

Talking With Hone Tuwhare

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whatever I talk to, whoever I talk to, I hope I'm talking *with*, not talking *down*.
(Tuwhare, Interview 1992)

When Apirana Taylor opens his review of Hone Tuwhare's collection *Mihi* with a mihi to the poet, he draws attention to something about Tuwhare's work that encourages people to respond in a conversational way, as though they have been spoken to, and feel sure of being listened to in return. This something, I venture, is his willingness to talk *with* not *down*, signaled in his poems by an emphasis on respectful and familiar speaking and listening. This conversational disposition embraces not only people ('whoever'), but extends to more-than-human elements of the world ('whatever'). Of his marked tendency to 'talk directly' to natural elements such as 'rain' and 'weather' Tuwhare says:

Even if you're addressing something inanimate. Even a person who's no longer of this world – there's just the insistence that the person has got ears, at least is listening, you know. (Interview 1992: 189)

Tuwhare's insistence that the populations of the non-human and spirit worlds are not only listening but have something to say gives his landscape and ekphrastic poetry conversational impetus. *Talking with* in these works has an almost magical power to draw out other voices in the world around him and to lead into a deeper, more vibrant experience of landscapes and objects.

In Tuwhare's early landscape poem 'Not by Wind Ravaged' (1993: 25) the speaker addresses a land that has been assaulted, 'ravaged'. Introduced plants, 'gorse and broom' and 'thistle', metonyms for the process of British colonization, and allusions to 'avaricious men' implicate European colonizers in the assault on the land. The speaker's talking with the land is a sexualized act that stirs a dulled and 'voiceless' landscape into vocal animation and fertility. In the course of the poem, by throwing his lot – his identity, his voice and his body – in with

the land's, he recovers an empathetic relationship with land that is jeopardised, negated, by the bearers of gorse and broom and thistle.

Tuwhare's handling of grammatical elements in the first two stanzas of the poem increases the potency of talking with land. Through this he creates a feeling of heightened release and sudden animation at the beginning of the second stanza that coincides with the speaker's invocation. He opens the poem with a long sentence that constitutes the first stanza and annexes the second:

Deep scarred
not by wind ravaged nor rain
nor the brawling stream
stripped of all save the brief finery
of gorse and broom and standing
sentinel to your bleak loneliness
the tussock grass –

O voiceless land let me echo your desolation.

Irregular and truncated syntax builds tension in the first stanza as Tuwhare piles dependent clause on top of dependent clause without the focus of distinct active or passive subjects, enacting the idea of suppressed identity. Adverbs that usually refer to the treatment of bodies 'scarred', 'ravaged', and 'stripped' – imply that a *personal* subject or object is withheld in this stanza and a second person possessive in the phrase 'your bleak loneliness' adds to the feeling of an out-of-reach personal presence. This stanza mimics a ground drained of animation. The convolutions and uncertainties of the sentence halt its progress; a lack of clear subjects and objects means the energy of its verbs is trapped or dribbles away. A cluster of negations inhibits movement, nullifying the first of two present participles 'brawling' – an adverb for the stream whose influence, like the wind and rain's, is supplanted by an insidious aggressor. 'Brawling' can be used specifically to denote the action of a stream, but also refers to physical bickering between people, giving the stream an animistic quality. The lyric subject in 'No Ordinary Sun' (1993: 28), which appears alongside 'Not by Wind Ravaged' in Tuwhare's first collection, in order to show what is at stake when a radiant nuclear blast eclipses the ordinary sun, likewise invokes animistic natural elements via negation. The speaker bids a tree to 'No more incline a deferential head / to the wind's talk, or stir / to the tickle of coursing rain'. Warlords and other greedy men, it would seem, nullify, not simply the land's activity but its status as a subjective vocal being or cluster of beings – whereby the wind can 'talk', trees may express deference, rain can 'tickle' and in 'Not by Wind Ravaged' a stream can brawl. Where there *is* a present participle stated in the positive in this stanza, 'standing', it primes readers, by this point thirsty for meaning and animation, for a sentence

subject stirring into action, yet Tuwhare suspends its verbal impetus over a line break and a full line sans subject before, anticlimactically, it spends its energy on ‘the tussock grass’. By putting them through syntactical deprivation, Tuwhare stirs his readers’ empathy for a speaker who is searching for connection and identity, struggling to find an outlet when the integrity of his cultural structures has been eroded (an erosion shown in the second stanza by a supplanted marae and a ‘rotting’ whare tipuna).

In his invocation the speaker releases himself, the land and his audience from this state of painful inertia and anonymity, giving disparate elements of the sentence focus and meaning. He restores personal pronouns, active subjects, present tense verbs and flowing syntax to the ground of the poem. Both land and speaker attain clear subject status for the first time in his invocation, their identity and voice are mutually constituted. The land speaks through the lyric subject, and he finds voice by echoing the land.

In talking with the land, then, the human speaker affirms their shared identity. He enacts integrity and intimacy between people and land that Geoff Park, citing the parallel versions of the Treaty of Waitangi, argues was lost in translation from Māori to English:

The ‘whenua’ of the Māori version became the English ‘land’ – the meaning of whenua that has prevailed ever since. But, as any Māori who has absorbed her history knows, the grievous losses that Māori have suffered since the treaty, while sited in the solid surface of the Earth that we call ‘land’, have been much more than the loss of ground. (Park 242)

Whenua, in its fuller sense, is at once both land and a mother and baby’s placenta or afterbirth. The custom of burying afterbirth fuses these two elements in practice as well as language in Māori and other Pacific cultures, sealing and representing the bond between a land and her people. As we are all bound to our mothers in utero via a placental connection, in burying that placenta Māori (and others who want to affirm a native – natal connection with land) bind themselves to Papatūānuku. A familial, visceral connection with land is at stake, then, when the English term supplants the Māori.

In ‘Not by Wind Ravaged’, by connecting vocal expression with sexual expression, Tuwhare gives talking with the land a full body depth and a natal power that recalls the bodily symbiosis of whenua. In the first two stanzas undertones of sexual maltreatment and repression attend the land’s voiceless condition. It or, more appropriately, she is ‘stripped’, violently used (‘ravaged’), dressed in gaudy foreign lingerie (‘brief finery’). Land is a woman objectified, robbed of subjective sensuality – desolate, lonely, with ‘dull folds’. Somehow by the end of the poem her ‘dull folds’ are transformed into ‘moist lips parting / to the morning

sun' in an image of a flower that is at once fecund, erotic and vocal. The process of this transformation can be traced to the lyric subject's two offerings – a sexualised body (his 'nakedness') and his voice:

Distribute my nakedness –
Unadorned I come with no priceless
offering of bone or jade
to the wild berry shall I give
a tart piquancy; enhance for a deathless
space the fragile blush of manuka...

You shall bear all and not heed.
In your huge compassion embrace
those who know no feeling other
than greed:
of this I lament my satisfaction
for it is as full as a beggar's cup:
no less shall the dust of avaricious men
succour exquisite blooms
with moist lips parting
to the morning sun.

There is an impression that the speaker makes love to the land. 'Unadorned' he offers his body to the land as a gift, promising he will provoke its 'dull folds' into a more intense fruitfulness, enhance the 'fragile blush' of its blossoming. In the fourth stanza, in tandem with the land's promised blossoming, he comes to an awareness of the earth's powerful generosity and endurance, saying: 'you shall bear all and not heed'. The word 'bear' conveys a sense of pregnancy and birth, of carrying and holding, as well as endurance. Finally, in the last lines of the poem, the image of 'blooms' actively opening, 'parting' to 'the morning sun' (a symbol of nourishment and cyclic renewal) conveys the land's renewed fertility and growth. The 'moist lips' of these blooms suggests nourishing morning dew and sexual arousal as well as vaginal lips parting in the process of birth (in contrast to the land's 'bleak' and barren condition under 'avaricious men' in the first stanza). Tuwhare connects the land's transformation with his sexualized offering when he uses a word that combines senses of acceptance, sexual fulfilment and religious sacrifice or offering – 'satisfaction' – to describe his art in the land's flowering.

At the close of the second stanza, the speaker laments the fate of his voice when his cultural structures have rotted away, his house's mana 'fled':

I come to you with a bitterness
that only your dull folds can soothe
for I know, I know
my melancholy chants shall be lost

to the wind's shriek about the rotting eaves.

Distribute my nakedness –

Immediately followed by the imperative to 'distribute' at the opening of the third stanza, this account of his voice's fate, to be lost to the wind, suggests a dynamic relationship between the wind's taking up of his words and the distribution of his 'nakedness'. This sequence creates an underlying narrative wherein the speaker's 'melancholy chants' are scattered like seed, distributed by the wind. When the earth later yields a vocal flower with 'lips parting' as if in prayer 'to the morning sun' it seems that his scattered, apparently lost voice has fallen to earth and come to fruition there. In his investment of body and words the speaker restores native life and voice to the land.

Two (or three) complementary ways to read the ellipsis at the end of the third stanza relate voice and particularly conversation to sexual arousal and reproduction. In 'Small Signs and Impressions' (1986: 50) Tuwhare uses ellipses to signify Tangaroa's responses (or at least the possibility that he might respond) to the lyric subject's questions. At one point the lyric subject follows an ellipsis by saying: 'Ay? / speak louder'. Apparently wordless space in 'Not by Wind Ravaged' reads similarly as a listening gesture. An ellipsis situated at the end of the third stanza draws attention to the space between stanzas, and so creates an extended period of silence. When the lyric subject takes up speaking again after this prolonged ellipsis, it is with a renewed emphatic awareness of the land's qualities ('You shall bear all and not heed') as though in the space provided by the ellipsis and the blank space between stanzas the land articulates its nature and he listens. Explicit revelations within the text do not account for the conviction expressed in the fourth stanza. To understand the space as filled by another voice and the speaker's relationship with the land as a conversation helps to make sense of what otherwise reads like a leap of logic.

The space is also part of a sexual exchange. The manuka blossom's 'fragile blush', evoking the flesh glow of sexual arousal and orgasm, heralds the ellipsis. Like the frustrating syntax that helps readers to empathize with the land and the speaker's frustration in the first and second stanzas, the physical properties of ellipsis draw them into a suspended moment here, perhaps the kind of floored silence that accompanies sexual climax. Couched in allusions to sex and childbearing, this ellipsis could also signify a gestation period, a pregnant pause.

In 'Child Coming Home in the Rain from the Store' (1993: 56) a child unlocks a vibrant, synaesthetic experience of the land by talking with a 'solitary stone'. In the way he presents the child's verbal address to the land Tuwhare returns to the idea that talking to elements of

the land, ‘to things’, can prompt a response. By paralleling verbal addresses in this poem – the lyric subject talks to the child who talks to a stone – he implies that the stone might respond to the child in the same way that the child might respond to another human speaker. The first two stanzas evoke a process whereby an element of the land comes alive with gradually increasing intimacy and intensity apparently stirred by the child’s vocal and aural attention:

I know you stop only to talk
not to the cruel metal road
but to a stone a solitary stone
sharp-edged with flat shiny
faces

In this passage from the first stanza a more detailed description of the stone follows a midline break as though it has expressed its particularity in the silent space provided. A midline break in ‘your talk / to things *and for things*’ in the third stanza also mimics a conversational dynamic: the child addresses things, talks ‘to things’ and then leaves room for them to respond before speaking with an extra level of engagement ‘*for things*’. In the description of the stone that follows the child’s overture and listening space in the first stanza, the word ‘faces’ with its connotations of personality and communication, appears at the end of the sentence and stanza and alone at the beginning of a new line so it impresses upon the reader singularly and unexpectedly. Up until this point the stone’s qualities – ‘sharp-edged’, ‘flat shiny’ – are uncommunicative; the language used to describe them befitting an inanimate geological fragment. Although the adjective ‘solitary’ does evoke a human-like state it also suggests a lack of communication. Tuwhare’s placement of ‘faces’ makes it seem as if the stone is suddenly endowed with personal life and expression. In a stanza that ends without a full stop this single-word line has a portal quality, opening after a significant space between stanzas onto a stanza of expressive italics:

*Through your mind’s eye know
the feel of washed leaves
made green again: tall rain-shafts
drifting: wind wincing
a water-filled pothole*

In their departure from regular text into the delicacy and otherness of italics with their deep yet gentle impressions, these words could be read as the stone’s more intimate response to the child or the deeply moved ‘child-delighting’ poet’s internal response. Either way the italic imperative of this stanza encourages the child (and anyone else who may be listening) to inhabit the land fully and imaginatively through ‘*your mind’s eye*’ – as if in talking with the

stone the child opens up a deeper and more encompassing experience of the landscape. In this synaesthetic account experience of the land is at once tactile, proprioceptive, emotional and visual: *'wind wincing / a water-filled pothole'*. Tuwhare blurs the boundary between the land and the person in this stanza: a directive to *'know / the feel of washed leaves / made green again'* could compel you to recall how it feels to touch wet leaves or to imagine yourself as a living plant, washed with rain.

This casting of a stone as a partner in dialogue, recalls Tuwhare's earlier work 'Mauri' (1993: 26) which traces the life of a 'meek stone'. Tuwhare (or his editor) footnotes 'Mauri' with a definition of its title. 'Mauri' is 'a material symbol of the hidden principle protecting vitality. Life principle, talisman, thymos of man'. This footnote encourages a reading of the 'meek stone' as an example of a talisman or a symbol of the life principle. In both 'Child' and 'Mauri' dialogue is integral to unlocking the talismanic quality of a stone. The child's talk with a stone heralds entry into a vibrant landscape and in the second and third stanzas of 'Mauri' Tuwhare links communication with a stone to rejuvenation and vitality in the natural world – to water, plants and growth:

From its soul's core, sun
to another sun responded:
succoured the lonely man
his tribe's invention of trees
sweeping the sky's floor clean.

When gods were fused
to an angered one
all-seeing triple-faced
still
did this man's tribe store
reverence for the stone
from whence plants sprang
sweet water leapt

Tuwhare implies that dialogue enables the stone's capacity as a 'wellspring'. Discourse, a 'sun' at the core of the stone's soul responding to 'another sun', sustains an animate world. Internal rhyme connects human responsiveness ('reverence') with the source ('from whence') of the natural world's vitality, suggesting that correspondence between people and a mauri is related to its efficacy.

Tuwhare intimates that setting Christian against pre-European religion in this poem, having 'one idea clashing with another', creates an 'energy' (Interview 1995: xlvii). By placing 'still' on its own in the midst of the third stanza Tuwhare highlights the poem itself as a site of

dialogue within and between languages and cultures. The semantic quality of the word ‘still’, suggestive of silence and rest, accentuates the space surrounding the word, a space that in turn brings this particular sense of ‘still’ to gentle prominence like a swatch of red next to the word red. The multiple definitions and grammatical functions of this word in the context of the stanza generate dialogue of a different kind. The break after ‘still’ causes a suspension of syntactical meaning that results in variant shifting readings of the word and its role within the sentence. In one reading ‘still’ is an adjective meaning static within a cluster of adjectives that describe the qualities of a Christian God (‘an angered one / all-seeing tripled-faced / still’). Read differently, ‘still’ is an adverb indicating an action perpetuated and refers to the ongoing quality of the tribe’s ‘reverence for the stone’. In this way ‘still’ acts as a pivot between the two states in conflict within the poem. Its placement draws attention to its multiple meanings and to a negotiation between these that could itself be described as a conversation, as Tuwhare uses the term in conversation with Bill Manhire (Interview 1992: 189).

The first stanza of ‘Mauri’ sets up a contest between modes of representation not wholly unlike the contrast in ‘Child’ between ‘solitary stone’ and its ‘cruel metallised road’ counterpart which the child does *not* stop to talk to. Here ‘images of brass’, ‘polished’ and ‘shaped’ passive objects, conflict with an active subject, the ‘meek stone’ which possesses ‘consciousness’. The primary speaker in ‘Mauri’ attributes the death-like state (‘ashen face’) of the dialogic talisman, the ‘meek stone’, at the close of ‘Mauri’ to European conceptions of deity and representation whose supremacy is threatened by the potency of the stone’s dialogic energy.

There is another stone mauri that mediates between realms in the origin story of a well-known wooden whakairo, *Uenuku*, a carving whose creation is dated from the *Te Tipunga* period (1200-1500). This carving represents an ancient form of Tainui’s demigod who also manifests as a rainbow (see Brake 135). The god’s shapes move:

The spirit of Uenuku was apparently brought to New Zealand by the people on the Tainui canoe, in a stone. Upon arrival they made a carving in which the spirit of Uenuku then resided. (Evans)

Here a stone and subsequently a carving are vessels for Uenuku’s wairua or life force. Witi Ihimaera, in his preface to Brian Brake’s collection of photographs containing a famous image of this carving, comments on Brake’s ability to capture the wairua inherent in matter:

I believe that [he] saw what Māori saw: the living object, the wairua that all Māori know resides in wood, in greenstone, in whalebone, in bird feather. It is this wairua that he sought. Not just beauty – and seeing beauty and photographing beauty are, of

course two different matters, and not easily done. No, he sought that something else, the talismanic quality that resides within every object in our world. (Ihimaera: 11)

Tuwhare's body of work contains a significant subset of poems that, like Brake's photographs, refer to works of art in other media. In these ekphrastic poems he brings traditional and contemporary visual artworks to life by talking with them, acknowledging their subject status or speaking with the artist through their work, or both. In response to the poet's conversational attention, a carved ancestor tells him to 'piss off' in a familiar fashion ('Totem Thoughts' 92) and colours in a print 'leap out to hong'i' him ('A Poem for Marilyn Webb: Gore 1986' 1993: 192-93). His ekphrastic poems respond to what Ihimaera identifies as 'the living nature' of artifacts in Māoritanga (11), a concept that is integral to a whare tipuna, a house that embodies an ancestor's wairua.

Chadwick Allen argues that the act of talking with the whare tipuna accounts for its ongoing life. Those people who live with the resultant form, in an important sense its readers, vivify the ancestors by speaking to them, making an offering of voice:

The house and the ancestor whom it incarnates 'live' so long as they are kept up; during whaikorero (speech making) on the marae, the house is addressed as a living elder. (Allen 48)

Asked by Bill Manhire 'But you would talk to a house [...] wouldn't you? You'd talk to it as if it was alive?' Tuwhare answers:

Oh yes, you have to. That's one of the things you do address. When you go to a marae, you address the house. You do your homework, of course, and you have to find out what the name of the house is – and you address it as a person. Well of course it is a person; it's named after a person, you see. (Interview 1992: 189)

Two poems in particular, 'Totem Thoughts' and 'To a Maori Figure Cast in Bronze Outside the Chief Post Office, Auckland', show the importance of talking with whakairo. Tuwhare takes up the motif of a house that is both a physical structure and living lineage in 'Totem Thoughts' where the lyric subject strikes up a conversation with his ancestors, joined in a carved embrace in the structure of a whare tipuna. At the end of the fourth stanza, his 'male ancestor' retorts: 'Well, if the pā is NOT under attack, why don't / you piss off, then?' At this, the lyric subject offers a retrospective aside to his audience:

Aw, *heavy*. But I didn't want to argue the toss. In point of fact, the pā was about to be taken over – I am bound to say – by a GLIB COMMERCIAL INTEREST. But who cares for that? For lovers – like my ancestors – it was a period of supreme self-

containment: a timely and timeless happening – history, art, more sex: me. (*‘Totem Thoughts’* 92)¹

The lyric subject affirms that his ancestors’ wairua, like the land’s ‘huge compassion’ in *‘Not by Wind Ravaged’* will endure in the face of throwaway capitalism, ‘GLIB COMMERCIAL INTEREST’; he gives the moment and the form an untouchable quality – it is self-contained and ‘timeless’. Although the wooden structure that houses the ancestors’ wairua is at risk they are promised ongoing life in the body (and, I would argue, the poem) of their descendant who finds them in a present continuous sexual clinch, ‘embracing’, the wahine’s ‘feet locked / together behind [the man’s] back, twiddling her toes’. ‘She looked arch’, the lyric subject observes, ‘I guessed she was comfortable’. When he says: ‘For lovers – like / my ancestors it was [...] / a timely and timeless happening – history, art, more sex: me’, sequence and punctuation imply that he is the immediate consequence of the couple’s intercourse – ‘more sex: me’; he emphasizes the tipuna’s continued participation in the cycle of life. By ‘talking with’ these ancestral forms, the lyric subject acknowledges them as sentient subjects – “‘I thought it was you fellars’” – and opens up a reciprocal exchange, affirming their relation to him and their ongoing bodily life in the present. ‘We’ll make it’, he reassures them, ‘on my feet you walk’.

Tuwhare suggests that the subjects of a carving may continue to be alive and potent elements of an ever-present past – ‘timely / and timeless’. In *‘To a Māori Figure Cast in Bronze’* (1993:75) he playfully yet poignantly contrasts this animistic perception with a worldview wherein a statue exists solely as a *representation* of a person once living, now dead – a frozen commemoration of a life rather than a life continuing. The title of the poem denies the man a distinctive identity and emphasises him as a static representation; he is a nondescript ‘Māori Figure’, a label that belies the idiosyncratic voice, the ties to family and place revealed in the poem itself. A shift in voice from the title to the body of the poem (where the title speaks *to* a Māori figure, the body is devoted to speech from the figure’s point of view) implies a connection between the poet’s address and the figure’s ability to speak and be heard. The poem, like the speaker’s address to land in *‘Not By Wind Ravaged’*, is an act of empathy, restoring the figure to partial life where he has been sentenced to a hollow death on a pedestal, away from his marae. But the simultaneous application of two kinds of regard to the statue – one implied by the fact of his bronzing, position and nondescript label, the other by the poet’s attention – is painful and tense. The ‘Māori Figure’ epitomizes a clash between these two perspectives; he is caught between states of active sentience and immobile aesthetic

¹ A version of *‘Totem Thoughts’* with slightly different punctuation and italic emphasis from the version quoted here appears in Tuwhare’s collection *Short Back and Sideways* (Auckland: Godwit, 1992) under the title *‘Back Words: Totem Thoughts’*.

distance. His form and therefore his wairua have been displaced, causing a painful disjunction. He describes his 'cast' condition bronzed atop a pedestal outside the Chief Post Office in Queen Elizabeth II Square in downtown Auckland, 'stuck up here, glaciated, hard all over / and with my guts removed'. He goes on to reveal, heartbreakingly, that he is:

all hollow inside with longing for the marae on
the cliff at Kohimarama, where you can watch the ships
come in curling their white moustaches

The language of his lament emphasizes his static emptiness – he is 'glaciated' and 'stuck', his 'guts removed', reduced to a 'hollow' frozen shell. Like the 'polished images of brass' in 'Mauri' and 'the cruel metallised road' in 'Child' his hard metallic surface discourages reciprocal and organic interaction. A chief source of his despair and frustration is the way people ignore him; they don't speak *to* him or treat him as a living entity (except, of course, the poet): 'They never consulted me about naming the square', says the figure indignantly. The 'beetle-girls with their long-haired / boyfriends' appear oblivious to his yearning, frustrated presence. In stark contrast to the fecundly embracing tipuna in 'Totem Thoughts' he is literally impotent in the present, unable to 'fix the ripe kotiro [...] with their mini-piupiu-ed bums twinkling' and isolated from his 'old lady' who, he claims (referring to his removed, bronzed stasis), 'is not going to like it'.

Tuwhare suggests that, as including carved ancestors in whaikorero can keep them alive, a lack of correspondence between an artistic form and its context leads to its stasis and removal from the present to artworks that are 'in a salon like a time capsule' (Wedde), powerless on pedestals.

Two poems that centre on works by contemporary artists, 'Poem for Marilyn Webb: Gore 1986' and 'Hotere' signal the place of contemporary artworks in a tradition where objects can be talismanic for wairua or mauri and, importantly, where engaging with art works is a way of acknowledging and perpetuating their animate status. In 'Poem for Marilyn Webb' (1993: 192-93) Tuwhare responds to printmaker Webb and her work in the context of an exhibition (and of a poem). In his account, the two-dimensional static prints have a vital depth and dynamism that is enacted in the present:

Your rainbows aniwa-niwa themselves out of nowhere and into
your lake prints with a smoky splash. Lake fish of immense size
leap out of Lake Mahine-rangi to catch a ride on your rainbow-
escalator, and in a great migratory arc drop into Lake Taupo
in the North Island, thinner; much paler. It's the new
Māori/Celtic legend.

Tuwhare elicits this animated response from Webb's prints with a special sort of attention:

To concentrate, I pause in front of number
eighteen making a tunnel of my fist to look through. Your
colours leap out to hongi me.

His careful regard, like the child's pause to talk to the stone in 'Child', yields a lively communicative response from the print's elements. Repetition connects the way colours 'leap out' of Webb's print to the way fish 'leap out' of Lake Mahinerangi. As the land impresses itself upon an attentive artist in a dynamic and expressive way, the artist's work impresses upon a receptive audience. Tuwhare's dynamic interaction with the prints is in contrast to 'immobile groups of people sipping wine and chatting'. His willingness to communicate with the artist both by engaging with her work and in person (in a 'hip-locked' embrace) makes Tuwhare different from 'the Critics', 'the parochial manipulators' who 'are the first to leave without / meeting the artist who might be from the wop-wops, Tutae Kuri / River, or worse – a woman'.

Art in this poem is personal communication that can cross barriers of time and space and death. Tuwhare lavishly assures the artist that:

Blake would share a mead-bowl with you. And Turner.
I'd bring a half gallon of it too, if you'd cook a memorable
crab chowder. Yr own. Not Aunt Daisy's.

Dead poets and artists like William Blake and JMW Turner may interact with people in the present through their work and responding to an artist's work can be a way of talking with them as immediately and bodily as if you were sharing mead and crab chowder together.

In 'Hotere' (1993: 51), a poem that Manhire argues is 'a monologue with a conversation, or several conversations, inside it' (149), Tuwhare pays tribute to another contemporary, painter Ralph Hotere. This poem (in reciprocal fashion, as a number of Tuwhare poems feature in Hotere's paintings) sets him in front of a succession of three Hotere canvases. In the second stanza of 'Hotere', in response to 'three / vertical lines precisely drawn / and set into a dark pool of lacquer', he says:

and even though my eyeballs
roll up and over to peer inside
myself, when I reach the beginning
of your eternity I say instead: hell
let's have another feed of mussels

His response implies that Hotere's flat canvas somehow conveys the infinite, an 'eternity', at a fixed point, a canvas, a 'beginning'. This eternity is both internal to the visual artist (it is 'your eternity') and held within the poet who can 'reach' this by peering 'inside' himself. The way the poet abandons the canvas in favour of sharing 'a feed of mussels' with Hotere may suggest a bridging of these two eternities in everyday conversation between poet and painter, that the engagement between lyric subject and canvas is comparable to the kind of talk that might take place over mussels' (or, for that matter, over mead and crab chowder).

In contemplating another Hotere painting, 'a superb orange / circle on a purple thought-base', the poet is brought (at the poem's close) to the deep mystery of love:

I shake my head and say: hell, what
is this thing called *aroha*

Like, I'm euchred man, I'm eclipsed?

The question mark that closes 'Hotere', as well as evoking the rising intonation of colloquial New Zealand speech, suggests a deferential and receptive stance towards others, in this case to the visual artist and the eclipsing love that is somehow transmitted through his canvases.²

In Tuwhare's landscape and ekphrastic work, talking with forms is integral to life and growth, to the embodied vitality of the spirits within and beyond these forms. In Tuwhare's poem, Hotere's paintings, like stones or carvings imbued with mauri or the life of their subject, hold elusive yet enduring principles, wellsprings that can be released by engaging with them. Like Tuwhare confronted by Hotere's 'eternity' and '*aroha*', a reader of Tuwhare's poems may find a loving voice there that corresponds with something in *themselves*.

No reira, e Hone; in closing, just for a moment I take the liberty of insisting that you have ears or, at least, are listening and I echo Taylor's earlier words: 'Kāhore tēnei he poroporoaki ki a koe, engari he mihi, mō tō mihi ātaahua'. (This is not a farewell to you, but a mihi, for your beautiful mihi). Kia ora.

² In earlier incarnations of the poem, a will towards this kind of openness is conveyed by an absence of any punctuation at all in place of the question mark (Interview 1992: 150).

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