

Beyond Philology No. 16/2, 2019
ISSN 1732-1220, eISSN 2451-1498

<https://doi.org/10.26881/bp.2019.2.04>

**A vision of postcolonial New Zealand
in Keri Hulme's novel *The Bone People***

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*Received 13.02.2018,
received in revised form 17.01.2019,
accepted 30.05.2019.*

Abstract

Initially rejected by a number of publishing companies, Keri Hulme's book entitled *The Bone People* attracted public attention in 1985, when it was awarded the Booker Prize. The novel ponders the topic of isolation and the feelings and actions related to it. The characters build their own borders, physical or psychological, while living in a country whose multiculturalism is an inherent quality. The author presents a postcolonial vision of New Zealand by providing an example of three people of various origins who, despite being tormented by their troubled past and with a present marked by various forms of abuse, finally manage to overcome the boundaries in order to create bonds and become a family.

Keywords

Hulme, New Zealand, Maori, postcolonialism, borders

Wizja postkolonialnej Nowej Zelandii w powieści Keri Hulme *The Bone People*

Abstrakt

Książka Keri Hulme zatytułowana *The Bone People* została odrzucona przez wiele wydawnictw, jednak przyciągnęła uwagę czytelników w 1985 roku, kiedy to Keri Hulme otrzymała za nią nagrodę Bookera. Powieść porusza temat izolacji oraz uczuć i czynów z nią związanych. Bohaterowie budują swoje własne granice, zarówno fizyczne, jak i psychologiczne, żyjąc w kraju, którego nieodłączną cechą jest wielokulturowość. W swojej powieści autorka przedstawia postkolonialną wizję Nowej Zelandii na przykładzie trojga ludzi różnego pochodzenia, którym, mimo iż są nękani trudną przeszłością i teraźniejszością pełną różnych nadużyć, udaje się przekroczyć własne granice tak, by wytworzyć więź i stworzyć rodzinę.

Słowa kluczowe

Hulme, Nowa Zelandia, postkolonializm, granice

1. Introduction

A number of publishing companies initially rejected Keri Hulme's book *The Bone People*,¹ but in 1984 it was finally published by a small publisher, Spiral. It attracted public attention in 1985, when it was awarded the Booker Prize. The novel is set in New Zealand, on the coast of the South Island, in the second half of the 20th century, although the exact time is never given. The main characters come from various cultural backgrounds and do not seem to belong together. Among them are:

- a woman named Kerewin, who lives in a spiral tower next to the beach. She is an artist, a painter who has lost her creative inspiration. She lives a solitary life, separated from her family

¹ In some articles the title of the novel is written with small print.

due to a disagreement in the past. In appearance, Kerewin is European though her mannerisms are Maori;

- Simon - a mute boy, whose age is uncertain. He is lonely as well, because his peers do not understand his strange behaviour: he does not understand the meaning of personal property, he is afraid of needles and of getting a haircut. Simon's past is unknown – he was washed ashore on the west coast of the South Island during a storm and found by Joe. Yet, his whiteness suggests that he is of European descent;
- Joe, who is Simon's guardian and calls himself Simon's father. When Joe found Simon, he had a wife and a small child. Unfortunately, his wife and baby son died of the flu. Joe, left to take care of Simon alone, started drinking heavily and beating Simon. He has some identity problems, too – despite his Maori appearance he does not seem to belong to the Maori community.

The lives of the characters are turned upside down when Simon appears in Kerewin's house: he breaks into her tower and into her life as well. The woman is shocked by his presence but gradually becomes interested in the lives of Simon and his father. Throughout the novel, the three of them develop a complicated, yet eventually satisfying, relationship.

This article attempts to present the structuring of a postcolonial vision of New Zealand that Keri Hulme provides in the novel. The article is divided into five parts devoted to the introduction of the tenets of postcolonialism, the analysis of the theme of isolation presented in the novel, the depiction of abuse and violence as a means of communication and the influence of the past on the present, to finally arrive at the analysis of the resolution that the novel offers: a unitary vision of postcolonial New Zealand.

2. Postcolonialism

As Ralph J. Crane aptly observes in his article "Out of the Center: Thoughts on the Post-colonial Literatures of Australia and New Zealand", it is difficult to define the term "postcolonialism"

(1996: 21) exactly. Stephen Slemon also offers his explanation of the meaning of postcolonialism, underlining its need to confront the colonial relations:

Definitions of the 'post-colonial' of course vary widely, but for me the concept proves most useful [...] when it locates a specifically anti- or *post-colonial discursive* purchase in culture, one which begins in the moment that colonial power inscribes itself onto the body and space of its Others and which continues as an often occluded tradition into the modern theatre of neocolonialist international relations. (1991: 3)

In the chapter "Introduction: Points of Departure" published in *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, Peter Childs and R. J. Patrick Williams also draw attention to the problems of setting this phenomenon in time and space, as they claim that in each region, colonisation took place in a different moment. This makes the beginning of decolonisation impossible to pinpoint. One may assume that the beginnings of post-coloniality in New Zealand coincide with the appearance of the movement called the Maori Renaissance – a revival period of Maori art and literature that took place in the 1970s (Sinclair 1992: 283, Williams 2006: 208), which corresponds to the date given by Ashcroft et al (2007: 168).

What is certain though, is that former colonies had to start dealing with their long-forgotten pasts. As Masao Miyoshi claims in "A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State", "[o]nce the Europeans were gone [...] the residents of a colonial theory were thrown back on their old disrupted site that had in the precolonial days operated on a logic and history altogether different" (1993: 730).

Among the common aspects that Crane considers to be the tenets of postcolonial literature are: "the shared experience of colonization and the emergent interest in the effects of colonialism, an interest in the experience of the post-colonial condition itself" (1996: 21). As Childs and Williams suggest, "[t]he

question of identity traverses post-colonial thinking, [...] the problem of unsettled or unsettling identities [...] is an issue at the heart of post-colonialism” (1997: 13). It is “much more to do with the painful experience of confronting the desire to recover ‘lost’ pre-colonial identities, the impossibility of actually doing so, and the task of constructing some new identity on the basis of that impossibility” (1997: 14). James Clifford explains in “The Global Issue: A symposium” that

at least three processes are always going on. One is the disappearance of certain orders of difference. The second is a process of *translating* orders of difference. And the third is the creation of new orders of difference. This last, I would divide into two locally interconnected dimensions: first, imposed or neo-colonial forms, stemming from an economic relationship to the state or the wider world system; and second, emergent orders which are invented out of historical debris, moulded from indigenous and foreign material. (1989: 87)

It is by means of a “cultural translation”, to use Homi K. Bhabha’s term, that a new identity is constructed (1994: 228). In the postcolonial world, elements of both native and foreign cultures are necessary in order to create a new, unique vision of the country. Crane also emphasises that it is worthwhile to consider literature’s “desire to reclaim the histories of the indigenous people, and to educate non-indigenous readers about Aboriginal and Maori cultures” (1996: 20). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in turn, worries that postcolonial analysis is based on Western perceptions (1993: 66). Indeed, in “Who Can Write as Other?” Margery Fee underlines how difficult it is to rewrite the dominant ideology. Yet, Keri Hulme provides an insider’s perspective on the culture of New Zealand. In her article, Fee opposes C.K. Stead’s argument that Hulme is not entitled to speak for the Maori people because of her mixed ancestry (2006: 169). She views Hulme as one of the few writers who have attempted to “integrate Pakeha and Maori culture in a way that transgresses the boundary between them” (2006: 170). And indeed, Hulme “produce[s] a different version

of reality” (2006: 171). She confronts the readers – both indigenous and non-indigenous – with Maori culture, provides an overview of the conditions of postcolonial New Zealand, and she also attempts to create a new Maori identity.

3. Isolation

The novel is abundant with various forms of isolation: both physical and psychological. The character of Kerewin is the most prominent example of a chosen isolation. After leaving her hometown, the heroine sets off on a journey to Japan. By distancing herself from her original world, she means to discover her own idea of a peaceful life. Upon her return to New Zealand, Kerewin wins a substantial amount of money in a lottery and builds herself a retreat on the beach. The place is rather peculiar: it is in the shape of a tower, with spiral stairs inside. It resembles the tower of an imprisoned princess: a place from which the woman is unable to escape. What differentiates Kerewin from a fairy tale princess is the fact that she has chosen such a prison for herself: she imagines it to be her own safe place, perfect for a recluse. In “Liminal Spaces and Imaginary Places in *The Bone People* by Keri Hulme and *The Folly* by Ivan Vladislavic”, Marita Wenzel asserts that “[the way] of belonging [is] explored through the metaphors of houses as cultural constructs and places that either depict isolation from society or act as defined spaces that foster human contact and personal relationships” (2006: 82). In the case of *The Bone People*, both of these meanings are valid. The explanation of the shape of the house is provided in the novel itself:

SHE HAD DEBATED, in the frivolity of the beginning, whether to build a hole or a tower; [...] It was the hermitage, her glimmering retreat. No people invited, for what could they know of the secrets that crept and chilled and chuckled in the marrow of her bones? No need of people, because she was self-fulfilling, delighted with the pre-eminence of her art, and the future of her knowing hands. But the pinnacle became an abyss, and the driving joy ended. At last there was a prison. I am encompassed by a wall, high and

hard and stone, with only my brainy nails to tear it down. And I cannot do it. (Hulme 1986: 7)

Kerewin isolates herself from the outside world by choosing a location far away from any civilization. Her only means of contact with people is a radiophone that she refuses to use until the day when she discovers Simon in her house. She considers him to be an intruder, but she hesitates before calling for someone to collect Simon from her property. She does not like people calling her and she is reluctant to communicate with the outside world:

It's her concession to the outside world, the radiophone. No one can ring her up unless they go through a toll-operator, kept by the Post Office especially for subscribers like herself, but she can ring anyone she likes. An expensive arrangement, but Kerewin has more money than she needs and likes privacy. (Hulme 1986: 23)

Kerewin is a self-sufficient woman. In her garden, she grows her own vegetables, but she also enjoys fishing, and the two activities enable her to obtain the basic provisions. She is proud of her independence from the outside world, and is glad she does not have to rely on anybody's support.

Kerewin spends the days and nights alone. In the solitary evenings, she creates a ritual of drinking herself to sleep. She takes pride in a cellar full of alcohol. At one point she ventures there to get herself a drink and is surprised by the number of bottles that she finds stored. On this occasion she says: "If I'm going to sit here, I might as well drink and forget about bloody Gillayleys" (Hulme 1986: 273).

The walls that Kerewin has built are not only made of brick. She has created a safe zone for herself by preventing anyone from maintaining contact with her. Yet, she seems to like her solitude: "She frowns. She doesn't like children, doesn't like people and has discouraged anyone from coming on her land" (1986: 15). As Philip Armstrong claims in "Good-Eating: Ethics and Biculturalism in Reading *The Bone People*",

Kerewin represents the ego caught up in solitary contemplation of itself: she addresses herself as “my soul,” or “Holmes”; she writes in a journal that she thinks of as her “paper soul” (96-99, 261, 431-37); her typical night’s entertainment is to get drunk looking at herself in a mirror by the light of a candle (275). (Armstrong 2001: 11).

She may indeed display a certain amount of egotism, but the real reason why she chooses to be alone is different: Kerewin isolates herself because she fears being hurt. At some point, when she gets to know and like Simon and Joe more, she promises herself that she will not create a strong bond with them:

But wait here a little longer, think about it a bit more. You’re involved with two strangers, different and difficult people. You’re different and difficult yourself, but strangely enough, you all get on well together. To the extent that there can be a real fight, forgiveness and renewed friendship after.

To what end, my soul? Remember how horrifyingly painful it was when you and the family broke apart? So much so, that a brief meeting with one member is enough to put you in despair. The pain is back. Be wary. Keep it a cool friendship. Look out for the child by all means – it’s the least you can do as a human being – but don’t let them get too close. (Hulme 1986: 250)

Moreover, when Joe beats his son for the last time and Kerewin discovers her illness, she decides to set out on a journey once more. As previously, she travels alone, and does not want anybody’s help. It is only at the end of this spiritual journey that she realizes her suppressed feelings and she comes to understand that she longs for a family. Up until that moment Kerewin is separated from her own family, her relatives by blood:

‘I don’t want to die, but I don’t know why I live. So what’s my reason for living?’ she asks the mirror image. ‘Estranged from my family, bereft of my art, hollow of soul, I am a rock in the desert.

Pointing nowhere, doing nothing, of no benefit to anything or anyone. Flaking, parched, cracked... so why am I?' (Hulme 1986: 289)

Still, there is another barrier that separates Kerewin from other people: it is her language, educated and intelligent. She uses sophisticated vocabulary that she has learnt throughout her life. Her utterances are full of neologisms and archaisms. Sometimes she intertwines English with foreign languages, such as French or Latin and she uses a lot of Maori which, these days, is not fully understandable for most people.

However, as Chris Bongie suggests in "The Last Frontier: Memories of the Postcolonial Future in Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*", Kerewin is not the only solitary character: "[t]he three characters, all painfully isolated in their own way, all of mixed or unknown ancestry (Joe is mostly Maori, but had an English father; Simon is clearly "white" but otherwise of undetermined, possibly Irish and French, origins [...])" (1995: 234). All three of the characters exhibit signs of estrangement, yet in a variety of ways. Joe does not belong either to the Pakeha, or to the Maori – he is situated in an in-between position, unable to identify with any ancestry. Simon's uncertain past – his origins, parents, familial relations – leaves him devoid of any background that he could refer to. He is also closed in his own world as his muteness prevents him from maintaining contact with his peers. Isolation in the novel, then, takes the form of both physical and emotional barriers.

4. Disruption of communication: violence and alcohol

The barriers that the characters create around themselves are also visible in the problems with maintaining verbal contact with other people. Communication between the characters is disrupted on a number of levels. Simon's muteness proves to be problematic for Kerewin, as, at the beginning, she cannot read his messages properly. In "The Silence of the Lambs: Childhood Disabilities, Gender Ambiguities, and Postcolonial Detectives in Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* and Peter Høeg's

Smilla's Sense of Snow" Richard Hardack proposes a theory that "[s]ilence or alternative forms of communication represent ways to elide a master('s) language. [...] If English remains at the center of Hulme's text, other forms of communication suffuse the margins" (2016: 148). What is interesting, though, is that it is Simon, the apparently European character, who does not conform to the rules of the English language, thus subverting its dominance. In "From Narrative Prosthesis to Disability Counternarrative: Reading the Politics of Difference in *Potiki* and *The Bone People*" Clare Barker proposes a short analysis of the meaning of Simon's communication method. In her opinion his disability must be viewed as central to the understanding of a new community:

Simon's ability to communicate without speech offers a direct exposition of the interrelational alternatives to spoken English. His identity 'is confirmed not through its difference to and separateness from others, but through his interconnection with them',² therefore demonstrating the benefits of interdependence – a key concept in Hulme's vision of biculturalism – and simultaneously advocating the centralisation of disability in a re-defined notion of community. (2006: 136)

Simon's language of gestures plays yet another role: it initiates contact between people. As Barker observes,

the face-to-face contact necessitated by Simon's muteness, combined with his insistence on physical proximity and touch, forces Kerewin to re-engage in reciprocal relationships, rendering Simon's muteness as a social ability rather than a communicational disability. (2006: 135)

Being mute, Simon's only means of expression is gestures. When he is angry, he begins to act violently as well. To attract

² Quoted in the article from p. 83 of Susie O'Brien (1990) "Raising Silent Voices: The Role of the Silent Child in *An Imaginary Life* and *The Bone People*". *SPAN: Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies* 30: 79-91.

Kerewin's attention he even destroys one of her few valuable items – her most beloved guitar. What is more, at the beginning of their relationship, Simon attacks Kerewin by flicking matches at her. He also stabs his father in order to protect himself during the last of Joe's beatings. For Simon, violence is a means of non-verbal communication. Hardack analyzes the characters' resistance to touch, but additionally claims that in Hulme's novel "[t]ouch is also depicted as a form of violence" (2016: 146). When Kerewin meets Simon for the first time, she is surprised by how tight his grip is: "Let go my wrist,' but the grip tightens. Not restraining violence, pressing meaning" (Hulme 1986: 17). Kerewin makes an attempt at analysing his behaviour: "The bird he killed... was it beyond help? Might he have a dark streak in him, as Joe seems to think? And that is why the violence? Flicking matches, throwing things... ah, I don't know. I don't know much about him at all" (Hulme 1986: 250).

Barker attempts to analyse Simon's violence in more general, social terms. Simon wants the world to look at his problems, but also at the problems of the whole community, even if his message is not easy to understand:

Simon's own violent behaviour is constructed as a response to his oppressive social context. It is only when Simon is introduced into hostile social situations, when expectations of normalcy are imposed upon him and others are unable (or refuse) to read his signs, that his muteness becomes disabling: 'he'll fight to make you understand. It's his last resort, spitting and kicking... he'll do his damndest to punch into you what he wants to say' (p. 49). His destructive vandalism is therefore an effort to communicate; he smashes the windows of thirty shops, for example, after discovering that Binny Daniels has bled to death after falling on a smashed sherry bottle (p. 368). In his fear and rage, Simon departs from his own rule of referentiality, rendering his act of communication indecipherable. It is therefore Simon's behaviour, and not his muteness, that signals an inadequacy in communication, demonstrating how impairments can become disabilities in unaccommodating social contexts. (2006: 140)

Joe also exhibits violent, abusive behaviour. His actions are determined by the enormous amounts of alcohol that he consumes after a hard day's work. Although he refuses to admit it, Joe is addicted to alcohol and after each of his alcoholic indulgences he vents his frustrations on Simon by beating him. Each time he is more furious and more fierce in his attacks. Joe explains these actions to himself as an attempt to teach the boy what kind of behaviour is expected of him:

Why should I feel guilty? Why does he always find some sneaky way to make me feel bad? He's the bad one. And you don't learn, Himi, that's why you get the hits. You won't learn. You shiver already, but as soon as it's over, you'll be out doing some other stupid thing and earn yourself another lot. (Hulme 1986: 136)

In *The Circle and the Spiral: A Study of Australian Aboriginal and New Zealand Maori Literature*, Eva Rask Knudsen provides an analysis of Joe's brutal behaviour towards his son: "Joe's violence towards [Simon] must also be understood in an archetypal sense which transcends the context of social outrage at child abuse" (2004: 158). Even though it may be seen as an overgeneralization, by beating Simon, Joe attempts to take control of the colonial oppression of the past.

Kerewin also exercises violence. During her expedition to Japan she learned to fight and considers it a useful skill. She beats Joe in retaliation for his beating Simon. Armstrong offers the following commentary upon Kerewin's behaviour, connecting it with another event of Simon's abuse: "Kerewin's standing in Simon's place, her decision to step into the violent relationship between father and son, anticipates the next and far more shattering moment of violence, when she participates in the final beating of Haimona that nearly kills him" (2001: 13-14). The protagonist cannot express her anger with Simon for destroying her belongings by means of words and she prefers to use violence instead: "Her voice trembled. Her hands trembled. He can see them still. Trembling to get hold of any part of him that can feel a hurt, and wreak vengeance on him" (Hulme

1986: 304). Yet, during a conversation with Simon, she is so angry that “she can’t touch him physically, so she is beating him with her voice” (Hulme 1986: 307). Hardack comments that, in this case, “[s]ilence is safe, while language itself can become a manifestation of violence” (2016: 146). It is hence through language that Kerewin shows her anger and frustration towards the boy.

5. The troubled past

The past of all three main characters haunts them throughout their lives. Their problems with creating proper bonds and maintaining contact with other people are related to their unresolved issues from the past. Hardack proposes to view all the diseases and disabilities of the present as personifications of “the traumas that attend the legacy of colonialism, especially in the context of disrupted childhoods, lost languages, dispersed and lost families, and a kind of internal narrative break – a loss of stories, continuity, kinship, and the language to transcribe those events” (2016: 149). As it shall shortly be demonstrated, all of the characters need to confront their past in order to recover their future.

Joe blames all the failures of his adult life on Simon. On her deathbed, his wife ordered Joe to care for Simon as their own son was already dead. They both die of flu, which Joe associates with the disease brought to New Zealand by colonisers. At one point during his spiritual journey to meet the *kaumatua*, a member of the elderly whose role is to teach and guide the younger generations, Joe has a dream about his wife and Simon. In the dream, his deceased son Timote appears, sucking the breast of Joe’s late wife, Hana. Then Simon takes the place of Timote and when he proceeds to suck Hana’s breast, Hana and Timote transform into moths and disappear. It seems that Hana’s metamorphosis into an insect is a consequence of Simon’s depriving Hana of her beauty and energy: “Her skin goes grey and begins to run with sweat” (Hulme 1986: 351), suggesting that Simon is responsible for Hana and Timote’s illness

and death. The nightmare is a reflection of Joe's deep resentment towards Simon.

Joe does not contain his anger for Hana and Timote's deaths when he tells Simon: "you have just ruined everything, you shit" (Hulme 1986: 308). In her PhD dissertation titled *UNSETTLING WHITENESS: Hulme, Ondaatje, Malouf and Carey*, Antje M. Rauwerda presents the view that:

In his accusation of the boy, Joe accuses the Pakeha for the destruction of Maori culture and of his own family. For Joe, everything Maori is ruined by Simon who represents everything Pakeha. Joe beats the boy and explains that he does it because "it's not like I am hitting you, my son" (171). It is more like he is hitting a symbol of colonial intervention. (2001: 63)

Joe's childhood experience is what has determined his future identity issues. In "The End at the Beginning: Spiral Logic in Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*", Megan Thurman speculates about the reasons for Joe's problems: "Joe struggles to translate his morals into a corresponding ethical course of action because he has been torn between two cultures since birth" (2016: 10). Joe himself admits: "That's the way I feel most of the time." More loudly, 'My father's father was English so I'm not yet 100% pure. But I'm Maori. And that's the way I feel too, the way you said, that the Maoritanga has got lost in the way I live'" (Hulme 1986: 62). It is only through reconciliation with his past, and by creating bonds with the land, that Joe is able to overcome his problems. As Bongie comments: "[i]n the chapter of Part Four devoted to him, 'The Kaumatua and the Broken Man,' Joe comes face to face with the cultural past from which he has been estranged" (1995: 238).

Reimmersion in one's cultural heritage proves to be healing not only for Joe, but also for Kerewin. The woman would like to forget about her family, but the memories haunt her. She claims that her family "stomped on [her] heart". Joe wonders about the reason for her leaving her family: "that she had broken up with her family over a relationship they didn't approve

of. She didn't approve of? That her loneliness, being apart from her family, had driven her to this part of the country where none of them lived. He could understand that" (Hulme 1986: 101). Yet no true reason for the lack of contact between Kerewin and her family is ever given, apart from hints at the argument that estranged them:

But my family is gone.

I am alone.

Why did I lose my temper that night and wound everybody with words and memories?

("It's the bloody horrible way you've remembered everything bad about everybody, and kept it and festered it all your life...")

They started it. I finished it.

They are gone beyond recalling. I am gone too. Nothing matters anymore. (Hulme 1986: 167)

Even though Kerewin is reluctant to admit it, she longs for family. This is visible in her conversation with Simon: "You know what, my friend Gillayley? A family can be the bane of one's existence. A family can also be most of the meaning of one's existence. I don't know whether my family is bane or meaning, but they have surely gone away and left a large hole in my heart" (Hulme 1986: 242). At the end of the novel, though, Kerewin comes to understand that in order to heal her wounds, she must reconcile with her relatives and create a new family herself.

Simon's origins are uncertain, as he was washed ashore during a stormy night and Joe found him by chance. Nothing is known about his background and the boy remains a mystery. Joe describes the peculiar behaviour Simon displays in the hospital after being found on the beach:

He had obviously been in hospital before, and it was clear early on, from the way he reacted, that the other time had been bad. X-rays showed he had had widespread injuries to his pelvis and hips, and they would have kept him in hospital for quite a while, the medics reckoned. The other thing is, he never talked.

Screamed, my God could he scream! He was, and is, a fluent screamer. But he never said anything, or acted like he was used to talking. The ENT bloke who examined him said there was no physical reason to prevent him from speaking. He's got all the gear needed, eh. But if he vocalises, he throws up, and violently. (Hulme 1986: 86)

Simon's past is the most vivid example of a traumatising experience, as he is taunted by a "vivid haunting terrible voice, that seemed to murmur endearments all the while the hands skilfully and cruelly hurt him" (Hulme 1986: 5). Kerewin attempts to investigate what events from Simon's past caused this and she learns that his guardians were heroine dealers, who probably injected drugs into Simon, too (Hulme 1986: 378-379).

The healing of all of the characters and their coming to terms with the past is necessary for the creation of a joint future. As Wenzel asserts, "Kerewin, Joe and Simon need to overcome personal demons and find their spiritual feet before they can attempt a future with any means of success" (2006: 88). Once they have done it, they can create a family.

6. From culture clash to unitary vision

The Bone People presents a new, postcolonial vision of New Zealand. It works as an allegory, showing a potential way to synthesise all the present cultures into one, new and unique culture of New Zealand. All of the characters serve as symbolic representations of different cultures. Simon is presented in the novel as a typical European:

There isn't much above a yard of it standing there, a foot out of range of her furthest reach. Small and thin, with an extraordinary face, highboned and hollow-cheeked, cleft and pointed chin, and a sharp sharp nose. Nothing else is visible under an obscuration of silverblond hair except the mouth, and it's set in an uncommonly stubborn line. Nasty. Gnomish, thinks Kerewin. (Hulme 1986: 16)

Rauwerda holds the view that “Hulme exaggerates the paleness of the child, unsettling his whiteness by making it hyperbolic. She uses Simon to invoke the disempowered and disadvantaged colonial whiteness” (2001: 48). Simon’s arrival in New Zealand is sudden and mysterious, referring back to the time when the Europeans started their settlement. His behaviour is also destructive, as were the actions of the colonizers.

Moreover, Simon is different because of his impairment: the muteness of the child has its symbolic meaning, too, as according to Barker “the disabled child [is] read in terms of possible narratives of indigenous disempowerment, survival and activism” (2006: 130). Yet, despite his different appearance, evident disability and mysterious background, he is taken into a family and is accepted as one of the people.

Joe, on the other hand, is a modern Maori. He has a Maori appearance, but he does not consider himself as belonging to Maori culture and says with regret “if I was proper Maori I’d...” His doubts about his Maori ancestry are related to his upbringing:

Maybe I can blame my grandfather for that in me, eh. He was highly respected and that, an elder too, but of the church, not of the people. He avoided the marae... I think he was ashamed, secretly ashamed, of my Nana and her Maoriness. But oowee, was that old lady strongwilled! What she wanted, she got, me or anything else... but the old man, I think he took it out on me for being like her, for being dark, and speaking Maori first, all sorts of things... he always seemed fair about it, at least, he always gave me a reason, but he was hard on me. And my Nana wasn’t one for letting kids take it easy. (Hulme 1986: 227)

Kerewin seems to be the binding character in the novel. She combines the features of both cultures. Her skin colour suggests that she is a descendant of Europeans, yet, deep inside she feels Maori. She speaks the native language and knows much about the traditions and Maori culture. Joe realizes that:

'You speak Maori, and know a bit about, about things. Are you Maori by any chance?' Kerewin, blue-eyed, brown-haired, and mushroom pale, looked back at him. 'If I was in America, I'd be an octoroon' [...] It's very strange, but whereas by blood, flesh and inheritance, I am but an eighth Maori, by heart, spirit and inclination, I feel all Maori'. (Hulme 1986: 61-62)

Joe and Kerewin bond over their Maori ancestry – for both of them it provides a healing power that enables them to start their life anew. Kerewin builds the community's *marae*, a place for meetings, and Joe meets a *kaumatua* – a member of the elders who nominates him to take responsibility for protecting the land's gods.

The characters' physical illnesses and problems are symbolic representations of cultural illnesses, as in the text, "forms of disability personify the traumas that attend the legacy of colonialism" (Hardack 2016: 149). Joe's alcoholism, Kerewin's mysterious illness and Simon's muteness all refer back to the source of evil associated with the colonizers. It is only through immersion in culture and creating bonds between each other that they can heal both their physical and psychological impairments:

The Bone People emphasizes how the complete cycle of life-rituals represented by the social alienation, transition and integration (Van Gennep, 1960) has a healing effect on individuals and societies. [...] Hulme expresses a reverential respect for myth and the past to act as guidelines for a new future. (Wenzel 2006: 81)

In "Postmodernism or Postcolonialism?" Simon During suggests that Hulme's aim is to prove the importance of Maoriness as necessary for the (re-)building of New Zealand identity: "*The Bone People* [...] desires a postcolonial identity given to it in Maoriness. The heroine in rebuilding a marae, the hero, in guarding the remnants of the sacred ships of the tribe, heal their alienations by contact with a precolonial culture" (1985: 373). Indeed, Kerewin, as the in-between character, provides the ultimate resolution to the problems described in the novel.

She is the one who makes the decision to create a new family together with Joe, but she also includes Simon, the representative of the Pakeha, as part of their family and decides to build a new house for all three of them. Even before Kerewin sets out on her spiritual journey she realizes the inseparability of the three of them and she conveys her revelation by means of art: she creates a tricephalos, a sculpture comprising their face, “which becomes a symbol of their belonging and togetherness and wholeness” (Wenzel 2006: 88). Upon finding it, Joe confirms Kerewin’s connection with him and Simon: “[s]he saw us as a whole, as a set” (Hulme 1986: 315).

The new house that Kerewin builds for her family takes the form of a shell. The heroine comments on the reasons for her architectural choice:

I had spent many nights happily drawing and redrawing those plans. I decided on a shell-shape, a regular spiral of rooms expanding around the decapitated Tower... privacy, apartness, but all connected and all part of the whole. When finished, it will be studio and hall and church and guesthouse, whatever I choose, but above all else, HOME. Home in a larger sense than I’ve used the term before. (Hulme 1986: 434)

The creation of such a patchwork family suggests the creation of a utopian unity between the Pakeha, who were once the invaders, and the native people of New Zealand. As Hardack observes, in the text “surrogate parents are also bound to their adopted children in mutual dialogical hybridity and through a complex process of reflection and exchange” (2016: 153). The characters can finally create one new culture fit for the post-colonial reality, a so-called “composite” (Knudsen 2004: 177) picture of the new society:

[T]he three people finally reunite as a prototype of a family and so stage their reintegration into society where the family unit functions as a necessary and valuable component. Whereas Kerewin’s tower initially serves as a symbol of separation, her convoluted new house at the end of the novel represents and anticipates the

eventual creation of a new social dynamic, thereby indicating that the present can learn from the past. (Wenzel 2006: 83)

The family thus needs to emerge as a part of community, enabling it to heal after the colonial times.

Kerewin Holmes, the protagonist, whose name reflects the author herself, shows that the borders of the new New Zealand are blurred, that the racial differences are no longer so visible, because no-one is purely Maori or solely European. According to Hardack, this perspective can be called “[i]ndigenous intra-culturality”, as “Hulme write[s] from within and without [her society] and simultaneously inhabit[s] multiple positions, identities and genres” (2016: 140). As Wenzel states, “In *The Bone People*, Hulme uses fiction and the imagination to undermine static or conventional perceptions of identity. She proposes to reconcile, link or connect different cultures by means of literature and its close correlatives myth and art” (2006: 82). In this way, the author sets out on a journey to the beginning of Maori culture, abundant with the works of art and complex mythology.

Patrick Evans in “‘Pakeha-Style Biculturalism’ and the Maori Writer” acknowledges that “[Hulme] offers [...] a suitably elastic concept of what she calls the ‘numinous’, something that enables her to replace the bicultural ‘either-or’ with what is, in effect, a sort of ‘both-and’” (2006: 26). This hybrid character of her work is crucial in the understanding of the new emerging culture of New Zealand. Barker confirms Evans’s views, also commenting upon Simon’s role in the act of cultural unification:

Hulme offers a [...] vision of a ‘commensal’ bicultural nation, denoting a version of cohabitation in which differences can be maintained and respected. Within these contexts, the disabled child is seen to signal the future of Maori culture in New Zealand: Simon is the focus of *The Bone People*’s commensal vision, representing the challenges to be faced in the movement towards a true biculturalism. (2006: 130)

Implementing the element of the western world in the construction of a new identity underlines the importance of Pakeha tradition and output in New Zealand. In the postcolonial reality, the social roles are subverted, the *status quo* is undermined:

Each project already contains a part of the other within it: Kerewin's bit of Maori and Joe's bit of Pakeha problematize the categorical boundaries that might once have separated them. This creates the condition for a confusion of roles, a postmodern *mélange*, that not only threatens the idea of a single cultural identity – Maori, Pakeha – founded upon sheer difference, but ironizes the projects themselves. (Bongie 1995: 235)

As a matter of fact, the novel itself is bound neither by a clear beginning nor an ultimate ending as, according to Maori beliefs, the ending is always a beginning and the beginning is the ending (Thurman 2016: 9). Elizabeth Webby in "Spiralling to Success" confirms that "[the book's] structure is, indeed, that of a double spiral, where beginning and ending are in perpetual interchange" (qtd in Thurman 6). The book's prologue is titled "The End At The Beginning" and its epilogue ends with the Maori words "TE MUTUNGA – RANEI TE TAKE [Eng. The end – or the beginning]" (Hulme 1986: 445). Maori understanding of time as a spiral principle makes it possible to view the book in more universal terms. Also, this understanding proves that the novel's borders, whether generic or physical, are blurred.

The novel's fluid form suggests that clear-cut boundaries are not valid in the postcolonial world. To create a new society, the characters have to dismiss the categories of colour, race and background. Keri Hulme presents a vision of the world where binary divisions no longer serve as principles for creating a nation. In her eyes, the community of postcolonial New Zealand is blended, multicultural and diverse.

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