



**Translating Indigenous literature from Aotearoa into Italian:
Patricia Grace's *Pōtiki* and Hone Tuwhare's *Small Holes in the Silence*.**

Dr Antonella Sarti Evans

Introduction

In this article, I aim to give some insight about translating into Italian two original bilingual works of literature from Aotearoa New Zealand, with te reo Māori as a crucial and enriching part of NZ English. I will focus on the iconic novel *Pōtiki* (1986) by Patricia Grace and on Hone Tuwhare's celebrated poetry from *Small Holes in the Silence* (2016). In translating NZ literature, I have always been fascinated by new English words, puns and metaphors often entangled with Māori phrases, which clearly have no correspondence in the Italian language. As a translator, my intention is to echo the *colours of words* from the unique voices of Kiwi authors – the colours of words being conveyed through lexicon, syntax and rhythm. I believe that translating literature is a form of art: the constant choice of vocabulary and style means creative interpretation. On the other hand, in giving foreign readers access to original texts, the “invisibility of translation” ought to be retained¹. Invisibility is a kind of paradox: it depends on the translator's skills to maintain this mediation imperceptible within that creative relationship. A good translation expresses the unique and diverse voice of the author, and surely, one of the most challenging tasks in literary translation is keeping faith to the original cultural context and registers through usage of contemporary, updated language. One example: Patricia Grace often used the word “race” in *Pōtiki* which was considered acceptable back in the 1980s but it was not longer recommended for use in 2017, when I translated the book; thus, I translated “one of our race” as “one of us” (“uno di noi”). Having Patricia Grace's support and guidance throughout the translation of her work has been priceless and made me feel so honored. Also, I am thankful to Rob Tuwhare, for his kind assistance and enthusiasm during the translation of his father's poems into *Piccoli Buchi nel Silenzio* (2018). I think it is dutiful, as a translator, to give a contribution to the diffusion of a wonderful, ancestral culture which is being continued, amplified and re-created in a written form by generations of authors – whose Resistance is inspiring. Finally, I will comment on the importance of translating Indigenous literature from Aotearoa into Italian, given the historical and cultural connections between those two countries and their people.

Translating Pōtiki: why?

Pōtiki is a wonderful example of the transposition of oral tradition into contemporary New Zealand literature: it is so authentic and genuinely New Zealand, depicting Māori community life back in the 1980s yet not slightly affected by ethnic nationalism², and at the same time conveying deep, Indigenous spirituality. The re-interpretation of myth takes place within daily life along with the harsh battles a Māori community fights to defend their basic right to live at peace on their own land, and together. Now, that right is sacred and the battle is common to numerous places in the world. Italy

¹ Prof Briar Nelson, Monash University, Melbourne, while visiting Victoria University of Wellington in Spring 2017.

² As also NZ literary translator Geraldine Harcourt has underlined (during her talk at the Japanese Embassy, Wellington, 1 May 2018).



has faced a huge issue of immigration in recent decades, due to wars and persecutions in Africa and in the Middle-East: thousands and thousands of people having to leave their lands, jobs, community life because of the greed and mean exercise of power in their countries, and dangerously reaching the Italian coasts as refugees. Abuse of power and unfair treatment occur in both hemispheres, and it's awful to see minority groups threatened on their own land (as denounced in *Pōtiki*). What I find amazing is how the battle to regain those basic rights, which nationwide coincided with the battle to recover the native Māori land along with the Māori language from the 1970s onwards, has brought such an enrichment to NZ culture and to NZ English broadly. Te Reo Māori has entered NZ English in an endemic way, progressively: it is a *taonga* 'treasure' New Zealanders must protect, starting with opposing the regress in the public sector usage that the newly appointed National government has announced it will pursue.³ Having moved back to New Zealand a few years ago, I noticed a remarkable increase of te reo being spoken compared to the mid-1990s, not to mention what was like in 1986 (when *Pōtiki* was first published): in those years people could get fired simply for saying "Kia Ora" instead of "Hi there" in public offices.⁴ So many Māori words and phrases are now part of our daily speech in Aotearoa, along with their special rhythm and musicality. Hopefully, the musicality of Māori chants will pervade more and more the inflection of NZ spoken language.

Pōtiki is structured like a Māori *whaikorero* 'oration' itself, beginning with a chant, continuing with the main contents of the speech and ending with a *waiata* 'song', as explained by the author:

*So I began Pōtiki with a chant, then went into the main story and ended with a song.
At the very end are the words "ka huri", words often said when an orator concludes.
These words turn the 'speaking' to the next speaker; it's someone else's turn to speak.*⁵

The main character, Toko (or 'Pōtiki', the last born) is a child who suffers from physical disabilities and he is a victim – the symbolic scapegoat – of the violence caused by greed against his own community. He is a disabled child, who is gifted with *mana* 'wisdom' and the enchanting power of a story-teller:

*He has a greater and wiser vision and he understands the past and the present more than other people do. He sees and understands the struggles that people have and what this leads to. He also sees that what has come from the past is in the people of the present, and will be in the people of the future. So who they are now is because of who their ancestors were. He sees that the ancestors are there with the people now.*⁶

³ On January 20, 2024, the Māori king Tūheitia called a national Māori hui 'gathering' at Tūrangawaewae Marae to discuss how to respond to the new government's announced policies towards dismantling some fundamental Māori rights achieved through decades of fighting and in accordance with the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. Those unwinding policies aim to remove the use of the Māori language within the public sector and unravel the Māori Health Authority, as a start. The gathering counted more than 10.000 Māori participants from all over the country. Tūheitia incited, "The best protest we can do right now is: be Māori. Be who we are, live our values, speak our *reo* 'language', care for our *mokopuna* 'grandchildren', our *awa* 'rivers', our *maunga* 'mountains', just be Māori. We need to be united first, and then we decide our future".

⁴ As it was the case of post-office telephone operator Naida Glavish, who later became a Māori MP.

⁵ From an interview with Patricia Grace published in *Spirit Carvers. Interviews with eighteen writers from New Zealand*, edited by Antonella Sarti, Cross/Cultures 31, Rodopi, Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1998, p.52.

⁶ Ibid. p 52.



Past, present and future time are interwoven in the Māori culture, while Patricia Grace also believes that “written stories are just an extension of *our* oral story-telling”:

*I think that we are our ancestors. We are here now because of our ancestors. I think of a circle, a necklace, each of us being a little bead on it. It's not a straight, long line with the past here and the future there, but with past and future circling or spiraling, so that it all becomes part of the present. Past and future are part of the present.*⁷

Toko's story echoes the Māori myth of Maui: like Maui, Toko-Pōtiki was born on a beach under unusual circumstances, he pulled up a big fish,⁸ he had a fire story (the arson which destroyed the Māori settlement, in the novel), he had a water story (the *Marae*, Māori community land, was flooded) and prematurely met his death when he passed through a toothed aperture. Whilst the ancient Maui perished while entering the vagina of Hinenuitepo, the goddess of death which he dared defeat, Toko was killed by entering a door to the *wharenuī* ‘the meeting house’, in a mysterious explosion. The myth is being revisited and made alive in contemporary times, and I wonder: how many children can identify with Toko in the world nowadays? How many children like Toko have stories of usurpation to tell? Of persecution, and of violent death?

Pōtiki was a literary case. Not only it received the New Zealand Book Award (1986) – the first time a Maori woman writer received this award⁹ – effectively, it led the way towards the recognition of Indigenous literature from Aotearoa as the Nation's own literature, which is quite evident nowadays. *Pōtiki* is praised as a masterpiece of NZ literature, and has been read largely by NZ students for three generations now. Along with Witi Ihimaera and Hone Tuwhare, Patricia Grace was one of the most remarkable protagonists of the Māori Literary Renaissance which through the revival of the Māori language and creation of Māori literature supported and aligned with the movement of recognition of Māori social rights since the 1970s. However, the author was not spared some harsh, closed-minded criticism when *Pōtiki* was released, as she mentioned in her Memoirs:

*Pōtiki had a mixed reception. When I first began writing, I knew I wanted to write about the ordinary lives of ordinary people who were Māori, who I knew hadn't been written about before in fiction – or who were only beginning to be written about. So, a sentence in one mostly positive review which ended with a statement that I could write a ‘truly New Zealand’ book one day, was puzzling. Others called it a ‘political’ novel, a description I didn't understand at the time – written to “incite racial hatred and create social disharmony”, according to an irate parent whose child had been given the book to read as part of his school programme. Another of his complaints was that it didn't use proper language.*¹⁰

⁷ Ibid, p 49.

⁸ In the ancient myth, Maui fished up the North Island of New Zealand, which is called in Māori *Te Ika-a-Māui* (“The fish of Māui”).

⁹ Already in 1975, Patricia Grace was acknowledged as the first female Māori author of short fiction with the publication of *Wairiki and other stories* (NZ Penguin).

¹⁰ Patricia Grace, *From the Centre: A Writer's Life*, Auckland, NZ Penguin, 2021, pp 193-194.



Translating Te Reo Maori from *Pōtiki* into Italian.

Māori words and phrases are so naturally and fluently interwoven within English in *Pōtiki* to make it sound like one language. What Patricia Grace did back in the 1980s was quite innovative: she studded English with Māori words which were commonly spoken on a Marae or by Māori communities, while paraphrasing the long sentences into English subsequently, and smoothly, so that non-Māori speakers would not lose any content. However, for those readers who liked to take the challenge of discovering and delving into Te Reo, the book welcomed them into one more beautiful dimension. Indeed, the whole novel is an invitation to appreciate the Māori culture.

The publisher and I chose to have footnotes and a glossary of Māori words in Italian. We put footnotes in Italian translation for the most recurring Māori words of daily usage, as typically understood by NZ readers today. In addition, we introduced a glossary at the end of the book for some key concepts belonging to the Māori culture and mythology, and for words which are not of strictly daily usage. The idea of a glossary was accepted by Patricia Grace for our publication: Italian readers could appreciate the Māori language and culture more directly, and Māori words wouldn't remain just sounds for people who live out of the NZ context. On the contrary, the author would not have agreed to have a glossary at the end of original *Pōtiki*, as it was in her intention to give her NZ readership the taste and feeling of Indigenous daily speech in Aotearoa. As she made it clear, she didn't want Māori to be treated as a foreign language in its own country.

Examples of Māori words widely used by NZ speakers today, and included in *Pōtiki* are: *tangi* 'funeral', *waiata* 'song', *mana* 'authority/wisdom', *koha* 'gift/donation', *kai* 'food', *wharenuī* 'meeting house', *wharekai* 'common dining place', *hongi*, the famous Māori greeting gesture nose against nose, *haeremai* 'welcome', *aroha* 'love/commitment', *tupuna* 'grandparents/ancestors', *kui* 'grandma', *paua*, a popular native mollusc, *manuka*, a native tree, *porangi* 'crazy', *whanau* 'family', *urupa* 'cemetery' etc. I provided a translation for those words in footnotes. I had a footnote on the very first page as well, following the initial poem/song referring to an act of creation, since I thought it was very significant for Italian readers to know the meaning of *Tihe Mauriora* immediately (intended as both 'first breath of life' and 'request of the right to speak') – a pivotal Māori concept:

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,
a springing,
to an outer circle,*

*There comes
an intake of breath –
Tihe Mauriora!¹¹*

I translated in an Italian footnote the final greetings which commonly close a ceremony on the Marae or elsewhere after an official meeting of importance in New Zealand, and which have become widely spoken now: “Tena koutou. Tena koutou, tena koutou katoa” (“Many greetings to all of you”). Just to give an idea of how naturally Māori words are interwoven with English in Patricia Grace’s writing, let me quote a few lines from *Pōtiki*:

I knew that all the people were at the meeting-house and that in the wharekai the tables would have been set for morning (..) I would not approach the wharenuui at such a late hour¹²

Thus, I translated the words *wharenuui* ‘meeting-place’ – ‘casa d’incontro’ and *wharekai* ‘eating place’ – ‘sala di ristoro’ in footnotes. I would like to quote a beautiful piece of dialogue between Granny Tamihana and her granddaughter Mary, by the beginning of the novel:

At twelve o’clock Granny Tamihana hobbled up onto the verandah and called out to her, ‘Haere mai te awhina o te iwi. Haere mai ki te kai, haere mai ki te inu ti’

‘See, Gran?’

‘Very beautiful my Mary’

‘Beautiful and nice.’

‘Very beautiful and nice.’

‘Very beautiful and nice... You come and have a cup of tea now.’

‘Cup of tea.’

‘Come and have a cup of tea and a bread.’

‘Come back after and do my work.’

¹¹ *Potiki*, 1986. Auckland, Penguin, p.7.

¹² *Ibid*, p.25



'When you had your cup of tea and a kai.'

*'Come back after. After,' she said to the house as she followed Granny Tamihana out.*¹³

Patricia Grace used the welcoming phrase between Granny Tamihana and her granddaughter so naturally in Māori: “*Haere mai te awhina o te iwi. Haere mai ki te kai, haere mai ki te inu ti*” meaning “welcome to help the people. Welcome to eat and drink”, which I translated into Italian as “benvenuta ad aiutare la gente. Benvenuta a mangiare e a bere” in a footnote, since those Māori words and phrases have become familiar to NZ speakers today (eg. *haere mai, kai, iwi* and so on). Moreover, I noticed that Patricia Grace used to paraphrase the main contents of Māori phrases in the following lines in English, in what resulted to me as a natural flow in *Pōtiki*, and in a way that resembled the speaking habits of many Māori people, included herself.

*My first language is English. So I need to write in English because I can't write well enough in Māori; but I often have decisions to make about the Māori words that I use in my writing. If I like to use them, I do use them; if it seems he natural thing to do, I do it. So the Māori words that I use in the English text are usually words that I am comfortable with using when I speak. If the Māori words that come comfortably into the English sentence and the person that I am writing about would use those Māori words naturally in English speech, then I use them. I use them for the character.*¹⁴

Patricia Grace has been fighting a battle to regain the Indigenous language in New Zealand, and I wanted to acknowledge that. I tried to have Italian readers make the effort of discovering Te Reo to some extent, however I had to keep in mind a very different kind of readership, for whom both Māori and English are foreign languages. It is important for foreign readers to make sense of both languages, as *Pōtiki* was a pioneer bilingual masterpiece.

A few examples in translation of NZ English from *Pōtiki* into Italian

The language of *Pōtiki* is unique in its dialogic, daily-life poetry and it was both a challenge and a pleasure for me to translate this novel, 30 years later, into Italian. Patricia Grace is a master of the English language: she exploits the beauty of English conciseness constantly, in an intense and original way. Italian is by definition an analytical language, as opposed to synthetic English, which means that several Italian words often need to be used to translate a single one from English, not to mention words created or shaped anew. I will provide a few examples of concise metaphors from *Pōtiki* I found so beautiful: “the water bangled” (“l’acqua disegnavo cerchi come braccialetti”: the idea is there both of shining light and circles on the water’s surface which I had to choose from), or “screaming the night into two” (“spezzando la notte con i suoi strilli”).

¹³ Ibid, p.20

¹⁴ From *Spirit Carvers. Interviews with eighteen writers from New Zealand*, edited by Antonella Sarti, Cross/Cultures 31, Rodopi, Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1998, p.50.



I found the translation of idioms from *Pōtiki* so intriguing (for example, “a stick in the mud”, “un pesce lesso”, or “sempre col naso per terra”), as well as slang expressions such as “to backy the children” (“portare i bimbi in spalla”), “liney hands” (instead of “wrinkled”/“rugose”, which I translated as “mani increspate”) and so on. I was fascinated by unusual associations of words such as: “stacking thunder” (“il tuono che s’impila/che s’ammassa”) or “bowling waves” (“onde che rotolavano”), by onomatopoeas like “the creening of seagulls” (“il criei-criei dei gabbiani”) and by puns, for instance: Mr Dollarman or Dolman (which I chose not to translate). Also, I found a challenge in conveying the meaning of special phrases, for example: “at this elbow of knowledge”, which refers in a particular way to a sequence of carvings in the *wharehau* ‘the meeting house’ and, out of metaphor, to the passing on of knowledge from a master to a young carver. Another stimulating, yet so ordinary word I remember is ‘shift’ which is used with several meanings, ranging from motion to emotion (‘muovere’, ‘commuovere’, ‘slittare’ o ‘cambiamento’, ‘mutamento’ etc) and becoming quite extraordinary, in the combination of those.

Another poetical phrase that struck me was: “the wailing of women that swells and recedes the way the sea does, the way the wind does, the way the heart does at certain times” I found it fantastic in its simplicity and perfection, while recalling the Māori attachment to the sea. Patricia Grace used the word ‘recedes’ for the sea, the wind and the heart, and it was not possible to find a single Italian word matching all of those, for sure not the Italian verb ‘recede’ (I translated: “il gemito delle donne che si gonfia e si ripiega come fa il mare, come fa il vento, come fa il cuore in certi momenti”). *Pōtiki* takes place on a Māori settlement along the coast (I feel the setting was inspired to Hongoeka Bay, Plimmerton, where the author lives), and the sea is a constant presence for the characters. It is important to note that the sea (*Tangaroa*)¹⁵ has always been considered as a sacred source of life in the Māori culture: feeding, nurturing and healing.

Translating Hone Tuwhare’s poetry *Small Holes in the Silence–Piccoli Buchi nel Silenzio* (2018)

I was fascinated to find out that a literary ‘dialogue’ had occurred in the years between Patricia Grace and Hone Tuwhare, as the title of Tuwhare’s poem ‘Small Holes in the Silence’ reveals. Indeed, Patricia titled her latest collection of stories ‘Small Holes in the Silence’ in 2006, which she dedicated to Hone (a few years before his death); later on, Hone’s son, Rob Tuwhare, chose the same title for the posthumous collection of Hone Tuwhare’s poetry. As a reply to another of Tuwhare’s famous lines: “A wooden spear can be parried, but not a spear of words”, the poet’s friend and Māori translator, Hone Hohepa, wrote in the preface to collection *Small Holes in the Silence* that his ‘spear was the pencil’:

We notify the world that you were an expert with spears fashioned from wood, and your spear was the pencil. Your words flowed through that spear, and you stood a solitary warrior, priest and poet in the English language (..) the world has your poetry,

¹⁵ Tangaroa is the god guardian of the oceans, born after the separation of Ranginui (the sky Father) and Papatūānuku (the Earth Mother) along with Tane, the god of the Forests; Tāwhirimātea, the god of the winds and the weather; Tūmatauenga, the god of war, and other siblings.



*the people share your mana because the composition, the hues and the deeper meanings that welled up were in fact Māori.*¹⁶

I believe that Hone Tuwhare's poetry is a marvellous example of interpretation and conciliation of the dual soul of NZ identity: Māori and Pākehā (white, of European heritage). His voice always conveyed an inborn humanity and compassion, along with his biting humor and vocal fight against intolerance, spoliation and injustice. Tuwhare's poetry is imbued with *te ao Māori*, 'the Māori world' and Māori myths so profoundly, yet it falls for the fascination for some pivotal Western literature, such as the Bible and Shakespeare. And whilst most of Tuwhare's poems are written mainly in English, undoubtedly the Māori culture and ideology offers the most unique perspective: in an animistic worshipping of Nature (Papatūānuku, the Mother Land) and a never-failing attachment to the Māori community life, along with the cult of the ancestors. Māori words are adapted to the English lexicon by Tuwhare repeatedly and in such a witty way, while creating neologisms; one I liked especially was *honginess* (from poem 'Showing off, wave?') – 'hongī' is the traditional Māori greeting gesture nose against nose, while 'ness' is, of course, an English suffix for nouns:

*the sensuous curve
& curl of a white-
topped wave-length
sprinting – only to
clash with an
opposing running one
in an exuberant
frolicsome white-
nosed bluntness of
honginess (...)*¹⁷

I translated *honginess* very simply as "fare hongī" ("in un'esuberante/allegria schiettezza/bianca di naso/a fare hongī (..)") Alternatively, 'hongī' is used as an English verb: "sore feet hongī" in the poem 'Maniapoto':

*Blistered feet are slapping the sealed road. Sore feet
hongī an endless greeting to loose stones scattered by*

¹⁶ Small Holes in the Silence, 2011. Auckland, Godwit, p.13

¹⁷ Ibid, p.281



*the road-side.*¹⁸

“Piedi ricoperti di vesciche schiaffeggiano la strada asfaltata. Piedi doloranti
si scambiano un infinito hongì coi sassi sparsi
a bordo strada.”¹⁹

With the publisher of *Piccoli Buchi nel Silenzio* (a selection of poems from *Small Holes in the Silence* in a parallel text), I agreed to put footnotes for all Māori words and phrases typically understood by NZ readers today, so to be faithful to the original intention of the poet to introduce evocative words from Te Reo, while asking our readers to take the challenge of discovering the native language of Aotearoa. I found Tuwhare’s skill in blending Māori with English an amazing way to communicate diversity within affinity. Among the many examples of use of Māori words within English throughout *Small Holes in the Silence*, I may quote:

from poem ‘Rain maker’s song for Whina’: *we will all become taurekareka*

‘taurekareka’ means ‘destitutes’, ‘enslaved’ – ‘schiavi’ as I wrote in a footnote,

and a few lines later the phrases: *you must think of your tupuna* (‘ancestors’ – ‘avi’), and the beautiful greeting *Kia ora tonu koe* (‘Hello, be well – live life to the fullest’).²⁰

I found another interesting example of Māori words embedded within English in the poem ‘Not by wind ravaged’: *The mana of my house is fled.*

As widely known in New Zealand, *mana* means ‘spiritual power, dignity, authority’, a word which has long entered the NZ English vocabulary, as well as the word *koha* ‘gift’–‘dono’ chosen in conclusion of the poem titled ‘Maniapoto’:

we leave our koha-gifts of forgotten singlets and underpants (..)

*Your tuna and pūhā kisses, we take with us.*²¹

Tuna refers to a kind of ‘eel’, while *pūhā*, along with *kamo-kamo* are traditional vegetables from the Māori cuisine, which are quite often mentioned in Tuwhare’s poems, such as in ‘Country Visit’:

she said she would make

dough-boys to go with the kamo-kamo, the meat

*and the pūhā...*²²

Also, I put a footnote for the Italian translation of *Raro-henga*, ‘the after-life’–‘l’aldilà’:

what happens to your waste-words poet?

Do they limp to Heaven, or go down easy

¹⁸ *Small Holes in the Silence*, p.182

¹⁹ *Piccoli Buchi nel Silenzio*, p 83.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.180

²¹ *Small Holes in the Silence*, p.182

²² *Ibid*, p.115



To Raro-henga? (from the poem ‘On a theme by Hone Taiapa’)²³.

I found it very natural for Tuwhare to use the common Maori word *taniwha* ‘a spirit’–‘spiritello’ with English plural ‘s’ in poem ‘Children’s Tale’:

the taniwha breaths fire

and hot stones (..)

He is the boss of all the taniwhas.

Exceptionally, I chose to translate the word *aroha* ‘love’–‘amore’ straight on the line in italics, instead of adding a footnote, as I didn’t want to break the immediacy and strength of the poet’s message. *Aroha* is one of the very early words the Māori people taught (and teach) to non-Māori, and it is universally known in Aotearoa. I do believe it is number one word in NZ English, and a fundamental concept in the Māori culture (love as a commitment, with a broad meaning).

I shake my hands and say, hell, what

is this thing called aroha

“scuoto la testa e dico, dannazione

cos’è questa cosa che chiamiamo *amore*” (from the poem ‘Hotere’)²⁴

Hone Tuwhare loved to experiment in rhythm, syntax and especially, lexicon. There are plenty of examples of puns and intriguing language games with English words; for instance, while translating poem ‘A Northland Heart-Scape’, I was charmed by the expression *heart-scape* ‘cuor-veduta’, made up of the words *heart* ‘cuore’ and *scape* ‘veduta’, the latter coming either from the ordinary word *landscape* ‘paesaggio’ or *escape* ‘fuga’; in the end, I decided to translate it as ‘fuitina’ meaning ‘lovers escape’.

A recurring and permeating theme in Hone Tuwhare’s poetry is the awe for Nature, especially for powerful Tāwhirimātea, the Maori god of the storms, along with the personification of the water (sea, river, streams). Rain is the protagonist of one of Tuwhare’s most iconic poems, ‘Small Holes in the Silence’, around which the poet forges an unforgettable image:

I can hear you

making small holes

in the silence

*rain*²⁵

Another well-known poem is titled ‘Reign Rain’. In the case of the brilliant alliteration *reign rain* I had the dilemma whether to translate it into Italian as ‘regia pioggia’ (with a strong alliteration in ‘gia’) or as ‘pioggia padrona’ (with smaller alliterations in ‘p’ and ‘a’). I opted for the second choice, which was less musical, yet the sound came out more linked with the meaning and also,

²³ Ibid, p.134

²⁴ *Small Holes in the Silence*, p.100

²⁵ Ibid, p.88.



because the word ‘padrona’ is more updated than ‘regia’. Out of curiosity, I checked the Māori translation and I admired the solution Patu Hohepa had found in *ūa-uaua* (‘water-demanding, ‘acqua-esigente’). While preferring to adhere more closely to the musical effect of the original alliteration, he had changed the binomy slightly, and so adjusted the translation from English (‘rain’) to the key Māori concept of water – which is a recurring practice while introducing new words, or words in translation, to the Māori semantics. Another melodious effect was offered by the multiple alliteration *warning warming message* (which I translated into Italian as ‘avvertimento-addolcimento’) besides the imaginative expression of Anglo-Saxon conciseness: *balloon up into a high* (‘librarmi in aria come un palloncino’).

From the poem ‘Sea Call, I translated *And I shall stuff my longing/in an empty bag*²⁶ as “Ed io riempirò della mia voglia/una sacca vuota”. The linguistic game is played here by the word ‘longing’ which offers an interesting echo with ‘belonging’. Instead of ‘longing’ (‘brama’, ‘desiderio’, ‘voglia’), a reader might have expected the usual word ‘belonging’; in so doing, the poet evoked both meanings in a very original way, I believe. Similarly, in the poem’s title ‘Bird of prayer’, the main translation for ‘prayer’ is Italian ‘preghiera’, yet in its association with ‘bird’, I felt that ‘prayer’ might recall the word ‘prey’–‘preda’ which links to the poem’s contents in double meanings. My translation has been faithful to the original: ‘Uccello da prece’. However, in choosing the more poetical word ‘prece’, instead of common ‘preghiera’, I intended to suggest a similar echo with ‘preda’ (‘Uccello da preda’ would be what readers expected, at first).

From the poem ‘Toroa, Albatross’, I translated the new adjective *chest-expanding* in a quite fancy way as “respir-espande”, in order to re-create the idea of a new compound word yet to maintain a suggestive juxtaposition of sounds (‘respira’ means ‘breath’, not literally ‘chest’). Another example of a new English word forged by the poet in ‘Toroa: albatross’ is *immeasurable*: a mix of *measureless* ‘smisurato’ and *immeasurably* ‘immensurabile’, which I translated as ‘incommensurabile’. Tuwhare’s lines are enriched with plenty of refined, aulic words, often of Latin origin. Some beautiful examples I can recall are: *ardour* ‘ardore’, *impious* ‘empio’, *vermilion* ‘vermiglio’, *zealously* ‘con zelo’, *turbulence* ‘turbolenza’, *depletion* ‘deplezione’, *violate* ‘violare’, *encumbrances* ‘fardelli’, which of course were not difficult to translate into Italian, yet when used along with slang phrases such as “*he doesn’t give a fart*” (“non gliene frega un accidente”) o “*I’m euchered*” (“ho perso ad euchre”) made the translation process quite intriguing.

I thought the metaphoric idiom ‘bring the House down’, meaning ‘move the audience to the point of shaking the room by clapping’/ ‘give an ovation’ was used by Tuwhare in a very interesting way, possibly hinting to the political meaning of ‘shaking the House of Parliament’ (the word ‘House’ is written with capital letter and within quotation marks) as the end of the poem ‘Rain maker’s song for Whina’ coincides with the end of the first *hikoi* ‘march’ for the Māori Land rights to the Beehive in Wellington:

*E, kui! What a way to bring the ‘House’ down. You could not
have lobbed a sweeter grenade. I’m all eared-in to you,
baby... Kia ora tonu koe.*²⁷

“E kui! Che bel modo far tremare il ‘Palazzo’. Una granata più dolce

²⁶ Ibid, p.68.

²⁷ *Small Holes in the Silence*, p.180.



non potevi lanciarla. Sono tutt'orecchi per te,
bimba... Kia ora tonu koe.”²⁸

Kui means ‘grandma, old woman’ and it refers to Whina Cooper, the extraordinary Māori elder who inspired and guided the 1975 famous *hikoi*, march of protest across the entire North Island of New Zealand, from Cape Rēinga to the capital city. Hone Tuwhare quit his job to join the *hikoi*.

Hone Tuwhare’s poetry is a renowned synonym for commitment to the Māori cause. His very first collection of published poems, *No Ordinary Sun* (1963) was a portentous success and a milestone of Indigenous literature in Aotearoa. Unexpectedly written by a Māori worker with no secondary education, it sold 700 copies in only 10 days (New Zealand counted a population of 2.5 million at the that time). Tuwhare’s poems were the very first ones in history to be addressed to a Māori readership, coming from a self-taught author, and absolutely anti-conventional in their ways to depict the landscape, to share love, and to bravely face social and political matters (both on a national and international level, from anti-nuclear protest to anti-apartheid). The title poem of the collection was inspired to visiting the ruined town of Hiroshima, while the author was serving in the NZ army in Japan (Jayforce). The impression of that sight and pain is still so profoundly vivid, 60 years later. Here is the last stanza, and my Italian translation:

*Tree let your naked arms fall
nor extend vain entreaties to the radiant ball.*

*This is no gallant monsoon’s flash,
no dashing trade wind’s blast.*

*The fading green of your magic
emanations shall not make pure again
these polluted skies...for this
is no ordinary sun*

“Albero, lascia cadere le braccia nude
e non estendere vane lusinghe al disco radioso.

Non è lampo di monzone galante,

Né moto di vento propizio e rapido.

Il verde che si scolora dalle tue magiche

emanazioni non render di nuovo puri

questi cieli inquinati...perché questo

non è un sole comune.”²⁹

²⁸ Piccoli Buchi nel Silenzio, p 79.

²⁹ Piccoli Buchi nel Silenzio, p 24 and p 25.



Since the publication of *No Ordinary Sun* Hone Tuwhare's mighty voice has symbolized the Māori Renaissance in and out of the country, until his death in 2008 and afterwards. Both in poetry and in daily life, Tuwhare dedicated his talent and energy to defend Indigenous rights: in 1973 he organized the very first conference of Māori artists and authors at Te Kaha, Bay of Plenty (to which Patricia Grace took part), and joined both the first and second *hīkoi* (1955, 1984), protesting for the lack of fulfilment of the Treaty of Waitangi insofar as the protection of Indigenous rights. His poems were like "spears", and not only were they recited (and sung) at Arts Festivals, in schools, universities and conferences, but even in pubs and in jails. Tuwhare was twice awarded honorary degrees of Doctor of Literature (University of Otago, 1998, and University of Auckland, 2005). The collection *No Ordinary Sun* was followed by 13 more collections of poetry, before the posthumous *Small Holes in the Silence*, in which the poem 'No ordinary Sun' is central.

The importance of translating Indigenous literature from Aotearoa into Italian

Patricia Grace and Hone Tuwhare are exemplary Māori authors. I introduced Patricia Grace's writing to the Italian readership in 2000, by translating several stories from her collection *The Sky People*. However, *Pōtiki* had touched my heart since reading it in Wellington in 1994. When I resumed my translation work of NZ literature, back in Aotearoa about 20 years later, I had no doubt I wanted to suggest that novel: a masterpiece which had already been translated into eight foreign languages, yet not into Italian. At the same time, Hone Tuwhare's poetry left a profound impression in my mind, and I discovered that only a couple of his poems had been translated into Italian, on a magazine, a few years earlier. Thus, I proposed my translation in parallel text of *Small Holes in the Silence* to Affluenti-Edizioni Ensemble, Florence, when I was asked to launch some Indigenous poetry from New Zealand. Both publications were received with great enthusiasm by Italian readers.

In Florence, people remembered a historical date: August 1944, when New Zealand soldiers, including the 28th Maori Battalion, fought to free our city from the Germans. After entering the historical city, welcomed by jubilant Florentines, they set their headquarters at the Hotel Baglioni, near Santa Maria Novella, and mixed up with Italians for several months. In Rome, the launch of both books in the Italian translation raised memories of the bloody battle of Cassino (not far away, further south) where a dreadful number of young men from Aotearoa had sacrificed their lives. The battles in Cassino and the battle in Florence and its surrounding area (the Chianti valley) have been honored every year since the end of WW2, with the participation of New Zealand veterans.

In the early years 2000, Patricia Grace visited us in Florence while doing historical research towards writing another important novel, *TU*, set mostly in Italy and focused on the fighting of the 28th Maori Battalion. The book was inspired by a brief war diary written by her father, who was a survivor. Later on, I translated *TU* as well, which was acclaimed in Italy. Since WW2 there have been bonds between the Māori and the Italian *tangata* 'people' both in Aotearoa and in Italy; the lively connections which started between the thousand soldiers who fought in our country and Italian common people reverberated in the love for the Italian language (the affinity in pronunciation of the vowel sounds with Māori is fascinating), songs (I met Māori veterans who remembered the words of love songs even 70 years later), and towns (many Māori children were named after Italian towns). So, the connections were already there, as well as a fertile ground for the reception of Indigenous literature from Aotearoa in Italy, which is another multicultural and multiethnic society, through its



long migration history. I believe firmly that *te ao Maori* ‘the Maori world’ and legacy are the core of today’s New Zealand soul: a most precious and unique *taonga* ‘treasure’. This *taonga* needs to be nurtured and protected, so it can grow strong and prosperous, and it is so important to have it known abroad, as well as at home. There’s still a long way to go towards social equity for the Indigenous people in Aotearoa, yet I am confident that the *mana* of the Māori poets and artists, after starting the arduous path towards recognition of fundamental civic rights half a century ago, is still guiding all New Zealanders who love beauty, creativity and justice, to a better place. To a shared one. As a literary translator and a recent NZ citizen, I am delighted to take part in this journey and I do hope I will witness an unfaltering progress in the years to come.

The seed I would like to plant in your heart is a vision of Aotearoa where all our people can live together in harmony...and share the wisdom from each culture.

Dame Whina Cooper (1895 – 1994)



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