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in Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures

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Italian melodrama as resistance strategy in Witi Ihimaera's work

Paola Della Valle

I

Ihimaera's *The Matriarch* (1986) was the first work to offer a Maori view of the nineteenth-century New Zealand Land Wars, and was followed in 1997 by its sequel *The Dream Swimmer*. Although the extensive use of operatic quotations in both novels cannot go unnoticed, scholarly comment has largely avoided investigation of their functions.

Judith Dell Panny briefly mentioned how Verdi excerpts in *The Matriarch* provide a parallel between the Maori struggle to achieve nationhood and retrieve their land, and the nationalistic struggle of the Risorgimento in Italy in the nineteenth century: "The references [to the Italian context] assist the European reader to proceed from the familiar to the unfamiliar, to see history in a wider context, and to see it from a Maori perspective" (1998: 6). Alistair Fox has been the only critic so far to analyze in depth their symbolic meaning, bringing into focus how "they provide a symbolic subtext that, in combination with elements drawn from Greek myth, helps to shape and intensify the whole fictive representation" (2006: 5). Fox concentrates in particular on *The Dream Swimmer* and on how its quotations (all from Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida*) serve as "symbolic markers" that define the protagonist's experience in political, cultural, and psychological terms. He acknowledges the political implications that *Aida*'s fable suggests in the New Zealand context, in particular "the general evocation of a sense of grievance and the desire to be liberated from oppression" (6). However, Fox notices how in *The Dream Swimmer* the cultural and psychological implications of the operatic quotations have even more relevance to the narrative than the political ones and he basically concentrates his attention on them: "Political allegory is the simplest level at which the story of *Aida* is applied" (7).

This essay explores Ihimaera's appropriation of Italian melodrama, in particular in *The Matriarch* (2003 [1986]), which includes excerpts from a wide number

of Verdian operas. In order of appearance in the novel they are: *Aida* (13, 121, 197), *Otello* (45, 368–69), *La forza del destino* (51, 55, 62, 392, 415), *Macbeth* (78), *Nabucco* (207, 228, 292), *Don Carlo* (301, 362) and *Un ballo in maschera* (314, 341, 347). The aim is to demonstrate that Ihimaera's political allegory is not so simple as Fox contended in relation to *The Dream Swimmer*, and not limited to the use of operatic quotations. Ihimaera does not only trace a vague political parallel between two Antipodean nations fighting a patriotic war of liberation in the same period. The spirit of the Italian Risorgimento is fully evoked by Ihimaera's drawing on the emotional Manicheism and characterization of Verdian operas, and by blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, which also characterized both the Risorgimento and its most remarkable artistic product, the *melodramma*.

II

The Risorgimento is an *unicum* in the history of the Italian peninsula, and the Risorgimental idea of "the nation" is the fruit of an invention. The fervor animating Italian patriots, *l'amor di patria* (the love for one's homeland), as Folco Portinari suggests following Ernest Gellner's proposition in *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), precedes the actual existence of a *patria*. *Patria* is the object to be made, after centuries of fragmentation into many kingdoms dominated and contended for by foreign powers. This implies a creative as well as a sacrificial effort. And the sacrifice, in turn, invests the patriotic struggle with a religious sacredness in a secular form (Portinari 2007: vii). It is worth noticing that the word *patria* comes from the Latin *patres* (fathers, that is, ancestors). The notion of *patria* involves kinship, blood relations, the bond with one's ancestors. While its English renditions as "home," "homeland," or "native land" imply physical, geographical, and territorial connotations, *patria* is literally the home of one's ancestors or "fathers."

The Italian invention of *patria* bears many similarities with the Maori nationalist struggle. The Maori, too, saw themselves as a nation only in the mid-nineteenth century, as a result of their disillusionment with the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) and of the increasing presence of the Europeans, who surpassed the Maori population in 1860. In this decade the word "Maori" (normal, ordinary) came into common use, as opposed to "Pakeha" (alien, foreign), while previously their identity was simply expressed according to their tribal affiliations. And these years are marked by the birth of the Maori King Movement in 1856, the rise of Messianic movements (the Hau Hau and Te Kooti's Ringatu Church), and the renewal of the hostilities between Maori and Pakeha in the Waikato War. The notion of *patria* or nation was the result of an imaginative creation for Italians and Maori alike, who saw themselves as "imagined communities," in Benedict Anderson's words (1991 [1983]), claiming their descent from the original inhabitants of the land and investing their struggle with the sense of a religious mission. This can be read as a

nativist form of resistance (see Parry 1994: 175) appealing respectively to an ideal "Italian nation"—which had never really existed, except for the common heritage of the Latin civilization and language—and to a "Maori nation," which similarly defined itself as such only after the arrival of the Europeans.

Portinari also stresses the crucial function of *melodramma* in nineteenth-century Italy as a vehicle of ideological transmission, much more effective and powerful than books and literature. Carlotta Sorba further develops Portinari's argument by contending that Italian melodrama was not only the most popular dramatic and musical genre of this period but it also became the artistic form which embodied the collective imagery and sensibility of the people (2007: 483). Furthermore, she stresses the complex interrelation between life and art, fact and fiction, which characterized the Risorgimento and *melodramma*, arguing that while Italian political events went on stage entering (allegorically) into the plots of the operas, similarly the aesthetics and ethics of *melodramma* moved out of the theater to influence deeply the language, gestures, behavior, even the clothes of common people and politicians, as though the country had been transformed into a big stage where patriotic actors performed their struggle for liberation. Sorba views Italian melodrama not only as the product of an age but as an active agent and "sense-producer," following Victor Turner's theory (1982) that in a complex culture performing and narrative arts function as "active and acting" forces of the culture itself. Sorba underlines how Turner articulates his theory by playing on the double meaning of the verb "to act" and by applying the original etymological meaning of performance, from the old French *parfournir*, which signified "to complete, to bring to an end." "To perform" means to bring to an end a complex process (Sorba 2007: 483).[1]

Sorba substantiates her argument by citing excerpts from public speeches, political manifestos, pamphlets, and notices, all sharing an emphatic common rhetoric and syntax. She underlines their frequent use of exclamation marks, interjections, and repetitions; their prophetic and exhortatory tone; a plethora of rhetorical figures such as the oxymoron, hyperbole, and antithesis, which emphasize the polarization between good and evil. This Manichean view of reality is reinforced by the personification of virtues and vices, and their identification with the oppressed Italians and the foreign oppressors. Overtly moral epithets are employed in descriptions of the enemy, investing the political battle with a larger universal meaning (498–99).

As shown by Risorgimental iconography and historical records, this emphatic rhetoric was accompanied by exaggerated facial expressiveness and gestures, and the open manifestation of emotions and feelings: the same hyperbolic aesthetics characterizing melodrama. When Milan was liberated on March 23, 1848, the chronicles describe a great theatrical scene, where one could easily meet people disguised as medieval knights or bandits. Theatrical costume-shops were stormed

by people buying all sorts of items. The patriotic "look" or "guise" was not a novelty. It had accompanied all the demonstrations and uprisings as a sort of "visual challenge": a provocation to authorities and police forces, and a recognizable sign of belonging to the same cause as the revolutionaries (492–93).

The interconnection between art and life was therefore one of the most striking features characterizing the Risorgimento, which saw the opera conveying major historical issues and inflaming the patriotic spirit, and patriots dramatizing their ideals and principles according to the aesthetics and ethics of an artistic genre.

III

Ihimaera's *The Matriarch* includes three major strands. The main narrative revolves around the figure of the protagonist Tamatea Mahana and his quest in the present to unveil mysteries concerning the past of his grandmother, Artemis Riripeti Pere, the matriarch. The second strand tells of Tamatea's recollections, partly from memory, partly from witness reports, of Artemis's story, including the education she imparted to him as a future leader of the clan, invested with the crucial mission of retrieving lost tribal land from the Pakeha. The third narrative covers the general history of the Mahana clan, which is connected to Maori cosmogony and myth. This part includes sections on the illustrious ancestors of the family that took active part in the New Zealand Wars: prophet Te Kooti and Member of Parliament Wi Pere Halbert, two historical figures and heroic patriots of the Maori nation.

If *The Matriarch* is one of the first historical fictions in New Zealand literature to provide the Maori perspective on the past, as exemplified by the account of the "Matawhero Massacre" purposely defined "Matawhero Retaliation" by Ihimaera, the novel owes much to the aesthetics and ethics of Italian melodrama, which serves as a "sense producer" of the fictional story and of the crucial moments of New Zealand history it recounts. Italian melodrama is not only present in the quotations from Verdi's operas, interacting with the narrative so as to amplify the protagonists' emotional feelings in various situations. It escapes from those quotations and pervades the whole work. And since fictitious as well as real facts and people intertwine, melodrama becomes the link between reality and imagination, fact and fiction. New Zealand history and the novel's story are taken onto a stage, amplified, and dramatized. This adds to the representation of figures and episodes endowed with sacredness and symbolism, as well as serving as a parallel with the Italian liberation war to legitimize the Maori nationalist struggle.

All the ingredients of melodrama are present: a Manichean vision, hypertrophic rhetoric and gestures, and even the use of attire which resembles theatrical costumes. Furthermore, the "triangle" formula—ever-present in melodrama and

opposing the couple of soprano and tenor to an antagonist, a baritone or mezzo-soprano (see Chiappini 2007: 306–7)—is also the basis of the complex intertwining sub-plots of the novel, presenting a heroine (Artemis, who has "a dramatic soprano voice"), a hero (Tamatea), and an antagonist (Artemis's husband, Ihaka, or Tamatea's mother, Tiana). The only variation to the melodramatic formula is that Artemis is not a young innocent woman but the young hero's grandmother. Her age justifies the dark timbre of her voice as a "dramatic soprano."[2]. Their relationship, however, can be easily defined as a physical and spiritual affection, with erotic connotations too, as testified by the jealousy aroused in both Ihaka and Tiana. When Artemis does not allow Ihaka into her alcove, because little Tamatea is sleeping there, Ihaka's enraged reaction alludes directly to Tamatea as a sexual rival:

> Go to him, your man-child, but remember this Artemis, if we fight he and I, in future times, I will give him no quarter . . . He has taken you away from me, he whose boy-cock is match for that of a full-grown man. (367)

Tiana is also seen competing with Artemis for primacy in Tamatea's affection, as testified by her refusal to let Artemis adopt Tamatea and take him away from her. Their confrontation reaches dramatic tones at the Wellington *hui* (meeting), when a journalist reports the "mortal struggle" going on between the two women, only resolved by Tamatea's intervention (266).

Artemis is always depicted as a "diva" on the stage. She is actually compared to an Italian opera singer, Renata Tebaldi, not only for her physical appearance "which belies the [same] strength of intellect and beauty," but most of all for the intensity and passion of her voice, conveying her "imperious" and "commanding" temper in "ravishing pianissimo" (13). She also shares with the Italian singer the same "patrician" features and a "madonna smile," emphatic epithets which are repeatedly used for her in the course of the novel, together with those of "Roman beauty" and "goddess."[3] Her position is always in the limelight—literally shining, gleaming, glowing, blazing, or figuratively being the center of the attention—both in her family and in public events, such as Tamatea's piano concert or the Wellington *hui* (a meeting between the Prime Minister and tribal delegations to debate land questions). Her suggestive attire—a black dress, a veil and pearls threaded through her hair—becomes her "costume" throughout the novel.

The apotheosis of her theatricality occurs at the Wellington *hui*, where the phases of the ceremony are marked by her lifting the veil or pulling it back over her face, a hypertrophic gesture which seems to be a command for her own people, for the hosting party, and also for natural elements: it can attract the sun, disperse clouds, even cause a moon eclipse. With her dramatic performance, Artemis not only defies the Pakeha Prime Minister but also challenges Maori

traditions, which confine the role of women to *karanga* (calls) in public meetings, excluding them from *whaikorero* (oratory). The claim Artemis makes to give a speech like all the other male chiefs in the assembly is a claim to exert her full authority as a political leader and her role as *prima donna* on the stage. After being paralyzed by obscure supernatural forces seemingly wanting to punish her act of pride and threatening her "luminosity" (245), she is saved by the intervention of her young grandchild Tamatea—the heroine saved by the hero—with a singing performance: Tamatea begins a chant evoking the origin of their tribe from the gods transported on the Takitimu canoe from Hawaiki to Aotearoa. By claiming their credentials to speak on the *marae* (an open gathering place in front of the meeting house) Tamatea appeases the "creatures of light and creatures of darkness" adverse to the matriarch, and she can gloriously finish her performance (115). The crowd in the *marae*, previously "hissing" and "shouting" like a disappointed audience (112), starts to applaud, as first Tamatea and then an eager journalist report:

> Her *voice* was strong and challenging. It seemed to ring out and across the marae, filling the air with its authority and arrogance.
>
> The crowd continued to *applaud*. With a *dramatic gesture*, the matriarch began to stand, climbing into the sky, to receive the acknowledgement of her mana . . .
>
> ("Oh, it was *quite a show*," the journalist said. "There's no doubt in my mind whatsoever that your grandmother was *an actress of the first magnitude*. She had us all eating out of her hand . . .") (246, my emphases)

The double meaning of "acting" and "performing," as previously suggested by Turner, applies to this scene. Artemis acts in both senses of the verb, and "performs" her mission, both dramatizing it and bringing it to an end.

Artemis is not the only melodramatic character of the novel. All the Mahanas are described as opera heroes and heroines, conforming to dramatic roles and judged according to the quality of their performance. Just as the journalist stressed Artemis's theatricality, so another external observer mentions the dramatic penchant of the whole family: Tamatea's Pakeha wife Regan. She defines Tamatea's family "so . . . so . . . Italian. All this Sicilian passion" (19), and she later adds that the whole clan is "so Italianate" and that they are "larger than life" (20). The melodramatic traits of the Italian character had already been noted by Madame de Staël, who defined them as "a people torn apart by invasions, oppressed by present conditions, but not oblivious of its past greatness" (De Staël quoted in Chiappini 2007: 290). As Simonetta Chiappini reports, according to De Staël the opera suited Italian people because it was a projection of all their impulses and surges mortified by their exclusion from an active participation in political and civic life. In the novel, the condition of Italians and Maori is equated

not so much by the search for a precise historical parallel as by the dramatization of their life as a result of oppression and foreign colonization.

On the day of their wedding, Uncle Alexis and Aunt Roha are compared to Escamillo and Carmen in Bizet's opera (11). Tamatea's father is depicted as a "nobleman" (39, 58), although lacking the charisma, intelligence, and cunning of the leader. He never reaches a heroic stature and remains a second lead in the novel. All the members of the family are said to have "patrician" features (216), all but Artemis's husband, Ihaka, who becomes Tamatea's principal enemy after Artemis's death. Ihaka first appears as a second lead, shadowed by Artemis's charisma and beauty. After her death, however, he achieves his fulfillment as a villain. Ihaka cannot but be an antagonist, because he does not possess the *physique du rôle* of the hero, as Tamatea notes: "The aging process has not been kind to him. The virility which one associates with a tribal leader has gone from him. The physical presence, that he never had . . . Look elsewhere for the patrician features of the family" (216). In *The Dream Swimmer*, he is described exactly as a bad opera singer, "a faded Italian baritone who has lost everything except his sense of drama, attempting to convey strength of voice with an instrument that has never been noted for vocality" (Ihimaera 1997: 400).

Tiana is the other antagonist in the "triangle" formula, and her character recalls the negative heroines such as Amneris in *Aida* or Abigaille in *Nabucco*. While the matriarch's beauty is unquestionable and adds to her charisma, Tiana "has never been conventionally beautiful" (52). She is never radiant or in the spotlight. She is rather in half-shade or in the background, like "a dark star" (402), and must tilt her face for the light to illuminate her: "My mother had a habit of tilting her face so that the light struck its plane with strength, with resolution" (21). Her character is not fully developed in *The Matriarch*, as it will be in *The Dream Swimmer*, but her feeling of "loving-hate" for Tamatea, in Fox's words (2006: 12), is already alluded to: the same contrasting feeling that pervades the negative heroines of the Verdian operas.

The treatment of the two real figures, Te Kooti and Wi Pere, can also be connected with melodramatic ethics and aesthetics. Their stories are narrated from a Maori perspective, using different sources: the matriarch's account, witness reports, letters, official records, chronicles of the time, and finally the direct intervention of the narrator, who acts as an ultimate commentary emphatically addressing the reader.

Te Kooti's figure could be compared to that of the eponymous character of Verdi's opera *Ernani*. Ernani is in fact a nobleman, Don Giovanni d'Aragona, who conspires against the king, Don Carlo, to revenge his father's killing. Ernani acts according to a strict code of honor, which will lead him to suicide at the end of the opera. Te Kooti himself appears as an educated nobleman and loyal warrior serving the Pakeha government, but he is turned into a bandit after his unjust

imprisonment and exile in the Chatman Islands. Like Ernani, his code of honor is strong and inflexible, emphasized by the religious mission he has been invested with by God. Te Kooti becomes a prophet and military chief, in charge of freeing all the Maori rebels imprisoned with him and leading them to the "land of Canaan," under the protection of the Maori king. The Matawhero Retaliation is therefore presented as a necessary act of war against the governmental forces chasing him and as an ultimate vindication of his injured honor. The Manichean division between good/oppressed/Maori and evil/oppressors/Pakeha is established by the biblical metaphor used by the matriarch in her account and by Te Kooti himself, when his words are reported. Their tone is prophetic and exhortatory, as shown in the following passages:

> *Glory To Thy Holy Name.* And upon landing at Whareongaonga, on 10 July 1868, the prophet told the people that he would be like unto Moses and that, with the guidance of Jehovah, would lead us out of the bondage of Egypt. (140)

> *Glory To Thy Holy Name.* It was then that the prophet gathered the people together. He said unto them: "Three times we have been attacked since we left Whareongaonga and three times I have entreated the Government not to kill us . . . But Pharaoh still pursues us . . . For this reason, and in the name of Jehovah, the people must be protected. The Egyptians will never leave us in peace." (141–42)

The narrator's words, too, are very emphatic, including interjections, repetitions, question marks, and addressing the reader directly:

> Oh yes, lest we forget, where was the Pakeha law when Gisborne settlers began to seek out Maoris who were suspected of having been involved in Te Kooti's retaliation at Matawhero? Where was the law when some former followers of Te Kooti, mostly women and children, were held overnight at Patutahi in March 1869? (173)

> Yes Pakeha, you remember Matawhero. Let me remind you of the murder at Ngatapa. (177)

As to the "Honourable Wi Pere," his story is narrated through many sources, including his public speeches recorded in the Parliamentary Hansard. Wi Pere is defined as an excellent orator "with outstanding vocal and histrionic abilities" and "a man of passion especially when debating the land" (315). Most of the section is centered on his above-mentioned histrionic qualities. Like Artemis, Wi Pere is a

prima donna, and this time the "stage" is the public arena of the Parliament. At the beginning of the section she saluted him with "Ave, ave Caesar" (301) and later he is equated with a Roman senator. In his speeches he makes extensive use of rhetorical devices, metaphors and similes, quotations from the Bible and from literary texts (for example, *Robinson Crusoe*), Maori proverbs, interrogative sentences, in a direct and forceful language, as shown in the following passage:

> I think this Bill should be called 'An Act to prevent Satan dealing with Native Lands'. By 'Satan' I mean those who have obtained our lands wrongfully. I do not think that any European members ought to object to this Bill; because his own land will not be affected by it—it only touches the lands of the Native people, and will save them from the teeth of the dragon which has been devouring them hitherto. (337)

Te Kooti and Wi Pere are two historical figures, but they are endowed with the same theatricality of the fictitious characters, raised to the status of legends and mythologized. They become symbols of two different ways to fight a right cause, exemplifying the same mix of fact and fiction which characterized real life and art in the Risorgimento.

The melodramatic quality of the whole story is further underlined by numerous allusions to musical terms, as if the novel were indeed a musical score. The squealing of some pups is called "appogiaturi" (63 [*sic*]: "appoggiatura" is a musical embellishment) as opposed to the loud barking of the dogs, and Rongopai paintings, too, "were embellished with the appogiaturi of the oppressed" (190). Major Biggs's assassination in the Matawhero Retaliation is preceded by a "lyrical and rhapsodic interlude" (144): the account of a picnic at the river with his family, the day before they are all massacred by Te Kooti's followers. The building of Rongopai meeting house is defined as the most beauteous triumph of the Maori nation in its darkest hour, and compared to an "aria" (193). Italian words common in opera libretti are interspersed in the novel: *fatalità* (83 and 144), *furore* (115), *bravo* (243), *morbidezza* (229). Similes are traced to reinforce the Maori/Italian parallel: Rongopai is the Sistine Chapel of the Maori nation (133), its architect a Maori Leonardo da Vinci (184), and the feud between the two Maori chiefs is parallelled to "the great Italian struggles between rival citadels and aristocratic houses" (98).

Finally, the function of the operatic quotations, whether they are sung by a character or just inserted in the narrative, is always to provide an emotional equivalent—that is, to offer an amplified and evocative explanation to a certain scene or subject, to dramatize it. Artemis is the only character who actually sings passages from *Aida*, *Don Carlo*, and *Otello*, which confirms her role of *prima donna* in the book. A couple of examples will serve to exemplify Ihimaera's use of the Verdi excerpts. At the beginning of the novel, Renata Tebaldi (and implicitly

Artemis) are made to sing an aria from Aida: *"A costoro schiava non sono . . . della mia patria degna sarò. I am not a slave . . . I will be worthy of my native land"* (13).[4] Aida, the daughter of the Ethiopian king Amonasro, is enslaved in Egypt and loves the Egyptian warrior Radamès. When Amonasro's army attacks Egypt to free her, he is made prisoner too, but succeeds in concealing his real identity from the Egyptians in order to lead the Ethiopians' rebellion. These words are pronounced by Aida after her father has accused her of being a traitor, since she does not want to betray Radamès. Her tormented oath of loyalty to the Ethiopian cause alludes to Artemis's painful acceptance of her destiny as a tribal leader, which had a price to pay, too. Artemis loved only once in her life, when she was completing her education in Venice (Italy). But she renounced love to fulfill her mission and went back to New Zealand, on her great-uncle Wi Pere's request, for her arranged marriage with Ihaka Mahana, which would guarantee the alliance to another powerful tribe.

Later on, a quotation from Verdi's *Macbeth* opens a section dealing with the events that constitute the prelude to Te Kooti's retaliation. Because Ihimaera wants to offer the Maori perspective on this gloomy episode of the Land Wars, he needs to analyze, step by step, all the complex causes which preceded it. Following Ihimaera's account, Te Kooti's retaliation comes to be seen as a ring in a chain, a bloody answer to other bloody or unjust events, in a spiral of violence which characterizes any war. The quotation from the aria sung by Lady Macbeth in Act II, just before Banco's assassination, alludes exactly to this spiral of violence that, once started, cannot be stopped:

> *La luce langue, il faro spegnesi ch'eterno scorre per gli ampi cieli. Notte desiata, provvida veli la man colpevole che ferirà. Light thickens, and the beacon that eternally courses the far-flung heavens is spent . . .* (78)[5]

The three extracts from *Nabucco* (207, 228, 292) are all from the famous aria *"Va pensiero sull'ali dorate,"* sung by the enslaved Jews in the kingdom of Babylon.[6] This became a sort of national anthem for patriots during the Risorgimento, an allegory of the condition of the Italians under foreign oppression. In *The Matriarch*, the *Nabucco* excerpts always introduce sections on Tamatea's education, steps in the *poutama* (staircase) of knowledge he is ascending to become the future tribal leader. The matriarch teaches him about his birth and family (207–8), about the history of their tribal confederation and the geography of his land (228–33), and about the origin of his people grounded in myth (292–97). The Verdian excerpts allude to the objective of Tama's education: fulfilling his mission, fighting the Pakeha, and retrieving the tribal land, as shown in the first of the three quotations:

> *Va pensiero, sull'ali dorate; va ti posa sui clivi, sui colli . . . Go, my thought, on golden wings; go, alight upon the slopes, the hills, where soft and warm, the sweet breezes of our native land are fragrant . . . Del Giordano le rive saluta . . . Greet the banks of the Jordan and Zion's razed towers . . .*
>
> My parents, Te Ariki and Tiana, are the first step of the poutama of my life. The matriarch, my grandmother, the woman who wore pearls in her hair, is at the second step of the poutama. Hers is a blinding presence, imperious and commanding, bidding me forever forward to battle with the world of the Pakeha. (207)[7]

For the Maori, as it had been for the Italians, *Nabucco* becomes a hymn of liberation, expressed in the same biblical imagery that had kindled their minds and emotions during the New Zealand Wars, thanks to the teachings of prophet-warriors like Te Kooti. It accompanies the future leader, chosen by Artemis to continue her mission, that is, to be "forever forward to battle with the world of the Pakeha" (207).

To conclude, in *The Matriarch* (and in its sequel *The Dream Swimmer*, which follows exactly the same aesthetic line, although focusing more on the character of Tiana) Ihimaera does not only trace a vague parallel between two nationalist movements developing and fighting in the same period in two Antipodean countries. He enacts a conscious appropriation of a Western genre with a highly political and symbolic value, and inflects it so as to serve the Maori view. In using a "purposeful form of hybridity" (Fox 2006: 16), he claims the right of postcolonial subjects to counter-colonize Western literary expressions. The result is an evocative and sophisticated work, which shows that "composite" complexity which characterizes the postcolonial world. The word composite, rather than "hybrid," seems the most appropriate for Ihimaera's works, since "it embraces creativity as part of its intrinsic meaning," as suggested by Eva Rask Knudsen (2004). And this is what *The Matriarch* provides: a creative representation of Maori history, whose subversive power lies in the richness of its composite textual form.

Notes

1. In Sorba (2007) references to Turner's work *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982) are in the epigraph on p. 481, in note 11 on p. 483, and on p. 507.
2. According to the timbre of her voice, a soprano can be *leggero* (coloratura soprano), *lirico* (lyrical), or *drammatico* (dramatic). The lighter timbre of a coloratura or lyric soprano is more suitable to young heroines.
3. As for Artemis's "madonna smile," see pp. 78 and 121 ("She smiled her madonna smile"), and 210 ("In the photograph, the matriarch has a slight smile like a madonna"). For patrician and Roman attributes, see pp. 18 ("The face of a patrician woman. The matriarch."), 130 ("He looked into that patrician face of hers"), and 209 ("She was a striking lady, very beautiful in a Roman sort of way"). For her resemblance with a goddess, see pp. 16 ("People were very respectful to her not only

because of her status but also because she was like a goddess") and 406 ("the light of a thousand torches made her look like a golden goddess").

4. See Verdi, *Aida* (III), in Mioli (2001: 663). This is the only operatic quotation on p. 13. Ihimaera generally (but not always) quotes operatic passages in Italian followed by their English translation. When there are several quotations on the same page, they are interspersed in the narrative, not always in the order they appear in Verdi's work. But they always pertain to a specific aria or duet, evoking the specific feelings of the Verdian characters at that moment. It is as though Ihimaera's characters were singing pieces by heart, caring less for the exact correspondence to the Verdian text and more for the feelings that the musical piece evokes.
5. See Verdi, *Macbeth* (II.ii), in Mioli (2001: 577).
6. See Verdi, *Nabucodonosor (Nabucco)* (III.iv) in Mioli (2001: 81–82).
7. See Verdi, *Nabucodonosor* (III.iv) in Mioli (2001: 81).

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