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Changes in Tone, Setting, and Publisher: Indigenous Literatures of Australia and New Zealand from the 1980s to Today

Per Henningsgaard

This article examines four novels written since 1980 by two Aboriginal Australian authors and two Maori authors. Two of the four novels were written near the beginning of this period and feature settings that are contemporary with their publication; *The Day of the Dog* by Aboriginal Australian author Archie Weller was published in 1981, while *Once Were Warriors* by Maori author Alan Duff was published in 1990.¹ The other two novels (*That Deadman Dance* by Aboriginal Australian author Kim Scott and *The Trowenna Sea* by Maori author Witi Ihimaera) are works of historical fiction written in the last decade.²

Once Were Warriors tells the story of the Hekes, an impoverished Maori family living in Auckland, New Zealand. Abuse, neglect, and alcoholism feature prominently in this family saga. Following the rape and suicide of their teenage daughter, the Hekes are forced to confront the issues plaguing their family. Eventually, their desperate search leads them to reconnect with their Maori heritage.

In *The Day of the Dog*, Weller depicts Doug Dooligan, a young Aboriginal Australian man, beginning with his release from prison. Doug soon resumes the same destructive behaviours that landed him in prison in the first place. His gang steals cars, drinks heavily, and provokes fights. Doug briefly moves in with his sister and begins to rehabilitate by getting in touch with the land. This effort fails, however, when his toxic friends find him and suck him back into their dangerous lifestyle.

These two novels represent some of the earliest works of Indigenous writing to attain popular success in their respective countries. This achievement is significant for many reasons, not least because one of the effects of colonisation is the silencing of the voices of Indigenous people, and these novels provided a voice. This is not to say, however, that they were anywhere near the earliest examples of published Indigenous writing in these two countries.

The first Aboriginal Australian writer to have a book published was David Unaipon.³ His collection of myths, *Native Legends*, was published in 1929.⁴ Nearly 40 years passed, however, before another Aboriginal Australian writer published a book; Kath Walker's book of poetry was published in 1964.⁵ It is not nearly so clear who was the first published Maori writer, though it is generally held that the Maori people took to writing and publishing in their own language in the

¹ Archie Weller, *The Day of the Dog* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1981); Alan Duff, *Once Were Warriors* (Auckland: Tandem Press, 1990).

² Kim Scott, *That Deadman Dance* (Sydney: Picador, 2010); Witi Ihimaera, *The Trowenna Sea* (North Shore: Raupo, 2009).

³ Craig Munro, 'Case-Study: Indigenous Writers,' *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946-2005* edited by Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2006) 150.

⁴ David Unaipon, *Native Legends* (Adelaide: Hunkin, Ellis, and King, 1929).

⁵ Munro 151; Kath Walker, *We Are Going* (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1964).

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mid-nineteenth century, which is a development unparalleled in Australia.⁶ But otherwise, as Anita Heiss writes in her seminal book on the subject, *Dhuuluu-Yala – To Talk Straight: Publishing Indigenous Literature*, ‘The publishing success of Maori writers and their history of publication ... is very much comparable to that of Aboriginal Australia.’⁷ For example, much like Aboriginal Australian writers, ‘publications by Maori [writers] ... only gained momentum ... in the 1960s.’⁸

As for novels by Indigenous writers, which are the subject of this article, the first novel by an Aboriginal Australian writer did not appear for more than another decade; Monica Clare’s *Karobran* was published in 1978.⁹ Similarly, Maori writer Ihimaera’s first novel, *Tangi*, was published in 1973.¹⁰

So, while *The Day of the Dog* and *Once Were Warriors* were published approximately 20 years after Indigenous writing in this part of the world first gained some publishing momentum, they played an important role in making the field more popular than it had previously been. The Indigenous authors of these two novels were instrumental in establishing a new, provocative genre of literature. Robyn Bargh, publisher at Huia Publishers in Wellington, confirms this observation: ‘In the 1990s Maori literature came into its own.’¹¹ Much the same observation could be made about Aboriginal Australian literature, though perhaps this date would be pushed back to the 1980s when *The Day of the Dog* was published. Weller’s and Duff’s books paved the way for future Indigenous authors. These early works perform a poignant social commentary by chronicling the fallout of colonisation and their characters’ attempts to reclaim some form of cultural pride.

The other two novels, Scott’s *That Deadman Dance* and Ihimaera’s *The Trowenna Sea*, represent a more recent (and remarkably different) type of Indigenous writing. *That Deadman Dance* tells the story of a colony in Western Australia between the years 1826 and 1844. One young Aboriginal Australian boy, Bobby, is educated simultaneously by his community and by the European colonisers. *That Deadman Dance* chronicles the dramatic evolution of Aboriginal Australian–European relations beginning with first contact and covering an 18-year period.

Ihimaera also considers the process of colonisation in his novel *The Trowenna Sea*. Ismay and Gower McKissock are a British couple married for the sake of convenience. Ismay wishes to move to New Zealand but needs to be accompanied by a man. Gower needs a wife to bring to New Zealand, where he hopes to establish a medical practice in the new colony. Readers are treated to Ismay’s and Gower’s firsthand accounts during the colonisation of New Zealand and Australia. Ismay learns to speak the Maori language, and she and her husband befriend several Maoris. One of these individuals, Hohepa Te Umuroa, also shares his story in *The Trowenna Sea*, representing the colonised point of view.

⁶ Anita Heiss, *Dhuuluu-Yala – To Talk Straight: Publishing Indigenous Literature* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2003) 190.

⁷ Heiss 191.

⁸ Heiss 191.

⁹ Monica Clare, *Karobran* (Sydney: Alternative Publishing Co-operative, 1978).

¹⁰ Witi Ihimaera, *Tangi* (London: Heinemann, 1973).

¹¹ Heiss 192.

So far, this article's promise to examine four novels written since 1980 by two Aboriginal Australian authors and two Maori authors has been only superficially fulfilled. A brief summary of each novel has been provided along with some contextual information about the publishing of Indigenous literatures in Australia and New Zealand. This back-and-forth movement between close and distant readings (in this case, between textual summary and publishing history) is symptomatic of the article's research methodology. Indeed, as this article proceeds to compare the four novels in question, on one hand the readings will only get closer and on the other they will get more distant. With this in mind, this article will now undertake a close (though, admittedly, brief) reading of two textual elements – tone and setting – in the four novels.

The shift in tone between the earlier novels (i.e., Weller's *The Day of the Dog* and Duff's *Once Were Warriors*) and the more recent novels (i.e., Scott's *That Deadman Dance* and Ihimaera's *The Trowenna Sea*) is particularly remarkable. The tone of the earlier novels is highly charged with emotions including, perhaps most dramatically, rage about the state of Indigenous communities. For example, Weller writes,

At the age of three she was taken from her sad, drunken wreck of a mother and placed in Sister Kate's home where she remained with a kindly cottage mother for two years before being reclaimed by a grandmother influenced in part by vague feelings of affection but even more by a desire to claim the child endowment.

After that there was a spell back with her mother until she was returned to Sister Kate's, this time accompanied by several of her numerous brothers and sisters. The pattern was repeated until by the time she was twelve and surviving by rolling old drunk white men and other such activities she graduated to Nyandi Correction Centre. She ran away and from then on her existence has been one of escape and recapture by the Department.

Her own mother barely remembers her now. Soon she will become a mother herself – and the whole cycle will start again.¹²

The tone of this passage is typical of both *The Day of the Dog* and *Once Were Warriors*; it is pessimistic, critical of its Indigenous characters (the mother is a 'sad, drunken wreck,' and the grandmother has only 'vague feelings of affection' for her granddaughter), and offers little hope of redemption.

Indeed, any hope of redemption these two novels provide seems to come from a shared vision of an idealised Indigenous cultural purity obtainable by reclaiming one's heritage. In *Once Were Warriors*, for example, the Heke family begins to learn about Maori culture to heal the wounds of the loss of their daughter. By the end of the novel, the entire neighbourhood understands the importance of embracing their culture:

Word going round all over Pine Block that something good was happening; you know, change. That change was happening to some of the people living there. And every Saturday, nine in the morning sharp, y'c'd see the crowd gathered at Number 27 Rimu, to

¹² Archie Weller, *The Day of the Dog* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1997) 12.

listen to this high chief fulla, Te Tupaea, tellin the people of their history. Our *proud* history.¹³

In contrast to the abrupt turn from pessimism to optimism evidenced by the above passage from the final pages of *Once Were Warriors*, the tone of *The Day of the Dog* remains more resolutely pessimistic. About two-thirds of the way through *The Day of the Dog*, however, Doug briefly moves in with his sister and her family and re-establishes a connection to the land. For two weeks, he camps in the outdoors, builds a fence for his brother-in-law, and savours the rewards of his hard work. This reclamation of his Indigenous identity via his connection to the land is the closest Doug comes to happiness:

This country is his Shangri-La, where all things are eternally young and bountiful and beauty is everywhere. There is no such thing as ugliness, since even ugliness is beautiful here. ...

The cool, tangy air washes the red from his eyes and the drink from his brain. He becomes sharp-eyed and alert and happy, as he was on his father's farm.¹⁴

All of Doug's achievements come undone, of course, once Doug's friends find him and reintroduce him to old habits. This particular aspect of these two earlier novels' tone could be characterised as hope of redemption moderated by the high barrier to entry of overcoming poverty, violence, alcoholism, and so forth, on the way to reconnecting with one's Indigenous heritage. Their tone played a significant role in shaping these novels' critical and popular reception at the time of publication.

In contrast to the tone of the earlier novels, which is highly charged with emotions, the more recent novels dispassionately depict the historical act of colonisation. For example, Scott writes,

Menak wondered again if it was wise to allow these other strangers to remain so long, these pale horizon people. True, they chose to camp where Menak or anyone else would not – beside the water in the coldest winds and yet where the sun does not reach until late morning. The water is deepest there, too, but a poor place for spearing fish. ... Perhaps when the whales and cold again return, perhaps they will leave. Or offer a little more.¹⁵

In this excerpt, the tone of which is in many ways typical of both *That Deadman Dance* and *The Trowenna Sea*, there is none of the rage that typifies the tone of the earlier novels.

Furthermore, while the earlier novels seem to idealise Indigenous cultural purity by reclaiming one's heritage, the more recent novels suggest that compromise between the Indigenous and settler populations of Australia and New Zealand is the optimal way to achieve a prosperous future. For example, both *That Deadman Dance* and *The Trowenna Sea* contain scenes of Indigenous people embracing European culture through song. In *The Trowenna Sea*, Hohepa leads a group of convicts in a traditional British song following a Christian church service:

¹³ Alan Duff, *Once Were Warriors* (New York: Vintage International, 1995) 184.

¹⁴ Weller, *The Day of the Dog* (1997) 131.

¹⁵ Scott 151-2.

The minstrel boy to the war is gone,
 In the ranks of death you'll find him –
 ...
 His father's sword he has girded on
 And his wild harp slung behind him –
 ...
 No chains shall sully thee!
 Thou soul of love and bravery,
 Thy songs were made for the pure and free
 They shall never sound in slavery –¹⁶

Similar scenes occur in *That Deadman Dance*. For instance, Wunyeran, an Aboriginal Australian woman, breaks into song: 'Oh where have you been all the day, Billy boy Billy boy?'¹⁷ In addition to song, Aboriginal Australian characters incorporate European customs into their dances. The eponymous 'Deadman Dance' is an Aboriginal Australian dance with some movements borrowed from a military drill performed by the British. These scenes of cross-cultural incorporation are notable because they illustrate the openness of Indigenous cultures to integrate aspects of European cultures into their own.

Significantly, these examples of cross-cultural incorporation flow in more than one direction. As was previously mentioned, the character of Ismay in *The Trowenna Sea* learns to speak the Maori language. In *That Deadman Dance*, the European colonisers depend on the Indigenous residents to establish their colony. The colonisers teach several Aboriginal Australian characters, most notably Bobby, how to read and write. At a time when Aboriginal Australians outnumbered Europeans, concessions by the Europeans had to be made. They respected the land and learned a little bit of the local language. Indeed, Australian literary critic Anne Brewster describes *That Deadman Dance* in the following manner: 'The novel overtly suggests that the "friendly frontier" was indeed, in some small measure, typified by courteous relations.'¹⁸ However, once more settlers came to the new colony, and the Indigenous population no longer outnumbered them, the Europeans did not need the cooperation of Aboriginal Australians to survive. In a dramatic speech before a mixed crowd, Bobby addresses this issue of failed compromise:

My old uncle knows this language I am speaking now [that is, he knows English], but he keeps his tongue away and says it is not worth the sound of it. He would not understand the spirit of words on paper, only in their sound.

We all different from when we babies, you and me too. I change, doesn't mean I forget all about my people and their ways. But some people come to live here, and wanna stay like they never moved away from their own place. Sometimes I dress like you people, but who here I ever see naked like my people?¹⁹

¹⁶ Ihimaera 319.

¹⁷ Scott 129.

¹⁸ Anne Brewster, 'Whiteness and Indigenous Sovereignty in Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance*,' *Journal of the European Association of Studies on Australia* 2.2 (2011) 62.

¹⁹ Scott 391.

Both Scott and Ihimaera use their novels to address the issue of compromise – both the failed compromises of the past and the hope for future compromises to come. In Brewster’s analysis of *That Deadman Dance*, she describes the way in which the novel engages with this particular idea:

The novel’s vision of Noongar sovereignty, I propose, incorporates ... the adjunct vision of the possibility of an alternative intercultural social contract (during the period of early contact depicted in the novel) which accommodated non-Indigenous people on Noongar land in relations of Indigenous hospitality and exchange. ... The question as to whether this alternative is still available in contemporary Australia, is left open by the novel.²⁰

In addition to engaging with the hope for future compromises to come in the way Brewster describes, the decisions by Scott and Ihimaera to include the voices of both coloniser and colonised in their novels appears to be some sort of structural and/or political compromise on their part. Once again, the shift in tone between the earlier novels and the more recent novels is put in sharp relief by this shift from an idealised Indigenous cultural purity to advocating compromise between the Indigenous and settler populations of Australia and New Zealand.

Coupled with the shift in tone, the settings have changed from settings that were contemporary with their publication in the 1980s and early 1990s to historical settings for the more recently published novels. Both *That Deadman Dance* and *The Trowenna Sea* focus on the European colonisation of Australia and New Zealand in the nineteenth century. These novels perhaps attempt to explain the unrest in Indigenous communities in the 1980s and 1990s, which the earlier novels chronicled, by discussing and analysing the very first race relations between the Maoris or Aboriginal Australians and the European colonisers.

It is tempting to ascribe the shifts in tone and setting over this 30-year period to the changing social and political realities surrounding the issue of Indigenous relations in the two nations. And these factors undoubtedly played an important role in the aforementioned shifts; Indigenous authors writing today are responding to a different social and political reality compared to Indigenous authors writing in the 1980s and early 1990s. What this explanation overlooks, however, are the concurrent changes in the publication of Indigenous literature and how these might contribute to the types of changes noted above. It is here, of course, that this article shifts again from close reading to distant reading. In this case, the distant reading techniques being employed draw liberally from methodologies developed by scholars of book history.

Before going any further, it is perhaps important to answer the question, ‘What is book history?’ Whereas most literary scholarship concentrates on what is printed in the pages of a book as the key to the book’s role in the development and transmission of culture, book history considers those other aspects of the book that inform this process. Noted book historian and former director of the Penn State Center for the History of the Book, James L.W. West, III, has observed that book history ‘usually ... concentrate[s] on a group of related topics: authorship, bookselling, printing, publishing, distribution, and reading.’²¹ In other words, book history

²⁰ Brewster 63-64.

²¹ Quoted in Per Henningsgaard, ‘The Teaching of “Book History” in English and Cultural Studies Units,’ *Preparing for the Graduate of 2015: Proceedings of the 17th Annual Teaching Learning Forum, 30–31 January*

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studies all those aspects of the book that have historically been seen as incidental to the main purpose of the book, which is to transmit ideas, but in fact crucially inform this process. It considers the book as a material object with its own history of production and consumption.

To date, when book history methods have been applied to the study of Indigenous literatures in Australia and New Zealand, by far the most common subject of study has been the impact of non-Indigenous editors on writing by Indigenous authors. For example, there is the book-length study by Jennifer Jones, *Black Writers, White Editors: Episodes of Collaboration and Compromise in Australian Publishing History*.²² Furthermore, there are numerous journal articles on the subject, including (to name just a few of the more prominent examples) Graham Seal's 'Indigenous Australian Life Histories: A New Genre of Writing and Publishing?'; Robin Freeman's "'We Must Become Gatekeepers": Editing Indigenous Writing'; and Margaret McDonnell's 'Protocols, Political Correctness, and Discomfort Zones: Indigenous Life Writing and Non-Indigenous Editing.'²³ Furthermore, in Heiss's aforementioned book, *Dhuuluu-Yala – To Talk Straight: Publishing Indigenous Literature*, she devotes an entire chapter to the subject of 'Editing Indigenous Literature.'

Notably, the publication dates for all of these articles and books are in the 2000s. This is reflective of an uptick of international interest in book history as both a field of study and a set of research methods. Book history is finding its way into the curricula of a growing number of Australian and international universities, and rapid technological innovation (such as the development of ebooks) is only expected to make the study of book history more useful and important. Nonetheless, the focus of these sources on the editing of Indigenous literature by non-Indigenous editors does nothing to account for the changes noted earlier in this article – specifically, the shifts in tone and setting in Indigenous writing over a 30-year period leading up to the present. After all, as recently as 2003, there were only 'four "industry trained" Aboriginal editors in Australia.'²⁴ While this is four more than were on the scene when *The Day of the Dog* was published in 1981 and three more than when *Once Were Warriors* was published in 1990, the numbers of Aboriginal Australian editors are too small to have had much of an effect on recently published novels by Aboriginal Australian writers. This is especially so since the four Aboriginal Australian editors currently practising are all associated with Aboriginal Australian publishing houses (i.e., Aboriginal Studies Press, IAD Press, and Magabala Books), which collectively publish a very small percentage of the total output of Aboriginal Australian writing today. Moreover, these editors/publishing houses were not responsible for the publication of *That Deadman Dance*, which is the example of recent Aboriginal Australian writing being

2008 (Perth: Curtin University of Technology, 2008).

<http://otl.curtin.edu.au/tlf/tlf2008/refereed/henningsgaard.html>.

²² Jennifer Jones, *Black Writers, White Editors: Episodes of Collaboration and Compromise in Australian Publishing History* (Sydney: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2009).

²³ Graham Seal, 'Indigenous Australian Life Histories: A New Genre of Writing and Publishing?' *International Journal of the Book* 3.1 (2005/2006) 79-84; Robin Freeman, "'We Must Become Gatekeepers": Editing Indigenous Writing,' *International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* 6.2 (2009) 133-49; Margaret McDonnell, 'Protocols, Political Correctness, and Discomfort Zones: Indigenous Life Writing and Non-Indigenous Editing,' *Hecate* 30.1 (2004) 83-95.

²⁴ Heiss 66-82.

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considered in this article. In New Zealand, there are only two publishing houses – Huia Publishers and Te Reo Publications – that have ‘in-house Maori editors.’²⁵ Again, these two publishing houses are not responsible for anywhere near the majority of Maori writing today, nor are they responsible for the publication of *The Trowenna Sea*. In fact, *The Trowenna Sea* was published by Penguin imprint Raupo and, surprisingly, Penguin claims it ‘does not currently employ a Maori editor or language expert as the “establishment isn’t large enough.”’²⁶ Clearly, the editing of Indigenous literature by non-Indigenous editors, while it certainly impacts upon individual works of Indigenous literature, does nothing to account for the specific types of changes noted earlier in this article.

If editing as a component of book history cannot account for these changes, what component can? This article turns instead to publishing. Heiss’s *Dhuuluu-Yala – To Talk Straight: Publishing Indigenous Literature* is one of a much smaller number of published works ostensibly concerned with the intersection of the subjects of publishing and Indigenous literature, yet the title of her volume is arguably misleading. Rather than focusing on ‘publishing Indigenous literature,’ her book takes a much more expansive outlook. After all, *Dhuuluu-Yala – To Talk Straight* is split into three parts: authorship, editing and publishing, and readership. And in the middle section, which is ostensibly concerned with both editing and publishing, her discussion of publishing totals only 18 pages of a 219-page book (not including appendices, endnotes, bibliography, and index). Clearly, publishing is not the focus of this book.

Furthermore, half of Heiss’s 18-page chapter on the subject of publishing Indigenous literature is devoted to Indigenous publishing houses. Of course, there remains some debate about what constitutes an ‘Indigenous publishing house’; the definition of this term has changed shape and provoked contestation over the years. It is worth noting that ‘there [are] no all-Black publishing houses in Australia,’ in the sense that ‘publishing houses that identified as Indigenous entities still tended to have disproportionate non-Indigenous inhouse [sic] influence.’²⁷ Looking past this debate, Heiss devotes significant attention to Aboriginal Studies Press, which was established in Canberra in 1965 ‘as the publishing arm of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.’²⁸ Furthermore, Heiss discusses how, in 1972, IAD Press was established in Alice Springs as ‘the publishing arm of the educational college, the Institute of Aboriginal Development.’²⁹ In their early years, however, neither publishing house was exclusively devoted to publishing works by Indigenous creators, but rather also considered works by non-Indigenous writers on Indigenous issues. Consequently, Magabala Books, which was established in 1987, refers to itself as ‘Australia’s oldest independent Indigenous publishing house,’ since it publishes only those books where an Indigenous creator was involved.³⁰ Heiss

²⁵ Heiss 210.

²⁶ Heiss 209.

²⁷ Heiss 51.

²⁸ Louise Poland, ‘An Enduring Record: Aboriginal Publishing in Australia 1988-1998,’ *Australian Studies* 16.2 (2001) 84.

²⁹ Heiss 51.

³⁰ ‘Home,’ *Magabala Books*, 12 January 2016 <http://www.magabala.com>.

does the same thing in her coverage of Maori literature – focusing on Maori publishing houses such as Huia Publishers, Te Reo Publications, and Aoraki Press.

Yet, the separate bibliographies of Aboriginal Australian literature and Maori literature that Heiss provides as appendices to her book do not justify her focus on Indigenous publishing houses. To take just one sub-category from each of the two appendices – the sub-category of fiction – Heiss lists roughly three times as many titles published by non-Indigenous publishing houses as she does titles published by Indigenous publishing houses. This statistic is consistent whether one is considering fiction by Aboriginal Australian writers or by Maori writers. Of course, Heiss's bibliographies are not exhaustive, but there is no reason to believe she would systematically favour the output of non-Indigenous publishing houses over that of Indigenous publishing houses; in fact, if the body of her book is anything to go by, the opposite seems more likely.

Of course, Heiss also discusses non-Indigenous publishers of both Aboriginal Australian and Maori literatures. Yet, Heiss prefaces these discussions by noting, 'While many Aboriginal writers have come through our own publishing houses, few have come through the mainstream.'³¹ Not only is this observation directly contradicted by Heiss's own bibliographies of Aboriginal Australian and Maori literatures, but her obsessive focus on Indigenous publishing houses comes at the expense of her ability to observe important trends in the publication of Indigenous writing by non-Indigenous publishing houses.

This is not meant as a criticism of Heiss's book, which is a valuable scholarly resource, but merely as a point of clarification. Once it is clear how little attention Heiss actually gives to the subject of publishing in her book – and, moreover, how little attention she gives to the publication of Indigenous writing by non-Indigenous publishing houses – it is possible to understand how she may have overlooked significant developments that have contributed to the aforementioned shifts in tone and setting in Indigenous writing over a 30-year period leading up to the present.

The most significant development Heiss (and others who have written on this subject, though there are not many, and Heiss is the most prominent example) overlooks is the transition from Indigenous literature being published by small to medium-sized local publishing houses, to Indigenous literature being published by the local arm of a multinational conglomerate. To clarify, near the beginning of this 30-year period, most of the books by Indigenous authors that were widely read in their home countries were published by small to medium-sized local publishing houses. More recent titles by Indigenous authors that are widely read in their home countries now come out of publishing houses owned by multinational conglomerates. It is hardly surprising that the Indigenous literature produced by these two very different institutional structures should differ in significant ways.

Heiss mentions several of the small to medium-sized local, non-Indigenous publishing houses responsible for producing so many examples of early Indigenous literature. In the case of Aboriginal Australian literature, she singles out for special mention University of Queensland Press, Fremantle Arts Centre Press (renamed Fremantle Press), and University of Western Australia Press (renamed UWA Publishing). Significantly, these three are all small to medium-

³¹ Heiss 58.

sized local publishing houses that are protected to a certain extent against publishing failures by underwriting from either a university or the state government. When a body of literature moves from this institutional structure to a multinational conglomerate, this represents a particularly dramatic shift in priorities and governing philosophies. All three publishing houses have shown a tenacious commitment to the publication of Indigenous literature, which is not always a commercially beneficial undertaking. To this list one could add Reed Publishing in New Zealand (which Heiss also mentions though it is significantly larger than the others) and Allen & Unwin in Australia (which Heiss does not mention though it occupies a position similar to Reed Publishing). These two publishing houses have not shown quite the same commitment in terms of numbers of books published, but as home-grown publishing houses they were quick to support the surge of Indigenous writing in the 1980s. Consequently, Allen & Unwin published Weller's *The Day of the Dog* in 1981, while small, home-grown New Zealand publisher Tandem Press published Duff's *Once Were Warriors* in 1990.

If Heiss is regrettably unobservant of these macro-level events in the publication of Indigenous literature in the 1980s and early 1990s by non-Indigenous publishing houses, then she is blind to any events since then. Admittedly, Heiss specifies in her book that her research is 'current up to the mid-1990s although some references to developments in the late 1990s/2000 have been included.'³² Even with this caveat, her research seems to have overlooked a particularly important and influential development in the publishing industry that was well underway by the mid-1990s when Heiss's industry coverage tapers off. Specifically, 'the second phase of mergers and acquisitions in trade publishing ... began in the early 1980s and has continued to the present.'³³ As John B. Thompson notes in his authoritative book on the contemporary publishing industry, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century*, 'The outcome of this process of consolidation was that by the end of the 1990s there were four large and powerful publishing groups in the field.'³⁴ Clearly, such a significant development in the global publishing industry is likely to have an influence on the production of Indigenous literatures in Australia and New Zealand. Indeed, as was mentioned earlier, many (perhaps even most) of the recently published books by Indigenous authors that are widely read in their home countries now come out of publishing houses owned by multinational conglomerates. Consider, for example, Scott's *That Deadman Dance*, published by Picador in 2010, and Ihimaera's *The Trowenna Sea*, published by Raupo, which is a division of Penguin, in 2009. (Admittedly, *The Trowenna Sea* was not widely read because it was withdrawn from sale following charges of plagiarism, but Ihimaera's track record as the author of many award-winning and bestselling books, including the international phenomenon *The Whale Rider*, almost certainly ensures it would have been widely read had such charges not been levelled against the book.)³⁵ Interestingly, the publisher of *The Trowenna Sea*, Raupo, is home-grown New Zealand

³² Heiss vi.

³³ John B. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010) 107.

³⁴ Thompson 112.

³⁵ 'Reviewer Claims More Plagiarism in Ihimaera Novel,' *New Zealand Herald*, 20 November 2009, 12 January 2016 http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10610510.

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publishing house Reed Publishing with a new name and under the ownership of Penguin since 2007.

Clearly, the shifts in tone and setting in Indigenous writing over a 30-year period leading up to the present are only the half of it. Indigenous writers are now writing for an international literary marketplace, and the implications of this are huge. This observation prompts the question, 'At what stage in the publication process are these multinational corporations exerting an influence on books by Indigenous authors that differs from the influence previously exerted by small to medium-sized local publishing houses?' Unfortunately, this is a difficult (if not impossible) question to answer. It should be said, however, that there is little reason to believe this influence happens at the editorial level; as was suggested earlier in this article, the characteristics of the editors in these two institutional settings do not differ dramatically. Furthermore, there is quite a bit of movement of editors between publishing houses of all stripes.

Leaving behind editorial influence, there are two much more likely sources of this influence: authorial self-censorship and multinational publishing house acquisition policies. Once again, it is difficult (if not impossible) to conclusively establish the influence of these factors. Nonetheless, the argument for the influence of the first of these two factors would rest on the supposition that Indigenous authors are increasingly aware that they are writing for an international literary marketplace and (either consciously or unconsciously) craft their narratives to appeal to (or, at least, to not alienate) this audience segment. The shifts in tone and setting documented in this article are certainly conducive to appealing to a wider readership. For those Indigenous authors publishing with small to medium-sized local publishing houses near the beginning of the 30-year period documented in this article, the prospects of a wider readership were not as seriously considered because there were fewer precedents for it and, besides, their publishing houses did not have nearly the same capacity (in terms of marketing reach, distribution, and so forth) to reach such a readership.

The argument for the influence of multinational publishing house acquisition policies would, similarly, rest on the supposition that these publishing houses are contracting works by Indigenous authors only if these works will appeal to the broadest possible audience, including an international readership. The well-established 'institutionalisation of Indigenous studies in the academy' may be a contributing factor here as acquisitions editors try to anticipate which books the academic community might embrace.³⁶ When a book is set as a required text in a university course, this can lead to regular sales for many years to come, which is obviously a desirable outcome for the publishing house.

Once again, it is clear that there are significant implications to the shift from Indigenous literature being published by small to medium-sized local publishing houses, to Indigenous literature being published by the local arm of a multinational conglomerate. It is important to further observe that the implications of this shift are huge for not only the Indigenous writers themselves but also (and perhaps especially) for Australian and New Zealand readers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, as they begin to think about how this new literature might fit within or challenge existing national and Indigenous literary traditions. Moreover, the

³⁶ Jodi A. Byrd and Michael Rothberg, 'Between Subalternity and Indigeneity: Critical Categories for Postcolonial Studies,' *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 13.1 (2011) 10.

'Changes in Tone, Setting, and Publisher: Indigenous Literatures of Australia and New Zealand from the 1980s to Today.' Per Henningsgaard.

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methodology of this article and the considerations it raises about the production of an Indigenous literature are designed to get other scholars thinking about the various factors that contribute to shaping the meaning of an individual book and of 'Indigenous literature' as a concept.

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