A Visitor's Waiata Whaiāipo

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Since women in traditional Māori society usually took the initiative in love, they were the ones who composed most of the love songs. The words of hundreds of these waiata were written down in the second half of the nineteenth century, mostly by Māori men, and the resulting manuscripts and early publications are now in our libraries.

Many love songs were heartfelt, a response to the poet's own circumstances, but others were not seriously intended and were sung mostly for entertainment, often by revellers on moonlit nights. Among them are waiata whaiāipo, witty, flirtatious compositions in which, usually, a woman speaks admiringly of two or three distinguished men and claims to be in love with each of them.

References to well-known landmarks — hills and headlands in particular — locate the poet and her men in the landscapes to which they belong, and must have added much to their interest. Songs must often have been all the more popular because of the opportunity they provided for people to sing about famous places.[1]

The Tāmaki region,[2] with its large population, rich food resources and spectacular harbour, was one of the most famous of all. It is celebrated in a waiata whaiāipo, apparently once fairly well known, in which an anonymous poet represents herself as looking across the water to Takapuna (the name then given to the stretch of land that ends in what is now usually known as North Head).[3] She looks calm, she says, but really she's in turmoil.[4]

There's been an affair, she claims, with a man named Tere, and she's still in love with him. Then there's Parawini, whom she addresses, telling him rather grandly that he may as well go back home because she is tapu, not free to take a lover. Although a poet speaking of her tapu is usually complaining that as a woman of rank she has been forbidden sex before marriage, here the remark is playful: 'I'm much too good for Parawini, anyway.'

She reinforces this assertion of tapu and mana by speaking metaphorically of 'standing on a batten' (he turanga kaho). Horizontal battens, or kaho, supported the layers of thatch inside the roof of a house, while another batten lay along the ridge of the roof outside. In the house of a person of rank, the highest of these battens possessed an intense tapu, which was closely associated with the owner's tapu and mana. Because of this association, the owner would not normally permit anyone else to stand on the roof of his house.

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But a leading rangatira might choose to make a specially significant announcement while standing on his own roof, thereby asserting his mana and emphasising the importance of the occasion.

Although the poet appears to speak rather dismissively of Parawini, she is in fact paying him a compliment by mentioning him. So who was Parawini? His name is the Māori version of an English name, probably Brown (although the usual equivalent of this is now Parāone). He may have been a Pākehā, or a Māori who had taken an English name. Quite possibly he was William Brown, a young Scotsman who with his friend John Logan Campbell was living in the region in 1840, keen to buy land (the two of them ended up owning Motu-korea, now also known as Browns Island). Perhaps Parawini's home—the land of which the poet speaks, the land to which he may as well return—was Britain.

In the last lines we learn that the poet is not living permanently in Tāmaki but is a visitor to its populous shores. After all the excitement, she is ready now to return to her own people (or so she says), and she brings her song to an appropriate close by speaking of the journey she will make. The name TTpaka refers here (it can have a wider meaning) to the channel, now usually known as Tāmaki Strait, which lies between Tāmaki's shore and Waiheke and Ponui Islands; across its far end there lies a small island, Pakihi, which bars the way visually but is at the same time a landmark serving to remind the viewer of the Hauraki region beyond. The poet ends her song by sending her mihi, her loving greetings, over the heights of Pakihi to her relatives back home.

Tēnei ka noho
Tēnei ka noho, ka whakamau ki waho
Ngā rae kōkiri o Takapuna raia.
Waho nā, e te iwi, te tirohia mai nā,
Taka ko roto nei, me he ao e rere.
Wai ka tohu iho e hoki rua te makau?
Nā roto I kare atu — ko koe nei, e Tere!
Tēnei te aroha, māku rawa e huna iho.
Nāaku rā i tuku atu te rewa o Parawini —
E hoki ra koe ki tōu whenua,
Ka tapu tēnei, he turanga kaho!
Kei hei taku ara i whanaatu ai au?
Kei Tīkapa rā, marama te titiro,
Pae ka riakina o Pakihi raia,
Ki te tahu ripariPa, te wā ki aku hoa —
Ka mutu, e te iwi, aku rangi mihi atu ī!

Here I sit
Here I sit, gazing out to where
Takapuna's headlands are thrusting up.
You see my outer self, you people —
Inside I'm in a whirl, like flying clouds.
Who would expect a lover to return?
Within, I longed — for you, Tere!
I'm so much in love, but I must hide it.
Yes, I let Parawini sail away —
Yes, you can go back to your land,
I am tapu, standing on a batten!
Where is the route I must follow?
Over there at Tīkapa, so I can plainly see
The uplifted ridge of pakihi,
The high horizon my friends live beyond.
My people, this ends my greeting.

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- McGregor, John. *Popular Maori Songs.* Auckland: Field, 1893.
- McGregor, John. *Popular Maori Songs.* Supplement No. 1. Auckland: Champtaloup and Cooper, 1898.

Endnotes

[1] The word 'waiata' refers to one particular poetic genre; it is not a descriptive term, so is not translatable. There are several sub-genres. A waiata whaiapo is a 'waiata speaking of love' or 'waiata addressed to lovers,' as opposed to the often more seriously intended waiata aroha, or 'waiata of longing.'

[2] The region named Auckland by the Pākehā.

[3] The text given here comes from McGregor 1898:21; it is translated for the first time. A variant text can be found in McGregor 1893: 90.

[4] Her metaphor (lines 3 and 4) follows a traditional pattern.

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[1] The Nautical Almanac is the direct linear successor of tables issued 1767-1831 by the Commissioners of Longitude; 1832-1959 by the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty; 1960 jointly by H. M. Nautical Almanac Office and the Nautical Almanac Office, US Naval Observatory.

[2] I am grateful to Garry J Tee of Auckland University who kindly provided a photocopy of the Preface and other papers relating to Babbage and Comrie.

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