Walking Backwards Into The Future

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WALKING BACKWARDS INTO THE FUTURE

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Theatre
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2011
ABSTRACT

Recent artists like Norwegian Recycling and E-603 have created a new genre of art within music: digital recycling. These artists take many different well-known and less-known lyrics, music, and spoken word and combine them together. This meshing of multiple pieces of art has new historical roots. The different images, auditory and visual, that these creations produce and often enhance meaning and connections through popular media. These connections interest me most.

Through the lenses of post-colonial, gender, and queer theories, I examine Witi Ihimaera's creative work. I splice in different theorists' words, my own thoughts, and images to enhance and accent Ihimaera’s “Singing Word” (Juniper Ellis 170). According to Ihimaera, the written word and the “novel is alien to the indigenous form, and that where Maori are going now is probably where it’s most natural, and that is into theatre or into poetry…and oral storytelling” (Ihimaera 170). As the first published playwright in New Zealand and as an English professor at the University of Auckland, Witi Ihimaera is a role model and leader to many other Maori and New Zealand playwrights and writers. I am most interested in understanding what and how he has been influenced as an artist. I craft a document that extends the idea of a written word in a Maori context, in which I explore the major influences on Ihimaera as a theatrical creator and influencer of other Maori artists.

Chapter one introduces Witi Ihimaera and my methods. Chapter two includes my research on the Maori culture with the following subsections: the people, their traditions, and their paternal systems of power. Chapter three is my research on the influx of Pakeha authority highlighting the Mormon take over and how that affected author and playwright Witi Ihimaera.
Chapter four is my research on how Ihimaera’s homosexuality has influenced his creations and the contemporary Maori Performance. Chapter five contains my conclusions of the connections I find. In addition, I use examples from Witi Ihimaera’s fictional novel *The Uncles Story*, as well as many other of his plays and novels, to show examples of influences from Maori culture, Mormonism, and his homosexuality on Ihimaera’s work.
I dedicate this work to Nonalee Davis, my Pikorua.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you Witi Ihimaera for doing an interview with me and letting me use your words.

Thank you Rebecca Wike for editing this work of literature.
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INTRODUCTION

Born in Aotearoa (New Zealand) in 1944 into the indigenous tribes of Te Aitanga A Mahaki, Rongowhakaata, and Ngati Porou, Witi Ihimaera began creating his repertoire of literary creations which includes novels, short stories, drama, poetry, librettos, and children’s stories. The following titles are Witi Ihimaera’s performance pieces of literature: *Waituhi: the Life of the Village*, *The Clio Legacy*, *Tanz der Schwane*, *Galileo*, *Woman far Walking*, *Whale Rider*, and *The Wedding*. Beginning in the 1970s, Witi Ihimaera became the forerunner for Maori storytelling to the *Pakeha* (the Maori word for white people who rule the world.) As of 2011 there are many other budding Maori artists who have achieved global recognition; however, the literary journey that Witi Ihimaera has embarked upon since the 1970s is of special interest to me.

Thus, I must introduce myself as well. I am a Caucasian female, classified as a millennial. While instructing at a performance institution in 2009, my boss excitedly handed me a copy of *Woman Far Walking*, Ihimaera’s first published play, to read and teach to a student. For the next year I taught a student this script and we both learned many fascinating isms of the Maori people. Even more captivating than our research into the Maori people was the research into the author Witi Ihimaera. I was moved by the matriarchal message of this play, as the heroine battles throughout her existence against various colonizing forces. The heroine even has a monologue that expresses men, women, and children *all* go to battle – it’s a community effort.

What struck me even further about this play is that it is a tale of some of the Polynesian peoples. Having gone to Brigham Young University (BYU) for my undergrad degree, I knew
multiple Polynesian people. I had two Polynesian roommates; I went to multiple dance classes on the Haka and Poi dancing; BYU had many luaus and Polynesian appreciation celebrations. When I was at BYU I realized that many of the natives to Hawaii are Mormon. I was never really aware why Mormonism caught on in Hawaii so well, mostly because at the time I identified as Mormon and thought that Mormonism was going to take over the world: it only seemed natural.

With all of this information and research into Maori people and performance, I bought seven of Witi Ihimaera’s works to see what interests him as a Maori writer and to see if I could pick up on any Mormon images or ideas. The Uncle’s Story blew me away as Ihimaera wrote this beautiful epic love story between two men. I had no idea until this point and a Google search later that Ihimaera identifies as a homosexual man. This story, as well as many other of his stories, has multiple Mormon sayings, ideas, and images. In my own opinion, Mormonism has been and is a colonizing group of people attempting to reach the whole world: how does Ihimaera view Mormonism? How much does Mormonism effect the Maori people of New Zealand?

As a former Mormon identifying as a lesbian, I knew that I wanted to know as much about Ihimaera and what his own aims are. Even more, I wanted to know how he achieves his goals and how effective they are.

I have no intentions of colonizing the land of Witi Ihimaera and the Maori people, like many of my Pakeha predecessors. I understand that as a non-Maori person, simply by writing an analysis on Maori performance addressed to a primarily non-Maori audience, I put my post-colonial goal at risk. I am taking many precautions in order to avoid this risk.

First, I have conducted an on-line interview with Witi Ihimaera, and he approves and is intrigued by my topic of discussion. Knowing what my aim is, he has given me permission to use
his words.

Second, I use the English language as my primary medium of communication. Ihimaera professes that “Maori language is tapu, or sacred…English is profane” (The Singing Word, 174). Ihimaera writes all his publications primarily in English. He has expressed that he does not want to dirty the Maori language with his stories and social commentaries, and some things just cannot be expressed within the confines of the Maori language. “With English you can go anywhere with it, you can do anything you like with it, you know it is common, an ordinary language” (The Singing Word, 174). This ordinary language is his tool in order to spread the Maori traditions and magical spirit to a non-Maori audience. Although I do not agree that you can say or do anything with the English language, the English language is most accessible to various and multiple people all over this world: I also use English as my own medium to reach as many audience members as possible.

Finally, I use Maori symbols (as well as Mormon and homosexual symbols) as word formations. The Maori people first recorded ideas and stories with symbols instead of a written language that the Western countries are fond of. I do not want to lose the ideas of Maori people and language, which cannot be expressed simply through the English language. I do not want to blaspheme the sacredness of the Maori language, but the sacredness of this language and the symbols that the Maori people hold near to their belief system parallel the sacredness of certain symbols of the Mormon faith and the sacredness of certain symbols of the homosexual communities. The pages after the introduction are reminiscent of type-writer word art. The index of this piece contains a key to the meaning of each symbol. The use of color will also play a key role. If I can make the words dance on the page, then I have really achieved a great feat.

Ihimaera’s own body of work includes many art forms; he does “not want to separate one art’s
discipline from another or the artistic from the artisan” which comes “from the holistic nature of Maori thought…The word should be able to be deployed in all its magnificence” (Ihimaera, 2010). By tapping into the various mediums of storytelling, I have attempted to imbue my English words with a sense of Ihimaera and uphold his ideologies on the inclusivity instead of the exclusivity of homosexual people in a Mormon –Maori world.

Ihimaera believes that destroying a peoples’ stories will lead to the death of those people. I do not want to injure any stories, but I do want to bring relevant information to the stories in order to achieve a deeper understanding of Ihimaera and the three main influences on his creative work: Maori life, Mormonism, and his sexuality.
MAORI CULTURE

Witi Ihimaera, during an interview with Juniper Ellis, gave a beautiful insight into the life of the Maori people and their cultural intelligence: “we have a saying you know in Maori and that is that we walk backwards into the future” (The Singing Word 173). With this perspective in mind, I explore the beginning of Maori existence in order to more fully understand contemporary Maori culture and performance. Thus, with a clearer view of the history of Maori culture I am able to see the many generations that have influenced the work of Witi Ihimaera. This influence is pervasive, from his first publication in 1972, Tangi, to his latest works which are still being published and created today. Ihimaera expresses in Tangi, “as long as you remember [Maori ancestors] you are a Maori” (Ihimaera 49). The symbols in this section are called: Hai Matau, Mania, Fernling, Pikorua, facial tattoos, and the image of a Haka dancer. These symbols represent strength within the community, defensive and protective ideas, and respect for the elders or origins. Additionally, I examine Maori landscape, origins, oral traditions, and the preservation of Maori culture. The analysis of the whole of Maori life would not be complete without looking closely at the contribution to Maori literature and performance that has been made by Witi Ihimaera.
Maori Landscape

New Zealand has been a popular shooting location for many films since the 70s. The lovely cliffs and mountains contrast with the ocean to make for a very dramatic scene. Appreciation of this intensity existed long before cameras were rolling. The landscape is known as whenua to the indigenous tribe of Aotearoa, the Maoris. The Maori people believe the reason they were sent there was to protect the whenua. “It's embodied as the Earth Mother or Papatuanuku. It's also the place where the afterbirth of a child is buried to ensure the ‘psychic’ self continues to resonate within the ‘physical’ self’s life” (Ihimaera 2010). It is very important in Maori culture to protect the family, mainly women and children. The Maori people, especially Ihimaera, hold strongly to the belief that Papatuanuku’s power is a main source of creation and creativity. “The Maori conception of the spirituality of one’s connection to the land means that the story expands to take in many dimensions of cultural identity and survival” (McNaughton 27). Maori tales, just as Maori land, have endured with Papatuanuku’s protection.

The whenua will continue to survive as long as Maori writers continue to incorporate it into their stories.
Maori Origins

Legend tells us

the first Maori man found Aotearoa

more than 1200 years ago. The first Maori
canoes to arrive on the islands came from Hawaiiki.

The Maoris are Polynesian people thought
by anthropologists to have migrated from
South East Asia between 900 A.D. and 1120 A.D. The canoe can be found immortalized in
several visual art forms today, one artful depiction can be found in figure 1. In addition, the origin of life is paramount to Maori society.

“Maori also say that if you are born a Maori, you die a Maori and no matter what you have done in your life your people will come to get you. That's what the connectivity of whakapapa [genealogy] gives you: the sense of belonging to people who are all entwined in te taura tangata, the Maori Rope of Man stretching from the beginning of the world into the future” (Ihimaera 2010). This approach places origins of land, people and individual persons as equally important in the life of the Maori people as their present and future happenings. Thus, the Maoris guard their history; the majority of their rituals celebrate the rich history of the Maori people and their origins. Many traditional Maori rituals are regularly practiced today, despite the diverse views offered by the contemporary world. The continuation of these practices is the Maori way of moving back into the future.
Figure 1: The Seagoing Waka: or Canoe
Oral Traditions

As previously mentioned, the Maori guard their history through oral stories. Prior to the colonization by white people, predominately European, Maori prose and poetry was orally passed to the next generation. “Maori have handed down their cultural heritage verbally” (Meklin, 360). The history of the Maori remains intact today because the stories were passed down in conjunction with a cultural respect for their content.

In many instances, the time lines within the oral stories relate correctly to contemporary anthropological thought. Prior to the 1970s, many pakeha historians believed that there existed no true accounts of Maori history, others held that any records had long been lost. The Maori disagree: “So the Maori language, and in particular, the oral archives, have not been lost, and their wairua (spirit)—rather than magic—is intact” (Meklin 362). These oral and performance based stories are Maori history. The Maori people’s faith in their beyond-realistic testament to their version of history and also highlights the importance of spiritual influences on their beginning.

Men and women have unique oral chants they perform and pass on. For Ihimaera, “the thread that most weaves its way through [his work] is the female voice in karanga (ceremonial call)” (Ihimaera 2010). These oral traditions are often rituals and chants that are performed regularly while revealing pieces of Maori history through the content.
Oral archives are not limited to storytelling in the strictly classical sense. Several legends and stories were imparted through *waiata*, which is Maori for song. The Haka, or war dance is the most popular and often recognized of the ancient songs. The Haka is still intact today as it is the most prevalent of New Zealand icons. The All Blacks Rugby team from New Zealand performs the Haka before a game beings. “Make the earth tremble, As hard as we can, I am doomed!

I will die! No I am alive! Life is mine! I will be defeated!

I will die! No! I take back my life. Life is mine! I am born of distinguished people Whose legacy shines on me like the sun.

In your ranks hold fast!”

There are many verbal and physical variations of the Haka, but the message is the same in each: to scare the opponent off of their land, or battleground.
Preservation of Maori Culture

In addition to oral storytelling, waiata and dances such as the Haka, the Maoris made use of the visual arts as a manner of cultural preservation. Each of these creations tell a story or embody the end of a story.

The three main forms of visual art that have conserved Maori stories are designs on the walls of meeting houses, tattoos, and Maori symbols. “This is literature in its extended meaning, not just written but oral, not just on the page but also on the walls on a meeting house, as imprinted by facial tattoo, and so on” (The Magnificent Accident). Figure 2 displays the famed Waitangi meeting house. Stories of triumph and the Maori people are carved into the interior walls. The carvings are tapu; Ihimaera suggests that the Maori language and the way in which it is used are sacred. The symbol-ism of walls covered in carvings representing stories of origination is in itself overpowering. The Maori culture is clearly a symbolic one. They have erected their buildings and society on the foundation of their past triumphs. In a similar vein, the dramatization of ritual life continues to be a theme of every aspect of Maori culture. Maori men and women are famous for their tattoos, specifically the facial tattoos. As in the previous video, the facial tattoos shown that cover the entire face are typical of Maori men’s tattoos.
Photo by: Holger Leue

Figure 2: The Interior of the Meeting House at Waitangi
These traditional tattoos are meant to frighten all enemies away, because it is the duty of a Maori male is to provide protection to the land given to them by divine powers. Females have tattoos on just their upper lip, lips, and chin. These tattoos are an extension of their tongue.

Currently “the Australian community theatre group Zeal Theatre explores the notion of ritual re-incorporation—involving actual tattooing on stage—as a means of transcending” (Balme, Carstensen 35). Another recent trend in Maori culture is the popularization of permanent tattooing, much as they did a hundred years ago. As seen in the previous study, the Maori people communicate heavily through the use of symbolism. As illustrated by the previous word symbols, each has a unique story and meaning that the Maori people have assigned it. Although there is not a Maori alphabet, a bank of symbols, each carrying complicated and layered meanings has managed to endure the test of time.

In a manner similar to Western culture, colors also bring to mind several images and ideas within the Maori culture. The color red is prominent in Maori land, cloth, food, and architecture. “The color red evokes, as above, the dawn. It also is the color of the red mud from which humanity was made by Tane. It is the primal color that most
indigenous people
would associate with: blood of course and, in our
meeting houses, the color that most wooden images have been
painted” (Ihimaera 2010). The Maori people have managed to preserve
much of their culture and heritage without the use of formalized written
language as is common in the West. Instead, the Maori have preserved their
history through cultural symbolism, as illustrated through their facial tattoos and
the walls of meeting houses. The Maori also utilized performance as a method of preservation. We already know that the Haka is habitually done by the All Blacks. However, many other performance based artists—musicians, theatre makers, and school performers—are also making an effort to preserve their Maori culture. Recently musicians such as Marco Allevi have created music that is reflective of the Aotearoa and Maori customs. These sounds evoke a sense of the land, air and water surrounding the Maori people. Hopefully the island of New Zealand will never lose the natural beauty that has been preserved over all of the years. However music like “Invisible Winds” does a fine job of expressing and preserving its beauty.
Maori people honor their past.

This idea of honoring elders in particular is prevalent throughout Ihimaera’s works. It’s important to honor their elders as seen in figure 3, with a father and son in a hongi, the Maori greeting. The theatres are concerned with celebrating and preserving their past. “We are what we remember…It is a theatre of remembering focused on rediscovering cultural roots in order to fashion a new identity, built on old routes while connected with the modern world of inter-culturalism and globalized patterns of movement and exchange” (Balme, Carstensen 35). The Te Arawa people preserve Maori art by dancing the poi shown in Figure 4. Unfortunately, the preservation of Maori culture through artistic means is a controversial topic within Maori high schools. Most schools will have celebrations of Maori culture, in order for the people of New Zealand, Maori or not, to support their Maori past and commemorate it. As such, annual secondary schools “celebrate indigenous Maori performances” at festivals (Gershon, Collins, 1798). Maori people are being colonized today by political pakehas like David Lange, the late New Zealand Prime Minister until 1989, who commented that achieving a valuable education is not possible “by getting dressed up and dancing in the street” (New Zealand Herald, March 21, 1997). The fight for cultural preservation still remains between Maoris and pakehas.
Figure 3: *Hongi*, the traditional Maori greeting

Photo by: Holger Leue
Figure 4: *Te Arawa* Women Poi Dancing

Photo by Holger Leue
Witi Ihimaera’s Contribution

As a Maori writer, Witi Ihimaera began a literary trend among Maori artists to spread their art on a global scale. Ihimaera is an acclaimed author, not only to his own people, but on a global level as Western literary critics have reviewed his work and labeled it “New Zealand’s brand of magical realism” (The oxford companion to New Zealand literature, 1998). Ihimaera is first and foremost a Maori man, and thus his main literary influence is Maori life. To further explore the Maori influences on Ihimaera, I examine his relations to Whenua, Maori origins, storytelling, and preservation of Maori culture. The rich whenua of Aotearoa permeates all of Ihimaera’s fiction. The land, at times, seems like another character. Also, several of his works focus on characters that belong to the working class. “For many cultural reasons, the landscape is crucial to building the various resonances that enable me to create what I call ‘Maori country.’ A further element is that most of my work is situated within a particular part of Maori country: the Gisborne-Povery Bay region, which tribally grounds me and ensures that there is a specificity and authenticity to my work: a location that is substantiated through my whakapapa or genealogy.
The landscape is therefore my specific Maori Atlas with its own compass points and features emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual and psychic” (Ihimaera 2010). Ihimaera places each of his stories in the specific area that he is from and hence most familiar with. Like many when Ihimaera writes a scene happening near a specific landmark, that scene will then be enriched by Ihimaera’s own feelings about that particular place. For example, in *The Uncle’s Story* love, in all forms exists within the walls of Sam’s parents’ home. As the story unravels, Sam falls in love with another man during the Vietnam War, a fact his father would never accept. As the characters collide and in time fight out their differences, the father-son battle happens in the stables, not in the home. Like Ihimaera, Sam finds comfort in his home despite his conflicts with his family. The stable is a filthy place, but also the same place Christ was born. The choice of landscape for that scene indicates a divergent meaning for the stables and the home. “His fiction’s initial purpose [is] to establish and describe the emotional landscape of the Maori people” (The oxford companion to New Zealand literature). The emotional *Whenua* of Maori people is the strongest component in each tale. Each character’s emotional being is very important as Ihimaera
skillfully fleshes them out.

Most of Ihimaera’s characters are
Maori; however, many characters
are pakeha colonizers. The dynamic
these two character types
bring to the page allow for
Ihimaera to create an immensely visual
and auditory depiction of Maori people. Although
Ihimaera holds that he does not employ the
color red to symbolize something specific,
he will admit he “does have a habit of associating
red-hair with the colonizer” (Ihimaera 2010). Ihimaera’s incorporation of
Maori origins into his works serves as an avenue for
bringing the Maori experience to a global audience. Thus, it is
not difficult to see why most of Ihimaera’s stories include parables
of why the Maori, and not the pakeha, are in charge of the land.
and legends of why the Maori are in charge of the land. Witi’s
Ihimaera’s play, Woman far Walking, dramatizes the experiences of one
woman who survived the treaties and lies the pakehas have convinced
the Maoris to believe since the 1840s. The play is nearly a history (or
should I say herstory) lesson, warning against repeating mistakes.

Ihimaera strives to link his origin and identity throughout his
work. “My tribal links are crucial for all my explorations
throughout all my worlds. They enable me to work
horizontally through my Maori world as
well as vertically
into its history. They are also
the umbilical that binds me to my
roots” (Ihimaera 2010). A true
story teller, Ihimaera depicts many
voices within the Maori
culture in order to bring life
to his stories. “The tribal voice in all its
forms: whaikorero (speechmaking), karakia
(prayer), waiata (song), haka (male posture
dance)” are used in the fiction of Ihimaera
(2010). The unifying voice of Maori persons
provide each of Ihimaera’s stories with
independent, passionate characters
who link with the Maori people and perspectives
on social issues. Most often, Ihimaera uses the voice of a
woman to take center stage regarding social progression within
the Maori culture. It’s a woman’s voice in The Unlce’s Story that
articulates Ihimaera’s belief on standing up against the colon-
izing forces of Maori people and homosexual Maori people.

Ihimaera has chosen to write in English to ensure global preservation.
Another step toward further preservation is taken as he writes in
several different mediums. “I have never been happy with
making academic divisions in the ways we see our-
selves: the binaries of the real/unreal, past/
present/future and so on.
Thinking like this, I would therefore not want to separate one art’s discipline from another or the artistic from the artisan. Also, the word should be able to be deployed in all its magnificence through short story, film, opera, musical theatre, play, non-fiction, essay and so on” (Ihimaera 2010). As a writer of each of the previously mentioned formats, Ihimaera is a leader in preservation of Maori culture through performance and other art forms as well, including visual art. Ihimaera’s influences and agenda within the context of Maori life—the landscape, Maori origins, the Maori voice, and preservation of Maori culture—run throughout his written work. While he is a major part of Maori culture, Ihimaera is just one of many voices that could bring the issues of colonization for the Maoris via the arts to a global audience. In addition to raising social awareness, Ihimaera stays true to Maori thought as he transcends time within his works. Looking back through time to find a more meaningful future is Ihimaera’s aim and result. Due to his environment, social goals, and artistic choice of landscapes, Ihimaera’s creative work is deeply founded in Maori cultural-isms.
MORMONISM MEETS MAORI

The Mormons, similarly to the Maoris, have a rich culture based on a divinely guided pilgrimage to a land of promise, and both cultures strongly believe in protecting their respective promise lands. Similar to their beliefs in a promise land, the cultural intelligence of the Mormons and the Maoris share several compatible beliefs. As a result, many Maori people have converted to Mormonism. According to Brigham Young University Mormon Religion Professor Grant Underwood: “The rise of Mormonism among the Maori does indeed offer a compelling case study in how cultural conjunctures can yield an authentic hybrid” (Underwood 145). It is important to comprehend this new hybrid culture when attempting to understand Maori artists such as Witi Ihimaera. To further explore the nature of this hybrid culture and what it means for Ihimaera, we will examine the many similarities between the two, the Maori acceptance of Mormonism, Mormon symbols, and the Mormon dramatization of history. In this section I use the following Mormon symbols and images as word art: the Salt Lake City Mormon Temple, the Angel Moroni, a beehive, the armor of God, the shield of faith, the sword of the spirit, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra, and another Mormon Temple. These images and symbols represent strength, strength in numbers, divine protection, and the voice of God. To conclude the findings of our study, we will examine the effect of Mormonism on the works of Witi Ihimaera.
**Similarities between Mormonism and Maori Culture**

Within both of the Maori and Mormon cultures there exists seemingly endless parallels stemming from their religiosity. These similarities are why there are “nearly eight thousand Mormon Maoris today” (Underwood 138). The most compelling similarity between these cultures is their fight against colonization. In Mormonism’s early years the people fought hard against forces that aimed to annihilate Mormonism. Mormons were forced to flee from many areas as a result of violent advances by outsiders and hostile government policies. Hostility continued into the promise land, Utah. At the same time, in what the Maori people call the Maori Wars, 1830s-1940s, the Maoris were defending their land and place as a people against the strong colonizing Pakeha forces, mostly from England. In an effort to protect Maori land, the Treaty of Waitangi was signed by the Maoris and Pakehas in 1840. The Pakehas did not honor the treaty. “Maori, as other colonized peoples, readily identified with Israelite oppression at the hands of Gentile neighbors” (Underwood 135). These attempts at demolishing cultures are no longer in active combat. However, current colonizing attempts remain strong in political arenas for both cultures.
The divine call to guard their land and the affect colonization has had on the cultures are not the only similarities found. A strong emphasis on family is present in both. Also, patriarchy is rampant in their cultures, as both communities mandate that leaders be male. Their model of male power is consistent throughout all areas of culture, as men are seen as the head of household. In the contemporary society, it is easy for any religion to change doctrines or cultural norms to adapt to popular secular dogmas concerning women in religious and official positions of power. However, the Mormon faith gives divine consent to the Maori leaders to perpetuate patriarchal practices. Patriarchy, in both cultures, manifest as a celebration of women in the domestic sphere. This classic view of domesticity is seen by women within the cultures as offering women a certain power, through shaping their children’s lives and consequently the future. This power dynamic is so similar that it is not surprising that the Maori culture was so accepting of the Mormon missionaries and their religious beliefs. Mormons and Maoris also share a sense of strong community. As a member of either group others in your cultural group will assist you when needed. These similarities are essential for understanding the union.
Maori acceptance of Mormonism

In the beginning of the 1880s, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) began colonizing the Maori people as they “launched a sustained mission to the New Zealand Maori…By the turn of the century, the church counted nearly a tenth of the total Maori population as members” (Underwood 133). The Maoris share many cultural traditions with the LDS, thus the high conversion rate is unsurprising. The many connections “provided an unusually rich, culturally compatible resource for shaping and proclaiming their identity” (Underwood 133).
As well as the cultural ties, the Maoris also have several religious ideas that complement the Mormon faith and vice versa. When the Mormons and Maoris share a religious genealogy and intersecting histories. According to the Book of Mormon, missionaries traveled to New Zealand with “much provisions” and were “never heard of more” (Alma 63:6-8). LDS missionaries who went to the eastern islands noted the travelers from early United States-identified with the Maori leader, Hagoth “settled in the Marquesas or the Tuamotus” - or even as far away as Hawaii - “Thus, the Book of Mormon was read to detail the Israelite origins of the Maori” (Undersood 137).
In essence, the Mormon missionaries were able to convert many Maoris because Mormon history upholds Maori ideas and beliefs in Mormon literature. “To this day, Maori Latter-day Saints cherish the Book of Mormon as their story, before they sailed in their waka (canoes) to Aotearoa” (Underwood 140). In a way, the LDS missionaries validated Maori existence. Many rangatira, Maori chiefs, even predicted the coming of a Christian religion, so the Mormon faith was a perfect fit. Maoris started to “incorporate the Israelite saga into their own traditions” (Underwood 135). The LDS have a perspective that coincides with the Maori perspective. “The Mormon elders may have been Pakeha…but they were serving Maori determined ends” (Underwood 144).
In 2011, many Maoris are still Mormon. Although the 700 student Mormon college in New Zealand closed in 2009, the presence of this school shows how large a Mormon population existed in New Zealand. In Figure 5, the Maoris embrace the Mormon religion in a hongi. This picture depicts the ongoing relationship between Maoris and Mormons. This relationship has created a new culture: the Moraoris or the Maomons. This new culture is a result of the enduring cultural impact made by the missionaries in the 1880s. As a result of the preaching and doctrines, Maori culture would be forever altered; Maori art and literature would from that point on differ as a result of the Mormon injection into their society. Artists and writers would be raised with stories of American natives and their magical adventures. The dramatic tale of Joseph Smith, with its epic nature, will forever influence the minds of Maori people as they create stories and sagas of their own.
Photo by Holger Leue

Photo repeated to show the strong connection between Maori and Mormonism

Figure 5: The Hongi of Maori acceptance of Mormonism
Mormon Symbols

In the Mormon culture, as in the Maori cultural beliefs, symbols have great significance for the community. According to the Latter-day Saint (LDS) web-site, “In the scriptures we learn that we are engaged in a battle against evil and that we must protect ourselves if we are to be victorious” (lds.com). The symbols discussed here all pertain to the daily battle Mormons engage in: a shield, sword and the whole armor. The shield, in Mormon culture, is a “shield of faith, wherewith [LDS] shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (D&C 27:17). The shield is a defensive piece, which is similar to a belief held by the Maoris. “In the Church we can teach about the materials from which a shield of faith is made: reverence, courage, chastity, repentance, forgiveness, compassion…The actual making of and fitting on of the shield of faith belongs in the family circle. Otherwise it may loosen and come off in a crisis” (Packer 8). According to Packer, a former President of the Mormon Church, the strength of a shield comes from the strength of the family, a principle that is widely accepted throughout the Maori people. Now Mormons wear the shield in the form of jewelry, most commonly a ring; Maoris also wear their symbols.
The sword in the Mormon faith is the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (D&C 27:18). Swords are used to pierce, typically in an offensive action. The word of God is “sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12), and even has the ability to “thrash the nations” with preaching truth according to LDS doctrine. (D&C 35:13).

It is this symbol which perpetuates the aggressive attitude within the LDS community. Today this stance is usually expressed in the form of missionary work.
Mormons also use the symbol of putting on the whole Armor of God to describe the act of protecting believers from all worldly temptations. The Armor is believed to be as strong, or stronger than, chainmail. Previous Mormon prophets have professed, “Examine your armor. Is there an unguarded or unprotected place? Determine now to add whatever part is missing. … Through the great principle of repentance you can turn your life about and begin now clothing yourself with the armor of God through study, prayer, and a determination to serve God and keep his commandments.”

(Tanner 46).

Similar to the warrior Maoris; the Armor of God will guard his people so they are able to protect the chosen land.

The importance of a common thread protecting and defending is with both of these cultures.
Mormon dramatization of History

Much like the haka Mormons use performing arts to preserve and celebrate their history. The world-famous Mormon Tabernacle Choir is the best known performance group made up of Latter-day Saints; like the choir, most Mormons dramatize history through music in less formal manners. Many of these songs are calls for the people to stand up for their religious beliefs or defend their God-given rights. One of the battle cries that the Mormon Tabernacle is best known for is The Spirit of God. This inspiring anthem was sung at the dedication of the first Mormon temple in Kirkland on March 27, 1836; the song is still sung at all LDS temple dedications. Another song that the Mormon culture is widely associated with, though it is not an exclusively Mormon song, is the Battle Hymn of the Republic.
In the LDS culture, performance is not limited to song. Many Mormons participate in historical pageants that inform and excite the audience about the beginning of the Mormon Church. Many pageants highlight the life of Joseph Smith, the first prophet of the LDS Church. The Hill Cumorah Pageant has taken place in New York since 1937; it is a stunning performance of song and dance that celebrates the life of Joseph Smith, Jr. Although the movement and dance throughout the pageant are very different than Maori dances such as the *haka*, the costumes are comparable. Similarly, the themes of the pageant and reminiscent of those themes found in Maori dance: celebration of life and protection of their people.
Witi Ihimaera was “born and baptized a Mormon” as many Maoris are today (Ihimaera 2010). He completed three years of studies at the Mormon college in New Zealand, this time, much like his earlier education throughout his young life, “Mormon history and Mormonism was integral to all [his] curricular and extra-curricular syllabuses” (Ihimaera 2010). Ihimaera’s life began surrounded by the ideas of Mormonism.

Reflecting on his life, Ihimaera shares the following about his experience:

It was a family tradition to go to the college...The proposition at the end of my schooling was that I would attend BYU and/or go on a mission but, despite my grandfather’s and parent’s enthusiasm I declined both opportunities. At that point I realized I could not conform to the high principles required. I also did not want to leave New Zealand for many reasons. I was in love, I felt that my future was in New Zealand...In those days... and even today I like nothing better than to walk around our farm. -Witi Ihimaera, 2010
Having been raised Mormon,

Witi Ihimaera is “very familiar” with the Joseph Smith, Jr. story.

Many likable male Pakeha characters in his stories often share attributes with the LDS Church’s picture of the character of Joseph Smith. Cliff, one such heroic character in The Uncle’s Story, is a blond, built and handsome Pakeha: the physical description of Joseph Smith, Jr.

The Uncle’s Story also includes many direct Mormon references. Sam, the tragic hero of Maori decent in the story, mentions on many occasions that the “Mormon elders from Brigham Young University” had taught him many of his skills (Ihimaera 54). As the story progresses to a battle scene, “Sam remembered when he had a chorus part in a high school musical put on by those Mormon elders from Brigham Young University: Mine eyes have seen the glory / of the coming of the Lord, / he is trampling out the vintage / where the grapes of wrath are stored!”(Ihimaera 104-105). It is noteworthy that the Battle Hymn of the Republic came to his mind and not the Haka. The Uncle’s Story is one of many Mormon influenced Witi stories.
According to Ihimaera, he “still pray[s] every morning and pray[s] every night. Neither [his] spiritual beliefs nor Christian beliefs have changes at all throughout [his] life” (Ihimaera 2010). Although Ihimaera is no longer a practicing Mormon, the religion of his youth, Mormon ideologies not only influenced his early life, but persist, impacting his current life. One prominent ideology that is prevalent throughout all of his work is Joseph Smith, Jr.’s belief that “there is an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11). The main plot conflicts within Witi’s stories all arise from oppositions: Maori vs. Pakeha, colonized vs. colonizer, old vs. young, patriarchal vs. matriarchal, and heterosexual vs. homosexual. The story The Whale Rider is a prime example of such a plot; the driving conflict is the opposition between patriarchal vs. matriarchal and old vs. young as Paikea, a twelve year-old Maori girl, pushes against her grandfather Koro to be a the next leader of their tribe. Women cannot be in roles of power, according to Maori men and Maori tradition. In Woman Far Walking Tiri is a colonized Maori woman from her childhood all the way until she is 160 years.
The director of a television reporter for Tiri’s interview on being the oldest woman in the world informs the reporter: “The whole world wants footage of the old girl’s birthday. They want sensation” (Ihimaera 34). The reporter goes on to label Tiri as the “queen of the cannibals” (Ihimaera 34). After all that this 160 year-old woman has been through, she is continuously colonized, and now by the media. In *The Uncle’s Story* the struggle between homosexual vs. Maori and old vs. young is prevalent as Sam’s father, Arapeta, scolds Sam when he understands of his son’s homosexuality: “Have you asked God’s forgiveness?” (Ihimaera 253). Sam’s reply is “do what you have to do, but don’t bring God into this” (Ihimaera 253). The idea that homosexuality is real and valid is against both Maori and Mormon belief. However, the binary struggle is rooted in Mormon belief. Joseph Smith and Mormon doctrine dictate that going through the struggle of opposition strengthens the character of that person and brings them closer to God. The struggle arises from Joseph Smith’s ideas on the nature of human beings as they are in their imperfect state on Earth. What is interesting to me is that Ihimaera reverently approaches the topic of God, as he did with Sam, growing away from the Mormon beliefs, proving Joseph Smith theory.
In Ihimaera’s story, *Bulibasha: King of the Gypsies*, many conflicts are centered around the antagonism between two patriarchs: Tamihana and Rupeni Poata. The story is told from the perspective of Tamihana’s grandson, Simeon. The story begins in the Mormon Church that Tamihana is a member of. Simeon, the narrator, finds the Mormon Church services to be comically long and boring. The inclusion of this perspective leaves the audience to wonder if that is the way Ihimaera feels. On the back of the book, *Bulibasha* is described as “a rich, warm novel that takes the listener into the heart of contemporary Maori culture” (Ihimaera 1997). The central place of Mormonism in the story can only suggest that the LDS Church is part of the heart of contemporary Maori culture.

Ihimaera sometimes, “wonder[s] what life might have been like for [him] had [he] not been so independent minded and obstinate” about not going to BYU or a Mormon mission (Ihimaera 2010). Witi’s obstinate independence guided him from his very safe, non-political first Maori novel, *Tangi*, to 30 years later and various politically charged publications supporting his homosexual lifestyle and belief systems of homosexual inclusivity rather than exclusivity in society.
When Witi Ihimaera publicly came out with his publication of *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, he carefully altered his public image and began to support the thriving gay community, or gay tribe, in New Zealand. “In my own country, my own Maori people are among the most homophobic in the world. They are a strong, wonderful people but their codes are so patriarchal as to disallow any inclusion of gay Maori men and women within the tribe” (Ihimaera 337). Although the previous quote is from a piece of Ihimaera’s fiction called *The Uncle’s Story*, the statement continues to ring true in contemporary New Zealand. Ihimaera’s homosexuality has greatly influenced his artistic work, which he continues to use as a mode of mass communication to affect the culture in New Zealand. In this section I will use the following homosexual symbols and images: the rainbow color pallet, the rainbow flag, the equality sign, lesbian sign, gay sign, lambda, and pink triangle. These symbols, images and colors represent the celebration of all people, the equality of all people, pride, and reminders of past tragedies against homosexual people. In order to further understand the impact of his sexuality on his work, we will delve into the meaning of *Wicked Ihimaera*, politics and sexuality in New Zealand, his literature with specific homosexual themes, and the life of the gay tribe in New Zealand.
Wicked Ihimaera is an unsurprising nickname for Witi Ihimaera. In the early 1970’s he began to write literature that spoke directly to the heart of Maori culture. As the first published Maori author his work was well received and resonated strongly with most Maori readers. As Ihimaera began to focus on anti-patriarchal themes, as in *The Matriarch* in 1986 and *The Whale Rider* in 1988, he began to be seen in a rather edgy light; though he did remain supported by some groups of Maori feminists. With his publication of *Nights in the Garden of Spain* in 1995 and *The Uncle’s Story* in 2005, the homosexual themes in these works began to push his Maori audience in new and uncomfortable territory. Although Witi Ihimaera is widely popular today, especially in New Zealand, he is still known as *Wicked Ihimaera*. The careful orchestration of his coming out and his social commentary through his works are just two of the reasons he is commonly referred to as *Wicked*. “There has always been in my case a sense of planning and a sense of constructing the future” (Ihimaera 179). Wicked or not, Ihimaera’s story do is point to an interesting discovery concerning the willingness of the Maori people to accept the presence of homosexuality among them. The careful choices made by Ihimaera regarding the crafting of his career he was able to achieve his ultimate goal: “What I wanted to do was to provide a model for gay men and women, the gay tribe; I don’t in fact care whether or not Maori or other New Zealanders are affected by it. That was and still is, secondary to the main imperative” (The Magnificent Accident 364). Thanks to this ‘wicked’ author, New Zealand now has a gay tribe.
Ihimaera’s sexual identity is important in his life, “sexual identity is as important as cultural identity when you’re…becoming yourself” (Ihimaera 178). Ihimaera has regularly expressed the importance of cultural character, which is why he aims to create and be a member of a community that celebrates being both Maori and homosexual. As a writer, Ihimaera has struggled with blending his two identities together: “I must have sensed…that drive towards the transgressive which made me into a writer… and enabled me to explore issues of sexual identity as well as cultural identity, once I left that homegrown boy behind” (Ihimaera 2010).

This goal has been difficult because not only do most Maori people not accept homosexuality, the language is not equipped with words to express homosexuality. “Maori is a warrior culture and a homophobic one at that, and does not always have special terms” (Meklin 32). Simply put, homosexuality in Maori is by definition wicked.
For Ihimaera, his feelings on sexuality are emphasized through his political activity. The books he wrote in the 80s and early 90s are clearly politically motivated since Ihimaera held political offices in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the New Zealand Council in New York, Counselor of Public Affairs for the New Zealand Embassy, and other offices from the late 70s to the early 90s. It is unsurprising that with this political background Ihimaera wrote two pieces of art, each containing extremely political arguments and the homosexual versus heterosexual theme. In December of 2005 the New Zealand Parliament rejected a bill to legalize same-sex marriage. Figure 7 shows two men performing the Haka at a rally against the legislation. In contrast, Figure 8 shows a poster in favor of diversity from the counter protesters at the same event. Witi Ihimaera’s second work with a homosexual story was published in 2005, ten years after his coming out tale. The timing makes one wonder if this work, *The Uncle’s Story*, was in any way a last-minute attempt to foster publicity and promote gay marriage before this bill came under final consideration. In an interview about his sexuality, Ihimaera remarked that, “My job is to reinforce the structures of power and weaning for the Maori body politic. But this is not an either-or situation in New Zealand” (The Magnificent Accident 363). It is possible that writing the beautiful love story, *The Uncle’s Story*, was his reinforcement of structure and power. Although Ihimaera did not come out at the beginning of his career, he does celebrate his gay colleagues as he expressed to his interviewer, “I’ve always admired you because you’ve been out from the very beginning, and I could never have done that … I am Maori” (Ihimaera 178).
Figure 6: Enough is Enough Rally: Two men from Destiny Church performing the Haka on August 24, 2004 at the New Zealand’s’ Parliament against civil union’s legislation.

Photo courtesy of Ecoqueer at the Beautiful Monsters blog
Photo courtesy of Ecoqueer at the Beautiful Monsters blog

Figure 7: Counter protesters at the Enough is Enough Rally in August 2004
Within his works, homosexual characters are members of the oppressed section of society. “Oppression is a historical condition from which Maori have now managed to emerge, although, of course, the primary structures of power are still Pakeha” (Meklin 363). The Pakeha versions of man-hood, especially the Mormon version, seem to oppress an identity of homosexuality as well. Still worse, the Western cultural ideas about homosexuality and how to handle homosexuality also serve to oppress Maori homosexuals. “These Western notions of masculinity are not the same notions for us, that western notions of exclusivity in terms of sexual practice are not for us, that because of our notions of whakapapa and the need to maintain the line, that having children should not be an option that is not for us” (Ihimaera 180). My own ideas about being a lesbian are very westernized as these ideas are formed as reactionary responses. For example, I actively choose to befriend other homosexuals because we have (in my mind) a common bond that separates us from society. I also do not feel strongly about having my own children for various reasons, but mostly because I selfishly do not want the responsibility of raising a family. Ihimaera views his homosexuality as a trait that should have nothing to do with separation from society. Maori people are an inclusive group of people and should not, according to Ihimaera excluded people for being
homosexual. The duty of raising a family is an honor in the Maori culture, taking that honor away because someone is a homosexual does not work for Ihimaera and his other fellow homosexual Maoris. Witi Ihimaera’s stories have many politically driven monologues that directly deal with this issue of children. “Insofar as my coming out was concerned, it was not facilitated by Western values, but rather compelled by the need to be in opposition to those values. Maori gay men were doubly discriminated against, both by race and by sexual practice. I am not trying to establish a western framework for Maori gay men, but rather a framework that evolves from a Polynesian and Maori tribal perspective” (Meklin 363). Ihimaera is trying to create a safe space, or the gay tribe, so that other practicing Maori homosexuals can also continue as their Maori traditions have led them. Taking the Western approach to homosexual Maori men would mean that they get separate gay clubs, gay neighborhoods, and no rights or very, very costly rights for children. Being both a Maori and a homosexual is very important and he should not have to give one up to satisfy the other. For Ihimaera his “cultural registration has always been more important than [his] sexual registration.” However, he has strong feelings concerning these two identities and their intersection that are expressed in his art. Witi Ihimaera’s works show that he firmly believes that these two cultural and sexual identities can unite and should unite (Ihimaera 178).
Homosexual Literature

As previously mentioned, Witi Ihimaera published two Maori novels with homosexual themes: *Nights in the Garden of Spain* and *The Uncle’s Story*. “These new works, and indeed earlier works from the Pacific, must be examined from a more complex perspective that of a simplistic insider-out sider dichotomy” (Tawa 160) Ihimaera writes with an insider-outsider perspective, believing that there is opposition in all things. He also introduces a reactionary perspective to that dichotomy. The *Nights in the Garden of Spain* is Ihimaera’s coming out tale and has a detailed description of the life of a homosexual man in New Zealand. “Nights in the Gardens of Spain might best be described as a rich, multilayered coming out tale which explores the complexities of individual lives and broader questions around sexuality as a whole” (Brickell 24).

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"Nights in the Garden of Spain" is a piece of literature about a Maori doubly-condemned for his homosexuality and ethnicity. "The theme of double-condemnation is echoed by one of the characters in "Nights in the Garden of Spain" as the Maori protagonist is not just in love with a man, but a Pakeha man. The colonized pursues a colonizer. Is this love a byproduct of colonization or did Ihimaera randomly make this choice? "Ihimaera tantalizingly suggests that among men heterosexuality and homosexuality are not so closely divided… Homoeroticism was always a possibility" (Brickell 24). This initial homosexual publication could be, and very likely is, a support to gay men and women of Maori land.
Ihimaera’s other publication with heavy homosexual themes is *The Uncle’s Story*. The ideas of twice-condemned continue within this story. “At times the opposition between ‘gay’ and ‘straight’ becomes entangled with an opposition between ‘gay’ and ‘Maori’” (Meklin 30). Yet, this story does not contain the *Pakeha* condemnation. The straight, Maori father chides his homosexual son as he says, “You are supposed to be a warrior. Instead, you are a woman.” (Ihimaera 251). Witi shows that in Maori culture a gay man is the same as a woman.

Similarly, the only way to hold power, the priesthood, in the LDS faith is to be a straight man. “To be gay instead of ‘the iwi’ is to be selfish. Somebody needs to carry on the family lineage.” (Meklin 30).
Ihimaera’s two homosexual Maoris characters in this story are also attracted to *Pakeha* men.

As one of the gay Maori’s characters says, “I like white boys. When I put my brown hands on them it makes me feel so dirty” (Ihimaera 125). In an analogous way the first Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. went against the grain of society and created his own belief system. He is described as blond, built, hard-working, white, handsome, and charming. Cliff, an American soldier and *Pakeha* love interest for a Maori soldier, Sam, and is the exact portrait of Joseph Smith. How *dirty* and thrilling would it be for a Maori homosexual to seduce a Joseph-Smith-like character?

Ihimaera confronts a main issue for homosexuality, “Too many people associate being gay with being weak. It isn’t a weakness, it’s a strength” (Ihimaera 189). This sentiment seems to be the mantra that Ihimaera aims to spread throughout all of New Zealand.
The Gay Tribe: a Literary Construct

When asked in an interview with Chris Brickell, Ihimaera said he most closely identifies with the noble savage character in The Uncle’s Story. The Noble Savage, Tame, which is part of Witi Tame Ihimaera’s, actual name gives the following monologue: “Marriage should be an option for gay Polynesian men and women. With it we can establish a tribe—a tribe based not just on sexual identity but on family. A tribe must have children to survive. It must also have parents, grandmothers and grandfathers. Even though the children may not be gay by practice, they will be gay by genealogy through their fathers and mothers. When my own children grow up, I want to think of themselves as belonging to a great new gay family, a wonderful new gay tribe” (Ihimaera 290). In another interview Ihimaera said the following regarding this idea of a gay tribe or family: “If you ask my daughters, ‘Are you gay?’ then they will say ‘yes’, even though they’re not gay in sexual practice. Because I am a gay father, because they are my children, they have come to look upon themselves as being part of that gay tribe…Its inclusivity rather than exclusivity within the gay tribe, as much as I’ve tried to approach it in terms of Maori culture” (Ihimaera 181). Obviously, Ihimaera’s personal philosophies are present in each of his artistic creations; if not present verbatim in the text they are intentionally imbedded in the plot and characters. Mormon doctrine teaches that all members should be anxiously engaged in missionary work at all times. In a comparable way, Witi Ihimaera is actively using artistic mediums to engage his audience in his ideas and encourage conversations that could lead to the acceptance of homosexuality by the greater Maori culture.
Ihimaera’s mission of homosexual acceptance has begun to work as the gay tribe has become
more than just a fictional idea: “there’s also the gay tribe here in New Zealand… I’m
talking about Maori gay and Polynesian gay, who have been empowered by a new
literature of sovereignty to be able to develop this kind of tribal instinct” (Ihi-
maera 178-179). A success can be seen in the use of the term “gay tribe”
being used in ever day conversation. This common usage began
after the publication, *Nights in the Garden of Spain* and was
aided by, *The Uncle’s Story* published ten years later.

This success prompted further support for the gay
tribe idea. “I love it when I hear people say,
The gay tribe is ten percent of the pop-
ulation, almost the same as the
Maori tribe” (Ihimarea 178).

These discussions have
shown clearly that
Witi Ihimaera’s
sexuality does
influence
his work.
CONCLUSION

During an interview with Ihimaera about his life and career, interviewer Brickell commented:

“Witi you don’t exist, you’re really just a concept” (Ihimaera 180). In many ways, the thinking of Ihimaera has carefully crafted throughout his life appears to be too overwhelming for just one person to carry on. This statement also requires us to question if Witi truly believes in all that he preaches. Just as Ihimaera has always taken a tribal approach to life. [Ihimaera tries] to maintain an inclusivity, even if it is often based on difference rather than unanimity” (The Magnificent Accident 365).

This inclusive approach to life has translated into his artworks and created a concept-motivated method; in his life and works Moari culture, LDS culture and homosexuality have found common ground.
With our understanding of traditional Maori culture, the importance of war is clear. “The mana of a man, his value in Maori culture, was in his fighting power and his warrior tradition. It was all symbolized in a man’s cock. It, as much as the fighting club, personified all that a man was. With both, man was made sacred and women profane” (Ihimaera 149). Ihimaera is a product of a warrior culture and has now become the captain of his own battalion: the gay tribe. Ihimaera leads his charge through his words, as he wrote in my interview with him: “the word should be able to be deployed in all its magnificence” (Ihimaera 2010). Ihimaera’s strategic use of the word in his artistic creations not only stands up for other Maori-Mormon-homosexuals, but uses the tactics he learned from his three cultural educations to incredible effect in his fight. As we have seen, the Maori bring the defense of their tongue: chants, sacred words, movement, and the whakapapa. Mormon culture gives a weight to symbolic and literary weapons when standing up for truth. Contemporary LGBT culture has many leaders, including a transsexual member of parliament in New Zealand—Georgina Beyer, who are activists.
Now that we have established the themes he included in his artistic works, how carefully he constructed the effect of those works, and the influences of his art, we must acknowledge what Ihimaera actively omitted from his work. The back-binding of *The Nights in the Gardens of Spain* admits to an omission of “the original, more explicit and ruthless version of *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*” (Ihimaera). Though it is possible to gain access to the lost pieces from Ihimaera himself, it makes one wonder what experiences were omitted by this Maori, twice colonized man. Were these omissions made intentionally by Witi or was an editor, acting as yet another colonizing force, be it Maori or *Pakeha*, instrumental in these omissions. Purposeful or not, the omission of material is a result of the outside influences on his artwork.
The description of the omission is “explicit and ruthless,” but that is all that is said about the omitted section of this tale. A few questions arise at this statement: First, what does “explicit and ruthless” pertain to? This phrase might mean that the extent to which Maori people do not accept homosexuality as a practice is ruthless. Ihimaera might be suggesting that those who practice homosexuality in Maori land might be treated like Matthew Sheppard, or worse. But, Ihimaera’s later piece of literature of homosexuality, The Uncle’s Story, is very explicit about the physical detriment to those Maoris who practice homosexuality. Perhaps this phrase is referring to the explicit and ruthless nature of the actual act of sex between two men. The Maori culture suppresses the ideas of homosexuality so much that ruthless reactionary anger is released behind bedroom doors (or wherever place the two can find). Maybe Ihimaera knew that his mass audiences were not ready for such explicit nature, whether it is the description of physical pain or physical ecstasy, but this leads me to my next question: what else has Ihimaera omitted? Ihimaera’s first published piece of literature, Tangi, was published in the early 70s; however, he had written many other pieces before that. Witi often comments on how he carefully constructs his career. Although omissions happen in the process of editing, which every piece of literature endures, the three influencing sources that created his work have also deterred it.
One extremely compelling piece of his intersection of homosexuality, Maori artistic intersection of homosexuality, Maori culture, and Mormonism is the primary sacrilegious impression. Any member of these groups might shutter at this mixture.

This un-
likely mix of
cultural beliefs goes
from fiction to reality with
Witi Ihimaera lending
the ideas to his artistic work while
celebrating
features of all three in daily life.
The blend of these symbols created a hybrid
mindset that permeates the fictional Ihimaera-created lands of Aotearoa, making this world the perfect place for Witi to create the new Maori Gay Tribe.
Creating this new world of Aotearoa with a new found acceptance for all three of Ihimaera’s muses may be Witi’s goal. However, Ihimaera has mainly created stories and lands within those stories that reject at least one of these three identities, which is the ultimate source for the conflicts within the stories. *The Uncle’s Story* contained all three conflicts as Sam, the Maori son, fought against his Maori family to leave and not assume the family duties; Sam fought against his father about his homosexuality; and Sam used his knowledge of sign language to secretly communicate with his same-sex love interest, an ability learned from Mormon missionaries (going against the Mormon faith as he secretly/guiltily pursued a man). As for the future, Ihimaera will most likely continue to build his reality-based fictional land with characters and situations that showcase the harms humans do to each other by not accepting people for who they are. The land that backs a gay tribe within a Maori and LDS culture, would give Witi a great sense of triumph that he has achieved through his use of his artistic talents.
The influences on the works of Witi Ihimaera have no doubt changed his outlook on life and aided the creation of his ideas and structured his belief system. With this deeper understanding of Ihimaera’s motivations it becomes imperative for Witi to have an opportunity to speak out for those who have been so long damned. Although the following excerpt is taken from a work of fiction, the feelings are based in history. “We have been marginalized. In many places our cultures, yours and mine, have been destroyed. We occupy the borderlands of White society. We live only by the White man’s leave within White structures that are White driven and White kept. Our jailers might be kindly, but they are still our jailers” (Ihimaera 320). This is a noteworthy call-to-action which Ihimaera proposes to all his readers throughout his works, though not always as directly. This is clearly a reactionary position to the years of colonization that the Maori, Mormon, and homosexual peoples have been subjected to. No matter how we see his motives, it is important to take notice of what he suggests: I do not want to be and will not be a jailer, ‘kindly’ or otherwise.
Referring back to my original ideas that are influenced by the digital mash-ups of Norwegian Recycling and E-603, the use of images and introduction of color played a key role in the discoveries in Ihimaera’s literature. Digital mash-up music intends to re-make aspects of well-known and not known music.

Starting the argument discussing digital mash-up music intends to re-make aspects of well-known and not known music. Ihimaera’s literature. With the introduction of Mormon symbols, my Western audience has more knowledge, but still very limited. As of 2011, almost any Western audience knows the color pallet and many symbols associated with the homosexual community. The argument is meant to become more familiar as an audience progresses. The use of black and white, and an intentional choice in juxtaposition to the rainbow of colors in the homosexual section: the familiarity is celebrated. In the conclusion, the cultural mash-ups that Ihimaera presents in his literature are expressed through the mash-ups of symbols and colors. The choices made in the conclusion embrace the beauty of Maori culture, Mormonism, and homosexuality that can often be overlooked.
APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW WITH WITI IHIMAERA, INTERVIEWED BY CAMILLE NORMAN
CN: Does the landscape of New Zealand influence your creative work, if so, how?

WI: Maori people call the landscape the whenua. It's embodied as the Earth Mother or Papataunuku. It's also the place where the afterbirth of a child is buried to ensure that the "psychic" self continues to resonate within the "physical" self's life. So for many cultural reasons, the landscape is crucial to building the various resonances that enable me to create what I call "Maori country." A further element is that most of my work is situated within a particular part of Maori country: the Gisborne-Povery Bay region, which tribally grounds me and ensures that there is a specificity and authenticity to my work: a location that is substantiated through my whakapapa or genealogy. The landscape is therefore my specific Maori Atlas with its own compass points and features emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual and psychic.

CN: What sounds are prevalent within your work?

WI: I've never thought of sounds in my work! However, now that I do think of the question, I would say that it would be the tribal voice in all its forms: whaikorero (speechmaking), karakia (prayer), waiata (song), haka (male posture dance). The thread that most weaves its way through is the female voice in karanga (ceremonial call). My very first memory at all must have been when I was three or four: utter blackness and then red, very red dawn, and hearing chanting in the dark. I cried out for my mother and asked her what the sound was and she answered, "Don't be afraid, it is only the old people across the river and they are at their prayers." Maori always used to pray, greeting the dawn, praising Earth and Sky throughout the day, blessing the meal and, of course, praying before bedtime. What's interesting is that I most affirm the word in my work, especially the singing word, which is how Barry Mitcalfe characterised the Maori language.

CN: What does the color red evoke for you?

WI: The colour red evokes, as above, the dawn. It also is the colour of the red mud from which humanity was made by Tane. It's the primal colour that most indigenous people would associate with: blood of course and, in our meeting houses, the colour that most wooden images have been painted. I'm not too sure if I associate it with any particular emotion or sensation. I do have a habit of associating red-hair with the coloniser.

CN: How has your father influenced your work?

WI: My mother died in January of this year at 89 and my father died in September this year at 96. They are inseparable in my imagery, "My mother was the Earth, my father was the Sky" and I cannot really think of one without the other. If I was to characterise them separately however, I would say that
my mother controlled and still empowers my psychic world (imaginative, spontaneous, creative and, best of all, transgressive); my father controls and still empowers my physical (real) world, balancing out the irrational and transgressive with the rational and the moral. I used to say of him that he was and still is the compass point from which I move whenever I begin my journeying, politically, financially, creatively and so on, and to which I return when day's done. But my mother enables me to explore, to go deeper into myself for responses; I always trust her to bring me back if ever I go too deeper into that chasm which Nietzsche so well wrote about: If you look too long into the abyss, the abyss looks long into you. My father holds me back from the abyss. My mother enables me to dive into it.

CN: How has your tribe and lineage influenced your work?

WI: My tribal links are crucial for all my explorations throughout all my worlds. They enable me to work horizontally through my Maori world as well as vertically into its history. They are also the umbilical that binds me to my roots and which provides me with the sense of home that all writers need: no matter where I go, I know where I come from and can return. Maori also say that if you are born a Maori you die a Maori and no matter what you have done in your life your people will come to get you. That's what the connectivity of whakapapa gives you: the sense of belonging to people who are all entwined in te taura tangata, the Maori Rope of Man stretching from the beginning of the world into the future.

CN: Why do you create in multiple mediums instead of sticking with one medium?

WI: I guess this must come from the holistic nature of Maori thought. I have never been happy with making academic divisions in the ways we see ourselves: the binaries of the real/unreal, past/present/future and so on. Thinking like this, I would therefore not want to separate one arts discipline from another or the artistic from the artisan. Also, the word should be able to be deployed in all its magnificence through short story, film, opera, musical theatre, play, non-fiction, essay and so on. The one "discipline: however, that I am unable to locate myself within is poetry. I find it immensely difficult and, therefore, poets to me are the greats of literature.

CN: What do your spiritual and/or religious beliefs align most closely to today? Have they changed throughout the years?

WI: My spiritual beliefs are primarily sourced from my Maori spiritual inheritance. However, I was also born and baptised a Mormon and all those practices of Mormonism are those which still most inform my Christian life. I still pray every morning and pray every night. Neither my spiritual beliefs or Christian beliefs have changed at all throughout my life and nor do I see any
difference between them: both are aimed at endeavouring to realise goodness, integrity and moral compass and the quest for perfection.

CN: How familiar are you with the Joseph Smith Story?

WI: Very familiar.

CN: In your year at the Mormon Church College at Tuhikaramea, Hamilton, did you have to take any courses on Mormon history/Mormonism? If so, what were they?

WI: I was actually at the Mormon College for three years. At the time there were no specific courses on Mormon history or Mormonism that you gained credits for - if that is what your question is about - but Mormon history and Mormonism was integral to all our curricular and extra-curricular syllabuses.

CN: Did you participate in extra-curricular activities while attending this college? If so, what were they, and what was your experience?

WI: I was captain of the hockey team, I played the organ on Sundays, I was involved in the Maori culture club, I toured during fundraising visits around New Zealand as a semiclassical pianist.

CN: Why did you attend this college?

WI: My grandfather, two uncles and three aunts all worked at the College during the years in which it was being erected. I am one of three siblings who went to the college. It was a family tradition to go to the college: other cousins also attended. The proposition at the end of my schooling was that I would attend BYU and/or go on a mission but, despite my grandfather's and parent's enthusiasm I declined both opportunities. At that point I realised I could not conform to the high principles required. I also did not want to leave New Zealand for many reasons. I was in love, I felt that my future was in New Zealand and to be absolutely truthful I had no personal ambition: in those days I was really a homegrown boy and even today I like nothing better than to walk around our farm. I must have sensed, too, that I was still growing and testing things - that drive towards the transgressive which made me into a writer (writing was a very transgressive thing to do in those days) and enabled me to explore issues of sexual identity as well as cultural identity, once I left that homegrown boy behind.

CN: I believe you were somehow associated with BYU at a point, perhaps in Hawaii, but I am not positive. If this is true, how did you participate?

WI: No, I was never involved in BYU. I did, and still do, go the Polynesian Center at Hawaii whenever I am there as I have relatives who are
still in Hawaii. I did visit Salt Lake City once, and BYU there, and was moved to wonder what life might have been like for me had I not been so independent minded and obstinate. But I have always known, and all my friends and family know that I am probably one of the most self-controlled people on earth. I think that's why I'm so admired by them. I am very good at saying Yes and No, and I think that the person like that who can make a decision - even if it might be wrong - occupies an interesting position because he or she is willing to make the decision. A lot of my characters, like Kahu in The Whale Rider and Simeon in Bulibasha exhibit this trait. But I did wonder, as I have outlined above, about the alternatives that might have mapped themselves out for me had I gone to BYU and on a mission.

CN: How many Mormon-Maori tribes do you know of? Or is there a Mormon tribe at all?

WI: I don't know what you are referring to when you talk of Mormon-Maori tribes. I'll answer by saying that I know many Mormon Maori men and women.

CN: Is your gay tribe the only gay tribe?

WI: The Maori gay tribe that you refer to is a literary construct that I was proposing in "The Uncle's Story" as an alternative for Maori gay men and women. I'm proud, however, that there are many young Maori gay men and women who belong to an indigenous political grouping in New Zealand and consider that they belong to a Maori gay tribe.

CN: Is there any specific symbol or color or icon that gay Maoris identify with?

WI: Not that I know of. What I think is happening is that Maori gay men and women are endeavouring to normalise themselves within Maori tribal society and any icons are more likely to be Maori than gay.
APPENDIX B
PERMISSION FORMS
February 11, 2011

Ecoqueer
http://www.stonesoup.co.nz/ecoqueer

Dear Ecoqueer:

I am completing a master’s Thesis at the University of Central Florida entitled "Walking Backwards into the Future." I would like your permission to reprint in my thesis the following images:

The images to be reproduced are in my thesis to show the political impact that homosexuality has on Witi Ihimaera’s literature.

The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my thesis/dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own or your company owns the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter where indicated below and return it to me via email (camamie@yahoo.com) in a pdf file. Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,

Camille Norman

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

By: ____________________________  Date: 9/3/11
Permission to use your photos

Holger Leue,

I am currently a graduate student at the University of Central Florida. I am doing my Thesis on Maori performance, and I would like to use a few of your photographs that are found in Beautiful New Zealand. The photos are: "The seagoing waka, or canoe", "House at Waitangi", "visitors practise the hongi, the traditional Maori greeting", and "women practise the art of poi dancing". I know that these aren't the titles, but they are the descriptions found in the book.

Thank you,

Camille Norman

Kia Ora, Cami, 

yes, I'd be happy to assist. Please make your image selections from the following links:

http://www.leue-photo.com/galleries/newzealand/northisland
http://www.leue-photo.com/galleries/newzealand/southisland
http://www.leue-photo.com/impressions/new/msc-southpacific

Please send me the image numbers or thumbnails and I will e-mail you photos sans watermark.

Cheers,

Holger
Camille Norman
483 Spruce Dr.
Pine Lake, GA 30072
Camamie@yahoo.com

February 11, 2011

Witi Ihimaera
w.ihimaera@auckland.ac.nz

Dear Witi Ihimaera:

This letter will confirm our recent email correspondence. I am completing a master’s Thesis at the University of Central Florida entitled "Walking Backwards into the Future." I would like your permission to reprint in my thesis excerpts from the following:

- The interview that I conducted via email. The actual quotes follow this page.
- Quotes from the interview entitled *The Magnificent Accident*. The actual quotes follow this page.
- Quotes from *The Uncles Story* that follows this page.

The excerpts to be reproduced are throughout my thesis show the connections that your literary work has to Maori life, Mormonism, and homosexuality.

The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my thesis/dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own or your company owns the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter where indicated below and return it to me via email (camamie@yahoo.com) in a pdf file. Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,

Camille Norman

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

By: ________________________________ Witi Ihimaera  Date: 25 February 2011
Quotes from the on-line interview with Camille Norman

Not want to separate one art’s discipline from another or the artistic from the artisan

From the holistic nature of Maori thought... The word should be able to be deployed in all its magnificence

It's embodied as the Earth Mother or Papatauanuku. It's also the place where the afterbirth of a child is buried to ensure that the 'psychic' self continues to resonate within the 'physical' self's life

Maori also say that if you are born a Maori you die a Maori and no matter what you have done in your life your people will come to get you. That's what the connectivity of whakapapa gives you: the sense of belonging to people who are all entwined in te iaura tangata, the Maori Rope of Man stretching from the beginning of the world into the future
the thread that most weaves its way through [his work] is the female voice in karanga

The color red evokes, as above, the dawn. It also is the color of the red mud from which humanity was made by Tane. It is the primal color that most indigenous people would associate with: blood of course and, in our meeting houses, the color that most wooden images have been painted

For many cultural reasons, the landscape is crucial to building the various resonances that enable me to create what I call 'Maori country.' A further element is that most of my work is situated within a particular part of Maori country: the Gisborne-Poverty Bay region, which tribally grounds me and ensures that there is a specificity and authenticity to my work: a location that is substantiated through my whakapapa or genealogy. The landscape is therefore my specific Maori Atlas with its own compass points and features emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual and psychic

Does have a habit of associating red-hair with the colonizer

My tribal links are crucial for all my explorations throughout all my worlds. They enable me to work horizontally through my Maori world as well as vertically into its history. They are also the umbilical that binds me to my roots

The tribal voice in all its forms: whaikoreo (speechmaking), karakia (prayer), waiata (song), haka (male posture dance)

I have never been happy with making academic divisions in the ways we see ourselves: the binaries of the real/unreal, past/present/future and so on. Thinking like this, I would therefore not want to separate one arts discipline from another or the artistic from the artisan. Also, the word should be able to be deployed in all its magnificence through short story, film, opera, musical theatre, play, non-fiction, essay and so on

Born and baptized a Mormon
It was a family tradition to go to the college... The proposition at the end of my schooling was that I would attend BYU and/or go on a mission but, despite my grandfather's and parent's enthusiasm I declined both opportunities. At that point I realized I could not conform to the high principles required. I also did not want to leave New Zealand for many reasons. I was in love, I felt that my future was in New Zealand... In those days... and even today I like nothing better than to walk around our farm

Still pray every morning and pray every night. Neither my spiritual beliefs nor Christian beliefs have changes at all throughout my life

Wonder what life might have been like for me had I not been so independent minded and obstinate

I must have sensed... that drive towards the transgressive which made me into a writer... and enabled me to explore issues of sexual identity as well as cultural identity, once I left that homegrown boy behind

The word should be able to be deployed in all its magnificence
Quotes from *The Magnificent Accident*

Maori have handed down their cultural heritage verbally

So the Maori language, and in particular, the oral archives, have not been lost, and their wairua (spirit)—rather than magic—is intact

This is literature in its extended meaning, not just written but oral, not just on the page but also on the walls on a meeting house, as imprinted by facial tattoo, and so on

What I wanted to do was to provide a model for gay men and women, the gay tribe: I don’t in fact care whether or not Maori or other New Zealanders are affected by it. That was and still is, secondary to the main imperative

My job is to reinforce the structures of power and weaning for the Maori body politic. But this is not an either-or situation in New Zealand

Oppression is a historical condition from which Maori have now managed to emerge, although, of course, the primary structures of power are still Pakeha

Insofar as my coming out was concerned, it was not facilitated by Western values, but rather compelled by the need to be in opposition to those values. Maori gay men were doubly discriminated against, both by race and by sexual practice. I am not trying to establish a western framework for Maori gay men, but rather a framework that evolves from a Polynesian and Maori tribal perspective

always taken a tribal approach to life. [Ihimaera tries] to maintain an inclusivity, even if it is often based on difference rather than unanimity

25.2.2011
Quotes from *The Uncle’s Story*

Mormon elders from Brigham Young University

*In my own country, my own Maori people are among the most homophobic in the world. They are a strong, wonderful people but their codes are so patriarchal as to disallow any inclusion of gay Maori men and women within the tribe.*

*You are supposed to be a warrior. Instead, you are a woman.*

*I like white boys. When I put my brown hands on them it makes me feel so dirty.*

*Too many people associate being gay with being weak. It isn’t a weakness, it’s a strength.*

*Marriage should be an option for gay Polynesian men and women. With it we can establish a tribe—a tribe based not just on sexual identity but on family. A tribe must have children to survive. It must also have parents, grandmothers and grandfathers. Even though the children may not be gay by practice, they will be gay by genealogy through their fathers and mothers. When my own children grow up, I want to think of themselves as belonging to a great new gay family, a wonderful new gay tribe.*

*We have been marginalized. In many places our cultures, yours and mine, have been destroyed. We occupy the borderlands of White society. We live only by the White man’s leave within white structures that are White driven and White kept. Our jailers might be kindly, but they are still our jailers.*
LIST OF REFERENCES


INDEX

Hei-Matau – this Maori symbol represents strength, luck, prosperity, fertility, and respect. This symbol is reminiscent of a fishing tool, which also holds admiration for the sea and the creatures in it.

Manaia – this Maori symbol has roots in mythical creature that’s part human body and part bird head. This creature was the spiritual link between the world of the gods and the world of the humans.

This is a symbol that is reminiscent of Maori facial tattoos. The facial tattoos are used as a defensive tool while in battle. The tattoos on the chin are to elongate the tongue.

Fernling – this Maori symbol represents that beginning of a relationship and union. This symbol also represents a respect for the water.

This is an image of a Maori man doing the Haka, which is a war dance that the Maoris perform as a scare tactic toward enemies. This is also a dance of protection of Maori people and Maori land.
Pikorua – this is a Maori symbol that represents the relationship and alliance of two cultures. This symbol is one of the most widely used Maori symbols in contemporary society.

This is an image of the Mormon temple in Salt Lake City. This temple has the highest flow of traffic compared to all other Mormon temples. Mormon temples house the most sacred Mormon rituals for the LDS faith.

This is an image of the Angel Moroni, which is atop every Mormon temple, the sacred house of Mormon rituals and practices.

This is an image of a beehive. Utah, the home of many Mormons and their leadership, is known as the beehive state.
Shield of Faith – this is a symbol in the Mormon faith and culture that depicts good faith is protection from the secular world.

Sword of the Spirit – this is a symbol in the Mormon faith and culture that represents the idea that any worthy Mormon man or woman can yield the strength and power of God to further God’s mission.

This is an image of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir & Orchestra at Temple Square. This is a place where many reverent performances take place, while being open to the public.

This is an image of a Mormon temple. The Polynesian spirit and Mormon faith collide in the Laie Hawaii Temple, which was first announced in October 1915.
This is a color pallet that the homosexual communities identify with. Symbolically, all the colors come together in one accepting community.

Rainbow Flag – this is a symbol used by the homosexual community that quickly identifies the sexuality of an individual to anyone, homosexual or not.

Equality Symbol – this symbol is used by the Human Rights Campaign to promote the equality of all, especially integrating non-heterosexual people into the norm.

This is the symbol for a lesbian couple and lesbian love.

This is the symbol for a gay couple and gay love.
Lambda – this symbol was adopted by the New York Gay Activists Alliance in 1970. This symbol ultimately means gay liberation. This symbol became and international symbol as well.

Pink Triangle – this symbol is the most widely used symbol throughout the homosexual community. It originated during WWII, as the Nazis target and banded gay men with the pink triangle.