“The Way of Survival”

The Importance of Children in Patricia Grace’s *Potiki*, *Cousins* and *Baby No-Eyes*
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Introduction

Māori Literature and Patricia Grace

Because Māori culture has such a rich oral tradition it took a while before anything was written down or published. Norman Simms claims that “a written literature began in the Māori language early in the nineteenth century but until recently was limited to non-narrative writings” (223). However, he is speaking of writings in Māori reo, language, here. The tradition of published fiction by Māori in the English language is not yet half a century old. It started in 1964, with the publication of No Ordinary Sun, a book of poems by Hone Tuwhare, and has been flourishing ever since. There are several themes in literature by New Zealand’s best known Māori writers, which allow us to see Māori literature as different from English literature in general. According to Reina Whaitiri and Robert Sullivan they are “political struggle, spiritual survival, the importance of recovering and sustaining Māori traditions, the conflict between nature and the urban environment, and the plight of whānau, hapū, and iwi (family, tribe, and people) in modern society” (77). These themes are what the writings by the most important writers have in common.

Witi Ihimaera (born in 1944) is perhaps the most well known Māori author. He was the first Māori to publish a novel (Tangi) and a collection of short stories (Pounamu, Pounamu) in English. Both were published in 1973. Apart from novels and short story collections he has also written plays and composed operas and he is, as Whaitiri and Sullivan write, New Zealand’s “leading anthologist” because “his five-volume anthology, Te Ao Mārama, is the most complete record of contemporary literature ever published” (78). An interesting fact about Ihimaera is that he stopped writing for ten years in 1975, because he felt that “his early work was ‘tragically out of date’” (Evans 11). When he had resumed writing he published his novel The Matriarch in 1986. In her study of Australian Aboriginal and New Zealand Māori Literature The Circle & The Spiral Eva Rask Knudsen remarks that Ihimaera “focuses on the issue of self-representation” (338) in this novel. He is “not as preoccupied with writing back to the European centre as he is concerned with writing back to a Māori centre in order to find new means of self-representation there” (Rask Knudsen 340). Where his earlier work was more of an attack on the outside world his newer literature is looking at the Māori from the inside.
New Zealand’s most famous poet is Hone Tuwhare (1922-2008). As said before, he was the first Māori to publish poetry. His poetry is characterized by his sense of nature which “stems from an understanding of Māori cosmogony, shown by his frequent references to deities such as Tangaroa, a personification of nature” (Whaitiri and Sullivan 77). One also finds in all his poetry “a celebration of the sensory satisfaction of language, making his work a pleasure to read aloud” (Whaitiri and Sullivan 77). The language he uses is beautiful to listen to. Often he was faced with editors deleting certain poems because they were too outspoken against colonization. In Patrick Evans’ words Tuwhare “had to smuggle his messages past the parent culture” (17) when he, for example, wrote about nuclear war and colonialism, which were two of his favourite topics.

The third writer to discuss, and the writer whose work my dissertation will analyze in much more detail in coming chapters, is Patricia Grace (born in 1937). She was the first female Māori to publish a collection of short stories in English, which was Waiariki, published in 1975. From then until now she has so far published six novels, seven collections of short stories and three children’s books. She has won several prizes and was even long-listed for the prestigious Booker Prize for her novel Dogs Side Story. She is known for her experimental way of using language as she often combines English and Māori. Even though she writes in English, she still uses many words and even phrases from Māori reo without providing the reader with a glossary. In an interview she said that she does not speak Māori herself but that she uses so many Māori words because “the language belongs to the characters” and she wants them “to be authentic” (Fresno Calleja 112). Also the Māori tradition of orality comes through the English text as it were, when she uses several perspectives and characters to tell the stories of her novels, even dead children, as we will see in Cousins and Baby No-eyes. According to Whaitiri and Sullivan she has “extraordinary range and vision” and she is able to write with humour but also make the reader feel human depth, for example at a funeral, and she writes with great social insight (78).

Patricia Grace was born in 1937 in Wellington and lives in Hongoeka Bay, a small and traditional Māori settlement on the North Island of New Zealand. When in 2008 she won the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, an award for literature by the international literary magazine World Literature Today of the University of Oklahoma, in her Neustadt Lecture she talked about this community: “The land we live on, the settlement that I am speaking of, is on ancestral land that has been handed down to us through generations, from our ancestors. It is a remnant of land of three interrelated tribal or family groups. Because of it being ancestral land, it means that everyone in our community is related to me or is married to a relative of
She illustrates what living in such a community is like and talks about how the members of the small community gather shellfish and driftwood, about being surrounded by extended family when she visited as a child and still now that she lives there as an adult, about the marae (meetinghouse) and kitchen the community built for itself and about receiving guests here. When we learn a little more about Māori culture and communities in chapter one we will see that this is a very traditional settlement and in Potiki, the novel I will discuss in chapter two, a very similar community is at the heart of the novel. In the Neustadt Lecture Patricia Grace also mentions this: “in the writing of my novel Potiki I have drawn very much on the place where I live, in its setting and the type of community it is. Although the characters are all created characters, the issues surrounding land, which give foundation to the story, are ones that Māori communities live with every day” (29), she says. We will learn about a similar community in Cousins in chapter three. This novel takes place a little later, and many members of the family central to this novel have left for the city, but still the community is what everyone goes back to in the end. In chapter four Baby No-Eyes is discussed, which again takes place a while later. This novel was inspired by an actual event concerning a dead Māori baby. Thus not only in Potiki, but in more of her work Patricia Grace was inspired by her own life or by life in general.
Chapter One
Culture and Literature of the Māori of New Zealand

As the novels of Patricia Grace all take place in New Zealand in more or less traditional Māori communities, it is important to first elaborate on these communities and on the special relationship the Māori have with their land.

The Māori of New Zealand, the indigenous inhabitants of the country which they also call Aotearoa or the land of the long white cloud, usually live very communal lives. Their communities have several layers. To begin with there are the waka, or canoes. The members of a particular waka can trace their ancestry back to the crew of one of the canoes of the Polynesian settlers that discovered New Zealand. These settlers where the first inhabitants of New Zealand, but the exact date they arrived is unknown. However there is evidence of “a sizeable population by AD 1200” (Davidson 6) which usually makes historians set the date for the first settlement at around AD 800. As said before, these settlers arrived in canoes and their descendents form the waka, the first layer of the Māori community.

All these waka consist of several īwi, normally known in English as a tribe. An īwi is “an economically and socially self sufficient grouping in which land ownership is lodged, and in which political decisions could and would traditionally be made” (Gregory 22). Each īwi has its own marae which consists of the “community facilities” (Barlow 73): a sacred, carved meeting house (the wharenui), the open grounds in front of it and often a complex of buildings around them. This is where formal meetings and discussions take place and where guests are accommodated.

Waka in their turn are made up of hapū, clans or sub-tribes. According to Baroussa and Strong the hapū is “the main functioning unit of Māori society” (231). It is governed by “a rangatira or hereditary chief” (Gregory 22). The people of a hapū are responsible for various collective activities, such as “agriculture, warfare […] and hunting” (Gregory 220). They also help their different whānau in for example house building.

These whānau are the subdivisions of each hapū. In Western societies when we speak of family we often mean a household: a father, a mother and their children who live together and whose lives are intertwined. In Māori culture emphasis is on a much larger family, the
whānau, which is usually loosely translated as extended family. This whānau consists of “elders (kaumātua or male elders and kuia or female elders), male and female adults (tāne and wāhine), and children (boy or taitama and girl or kōhine) and grandchildren (mokopuna)” (Gregory 21), so several generations all live together in close-knit communities. According to Patricia Grace herself “family, in Māori terms, means aunts, uncles, first, second and third cousins, grandparents, the brothers and sisters of grandparents, great aunts and great uncles and the ancestors as well” (Della Valle 132). For Māori their whānau is the most important layer of the community. In his essay ‘Parallel Themes: Community Psychology and Māori Culture in Aotearoa’ Robert J. Gregory calls it “the core group for reproduction, socialization, a sense of identity and culture” (21/22). These four layers of the Māori community, waka, iwi, hapū and whānau, create a very clear social structure and “gave each individual a sense of identity and a place, role, set of responsibilities, and expectations” (Gregory 22). People have a feeling of a direct link to their ancestors (tūpuna) and a place they belong to.

Apart from the notions of family and whakapapa, genealogy or descent, which are very important concepts in Māoritanga (Māori culture, practices and beliefs), another essential aspect of Māori culture is whenua, which translates both as land and placenta. Māori have a strong spiritual connection to the land. In his essay ‘Land: Māori View and European Response’ Douglas Sinclair explains it as follows: “The Māori loved his land and identified with it. His close, spiritual relationship with the land stemmed from his traditional concept of the basic origin of mankind deriving from the loving union of the earthmother, Papa-tu-a-nuku, with the sky-father, Rangi-nui-tu-nei” (64). He claims that “the land was regarded as the sacred trust and asset of people as a hole” (65). It is often said that Māori believe they belong to the land, which is in strong contrast with the Western notion of land belonging to a person, or in other words the notion of people owning the land. It is not a coincidence that whenua also means placenta. It is Māori custom to bury the placenta in the marae, the land of their tribe, which strengthens the notion of belonging to that land.

Even though so far the structure of the Māori community is explained in the present tense, not all traditions and social structures are as strong as they used to be. Ever since the arrival of the Pākehā, white European settlers, starting with Captain Cook’s first expedition which “explored New Zealand in 1769 and 1770” (Davidson 10), the social structure and the feeling of identity has been under great pressure, because for example land was taken away and traditions and customs were ignored by the colonizers through the years. When in the 1930s urbanisation started even more was lost. This migration from rural regions to the cities, which is “generally thought to have been triggered by World War Two” (Belich 472), resulted
in 83 percent of Māori being urban in 1986. As the same percentage was rural in 1936 this means that “a complete inversion of urban-rural proportions had occurred in 50 years” (Belich 472). It is not difficult to imagine that this urbanisation and the difficulties with upholding the old Māori traditions were causes for several problems. Families fell apart because in the cities they could not live together as a close-knit community as they did before. The feeling of identity, the link to the ancestors, the sense of belonging to a certain place and a certain group weakened for many Māori.

However, despite everything the Māori have not simply merged into the Pākehā people. The Māori language is still very much alive and many traditions are still practiced. Grace herself, for example, still lives on her ancestral land with many family members close by. In 2006 she said in an interview, when asked about the influence of “the individualism of Western models” (Della Valle 132), that “not so many live in extended families now, but still belong to extended families, so they do still have a place of origin […] Even if families do not live in close proximity, or on tribal lands, there is usually contact” (132). She also acknowledged that there are people who are cut off from their family and land. They are very isolated and know little about where they come from. However, she said that even those people “do still have a tūrangawaewae, because they have an ancestry that connects them to a particular place. Tūrangawaewae literally means “a place where one puts one’s feet – a place to stand”. The right is inalienable and tūrangawaewae is a place where one has a right to live, a right to return to, a right to speak and a place one may go back to for burial at death. In most cases the cords are not completely severed, but in some cases they are” (Della Valle 132). So even though much may have been lost, according to Grace Māori culture is still predominantly present in modern day New Zealand.

Secondly, as I will focus on children in this thesis, I will explore the child’s role in the whānau. In a lecture she gave as the 2008 Neustadt Laureate about life in a Māori community, Patricia Grace explains how the Māori concept of family is different from the Pākehā one. “[...] when I was a child staying there I was among grandparents and other elders as well as aunts, uncles, and cousins. And this was like having several grandparents, many mothers and fathers, and many brothers and sisters” (29). This shows how extended family can be as close to the children as their parents and brothers. Later, when she talks about the hospitality of a community when they host guests at their marae, “all generations work together on all that needs doing”. She stresses how everyone, including children, participates in the community. Children have their own place, their own job and responsibility.
When he describes his life in his Māori community in the essay ‘Being Māori’ in Michael King’s collection ‘Te Ao Hurihuri. Aspects of Maoritanga’ John Rangihau, who was a member of the Tuhoe tribe (a Māori tribe that lived, according to McGarvey, around Te Urewera, in the central eastern part of the North Island), a Māori consultant and who worked at the Centre for Māori Studies and Research at the University of Waikato (Rangihau 5), paints a similar picture to the one Grace shows in her lecture. He begins by saying that his “feeling of identity and commitment to Māori things is the result of history and traditions, and the fact that I grew up in a Māori community. In this community there was always a sense of the value of land and the emotional ties Māori have to it” (183). This stresses the importance of the close-knit communities mentioned earlier. When it comes to the children in these communities, Rangihau says that “it was a community where children were allowed to do their thing, where there was a place for the aged, and a place for the middle-aged [...] From the time we were children we had to learn what it meant to be part of an extended family [...] The essence of community apprenticeship was young people learning by participating, by becoming carriers of wood, by chopping the wood and by setting up the hangi” (183), a hole in the earth with hot stones in it on which wrapped food is placed and heated. This description Rangihau gives shows how in his community children participated. They were given some freedom to do what they liked and they were active members of the community and, above all, they grew and learned. They learned from the other members of the family, who all had their own parts to play in the whānau, just like the children. It will be interesting to see how Patricia Grace deals with this feeling of community and the importance of the children in her novels.

John Patterson wrote a book called Exploring Māori Values. In a chapter on spirituality he describes a tribe’s young people as a “tribal taonga”, which means, according to the Te Aka online Māori-English Dictionary, “possessions, treasure or something prized”. He quotes Moana Jackson, a Māori lawyer, who wrote in 1988 that in a Māori community “the young were seen as the coming strength of the people and were nurtured as such. They were the taonga of the tribe and the foundation of its future mana. As such, they were granted the spiritual protection of the gods and the physical support of the hapū” (qtd. In Patterson 97). This implies that children in a Māori community were valued and respected very much, perhaps more than in Western societies. They were seen as essential for the future and treated as such.

All in all I think we can safely say that children play an important role in the community of the Māori. People are very conscious of the fact that the children are their
taonga. They are something to be treasured and are treated with much respect. They have their place and their own jobs and responsibilities in the community, they help and are helped by others and they learn from the older members of the whānau but older people can also learn from them.

Thirdly I will discuss relevant elements from Māori mythology and other concepts that are important in the daily spiritual life of the Māori. These are the stories and concepts which are most relevant for my dissertation because Grace’s novels are full of references to mythology and also with traditions that have a lot to do with the myths, characters and concepts discussed here. The Māori have their own mythology with many gods. They believe, like Western religions, in their own creation myth. The “gods responsible for the creation of the universe” (Barlow 11) are the atua and Io is the supreme god. The creation myth starts with Te Po, the night, which is the only thing that existed at the beginning. There was just darkness until Io created two other gods, Rangi nui and Papa tu a nuku. “Rangi nui, the Sky, dwelt with Papa tu a nuku, the Earth, and was joined to her, and land was made” (Alpers 16).

These two gods had many children, all male, who, after long discussions about what it would be like to live in the light, parted their parents again, thus creating the earth below and the sky above it. According to Barlow there are seventy gods in total, but “only eight are widely known” (11). It is unnecessary for me to cover them all in detail, so it will suffice to mention them. There is Tangaroa, the god of the sea, lakes and rivers, Tāne, god of the forests ad birds, Tāwhirimātea, the god of the elements, Rongomatāne, the god of food, Haumia, the god of the fern root and wild herbs, Rūaumoko, the god of volcanoes and earthquakes, Tūmatauenga, the god of man or war, and Whiro, the god of evil.

Some important concepts associated with the gods are mauri, mana and tapu. It is a special power possessed by Io which makes it possible for everything to move and live in accordance with the conditions and limits of its existence” (Barlow 83). Mauri is not limited to the gods, but every living thing has it, including seas, land, forests and animals. They all have the “power which permits these living things to exist within their own realm and sphere” (Barlow 83), but it cannot be controlled by them. It is not to be confused with mana, “the enduring, indestructible power of the gods” (Barlow 61), which in these modern times is also used to name for example the power of the land, the power of the individual or the power of the ancestors. According to Marsden “the Māori idea of tapu is close to the Jewish idea translated in the words ‘sacred’ and ‘holy’ [...]” (119). It is not only associated with religion, but also with the law. The concept of tapu gives a person, a place or a thing the quality to be untouchable and that quality is the “main element of the concept of tapu” (Marsden 119).
To conclude this section there is one important symbol which cannot go by unnoticed, because Grace uses it a lot, both in the way she tells her stories and as a symbol in those stories; it is the spiral. Nowadays it is a symbol for the whole of New Zealand but it originated with the Māori. The spiral returns in many parts of life, for example art, like carving, tattoos and even literature. In *The Circle & The Spiral* Rask Knudsen explains that “*Māoritanga* is believed to have gradually matured like a spiral unfolding itself, or like the curling fern frond [...]” (4). The fern is a common plant in *Aotearoa* and a young fern leaf uncurls into adulthood, as it were. A circle, an important symbol in the culture of the Aboriginals of Australia, can be seen as something which is repeating itself. When you walk in a circle once in a while you pass the same spot. A spiral on the other hand “has no natural beginning or end, no uniform centre and periphery; these are in fact interchangeable [...]” (Rask Knudsen, 25). A spiral consists, in a way, of several circles, but every time the circle is about to pass the point where it has already passed, it takes a slightly different route and circles around the previous circle. Rask Knudsen says that “quite contrary to ‘Aboriginalist’ and Maorist’ views of indigenous cultures as static and unchanging, one finds, in both Aboriginal and Māori literature, a strong focus on movement, transformation and passage as integral aspects of the indigenous world-views and notions of creativity” (25). Traditions for example, may always be the same, but if we put the form of the spiral on them, they may change every now and then, even if they change just a little bit. Patricia Grace uses this spirality in the novels to be discussed in the following chapters.

First of all we will see in chapter two how *Potiki* is full of mythological references and how several of its characters can be compared to mythological figures. Then in chapter three I will discuss *Cousins*, an important Māori tradition and how the children in the story influence this tradition. Finally, in chapter four *Baby No-Eyes* is discussed in relation to spirituality and children.
Chapter Two

Potiki - Children and Mythology

Potiki, Patricia Grace’s second novel, was published in 1986. It is full of aspects of Māori culture. One very important aspect of this culture is the art of storytelling. The Māori have a rich oral tradition and this tradition is also very much present in this novel, not just because of the events that make up the story, but also in the way the book is written. Eva Rask Knudsen claimed that “storytelling is intrinsic to the narrative composition of Potiki, it determines the entire plot” (194) and Fuchs even goes so far as to say that “the process of dramatic storytelling, and not plot, is nearly all there is to Potiki” (173). The way the story is told, even without taking into account what the story is about, is in itself an example of the Māori oral tradition. Grace herself said that “Potiki is set out like a whaikorero, a piece of oratory” (Fresno Calleja 114). She explains the format of such a formal story: “It will often have at its beginning a chant, tauaparapara it’s called, something that brings the attention towards the speaker. And then we have the greetings. Then will come the body of main part of the speech and at the end there will often be “Ka Huri” to turn over to another next speaker or the next storyteller to tell his/her story” (Fresno Calleja 114). The prologue about the carver can clearly be seen as the tauaparapara and the novel indeed ends with Ka Huri, or “spread the word”, as Fresno Calleja translates it.

The importance of children in this novel is first of all shown by giving a child, Toko, a voice as one of the speakers of the book. Potiki can be seen as a collection of stories. There is not just one narrative: several characters take it upon them to tell their side of the story. Roimata and Toko actually ‘speak’ in the first person and the narratives of the others, Mary, Hemi, Dollarman, James and even the urupa (the stories) and Potiki, are written in the third person. Rask Knudsen mentions that “with regard to the inspiration of traditional forms in Grace’s text, Christine Prentice notes that chapters and narrators are replaced by stories and storytellers and that this prevents the text from being controlled by a single narrative voice” (Rask Knudsen 194). The way the first person speakers Roimata and Toko tell their tales is also striking. Roimata introduces herself and her family very formally: “My name is Roimata Kararaina and I’m married to Hemi Tamihana. We have four children, James, Tangimoana,
Manu and Tokowaru-i-te-Marama. We live by the sea, which hems and stitches the scalloped edges of the land. This piece of land is the family land of the Tamihanas” (15). It is as though this is a formal first meeting where Roimata shakes someone’s hand and tells about her family, before she starts telling a story. Toko clearly is a young storyteller. He has a “childlike diction” (Fuchs 175), as can be seen for example in chapter 8, when he starts telling the story of his big fish: “I know the story of when I was five. The story has been told to me by my mother Roimata, my father Hemi, my sister Tangimoana, and my brothers James and Manu. But also it is a remembered story. Five is old enough to remember from, and five is not very long ago. It is a big fish story” (47). Toko here speaks in a childlike manner, which is completely logical as he is a child; a child telling a story. So Grace does not only give the adults a voice, but also the children. This child is important enough to tell his own story, to have his own voice.

What is also interesting is Grace’s use of the Māori language. Even though the novel is written in English, many words and even complete sentences are in Māori, like the way a Māori would use both English and Māori at the same time. This shows the importance of this culture. Otto Heim writes that “it’s importance as a living bond linking people across generations in a shared world would seem to determine to a large extent the value of language in Māori culture” (193). Thus their language is one of the things that define the Māori people. It is part of their identity and even though they often speak English, they still use their mother tongue. In Potiki Grace does this as well, even though she admits she does not speak the language herself. She says to choose this type of writing because she is “used to hearing and speaking that type of English” (Fresno Calleja 112). It is what she knows from real life, from speaking and listening. So her use of Māori, next to the manner in which both Roimata and Toko tell their tales and the way the stories of all the different storytellers overlap and complement each other, helps make this novel feel like a piece of oratory.

A second important aspect of this book is mythology. As the Māori greatly value family and they trace their lineage back to old legends, mythology is an important element in the culture of the Māori. According to Ranginui Walker “Māori myths are arranged in a progressive sequence of three story complexes. From the cosmogonic myths to the Maui myths and the Tawhaki myth there is a progression from the creative activities of gods and demi-gods to the activities of real men” (171). The creation myth and the stories about the demi-god Maui are very much present in Potiki. In the last part of this chapter I shall focus on Toko and compare him to Maui, but first it is important to say something about Hemi and
Roimata and their children James, Tangi and Manu as all of them can also be compared to mythological figures.

Throughout the novel Roimata refers to herself as being a “watcher of the sky”, for example in chapter 23, when Grace writes: “But I am a patient skywatcher”. She is also often associated with gulls, for example in chapter 28, the chapter of the stories: “A woman told of the gulls and of how they feed from sea and shore, rest on land but find freedom, the struggle that is freedom, in the skies” and later the woman says that light is a gift of the sky but that the dark is a gift as well. “‘And the watchers know it, waiting, and believing that what is not seen will one day be seen. The watchers know that the earth will give its gifts, and that the sky will too. I am an ever-watcher of the sky,’ she said, ‘a patient above-all watcher’” (174). Hemi on the other hand is, so to speak, a more down to earth character. Many times in the novel he says that “all we need is here”, by which he means their land and the people of the land. All they need is their land and people to work on it and they can make a living. When we look at chapter 28 again, we find the story of Hemi which starts like this: “A man told of an end that was a beginning. The time of no work was a time when his real work had begun, or was taken up again as he had always intended. His story was of the ground, the earth, and of how the earth was a strength, how earth strengthened them all” (175-176).

This contrast of sky and earth, immediately reminds us of Rangi nui and Papa tu a nuku, or the Sky Father and the Earth Mother from the creation myth; two opposites who need and complement each other: the roof needs the ground for something to lean on and the ground needs the roof for protection. The interesting thing is that their roles are reversed: the female character is now associated with the sky and the male character with the earth, instead of the other way around. Rask Knudsen comments on this:

Roimata and Hemi are very much like this mythical couple who, after their separation, came to realize that light is a gift [...] of the sky” but that dark earth is “a gift also because in the dark there is nurturing” (174). In an interesting inversion of gender roles that has the practical Hemi nurture the earth and the imaginative Roimata bring the renewing quality of light into the relationship, they move with their children into “the world of light” (213).

She also compares them to the Māori meeting house when she says they “face each other like the opposite poles of roof and ground in the wharenui” (213). Because of this reversal of their
roles Hemi and Roimata are not the personification of the two gods, rather admirers. Otto Heim discusses this in a chapter on spirituality in Māori fiction:

 [...] the relationship of Roimata and Hemi with the primal parents is not so much one of identity as of love. The woman Roimata is attracted to the male sky, and the man Hemi to the female earth, and their own relationship enacts the complementarity of male and female elements that pervades the universe. Roimata indeed characterises their relationship in these terms towards the end of the novel: ‘In being turned another way we have turned to each other, the one looking to the sky, the other to earth – the mother to the father, the father to the mother’ (206).

Thus Hemi and Roimata are not the gods themselves, but their worshippers. They are like the gods and like the roof and ground of the meeting house: they are opposites and both have qualities the other lacks, which makes them attract and also complement each other very well. This interwoven piece of Māori mythology is one of the parts of the novel which show how important this mythology is. It is everywhere in the culture of the Māori and thus everywhere in their lives.

This comparison with the creation myth can be taken one step further by looking at the children of Rangi nui and Papa tu a nuku. Even they can be compared to the children in this novel by looking at their different roles in whanau. To begin with, James is the eldest son of Hemi and Roimata. When looking at the eight most important (according to Cleve Barlow) children of the Sky Father and the Earth Mother, I believe James can be best compared with Tangaroa. Barlow describes him as follows: “Tangaroa is the god of the sea, lakes and rivers, with dominion over all creatures which live in them. Tangaroa possesses several gifts, chief of these being the art of carving” (11). It is this last part of his description which makes me compare him to James, as James becomes a carver himself, which is in a way quite a surprise in the novel. He is the only child with an English name and probably also the easiest child. In her introduction of the family in the first chapter, Roimata says that “James is like his father – quiet and sure, and with the patience that the earth has. Although first born, it was James who came most easily from between the thighs. His cries caused no earth tremble, no ripple on midnight hour” (15). He likes school and fits in quite well with the Pākehā. Still he apparently finds his own culture important enough to go to another village to learn the art of
carving and carve the *poupou* left by the carver from the prologue. Thus in the *whanau* he fills the role of the carver, which is a very important one. Not everyone can carve and carvings are an important part of the *wharenui* and the *wharekai* in a Māori village and of their culture.

Tangimoana can be compared to *Tāwhirimātea*. Tangimoana is a bit more trouble than James, as Roimata explains. She “is a year younger than her brother. She is not patient, but is as sharp-edged as the sea rocks, and hears every whisper of the tide. On the night she was born I woke to the pained crying of the sea. We took her name from the sounds that the sea made” (15). The references to the sea might make you think of *Tangaroa* as well, as he is the god of the sea, but I feel her profile even better fits another god. “Tāwhirimātea is the lord of the elements: the winds, storms and tempests. He was the only one of the children who would not agree to the separation of his parents and as a result he chose to remain in the company of his father” (Barlow 12). In contrast with many other members of the family, Tangimoana is the only who really stands up for her people, or at least she is the one who starts it, in this novel. Her parents wait, are quite passive and turn their backs to the hills where the developers are starting their machines. Tangi on the other hand, is angry and wants to act. She is one of the young people who stop the developers by destroying their road, buildings and machines. Like James, she is very important for their community. In the end she studies law and will become a lawyer and hopefully be able to fight for the rights and the land of her people. Like the god *Tāwhirimātea* she is one the few who disagree with the rest and her temper may be compared to the god’s storms and tempests.

Manu can be compared with the god *Tāne*. He is the third child. His name means bird; his mother often calls him ‘our little bird’. “Tāne is lord and master of the forests and the birds of Rehua (caretaker of bird life). He was responsible for separating *Rangi nui* and *Papatu a nuku* from their close embrace by thrusting Ranginui upwards. By this act the children were able to escape into the world of light” (Barlow 2). Manu is a different child: he is scared but like the others he too has a special place and role in the whanau. Roimata, again, introduces him: “Manu is the youngest that was born to Hemi and me. He is afraid of noise and night, shapes and shadows. He calls and struggles in sleep and we need to wake or comfort him. I knew nothing of his birth. By the time I saw him he was sleeping, a tremor on the mauve closed lids of his eyes” (15). Manu is so afraid that he cannot even go to school and Hemi and Roimata decide to keep him at home. He may not be as brave and angry as Tangi or as skilful as James, he has his own important role to fulfil in the *whanau*. He leaves school because “they’ve got no stories for him” (37) and when he is taught at home, what they do is tell stories. Not only Manu is homeschooled, but also Toko stays home, because he is
cripple and not healthy enough to go to school. So they both tell stories and learn from them and gradually the whole whanau starts telling stories. All have their own type of story and they change:

Gradually the stories were built upon, they changed. None changed more than Hemi’s which told more and more about people who were not working anymore because there was no work for them and of people who were beginning to be cold and poor. Moe and more he was telling about the land and how the land and the sea could care for us. It could care for those who had gone away too, but who would return now that work was hard to find (41).

Thus the stories start to change life in the Tamihana community, thanks to Manu who started all this. They help ensure that the whanau goes back to tradition more and more: “[...] stories became once more, an important part of all our lives, the lives of all the whanau [...] And this train of stories defined our lives, curving out from points on the spiral in ever-widening circles from which neither beginnings nor endings could be defined” (41). This change, initially brought about by Manu can be compared again to the change brought about by the god Tāne. Both Manu and Tāne cause a change for the better in their communities: Tāne makes sure that he and the other gods can live in the light by separating their parents and Manu start the telling of stories, which helps the Tamihana community to go back to their traditions.

Toko, the most important child in this story, can also be compared to a Māori god and even to a biblical figure. Although Toko is raised as one of Hemi and Roimata’s own children, his real parents are Mary and probably a man named Joseph Williams. Toko is the Potiki, which is the youngest child. He is disabled or crooked as he often calls it himself, and he is a special child. He has certain visions and knows things before they happen; he sees, for instance, a night of colours, which is the night the whanau is on fire and a night of stars, the night of his own death. He also knows that people are coming and that stories will change. He is seen, from the beginning of his life, as a gift. “Toko is a gift that we have been given, and he has gifts. He has a special knowing” (46), is how Roimata often describes him.

Toko has a striking amount of parallels with Jesus Christ. His parents are called Mary and Joseph, first of all, and his mother’s pregnancy is something of a mystery; no one even knows she is pregnant until after she has given birth. We can compare this to Mary, the
mother of Jesus, who mysteriously became pregnant through the Holy Spirit. In *The Gospel according to St. Luke* in the *New Testament* of *The Bible* we read how the angel Gabriel comes to Mary and tells her about her future son:

> “And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest [...]. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of the shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1.31-35).

Of course this is not what happened to Mary in *Potiki*. However, the mystery around these two pregnancies is similar. Also, as Rask Knudsen points out, Toko’s “coming was predicted by the master-carver of the prologue, he suffers and dies in the attempt to defend his people against cultural enslavement” (207), as the angel Gabriel predicts the coming of Jesus Christ. Toko’s death may also remind the reader of Christ’s death. When Roimata enters the *wharenui* she sees Toko “sprawled across Mary’s lap” (163). This, Rask Knudsen believes, “evokes the Pietà image of Mary and Christ after the crucifixion” (207).

Jesus Christ, however, is not the only figure Toko bears many resemblances with. *Maui* is a demi-god, well known for his trickery. He is quite mean and again and again plays tricks on people and on gods. Thus his character is as much unlike that of Toko as possible. However, their stories are very much alike. Like Toko, *Maui* was the youngest child, the *Potiki*, like Toko and both are thrown in the water by their mother right after their birth. Toko is saved by his sister Tangimoana and *Maui* “was rescued [...] by the winds and brought back to the shore on a bed of seaweed” (Rask Knudsen 208). Also, both have something mysterious and magical. Toko has his special knowledge and *Maui* knows magic. He is able to transform into all kinds of birds and his brothers say, even though in a cynical way, that he has a “great knowledge” and “skill in magi” (Alpers 36). Another interesting similarity is the story of Toko’s big fish. Once Toko knows that there is a big fish for him. He goes fishing with his father, James and Tangi and indeed he catches a huge conger eel. *Maui* also goes fishing and manages to fish up something else: “At length there appeared beside them gable and thatched roof of the house of Tonganui, and not only the house, but a huge piece of the land attached to
it. The brothers wailed, and beat their heads, as they saw that Maui had fished up land [...]” (Alpers, 56). Maui fished up the North Island of New Zealand.

Now the question is what to make of this double identity of Toko? On the one hand there is a traditional Māori god and on the other hand a Christian figure, brought to New Zealand by the Western colonizers. The comparison with Maui is much more logical as he is from the mythology of the Māori themselves, yet the parallels with Christ cannot be denied. Rask Knudsen feels that Maui is much more important. She claims that “the evocation of this figure overshadows all Christian allusions” (207). She feels that “the Maui symbol is less obvious – but possible more significant than that of Christ – because it relies on the reader’s capacity to look through the text with Māori meaning” (208). Thus perhaps the problem is that as western, perhaps Christian, readers we give too much meaning to these biblical references. I believe that in the modern Māori culture both Christian faith and Māori mythology exist side by side and are perhaps even mixed:

Since the arrival of Christianity the Māori have all but abandoned their traditional gods for belief in the Christian God and Jesus Christ. In a few cases, the Māori have attempted to mix aspects of their traditional beliefs with biblical teachings. Today there are a number of Māori who are dissatisfied with Christian practices and who are choosing to revive beliefs in the traditional gods. There are other less radical approaches, too; the new Anglican prayer book, for instance, contains some traditional Māori concepts along with Christian liturgy (Barlow 12).

I believe Grace might want to show this modern religion by using both Christian and Māori figures to compare Toko to.

Just like James, Tangi and Manu, Toko has a role in the whanau of the Tamihanas. His body is weak and so he cannot do much to help working on the land or catching fish. Still he is very important. As said, he is regarded as a gift. Children are often seen as something old, which already existed before it was born. Grace refers to this when she writes about a carver and how the figures he makes already exist: “There was once a carver who spent a lifetime with wood, seeking out and exposing the figures that were hidden there” (7). A few lines later she writes:
This does not mean that the man is master of the tree. Nor is he master of what eventually comes from his hands. He is master only of the skills that bring forward what was already waiting in the womb that is a tree [...] It is as though a child brings about the birth of a parent because that which comes from under the master’s hand is older than he is, is already ancient (7/8).

Thus children are regarded with great respect. For Toko this is most definitely the case. Because of his special knowing and his “crookedness” he seems like a wise, old man. There is a special door for him in the wharenui, so he can enter easily in his wheelchair, and there is place just for him inside the house. Toko himself tells us about certain privileges he has in the meeting house:

I could listen to what I wanted to listen to, and if I wished to speak, or was asked to speak, I could speak from there, throwing my voice into the heke. I was always given a time to speak even though speaking is mostly done by those who are old. But the people knew that I would never be old, and that is why they allowed my oldness while I was a child still. Some would say that I had never been a child (154).

Toko, in short, has a special place. A last thing which makes him special is the manner of his death. Everyone knew he would die soon because he was not strong, but not like this. His death is in a way, like that of Jesus Christ, a sacrifice. His death is the last drop for Tangi and the other youngsters and they make sure that the developers stop ruining their land. If Toko had not died, perhaps the plans of the developers would have succeeded, but because of his sacrifice the life of his people and his land change, in a way, for the better.

Thus in Potiki several aspects show that in this novel and in the culture of the Māori children are taken more seriously than in Western communities and a treated more as equals (to adults) than Western children. Children, in this case Toko, get a voice in Grace’s book. They are compared to important figures from Māori mythology and even to Western biblical figures. People look down on them less and they are sometimes even seen as something ancient, something that already existed before it was born and therefore as something that must be taken seriously. Thus children in Māori children are at the same time past and future.
Chapter Three

Cousins - Children and Traditions

After Grace published two short story collections her next work was Cousins, published in 1992. Like Potiki, Cousins also shows the great importance of the family in the Māori culture. The three cousins central to the story, Mata, Makareta and Missy, all have very different childhoods and deal in different ways with the traditional Māori society that is, in one way or another, so important in their lives. Makareta is the chosen one; she is very privileged and is very much in touch with Māori culture and traditions. She spends a lot of time with her grandparents and great-grandmother learning about her people and she is very spiritual. Because of her status she lives a very traditional Māori life and people treat her almost as if she were a princes. Normally Mata would have been the chosen one, because she is the oldest grandchild, but as she was estranged from the family because her mother went against her family’s wishes, Makareta took her place of the chosen one. She is treated as a special child and her family has clearly singled her out and have plans for her. She is the tribe’s taonga, which means ‘something cherished or treasured’. She is never allowed to do anything useful around the house and is always taken care of by her great grandmother Kui Hinemate who always makes her look beautiful. Her mother Polly calls her “their puhi” (202), which literally means virgin, woman of high rank. When she looks back on her childhood Makareta says: “I’d been loved and given everything and now my mother had used the word ‘puhi’ – the cherished, virgin daughter’. I realised the aptness of the word as I looked back over my childhood and realised that I had been brought up as a special daughter, for an arrangement with a special son” (203). Even though she has been brought up as a perfect Māori child, she does leave her family at one point. She does not rebel against her culture, but against a small part of it and decides to live a different life. Instead of living the traditional Māori life with her whānau and a Māori husband in the country, she chooses to live in the city, she marries a Pākehā. She becomes a political activist, thus dedicating her life to helping her people. Thus she is still very much Māori, but in a slightly less traditional way.

Mata on the other hand is completely out of touch with her culture. Moreover, she is in between cultures. In her article ‘My Father Didn’t Let Them Have me’ Rauna Kuokkanen
claims that “Mata exists in the world of introverted silence marked by insecurity, low self-esteem and ‘in-between’: somewhere between Māori and Pākehā worlds while dispossessed by and distanced from both” (49). She is the only child of Anihera. Normally the eldest daughter would have a very special place in the whanau; she “would be the puhi, or ariki tapairu, a chosen woman of the hapu” (Wood 76), but as Anihera has left her family she and Mata are cast away, they live in the city and Mata never learns about her culture. Kuokkanen claims she is “alienated from her own family and culture” but at the same time also “marginalized in the dominant, Pakeha society” (49). When she visits her family she feels out of place and does not know what to do but she is not part of Pākehā society either, as we see when she is on the train travelling to her family:

[…that was what she liked best, like thinking about houses. Inside houses were mothers, fathers and children, tables and chairs, cups and dishes in cupboards, curtains with flowers on them, floral wallpaper, patterned mats on floors, beds with shiny bedspreads, drawers and wardrobes full of clothes. There were toys and dolls. The dolls had dresses and pants and there were tins of beads that you could make bangles and necklaces with […] then the mother came and chased you out because you weren’t allowed. Betty wasn’t allowed to bring dirty, black children into the house to make bangles and necklaces for dolls. Or Home kids (17).

Thus she is a stranger to both cultures. Kuokkanen explains that colonialism normally brings about a change from one culture to another, which causes a bi-cultural society: people implement several aspects of two different cultures in their life. For Mata, however, “there is no passing from one culture to another. She does not belong to a culture to start with and therefore, she cannot enter another” (49). She is not bi-cultural; she has no culture of her own at all. She is placeless and culturally rootless and does not belong anywhere or to anyone. As a result of her rootlessness Mata is always looking for ‘someone of her own’, someone to love who loves her back. However almost everyone in her life that she likes either dies or abandons her and because of this she “never learns to have a relationship; she simply does not know what is supposed to be involved” (Kuokkanen 50). In a way Mata is still a child at the end of the novel, even though her age is that of an adult. She has no social skills and no relationships; her way of thinking is very childlike. When she meets Makareta again after
years of no contact, she is even treated as a child: “She turned the bed covers back for me, helped me into bed and tucked me in the way a mother does” (243). The way Makareta speaks to her and treats to her resembles the way of treating and speaking to a young girl. If one would read these parts without context, one might even deduce that Mata is a child. All in all the fact that she has no culture, no roots and no tradition in her youth results in a traumatized and literally immature adult, wanting nothing but the clothes and shoes she is wearing, a picture of her mother and her own two feet, taking her to nothing and nowhere, without hope.

Even though the chapters focused on Missy are scarce compared to those focused on Makareta and Mata, she plays a key role in the novel. Because of her mother’s faults, just like Mata, Missy has quite a different childhood than Makareta has. She and her family live slightly outside of the traditional close-knit whanau which was seen in *Potiki*. They live in a small, rickety house and need to take care of themselves. Even though they are near the other family members they are treated differently and are clearly less important than for example Makareta. As a child and a young adult Missy is a dreamer. She has fantasies of a life in the city, glitter, glamour and love. She does not get a good education because she is expected to often help her weak mother and lives a less traditional and privileged life than Makareta. She is very much Māori, but not as conscious as Makareta. This changes however, when there is talk of a marriage, the marriage Makareta was destined for, which I will focus on in the third part of this chapter.

A significant aspect of this novel which stresses the importance of children is the voice used in a small part of the book. *Cousins* exists of six parts, two for each cousin’s story. One of these parts however is rather special: while almost all parts are written in the third person and some in the first person, the first part of Missy’s story is told by her stillborn twin brother. We know he existed because in his first chapter he tells of how his great-aunt Kui Hinemate helps with the delivery:

Kui helped mama onto the bed and tended to her – washing and rubbing, pulling and pinning the binding cloth – and when that was done she stooped and spread the placenta, took the lamp and looked closely at it. That was when she found out about me, saw the signs, but she never spoke of me, I don’t know why. She put our whenua, our blanket, aside for burial and I listened to your indignant crying, Missy, thinking that the indignation could have been for me, your
brother, your twin. If Kui had spoken there could have been a tear for me perhaps, at least a word or two (157).

He speaks in the first person and addresses his sister, telling her story. In an interview in 2006 Patricia Grace explains this by saying that she thought it was “rather dull - too uniform” (Hereniko 157) to use just third person narration for all the characters and that she wanted more variety. She says that she “liked writing it so much, because here was this narrator addressing the character and knowing that character so intimately that he could tell everything, the whole story of that person—the future, past, and present” (Hereniko 157). According to Briar Wood “the narration of Missy's life in the first of two sections, dedicated to her by her stillborn twin, also leads to an emphasis on the poignancy of what he missed (and Missy experienced) as a child and young person, rather than an exploration of her role as an adult, which comes later” (77). This extremely interesting perspective says something about how important a child is, even a child that never even lived in this world. This child, who died before birth and was never even viable, gets a voice and speaks to his sister, the child who lived, and tells her story. This reminds me of an idea we learned about in Potiki; the idea that a child was something that already existed and only needed shaping, like a wood carving that only needs to be carved, but already exists inside the wood. This child, without a body, without a real chance to live, already has a spirit and a knowing.

Another theme in this novel which shows the importance of children is how they change a particular tradition. Traditions concerning marriage and weddings are very important in Māori culture. Two of the three cousins in this novel are confronted with these traditions and deal with them in their own personal ways. Traditionally most marriages were arranged marriages. For a marriage to be valid the most important requirement was “the unanimous approval of the whanau of bride and groom” (Metge “Marriage” 166). It was important that the two families were alike in rank and status and had a common ancestor, to ensure that the whakapapa or genealogy would remain as much the same as possible and the shared land would be safe for future generations. The two families would arrange a meeting called a taumau. Often this was the first time the bride and groom to be would even meet each other. At this meeting an agreement would be reached about the marriage. These agreements were very important: “if an agreement made at a taumau was not honoured the consequences were as serious as if the couple had begun to cohabit” (Metge “Marriage” 166). If a bride and groom or their families would not keep to the agreement the honour of the whole family was harmed. As time progressed rules concerning these traditions became less strict and often the
young people themselves would take initiative, but the most important aspect is still the approval of both families.

In *Cousins* Keita is very much concerned with arranging marriages in order to preserve genealogical lines. Her own marriage to Wi was arranged by their families. She tells Missy that this was all for the future generations and “she expects similar dedication to family interests from others” (Dell Panny, 11). For example, she asks Polly to marry her other son Aperehama to make sure that “the whakapapa is not upset” (102) and she is the one who sees to it that Makareta becomes the chosen one in her family. The marriage that is supposed to take place between Makareta and Hamuara in *Cousins* is arranged in a very traditional way. Hamuera and his family are invited on the *marae* to have dinner and a celebration. Makareta, however, does not know that this is an engagement party. Until right before the party starts she believes it is her birthday that they are about to celebrate. When she finally finds out what she was chosen for she realizes she cannot fulfil this role. Even though she always acted as the chosen one and never rebelled she now can no longer play this part and breaks with tradition: now that she is about to be married off to a person she does not know at the age of sixteen she goes against tradition and leaves.

Makareta rebels and breaks with Māori tradition, yet interestingly this is not seen in a negative light. She leaves her *whanau* and rebels against important traditions of her people, but she still treasures her culture. In the rest of her life she dedicates herself to learning even more about her people and she even becomes a political activist to help her people. As Kuokkanen puts it “Makareta respects the traditional Māori ways but feels that instead of passively following them, she wants to actively participate in the social change of her people” (52). Thus Makareta’s story shows that tradition can and may need to be changed as society modernizes. Despite choosing to live a different life from that of her rather traditional family she is still true to her culture and, equally important, true to herself. She would not have been true to herself had she married the man that she was chosen for so the Māori traditions of her family did not work for her. Instead she changes them to a point where she can both be happy with herself and with her roots in Māori culture.

When Makareta refuses to marry Hamuera her Cousin Missy’s steps in and takes her place. Interestingly the predestined roles of these two cousins reverse when Makareta fails to give her family what she has been brought up for, a marriage to a suitable young man from a related *whanau*. Missy surprises everyone, perhaps most of all herself, as she steps in and takes Makareta’s place. She “saves the honour of the family by stepping forward” (Dell Panny 7). By doing so she gives up her dreams and settles for a traditional life with a husband in her
home village in order to help her family and save their reputation. Here again we see a child, for she is only sixteen years old when this happens, who changes tradition to make it work for her and her family when time and circumstances ask for it. She is not the traditional eldest daughter and her family would normally not go through all the trouble of arranging a marriage for her as her parents have disregarded the wish of her family, but she changes all this by doing what is best for the whanau at that moment. When Missy says she will take Makareta’s place one of the old people sees a moko on her chin “carved in the same pattern as the one the ancestress wore” (221). Missy says “I know that the old ones see the ancestors in different ways and in different places, and that they often see them in the young” (221). This again confirms the idea that children are special in Māori culture and are not just a new born baby but they have strong relationship with their ancestor. From then on she and her new fiancé are regarded as “the taonga, the treasures of the people” (222) and she has really taken the empty place that Makareta has left behind.

Thus it is clear that the children in this novel bring about change in the traditions of the Māori culture. When people in this novel do not behave according to their family’s wishes they are cast out. The old people of the family cling to their traditions and what they believe is right for their family and the children are the victims of this. However, the children are also the ones who start a change: the evolving of certain traditions. They do not reject their culture but they do go against it in some ways and thus bring about changes in their culture which are necessary in order for this culture to survive. They bring about the effect that traditions are not simply circles, ongoing and unchanging through time, reoccurring in the same way over and over again. Instead they become spirals, ongoing, but still changing when they need to change. Rask Knudsen claims that “tradition is not opposed to change; it even invites and supports renewal” (332). It is inevitable in places where people live by traditions that these traditions evolve just like the people living according to them and this is exactly what happens in Cousins. Kuokkanen claims that in Cousins Grace “casts a discerning look at expectations of Māori family traditions to remain unaltered for everyone forever” and that “it is clear that for Grace, Māori traditions and culture are a living entity and that individuals live it in countless ways” (53). Even though Grace often criticizes in her novels the results of colonialism where Māori are not able to live their lives the way they want to, according to the rules they chose and keep their own culture, in this novel she is also critical about this culture and those who are too harsh and perseverant while applying these rules. What happened in history also happens in Cousins in a small way: traditions are altered in order to be true to oneself and one’s family.
After writing more short stories and a children’s book, Patricia Grace published her next novel, Baby No-Eyes, in 1998. Inspired by an actual event in 1991, when “a deceased infant's organs were removed without family consent, and the infant was later returned for burial incomplete, in disregard of Māori cultural protocols around the body and processes of mourning and burial” (Prentice 327), Grace decided that she wanted “to give that baby a life” (Della Valle 138). As in the other two novels, children play an important role in Baby No-Eyes. When Gran Kura tells the story of her parents she says: “Grandfather Tumanako and Grandmother Mahararahara had nine living children, the precious offspring, holding the life force. They were the way forward, the hope, the continuation, the way of survival” (158). This shows that children are the most important thing in the world to these people; they are the future and therefore are to be cherished. In this same story the importance of ancestry and genealogy is stressed:

It was one of the old ways – a sister bearing a child to her childless sister’s husband, so that both their own and the husband’s genealogies were kept in that child. It was important to them. What the ancestors gave deep in themselves, the spirit of them, the life of them handed down, was important to them. It was what life was all about. It was survival. Everything that was done was done because of the ancestors and because of the children’s children (162).

This passage emphasizes the significance of both ancestors and offspring and of the whanau in general.

In Baby No-Eyes we see a different type of family taking shape than the traditional whanau. Joan Metge explains that “Maoris are very interested in how people are related and how kinsfolk (whanaunga) ought to behave to each other. They themselves regard this interest in kinship (whanaugatanga) as one of the things that distinguish them from Pakehas”
Not only can many Māori “identify upwards of two hundred relatives either by name or as offspring of named relatives” (“Maoris” 111), but they also “live in rural communities where their forebears lived for generations, with the result that they are related to most other residents” (Metge “Maoris” 112). So children grow up surrounded by their parents and siblings, but also by daunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins. In both Potiki and Cousins we see communities like Metge describes, where the close knit families consist of actual family members, that is, what we in the Western world call family members, people who are related to each other. Te Paania loses her husband. Instead of becoming a single mother, raising her child all by herself, she creates a new family around her. She lives with a homosexual couple and they are such close friends that these two men are like fathers to Tawera. Even Gran Kura moves in. In an interview which appeared in the Journal of Commonwealth Literature in 2007, Grace comments on this situation: “Te Paania valued the family structure. She did not want to be a single parent living in the city on her own. She also didn’t want to go back to her home place. So she created a family in an urban situation. She created that family because she needed it for her child” (Della Valle, 132). So Grace has made Te Paania create this family because it is important for child to have one, to have a group of people around you to look after and to be looked after by. Thus we see that children are very important for the whanau, but that it also works the other way around: the genealogy, the ancestors and the family history are also very important to children.

Gran Kura belonged to a generation that was not so sure about the fact that the family and its history were something to be treasured by the young Māori children. When she is a child she gets responsibility of Riripeti, her teina, which is a younger sister or cousin. Riripeti dies as a result of the school which is very repressive and based on a British school system. The children are not allowed to speak Māori and even get English names for at school. This kills Riripeti in the end and Kura decides never to speak Māori again. According to Grace, Kura’s generation “suffered a lot of poverty, a lot of deprivation and they always had to be “good” so that they could survive, not to do things that would get them into trouble. They did not want to speak out” (Fresno Calleja 118). This is exactly what Kura means when she says:

We didn’t want to be these bad, ugly people, speaking this heathen language. We wanted instead to be these good people, wanted our children not to be who they were. No, no, not to be their ancestors [...] we didn’t know our children would refuse to be who we were trying to make them be. We didn’t know they would demand their names, or
that they would tear the place apart searching for what we had hidden for them (147).

This generation basically kept its culture, its genealogy or whakapapa and its history to themselves in order for the descendants to have a better life. What they did not realise was that this would not work. It is only when Shane comes to demand his Māori name and to complain about how they have his “stuff” (26), names, secrets, stories, that Gran Kura realizes how wrong she has been. Shane asks for his tipuna name. A tipuna is an ancestor or grandparent and according to Sandra Tawake “Grace uses tipuna to stand for the whole of Shane's Māori heritage, the mystery of his being that cannot be named in English, something that has been denied him; and the denying ultimately costs him his life...” (Tawake 48). Kura’s generation thought their culture could only hurt them, but Shane’s outburst shows that he feels a part of him is missing and he needs it. Even though it is too late for Shane this event finally “unleashes the flood of the grandmother Kura’s stories” (Kuokkanen 50) and she stops speaking English altogether. According to Grace “Kura came to realise that he was quite right, that he had a right to know all these things, otherwise he would just be a hollowed out person without a culture. So she made up her mind that from then on she would tell all the stories” (Fresno Calleja 119). Although the secret keeping of this particular generation may not have accomplished what they wanted it too, it was all done to protect the children. At the end of the story about Riripeti, Kura says, “We keep our stories secret because we love our children, we keep our language hidden because we love our children, we disguise ourselves and hide our hearts because we love our children. We choose names because we love our children” (39). This again, shows how valued the young generations of the whanaau are. Everything that is done is done for them.

Not only living children have a great significance, even the unborn are very much present in Grace's works. In the section on magic and religion in The Maoris of New Zealand Joan Metge explains how “the Māori believed in a pantheon of spiritual beings (atua) with supernatural powers” (30). This pantheon of beings does not only include the supreme god Io, the primeval parents discussed in chapter two and their children and several tribal gods and family gods, but also “familiar spirits, which originated from abortions, miscarriages and the ghosts of the dead” (Metge “Maoris” 30). This must sound familiar, as in Cousins we already encountered the voice of a non-living human being as “Missy's first narrative is told in the second person, by her dead twin brother who was never born, as if he is recounting the story of her life” (Tawake 52). In the interview with Fresno Calleja in Atlantis Grace tells that she
found this very interesting and rewarding, “because the twin had an overall view of everything” (117) and that she wanted to develop this in *Baby No-Eyes*. She does this by beginning her novel with a narration by a baby that is still in the womb, Tawera, whose thoughts we read in the prologue. I quite agree with Sandra Tawake who says “No Western fiction with which I am familiar incorporates the voice of an unborn author” (50). It is a very interesting perspective. The most obvious spiritual presence in this novel, however, is Tawera’s dead older sister. She died in the car crash that killed her father and badly injured her mother, but she is still has not completely left the world of the living. Even though there are moments in the novel where Te Paania and Kura are aware of her presence, Tawera is the only one who actually sees her, has conversations with her and can even be hurt by her.

The baby Tawera in the womb does indeed, just like Missy’s unborn brother, seem to have an overall view of everything around him. Even though he cannot, obviously, see all these things with his eyes, he is very conscious of all things happening around him and his mother. He is a very spiritual presence. Though not actually un-present, he is not present either, as he is still unborn. Even so, he is not only conscious of his mother’s rhythm of walking (which is not a surprise as a baby in a womb would feel the movement), but also of the rain, the darkness of the night, of passers-by and what they look like, of the streets, roads, gardens, traffic, and his mother closing her eyes. He is even conscious of another spiritual presence, his dead sister. Even if he is only vaguely aware of the nearness of someone else, he mentions her several times in the prologue. In the third sentence of the novel, for example, he already feels her with the: “My mother the frog. (And someone else.)” (7). And a few pages after: “My mother looked for lights to let us over. (Someone holding her hand, waiting with us.)” (9). Even before Tawera is born, the relationship with his dead sister already begins. It is a relationship that will prove very interesting and will be discussed later on in this chapter. Grace’s use of this particular voice is a very creative way of showing certain spirituality. Of course we know that a baby in the womb in the last stages of pregnancy is already a human being, a person if you will. It has all the bodily characteristics of a newborn baby. However, giving a baby this young a consciousness, a mind, a stream of thoughts, a spirit, is very uncommon. It shows a link between the world of the living and a possible other world. According to Tawake “this innovation emphasizes the Māori connection between the living and the dead, between the past and the present” (50). Also, the fact that even a child this young is given this much emphasis and attention, shows, again, that the child is of vital importance to the family.
Tawera’s dead sister, called Baby, who is in fact the title character of Baby No-Eyes, is the most obvious spiritual presence. Is she a spirit, a ghost? Whatever she is, it is clear that she is dead but has not yet passed to the afterlife. When Tawera has an accident at Te Ra Park and thinks he is dead, she tells him about a road, a road that dead people take: “I went there, remember” she says, “walked the road, heard them calling me, found the right place, went through the welcome ceremonies” (222). This road might be a version of the path to Te Reinga. Metge explains that to reach the home of once remote ancestors the spirits of the dead “travelled north along spirit paths to Te Reinga, a cape in the far north” (“Maoris” 37). According to myths this is the place where all spirits leave this world to live in a type of afterlife. So apparently Baby almost did leave our world. She was still needed however. She says that someone at the funeral felt sorry for her mother and told the people on the road to send her back. Te Paania needed a family and Baby was a part of that family. Te Paania’s Grandfather has an explanation why Baby is not gone yet: “She got to hang around for a while, so we know she’s mokopuna, not a rubbish, not a kai […] You don’t expect her go away, join her ancestors, foof, just like that […] not after all that business” (83). Because of what has happened she first has to prove that she is a human being and not garbage that can just be exposed of. Grandfather also predicts that at one point someone will have to send baby away: “You supposed to send it away, that baby. Kura and them didn’t send that baby off. Got to send it off, otherwise trouble, get up to mischief” (83). He foresees the difficulties that Tawera will experience because of his sister’s presence and that in the end she will have to go. These two characters show that the so important family or whanau can consist not only of living relatives and sometimes friends, but also of those who are not yet with us or have never actually been with us. They emphasize that “the bonds of family include the living and the dead and the unborn; these characters are people; they continue to be active, to play important roles in the lives of their families” (Tawake 50).

In her article ‘From Visibility to Visuality: Patricia Grace's Baby No-Eyes and the Cultural Politics of Decolonization’ Chris Prentice discusses the life stories of Baby and Tawera. She claims that “beginnings and endings, specifically those of life and death, are thrown into question as Tawera's story begins before his birth, and his sister's continues after her death, while Tawera evokes the womb-space again at the end to express the basis of his artistic practice. Both Tawera and Baby invoke Te Kore (the Void) in cycles of origin and destiny” (339). She argues that Baby and Tawera go beyond traditional beginnings and endings. Tawera’s story does not begin where one would expect it to, at birth, but before that, and Baby dies prematurely but her story does not end there. This reminds us of the spiral, a
well known Māori symbol, which has no beginning and no end but is ever ongoing. This spiral is also reflected in the “way the older people have of telling a story, a way where the beginning is not the beginning, the end is not the end” (28). This is a quote from Te Paania, when she talks about Gran Kura’s stories. She says “it starts from a centre and moves away from there in such widening circles that you don’t know how you will finally arrive at the point of understanding, which becomes itself another core, a new centre” (28). When we look at the novel itself, we can also see this form of storytelling: it is not chronological, but past and present alternate, just like voices and perspectives. These examples of spirality are a reassurance that our life, existence or spirit does not have simply a beginning and an end, but is ongoing, in whatever shape or form.

As mentioned before, another important aspect in this novel is the special relationship between Tawera and Baby. According to Patricia Grace relationships between the older and the younger is very specific in Māori culture:

There are what we call tuakana teina relationships. These are relationships between the older and the younger children, but not only children. It goes right through adult life as well. So older siblings have responsibilities for younger ones to look out for their welfare, to teach them, to guide them. And the younger ones have responsibility to the older ones, to listen to them, to be guided by them, to be loyal to them. And it is not only between brothers and sisters but between cousins, different ages and generations and so forth (Fresno Calleja 116).

We clearly see this pattern between Gran Kura and Riripeti for example. The relationship between Tawera and Baby is slightly different. Baby is the older one. However, she cannot see, so she needs Tawera to be her eyes. Tawera is, as a younger child should be, very loyal to her. He always helps her, makes space for her, and explains things to her and when he sometimes forgets he feels horribly guilty. Thus he guides and teaches her, which are, according to Grace, actually the responsibilities of the older sibling.

The relationship between this brother and his sister is very special. Baby may be dead according to hospital staff, but to Tawera she is very real and very much alive. He sees her, feels her and talks to and with her, while other people have no idea she is there or only feel her or know she is there because of Tawera. Tawera’s life with his sister is not easy: “She complains that I forget her, that I won’t move over in the bed, or make room on my chair for
her. She doesn’t like me to play with other kids, or talk to others. She gets me into trouble” (133). He always needs to make space for her, needs to explain everything to her. Other people notice and of course it seems very strange to them. She even gets him into trouble for speaking in school when everyone has to be quiet. We know Baby is not just inside his head, because she can even hurt him. When he forgets her, for example, she can get violent and give him bruises. Te Paania describes how she and Kura see him fall: ‘Then he came hurrying up the hill and was nearly home when we saw him trip sideways and fall. ‘It goes too far,’ Gran Kura said [...] ‘What happened?’ I asked. ‘I fell,’ he said. Have I given you misery, I wanted to ask” (209). In the end it is Gran Kura who knows that Baby has to go, as Te Paania’s Grandfather once predicted. She was needed once, but now it is better for everyone if she goes. When Kura herself is at the end of her life she and Baby work together to make Tawera allow Baby to go. According to Rauna Kuokkanen both have fulfilled their task in life:

Only after she has fulfilled her task of voicing the long-silenced stories and in that way, reconnected her immediate family with their whanau and whakapapa, can Kura leave (die) [...] Baby No-Eyes has also fulfilled her own task as a necessary member of family and a reminder of continued colonialism (63).

As Baby herself said, she was only back temporary because she was needed.

After Baby is gone, life does not immediately get easier for Tawera. Sending her away was very difficult, he was so loyal to her that the does not want to hurt her. In the end he says yes and she can go. However, after this he feels quite lost without her. As Prentice said “Tawera evokes the womb-space again at the end” (Prentice 339). Tawera has too much time and too much space. He sleeps on the side of the bed and sits on half a chair, because he is used to it, but there is no one to fill this empty space, this void. He also has time to spare because he does not have to explain things to her anymore. When he is older and almost an adult, he still struggles. Each of his paintings “holds a missing piece, a section of paper that is blank. Not one is complete. In each one, space pushes itself outward, and in doing so brings the eye towards it. Or on closed eyes it imprints on the retina, a patch that is dark and trembling, the size and shape of an egg” (292). This egg is what Prentice calls the womb-space. Baby leaves a void, emptiness and Tawera cannot fill it. In the end he realizes he first has to go back to this complete void. He cannot fill the egg in his paintings; he does not know how to do this. He realizes he has to make it larger, until the whole page is white. It is only
then, when he goes back to the beginning, the void, the noting, *Te Kore*, that he can go on. From then on he paints his sister and thus makes visible what was unseen before. Like Patricia Grace gives the children in her novels their own voice, Tawera finally gives a face to his unseen sister, the baby that was treated as garbage and whose eyes were taken out, now has a face for the first time. Thanks to Tawera not only he, but everyone can now see Baby.
Conclusion

In all three books children have a very noticeable place in the story. They play key roles and we see they are regarded in different ways than we in our Western society regard them. There are several ways in which the children stand out. First of all, the fact that children often get a voice in Grace’s work is striking. In Potiki when we read Toko’s chapters it is immediately clear that it is a child talking. About a third of all the chapters in this novel are written from his first perspective. Grace values this child so much that she gives it a voice, a turn to speak. His story is the most important one of the novel; it is his story and his death which result in actions by his family members and to stress this importance he even gets the last turn in the last chapter of the novel. Toko also has a special place within the community; because of his physique he reminds us of an old man and he is regarded with great respect because of his special knowing. He has a special entrance to the marae and a special seat. In Baby No-Eyes Tawera is similar to Toko in Potiki. The chapters from his perspective are clearly told by a child so he too gets a voice, a turn to tell his story.

Secondly, not only living children get a voice; spirits too get a turn to speak. We often find in these novels the image of how a child is something that already existed before it is actually born. We first read about this idea in Potiki, where a child is compared to a wood carving already hidden inside the wood before the carver even starts working on it. Even though it does not have a body yet and is not physically present in this world, the child already has a spirit and a consciousness. Inside the wood a form develops, it only needs the carver’s skills and tools to become visible. Thus without a form a child already exists. We also see this existence in a small part of Cousins, where a baby who was never born and never even viable, tells the story of his twin sister’s childhood. He is merely spirit, as his great Aunt only saw traces of his existence in the placenta, but still he exits, he has a spirit, a consciousness and he is all knowing. Though he is not physically present he knows all about his sister’s life. Grace elaborates on this idea in Baby No-Eyes. When we first meet Tawera he is not born yet, he is still in his mother’s womb, but is very conscious of everything that is happening around him. He does not only know about the houses, gardens and people they pass as his mother walks along a street, but he also notices a spiritual presence walking with
them: his dead sister Baby. She is the second spiritual presence in this novel. Even though she
died before she was even born, she is always present in Tawera’s life. He does not only feel
her, like some other characters in the story, but he sees and hears her too and she is like a
‘normal’ sister to him.

A third aspect of Grace’s work which shows the significance of the child is the
mythological comparisons we can make with the children. Especially in Potiki this is very
clear. Toko’s brothers and sisters can be compared to several gods from the Māori creation
myth. Most significant, however, is, again, Toko, who can be compared to both the Māori god
Maui and the baby Jesus. Mythology is very important in Māori culture, thus I believe it says
something about the importance of a child when it is compared to such an important god. The
fact that he is also in several ways like the Christian baby Jesus shows how Western religion
slowly makes its way into Māori culture and how Toko is a key figure, just like Jesus Christ is
in Christianity.

What becomes most clear in Cousins is how children play a crucial role in the securing
the future. This novel shows how some Māori traditions become outdated and need to be
changed in order for the new generation to still live in peace with their peoples traditions but
also with themselves. The children in this novel make sure that traditions do not eternally stay
the same. The do not move in circles, but they spiral; they change every now and then.
Children are very important for this future, as they are the ones who can continue a culture.
However, in order to do this they need to be able to change things so that their culture can still
exist in a changing world and they themselves still feel comfortable in this world existing of
several cultures. Makareta is seen as the tribe’s future. When she decides not to marry the one
she is meant to, it seems as though she does not fulfil this role, but in the end she does mean a
lot for her people as she becomes a political activist and wants to make life for the Māori
better. Even though in a different way than her forebears wanted, she is the future. She cannot
passively carry on century old traditions, but in a different way she is very important for the
Māori.

A fifth way in which children are significant we find for example in Baby No-Eyes
where it is stressed how important children are for the ancestors and for the future
generations. In Māori culture the whakapapa or ancestry is very important. Everyone knows
where they come from and who their ancestors where. What is also vital is that the
whakapapa is not upset, that the ancestors live on. This happens by the birth of children, who
are this way at the same time past and future. In Baby No-Eyes we learn that even if a woman
is not able to bear children, it is important that the ancestors live on in her children. In order to
achieve this a woman may bear her sister’s children so that the same genes live inside them. In Cousins the adults are also trying to make sure of this by making Makareta marry a boy from a tribe with the same ancestor. When this fails, luckily Missy steps in and makes sure that the whakapapa is not upset and the genes of the ancestors live on in future generations.

Thus in conclusion there are many ways in which children stand out in these three novels by Patricia Grace. They are always present, even if they are not (yet) physically present or never will be because they are already dead. They are respected, valued and seen as very important for the future of the Māori people. Thus they are “the way forward, the hope, the continuation, the way of survival” (Grace Baby No-Eyes 158): they are the future generations who must help their people keep their culture. They are the continuation of the ancestry which is so important to the Māori people. Because of their actions, with which they may slightly alter Māori traditions, Māori culture will survive.
Bibliography

Primary sources

Secondary sources


**Cover picture**