

*Family Resemblances:
The Construction of Pakeha History
in Jane Campion's "The Piano"*

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The capacity to live with difference is, in my view, the coming question of the twenty-first century.

STUART HALL, "Culture, Community, Nation" (361)

IN "Culture, Community, Nation," Stuart Hall argues that because of the increasing cultural diversity in the modern world, the "greatest danger" is posed by national and cultural groupings which "attempt to secure *their* identity by adopting closed versions of culture or community and by the refusal to engage — in the name of an 'oppressed white minority' — with the difficult problems that arise from trying to live with difference." Nationalisms which "reach for too closed, unitary, homogeneous and essentialist a reading of 'culture' and 'community' will have succeeded in overcoming one terrible historical hurdle only to fall at the second" (361). In former settler colonies where the struggle for justice by indigenous peoples confronts settler claims for an identity separate from the motherland, the white nationalism Hall describes can be particularly problematic due to its connection to the state.

In contemporary postcolonial New Zealand/Aotearoa, biculturalism and multiculturalism are contentious and difficult issues. According to Andrew Sharp's *Justice and the Maori*, the early 1980s were marked by an official government shift away from a multiculturalism that presented the indigene as only one of many other minority groups and toward a biculturalism which recognized the specific historical claims of the Maori over and above those of other groups (228). Biculturalism as an approach focused on "mana" and on the right of the Maori "to create and sustain a way of life independent of the Pakeha state" (230).¹ According to this

bicultural perspective, Maori are the “*tangata whenua o Aotearoa*” — literally, the “people of the land of Aotearoa,” — which implies that Maori are born of the land, “their generations buried in it, attached to it by indissoluble spiritual ties in a way that the Pakeha who regarded land simply as a commodity never could be” (8). Recognizing that *tangata whenua* are “intimately and indissolubly connected to the land” means acknowledging

that by prior occupation the land was originally and remained spiritually theirs; that by virtue of the Treaty of Waitangi they had agreed to an equal partnership with the Crown and with subsequent settlers . . . that te iwi Maori [the Maori “tribe”] had nowhere else to go, whereas the visitors had their homelands in which their cultures thrived; that while the Crown had sovereignty, they had the rangatira-tanga² appropriate to an equal partner. (230)

The Treaty of Waitangi, signed by over 500 Maori chiefs in 1840, established the basis for this late twentieth-century bicultural partnership between indigene and settler. In practice, however, the government’s approach to the situation was basically a form of multiculturalism with “special consideration” for Maori (228).

With the emergence of a “Pakeha” national identity seeking to distance itself from the British imperial past, the translation from colonial settler to white nativist identity employs similarities with recent Maori cultural nationalism. Jane Campion’s film *The Piano* (1992) defines a Pakeha nationalism that shares commonalities with Maori nationalism vis-à-vis British imperialism in a fictionalized nineteenth-century New Zealand/Aotearoa. Set in 1850 New Zealand, a decade after the signing of the Treaty, Campion’s film structures a system of representation which produces a sense of an imagined community, but with an important critical relation to this construction of identity. I term this relation “critical” or “hybrid nationalism,” a phrase which takes its cue from David Lloyd’s discussion of hybridity in *Anomalous States*. Lloyd argues that hybridity functions within a nationalist perspective as the inauthenticity and contamination against which nationalism works to establish itself as pure and authentic culture. In so doing, hybrid culture exposes nationalism’s similarity to imperial ideology, for while the colonizer sees the colonized as the “not-quite-human,” nationalism sees the hybrid as the “not-quite-authentic.” While imperialism

attempts to reduce the colonized to a "surveyable surface" homogeneous in meaning, hybridized culture offers an ambiguous space where damage and resistance are difficult to distinguish, where surfaces are "pitted or mined with uncertainty, depths and shallows whose contours vary depending on the 'familiarity' of each observer" (99). Thus, while the film attempts to create a nationalist Pakeha identity by recuperating a fragmented past, it also foregrounds the problematics of such a project which depends upon the exclusion or repression of certain aspects of that past.

The film depicts three forms of difference which continue to frustrate the nationalist wish for homogeneity: gender difference and sex roles; relations between settlers and the indigenous Maori; and gapped and traumatic temporalities which may not be assimilated into a linear, teleological national history. First, the film focuses on woman as reproductive body. In general, nationalism's valuation of women's reproductivity and their role as mothers and socializers within the nuclear family serves to maintain a male-centered nationalist ideology. Although the film has repeatedly been discussed as an account of sexual awakening, these readings ignore the threat implicit in Ada's "erotic autonomy," which subverts the "proper" nationalist avenues of reproduction such as legal marriage, the nuclear family, and monogamous sexual relations, thus challenging both British and Pakeha nationalism's use of women's bodies.

Second, because this critical nationalism arises out of a former settler colony, a doubly complex relation to empire serves as the film's basis for depicting similarities, while maintaining the differences, between settler Pakeha and indigenous Maori. Campion posits a Pakeha identity, through the figures of Ada McGrath and her subsequent "family" with George Baines and Flora, by means of an illusionary, constructed resemblance between Ada and the Maori characters.³ Further, the film contrasts Ada's use of "natural" languages with the mediated and deceptive languages employed by the Treaty of Waitangi and the filmic Bluebeard shadow-play. The director's self-conscious deployment of the shadow-play serves to suggest Ada's similarity to the filmic Maori by establishing both their mutually oppressed status under fraudulent legal contracts — such as Ada's marriage and the Treaty — and

their “genealogical” linkages, parallel acts of visual witnessing, and the compatibility of their futures.

Finally, while the film links Ada and the Maori through these similarities, it also maintains their historical specificities by foregrounding Ada’s implicit difference from the Maori: her lack of historical and spiritual connection to the land. Ada’s gapped personal history, replete with quasi-traumatic absences, is covered over by stories and taletelling which give the illusion of actual historical events. Campion’s use of colour and of the piano as object enacts the fetishistic nature of Pakeha nationalism by showing how the translation from settler to Pakeha is predicated upon a willful “forgetting” of the colonial past. Like Flora’s and Ada’s taletelling, the piano itself serves as the fetishistic site of loss which allows Ada to move toward an only partially whole future.

I. Woman, Reproduction, and the Nation

The Piano is often categorized as a popular film adaptation of Victorian romance novels such as Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* or Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. These readings emphasize Ada’s “sexual awakening.” For example, Ann Hardy argues that Ada can be viewed as the typical romance heroine who spends a period of time with the “Wrong Man” only to be “understood and appreciated by a fully masculine, yet sensitive, nurturing male” who leads her to an “uninhibited expression of her own sensuality” (9). Stella Bruzzi’s insightful article approaches the film from the perspective of touch which circumvents and establishes a radical alternative to the male gaze. Bruzzi argues that proximity between “clothes and body” is “the film’s means of articulating Ada’s sexual awakening,” her “abstract desire for closeness” (265). Critics have also read the Maori characters as peripheral, primitive, and crude caricatures. Hardy sees the Maori characters as “glorified porters” and “funny men,” a “colourful background and foil” to the “settlers’ pomposity” and sexual prudishness (11). Cheryl Smith and Leonie Pihama comment that the Maori are marginalized, serving only to “decorate the stage of life” where Pakeha are the key romantic figures, and that the Maori are constructed along “typically Eurocentric perceptions” which attribute to them a child-like fondness for imitation and an inability to distinguish between the real and the

imaginary (52). But although the Maori characters may be foils, I suggest they may also be figures of identification.

An alternative to these romantic and primitivizing readings would be informed by an awareness of the relation between sex and the establishment of the nation-state, whether it be British empire represented by Alisdair Stewart or Pakeha nationalism represented by George Baines. Linda Dyson points out that the mid-1980s marked the beginning of "troubling times for white New Zealanders" who were "forced to reassess their colonial history as a result of the demands for justice by the 'indigenous' Maori people which, together with Britain's continuing shift of focus away from the former loyalties of empire . . . brought about a 'crisis' of national identity" (267). Britain's entry into the European Community marked the end of New Zealand's special economic ties to Britain which had guaranteed a market for primary produce. This economic shift, in addition to Maori demands for justice, "shattered the national 'imaginings' of white New Zealanders whose power and privilege [had] been challenged" from above and below the nation (270). Dyson notes the term "Pakeha" has increasingly been used to stake out a white ethnic identity which makes claims to "indigeneity" by appropriating "traditional motifs" and claiming "spiritual attachments to the land" (268-69). Dyson argues that Ada and Baines refashion themselves as "born-again *pakeha*" through her sexual awakening and his "going native" (276). I would argue, however, that Campion self-consciously suggests that Ada is *already* sexually aware as well as "other": Ada is presented as inherently "indigenized," her similarities to the Maori already apparent, when she leaves Scotland for her journey to New Zealand, suggesting a "natural" otherness that precedes cultural assimilation or social learning. These "natural" similarities to the Maori are the basis for the Pakeha nationalism the film critically constructs.

An analysis of Ada's sexual choice of Baines over Stewart will assist us in understanding the relation the film draws between sex and the nation-state. Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias argue that the "central dimensions of the relationships between collectivities and the state are constituted around the roles of women" (1). Women within the nation-state are valued for their reproductive

and socializing roles, roles which in turn replicate nationalist ideology. One way in which women mediate between ethnic/national groupings and the state is by serving as “biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities” and thereby as reproducers of ethnic or national boundaries:

Women are controlled not only by being encouraged or discouraged from having children who will become members of the various ethnic groups within the state. They are also controlled in terms of the “proper” way in which they should have them — i.e., in ways which will reproduce the boundaries of the symbolic identity of their group or that of their husbands. (9)

Examples of these “proper” avenues include legal marriage, the nuclear family, and monogamous sexual relations. Ada’s sexuality destabilizes each of these categories.

Campion suggests that Ada’s “marriage” to Stewart is primarily a contractual relation, one which emphasizes the “legality” of their arrangement rather than the spiritual and/or romantic aspects of marriage. That is, she has been married to Stewart through letters exchanged between two patriarchal figures: “Today he [Ada’s father] married me to a man I’ve not yet met. Soon my daughter and I shall join him in his own country. My husband says my muteness does not bother him. He writes and hark this: *God loves dumb creatures, so why not he!*” Apparently the correspondence between Stewart and Ada’s father has effected an actual marriage: Ada refers to Stewart as “my husband” even before she has seen him, and when she lands on the beach in New Zealand, she is already wearing a gold wedding band. The association between Stewart and colonial, evangelical patriarchy is apparent when Ada describes New Zealand as “his own country” and when Stewart compares himself to God, thus echoing the traditional kiwi phrase describing New Zealand as “God’s Own.” When Ada is being “fitted” with the *faux* wedding dress, a woman’s voice coldly attempts a consolation for the absence of a formal ceremony: “If you cannot have a ceremony together, you can at least have a photograph.” The absence of spiritual joining recalls a key premise of biculturalism: that Pakeha claims to land are based on a written contract, the Treaty of Waitangi, while Maori claims rely on a spiritual and ancestral relation. Indeed, Stewart is unable to comprehend the spiritual significance of land. When the

Maori refuse to give him their ancestral lands, Stewart wonders, "[w]hat do they want it for? They don't cultivate it, burn it back, anything. How do they even know it's theirs?"

Ada's sexuality, then, is defined not by sentiment or spiritual attachment, but by contractual relation. She shows her awareness of this when she tears off the wedding dress and spiritually "communes" with her piano, imagining it embattled and abandoned on the beach. Ada's subsequent sexual involvement with Baines violates the nationalist constraint of monogamy, as well as a "legal" contract (marriage), thereby undermining the nuclear family and the legitimacy of Stewart's possible future progeny through Ada. In other words, Ada subverts the role of female reproducer prescribed by British nationalism and imperialism by means of what M. Jacqui Alexander has called "erotic autonomy," a term which implies a threat to the stability of the nation. Alexander argues that "erotic autonomy" challenges "the ideological anchor of an originary nuclear family, a source of legitimation for the state, which perpetuates the fiction that the family is the cornerstone of society" (64). It represents a danger to the heterosexual family and to the nation. And because loyalty to the nation as citizen is perennially colonized within reproduction and heterosexuality, erotic autonomy brings with it the potential of undoing the nation entirely, a possible charge of irresponsible citizenship or no citizenship at all (64).

As figures of erotic autonomy, the prostitute and the lesbian are also outside the law, although "poised to be disciplined and punished within it" (64). We can see, then, how Baines's giving the piano to Ada reveals him as a nationalist of sorts — for he, like Stewart, wants her to love him unpromiscuously and with no ulterior motive: "I am giving the piano back to you. I've had enough. The arrangement is making you a whore and me wretched. I want you to care for me, but you can't" (Screenplay 76).⁴ In returning the piano, he reneges on their agreement that he will exchange the piano's black keys for Ada's visits and sexual favors. His "gift" of the piano is thus a form of discipline, a means of controlling the use of her sexuality in purely monogamous, romantic forms of expression.⁵ As Harvey Keitel says, in "The Making of *The Piano*," Baines is interested in "the possibility of having a union, a family,

a relationship" (Screenplay 143). Ada's relationship with the illiterate, lower-class Baines threatens Stewart's class status as well. Thus, both Stewart's attempt to incarcerate Ada in his boarded up home and his violent dismemberment of her index finger are attempts to circumscribe her autonomy, and to reign her in to her bourgeois role as wife and mother to British subjects.

Flora, Ada's illegitimate child from a previous relationship, is another sign of Ada's autonomy. Flora plays a central role in the film as Ada's translator. Her very existence draws attention to Ada's prior non-marital sexual relation to Flora's father and indicates the impossibility of Ada, Flora, and Stewart constituting a nuclear family in the traditional sense, for Flora will never be Stewart's child. She points this out when she tells her mother, "I'm not going to call him Papa, I'm not going to call him anything. I'm not even going to look at him!" In the wedding photograph scene, Flora waits sulkily, wanting to assert her existence as Ada's lawful child, for the subject of the tale is Ada's (nonexistent) marriage to Flora's "REAL father." She says to Morag, "[m]y REAL father was a famous German composer. . . . They met when my mother was an opera singer. . . ." When Ada attempts to silence her, Flora responds sternly, "I want to be in the photograph!" As the next scene reveals, the photograph — which records a "sham" marriage, purely contractual and unconsummated — constitutes an attempt to erase Flora historically from Ada's life by ignoring her existence. The marriage commemorated in the photograph is at the end of the film left ambiguous: We do not see annulment or divorce proceedings or even Ada's marriage to Baines, and Baines's marriage to a wife in "old England" apparently remains intact. The final scenes, then, suggest that Ada and Baines's relationship remains non-contractual. The relationship also violates the norms of the nuclear family in that Flora, who is not Baines's daughter, serves as a constant reminder of her mother's autonomy.

The scene at their new home in Nelson thus points toward a key theme in the film: the deceptive relation between surfaces and depths, image and reality, presence and absence.

II. Resemblances

Although the film has been read as a narrative of sexual awakening, Flora's existence and Ada's story of her relationship with

Flora's father suggest that Ada is already a sexual being before she lands on the beach in New Zealand. She is also already "other": Ada's muteness and her stunted physical appearance mark her, for Stewart, as odd. During their initial meeting on the beach, he speaks loudly and slowly: "CAN-YOU-HEAR-ME?" In the screenplay Campion describes Stewart as searching Ada's face "for some sign of comprehension"; he is "unnerved by her lack of response" (21). Later in the scene, after remarking, "[y]ou're small. I never thought you'd be small," he asks Baines, "What do you think?" But Stewart ignores Baines's perceptive comment that Ada looks tired, asserting, "[s]he's stunted, that's one thing." Morag and Nessie regard Ada's piano playing, in evidence before her journey to New Zealand, as a sign of her inherent strangeness. Commenting on the film score, Michael Nyman points out that Ada's music is a "substitute for her voice": "I had to establish not only a repertoire of music for the film, but a repertoire of piano music that would have been Ada's repertoire as a pianist, almost as if she had been the composer of it" (Screenplay 150). Her music is not something one might learn, but a "talent." Morag says of Ada,

She does not play the piano as we do, Nessie. . . . No, she is a strange creature and her playing is strange, like a mood that passes into you. You cannot teach that, Nessie, one may like to learn, but that could not be taught. . . . Your playing is plain and true and that is what I like. To have a sound creep inside you is not at all pleasant.

Morag here suggests a key distinction between talent and learned behaviour, the natural and the tutored. This is not to say that Ada's playing is untutored, for she does burst into a Chopin "Prelude"⁶ when she wishes to startle Baines and arrest his amorous advances. Nonetheless, the majority of her displayed repertoire is very much of her own making; in other words, she could very well be the medium of another composer's music but chooses not to perform that function.

Ada's piano playing suggests an innate strangeness that echoes, indeed is symbiotic with, her other talent, her willed muteness.⁷ Her father calls her refusal to speak a "dark talent" (Screenplay 9). Indeed, the temporal origins of these two talents are linked, for her "mind's voice" tells us that she has "not spoken since [she] was six years old," and Stewart tells us that he has it in a letter —

presumably from her father — that she has “been playing since she was five or six.” Both substitutes for speech — Ada’s personal sign language and her piano playing — are direct forms of communication, as well as natural languages: they re-present by relying, not on words, but on the direct transmission of feeling. This is obvious in actress Holly Hunter’s vivid, direct, at times even poetic facial expressions and hand motions. Morag suggests this direct communication of feeling when she describes Ada’s playing as creeping inside her “like a mood that passes into you.” In this scene, the strangeness of the natural is made clear when Morag insists on being hidden behind a make-shift curtain as she executes a very natural habit in a “discreet toilet stop” (Screenplay 91). The colonial women, Nessie and Morag, are frightened by a “fluttering sound in the bush” (Screenplay 92). The implied allusion to a bird is significant: later, Stewart refers to Ada as his “love bird” and explains to her why he “clipped [her] wings.” Just as Morag is disturbed by Ada’s natural, unlearned music, so is she unsettled by the pigeon’s natural sounds.

Ada’s “dark talents,” her music and muteness, link her to another Other, Baines, who has gone only partially native: his *moko* (tattoo) is incomplete, signalling his marginality to both the Maori and Pakeha. In an unfiled portion of the screenplay, Hira says to him, “[w]ho do that? It not finish, that no good, *Peini*. You finish!” (55). When Baines expresses his desire to trade the piano for land and lessons, Stewart teases him, “Well, Baines the music lover, I never would have guessed. Hidden talents, George.” Of course, Baines’s real talent, which marks his alterity, lies in his ability to listen, to “read” Ada’s feelings, a quality which shows his similarity to Ada’s first lover. Flora, who usually translates for Ada, is not allowed into Baines’s “lesson,” for the piano is the medium of direct communication between them. As their relationship progresses, and their bodies meet in another, even more direct form of “natural”⁸ communication, the piano falls silent.

Campion contrasts this direct natural language — which links the illiterate Baines with the mute musician Ada — with a more deceptive form based on verbal languages and the need for translation between languages.⁹ In the initial “contact” between Ada and Stewart on the beach a subtle evocation of this difference

requires that we read in the margins. As Ada, through Flora's translation, attempts to persuade Stewart that the piano must be borne with them, two Maori figures are positioned, one each behind Ada and Stewart. Stewart's Maori mimic stands slightly behind and to the right of Stewart and copies him boldly; when another Maori teases Stewart, "[w]atch it, old dry balls is getting touchy!" the mimic cracks a smile and then resumes his shadowing of Stewart. Meanwhile, Ada's "shadow" is placed far behind her and is shot somewhat out of focus. As he is filmed only from the neck down, we cannot see his facial expressions, but we can see that he is mimicking her hand gestures. One wonders how this "shadow," placed so far behind Ada, is able to discern and copy her quick, fluid gestures. In this crucial scene the central action takes place in the margins, behind and around the central characters — Ada, Flora, Stewart, and the piano.

One might argue that Ada and Stewart are being shadowed in the same way. However, the difference between them emphasizes the similarity between Ada and the Maori characters and their opposition to the colonizer, Stewart. The film conveys this by distinguishing between mimicry and resemblance. According to Bhabha, mimicry is "at once resemblance and menace" (86). It disrupts the authority of colonial discourse and exposes that discourse's ambivalence, the almost-but-not-quite, the demand for narcissistic representation and its resulting paranoia (88). Stewart's Maori shadow engages boldly in mimicry. He resembles Stewart in that he wears European clothing and imitates Stewart's facial expressions and gestures. Yet he resists colonial authority, in the form of Stewart's presumptuous employment of the Maori characters as baggage carriers, by his evident enjoyment of the "old dry balls" comment. In a related scene, when Stewart offers buttons to the Maoris who have moved the piano from Baines's house to his, they angrily reject his "payment": "Stick your buttons up your arse, you bastard. We aren't children." In contrast, Ada's Maori shadow, who is only peripherally present in the frame, seems to represent what Bhabha describes as "repetition of *partial presence*," (88) or the metonymic presence which Bhabha argues is the basis for mimicry. Ada's shadow, however, does not seem to offer the resistance that Bhabha argues is central to mimicry;

rather, the resemblance between their hand gestures is more uncanny or magical than ironic. Indeed, in this scene, both of the Maori mimics are made to resemble Ada by their use of direct and natural expression: gesture. I am suggesting that this distinction between mimicry and resemblance occurs precisely because Ada is unlike Stewart, who is at this moment exerting his authority over Ada by informing her that the piano will not be borne with them. Insofar as Ada is depicted as having no colonial authority of her own, she resembles the Maori more than she resembles Stewart.

Through the theatrical space of the Bluebeard shadow-play, Campion further emphasizes the deceptiveness of verbal language and its difference from the naturalness of gestures and music in their connection to indigeneity. Most readings of the play-within-the-film assume that the Maori are unaware of theatrical conventions; such readings assume this is the explanation for their “comedic” rushing onto the stage to save Nessie from her shadow-husband. For example, David Baker writes that “the Maori men are *so* affected by Bluebeard’s performance that they mistake it for reality, with much comic bluster as the result” (195).¹⁰ This reading, however, ignores the fact that Chief Nihe is evidently well aware of these conventions: he says to his men, “[e]verything is fine, this is just a game” and “[h]oki mai! Hoki mai!” or “Come back! Come back!” (Screenplay 66).

What actually occurs when the two warriors run onto the stage is a kind of literalization, or a breakdown of the difference between fictional/literary space (the play) and “reality” or lived space. According to Andrew Lang’s translation of Charles Perrault’s “Blue Beard,” the female protagonist is saved from her murderous husband by her two warrior brothers, “one a dragoon, the other a musketeer,” who pursue the cowering Bluebeard and run their swords through his body, leaving him dead (Lang 258). The motif of the two brothers is repeated in the final, no longer comedic enactment of the Bluebeard narrative when Stewart, having read Ada’s message to Baines, picks up his axe and moves down the hill toward his house. He is briefly followed by two Maori men aware of his bloody intentions. The dismemberment scene is tragic precisely because there are no warriors to protect Ada this time.

In the shadow-play, the two warriors rush onto the stage yelling, "[c]oward bite on my club!" and "[l]et's see how this feels up your arse!" In the screenplay, however, they yell, "Coward! Show yourself, come out!" (66), implying the presence of the sheet behind which this portion of the play is being enacted. The central premise behind the play itself is the transition from the visible evidence of past violence — the bloodied heads of Bluebeard's dead wives — to the implied (not literal) and impending violence behind the sheet — Bluebeard's shadow decapitation of Nessie. When the two warriors yell out, "[s]how yourself, come out!" and when they tear down the sheets, poised to attack the "murderous" husband, their actions are predicated upon a kind of distrust, a belief that violence must be occurring behind the sheets.¹¹ They are demanding that the communication of the event be represented directly through gesture, not mediated through the language of light, shadows, and sheets. The sheet, then, acts as a translator in that it translates physical action — the chopping motion of the axe — into a sign or representation of violence, one which is implicitly deceptive precisely because no actual violence is occurring. This is elaborated in the scene where the Reverend practices the chopping motion on Nessie's hand. When he says to her, "[l]ook you're being attacked," his shadow is shown saying, "[a]nd with the blood . . . it will be a good effect!" The Reverend's shadow-figure with his angel's wings is implicitly contrasted to the earlier Maori mimics who are more substantial than shadows in that their gestures are forms of direct communication, unmediated by light and shadows.

To account for the warriors' assumption that violence is occurring behind the sheet, I turn to the historical period in which the film is set, the 1850s. According to James Belich, by mid-century the tribes that would eventually be known as "the Maori" had experienced contact with Cook and the introduction of European diseases such as viral dysentery, influenza, whooping cough, measles, typhoid, venereal diseases, tuberculosis, and related diseases such as phthisis, scrofula, and consumption (173). Campion notes the physical effects of contact: the screenplay describes the Maori characters as having "coughs, running noses and sores. (They have no immunity to European diseases)" (Screenplay 128). Furthermore,

by 1850 many Maori had become unwilling and unwitting subjects of the Queen as a result of the deceptive Treaty of Waitangi. The combination of invisibility and fraud that pervaded these early interactions with the British is evident in accounts of the first contacts between Maori and Captain Cook. Te Horeta Taniwha, a Maori chief present when Cook visited Mercury Bay, described how white men were thought to be goblins and their ship a god. Taniwha, who had never before seen muskets, was astonished when “one of the goblins pointed a walking stick at a shag and amidst the thunder and lightning the bird fell down dead” (Sinclair 32-33). Captain Cook’s own account of his first contact with the Maori at Poverty Bay in October 1769, also indicates that musketfire was particularly disturbing to the Maori in that it was invisible and therefore inexplicable:

The Coxswain of the pinnace who had the charge of the Boats, seeing [the appearance of four Maori] fire’d two muskets over their heads, the first made them stop and look around them, but the 2d they took no notice of upon which a third was fired and killed one of them upon the spot just as he was going to dart his spear at the boat; at this the other three stood motionless for a minute or two, seemingly quite surprised wondering no doubt what it was that had just killed their comrade: but as soon as they recover’d themselves they made off dragging the dead body a little way and then left it. (I, 169)

An article about the Treaty of Waitangi appearing in *The Bay of Islands Observer* of July 7, 1842 suggests the role of fraud and invisibility in British usurpation of tribal sovereignty. In this article, the image of a cloak becomes a metaphor for the deceptive nature of translation: “the simple truth is, disguise it as we may, that under this cloak of benevolence, has been practised the greatest hypocrisy: to obtain possession of the country honestly, if possible, but nevertheless to obtain it” (qtd. in Orange 91). The Treaty was a translated text: there were at least two versions of the Treaty, the “original” in English and the “translation” in Maori.¹² Andrew Sharp notes that the “translation” was a “fair but not literal reading of the English version” (17). Differences in vocabulary and conceptual systems contributed to misunderstandings and allowed for the persuasiveness of fraudulent transaction: “it may be that the Maori version was designed to play down what [Maori] would lose

and exaggerate what they would gain — that there was an element of British fraud or at least missionary over-enthusiasm in the whole transaction" can be "inferred" (17).¹³ In the film, the Reverend's zealotry concerning the "good effect" of the shadow-play is representative of this "missionary over-enthusiasm."

In fact, the church's production of the Bluebeard play reflects the extensive missionary involvement in the Treaty. Claudia Orange discusses how Wesleyan missionaries were urged by their London headquarters to support William Hobson's Treaty, and Bishop Broughton of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Sydney asked Henry Williams and his CMS colleagues to "help influence the Maori people to surrender sovereignty" (38-39). According to Orange, Hobson "expected missionary cooperation and received it in full" (39). For example, although neither Williams nor his son Edward were experienced translators or experts in the Maori language, Hobson requested Williams to translate the Treaty, and it was Williams who substituted the Maori terms — *tino rangatiratanga* and *kawanatanga* — which were to become crucial to contemporary controversy over the documents. When Hobson attempted to secure more unanimous Maori agreement to the Treaty, he was often hosted by CMS and Wesleyan mission stations in North Island. At Waimate, "[t]he strong missionary affiliation of Maori in this area greatly assisted Hobson in his mission" (60). Missionaries usually served also as translators between Hobson and Maori chiefs, and this pattern of missionary intermediaries continued throughout most of the Treaty signings (61). The missionary influence, according to Orange, added a religious aspect to Maori understanding of the agreement. Apparently, Williams was responsible for cultivating among Maori chiefs the idea that the Treaty was a "covenant," an agreement that would unite Maori and Pakeha as one people, spiritually and temporally. In this covenant between Maori and the Queen, the latter was head of both the English Church and state and thus appeared comparable to Maori chiefs who could hold also the rank of *tohunga* or priest (90).

This notion of the Treaty as fraudulent covenant parallels the film's narration of Stewart and Ada's marriage. The Treaty of Waitangi consists of three articles and a preamble, each of which contains a central problem in — depending on how one views it —

translation or outright fraud. The English preamble states that Queen Victoria is anxious to protect the “[j]ust Rights and Property” of the “Native Chiefs and Tribes” and to promote “Peace and Good Order” (Sharp 15). While the English version discusses rights and property, the Maori translation professes to protect *tino rangatiratanga* or “full, true chiefly authority,” suggesting that the Crown is more concerned with maintaining the chiefly structure of Maori society than with emphasizing, as the British version seems to suggest, private ownership and individual rights (17).

In Article I of the English version, Maori chiefs agree to transfer sovereignty — which Britain claimed to protect in the preamble — to the Queen; however, in the translation, chiefs retain their sovereignty while conceding their *kawanatanga* or governorship. If one reads the Treaty as part of the palimpsest of the film, one sees that in Ada’s contractual marriage to Stewart, she has unwittingly — since her father has arranged the marriage and all of its conditions — resigned her sovereignty to Stewart (who also represents empire) even though she may believe that she retains her sovereignty and has agreed only to be loosely governed by him. “Sovereignty,” in 1840 “legal English,” means “absolute and indivisible power to legislate, judge, and interpret the law; the absolute power to administer it, and to back up its requirements by force; the sole power to engage in foreign relations and thus to appoint and control diplomats and force of arms” (Sharp 17-18). There is no room in the British version for an “equal partnership.” This definition is fully borne out in Stewart’s behaviour. He represents the law in that his disapproval of Flora’s trunk-hugging game, and his exacting of a punishment — the scrubbing of the trunks with soap — is uninformed by the factors motivating Flora’s behaviour, i.e., Ada’s sexual relationship with Baines. He warns Ada not to see Baines, incarcerates her, and with absolute and unregretting swiftness administers his law by force — he “clips” her wings by axing off her index finger. Stewart’s absolute and tyrannical power is emphasized by the fact that Ada has not literally disobeyed his rule that she not see Baines: she has not seen him, and Baines, as she is well aware, is illiterate and thus unable to read the message. In the film, Baines does not see or receive Ada’s piano key on which she has inscribed her love for him. The angel’s wings which Flora wears

when she delivers the key to Stewart high up on a hill, suggests that she is an angel delivering a message to the sacred sovereign, the God to whom Stewart compared himself earlier: "God loves dumb creatures, so why not he!" Flora's wings also imply her collusion with the missionaries who acted as biased intermediaries, aiding the ascension of a new worldly ruler masquerading as deity. "*Kawanatanga*," the term used in the Maori translation, implies "governance" with "delegated and limited rights" which is "impersonal, unlimited in its law-making scope and not obviously sacred" (Sharp 8). Therefore, in Article I, the central difference between sovereignty and *kawanatanga* is that the former connotes a sacred, God-like power associated with monarchical rule or chiefly status. In effect, the English version of the Treaty denies the spiritual and sacred connection between chiefs, their *iwi*, and the land, and installs another sovereign, the Crown, along with the Crown's representative law, paralleled in the film by Stewart.

In Article II.1, Maori chiefs present and not present believed they were agreeing to retain their chiefly authority and *ratou taonga katoa* or "all things highly prized" (17). However, II.1 of the British version allows the Maori to retain "full and exclusive and undisturbed possession of their lands and Estates Forests Fisheries and other properties so long as it is their wish and desire to retain the same in their possession" (16). Thus, while the Maori version promises that their prized objects are in no way threatened, the British version implies that Maori ownership of their land and other properties depends, more problematically, on "their wish and desire" to retain such possessions. "Wish" and "desire" are also crucial themes in the film. Ada believes, upon entering the marriage, that she will be allowed to keep her piano; this is why she brings it with her to New Zealand. However, Stewart refuses to bear the piano from the beach and then trades it for Baines's land without her permission and eventually against her will. Ada emphasizes that she views the piano as her personal possession when she dashes her plate against the floor and writes, "THE PIANO IS MINE! IT'S MINE!" Stewart responds, "[y]ou can't go on like this, we are a family now. All of us make sacrifices, and so will you!" His words and actions indicate that all individual possessions are now subsumed under the larger category of the family (and under his authority as father and husband), just as

the Crown has positioned Maori “lands and Estates Forests Fisheries” under its purview by the mere fact of its *granting* Maori possession “so long as it is their wish and desire” (16). In fact, this detail shows how the Treaty was not a treaty at all, as there was no neutral third party brokering an agreement between Maori and the British; rather, the document enabled the British underhandedly to assume the power to “grant” Maori possession of lands which had been within Maori control for thousands of years.

In II.2 of the British Treaty, the Queen claims “exclusive right of Preemption” over lands which the Maori wish to “alienate” (16). However, the Maori version promises the buying or selling (“*hokonga*”) of land, and no “exclusive right” is implied, nor is “alienation” mentioned (16-17). It is apparent that the Maori believed they were agreeing to sell or buy land while the British wanted exclusive right to turn the land irrevocably into part of their empire, not part of any other nation (European or otherwise), not even Maori or tribal land. In the film, Stewart’s attempts to rape his wife can be read as claiming his “exclusive right” over her sexuality. He also grants himself ownership of the piano, selling it — and Ada herself — for Baines’s land. After this exchange has taken place, Ada must attempt to undo the process of “alienation” by bargaining with Baines, making visible parts of her body in exchange for access to parts of the piano (the black keys).¹⁴ The piano becomes hers only when the prospect of Baines’s love and spiritual connection makes it impossible for him to continue the game.

Finally, in Article III of the British version, the Queen guarantees to the chiefs her royal protection and the “Rights and Privileges of British Subjects” (16). This in itself is highly ironic and suspect, considering that at the time Britain already planned to settle New Zealand as a penal colony to be populated by convicts whom it had disowned as subjects and sent into exile. The Maori version of the Treaty recognized the governance of the Queen and granted the Maori “the same rights as the people of England” (Sharp 17) and thus placed Maori on a par with disowned, transported convicts and exiles — “people of England” who had no rights whatsoever in Britain!

To return, then, to the question, how might we account for the two Maori warriors who tear down the sheet in the Blue Beard

shadow-play? The shadow-play, like the Treaty of Waitangi and like Ada's marriage to Stewart, is deceptive precisely because it is a mediated or translated representation. The sheet allows the projection of shadow images which do not accurately reflect the action occurring behind it, just as the Maori version of the Treaty fraudulently misrepresents British intentions, and just as Ada has been led to believe falsely that her marriage to Stewart will allow her some control over her life, her body, and her possessions. In a scene not included in the film, Baines, before leaving the bush, visits Chief Nihe's *Pa* or "fortified village" (Salmond 472). Hira voices her distress, sadness, and attachment to Baines:

HIRA: *Peini*, I miss you, you are human like us. The *pakeha* man, they have no heart, they think only of land. . . . I worry for us, *Peini*. *Pakeha* cunning like wind, KNOCK you over, yet you not see it. Some they say, "How can *pakeha* get our land if we won't sell it?" . . . They wrong, *Peini*. Today our enamee he sell some land for heapah guns. Now, we too buy guns. We must sell our land to fight for our land.

(Screenplay 104-05)

In this speech Hira evokes the invisible and deceptive nature of Pakeha transactions: the Pakeha man "KNOCK you over, yet you not see it" (105). The Maori did not see that the British were attempting to swindle them out of their sovereignty, because there was nothing in the Maori version *to see*: the actual intent of the Treaty was hidden in the "honoured" text, the English version. The Maori warriors unmask Bluebeard's shadow-play because their previous transactions with the British have been "bad" deals. Their behaviour, then, is anything but an inability to distinguish between the real and the imaginary. Ada's marriage contract is also invisible to her; as her mind's voice tells us, her father has married her to a man she has "not yet met."

Like Ada and the Maori, Baines has also been cheated by Stewart, though willingly: he has exchanged eighty acres for a piano he does not play. In two scenes not included in the film, Baines trades most of his worldly necessities — his shoes, hat, and gun — for Ada's inscribed key which the Maori have managed to turn into an earring (105). The script reads, "*Outside the Pa walls near the kumera [sic] gardens, HIRA holds BAINES's saddlebags. It is raining hard as he rides out, hatless, shoeless and gunless, but clutching to his chest ADA's*

engraved key" (106). In contrast to Baines, Stewart is most concerned with finding "good" deals, which invariably means cheating someone. The morning after the wedding photograph is taken, Stewart leaves his new bride and Flora for "some Maori land" he wants and "may buy very reasonably" (32). When Baines gives Ada the piano, Stewart suspects immediately that Ada has arranged to spoil his deal with Baines: "[h]ah, you're very cunning, Ada, but *I've seen through you*, I'm not going to lose the land this way" (emphasis added). Not surprisingly, as he is a true imperialist, Stewart assumes she has planned to deceive him and invokes the sheet metaphor of the shadow-play. Stewart's obsession that the land remain his is the sole concern in his dealings with Baines: "And what does this do to our bargain? I cannot afford the piano if you mean me to pay." In the screenplay, Hira counsels Baines, who is left only with an empty hut: "You make BIG mistake, George. In first place you should swap land for wife. Now look, she gone, you no land, no music box, you got nothing" (78). Stewart also gains his "good" bargains by "compensating" the Maori for their labour with useless trinkets and buttons.¹⁵ Stewart's use of buttons as payment is evoked again during Ada's first willing visit to Baines. While she undresses, Stewart watches as her buttons burst and scatter to the floor. Later, as she dresses and retrieves them, a button falls through a crack in the floor boards, dropping into Stewart's shirt while he looks about, startled. This scene wryly pokes fun at Stewart's "compensation" of the Maori piano bearers as well as his paying for a "peep show" involving his wife and Baines. In fact, one of the piano lessons in this film involves not a piano but Stewart's own sexual education. Campion comments:

I have enjoyed writing characters who don't have a twentieth-century sensibility about sex. They have nothing to prepare themselves for its strength and power. . . . [T]he husband Stewart had probably never had sex at all. So for him to experience sex or feelings of sexual jealousy would have been personality-transforming. The impact of sex is not softened, it's cleaner and extremer for that. (137-38)

The sexual awakening is Stewart's, not Ada's.

Aside from the parallels between Baines and Ada and between Baines and the Maori, a familial connection between Ada and the Maori is subtly suggested during the unveiling of the shadow-play.

In purely circumstantial terms, Ada and Stewart resemble the play-characters of Anne (played by Nessie) and Bluebeard: Ada's life, like Anne's, is threatened by the sexual curiosity which her husband himself had encouraged; Stewart is very much the vengeful husband whose own actions have led to Ada's involvement with Baines.¹⁶ As I have already mentioned, in most Bluebeard tales, the unhappy young wife is saved from her husband's murderous intentions by her warrior brothers, a fact that implies a sibling relationship between Ada and the Maori warriors who tear down the sheet in the shadow-play.¹⁷ The film, then, self-consciously constructs a genealogical relation between Pakeha women and the Maori, a relation constituted by a shared history of oppression under empire. However, this familial relation reveals Ada as a settler by recapitulating the "familial language" of missionaries in the South Pacific, rather than a simply gendered coding of feminization or hypermasculinization of the native. The notion that "the benighted heathens were children of missionaries" is pervasive in mission texts and in photographs which imply "a familial order and hierarchy"; missionaries emphasized their "shared humanity" and "siblingship" with native peoples (Thomas 40). However, this siblingship is entirely different from the kind of long and intimate spiritual relation between Maori and the land demonstrated in *whakapapa* (oral genealogy), which is the basis for contemporary Maori land claims.¹⁸

If the Maori warriors are Ada's metaphorical "brothers," siblingship takes another turn — this time in the form of a sisterly relation — as Ada's muteness resembles the silence of two Christianized women, Heni and Mary. When Stewart discusses Ada's strange piano keyboard carved into the kitchen table, he says, "[i]t's strange, isn't it? I mean, it's not a piano, it doesn't make any sound. . . . I knew she was mute, but now I'm thinking it's more than that. I'm wondering if she's not brain-affected." Meanwhile, Morag shushes Heni and Mary as they timidly sing "Got safe ah Quin" (129). In this scene, the silenced condition of the Maori women mirrors Ada's muteness. All three women are treated to some extent as if they are pets: as Morag gravely notes, while Heni and Mary are seated on the floor badly mimicking the British anthem, "there is nothing so easy to like as a pet, and *they are quite silent.*"

Ada's most important similarity to the Maori becomes evident in a scene that recalls the warriors' demand, during the shadow-play, that the deception be exposed to their vision. After Ada's finger has been severed by Stewart, he attempts to justify his actions: "I meant to love you. I just clipped your wing, that is all." However, she is unconscious and unable to hear his confession. His explanation and his subsequent attempted rape of Ada occur while she remains unconscious, unable to see him or stop him. It is significant that what literally "arrests" him is her gaze: "*As he moves his body over her, he looks towards her, and to his shame and horror she is looking directly back at him, her eyes perfectly on his, perfectly focused*" (112). Like that of the Maori warriors, Ada's gaze is an act of resistance. Both are acts of witnessing, willful acts of seeing which prevent the deception from occurring. In Ada's case, her gaze also prevents the invisible consummation of her marriage and precludes the possibility that she will bear Stewart's children.

Her words, communicated telepathically (?) to Stewart, are the final manifestation of direct communication, for her supposed message is transmitted directly from her mind to his. He tells Baines, as he touches his forehead, "She has spoken to me. I heard her voice. There was no sound, but I heard it here. Her voice was here in my head" (114). Her request that he free her is not unlike the contemporary Maori struggle to found a new Aotearoa where Maori might create a life independent of the Pakeha state by virtue of their being *tangata whenua o Aotearoa*; by right of "prior occupation, the land was originally and remained spiritually theirs" although "by virtue of the Treaty of Waitangi they had agreed to an equal partnership with the Crown and with subsequent settlers" (Sharp 230). According to Stewart, Ada's voice tells him, "I am frightened of my will, of what it might do, it is so strange and strong. . . . I have to go, let me go, let Baines take me away, let him try and save me." However, what is most telling here about Ada's constructed resemblance to Maori is the deceptive nature of both her mind's voice and Stewart's relaying of her message, for the audience — even though it has heard her mind's voice in the opening and closing of the film — is not allowed to hear this particular telepathic message to Stewart; we hear only his (re)statement of the message to Baines. The possibility for deception is two-fold in that we are able neither to

confirm whether or not Ada has indeed voiced anything to Stewart, nor to witness the content of Ada's message, if any at all; and even if there was an actual communication, Stewart may have only told Baines what he had wanted Ada to say. At the centre, then, of Ada's "silent voice" is an unconfirmability, a point to which I return in the final section of this discussion.¹⁹

The resemblance between the contemporary construction of Pakeha identity through Ada and Maori struggles for justice in a bicultural New Zealand is reiterated in an earlier juxtaposition of scenes. Stewart's first attempted rape of his wife occurs at the same moment that a group of Maori have entered his home and are playing the piano. Flora's startled message interrupts Stewart's attack, and he subsequently boards up the cabin to imprison Ada. It is Morag, however, who unwittingly points out the irony of the scene, for she assumes that Stewart has done this because of the catastrophic effect of the play — which represents the Treaty — on Maori-Pakeha relations: "Alisdair, is it because of our play? Have the natives aggressed you? . . . I have to say, you have done the wrong thing here, you see you have put the latch on the outside. When you close the door, it will be the Maori that lock you in, you see? With the latch on the outside you are quite trapped!" Stewart attempts the impossible when he tries to keep Ada in but the Maori out; moreover, he is trapped in this paradoxical situation precisely because neither of them "want" him. The Maori refuse to sell him land because the land is spiritually significant to them; it is the burial ground of their *tupuna*, ancestors. Ada refuses to do "business" with him and eventually leaves him for a more sustaining relationship with Baines. Both Maori and Pakeha victims of empire's violent will to power struggle to reject empire before it can abandon them in the contemporary situation, Britain's turn toward the European Union.

The need for both Maori and the Pakeha to struggle together against the Empire is evident also in the scene in which the piano is loaded onto the longboat. Baines and his Maori friends debate whether the piano will cause the canoe to capsize. The Maori caution Baines, "[i]t's too heavy. The canoe will capsize"; "*Peini*, only a madman would take it." Baines counters, "[t]he piano is alright, it's balanced. . . . [S]he needs it. She must have it." Later, as the

oarsmen transport them to Nelson, Ada signs to Flora who interprets for Baines, "She says, throw it overboard. She doesn't want it. She says it's spoiled." Frustrated that Baines refuses to do as she wishes, Ada signs to a Maori oarsmen to throw the piano over. In this first scene of actual interaction between Ada and a Maori character, he understands her signs, unmediated by Flora, and responds, "[s]he's right. It's a coffin. Let the sea bury it." Ada begins to undo the rigging, and there is a shot from under the creaking boat as it tips and rocks dangerously in the water. Only then does Baines agree to throw the piano overboard. This scene posits the new bicultural New Zealand/Aotearoa. The piano, defiled and marked by the axe, represents the violent colonial past which must be submerged and officially forgotten if the two groups, Pakeha and Maori, are to live in the same land, if they are to survive the journey to Nelson. In throwing off the colonial past this new "family" and their Maori friends make the transition from colony to community.

Just as the unveiling of the shadow-play posits a genealogical and familial relation between the Maori and Ada, so this scene elaborates how, in the writing of a settler national history, the Maori are figured as Ada's relations who save her from the destructiveness of empire. It is precisely *Campion's* deliberate evocation of artifice — the crossing of the stage threshold, the circumstantial construction of relations between Maori and settler women — that points toward the constructedness of history. The film's exposure of the actual differences between Ada and the Maori — differences which underlie these illusory similarities — enacts this self-consciousness about history as an interested story told for particular purposes.

III. Differences: History and the Fetish

In "The Making of *The Piano*," *Campion* discusses the absence of history for Pakeha New Zealanders and indicates how this absence contrasts with the Maori relation to history:

CAMPION: I think that it's a strange heritage I have as a *pakeha* New Zealander, and I wanted to be in a position to touch or explore that. In contrast to the original people in New Zealand, the *Maori* people, who have such an attachment to history, we seem to have no history, or at

least not the same tradition. This makes you start to ask, "Well, who are my ancestors?" My ancestors were British colonizers — the people who came out like Ada and Stewart and Baines. (Screenplay 135)

Her words resonate with the excerpt from the Thomas Hood poem, "Sonnet: Silence," quoted during the concluding scene of the film, which shows Ada poised floating above her piano:

There is a silence where hath been no sound
There is a silence where no sound may be
In the cold grave, under the deep deep sea.

As in her telepathic message to Stewart, Ada's voice here articulates silence and absence. The poem and Campion's comments suggest that the Pakeha history conveyed to us by Ada is the silent space where no sound hath been and where no sound may be, for this silent space of history is the underwater grave in which the piano, now-coffin, is buried. To explain this connection, one must look to Campion's use of an aesthetic language, the lighting and colouring of particular scenes.²⁰ The underwater shot of Ada suspended above the piano has the blue-green tint that one would expect of such a scene. However, the uncanny resemblance of this colouring with the bluish-green forest scenes is deliberate on Campion's part. The screenplay provides exact direction concerning how the bush should appear. Here is the description of the first scene in the bush, a shot of Baines, Stewart, and the Maori baggage carriers on their way to meet Ada on the beach: "*Through a dense bush walk a party of fourteen MAORI MEN and WOMEN and two EUROPEAN MEN. The wetness, closeness and darkness of the bush is such that the air seems green, as at the bottom of a deep sea*" (17). Stuart Dryburgh, director of photography for the film, points out that the cinematography was inspired by "a nineteenth-century colour stills process" — the autochrome — which explains the use of "strong colour accents" to draw out the "blue-greens of the bush": "Part of the director's brief was that we would echo the film's element of underwater in the bush. 'Bottom of the fish tank' was the description we used for ourselves to help define what we were looking for. So we played it murky blue-green and let the skin tones sit down in amongst it" (Screenplay 141).

Ada's violent marital experience with Stewart, and her life in the bush, which is a fictional representation of Pakeha colonial history,

are deposited in the form of the piano at the bottom of a silent sea. This is why Ada herself, in an act of metaphorical forgetting, follows the piano down to its watery grave. Stewart, in his need to forget his experience with Ada, also desires that it take on the quality of a dream, a fiction.²¹ After he has dismembered Ada's finger, he confides to Baines, "I wish her gone. I wish you gone. I want to wake up and find that this was all a dream. That's what I want." When Ada, in the next scene, emerges from Stewart's cabin, dissheveled and injured, the blue-green light is absent from the bush, as if she is emerging from that underwater dream. Chevalier and Gheerbrant point out that the colour blue is "the most insubstantial of colours; it seldom occurs in the natural world except as a translucency" such as "the void of the Heavens" and "the depths of the sea" (102). They associate blue with the boundary between the real and the imaginary: "[i]t is the road to infinity on which the real is changed to the imaginary. . . . To penetrate the blue is rather like Alice passing to the other side of the looking-glass. Light blue is the colour of meditation and, as it darkens naturally, it becomes the colour of dreams" (102). The fictional implication of the blue-green tint is also echoed in the source-tale "Blue Beard," in which the blue tint to the character's beard implies his "unnatural and magical qualities," evidenced by his magical bloodstained key which reveals his wife's guilt and seals her fate. (Bettelheim 299).²²

Campion's use of colour, as well as her comment on the absence of Pakeha history, suggests her awareness about the constructiveness of narrative; the idea that the story told in the film is precisely a history which is actually a dream, a fiction, an imagined relation to the Maori, which covers over the silence that is Pakeha history. For it is not settler history that is absent, but Pakeha history. In the transformation from colonizer to settler to Pakeha, a new story premised on a forgetting — or, more precisely, a dis(re)membering — of the violent past must be told. Ada's dismembered finger metaphorically represents a break with colonial history, a history that, in some sense, cannot be remembered, having only now been made part of historical "memory." Hence, bodily dismemberment becomes a sign for dis(re)membering an absent past. The final shot of the piano — silent at the bottom of

this deep sea of forgetting in which sound has never been nor ever may be — self-consciously displays the piano as the fetish that is historical narrative; it attempts to establish a direct and authentic connection between Pakeha and the land, a relation which does not actually exist, for Ada, as Campion points out, is an immigrant, while the Maori have an extended spiritual and ancestral connection to Aotearoa.²³

Eric Santner defines "narrative fetishism" as "the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma *or* loss that called that narrative into being in the first place" (144, emphasis added). Campion's film provides three embedded examples of narrative fetishism: the story of the piano as told by Ada's mind's voice (the film itself); Flora's taletelling; and Ada's willful forgetting of the past. First, the story of the piano forms the basis for attempting to erase the settler absence of spiritual connection to the land through the creation of a romantic tale of a woman's struggle and her resemblance to the indigenous people. It is important that the story allude to other British romance novels, for example, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, since Campion self-consciously refers to Ada's story as a construction motivated by the desire to authenticate the indigenizing transformation from British settler to Pakeha. The violent nature of Ada and Stewart's relationship is a result of this spiritual absence. In fact, the story of the piano is filled with absences and gaps covered over by various other stories. The cause of Ada's muteness is never actually explained, though we are led to believe that her father views it as something she has a talent for and willfully chooses to exercise, a "dark talent" which emerged, significantly, at the time she began to learn the piano. We know that Ada's muteness cannot result from a physiological problem, because the film closes with Ada learning to speak. However, this is just one unanswered question in a script that is, as Holly Hunter notes, full of "things . . . unexplained to the audience or even to the characters themselves" (Screenplay 149). For example, Ada's and Flora's pasts are never fully revealed. The audience becomes privy to a portion of Flora's father's supposed story: that he was Ada's music teacher, that she could "lay thoughts out in his mind like they were a sheet," and that the pair did not marry because "he

stopped listening" (51). But Ada's use of the metaphor of the sheet, which is an indirect form of communication and therefore deceptive — as the shadow-play's similarity to the Treaty suggests — acknowledges that Ada's mind's voice, the story of the piano we are seeing (an image formed through light and shadow projected onto a sheet) is not entirely free of deception. Hence, Campion suggests that the tale being told in the film itself is also a construction, a deceptive fiction which covers over an absence of history.

Second, while Ada's mind's voice deceptively covers over gaps in her personal history, Flora's tale of her "REAL" father is also a fetish which attempts to hide two absences — the absence of her father and the lack of an explanation for Ada's muteness — even while it refers to these absences and is motivated by it. Flora's tale, which she calls "lies," is an attempt to legitimize herself and Ada to Morag. Flora embroiders a romantic tale of an orchestra conductor who married Ada in "an enormous forest, with real fairies as bridesmaids each holding a little elf's hand." After noticing Morag's skepticism, she confesses, "[n]o, I tell a lie, it was in a small country church, near the mountains" (31). Of course, what is odd about this scene is that Flora was not yet born when these supposed events transpired; she is motivated to tell the story partly by Morag's curiosity and partly by her own desire to be the legitimate daughter of a married couple, in spite of — or perhaps because of — the fact that she has been erased from Ada's life in the photograph being taken at the precise moment that Flora tells her tale. Flora's Scottish accent becomes "thick and expressive" (31) as she tells the fantastic story of her mother and father singing a German opera duet and being struck dumb and dead, respectively, by lightning. Just as in the unveiling of the shadow-play, the fictional space of Flora's tale merges with the actuality of Ada's marriage to Stewart, for outside Ada and Stewart are having their wedding photograph taken in a forest while a storm rains down and lightning flashes. The uncanniness of the growing similarity between Flora's tale and the surrounding events occurs because the film suggests that her tale is highly motivated, as is Ada's and Campion's. In the script, after Flora ends her tale with "[s]he-never-spoke-another-word," the wedding party returns, "*dripping wet, exactly as the couple in*

the story" (32). Tale-telling here is an incantation which produces a reality through its performance, for it is ultimately unclear whether Flora's tale produces the reality or is produced by the situation in which she finds herself. Herein lies the significance of the cartoon image of a man catching fire, an image which draws attention to itself by its stark difference — its made-ness — from the fairly realistically shot sequence of Flora and Morag and of the wedding photo, which both suggest a record of events, rather than a constructed story. In other words, Flora's performance of her tale and Morag's belief in its truth produce an alternate reality. This scene, then, is a metaphor for the film as a whole. It shows how the film itself, like Flora's tale, produces a false authenticity, a simulacra; just as Flora was not present at her parents' "marriage," so Ada's story — as told by her mind's voice — is a contemporary construction of a historical image for which there is no actual referent. Furthermore, Campion's reference to the nineteenth century through the film's evocation of the British romance novel and her publication of the novel after the film's release, point to the ways in which the film draws attention to its made-ness "after the fact." That is, the film is a contemporary reconstruction of the mid-nineteenth century which attempts to authenticate as historical a contemporary Pakeha identity. Just as Flora's tale persuades her audience that she is a legitimate child, so Ada's mind's voice (the film itself) constructs the illusion of historicity which is the fetish. The wedding photograph is ironic partly because it points to a historical contradiction: while the photograph was possible in 1850, the film could not have been. In this way, the film undermines its own historicity and authenticity even as it evokes it through the genre of the Victorian period film. Like Flora's and Ada's past, Stewart's and Baines's personal histories are also absent, never actually given. We do know that Baines is married to a wife in "Old England."²⁴ Stewart's background, however, is even more mysterious.

Third, narrative fetishism is a kind of "refusal to mourn" in the wake of trauma or loss; "it is a strategy of undoing, in fantasy, the need for mourning by simulating a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere" (Santner 144). Ada's relation to Stewart is indeed violent if not traumatic; however, in her willful forgetting, that violent history of colonization is

displaced onto the abandoned piano, thus allowing her to present herself as “made whole” through her healing relationship with Baines, her new piano, the return of speech, and the fetishistic completeness of her metal prosthesis. These absences in characters’ histories, however, are not necessarily traumatic, as Ada seems to remember her relationship with Flora’s father, and as the absence of Flora’s father does not technically constitute trauma for Flora since she was not yet born when he and Ada separated. The only possibly traumatic loss²⁵ is Ada’s muteness, about which she says, “[n]o one knows why, not even me.” The film’s use of these quasi-traumatic losses emphasizes the constructedness of the fetishistic narrative by undermining the psychological motivations for these narrative constructions and thus presents them as rather like willful acts of artifice.

What kind of story, then, does *The Piano* tell? The film constructs a story of a violent and unequal alliance-marriage, Ada’s rejection of that relationship — which is mirrored by the Maori rejection of the English version of the Treaty — and Ada’s final alliance with an indigenised Pakeha.²⁶ A new community is formed on the voyage to Nelson, one which honours — through Ada and Baines’s departure from the bush — the Maori right to prior occupation of certain lands, and honours the ancestral and spiritual relation to the land, even while it refers to a fictionalized and constructed Pakeha historical relation that hides or disguises the absence of such a relation. This new Pakeha constructed history is a fetish that covers over an actual absence of long and intimate connection to the land. The title “*The Piano*” is thus significant because the film is about the fetishistic construction of historical narrative which the piano enacts, for the piano itself functions as substitute for imagined “losses” which are actual absences. The piano substitutes for Ada’s absent speech and for her absent indigeneity, even while her muteness and direct communication link her to the native-ness she never “possessed.” In the now-famous piano-dusting scene, the piano substitutes for Ada herself. Finally, the piano stands in for the absent historical relation to the land, as the violent story brought about by that absent relation, the story of Ada and Stewart’s sham marriage, is tossed overboard and made silent. However, Ada admits that at night, just before dropping off to sleep, she

thinks of her piano "in its ocean grave and sometimes of [her]self floating above it" (122). The violent colonial past then must be "buried" in order for Ada to live, but it is not completely forgotten: it becomes the terrible unconscious of the new Pakeha nation founded upon the distantiation and partial forgetting of a shared past with empire. Ada's choice to be buried with the piano is necessary in order for her to be reborn as a Pakeha, for she must attempt to forget and bury the settler past, and her possible complicity in it, if she is to envision herself as part of the new post-imperial and bicultural New Zealand. The new family she forms with Baines and Flora in Nelson points to the possibility of a critical nationalist subjectivity, an alternative to one defined by contractual marriage, the nuclear family, and the monogamous imperatives of the nation, even while this new family also asserts its apparent affinities with British nationalism through its resemblance to traditional western marital and familial relations.

Campion's *The Piano* presents a self-conscious and critical construction of Pakeha nationalism through its critique of the ways in which women are appropriated as reproducers of both children and national boundaries. Further, the film constructs a sense of a shared history of oppression between Ada and the Maori through its presentation of a series of resemblances which include issues of governance and sovereignty, "genealogical" linkages, and visual witnessing. As the film draws these similarities, it simultaneously maintains their historical specificities by emphasizing the absent historical and spiritual relation between Ada and the land. To show how Pakeha identity relies on the fetishistic construction of historical narrative, the film self-consciously enacts, through its uses of colour, the piano as object, and taletelling, the translation of settler to Pakeha through a willful forgetting of a violent past.

NOTES

- 1 "Pakeha" literally means a "foreigner" and "a person of predominantly European descent" (Williams, 252).
- 2 Roughly translated, "rangatiratanga" means "full, true chieftainship or authority" (Sharp, 17).
- 3 Whenever possible in this paper I refer to the film's representations of Maori as characters and not direct presentation of Maori.
- 4 Where I quote text from the screenplay, I include page numbers. Quotes taken from the film itself are not parenthetically documented.

- 5 In contrast, Gillett argues that Baines returns the piano because he realizes the “poverty” of economy; he sees that he “cannot buy, and Ada cannot sell, the personal connection, the experience of love, which he desires.” She reads Baines as feminine in his desire, in that he doesn’t force an “active” masculine desire on to Ada, and this femininity on Baines’s part makes it impossible for Ada to be exchanged between Stewart and Baines as an object (282). While I agree with this reading, I also would maintain that there are other not-so-innocent motives for his gift.
- 6 To be exact, Ada plays Chopin’s “Prelude,” Op. 28, No. 7 in A Major.
- 7 Campion points out that Ada’s muteness is not a “handicap” but a “choice not to speak . . . it’s a strategy” (Interview 25).
- 8 My use of the term “natural” here is ironic, for there is a kind of implied irony about the presumed “naturalness” of heterosexual relations in romance narratives, and Campion seems to indicate this by means of the campy character Tahu, who propositions Baines at the stream: “You no worry, *Peini*, I save you!”
- 9 Molina also argues that the film is about the “deficiency of language”: “every character fails to communicate or to comprehend something in some way” (272). While this may be true, I would suggest that the film is exploring the dynamics of contact. Because the fundamental cause of violence in the film is the incommensurability of different languages, translators are needed to act as “buffers” which prevent violence from occurring. Consider, for example, the scene in which Stewart removes Ada’s finger, immediately after asking a series of questions which Flora is unable to translate for Ada: “Why do you do this? Why do you make me hurt you? Do you hear? Why have you done it? . . . You have made me angry. SPEAK!” Stewart makes it clear that the finger is made to answer for Ada: “*Speak or not you shall answer for it!* . . . Do you love him? Do you?! Is it him you love?” (96-97).
- 10 Perkins similarly argues that the Maori are “signs” and “objects” that contrast nature (“pure authentic sexuality”) to European culture, its repressive sexuality, and the dilemmas of white settlers (20-21).
- 11 As Bacchilega argues, the Bluebeard plot is structured by “duplicity and doubling” in that the heroine must be as clever, deceptive, and manipulative as Bluebeard himself (111-12). In Campion’s film, the motifs of duplicity and doubling are re-configured to imply similarity between Ada and the Maori, the duplicity (construct-edness) of that comparison, and the duplicity of the Treaty of Waitangi itself.
- 12 For discussion of the difference between versions of the Treaty, see Orange.
- 13 Orange notes that twenty years after the signing, the colonial government issued a new translation of the Treaty which spelt out the official understanding of the agreement: “Maori had signed away sovereignty of the country in 1840. There was no cause for them to seek separate institutions and no basis for alleging that their rights under the treaty had been ignored or imperfectly implemented” (3). At a major conference of chiefs held during the same year under government auspices, as in 1840, officials “presented the treaty in a most benevolent light” and Maori leaders came away “believing that their mana was upheld, and that the partnership of races, begun in 1840, might still flourish” (4).
- 14 Bacchilega reads Baines’s actions as a dismemberment of Ada, another enactment of the Bluebeard plot in which different parts of her body are displayed for him (130).
- 15 See the screenplay, where Stewart attempts to pay the Maori with buttons (129-130). The scene implies that in order for Stewart’s buttons to constitute payment, the Maori must first purchase other Western accoutrements — pants. In a similarly complex interaction, the Maori must, as Hira says, sell their land for guns in order to protect their land from settler encroachment.
- 16 Here is Andrew Lang’s translation of the Bluebeard tale which echoes the post-“wedding” plot of the film: “As soon as they returned home, the marriage was concluded. About a month afterward, Blue Beard told his wife that he was obliged to

- take a country journey for six weeks at least, about affairs of very great consequence, desiring her to divert herself in his absence, to send for her friends and acquaintances, to carry them into the country, if she pleased, and to make good cheer wherever she was" (254).
- 17 The emphasis on familial relationship is a central theme in Bluebeard tales in general. Bacchilega argues that in these tales, the heroine survives not only because of her "clever deception" but also because she has "human allies": "In the face of death, she relies on her family, her sisters or brothers, and more broadly human-kind, the community (to which the Bluebeard figure does not belong), to re-establish a link with life" (110).
 - 18 Ada is also linked to the land "spiritually" through a shot sequence that occurs after Baines returns the piano and while Flora plays a Scottish tune for Stewart. As Ada wanders among the burning trunks, there is a close-up of her hair gathered in an ornate bun and then a shot of the virginal and green bush. The camera work in this scene suggests that the viewer is moving towards and into Ada's head through her hair and into her thoughts of the land. I am suggesting that the film evokes the role of hair in Maori culture. Anne Salmond notes in "12 Maori Epistemologies" the significance of hair, the head, and their relation to *tupuna* or ancestors: "when a man talked with his ancestor-gods, their efficacy (*mana atua*) [spiritual godly power] found a pathway to his body through his head, and especially his hair" (241).
 - 19 Linda Hardy, in an evocation of the familiar reading of Ada's sexual awakening, briefly discusses the film in terms of "natural occupancy" which involves surrendering the "furnishings of culture both European and bourgeois" in order to "come into the sensuality of a 'natural occupancy' of the new land." Occupation occurs through a fictional imagining of settler society's "unhistoric origin as the (possibility of the) making of a settlement without a colony" (214).
 - 20 For a discussion of the film's use of white, see Dyson.
 - 21 Renan writes of forgetting and its relation to the nation: "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality. Indeed, historical inquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial. . . . Unity is always effected by means of brutality" (11).
 - 22 According to Bettelheim, the magical key is the only fantastical element of the story and serves as the only sign that the story is a fairy tale: "Actually this story is not a fairy tale, because with the single exception of the indelible blood on the key which gives away the fact that Bluebeard's bride has entered the forbidden room, there is nothing magical or supernatural in the story" (299).
 - 23 For a reading of the film in terms of sexual fetishism, see Gordon. As Gordon points out, the film and the Bluebeard play reveal fetishism's fantasy that representation equals reality: the film demands that its spectators "see representation in one moment, but that they misread it the next" (203). She argues that the film enacts an alternate feminine subjectivity based in auto-eroticism (Ada is both subject and object), masochism (she takes pleasure in her own suicide and annihilation), and negativity (what is unbelievable must be believed). Segal also regards the piano as a fetish object: "both desired thing and part of self, it is bulky, inert, biddable and sensual; its cumbersomeness and beauty make it the possession no one can hold with certainty, like their own body" (206).
 - 24 Cleave notes that the novel based on the film, written by Campion and Kate Pullinger, shows Baines to be an "ex-whaler" from Britain (12).
 - 25 Segal notes that in the novel written after the film (begun by Campion and then finished by Kate Pullinger), Ada decides to be silent forever because at six, when she contradicted the adults, she was ordered not to speak again that day (210).

- ²⁶ Cleave argues that Baines is a Pakeha-Maori, which implies a European who before the Treaty of Waitangi was "naturally [sic] at home with Maori people, speaking their language and observing their customs" (10). They numbered fewer than 2,000 and were often whalers, sealers, or escaped prisoners from Australian penal colonies who stowed away or hid with indigenous tribes. They often married into the tribe and went to battle against Europeans (10). Their association with a "convict" ancestry may be the reason for Pakeha "forgetting" them (11). I would argue that Baines is not a usual Pakeha-Maori in that his moko is not completed; this suggests that he is not completely part of Maori society. It is also significant that he does not wish to have the Maori wife which Hira suggests for him. For more discussion of Pakeha-Maori and their relations with Maori "wives," see Belich.

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