

Poem: Who Am I?

One more thing before you rush off and begin this book. You might want to cast your eye over this short poem. It's something I wrote some time ago, long before this book was even a twinkling in my eye. Nevertheless, I think it is a very compact way of expressing much of what the introduction, and therefore this book as a whole, is saying. The poem is about 'otherness', and what 'otherness' means. On the one hand, then, this poem is an analogy for this book. As I have noted above, this book is not like other books. This book does not fit into a neatly defined category. It is what it is, and that's that.

More importantly, this poem is an analogy for the main theme in this book—the 'otherness' of Māori. Ever since we Pākehā have stepped foot in Aotearoa New Zealand, we have been trying to put Māori into boxes—boxes of our own making. We have used words like 'tribal', 'war-like', 'lazy' or 'under-achieving'. Likewise, when we have sought to describe their culture we have also resorted to Pākehā-defined boxes. Thus we talk about Māori 'ownership' of land, Māori 'leadership', Māori 'families', or Māori 'meetings'. In doing so, we confine Māori and their culture into terms that suit us. We exert our power over their ability to define who they are. And we distort the truth.

Here then is an analogy for what this book is saying, and for what Māori as a whole are saying. The latter analogy works even better if the 'I' is replaced by 'we' and the 'me' by 'us'. For the poem below is expressed in somewhat individualistic terms. Māori culture, on the other hand, does not fit into this box either.

Who Am I?

I am who I am,
And I'm just trying to be,
Honest and open,
And utterly free.

Don't make me a box,
That you think I might fit.
For try as you might,
I just will not sit

In your rules,
In its walls,
Like most other fools.

I am who I am,
And I'm just trying to be,
Happy for once,
And just only me!