

Nuttall, Kōtuku Titihuia, *Tauhou*; Wellington, New Zealand, Te Herenga Waka University Press, 2022; paperback, pp. 168; RRP \$26.09 NZD; ISBN 9781776920259.

According to the 'Author's Note', Kōtuku Titihuia Nuttall's debut novel *Tauhou* should not be read as an exploration of the author's Māori or Coastal Salish heritages (156). Instead, Nuttall skilfully weaves the experiences of both her backgrounds into an enchanting and imagistic exploration of personal identity formed and negotiated within coastal cultures, colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. The novel draws inspiration from the shared experiences of Indigenous peoples, reflecting the concerns and values that bind the Native peoples of New Zealand and British Columbia, while also dancing through unique elements of each culture and their histories.

Tauhou's narrative structure is fragmented, weaving characters and stories throughout, but not seeking overall narrative coherence. Variety is the order of the day, foregoing linear story-telling traditions in favour of the inventive and the exploratory. At the narrative level, this inventiveness manifests in a free-flowing presence of characters, some of whom show up across chapters, some of whom disappear after a single chapter, and some of whom seem to shift in time and place. The continual changes of narrative focus, location, characters, and style creates a kaleidoscopic effect, producing an expressionist depiction of a world presented to readers in individual shards, some of which stand independently and some of which overlap. Many of the chapters are extremely short, often less than a full page long, while others tell extended stories following characters through a world shaped by the conditions of Māori and Coastal Salish culture. For instance, the first chapter, 'Daughter', is roughly half a page, while 'SNITŪEL', the second chapter, is a full page. But then the third chapter, 'Water', takes us into an extended exploration of cousins Hīnau and Salal as they discover their true familial connection and journey back to an ancestral village seemingly populated by the spirits of their predecessors. Most of the chapters are overtly prose, but some, like 'DOWRY' (137-138), read almost as verse, adding another layer of stylistic and narrative shifts to *Tauhou*.

The free-flowing structure of the chapters, stories, spaces, and temporalities aligns with *Tauhou's* fluid thematic of a story-world shaped by water. Building from her Polynesian and Pacific Canadian heritages, Nuttall's novel continually draws on oceans, rivers, lakes, and other liquid spaces. The first line of the novel introduces this watery world: 'Creator throws them into the ocean, Mother and Daughter, to become islands' (11). This opening chapter focuses on the nature of islands – as spaces for leisure, for science, for unique evolutionary traits, concluding, 'An island is the only thing between you and the bottom of the ocean' (11). For both the Māori and Coastal Salish, islands shape their worlds, representing territories with which they have deep, traditional connections. But islands also represent possibilities for

connection – like the connections between Nuttall’s two cultures – as characters move between them, using water as a medium to bridge gaps. The chapter ‘MOTU’ strongly reflects this intercultural connection, as it focuses on a young woman who leaves her own island to travel to another, where she encounters people with whom she builds a bond of friendship despite not speaking the same language, wearing the same clothing, or mutually understanding cultures (119-136). This bond recreates the earlier bond between the voyager’s grandmother and a woman of the other tribe.

Connections between women are another central thematic in *Tauhou*, in which women continually support and uplift one another, often in defiance of patriarchal norms. Men rarely feature in the novel, and when they do appear they are often accompanied by a vague threat of domestic violence. But the relationships between female characters throughout the novel are positive and reinforcing, whether between family, friends, or lovers. Women consistently provide one another emotional and material support, construct communities, and survive through suffering together. Across the storylines and the fragments, this mutual support remains a consistent theme in the novel, ebbing and flowing like the ocean currents but always present. In the conclusion of *Tauhou*, Nuttall returns to the opening, with the closing chapter closely mirroring the first. ‘Mother’ reworks the phrasing of ‘Daughter’, borrowing the opening line – ‘Creator throws them into the ocean, Mother and Daughter, to become islands’ (11, 154) – but arriving at a different end point. Instead of islands being between you and the bottom of the ocean, ‘Mother’ concludes, ‘A woman is a turtle, a fish, a canoe. A woman is an island. A woman was the only thing between me and drowning’ (154). Far from reflecting a shift in the novel’s ethos, this change reflects the interconnectedness of ecological and geographic spaces with communal or cultural spaces, highlighting the interconnectedness of place and people within Indigenous cultures.

Nuttall’s premier novel is an excellent exploration of an identity shaped by the experiences of colonized Indigenous ocean-going cultures and of women within settler colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal power dynamics. The novel’s unique, fragmentary structure keeps readers engaged because we can never predict precisely what will come next, whether the next chapter will be a developed narrative of identity exploration, a poetic fragment, an exploration of trauma, an apocalyptic dream-vision, or something else entirely. Readers interested in emerging feminist voices; New Zealand, Māori, Canadian, or First Nations narratives; oceanic environmentalism; postcolonial perspectives; or experimental narrative structures will find *Tauhou* extremely rewarding. Although there are some adult themes, the book would certainly be suitable for anyone from older teens through adults, meaning that this novel has a wide potential readership and great appeal across generations.

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