correspondents at large

A Bicultural Education

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IN 1995 I TAUGHT A COURSE IN NEW ZEALAND LITERATURE AT TOKYO UNIVERSITY. THE STUDENTS WERE ATTENTIVE, AND CURIOUS ABOUT New Zealand, but they found my Kiwi English hard to follow, being accustomed to American or British varieties. I wondered about their seeming tolerance recently while teaching a similar course to undergraduates back home, at Victoria University, in Wellington, when one of the Māori students complimented a Pākehā (New Zealand European) colleague for her Māori pronunciation.[1] Like most Pākehā, I have a rudimentary grasp of Māori, enough to be familiar with the words and phrases that have entered everyday speech and those in the poetry and fiction I teach. But I cannot conduct a conversation in Māori or read a Māori text, and I am as embarrassed by the irritation that my pronunciation of te reo (the Māori language) causes Māori speakers as I was by the difficulty my rising terminals and strange accent posed for competent English speakers in Japan.

Embarrassment about one's inability to be understood in a foreign country is not, however, the same as embarrassment about one's pronunciation of the native language at home, especially when one's country has a colonial history of language damage it is seeking to redress. New Zealand has been a bicultural country since the late 1980s, a descriptor especially noticeable in education at all levels, which includes schools that strongly emphasize learning te reo, from kōhanga reo (preschools) to kura kaupapa Māori (Māori immersion schools) and wānanga (universities). These institutions are attended by Pākehā as well as Māori students. The overwhelmingly English-speaking country has also been bilingual in a variety of public and everyday forums since 1987, when Māori became an "official" language.[2] Those educated in mainstream New Zealand schools since the 1980s now have a reservoir of Māori songs and phrases. They can count in Māori and list the Māori names of birds and colors. They can sing parts of the national anthem in Māori and—not always competently, but enthusiastically—perform the haka (notably "Ka Mate," as performed by the All Blacks rugby team) at graduation

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ceremonies, sporting triumphs, or on London pub crawls.[3] Those who have set out to learn the language more intensively for cultural or professional reasons can respond confidently to welcomes in Māori contexts and converse in te reo with varying degrees of fluency.

Compared with other settler societies, then, New Zealand would seem to set a standard for Indigenous recognition. Aotearoa New Zealand, as the country is now widely known, has done much to address the ill deeds of a colonial past. A settlement process based on the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi has spent nearly thirty years settling land claims and making apologies to affected iwi (tribes).[4] Māori cultural protocol is recognized in the judicial system, welfare practice, arts funding, and education.

The question remains, however, whether becoming Aotearoa New Zealand heralds more than a nominal equality. Does it also indicate that historical wrongs have finally been resolved, yielding a postcolonial identity as coequal peoples? Well, no, although the advances reflected by the adoption of a new, conjoined name are significant. By the hard measures of imprisonment, poverty, and educational statistics, Māori remain severely disadvantaged. By the softer measures of public discourse and official recognition—the naming of mountains, the occasional diverting of highways from sacred sites—biculturalism has its successes. State support for te reo is envied by First Nation peoples in other settler societies. And if talk-back radio callers still speak the language of Anglo-Saxon prejudice, their hosts are often Māori with equally outrageous opinions.

What of those Pākehā most disposed and equipped to realize the bicultural ideal: intellectuals in the universities, especially humanities professors who teach national history and literature? Since the 1950s writers and literary intellectuals have been enormously important in shaping the bicultural identity of the country. Most dramatically, the poet James K. Baxter in the late 1960s became an example to the idealistic young of a new kind of "Pakeha Maori," not the colonial variety of roguish European who adopted an Indigenous lifestyle but a modern citizen and celebrity finding a source of spiritual plenitude in Māori life and urging other Pākehā to place that fullness at the center of national attention. Ironically, Baxter underwent his bicultural epiphany in 1958–59 on a UNESCO-sponsored trip to India and Japan to investigate educational publishing (Millar). Deeply impressed by the experience of being the other and observing that poverty was less humanly destructive in India than in New Zealand,[5] Baxter rejected the view of education as a benevolent means of raising a premodern people to the superior condition of Europeans. Instead, he believed that Pākehā should reverse their system of values and learn from Māori in a spirit of humility.

Fifty years ago Baxter, the scion of distinguished academics, visited universities dressed like a medieval mendicant urging students to abandon the academy; many responded positively. Today, as enrollment in the humanities shrinks and the state hustles scholars toward the "useful" disciplines, students have little tolerance for romantic naysaying.

Nor was his radicalism embraced among the literary intellectuals he bothered for cash while castigating them for the emptiness of the education they supplied to would-be members of the bourgeoisie. Yet intellectuals were important in shaping a bicultural country. The role that less self-dramatizing literary intellectuals like the Auckland University lecturer and novelist Bill Pearson played in shifting postwar values was crucial. From the early 1950s to the emergence of the Māori Renaissance, in the 1970s, Pearson was an exemplary, and modest, public intellectual, trenchantly anatomizing the emptiness of Pākehā society, inconspicuously supporting Māori writers like Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace, and welcoming their literary arrival as

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a force that might fill a gap in the dominant forms of settler society. During the 1970s and 1980s, not without dissensions and disputes,[6] the Māori and Polynesian presence would become more prominent in the Auckland University English department, which by the 1990s counted Ihimaera and the Samoan-born Albert Wendt among its professors.

Since the 1980s, historians have also proved crucial to the articulation of a bicultural society, revisiting Māori experiences of colonization not from a position of superior knowledge but with a view to constructing a consensual and collaborative history. In Judith Binney's bicultural histories, the terms of inquiry in the gathering, interpretation, and transmission of cultural knowledge are scrupulously negotiated with, rather than imposed on, their subjects. James Belich's definitive postcolonial studies of the country's history celebrate Māori military adaptation during the wars over land in the mid–nineteenth century, arguing that Māori strategists successfully developed the techniques of trench warfare before the Europeans did—a notable interruption of the narrative of European dominance over Indigenous peoples throughout the nineteenth century (*New Zealand Wars* 296–97; *Making* 210–11).

These revisionary bicultural interpretations of the country's history met relatively little public resistance. There was no New Zealand equivalent of Australia's "history wars," in which conservative historians contested overwhelming evidence of extreme injustice to Aborigines, quibbling over the number of those kidnapped or killed by their ancestors (Windshuttle). Indeed, a difficulty for those writing New Zealand settler historiography lies in the continuity between their own progressivism and that of the Victorians they reprove. Bicultural reforms since the early 1980s are not wholly new or even necessarily postcolonial. New Zealand established a quota of Māori members of Parliament in 1868, and propertied Māori men gained the franchise in 1852 (extended to all Māori men in 1867), long before women of any ethnicity did, in 1893. Early colonial administrators and missionaries learned the Māori language, and late colonial poets borrowed Māori culture for their verse. Katherine Mansfield, as a wealthy Wellington schoolgirl eager to "see Maoris" on a camping trip through the remote Urewera district in 1907, carefully recorded Māori phrases in her journal (91).

Without minimizing the catastrophic losses of land, language, and autonomy Māori *s*uffered throughout the late nineteenth century, one can observe that the New Zealand settlers' attitude toward race was self-consciously progressive compared with that of settlers in other colonies. While the same hierarchy of Victorian racism operated in New Zealand and Australia, the hard racial attitudes that Australia shared with the United States and southern Africa did not take hold in New Zealand, or were not applied to Māori, although a sentimental view of the dying race was.

The birth of Victorian progressivism coincided with the founding, in 1840, of the British colony, which was visited by Victorian literary tourists, including Samuel Butler, who settled there from 1860 to 1864 and whose experience of Māori influenced *Erewhon* (During 47–49). Progressive ideas were embedded in education policy at all levels. David Hall points out that the poet-administrator Alfred Domett "foreshadowed" the view embodied in the 1877 Education Act that education should be "free, compulsory, and secular." From the education of the hero and heroine in Domett's epic cross-cultural romance, *Ranolf and Amohia* (1872 [Stafford and Williams 49–53]), to Mansfield's Wellington school days, thirty years later, a colonial education characteristically involved racial mixing (Mansfield carried this further than the Edwardian norm by having a lesbian affair with a Māori classmate, Maata Mahupuku). Education in the "native schools," though

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conducted in English and aimed at producing pliant workers, was often idealistic and occasionally seriously academic. Yet the British colonials in New Zealand did not extend their (theoretical) admiration for Māori to other Indigenous peoples, and their sentimentalizing did not temper their enthusiasm for land appropriation. Domett, who was briefly premier, favored harsh policies toward Māori.

What does it mean, then, to teach postcolonial literature—or colonial literature from a postcolonial perspective—in a country where the legacy of colonization is still deeply inscribed in the language one uses? It means that the particulars of colonial history need to be acknowledged and that drawing too sharp a distinction between the ethical landscape of the present and that of the past should be avoided. The literary intellectuals of mid-twentieth-century cultural nationalism—Allen Curnow, Denis Glover, and Charles Brasch—rejected local representations in colonial verse, where Māori myth and native birds, as they saw it, decorated a fictive and sentimental colonial culture. In a sense, Pākehā biculturalism returns to the heartily rejected period when white New Zealanders proudly wore the name Maoriland, just as New Zealand's recent tourism promotion depends on Māori to offer an attractive point of difference from other "natural" countries. Moreover, the colonial habit of celebrating Māori for their past while excluding them from the modern reappears in the reverent celebration of Māori culture as if it were unrelated to Māori life mired in the economic and social adversities of the present. Both colonial and postcolonial periods, in fact, are more ambivalent than this comparison allows, but both exhibit a Pākehā wish to place Māori in an idealized and unifying national imaginary.

If contemporary Pākehā intellectuals are thus attached to their settler forebears, in what sense are they postcolonial? Certainly, they are less capable across a range of disciplines than the omnicompetent Scottish scholars who founded their humanities departments. Victoria University's name indicates the persistence of Victorianism in Pākehā culture, just as the ubiquity of Māori street names indicates Victorian-colonial enthusiasm for memorializing the noble people they assumed, regretfully, they had supplanted. The last of the University of New Zealand's four "university colleges" established in the nineteenth century, Victoria University accepts its obligations to observe the Treaty of Waitangi in its governing structure, organizing systems, customs, and practice. Many staff members take courses in Māori language and culture as part of their professional development. Yet in Victoria University Māori-English bilingualism is less observable in ordinary conversation than, say, French-English is in Canadian universities. The analogy might seem unbalanced in that it compares relations between a colonizing language and an embattled Indigenous language with two languages jointly possessed of institutional and commercial power. But if Pākehā are truly to claim postcolonial status, they might follow Baxter's lesson in learning from the other and upend the entrenched relations of power in a settler nation by aiming at a rigorous bilingualism.

Victoria University is home to a prestigious writing school whose founder, the poet Bill Manhire, has conceived of the poem as a microcosm of a society conducting a vast "conversation" in mixed registers and languages (150–56). Such a conversation can only be fully conducted in both, or all, the languages of the nation's colonial history, especially by those who teach it.

Notes

1. *Pākehā* may also refer to Europeans generally. The words *Māori* and *Pākehā* have macrons in this essay, since that is the general rule in New Zealand. Because they are New Zealand–English words, not foreign terms,

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they—and other New Zealand–English words, like *te reo*—are not italicized.

2. English is not a de jure official language, merely a de facto one; only Māori and New Zealand Sign Language are de jure official.

3. The haka is a traditional war dance performed before matches by the national rugby team, the All Blacks. "Ka Mate" is a well-known form of the haka.

4. The Treaty of Waitangi was an agreement between Māori leaders and representatives of the British Crown that aimed to establish overall British governance while preserving traditional Māori rights to and authority over their lands, fisheries, and treasured objects.

5. Baxter observed that in Delhi the poor lived "in chambers of the Mogul tombs," while in New Zealand they had "the Health authorities and the Child Welfare Division on their backs" (qtd. in Millar). He believed, moreover, that the materialistic culture of settler New Zealand made the experience of poverty more shameful there than it was in Indian village life or in traditional Māori communities.

6. C. K. Stead famously claimed that Keri Hulme was not sufficiently Māori to win a prize for Māori writing (102–04).

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