



2005

'Craving For The Dirty Pah': Half-Caste Heroines in Late Colonial New Zealand Novels

Daphne Lawless

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi>

Recommended Citation

Lawless, Daphne, 'Craving For The Dirty Pah': Half-Caste Heroines in Late Colonial New Zealand Novels, *Kunapipi*, 27(2), 2005.
Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol27/iss2/28>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:
research-pubs@uow.edu.au

'Craving For The Dirty Pah': Half-Caste Heroines in Late Colonial New Zealand Novels

Abstract

In his discussion of a half-caste character in one of G.B. Lancaster's Canadian novels, Terry Sturm suggests that the half-caste in literature of the late colonial period

DAPHNE LAWLESS

‘Craving For The Dirty Pah’: Half-Caste Heroines in Late Colonial New Zealand Novels¹

In his discussion of a half-caste character in one of G.B. Lancaster’s Canadian novels, Terry Sturm suggests that the half-caste in literature of the late colonial period

is deracinated, belonging neither to one race nor the other, a piece of flotsam. In *The Law Bringers*, as in all the contemporary literature of the half-caste, such a focus enabled the author conveniently to avoid directly confronting the question of the viability and presence of indigenous tribal culture. The displaced culture is invariably consigned to the past, and all that is visible is the dying remnant, sunk in apathy, without belief, unable to function in either culture. (108)

I intend to show that, on the contrary, in New Zealand novels of the late colonial period which feature half-caste heroines, the ‘indigenous tribal culture’ is in fact continuously present, and threatening to the heroines; threatening, either physically or within the heroine’s consciousness, to drag her back to savagery. In this article, I take two major texts to represent the broader discourse of the half-caste woman in late colonial New Zealand novels: *A Maori Maid* by Harry Vogel (1899), and *Half-Caste* by F.E. Baume (1933). These two novels cover the ‘ends’ of the ‘late colonial’ time period; they also have extremely similar plots and ideologies of gender.

‘JEST DARK ENOUGH TO BE RA’AL PURTY’

In his study of interracial characters in literature, Werner Sollors identifies a discourse wherein the half-caste character is conceived as ‘essentially’ white, but tragically at the mercy of the non-white portion of their ‘blood’ — not only in terms of social attitudes, but because of the ‘darker’ impulses of their nature. This ‘conflict was believed to be ultimately biological, generated by the “warring blood” that was believed to be coursing in their veins’ (Sollors 224). To find redemption from its monstrous genesis the half-caste must atone for the sin of its parents by reconciling the two natures, which, in the colonial context, usually entails silencing the ‘savage’ within. Ngaia Carlyle in *A Maori Maid* and Ngaire Trevethick in *Half-Caste* are both presented as consistently appearing to be middle-class white New Zealand women, yet continually mindful of the danger of being overmastered by the ‘savage’ proportion of their ancestry. The half-

caste's internal struggle is a struggle to remain on the 'positive', white, upper-class, side of colonial society's binary oppositions, both in her perception of her self and that of others.

Both Ngaia and Ngaire fulfil the common pattern of female half-caste characters as outlined by Sollors, in that they are depicted as being so close to white as makes no difference, both physically and emotionally, and in that the heroine's 'passing' for white is of major importance. It is fundamental to the racial ideology of the novels that 'half-caste' is not a stable identity; as an 'unnatural' category, it will inevitably collapse and all half-castes will eventually settle into either a 'white' or a 'native' identity. The struggle of the 'tragic half-caste', then, is to find a stable identity in the 'white' category without fear of falling back into 'native' savagery. As will be argued this is only finally accomplished through marriage with a 'truly white' man, truly European in 'blood' and conforming to the highest standards of colonial bourgeois culture in behaviour. Thus, when I speak of the half-caste's efforts to be 'white', it will be assumed to mean 'to embody Imperial colonial morality, to be of the ideal colonial middle-class type'. Class and race are impossible to disentangle in this construction.

The two novels follow very similar plot lines. In Harry Vogel's *A Maori Maid* (1898), the protagonist, Ngaia, is the offspring of John Anderson, a wealthy colonial surveyor and Ruta, the daughter of a Waikato chieftain. After Ruta dies, Anderson, unable to acknowledge his beautiful but illegitimate daughter, supports Ngaire anonymously through a proper colonial girl's education. This leads her to believe that her real father is Anderson's station manager, Jack. The despicable Jack — who has a Maori wife, an Irish accent, and is the only true 'savage' in the novel — forces Ngaia to work as domestic servant to his own family and to the British-born cadets who work Anderson's farm for him. However, one of the cadets, Archie, sees through Ngaia's degradation and resolves to rescue her. The two set off on a gold-hunting expedition, during which they must defeat the plotting of both Jack and Anderson's legitimate but effeminate son, Cyril. After striking it rich on the goldfields, Ngaia is doubly blessed when Anderson posthumously recognises her and leaves her a large bequest.

Ngaire, the protagonist in F.E. Baume's *Half-Caste* (1933), is the offspring of Rewa — again a Maori woman of noble birth — and a chance liaison with a Cornish sailor. Again, the mother dies young, and Ngaire is sent to boarding school. Taunted by her white classmates, sickened by the 'savage' lifestyle of her mother's people and able to pass with ease as a 'Mediterranean-looking' white woman, Ngaire cuts all ties to her Maori heritage. Successfully making her way in the Pakeha world, Ngaire eventually marries Peter, the romantic hero of the novel. Ngaire never reveals her ancestry to Peter, and after she falls pregnant with their first child, is consumed with fear in case the child 'looks Maori'. Confessing all in a note, she flees back to her mother's family to bear her child.

Thankfully for Ngaire, the child is blond and blue-eyed, and Peter comes to reclaim his wife and son who are fully redeemed into the Pakeha world.

Sympathising with Ngaia and Ngaire as ‘virtually white’, the novels assume an Imperial middle-class readership. Their half-caste nature is presented as something of an embarrassing secret, which does not in fact change their essential nature but may betray them to downward mobility in both social position and self-respect. Their appearances, to begin with, give very few clues to their ancestry. Ngaia is described as being ‘in appearance ... without any marked characteristic of Maori blood’ (Vogel 175), whereas Ngaire is told by her Maori mentor Paul, ‘You’re so nearly white now that only your dusky grandchild will give away your secret’ (Baume 67). ‘Secret’ is a very important word here; knowledge of their racial ‘difference’ must be kept, or else societal preconceptions, and consequent loss of self-esteem, will not permit them to live the ‘white’ life of their choosing.

However, as in many of the American ‘tragic mulatto’ narratives, both half-caste heroines are “‘jest dark enough to be ra’al purty”, exceptionally beautiful but often doomed’ (Sollors 224). Specifically, Ngaire is described as pleasingly Mediterranean in aspect rather than threateningly Polynesian. ‘This girl with her fair hair and brown eyes was more like a French beauty’, says Baume (43), and later describes her as ‘a young Diana’ (103); that is, resembling a Greco-Roman goddess. By no means blond and blue-eyed, both the half-castes are nevertheless comfortably within a European range of appearance, albeit exotically, and erotically² Southern European. In Ngaire’s case, it is also repeatedly mentioned how Maori women in the village of her birth take her for a Pakeha, even going so far as to beg money from her (Baume 106). In contrast, Ngaia, while living with her foster-parents Jake and Kau, is seen by the local Maori as one of their own (Vogel 122), something that shocks and disturbs her. This is perhaps more to do with her abject domestic situation than her physical appearance; though both these narratives would no doubt have very different outcomes if the heroines had the same personalities and capabilities, but apparently Maori bodies.

For her tragedy to have any meaning, though, the half-caste cannot be imperceptibly white; she must have some (barely) visible sign of difference, ‘which the wary may read’ (Malchow 168). In other words, she must be in continual danger of being ‘outed’ as not-quite-white. For both characters, the first sign of difference is in their names. While Ngaia and Ngaire both ‘pass for white’ physically, their names are non-European, beginning with that most non-English of consonants, ‘ng’³. ‘The Otherness of the indigene is first heightened, by the use of an indigenous language or by the defamiliarisation of common aspects of white culture’, says Goldie (16); the half-caste women are thus familiar and defamiliarised at the same time. In a discussion of the ‘indigene maiden’, figured as highly desirable but not-quite-human and therefore sexually untouchable, Terry Goldie writes,

For some of the maidens, such as the title figure in *Half-Caste* ... a mixed-race ancestry is presented as an explanation of the variation between her attractions and those of other indigenes. Both texts first emphasise the white attributes ... Yet their indigene status is always clear and a major part of their sexual attractions.

(Goldie 69)

To a white readership, then, the half-castes are thus interesting and suitable objects of empathy because of their whiteness, while their barely visible non-whiteness, expressed in their names and subtle shades of complexion, makes them exotic/erotic and attractive.

CLASS, BREEDING, AND DOWNWARD MOBILITY

The two heroines differ in their racial inheritance, and thus the precise nature of their internal struggle. Ngaia, the titular character of *A Maori Maid*, is presented as gaining all her positive qualities from her father, the surveyor John Anderson; her mother, the Maori 'princess' Ruta, is a nearly silent figure, repeatedly described as 'only a Maori' (for example, Vogel 25, 27). Ngaia's 'beauty' (that is, her European-looking features) does derive partly from her mother (24). However, it is made clear that it was the influence of John Anderson's higher-class European 'blood' that prevented Ngaia from becoming 'savage' in appearance:

From time to time [Dave the coachdriver] had seen [half-caste girls] at the settlement, and he had observed how invariably they grew to forget their civilisation and became once more Maories. ... Perhaps one or two of those who were half-castes had remained slim-waisted; that was if their fathers were well bred Englishmen. The female offspring of a common, ill-bred white man and a Maori woman always grew big and gross and soon became a mother. (Vogel 118)

'Well bred' and 'ill-bred', here, connote respectively whites with upper- and lower-class status in the colonial hierarchy. However, Ngaia's genetic inheritance from colonial aristocracy is not guaranteed to prevent her 'regressing' to a stage of savagery:

The wretched girl [thought Dave] would become a regular Maori wife, with a whare of her own.... It seemed a pity ... that she should be sacrificed to the crude, dirty habits of her people, and become the victim of her surroundings until, without marriage, she became the mother of some chance Maori brat. (Vogel 118-119)

This 'regression' is figured as an absorption, something that happens by proximity to other Maori; it is a blending into one's surroundings, an adopting of the mores of society around one, including sexual promiscuity.

In Baume's novel, there is no class distinction based on 'blood' between half-castes. Ngaire has none of the advantages of the colonial upper classes, being the offspring of a casual liaison between a white sailor named Trevithick and her Maori mother, Rewa. Trevithick has no redeeming features, is licentious while drunk and misogynistic while sober (Baume 13); he dies quickly and conveniently by drunkenly falling from a wharf in Tahiti. Rewa, on the other hand, while

being depicted as filthy and amoral in common with the whole Maori society in which she lives, is articulate and assertive, bringing the clergymen of three religions together in order to shame one of them into baptising her illegitimate daughter (Baume 21). Her defence of her decision to 'lapse' into the Maori lifestyle is revealing:

'I'm quite happy, even though some bull Maori weighing over twenty-odd stone may have tribal rights over me. And that, my dear doctor, is not so pleasant in hot weather. But doctor dear, plenty food, plenty sleep. Ugh!' (Baume 12)

Rewa has thus made a clear choice that Maori 'savagery' is less demanding and difficult than the life of a civilised European. Ngaia is presented by Vogel as being her father's daughter, essentially white (and upper-class) but with her mother's ancestry being a source of complication and sorrow; whereas Ngaire's character and qualities are not presented by Baume as being necessarily 'white'. This fits in with Baume's more ambivalent ideas of the value of Maori 'blood'.

Both novels describe their protagonists as dreading 'reabsorption' into the savagery of their mothers' people. In Ngaire's case, this has already happened to her mother, who, while apparently being full-Maori, worked for a while in Pakeha society. The half-castes are given an advantage in avoiding reabsorption by the early death of their mothers, by means of a runaway horse (Vogel 55) and an embolism (Baume 22) respectively. However, they have no father-figure present to bring them fully into the white world either. Ngaire's father is dead (as well as worthless); Ngaia's cannot acknowledge her until, posthumously, at the very end of the novel, where he is responsible for the legacy that enables her and her white husband to live happily ever after. With both parents thus absent, they are orphaned in a state of uncertainty over which 'world' they belong to.

EDUCATION AND HYGIENE AS RACIAL MARKERS

Both girls have the benefit of a European education; in Ngaia's case provided by a white benefactor (in reality, her father), and in Ngaire's case by a scholarship. Young Ngaia has always been brought up to think of herself as white (Vogel 66), and thus her education is not shown as having a decisive effect on her self-fashioning, except to make the shock more traumatic when she is sent to live a 'savage' life with Jake and Kau. On the other hand, Ngaire's education is shown as vital in the development of her self-image as a white woman. She enters the school with a self-identity as Maori; this has been reinforced by her foster-mother Bella (Baume 25) and her mentor Paul (31–32). Indeed, her scholarship is for Maori girls; in what could almost be a parodic reflection of the plot of *A Maori Maid* it has been set up by a colonial aristocrat out of guilt for being 'responsible for the suicide of' a Maori girl (34). However, when Ngaire arrives at school, she is patronised by the staff (34) and, once she has indicated that despite her looks she is indeed Maori, she is bullied by the other pupils (44). It would be surprising in the light of this treatment if she were not motivated to reject her Maori identity.

Perhaps more than her experiences of school, however, it is becoming used to the school's hygienic standards which provoke Ngaire to identify as white. Being educated in the novel is not opposed to 'savagery'; for example, Ngaire's Maori mentor, Paul, is a lapsed Catholic priest. His relapse into Maori life is instead attributed to a 'savage' sexual appetite: 'Just as cruel as a bearing rein was the order of celibacy to a tribesman of the Waikato' (25). Before Ngaire leaves, he predicts that despite her better-educated instincts, she will yearn, for the filthy Maori society, and in particular, that she will succumb to 'savage' sexuality just as he did:

In your clean dormitory where all the whites are sleeping, you'll get a craving for the dirty pah that's worse than the alchemist's quest. You'll curse when you pray for the stinking huts and the dried shark and the rancid pork, but, by the living God, you'll have to have them, and clear, like I did. Clear just when your career is brightest ... it's a hundred to one on that you'll finish like any Eurasian in India, giving your brilliant self to a swine who should be executed as he creeps into your bed! (32)

Instead, quite the opposite happens: when Ngaire returns from school on holiday, she is struck by the filth, gluttony and other savageries of both the 'pah' and its inhabitants. It is thus suggested that if Ngaire were 'full-blooded' Maori, she would choose the 'pah' over white society and lead the same kind of life as her mother; the fact that she cannot indicates her essential whiteness, and thus her tragedy. Thus it is that Paul eventually describes her as 'no more a Maori than I am a priest' (91), meaning it as a mark of her value.

Baume's spectre of an inner Maori nature reasserting itself against colonial acculturation does not seem to appear in Vogel's novel. However, when she is sent to live with the degrading Jake, Ngaia senses horror at the prospect that, because of what she thinks to be her birth, she is to be 'made into a Maori':

She had been reared to look upon herself as a lady of gentle birth, whose lot it was to lead a life of refinement as an English girl among English people. She had now to remember that she was a Maori, and was, moreover, returning to her birthplace, to her people, to her future home, to Maoridom. (Vogel 115)

This makes it plain that 'being made into a Maori' means a loss of Ngaia's identity as a middle-class white woman and its attendant privileges; Jake, as a lower-class white, is figured as a savage himself. Vogel describes the 'general sort' of half-castes, such as Jake and Kau's children, as being more degraded than the general level of Maoridom (130); while Ngaia's saving grace is her upper-class white fatherhood, Ngaia's degradation is figured as a withdrawal of the privileges to which that has hitherto entitled her.

In Baume's novel, Ngaire describes her feelings at the prospect of moving between the Pakeha and Maori worlds:

'I'm not frightened because I have Maori blood in my veins. The Maoris as I know them are a marvellous race ... I've seen what happens to a percentage, a big percentage, of Maoris. If I were fully Maori, the physical side of the race would

appeal to me as strongly as the other. Take my own case. When I went back to the pah for holidays I was sick with the very native smell. They made a white woman of me without counting the cost. So I didn't go back to the pah.' (Baume 147)

This passage is an prime example of Baume's contradictory racial ideology. Ngaire's phrase, 'full Maori', might mean either having both Maori parents, or not being Pakeha-educated. This confusion as to what 'Maoriness' really is, is related to the conflict between questions of 'blood' and 'culture', which in itself underpins the course of the narrative. In any case, Ngaire believes that if she were 'full Maori', she would be more likely to be sexually attracted to Maori men; as it is, this 'marvellous race' physically disgusts her. This physical disgust is not only linked to Maori bodies per se, but also to the filthiness of Maori savagery, as indicated by her reference to 'the very native smell'.

However, this changes once she returns to the village of her birth on a school holiday. She is repulsed by not only the smell (59) but by the unsophisticated and filthy food (61, 69) and the unsophisticated speech and loose sexual morality of other Maori women (62–64). Most of this is summed up in the following scene, which causes Ngaire to faint:

Ngaire sat next to Epirihana and Kiri. She watched them eat in horror. They shovelled great chunks of meat into their thick-lipped mouths, washing the lot down with gollops of tea. They wiped their hands on their clothes. A belch would resound along the crowded table like the bark of a gatling gun. (74)

Baume presents this as the natural reaction of one acculturated to 'civilised' norms to a 'natural', that is, animalistic, mode of life: 'the growing horror which comes from scented soap and clean underwear, for grime and natural slovenliness of living, in itself part and parcel of the native mind' (81).

However, it is Maori sexual 'amorality' which is presented as the most fundamental distinction between Ngaire's civilisation and the savagery of her mother's people. Maori girls talk explicitly about sex, expose their nipples and show no shame in unmarried pregnancy. Perhaps more importantly, European men believe that Maori women are fair game for sexual conquest. Ngaire complains about a would-be suitor: 'That Treacy! As soon as I told him I was a Maori he made silly love to me and I hit him' (77). If Ngaire continues to profess Maoriness, she faces a lifetime of being thought of as an easily obtainable sexual object. This might be seen as the greatest possible blow to a self-image as a 'good' woman by colonial middle-class standards. This, combined with her new-found revulsion towards the Maori lifestyle, leads her to take her major decision:

She put down her magazine and walked to the end of the railway carriage, into the ladies' lavatory. For five minutes she looked at the reflection of her fair, beautiful face in the mirror over the basin. When she went back to her seat she had determined never to think of herself again as a Maori. (79)

This is presented as a meaningful act, embodying a view of 'Maoriness' as a socially constructed identity rather than a biological fact. It is also perhaps

significant that this scene takes place in a bathroom, a sign of colonial standards of cleanliness. Ngaire's tragedy, and the main thrust of the plot of the novel, is that she can never be sure of being able to give force to this decision on her own.

'A MAN WHO IS WHITE TO HER'

Ngaia does not struggle against her apparent fate, but 'resigned herself to her station in life' (146), that of domestic servant to Jake's family and to John Anderson's other farm labourers. The turning point in her fortunes comes when one of these men, Archie, takes a liking to her. Archie is figured as a type of the noble colonial male, the antithesis of Jake. As discussed above, he is in fact a 'white' man in both the physical and the moral sense. He instinctively knows, just by looking at Ngaia, that she is 'not for game' (168), that is, he understands her to be too noble to be treated as he is accustomed to treat lower-class women – that is, to sexually exploit them (185). Ngaia returns his nobility by showing to him 'the charm of sympathy and trust that a good woman instinctively shows towards a man who is white to her' (184). Jake's exploitation of Ngaia is figured as an usurpation, a despoliation seen in the same terms as the 'native rape' which was a vital boundary marker in colonial India (Sharpe 2). The colonial woman finds her fulfilment in domestic service to the man of her own class, rather than to a (white or black) savage.

There is thus a relationship of exchange between Archie and Ngaia. She provides him with comfort and moral guidance, thus revealing herself to be essentially a 'white' woman, and he removes her from her degradation by making her his wife, thus restoring her to her proper station in life. This proper station requires subsumation of her own identity in that of her husband and his success:

It was not gold for herself Ngaia prayed for in each bucket she hoisted. It was for him, toiling at the bottom of the shaft; for him, that he might grow rich and achieve his ambitions, his destiny. She might have been his slave striving without one thought of what would benefit her. (327)

Additionally, since Ngaia is 'a Maori maid', her relationship with Archie reflects the colonial relationship; possession of the indigenous female leads to possession of the wealth of the colonial landscape. Her reaction to finding a huge gold nugget is: 'You're rich, Archie, you're rich!' (335).

Ngaire's recurring nightmare of symbolic reabsorption into non-whiteness is so remarkably and explicitly sexual that it deserves to be quoted at length:

It was usually the same dream. Down from the metallised road ... she would run, in this her dream, so white that even her eyes were white. She could see herself running. She had the most beautiful white hair, white lips, white eyebrows, white face, white fingernails, white tongue, white eyes, everywhere white, white, white. And she would run happily down from the road to where voices were raised in harmony at pack, stark naked with white nipples on her firm breasts, and she would think nothing of her nakedness.

And then in her dream she would reach the entrance to the pah and see the dim outline of gods' statues which could never have existed, and all of a sudden she would look at her body and realise her nakedness. And then, when she strove for flight, as men's voices and guttural laughter floated in her dream, she would try to shriek with a throat that was nerveless, and black forms would reach her, man-forms she knew, and when they reached her they would vanish.... But when she looked at her white body, that glorious white body which had seemed beautiful to her ... she would see black streaks and patches and circles and straggling vein-like corrugations. And with her nails (black now, not white), she would strive to purify herself of the black horror and she would be in pain ... [After waking] she would turn on the light in a panic and look at her poor trembling hands and note their whiteness and shiver herself into a trembling second-sleep. (121)

The touch of the male figures in this dream blacken her perfect, exemplary whiteness. Being seen as a sexual object for males is, for Ngaire, the most terrifying danger of reabsorption into 'savagery'. In her initial pristine whiteness⁴, Ngaire's nakedness is no threat to her; it becomes dangerous when she is confronted with the black male presences who blacken her with their touch. Thus, Maoriness is associated with sexual defilement — to be 'a white woman' means to be sexually pure. This is emphasised a few pages later in the attempted seduction by a relative of her employer who assumes her to be sexually 'loose' because of her Maoriness (127).

Thus, like Ngaia, Ngaire's salvation must lie in being rescued by a 'good' male, who will protect her from sexual predators: 'Her dreams were unformed except as to mould. Always there would be a man, a tall, strong man with honour written large on his brow, yet invisible save to those who had honour' (132). The problem is twofold: that a noble white man might not want her if he knows of her 'savage' ancestry, presumably because of the presumption of sexual promiscuity; and that if she tries to hide this, then she risks being exposed if their child has Maori features.

Unlike Ngaia's Archie, who knows her to be half-caste (and indeed assumes her to be the offspring of the foul Jake), Peter, the romantic hero of *Half-Caste*, has no way of knowing Ngaire's parentage. Afraid that it will repulse him, Ngaire does not tell him. Her mentor, Helene Warr, professes herself confused as to why Ngaire should be ashamed of her Maori heritage. 'The only Maoris I've ever seen were magnificent men and you should be proud to belong to such a race,' she says to Ngaire. 'This inferiority complex of yours!' (143). Despite her protestations, however, Ngaire's shame for her hidden Maoriness is unabated, and her anxiety once again manifests in dreams:

Ngaire sat far into the night and found no rest. In her mind were the native songs of the pah ... all the Maori she had ever learned came back to her, and she became hypnotised by it, and imagined for a terrible moment that she could speak no English, and would have to give her wedding responses in Maori.

And along the beach came Paul and he called 'Tena koe, tena koe', and she could hear herself answering him in his own tongue, her own tongue. (204)

Her desire to leave no trace of her Maori origins extends to excluding Bella, her foster-mother, from her wedding to Peter; she has to watch the wedding party in secret from outside (210). But whatever she does to prevent herself appearing Maori in any way, she has no control over the possible appearance of her and Peter's child. Here is another of her dreams expressing this anxiety:

Someone would walk to her, someone in a smock and brown hood and hand her her baby. It would have a deep brown skin, squat nose, jet-black eyes, and on its lips, tattooed in the blue thick line she had known so well, would be the words, 'You should have told him'. (233)

Her anxiety over her own body betraying her as non-white leads to the events at the climax of the novel; Ngaire runs away from Peter on their honeymoon, and returns to the 'pah' to have her baby with Bella. No matter how Ngaire tries to keep 'Maoriness' out of her life, Maori society is the only place she feels she can be safe from the hatred she fears for perpetuating her mother's sin of miscegenation. Maori society is presented as a self-contained society of what Anne McClintock calls 'the abject' (71), relatively free from class distinctions in its poverty and savagery. This is precisely why reabsorption for Ngaire is, like the half-caste seen through imperial eyes, both alluring and repulsive. As it turns out, the baby is European in features, and she is reunited with Peter; this seems to bear out Helene Warr's constant reassurance that she is 'essentially' white, and that there is no shame or danger in acknowledging her 'Maori blood'. It is certainly no barrier, the novel suggests, to the traditional 'happy ending' of a white husband and child.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to Sturm's contention, in these two late-colonial New Zealand novels that feature half-caste heroines, the original 'native culture' is a constant, threatening presence. The 'half-caste tragedy' of the heroine — that of belonging to neither the colonising nor native worlds — is only averted by finding, attracting and keeping a 'true', that is, honourable, white man. Both half-caste heroines accomplish this by proving their own inner whiteness. In Ngaia's case this is achieved through the maintenance of proper female cleanliness, propriety and self-sacrifice in the face of class and racial debasement; her inheritance from her father is the final proof of how truly white she is. In the case of Ngaire, proving herself white is also an internal battle of self-discovery. Ngaire's self-identity as white is continually threatened throughout the novel; only the birth of her blond, blue-eyed baby finally proves to her that she is in no further danger of reabsorption.

Class is also vital to understanding these narratives. The heroines' mothers are the daughters of powerful figures in Maori society, thus elevating themselves above the common variety of 'native'. This, in turn, makes them worthy of the love of a middle-class white male conforming to proper colonial standards of behaviour. In another of the New Zealand half-caste novels, H. Gilmore Smith's *New Zealand Calling* (1936), this character type is referred to as 'a white man,

in every sense of the word' (19). Indigenous 'blood' can be redeemed, if not by the white father, then by the white husband who will remove the heroine from the danger of throwbacks to Maoridom, in her offspring and in herself. The 'happy' fate of the half-caste heroine reflects not only notions of women's place in the colonial society of the time, but of the place of Maori, the 'feminised' indigenous race.

NOTES

- ¹ This article is derived from research carried out for my PhD thesis, *The Sex Problem: Femininity, Class and Contradiction in Late Colonial New Zealand Novels* (Victoria University of Wellington, 2004). I follow Lawrence Jones' suggestion in defining the 'late colonial' period in New Zealand fiction as being from around 1890–1939.
- ² The two concepts are intimately linked, especially in Baume: 'Like the American negro, the Maori takes no pride in assimilation of white blood, useful as the difference in colour may be for devotees of the erotic' (Baume 24).
- ³ Although there was a fashion in the late colonial period for settler families to give their children 'decorative' Maori names.
- ⁴ It is worth noting in this context that the dream-Ngaire's firm and perfectly white breasts are implicitly compared to 'the fat breasts of the pah' (Baume 101).

WORKS CITED

- Baume, F. Eric 1933, *Half-Caste*, Macquarie Head Press, Sydney.
- Goldie, Terry 1989, *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literatures*, McGill-Queen's UP, Montreal.
- Malchow, Howard L. 1996, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Stanford UP, Stanford, California.
- McClintock, Anne 1995, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, Routledge, New York.
- Sharpe, Jenny 1993, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text*, U of Minnesota P, Minneapolis.
- Smith, Henry Gilmore 1936, *New Zealand Calling: A Novel*, T. Avery, New Plymouth, N.Z.
- Sollors, Werner 1997, *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*, Oxford UP, New York.
- Vogel, Harry 1898, *A Maori Maid*, Macmillan, London.