taiki e."

The narrative shows that the Māori do not escape into myth, but that the integration of myth and the everyday reference to myth is what enables the Māori to exist and continue as Māori, because the Māori define themselves as Māori through myth.

4 Epilogue

The narrator Witi Ihimaera argues almost throughout with Western reasoning about myth and enlightenment. In doing so, he shows his readers that all societies, regardless of their constitutional rules and lived values, need myth for self-realisation and the formation of community and identity. We at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz also draw on the myth of Johannes Gutenberg, even if we like to treat the myth in the sense of the philosopher Hans Blumenberg (2001, 38) with a "Maß von Unernst" [Measure of unseriousness] and "Leichtfertigkeit" [light heartedness]. The "Gutenberg Spirit" (Krausch 2017) has already been captured in theoretical approaches in a normative paper and culminates in the Christian motto "ut omnes unum sint". The achievements of Johannes Gutenberg, the "man of the

millennium," in the field of printing with movable type are undisputed. His history and work are being studied at our university (e.g., Füssel 2003 and Mattheus 2005). In addition, the 'Gutenberg myth' is honoured as part of the doctoral programme with the examination and celebration community of the doctoral candidate by visiting the monument of Johannes Gutenberg on campus. It is of great significance after 'corona virus restrictions' to bring people back together and revitalise the campus with all members of the university community, students, faculty, and staff, as well as the myth of Johannes Gutenberg in the spirit of our university motto "ut omnes unum sint" and thus with the imperative "Haumi e, hui e, taiki e." Thank you, Witi Ihimaera!

References

Blumenberg, Hans. *Die Arbeit am Mythos*. Suhrkamp, 2001 [1979].

Dodd, Kevin V. "Whale Rider: The Re-enactment of Myth and the Empowerment of Women." *Journal of Religion & Film*, vol. 16, no. 2, Art. 9, 2012, pp. 1–16, https://doi.org/10.32873/uno.dc.jrf.16.02.09.

Eckstein, Lars. "Think Local Sell Global: Magical Realism, the Whale Rider and the Market." *Commodifying (Post)Colonialism: Othering, Reification, Commodification and the New Literatures and Cultures in English*, edited by Rainer Emig and Oliver Lindner, Rodopi B.V., 2010, pp. 93–108.

Eckstein, Lars. "Ihimaera, Witi: The Whale Rider." *Kindlers Literatur Lexikon*, edited by H. L. Arnold, Springer Nature, 2020, pp. 1–2, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-05728-0_8797-1.

Egger, Christoph. "Das Mädchen und die Wale." *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 26 September 2003.

Füssel, Stephan. *Johannes Gutenberg*. 3rd ed., Reinbek, 2003.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Translated by Jutta Schlösser, Meiner, 1996 [1651].

Hokowhitu, Brendan. "Understanding Whangara: Whale Rider as Simulacrum." *New Zealand Journal of Media Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2007, pp. 22–30, https://doi.org/10.11157/medianz-vol10iss2id65.

Ihimaera, Witi. *The Whale Rider.* Heinemann, 1987.

Johannes Gutenberg-Universität (JGU). "Ringvorlesung / Lecture Series. Eine Uni – Ein Buch: *The Whale Rider*. Eine Erkundung Neuseelands mit Witi Ihimaeras Roman." *Eine Uni – ein Buch Mainz*, 7 July 2023, https://eine-uni-ein-buch.uni-mainz.de/programm/ringvorlesung/, accessed 23 March 2025.

Keown, Michelle. "Isles of Voices: Scotland in the Indigenous Pacific Literary Imaginary." *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, no. 9, 2013, pp. 51–67, http://www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue9/keown.pdf, accessed 08 April 2025.

Krausch, Georg. *Leitbild. The Gutenberg Spirit – Moving Minds. Crossing Boundaries*, 3rd ed., edited by Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, 2017, https://www.verwaltung.personal.uni-mainz.de/files/2020/02/JGU_leitbild.pdf, accessed 08 April 2025.

Matheus, Michael. *Lebenswelten Johannes Gutenbergs*. Steiner, 2005.

Prentice, Chris. "Riding the Whale? Postcolonialism and Globalization in *Whale Rider*." *Cross/Culture: Global Fissures. Postcolonial Fusions*, edited by Clara A.B. Joseph, pp. 247–267, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401203098_015.

Rein, Nele. "Wem gehört der Wal? Geschlecht und Ethnizität in *Whale Rider*." *total. Universalismus und Partikularismus in post-kolonialer Medientheorie*, edited by Ulrike Bergermann und Nanna Heidenreich, transcript, 2015, pp. 207–217.

SWR. "Big Read im Sommer: Eine Uni – Ein Buch. Die Uni Mainz liest den Roman 'Whalerider' von Witi Ihimaera." *SWR Kultur Gespräch*, 14 May 2023, https://www.swr.de/swrkultur/literatur/eine-uni-ein-buch-whalerider-von-witi-ihimaera-an-der-uni-mainz-100.html, accessed 08 April 2025.

Visser, Irene. "Exclusion and Revolt in Witi Ihimaera's *Whale Rider*." *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2008, https://journals.openedition.org/ces/9149, accessed 29 April 2025.

Asserting Feminist Claims within Māori Culture: *Whale Rider* (Niki Caro, 2002)[1]

Alistair Fox

Abstract *Despite the popularity of "Whale Rider" (2002) with audiences, some Māori found Niki Caro's cinematic adaptation of Witi Ihimaera's novel culturally offensive. They objected to the film as promoting a paternalistic narrative that ignored the role of Pākehā in the oppression of Māori and denounced the misrepresentation of various tribal traditions. The result, these critics claimed, was merely a simulacrum of Māori culture that distorted the original story. This essay identifies ways in which Caro and her producer deliberately reworked Ihimaera's source story so as to make the film of "Whale Rider" appeal universally across cross cultures with an international audience in mind. In particular, it traces how Caro applied her own personal feminist vision to Ihimaera's original, converting it from a narrative that was culturally specific into a conventional coming-of-age genre film with international box-office appeal.*

Keywords *New Zealand cinema; Witi Ihimaera; Niki Caro; coming-of-age film; Māori culture*

The most important New Zealand movie of 2003, Niki Caro's *Whale Rider*, first shown at the Toronto Film Festival in September 2002, where it was voted *People's Choice*, and released elsewhere the following year, was one of the most successful fiction films made in this country, winning 29 international awards. Apart from being highly successful in New Zealand, with ticket sales of 752,941 (Pivac 2011, 297), making it the fourth most popular locally-made movie to date, even more significantly, it was a huge hit internationally, with foreign box office earnings of $20,662,227.[2] In addition, it was the first feature-length film to be adapted from a novel by Witi Ihimaera, the most prominent Māori writer of fiction, inaugurating several other adaptations based on his works, including *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*

1 This essay was originally published in Alistair Fox, *Coming of Age in New Zealand: Genre, Gender and Adaptation in New Zealand Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017) ISBN 978–1474429443.

2 This figure is taken from Box Office Mojo, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&country=NZ&id=whalerider.htm, accessed 17 July 2016.

(Katie Wolfe 2010),[3] a coming-out drama, and *Mahana* (Lee Tamahori 2016), based on the novel *Bulibasha: King of the Gypsies*, with further plans under way to film his major novel, *The Matriarch*.

Despite *Whale Rider's* popularity with audiences, however, within New Zealand its reception was mixed. In particular, some Māori found the film culturally offensive, and objected to the fact that a Pākehā director had presumed to make it. The scholar Brendan Hokowhitu, for example, saw *Whale Rider* as "a problematic and even dangerous film for the project of Māori decolonization," on the grounds that "Pākehā have embraced this movie because it promotes a conscious paternalistic narrative of nurturing a savage culture while repressing the role of Pākehā in the oppression of Māori" (Hokowhitu 2008, 128, 132). In similar vein, Tania Ka'ai denounced the film as misrepresenting various tribal traditions, arguing that "the patriarchy/feminism division operates very differently in the Ngāti Porou tribe, where *Whale Rider* is based, than it does either in the film or in Eurocentric feminisms" (Ka'ai 2005, 1–15).

What such criticisms point toward is the fact that Caro and her producer, John Barnett of South Pacific Pictures, deliberately reworked the source story of *Whale Rider* for the sake of making the film appeal to an international audience. Barnett, who optioned the book 14 years before the film was actually made, became interested in the story because he felt

> . . . that this is a universal story, that these themes of inherited power and the clash between the contemporary and the traditional, the familial love and the obligations that Koro the chief has that get in his way of exercising that familial love, the role of a woman in society – those were things that it didn't matter where you came from in the world, you were familiar with these things. I really saw it as a story that people would understand wherever they were. (Welch 2003)

For Barnett, in other words, cultural specificity is unimportant compared with the potential for the story to have universal appeal, no matter what society in the world a spectator comes from.

For her part, Niki Caro was attracted to the project because she saw "a coming-of-age story in a young girl that wasn't about a sexual awakening, but was a spiritual awakening, and I thought that was really new, very compelling for me" (Caro 2003). She also opined, however, that "although the book is beautiful it doesn't present itself immediately as an adaptation"; consequently, when presented with the treatment that had already been prepared by the producers, Caro asked whether she could write her own draft that would apply her vision to the film (Kehr 2003).

3 The title of this film for its American release was *Kawa*.

We are confronted, then, with a film that was purposefully directed away from the source story as it was in order to be converted into a film that would appeal universally across cultures – in other words, a recognisable genre film – and a film that would also serve as a vehicle through which the filmmaker could project her own personal "vision." This is precisely the trend that is evident in Christine Jeffs's *Rain* (2001) when compared with the source novel *Rain* (1995) by Kirsty Gunn upon which it is based, and it reflects both the advent of an increasingly strong commercial imperative in New Zealand filmmaking from the 1990s onward, as well as the growing influence of a globalised international culture. The end result was a cinematic version of Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* that presented, in Hokowhitu's words, a "simulacrum" of Māori culture and the original story (2008, 125–126), while transubstantiating its inner meaning in the course of converting the source into a conventional coming-of-age genre film.

Ihimaera's Novel: Mode and Meaning

In terms of certain aspects of its cultural content and manner of presentation, Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* displays a close resemblance to Merata Mita's *Mauri* as an authentically indigenous work – that is, one that views the world from a Māori perspective and invests it with attitudes that derive from a Māori value-system and belief-system. At the heart of Ihimaera's story is the same importance that the character Kara in *Mauri* attributes to the transmission of knowledge through generations, as well as a strong awareness of the line of descent from ancestors. There is also the same sense of time as a spiral, reflected in the frequent return of episodes from the past into the narrative of the present, and the close connection Māori have with the natural environment and its creatures. Above all, in both Mita's film and Ihimaera's novel, there is the same sense of a union between the natural and the supernatural, and a belief in the importance of respecting *tapu* (prohibitions) and the *mana* (prestige, status, spiritual power) of others.

The omnipresence of these values in Ihimaera's story is conveyed through a variety of means. At the beginning of the book, the arrival of the gigantic *tipua* (supernatural being) in the form of a whale is accompanied by magic realism as Paikea, the man who is riding him, "began to fling small spears of mauri seaward and landward": "Some of the mauri in mid flight turned into pigeons which flew into the forests. Others on landing in the sea changed into eels. And the song in the sea drenched the air with ageless music and land and sea opened themselves to him, the gift long waited for: tangata, man." (Ihimaera 1987, 6) When the ancient whale returns near the end of the book, there is "a dull booming from beneath the water, like a giant door opening a thousand years ago," and "streaks of blue lightning came shooting out of the sea like missiles" (92–93). Such eruptions of magic realism are not simply dec-

orative: they serve to intimate the presence of a spiritual, supernatural dimension inherent in the nature of things.

The union of the natural and the supernatural and the communion of Māori with the natural world is also seen on the occasion when Kahu, the girl (named Paikea in Caro's film), dives into the sea to retrieve the carved stone her grandfather Koro has thrown there as a test to identify the boy who is destined to carry on the leadership of his people in the new generation. As Kahu is searching the reef for the stone, "white shapes came speeding out of the dark towards her." They are dolphins who "seemed to be talking to her," and speed her to another area of the reef, where she finds the stone and returns it to the surface (74). Later, near the end of the book, after Kahu has ridden the great whale, when she is found unconscious, "floating in a nest of dark lustrous kelp in the middle of the ocean," dolphins are guarding her, keeping her safe until she is rescued (117).

Equally present is an overarching sense of the importance of *whanaungatanga*, or the kinship network that binds the members of the tribe into a larger unit, rather than placing the primary emphasis on the individual and the nuclear family, as occurs in Pākehā culture (Ka'ai 2005, 5). The existence of this larger network, which encompasses both past and present, and extends over distance and time, is reflected in the inclusion of many plot strands concerning a variety of characters. It is also apparent in the comings and goings of those who are part of the *whanau* (family group), including the great whale himself, to Whangara as the home-place of the tribe. This is not just Kahu's story; it is also the story of Rawiri, the narrator of the story, who is aged 24 – a bikie who leaves home to live in Australia for four years, and then two years in New Guinea, with Jeff, his white flatmate (who foreshadows Jason, the white lover of Michael, the narrator in Ihimaera's *The Uncle's Story*), during which he grows into an understanding of himself as a Māori, not least as a result of encountering the racism of Jeff's parents. It is also the story of Koro, who is described as "like an old whale stranded in an alien present," as he struggles to find a way to understand his role in a changing world (Ihimaera 2000, 59). Not least, it is the story of the "handsome and virile" bull whale himself, who loves the human who became his master, suffers heartache at being separated from him when, having been taken by the whale to Aotearoa, his "golden master had met a woman and had married her." Thereafter, the bull whale yearns to be reunited with his handsome young master in "the dangerous islands to the south-west," being unable to dislodge him from his thoughts (10, 80, 11). The homoerotic overtones in the passages describing the relation between the bull whale and Paikea provide a reminder that, for Ihimaera, this is a very personal novel: it was written for his daughters, Jessica and Olivia, and embodies personal projections, some of them relating to his experience as a gay man, and some of them displaced into the story of Kahu herself, as he intimates in an interview. Despite being someone who has inherited all the expectations of leadership, he says, "I have been able to live a life away from the iwi [tribal kinship group] somewhat in-

consistent with that normally ascribed to any successor: I married a Pākehā woman, I am now a gay man, I have had daughters (not sons), and I don't live with the iwi." (Meklin and Meklin 2004, 358–366, here 363) Thus, just as in the novel Kahu disappoints traditional expectations by being the eldest child of an eldest son, but born a girl, Ihimaera in real life, by being a gay man in a culture that one of his characters describes as "among the most homophobic in the world . . . [in which] I am not supposed to exist," (Ihimaera 2000, 22) similarly contravenes the expectations of the kind of man a leader should be. Ihimaera's main purpose in the novel, therefore, was to open up a space within Māori culture for those who are not recognised within its patriarchal structures. In the case of *The Whale Rider*, this space involves acceptance of females as being equal in worth to males, but behind the claim for recognition of this right, one suspects, was the further claim for acceptance of gay males that Ihimaera would go on to assert in several of his later novels. The underlying thought – merely obliquely hinted at in the yearning of the bull whale for his golden master – is summed up by Sam's recollection of the hierarchical values of Māori society in *The Uncle's Story*, written a little over a decade after *The Whale Rider*: "The male was high and sanctified. Woman was low and common. How much lower were men who loved men ––." (219) Within the structures of *whanaungatanga* (sense of family connection) and *manaaki* (caring for others), these are the values that Ihimaera, through the fiction of *The Whale Rider*, is seeking to change. The point I would emphasise, though, is that in Ihimaera's version of the story, this is a space that he wants to see opened up *within* a Māori tribal perspective, not created by the superimposition of alien values imported from a different culture and imposed upon the Māori one from without. That is the fault that many Māori saw as vitiating Caro's cinematic adaptation of what, in Ihimaera's version, is quintessentially a Māori work.

Caro's Conversion of the Source Story into a Genre Film

In the course of adapting Ihimaera's novel for the screen, Caro, even though, as she rightly claims, "the most important events in the film are very faithful to the book," (Caro 2004) transformed it utterly. In accordance with her view that the most appealing aspect of Ihimaera's story was a coming-of-age element involving a "spiritual awakening," she stripped out any material that did not directly contribute to the depiction of the girl's coming-of-age. Hence, the observing presence of Rawiri is eliminated in order to substitute Paikea (Keisha Castle-Hughes) as the narrator through her intermittent voiceovers. Similarly, the whole story involving Rawiri's sojourn overseas and his relationship with Jeff is suppressed, and his role as the one who leaves the *iwi* is given to Porourangi (Cliff Curtis), Koro's eldest son, thus investing Porourangi with similar issues to those of Paikea, given that he is an artist with a German wife, and hence also contravenes the traditional expectations of his

culture of origin. In Ihimaera's version, to the contrary, Porourangi does not rebel against expectations in this way; instead, he dutifully remarries a Māori woman, Ana, after Kahu's mother has died, and begets another child, which Koro also hopes will be a son. The acceptability of Porourangi in the novel is reflected in the way Koro identifies him as "the one" in his generation to carry on the leadership of the people, unlike his namesake in the film, whom Caro's Koro (Rawiri Paratene) regards as a disappointment (Ihimaera 1987, 58). In Caro's version, a character called "Uncle Rawiri" (Grant Roa) still remains, but he is given an entirely different character, being presented as the stereotype of a fat and lazy Māori, lying outdoors on a couch in the sun with his marijuana pipe, so that he can be set up as a foil for Paikea to reform and rehabilitate in her role as incipient leader.

Just as Caro leaves out the major plot strand involving Rawiri in the novel, so too does she omit any allusions to the bull whale's yearning for his master, or the whale's grief at their separation and desire to be reunited with him. In the film, the whales are literally whales, and nothing more – neither *tipua* nor *taniwha* – which is consistent with a general moving of the story toward a mode of literal realism, with the episodes of magic realism in the novel being almost entirely eliminated from the film, apart from a vague intimation that somehow Paikea can communicate empathically with the whales, as when she says, after the whales are beached, "I called them and they came, but it wasn't right, they were dying."

Along with the disappearance of Ihimaera's magic realism, Caro also omits anything that suggests the presence of the supernatural. Hence, there are no dolphins to guide Paikea to the *rei puta* (whale-tooth ornament) at the bottom of the sea as there are to guide Kahu to the carved stone in the novel, and neither does a female consort persuade the bull whale to return Paikea to the surface as happens to Kahu; instead, Caro's Paikea simply lets go of the whale and floats naturalistically to the surface. In the absence of these magical elements, the whole sense of a numinous world in which human beings are in communion with the ancestors and the creatures of the natural world virtually disappears, to be replaced by a literalised form of realism that represents a different world view altogether.

This is not to say that the film does not seek to depict Māori life in its cultural specificity; indeed, the movie is full of scrupulous care in that regard, showing a range of cultural practices, such as several instances of a *waiata tangi* (song of mourning) and *karakia* (prayer), a *pōwhiri* (welcome ceremony), a *haka* (posture dance), and the launching of a *toiere* (war canoe with carved stem and stern) – all rendered with realistic detail. Despite this attention to external verisimilitude, which is filmed with exceptional beauty by Leon Narbey, the cinematographer, the Māori sensibility with which the novel is so pervasively imbued is absent. One only need compare this film with Merata Mita's *Mauri* to detect the difference. Take, for example, the music, for which Mita uses traditional Māori instruments – the *kōauau* (cross-blown flute), the *pūtorinō* (large traditional flute), and the *pūtātara* (conch shell trumpet) – to suggest

the presence of the ancestors at significant moments. In *Whale Rider*, Caro aims for a similar effect in the music that accompanies each shot of whales swimming, declaring her satisfaction that the composer, Lisa Gerrard, had been able to find "indigenous Māori sounds within her equipment" (Caro 2004). In the absence of a sense of a living connection with the ancestors, however, and of the past in the present, together with an unbroken continuity of values, such as imbues the whole texture of *Mauri*, these simulated "indigenous sounds" lack the full signifying function that they have in the earlier film, serving more as an emotive mood-setting device. There is a certain symbolic pertinence in the fact that the "indigenous" music of *Whale Rider* was made on an electronic synthesiser, bearing the same relationship to the authentic instruments used by Mita as the Māori world presented in Caro's film does to Māori culture in the real world.

The end result of these major omissions – leaving aside for the time being the numerous new scenes that Caro added – is to focus attention almost exclusively on Paikea's coming-of-age experience, turning the film into a classic genre film in the process, albeit one that uses Māori life and customs as a colorful, exotic backdrop.

A Feminist Vision in a Cross-Cultural Context

Caro has been open about her desire to apply her own vision to a girl's coming-of-age story that involves "a spiritual awakening." What does the film show to be the nature of this vision, and what kind of "spiritual awakening" does it imply? It is in this respect that, as several commentators have recognised, Caro implants into the story a feminist vision of female emancipation drawn from globalised western culture at large.

To some extent, this assertion of the right of females to be accorded equality with males in Māori culture was already present in Ihimaera's novel, in the idea that it should make no difference whether the first-born child in the line of succession to lead the tribe is a boy or a girl. This is what Koro himself comes to understand at the end of the novel when he tells Kahu to take her "rightful place" among her people: "You're the best mokopuna in the whole wide world," he said. "Boy or girl, it doesn't matter." Caro, however, pushes this notion a whole lot further, presenting Paikea not simply as a female who deserves to have her place acknowledged, but as a reformer who is prepared to defy and challenge the whole Māori cultural system.

Paikea, in Caro's vision, has a leader's mission and competence from the outset, as her name reflects. In Ihimaera's version, Kahu only becomes "Paikea" when she rides the whale, just as Kahutia Te Rangi, the ancestor after whom she is named, was given another name, Paikea (humpback whale), to commemorate his voyage to Aotearoa; in other words, it was a name that was earned by the performance of a heroic deed (Ihimaera 1987, 27). In contrast, Caro's heroine in the film is called

"Paikea" from the beginning, suggesting that in the filmmaker's conception she already has those outstanding qualities.

This reformulated conception is reflected in a series of new episodes that Caro invented to show Paikea's leadership in action. On several occasions, she is seen chastising members of the tribe for smoking (a health issue among the Māori population), as when she rebukes her grandmother, Nanny Flowers (Vicky Haughton), and two of her older women friends for smoking, or when she upbraids Hemi (Mana Taumaunu) for the same misdeed, having caught him smoking outside their school (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Paikea (Keisha Castle-Hughes) reproaches Hemi (Mana Taumaunu) for smoking in "Whale Rider".

Source: *Whale Rider*, dir. Niki Caro, 2002

She also shames Rawiri, who has become "fat and ugly" through indolence, into jogging to regain his health, and performs the role of a comforter to her own father when she explains why Koro regards him (and her) with disapproval.

Furthermore, Caro's Paikea is given additional exceptional competencies that illustrate her superior qualifications for assuming leadership of the tribe. In one new episode, for example, when Koro is trying to get an outboard motor to start and the starter-cord breaks, Paikea uses her ingenuity to join it together again and succeeds in starting the engine (Fig. 2). The symbolism of this scene is obvious: whereas her grandfather cannot start the motor that will propel his people forward, his granddaughter, with her superior skills, is able to do precisely that.

This use of a boat as symbolising the tribe itself is duplicated in the central symbol of the whole film, a half-built canoe that has been left abandoned and unfinished, stranded, like the whales will be, high and dry, unable to travel. Caro explains that she invented the *waka* (canoe) to serve "as an image to speak for a community, for a people, for a culture that were without constant sustenance, which is still magnificent, but runs the risk of falling into decay" (Caro 2004).

Fig. 2: Paikea (Keisha Castle-Hughes) fixes her grandfather's outboard motor in "Whale Rider".

Source: *Whale Rider*, dir. Niki Caro, 2002

The logic of using the canoe as a symbol of the tribe and its future requires that Paikea, as leader, take control of it and, indeed, at regular intervals through the movie she is shown standing in the middle of the *waka*. On one of these occasions, as Caro points out, "Pai's blanket, when she is standing in the waka, chanting, starts to look like a *korowai*, the cloak of a leader; she is starting to feel literally like the chief she is becoming" (ibid.). Finally, at the end of the film, once the *waka* has been completed and is "reborn, flying," we see Paikea "in what is known as the *rangatira* position – the chief's position, the most prestigious position" as the boat heads boldly into the future on a new journey of discovery (ibid.).

As satisfying as Paikea's occupation of Caro's invented *waka* might be in terms of the feminist ideology of the filmmaker's vision, in real life to have the girl trespass into the space of the canoe, let alone assume the chief's position, amounted to a breach of *tapu* in terms of Māori spirituality. Caro herself was highly aware of this, as she explains in her commentary: "women traditionally should not be in these canoes, and we had to have a *tapu*-lifting ceremony to make it safe for her to be in there, for me to be in there" (ibid.). Caro's willingness to breach *tapu* in this way, in a manner that Ihimaera scrupulously avoids in his version of the story, attests to the zeal with which she promotes a distinctly Europeanised feminist agenda in the film – the personal "vision" that she declared she wanted to "apply."

It is small wonder, then, that many Māori were offended by the movie, especially as the strict rules of *tapu* were repeatedly breached in a number of the new scenes Caro invented to augment Ihimaera's fable in order to convert it to her purpose. Regarding a new scene early in the film, in which children present a pantomime version of the story of the whale's arrival at Whangara, Caro notes: "There was some discussion about how appropriate it was in this sacred place [Whitireia, the meeting house] to have the whale farting, but as we know, farts are funny" (ibid.). *Tapu* is further breached twice during the scene of the *pōwhiri* to welcome the boys: first,

when, at her grandmother's instigation, Paikea leads the boys on to the *marae* (the open area in front of the meeting house), which is a man's role; and, second, when she takes a seat on the *paepae* (orators' bench), the front row of seats occupied by the visitors (Fig. 3). Again, Caro was aware of how culturally provocative this addition was: "When you watch the film with a Māori audience and she sits down there, you can hear an audible gasp – it's so transgressive, what she does" (ibid.).

Fig. 3: Paikea (Keisha Castle-Hughes) breaches tapu by sitting on the paepae, reserved for men, at a pōwhiri in "Whale Rider".

Source: *Whale Rider*, dir. Niki Caro, 2002

Similarly, she adds several scenes showing Paikea's determination to learn how to fight with a *taiaha* (long wooden weapon), and depicts her defeating Hemi in a confrontation, prompting the angry Koro, who has been instructing his *wānanga* (school) of boys in the art of the *taiaha*, to exclaim: "What have you done? You have broken the *tapu* of this school!" (ibid.).

The insistent provocativeness with which Caro challenges Māori customs in the furtherance of a white feminist agenda explains the indignation expressed by a Māori woman scholar such as Tania Ka'ai. For Ka'ai, the depiction of Māori culture in *Whale Rider* was a travesty that reflected misunderstanding of certain assumptions and practices that diverged from Pākehā ones. She particularly objected to the scene showing Paikea delivering the *karanga* (call), traditionally executed only by a *kuia* (elderly woman) during the *pōwhiri*:

> This is simply inconceivable in Māori society, for her grandmother was exposing her to the risk of *kanga* [curses]. Regardless of Paikea's inherited status, she is vulnerable because she has not yet reached puberty and therefore a prime candidate for such practices. Furthermore, Paikea behaved as if she was a child brought up by her father in Germany, with no knowledge of Māori culture, when she sat on the front pew with the men. A child raised by her grandparents would simply not be-

> have in this way. This is an example of the Eurocentric feminist belief that women can challenge a supposed male hegemonic practice that appears to discriminate against Māori women and, therefore, relegates them to lesser positions in Māori society. The disregard for the cultural significance of the *marae* and the protection of women is masked by this Eurocentric feminist challenge, thus portraying Māori as a 'barbaric' people who have no respect for women. (Ka'ai 2005, 8)

Ka'ai also took exception at the way Caro showed Hemi striking Koro on the back during a *taiaha* lesson: "it is simply inconceivable that a child, male or female, would beat an elder let alone a tribal leader with their *taiaha* (a weapon and oratory staff). To do so would be to commit a *hara* (a cultural offence of the worst order)" (11). In the light of Ka'ai's objections, therefore, one can see that, as fervent and committed as the film was, Caro, in the course of altering her source to fit the agenda of her personal vision, whether wittingly or unwittingly, transposed the story from being a Māori one, to one that is seen through Pākehā eyes, and not without a degree of condescension.

This difference of vision is reflected in a radical contrast that exists between the respective endings of the novel and the film. Ihimaera's Koro finally accords Kahu the acceptance that she has always craved, in spite of her gender, by telling her that, "Boy or girl, it doesn't matter." This prompts Kahu, in return, to reciprocate by saying that he is "the best koro in the whole wide world," (Ihimaera 1987, 122) Caro's Koro, in contrast, is punished for his patriarchal assumptions by being humbled – a diminution of status that is reflected in his last words addressed to Paikea: "Wise leader, forgive me. I am just a fledgling new to flight," which imparts a different message altogether by elevating Paikea to a status above her grandfather. The difference is highly significant. In Ihimaera's version, Kahu, in order to receive the acknowledgment she longs for, needs to pass a test that demonstrates her connection to the *mauri*, or life force, in the natural world; this is what will equip her to lead her people. In contrast, Caro's Paikea already has superior leadership qualities, and the test is transferred to Koro, for whom passing the test amounts to conceding that his granddaughter has those qualities, and hence can supersede him as a "wise [for which read 'wiser'] leader" whose feminist enlightenment is superior to his benighted patriarchal blindness. Caro thus passes a boundary of disrespect that Ihimaera was not prepared to transgress.

One further aspect of the cinematic version needs to be noted. As film scholar Bruce Babington astutely observes, the historical markers in the novel that evoke the history of Māori race relations with Pākehā, such as Koro's involvement in politics and references to Waitangi Tribunal settlements have been completely erased from the film, which makes the issues presented in the film non-specific and hence readable "in terms of both the indigenous community and the larger society, thus catering not only to national desires, but also international ones" (Babington 2007,

228–229). The only presence of Pākehā in the movie occurs in the fleeting glimpse we get in the final sequence of Porourangi's German wife, which implicitly suggests, as Māori scholars like Hokowhitu have argued, that the film sees the future for Māori as one in which Māori cultural distinctiveness is assimilated into a merging of the races under an "enlightened" Eurocentric set of values. While this erasure of difference between the races through the elimination of historical makers of the relationship between Māori and Pākehā may have made the film palatable to Pākehā and overseas audiences, commensurately, it made it less than satisfying to Māori. As the Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay wryly observed, to the extent that *Whale Rider* is a Māori film at all, it is an "indigenous film for beginners" (Calder 2003).

Māori Films after *Whale Rider*

Although Caro stepped well beyond where Ihimaera had felt he wanted to go in claiming the right to equality of women in Māori culture, crossing boundaries with respect to *tapu* that his fiction shows him as having been careful to observe, she was not alone in seeing a need for Māori culture to change. Indeed, Ihimaera himself would soon go on to write subsequent novels that would challenge the traditional culture even more aggressively, especially in *Bulibasha: King of the Gypsies* (1994), and *The Uncle's Story* (2000). In these two later novels he would depict protagonists who stand up to the patriarchal tyranny and bullying of a grandfather and a father, respectively, who are far more despotical than Koro is presented as being in *The Whale Rider*. Ihimaera's challenge to traditional Māori culture in these later novels is direct and explicit: in *The Uncle's Story*, for instance, he would also assert the right for a Māori man to be both Māori and gay, without relinquishing "the mana, the tapu, the ihi or life force and the wehi or dread that the dynamic of being a man depended on" (Ihimaera 2000, 156). Both of these themes – the rejection of patriarchal authoritarianism, and the right to be gay without loss of mana or sacredness – would in turn be developed in subsequent films adapted from Ihimaera's works – in *Mahana* (2016) and *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (2010) – suggesting a move away from the ideal of a "Fourth Cinema" embodying traditional Māori values, as exemplified in *Mauri*.

At the same time, subsequent films by Māori, on Māori subjects, display the same trend towards international genre cinema that is evident in Caro's *Whale Rider*. This tendency, which is particularly apparent in the two coming-of-age smash hits directed by Taika Waititi, *Boy* (2010) and *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* (2016) attests to two forces that would influence Māori filmmaking in the future: the incursion of globalised popular culture on one hand, and the effects of the development in New Zealand of biculturalism as a state-sponsored policy on the other. Whereas the former would supply a whole banquet of tropes from a variety of genres that filmmakers

could draw upon, the latter would license the incorporation of certain Pākehā practices and values. Both encouraged the evolution of new forms of cultural hybridity as a dominant characteristic of coming-of-age films in the second decade of the new millennium.

References

Babington, Bruce. *A History of the New Zealand Fiction Feature Film*. Manchester University Press, 2007.

Calder, Peter. "Riding High on 'Whale' Tale World Report: New Zealand Success of Whale Rider Promotes New Zealand Film Industry." *Variety* 393:5, 2003, A2.

Director's Commentary. Niki Caro, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, DVD, 2004.

Hokowhitu, Brendan. "The Death of Koro Paka: 'Traditional' Māori Patriarchy." *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2008, pp. 115–141.

Ihimaera, Witi. *The Uncle's Story*. Penguin, 2000.

Ihimaera, Witi. *The Whale Rider*. Heinemann, 1987.

Ka'ai, Tania M. "*Te Kauae Mārō o Muri-ranga-whenua* (The Jawbone of Muri- ranga-whenua): Globalising Local Indigenous Culture – Māori Leadership, Gender and Cultural Knowledge Transmission as Represented in the Film *Whale Rider*." *Portal: Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2005, pp. 1–15, https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/portal/article/view/92/59, accessed 11 April 2025.

Kehr, Dave. "At the Movies." *The New York Times*, Section E, 6 June 2003, p. 23.

Meklin, Margaret, and Andrew Meklin. "This Magnificent Accident: An Interview with Witi Ihimaera." *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2004, pp. 358–366.

[Niki Caro]. "Interview with Niki Caro, Writer/Director of *Whale Rider*." *The Movie Show*, Episode 12, 11 May 2003.

Pivac, Diane, Frank Stark, and Lawrence McDonald. *New Zealand Film: An Illustrated History*. Te Papa Press, 2011.

"Whale Rider." *Box Office Mojo*, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&country=NZ&id=whalerider.htm, accessed 11 April 2025.

Welch, Dennis. "The Producer." *New Zealand Listener*, vol. 189, no. 3295, 2003, pp. 20–24.

Addendum

Acknowledgements

The project would not have been possible without support. We would like to express our gratitude to the Stifterverband and Klaus Tschira Foundation for including Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU) in the *One University – One Book* series, to Creative New Zealand for supporting Witi Ihimaera's trip to Germany, and to the Vice President for Studies and Teaching at JGU, Prof. Dr. Stephan Jolie, for supporting the lecture series.

We are very grateful to Sirin Zeynep Aytun for her assistance in editing the volume and Linda Thiele for proofreading. The publication was kindly supported by the Publication Fund of JGU Mainz.

Authors

Dr. Mita Banerjee is Professor and Chair of American Studies at the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. She is the author of seven monographs, in which she explores the way in which literary and cultural texts might contribute to addressing some of the major challenges of our time, from climate change to refugee crises, aging societies and digitalisation. She has been especially fascinated by how the humanities may be in dialogue with the life sciences. Her recent book, *Centenarians' Autobiographies*, published with De Gruyter in 2024, investigates the relationship between life writing narratives and the medical paradigm of "Successful Aging."

Dr. Christoph Bläsi is Professor for book studies at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. Current fields of research include reading (surveying, categorisation of positive effects, etc.), AI in publishing and business aspects of educational media, his teaching covers aspects of book business and management as well as digital publishing.

Michaela Castellanos is a Ph.D. candidate in English at Mid-Sweden University. Anchored in American Studies, she enjoys researching and collaborating across disciplinary boundaries. In her doctoral dissertation, she analyses literature and film in which cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises) are prominently featured from ecocritical and animal studies perspectives.

Dr. Jennifer Cattermole is Associate Professor in Music at the University of Otago, New Zealand. She recently completed a book about the origins and development of Māori and Moriori musical instruments titled *Echoes from Hawaiki*, with the support of a prestigious Royal Society of New Zealand's Marsden grant. Her other research interests include music policy and politics, community music-making, and the role of music in reflecting and constructing place and identity.

Dr. Dieter Dörr is Professor Emeritus of Public Law, International and European Law, Media Law at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. He was Director of the Mainz Media Institute, Director of the Institute for European Media Law (EMR) in Saarbrücken, Member of the Advisory Panel on Media Diversity of the Council of Europe and a part-time judge at the Higher Regional Court of Koblenz. He has published extensively on national and international media law and international law (legal status and right to self-determination of indigenous peoples).

Dr. Anton Escher is Professor for Cultural Geography at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. His research interests are North Africa and the Middle East, the field of migration, migrant narratives, historic towns, indigenous people, and film geography.

Dr. Alistair Fox is Professor Emeritus at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, who specialises in English Tudor literature and history, New Zealand literature and cinema studies, and contemporary literary and film theory.

Witi Ihimaera was the first Māori to write a novel, *Tangi*, in 1973. He celebrated 50 years as one of the world's leading indigenous writers and thinkers by participating in the celebrations at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz attendant on his sixth book, *The Whale Rider* (1987), later made into the internationally acclaimed feature film in 2002. He continues to participate steadily in many creative disciplines as a teacher, essayist and lecturer as well as writer, and has an impressive body of fiction, film, theatre and television to his credit.

Wolfgang Jäger is a teacher at a secondary school in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. His fields of research are children's and young adult media and their didactics, democracy education, and digitisation in education.

Dr. Angela Kölling is currently Professor of Anglophone Studies at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. Her research interests include Oceanian literature and cultural studies of the digital realm (terra nullius 4.0, digital natives, Pacific Islands in the metaverse). Her work appeared in international journals, such as *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies, English Text Construction*, and *The Journal of New Zealand and Pacific Studies*.

Dr. Karyn Paringatai (Ngāti Porou) is Professor in Māori Studies at Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka – University of Otago, Dunedin, Aotearoa New Zealand. Her research interests are varied but centre on the application of Māori cultural knowledge within a diverse range of subject areas. She is a descendant of Paikea and often sings about his exploits whenever the occasion arises.

Dr. Julia Sander is Professor of contemporary German literature specialising in reading and literature education at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. Her fields of research are children's and young adult media and their didactics, critical literacy, and reading promotion in all-day schools.

Dr. Susan Sandretto is Professor of Education in *Te Kura Ākau Taitoka* [College of Education], *Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka* [University of Otago], Ōtepoti [Dunedin], Aotearoa New Zealand. Her fields of research are critical literacy, critical multiliteracies, and education policy. She contributes to undergraduate and postgraduate education in education studies and initial teacher education.

Dr. Thomas Tütken is a geochemist and paleontologist. He researches and teaches as a professor at the Institute of Geosciences at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. In his research, he uses isotope analyses of fossil teeth to reconstruct the diet, environmental and climatic conditions, as well as the paleobiology and mobility of extinct vertebrates.

Dr. Anke Vogel is a research and teaching associate in the Book Studies Department at the Gutenberg Institute for World Literature and Written Media at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. Her research and teaching interests include book market research (digital transformation, communication, sustainability), reading and readers research and children's and young adult book studies.

Dr. Svenja Völkel is Senior Researcher at the Department of English and Linguistics of the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. Her fields of research include linguistic anthropology, language typology, and cognitive linguistics with a regional focus on Oceania, particularly Polynesia, where she has conducted intensive field research since 2001. For the project, she spent about two months in New Zealand – at the University of Otago in Dunedin and in Auckland.

Dr. Bettina Wild is Lehrkraft für besondere Aufgaben at the German Department of the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. Her fields of research are children's and young adult literature and their didactics and literary learning.