

by Chris Winitana (from *Te Koi o te mere*)

ideals, needed to express to keep in touch with himself.

Feelings of anger and hatred. Of dignity and pride. Of mana.

Fused together.

Brought out by the haka.

In the beginning he'd never known such feelings existed inside him. He took himself as a Maori, for granted. He recognised, of course, he was Maori, not by mere virtue of the fact his skin was brown, but by differences in thinking and concepts from those with white skins.

When at an early age, he watched the men perform in true, natural style, he'd caught an inkling of those suppressed feelings.

At first he didn't understand why it was he felt the way he did. That he wanted to laugh and cry at the same time. Such was the depth of those feelings that had fleetingly surfaced.

It was only when he himself took part that he was able to understand. To see from within and without the true nature of his feelings. Where they derived from. Their spiritual source. How they were innately Maori.

Fused into his makeup.

He accepted them for what they were. Expressions of his Maorihood.

Through the haka, the ultimate expression of his virility and vitality. Enabling him to link as one with the past, present and future. The Maori universe. All those souls who had passed. All those souls yet to be born. Tuning into the all-important spirit world. Absorbing the strengths of his ancestors.

Discovering their mana. Letting them take hold of him, he, like a puppet expressing their will.

Feet wide.

Body braced.

His manhood the centre.

Feet flicking. A bull pawing the ground. Rameka moved.

His body rigid, yet fluent.

His mere, part of him, crossed at his chest.

The wiri.

The mana. Ihi. Wehi.

The pulse set. Piupiu moving in unison. As one.

Guttural calls of defiance. Taunting.

Twelve men. The spirit of a thousand.

He could feel the fire.

Spreading.

Through his fibre.

That of his men.

The fire which in ages past had been nurtured for battle. Which his ancestors, tupuna, had sought to blaze. Through the haka. Readyng the men for battle.

Building them up, to bloodpitch. Death-pitch.

The fire which he now cultivated. The fire of the spirit.

Maori.

The essence the same as the past. Unchanged.

Firing for the kill.

The battle now different. Of warfare. The enemy.

Of identity.

Billowing the fire to bring out the Maoriness. Reinforcing it through the haka.

His mere flashed, scything the air. Cutting it in a blur of beauty.

Rameka was one.

As if time had stood still. Come to a stop. The past. The present. The future. All as one.

He was a warrior. Leading his men to victory.

Urging them. Spurring them.

Bloodlust.

Calling his tupuna to the fight.

The spirit of a thousand.

An illusion.

Taunting the enemy.

Pukana.

Enemy.

White.

Daring them to take on the might of a people.

A culture spiritually in touch with all that had been.

Rameka, his voice, the cry of a heretic..

...IIIAHAHA... NA WAI ENEI MAHI WETIWETI..

— come on pakeha, come on... come out and taste the edge of my mere... that

dances before you...

His men taking up his call...

...NA TE KAWANA...

His words, alive, uttered as if of their own accord...

...NA WAI ENEI MAHI KIKINO... — come hither pakeha... reap the reward of your lies. Treachery. My mere thirsts for your blood...

His men afire...

...NA TE KAWANA...

His words, pulled from his mourn by a power greater than he...

...HE AHA TE TIRITI O WAITANGI... — I await you white devil, oh lord of lies. You who are nothing before me...

come taste the rewards of deceit...

They all as one, committing their thoughts into action, boosted by the power of the unseen spirits.

...HE RUKAHU, HE TITOTITO

HE PEPA WHANAKO I NGA WHENUA,

TIHAHAETIA,

KURATIA KI TANA UPOKO MARO, UPOKOKOHUA...

KSS AUE, KSS AUE, KSS AUE, HEI!

Rameka stood braced.

Tingling. Alive.

His senses burned.

Spirit fulfilled.

United.

The haka. It meant so much.

Kept him in tact.

In touch with his feelings.

Called his tupuna.

A united spirit.

The audience was clapping.

Rameka felt inspired.

Rejuvenated.

His eyes rolled.

Pukana.

He honed in on a face.

White.

Pukana.

The face broke.

White.

Tongue poking.

Back at him.

White face.

Laughing at him. A Maori. The haka.

That meant so much.

A white face laughing.

Poking tongues back at him.