



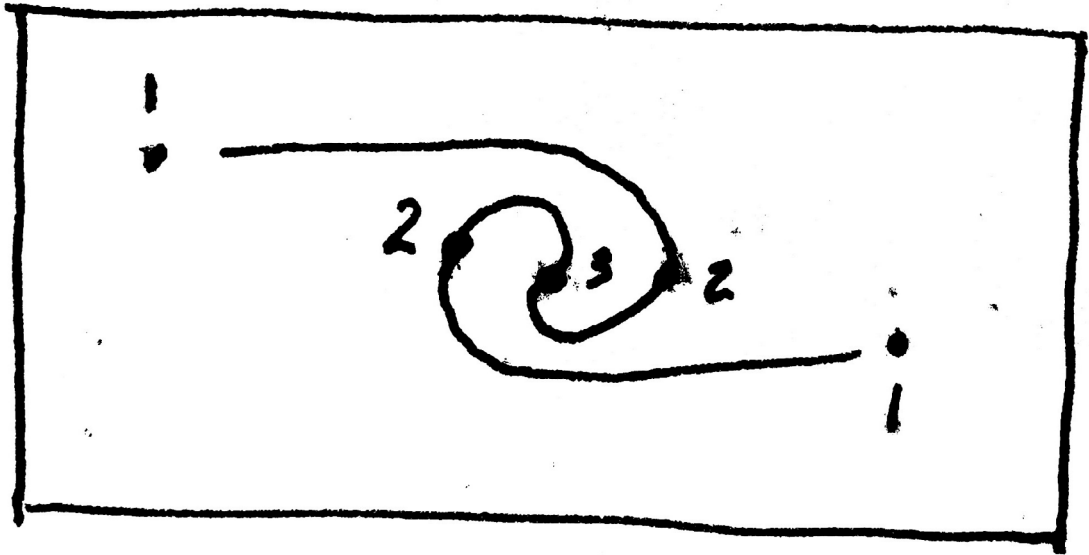
Kaiya Waerea

*Unfurling*

*Whakapapa Takatāpui*

Montez Press

Writers Residency



*Potiki* by Patricia Grace (1986) – ‘Dialogue with Leoné’,  
Broadsheet No.176 (1990).

1.

“From the centre,  
From the nothing,  
Of not seen,  
Of not heard,  
There comes  
A shifting,  
A stirring,  
And a creeping forward,  
There comes  
A standing  
And a springing,  
To an outer circle,  
There comes  
An intake  
Of breath –  
Tihe Mauriora.”

– Patricia Grace, *Potiki*, p.7

There are 214 issues of *Broadsheet*, a feminist magazine which ran in Aotearoa (New Zealand) from 1972 through 1997. It was the first regular feminist periodical in the country, and one of the longest running in the world, apparently. I’d been asked to do a write-up about it for a book gathering feminist periodicals from around the world, and while I initially wasn’t that interested in *Broadsheet*, with its *Spare Rib* style and imported European Women’s Lib framework, I had

gotten into it, the gossip and drama of its twenty-five-year history. And unlike its more radical contemporaries, it's fully digitised, rare for archival material from Aotearoa. So, over the worst of my Covid but still testing positive, I decide to set myself up in the yard and spend the day going through the PDFs nested by year on the University of Auckland's website.

Even though I knew it wouldn't make the edit, I got myself stuck on the idea of noting down every time *Broadsheet* changed printers. For the first couple of years, the paper was printed by Resistance Bookshop, a leftist radical bookshop and action centre. These were fragile, hand-typed, side-stapled foolscap format publications of around twenty pages. But in 1974 they professionalised their production, moving into a sixty-eight page magazine format. Across the remaining 194 issues they changed printers a handful of times, these changes not usually marked by a change in design, although I suppose if I was looking at the material in person I might have been able to feel for subtle changes in paper weight, in finish. However, working with the PDFs meant that identifying these moments involved looking for the colophon of each issue; for some reason, these were often in different locations across consecutive issues, and while they could often be found on the first or second page, or the last page, sometimes they would be on the fourth page, or the eighth page – and honestly, this kind of thing really annoys me.

Of course, I didn't go through every single one, but instead started with the first issue of each year, and if the printers had changed since the last, then I would work my way back every two issues until I identified the exact point where this change happened, leaping forward then taking small steps back. After Resistance Bookshop it was

Wanganui Newspapers Ltd., then Rodney and Waitemata Times, then Putaruru Press – but I couldn't find when exactly this changed to PrintCorp, who printed the final issues. I went back and forth, back and forth through the issues from 1989, '90, and '91, but some seem to be missing colophons completely, and some don't name the printer, despite credits for typesetting and photographic processing. But that couldn't be right: so back and forth and back and forth I'd go again between the slowly loading PDFs.

2.

“It was a new discovery to find that these stories were, after all, about our own lives, were not distant, that there was no past or future, that all time is now-time, centred in the being. It was a new realisation that centred being in this now-time simply reaches out in any direction towards the outer circles, these outer circles being named “past” and “future” only for our convenience. The being reaches out to grasp those adornments that become part of the self. So the “now” is a giving and receiving between the inner and the outer reaches, but the enormous difficulty is to achieve refinement in reciprocity, because the wheel, the spiral, is balanced so exquisitely.”

– Patricia Grace, *Potiki*, p. 39

We are in the realm of full colour digital printing, March 1990, Number 176, when I come across *Broadsheet's* first trans feature story. And it's not just a feature story, it's the cover story, our girl laughing in pearls, hair blown out, classic kiwi working-class 90s glam, which is to say classic English working-class 80s glam. The tone of the image is

promising, but I don't stop bracing myself until I've read the whole piece, and then the letters from readers in the following few issues, the sun below the treeline leaving me mottled with light.

Leoné Neil was a founding trustee of the Minorities Trust, a trans charity based in Wellington, the city I grew up in. The interviewer, Sylvia Baynes, asks Neil about the term “transpeople,” which Neil obligingly explains she coined to encompass transvestites, transsexuals, and “transgenderists.” Throughout the interview Baynes uses the term “transpersonality” the way we might now use transness, that is, trans-person-ality, *being* a transperson, and while this makes my head spin I kind of love it. “You made a remark to me previously that transpeople are often of above average intelligence?” Baynes asks. “This can also apply to Gays,” Neil answers, and I laugh, at all of us.

Of course, Baynes fails to pursue the most interesting things Neil has to say, perhaps preoccupied with trying to preempt the backlash from the magazine's mainly white, middle-class readership. But when asked about the Maori and Pasifika street queens of Karangahape Road and Vivian Street, Neil responds:

“...what right have white people to dictate [B]lack people on sexual orientation? New Zealand has a diverse ethnic as well as European culture and it may well be that the country needs to change its attitude towards this total subject. Non-Europeans sometimes do not differentiate between being transvestite or tran[s]sexual, and obtaining employment for them is also much more difficult.

We have a unique situation here in New Zealand, dealing with Maori and also Pacific Island concepts and trying to equate them with our white way of thinking when their way has existed for centuries.”<sup>1</sup>

Baynes changes the subject. But for a moment there they were, shifting in the corner of my vision.

Stretching across the inner and outer reaches, across land and sea, first through paper, then through pixel, a side note in a white conversation.

A gentle breeze. An intake of breath.  
Tihei mauri ora takatāpui.

3.

“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.”  
– Patricia Grace, *Potiki*, p. 41

The spiralling of stories that Grace returns to again and again throughout her novel *Potiki* is the form of a koru, an important motif in Māori epistememes. The koru is the bud of a fern yet to unravel: “the koru frond first circles back toward itself, then, unfurling from itself, spreads out in different directions while the koru trunk connects back through the strength and stability of its stalk into the nurture of Paptūanuku.”<sup>2</sup> Erina Okeroa connects this to the concept of roots and routes within diaspora consciousness, the dual motion of rooting down and forging routes outward, the unfurling koru providing intentionality and effort to the scattering implied in the term diaspora itself.

The family in *Potiki* have four kids, and when one of them starts going to school but can't bear it because there are no stories for him and there are cracks in the floor, they decide to teach him at home. The other kids go to school because there are stories for them there, and they aren't scared of disappearing into the cracks in the floor. When they get home, they all sit together and tell each other stories. School stories of the earth and the universe, of longitude and latitude. Of kings and queens or of classmates. Work stories, and stories of the whanau, stories from the newspapers, and from library books. Eventually they start making their own books,

“But our main book was the wharenuī which is itself a story, a history, a gallery, a study, a design structure and a taonga. And we are part of that book along with family past and family yet to come.

The land and the sea and the shores are a book too, and we found ourselves there. They were our science and our sustenance. And they are our own universe about which there are stories of great deeds and relationships and magic and imaginings, love and terror, heroes, heroines, villains and fools. Enough for a lifetime of telling. We found our own universe to be as large and extensive as any other universe that there is.”<sup>3</sup>

It feels childish to admit it, but reading *Potiki* I realised so much of what I think of as “my research” comes down to this, wanting to find myself in stories, wanting to find clues as to my own possibility. In Māori society, “decisions, actions, alliances, indeed any political act must be sanctioned not just by consensus but tradition, a precedence in whakapapa and oral traditions to explain and validate



current circumstances.”<sup>4</sup> This isn’t fatalistic, but more about how the deeper the roots of a fern go, the further away its leaves can stretch. Whakapapa is the connection across the inner and outer reaches of Grace’s spiral – not “I can only be what has been,” but “I can be because of what has been.”

But as takatāpui diaspora, this is complicated by the thickly layered filtering system of Christian-Imperial-Bureaucracy. Relying, at this distance, on what I can recover through the use of colonial technologies, the stories I can find myself in are restricted to glimmers happening just off-page, side notes in the white conversation that is queer history.

This is the mahi then. Bringing these traces out of my peripheral vision and into focus, so that the past and the future can come into interpenetrative reciprocity.

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 *Broadsheet*, March 1990, No 176, “Dialogue with Leoné”, Sylvia Baynes in conversation with Leoné Neil, p. 18.
- 2 Margie Hohepa, (2006), “Biliterate Practices in the Home: Supporting Indigenous Language”, *Regeneration Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 5(4), 293–315. p. 45.
- 3 Patricia Grace, *Potiki* (1986), p. 104.
- 4 Margie Hohepa. (2006). “Biliterate Practices in the Home: Supporting Indigenous Language”, *Regeneration Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 5(4), 293–315. p. ?