

JANE McRAE

## **'E Manu, Tena koe!' – O Bird, Greetings to you <sup>1</sup>**

*the oral tradition in Māori-language newspapers*

In a letter published in the newspaper *Te Wananga* in 1876, headed 'To Henare Tomoana' (the proprietor), Tiopira Hukiki began: 'E hoa, tena koe, ara koutou katoa i roto i te aroha o to tatou Ariki o Ihu. Ka huri' (Friend, greetings to you, that is to all of you, in the love of our Lord, Jesus. I conclude).<sup>2</sup> That short statement encapsulates a history of the transition of Māori oral tradition to print. The greeting is very brief but evidently after the fashion of ceremonial speeches. It was adapted, in handwriting, to the letter form for printing in a newspaper published by Māori. It took novel licence with the form of traditional greetings and named a god delivered by Christian missionaries. As an artefact, it was the consequence of the arrival of Pākehā (Europeans) in New Zealand, their introduction of writing and print and interaction with Māori.

Newspapers in Māori were published in New Zealand from the 1840s to the 1930s by the government, the church, and individuals. They were a means to advance political and religious convictions but they also reported local, national and international news, and invited opinion. During that unusual time—there have been no like papers because of colonisation's diminution of Māori language and culture—Māori contributed to them all, and published their own.<sup>3</sup> Accustomed to an oral tradition of Polynesian origin but recreated in their own language during some thousand years in Aotearoa, they acquired the art of writing from Pākehā in the early 1800s. My article concerns the printed legacy of that oral tradition, in particular the ancient, poetic