

He Waiata Aroha na Mihi-ki-te-kapua

The kind of traditional song known as a waiata generally took the form of a lament, but it was not only an outlet for emotion. It was also an important means of communication, a way of conveying a message to persons addressed by the poet, and others as well. Often the poet would sing his or her song in the presence of those addressed in it, but when they were living elsewhere the song would pass from one singer to another until it reached its destination. The composer of a good song could be confident it would eventually be heard by the persons to whom it was addressed. Such songs were sung for enjoyment and because of their human interest, and they became known far and wide.

Mihi-ki-te-kapua was a famous poet of Ngati Ruapani who lived on the shore of Lake Waikaremoana in the Urewera district. Several of her songs express the loneliness of her old age, when her children had left her. One of them is a waiata aroha, song of yearning, composed when she heard that her daughter, Te Uruti, was being ill-treated by her husband. Te Uruti was at Whakatane, a place near Te Whaiti in the rugged, heavily forested country to the north of the lake. The journey there was long and arduous, and Mihi could not visit her daughter. Her song, however, must soon have reached her.

A Mixture of Old and New

Mihi's songs were composed in the years between about 1845 and 1885. Like most of the songs of this period, they are transitional in style and content. Instead of the complexity and concision of the classical poetry there is a relatively simple and expanded style, and new material is employed in ways that are essentially traditional. It is this mixture of old and new that gives such songs their special interest.

When a poet mourning the absence of a loved one could glimpse from her home a hill near the place where that person was living, she might speak of this as providing a link with her beloved; on the other hand, if no such landmark were visible she might blame a hill for barring the way. Mihi allows herself poetic license in blaming instead a large and famous bird-spearing tree, a kahikatea named Te Waiwhero that stood near Te Whaiti. In reality the way was barred by the high ranges of the Ureweras, notably the Huiarau range immediately to the north; but since Te Waiwhero was a well-known landmark, this passage added interest to her song. The reference to smoke is traditional. Clouds flying towards a poet, or wind, or a flight of birds, or smoke from a fire could be regarded as messengers coming from the loved one.

A New Form of Communication

In the second stanza the poet speaks of a new form of communication that could be used between those separated by distance, and laments that she does not have the knowledge to use it. Ihaka must have been someone at Whakatane who knew how to read, so would have been able to read a letter to her daughter if she could have sent one; he may have been a lay preacher, a man who was spreading the Christian faith. The missionaries had taught their con-

verts to read and write so that they could study the Bible, and Maoris had seized upon this new system and quickly made use of it; by the 1840s they were writing many letters, often using language similar to that of oratory. This reference to writing as a new skill suggests that the song may have been composed in the 1840s or 50s.

Haumapuhia, who made the lake

At her home on the northern shore of the lake, Mihi could look straight across

He waitata aroha mo Te Uruti

Tiketike rawa mai Te Waiwhero —
Te turakina kia ngāwari,
Kia mārama au te titiro, ē,
Ki te rehu ahi o Whakatāne,
He tohu mai pea na te tau, ē,
Ki' māha, atu, ē, te ngākau,
Tēnei koe te hōkai nei, ē,
Ki tō moenga i awhi ai tāua i!

Me i mātau ana i ahau, ē,
Ngā kōrero e takoto i te puka,
Me tuhituhi atu ki te pepa, ē,
Ka tuku atu ki a Ihaka
Kia pānui a Te Uruti, ē —
'E hine, tēnā koe!
Ka nui taku aroha', i!

Kāore hoki, ē, te roimata,
Tē pēhia kei aku kamo!
Me he wai-rutu au ki Te Whāngaromanga ē,
Ko Haumapuhia e ngunguru i raro ra i!

Tāwhai rawa mai, e hika,
Ko Ruawharo, te rite ra i te tipua,
E maka noa ra i ana pōtiki —
Tū noa i te one to Matiu, ko Makaro,
Ko Moko-tua-raro ki tawhiti
I Ngaruroro ra, i Rangatira ra!