

Hinemoana Baker

Poem Notes

Late last year, for three startling months, I enjoyed the privilege of being 2009 Arts Queensland Poet in Residence. I was based in Brisbane from July to September, and the Queensland Writers Centre (who administered the programme) also sent me to various other places in the state – my first genuine outback trips.

While I was in Queensland, I wrote a series of poems which I'm calling *The Adventures of Kore Rawa on the Moon*. I could just as easily have called it *The Adventures of Hinemoana Baker on the Moon*. The poems became my way of negotiating my experiences of this new, extraordinary country, and a way of expressing what I was seeing – and what I wasn't seeing – while I was in Queensland. The name of the poems' main character – 'Nothing Nothing', 'Kore Rawa' in Māori – was inspired by the beautiful indigenous words in Australia that have so many pairs of 'o's: Toowoomba, Oodgeroo, Woolloomooloo. The concept of 'nothing' also speaks to experiences of invisibility, to the concept of 'terra nullius' – sadly so significant in Australia's history – as well as to the Māori concept of 'Te Kore', which is a state of ultimate potential and creativity.

I also made an audio version of this poem – the spoken text in a setting of field recordings from my Australian journeys. The album is called *Gondwanavista: An Outback Soundwalk*. The name 'Gondwanavista' comes from one of the hosts of the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum – Trish. 'Gondwanavista' was a description of the view she showed us from the top of a 'jump-up' – the 75-metre mesa plateau formation on top of which the museum sits.

Poet Notes

Hinemoana Baker is a writer, musician, producer and teacher of creative writing. Her Māori whakapapa, from both the North and South Islands, traces from Taranaki through the Horowhenua down to the Ōtākou peninsula near Dunedin. Her Pākehā ancestors were from England and Bavaria.

Hinemoana's first poetry collection, *mātuhi | needle* (2004), was co-published in New Zealand by Victoria University Press and in the USA by Perceval Press. She co-edited the 2007 anthology *Kaupapa: New Zealand poets, world issues* and created the sound design for *I Can See Fiji: Poetry and Sound*, a recording of poems by Pacific/US poet Teresia Teaiwa.

Hinemoana's second collection of poetry, *kōiwi kōiwi | bone bone*, was published in July 2010. In 2008 she completed a residency at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji. She was 2009 Arts Queensland Poet in Residence, and in August 2010 she will begin another residency, the International Writing Programme, based at the University of Iowa in the USA.

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Gondwanavista

(i)

She wants to join me on the sad canoe
Paddles making fire in our shoulders

She is named by the sea
You shall be known as Kore Rawa
says the sea

Nothing Nothing

Never Never

High on the jump up we scan the fossiliferous
Gondwanavista

(ii)

She dreams she is deep in a hole larger than a grave
And more shallow
Children gathered at the lip
Nuns in their dark habits

A shadow passes, blossoming speech bubbles follow him
They walk together, towards floating animal sounds
They find a supermarket, aisles flowing
With cattle, pigs, sheep
All manner of food

(iii)

Nothing-Nothing takes photos of the apricot moon
Of the young man on his way to war
Hat and boots in his left hand
The camel shape of his feet
The glinting black where the mackerel sky
Used to be

We walk down to the Coolibah Motel
In the still night Kore Rawa recites the names
Of all the reindeer on the Christmas serviettes

I take a photo of her, a white
And gold silhouette in the phone-box trying
To call home

The next day I put her on the bus
The moon is pale in the dark-blue
Morning sky, on the vibrating bus
Kore Rawa waits, a fish with aching gills

The love of a good hill at the end
Of a flat walk, the metatarsels
in plaster, and all her paperwork
Sealed inside

(iv)

She bends over the brackish water
Her feet in the slick, she finds
The rope and hauls in the trap
Inside six Blueclaws wave and stare
Truly abandoned, a small grey
Crab crawls over them

No, not like prawns
She says
Not crayfish either

She boils them orange, the smell like an over-ripe
Wedding bouquet

(v)

The children lurch in, like the river
They are always there even when
The water is gone
Kumara tastes like bamboo
Says one

The hokioi sounds like a creak in the floor

(vi)

Kore Rawa tells the girl about her father
When he was your age she says
He was so hungry he used to eat the millet paste
Instead of feeding it to the ducks

(vii)

Kumara tastes like bamboo

The hokioi sounds like a creak in the floor

(viii)

Its true
Thinks Nothing Nothing
Warmth floods everywhere

Nothing Nothing remembers her birth

The smell of fresh-picked silverbeet and
Singer sewing machine oil
How she wriggled and stabbed her way
Out of her mother's left shoulder
Grabbing at tendons and the calcifying
Muscle of the rotator cuff
A white and gold silhouette

A jump up

A mackerel sky

(ix)

Kore Rawa is the World's Oldest Mother

She fills the jug and pulls out her air scribe
The dust of 380 million years makes a fine film on the cutlery

You gotta pack a lunch to cross
The street around here
She says

She twitters as she feeds bread to her son
Roars like a motorbike when it's time to go home
When the sun goes down sudden