Female dramatic

Rongo from Hone Kouka's Waiora

Time: day, at the end of a long hot summer, 1965.

Location: A beach in a small cove on the East Coast of the South Island. The beach is narrow and goes down to the water.

Rongo is turning 18 and her family have recently moved from their rural homeland Waipara on the East Cape of the North Island to city life in the South Island. In an attempt to assimilate to their new life Rongo’s father Hone has forbidden his family to speak Maori, and Rongo mourns the loss of her language as she mourns her now-dead Nanny. A beautiful singer with “a voice like a tui”, Rongo has not sung for her family since they left Waipara. Of all the family she has the closest links to the spiritual world. Throughout the play the tipuna are present as characters only Rongo can see, until the play’s climax when the entire family is brought together by their presence.

In this excerpt it is Rongo's birthday and while the family prepare the hangi for her party, she goes away by herself to stand at the edge of the sea. Water laps around her feet. She holds a shell or stone in her hand, to remind her of her grandmother. She has just finished singing a waiata and is addressing her Nanny.

Note: The tipuna are with her, although at this point she cannot see them.

RONGO:

Did you like that Nanny? It is one of the wai that you taught me. Kei te mahara ahau ki nga pao, nga waiata, nga haka ara te katoa. E hika! Kei te makariri te wai ¹(beat) I am standing in the water
so I can touch home. Kei te whanui nga ringaringa o Tangaroa hei awhi a Papatuanuku. His hands smooth out the sand you see. Pari mai, pari atu.

So if I am held in those hands, I am taken back to the beach of Waiora, our true home. Waiora Te Ukaipo, The Homeland. *(beat)*

Nanny, I’m so hungry, not for kai, but for words. Here, we korero Pakeha, not Maori. Not allowed to. E Nanny, kei te mataku ahau. Scared I’ll waste away to a whisper, then nothing, and I will forget our words, and if I do, my children will have nothing to eat. Their mouths will not know the taste we once knew, they will forget. But we are hurting ourselves.

We are stopping ourselves from speaking the reo. No one is doing it to us. Dad said if we live like Pakeha, they will leave us in peace and we will be strong. *(beat)* But what will we be? I don’t think we will ever learn their ways. We will be a lost people first. We will. *(pause)* Aue e Nanny, whakarongo mai ki ahau, kei te whakarongo mai koe? Aue taukuri e. Tukua ahau kia haere I to taha. *(beat)*

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1 I remember the pao, waiata, haka, everything. Oh! The water is cold.
2 The hands of Tangaroa reach out along Papatuanuku.
3 Wash in, wash out.
4 I’m scared Nanny.

http://www.tki.org.nz/r/arts/drama/nzmonologues/index_e.php
Rongo bends down and scoops up a handful of water and slowly lets it trickle over her face.
She is dejected.

RONGO: Ka ngaro.  

Commentary

First performed in 1996, *Waiora* deals with Maori migration from rural and

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5 Oh Nanny, listen to me. Are you listening? Alas, take me with you. You were always so strong. I need your strength, speak to me. Are you listening? Listen!
6 Lost.
traditional ways to city life. It focuses on each family member's struggles and aspirations but Rongo is the story's central character. Her link with the spiritual world through the tipuna is crucial to the plot and expresses the theme of loss – of people, culture, identity, values, language, and links with the past – which is woven through the play.

In her introduction to the published playscript, Roma Potiki concludes:

At the beginning of the play the tipuna call the family to come together to work as one; by the end the whanau have realised how important their traditions are. It is John/Hone … who must finally speak in his own tongue, entreat his daughter to return to life, a life in which her whole being has longed to return to Waiora, te ukaipo, their homeland.

*Waiora* has been performed all over New Zealand and has toured internationally to the UK and Hawaii.