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“THE END AT THE BEGINNING” : SPIRAL LOGIC IN KERI HULME’S *THE BONE PEOPLE*

by

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In the epilogue of Keri Hulme's novel *The Bone People*, Maori factory worker Joe Gillayley reunites with his adoptive son Simon after undergoing a sort of spiritual rebirth. Though Joe delivered a near-fatal beating to the child during their last confrontation, Joe and Simon ecstatically dance and embrace. Simon exhibits "[n]o sign of reproach" and stares at his father with consistent "loveshine" in his gaze (542). Nevertheless, a tense encounter with Joe's cousin Luce soon after provokes anxiety:

Luce glides up to them, elegantly dressed in katipo colours. Cool hand on Piri's shoulder, cool eyes on Simon Clare, cool smile turned to see itself in Joe's eyes.

"Happy, Hohepa?"

"Yes, Luce." Get lost.

"With everything cos, every tiny thing?"

"No, Luce." Bugger off.

He stirs the silvergold hair with one cool finger. Not deep enough to touch the skull, enough to make his cool cool point.

The gentleness goes from his tired son's eyes, and something iron and quick takes its place. The fingers veer up into Luce's face, effoff. Right on, tama.

"Manners need some mending too," lidded mean gaze turned back to Joe.

"Piss off, Luce," says Piri, handing the child back. Right on, Piri.

(But all the while, the old man while, instinct fought against my [Joe's] clavicle and told me sin, hop in, the livin' water's warm. No way. Not that way ever again.)

(543-4)

Hulme immediately indicates that Luce is a threat to Joe and Simon through the colors of his outfit. They align him with the katipo, "a highly venomous New Zealand spider which is

black with a red spot on the back” according to the Oxford English Dictionary (“katipo, n.”). The metaphor explicitly asserts Luce’s dangerousness, as a venomous spider’s bite can cause intense physical pain, but Luce does not engage in physical violence. Hulme therefore subverts a direct correlation between the harm done by Luce and by the katipo. In doing so, she shrewdly begs the question: *why* does Joe feel threatened by Luce?

Luce acts as provocateur. Silence marks the short, circuitous exchange he initiates. In it, he speaks three times, and only once makes a declarative statement; his sole action is gently touching Simon’s hair. Despite this, his “cool smile” betrays that his innocence is merely a performance meant to provoke self-consciousness in Joe.

He knowingly interrupts a celebratory moment to taunt Joe by highlighting the undeniable difference in Joe and Simon’s appearances. He addresses Joe by his Maori name, Hohepa, before he “stirs [Simon’s] silvergold hair.” The combined effect underscores the divide between Simon’s fair complexion, indicative of his Pakeha heritage, and Joe’s much deeper skin tone, a recognizable external reminder of his Maoriness. Love, however powerful, cannot make Joe and Simon the same on a biological level. No matter their closeness, a stranger would never identify Joe and Simon as father and son on sight.

Luce’s calculated nonchalance worsens Joe’s irritation. By remaining relaxed during a tense moment, Luce implies that Joe is overreacting. The external invalidation of Joe’s emotions can then seize on any internal conflict and trigger intense distress, thereby ruining Joe and Simon’s happy reunion.

Ultimately, Luce punctures an otherwise idyllic scene and exposes the murky reality underneath, inviting Joe to crumble under the pressure of “every little thing.” Joe is forced to

question the security of his and Simon's future, and, by extension, Hulme encourages the reader to do the same.

Upon closer inspection, the passage reveals that Luce is simply a catalyst; Joe and Simon's unresolved conflicts are the true threats to their relationship. Simon's "iron and quick" reaction to a seemingly innocent touch evokes the harrowing past that normalized his physical abuse. The repetition of "[r]ight on" positions Joe as a chorus, reminding the reader of his troubling tendencies to desperately seek outside approval and to excuse the violence he inflicts on Simon. Hulme's juxtaposition of Joe's speech and thoughts in his responses to Luce allude to his treacherously inconsistent ability to act on his individual sense of morality. Moreover, Joe's pride in Simon's "effoff" signal toward Luce suggests that he retains some belief that Simon's actions reflect his own values. Luce reinforces this idea by directing the comment that Simon's "manners need some mending" at Joe.

These details are cognitive and behavioral manifestations of the same traumas that previously tore Joe and Simon apart. They remind the reader that neither Joe nor Simon has managed to miraculously overcome his past. As a child, Joe learned to distrust his own morals and instead privilege external validation, resulting in an overwhelming desire to control his reputation. Simon fears change and works desperately to maintain stasis even if he must suffer, enabling Joe's physical abuse. Both father and son remain unaware of the barriers stunting their psychological development and inadvertently perpetuate a status quo in which love and violence are inextricably linked. Despite this, *The Bone People's* epilogue closes with the image of Hulme's three protagonists—Joe, Simon, and Kerewin—linking hands as they eagerly await the dawn of a new day.

The Bone People tells the story of reclusive artist Kerewin Holmes. One night, she returns to her isolated New Zealand home and finds a child intruder within. The mute Pakeha (European) boy, Simon Peter Gillayley, quickly develops an attachment to Kerewin, and she reluctantly befriends both Simon and his adoptive father, Joe. Kerewin learns that a traumatic past haunts Simon and Joe struggles with the loss of his wife, Hana, and their infant child. Bonding between Simon, Joe, and Kerewin is further complicated when Kerewin discovers that Joe physically abuses Simon and warily intervenes.

The three are driven apart after Simon witnesses a violent death. In shock, he visits Kerewin, but she rebuffs him because of her anger that he stole one of her prized possessions. Simon leaves and is later brought home by the police for smashing store windows. Furious, Joe beats Simon severely, but Simon stabs Joe with a shard of glass in retaliation. Both are hospitalized and Joe is imprisoned.

In the novel's latter half, Kerewin contracts and recovers from a mysterious illness while Joe meets a spiritual elderly man and Simon is shuffled around various foster homes unsuccessfully. Ultimately, Kerewin, Simon, and Joe come together again. Kerewin formally adopts Simon, Joe facilitates reconciliation between Kerewin and her estranged family, and Hulme's three protagonists celebrate their reunification in Kerewin's newly-built spiral-shaped home.

The contrast between Hulme's picturesque ending and the brutality of much of the novel has generated controversy. Although love overshadows unease in *The Bone People's* final moments, the novel's epilogue rebukes deceptively simple notions of resolution that often accompany scenes of reconciliation. As a result, critics like C.K. Stead have struggled to locate the nexus of Hulme's immense novel.

In his essay “Keri Hulme’s *The Bone People* and the Pegasus Award for Maori Literature,” Stead states, “*The Bone People* is a novel about violence. It is also about love and about identity” (104). In contrast, Hulme once described her novel as “‘simply a story about love’” (Talmor). Their commonality is explicit, as “love” appears in both descriptions, but the dissonance between these descriptions stages perhaps the most important aspect of Hulme’s work.

The Bone People is best understood through the analogy of the spiral. As Elizabeth Webby explains in “Spiralling to Success,” her review of the novel, “its structure is, indeed, that of a double spiral, where beginning and ending are in perpetual interchange.” Additionally, the spiral influences the novel’s thematic arc since “fundamental to the novel is the idea that change and renewal do not mean a total rejection of the past” (Webby).

Early in *The Bone People*, Hulme reveals the spiral’s meaning through Kerewin’s narration, calling it “an old symbol of rebirth, and the outward-inward nature of things” (56). Its symbolic resonance is drawn from Maori conceptions of genealogy:

Maori notions of genealogy presuppose an intimate connection with the past.

Whakapapa memorializes a person’s descent from the gods, through the mortal generations, and even through canoe voyages from Hawāiki (the mythic homeland).

The term *whakapapa* literally means “to lay one thing upon another” or to lay one generation upon another [...] The past coexists with the embodied present,

constituting a person’s location and being. (Najita 100)

This emphasis on coexistence helps makes sense of the conflict between Stead and Hulme’s descriptions of the same work. Love is narrative locus, as Hulme posits, but concerns about violence, identity, and more orbit this focal point. As in a spiral, it is impossible to reach the

center without confronting the connections between each component. The dissonance between Stead and Hulme's descriptions of the novel accurately reflects its sometimes-startling refusal to compartmentalize seemingly disparate concepts.

Hulme's content disturbs Stead because "*The Bone People* seems at times disarmingly, at times alarmingly, naïve" (106). The novel is marked by "a bitter aftertaste, something black and negative deeply ingrained in its imaginative fabric" (107). Stead ends his article musing that,

I [Stead] suspect it [the negative element] has its location in the central subject matter, and that this is something it shares (to give another point of reference) with Benjamin Britten's opera *Peter Grimes*, a work which also presents extreme violence against a child, yet demands sympathy and understanding for the man who commits it. In principle such charity is admirable. In fact, the line between charity and imaginative complicity is very fine indeed. (108)

Stead's admission that he *can* identify the "negative element" exposes the fallacy of his assessment. He uses the language of speculation to cloak his discomfort with the intimate closeness of love and violence in the novel. The statement that he merely "suspect[s]" said closeness is at fault for his cool reception of the work allows Stead to deflect claims that this bias may diminish his authority as literary critic. *The Bone People's* content chafes against Stead's individual morality, but he refuses to admit to the conflict of interest. By maintaining a façade of impartiality rather than accepting the subjectivity inherent in humanness, Stead does both himself and Hulme a disservice. He conforms to academic convention and its demand for objective analyses, protecting himself from losing the esteem of others in his field, but he dismisses the opportunity to fully engage with Hulme's narrative.

It is understandably challenging to embrace *The Bone People*'s cautiously optimistic ending. Hulme fulfills the vision of togetherness that Simon has continually worked toward, but his return to the care of a previously abusive father is mildly discomfiting, at best. The reader hopes that the future for Joe, Simon, and Kerewin will bring genuine change, but Joe's moment of hesitation after conversing with Luce amid the raucous party prompts just enough doubt to be unsettling. However, this does not excuse Stead's oblique accusation that Hulme's depiction of child abuse is on the wrong, *unprincipled* side of "the line between charity and imaginative complicity."

The condescension of his remark transforms his personal disapproval of Hulme's depiction of the relationship between love and violence into a moral failure of Hulme's. This gives him a moral authority so that he can make her a scapegoat for his own internal conflict and shut down discourse in the process. Instead of engage with Hulme's way of thinking, which she clearly proposes via the spiral metaphor, Stead purports his own imagined moral superiority and champions his individual, prejudicial reading of the book while the author's vision languishes, misunderstood.

Stead inadvertently divulges the fundamental flaw marring his understanding of the novel when he insists, "*The Bone People* is at the core a work of great simplicity and power" because "[t]he narrative creates a simple pattern" (105). In the pattern Stead describes, "[t]he three principal characters are drawn slowly together to form a strong unit...[a] catastrophe occurs which blows them apart...[and] [a]t the end the three come together again, purged, and certain of their need for each other" (105). Though the logic of Stead's pattern is not directly opposed to that of Hulme's spiral, it reduces a complex structure to something obvious, even trite. It represents the exact direct causal logic that Hulme rejects.

The spiral is indirect by design. Adoption of the spiral form enables the cyclical connection between *The Bone People*'s epilogue, which ends with a Maori phrase meaning "The end—or the beginning," and its prologue titled "The End at the Beginning" (545). The structure similarly legitimizes the novel's lack of resolution by creating a situation in which Joe's past abuse of Simon coexists with the love and hope of a better future that father and son could share. The spiral is essential to understanding how the book deals with the relationship between love, violence, and sexuality. Without the spiral as lens, one inevitably reaches the wrong conclusions. Stead's article therefore perpetuates close-minded reading.

The same reductive vision is an unfortunate trend in criticism of *The Bone People*. In Marilyn Seymour's "The Uncanny as 'Home'," she asserts that Joe's actions are motivated by an urge to conceptualize a new mode of being rather than a desire to fulfill convention as an ongoing result of childhood trauma. This essay will first disprove Seymour's theory through examination of the ideals instilled in Joe as a child that have warped his ability to trust his own morals. Afterward, it will investigate Simon's background and similarly reveal its lasting impact on his development, exposing the suffering that shapes Simon's worldview and challenging Stephen Fox's idea that Simon is terrorizing Joe and masterminding his own abuse. Additionally, I will refute Leanne Zainer's claim that Simon's acceptance of physical abuse enables Hulme to uncritically address the relationship between violence and love. Both Simon and Joe's learned behaviors lead Joe to treat physical violence as a control mechanism. Because Joe is unable to trust his own judgment, his ambiguous sexuality vexes him and impacts his response to Luce's teasing that Simon may not be heterosexual. Joe's abuse of Simon is not, as Christina Stachurski contends, Joe's attempt to exorcise his own pedophilic desire for the child.

Ultimately, this paper will correct misconceptions about *The Bone People* through adherence to the philosophy of the spiral. It will demonstrate the fallacy of compartmentalization in the novel's analysis by emphasizing the importance of coexistence and asserting that attention to Joe and Simon's development as individuals is critical to conceptualizing the interconnected roles of violence, love, and sexuality in their relationship.

Joe's conduct embodies the very problem at the heart of critical misconceptions about *The Bone People*. Just as critics reach incorrect conclusions by analyzing the book in accordance with their personal philosophies, Joe responds to Simon's misbehavior without consideration for the destructiveness of ideals taught to him as a child.

Joe struggles to translate his morals into a corresponding ethical course of action because he has been torn between two cultures since birth. During his initial meeting with Kerewin, Joe reveals that Simon suffers from frequent nightmares and he medicates the boy to help him sleep. With "a strained gaiety in his voice," Joe suggests that Simon is "spooked" (75). Kerewin expresses belief in the possibility and Joe continues:

"Scared of ghosts and things in dreams...if I was proper Maori I'd..."

Into the following silence,

"You'd what?"

"Hah, I don't know." He laughed quietly. "Maybe take him to people who'd know what to do, to keep off ghosts in dreams." Laughing again, a dry unfunny sound like a cough, "See? Bloody superstitious Nga Bush? Get the Maori a bad name, eh?" (75)

The long pauses Hulme communicates via ellipses suggest a yearning for "proper Maori" identity, yet Joe invokes the primitivism rife in stereotypes of indigenous peoples directly afterward. His demotion of traditional spiritual beliefs to antiquated practices that "[g]et the

Maori a bad name,” suggest that Joe’s preconceived notion of what it means to be Maori is incompatible with modernity. However, his concern that the Maori could “[g]et,” or develop, a negative reputation also indicates his positive perception of Maori culture and interest in maintaining his Maoriness. This is a challenge for Joe because he thinks “proper,” or correct, Maoriness depends on stasis. Though Joe sees himself as undoubtedly Maori, he is *improper* Maori because his own modern attitudes are inconsistent with ancient beliefs and practices. He consequently occupies a liminal space in which his life is a perversion of an abstract, perfected Maori way of being, and harbors personal insecurity as a result.

Joe couches the sincerity of his words in self-deprecating humor but fails to disguise his unease. He performs nonchalance through forced, “unfunny” laughter that the novel’s narration equates with “a cough.” Since coughing generally denotes illness, the text implies that Joe suffers from an invisible ailment. Hulme reveals its cause later in the conversation after Kerewin admits she feels more Maori than Pakeha and Joe conspiratorially agrees:

“That’s the way I feel most of the time.” More loudly, “My father’s father was English so I’m not yer 100% pure. But I’m Maori. And that’s the way I feel too, the way you said, that the Maoritanga has got lost in the way I live.” (76)

Through his confession, Joe locates his own sickness in the separation he feels from Maori culture. He presumes an innate connection with Maori culture that can be “lost,” and further presumes that Kerewin’s faith in her own Maoriness will correct this. Marilyn Seymour likewise ascribes Joe’s motivation for creating a family unit with Simon and Kerewin to Joe “seek[ing] a way to exist that moves beyond the dominant reality” in “The Uncanny as ‘Home’” (128). However, both Joe and Seymour fail to note that Joe’s true sickness is an

inability to accept both the Maori and Pakeha parts of himself because of his belief in the idea of purity.

Theatricality marks Joe's speech in this passage. His initial agreement is spontaneous and genuine, but it quickly gives way to defensiveness. Though he dismisses the idea that being "100% pure" matters, the designation's hyperbolic redundancy suggests otherwise. In speaking "[m]ore loudly," Joe is assuming the conviction he wants to feel. His mockery of the concept is belied by his earlier proclamation his Maoriness is not "proper Maori[ness]."

The value of purity was instilled in Joe as a child. His paternal grandparents raised him because his father died prematurely and his mother was mentally ill. Their care subjected Joe to two major, dueling influences: that of his "proper Maori" grandmother and his Pakeha grandfather.

Joe's grandmother adhered to traditional Maori practices. The "strong-willed" woman dominated the private, domestic sphere and consistently invalidated Joe's opinions (278). To Joe, his father "always seemed good, and kind," but his grandmother insisted that his father "was born bad" (278). His grandmother never provided evidence of her son's malignance, but she occupied a position of power over Joe. She thereby encouraged Joe's impression that her convictions could be true even without justification. Joe came to trust her judgment despite its opposition to his own, and eventually came to "[feel] like some kind of leper for having a father so bad, so rotten" (278).

Though his grandmother encouraged Maori culture in the home, Joe's grandfather discouraged it in the public sphere. Joe's grandfather "was highly respected and that, an elder too, but of the church, not of the people" (278). He "was ashamed, secretly ashamed, of [Joe's] Nana and her Maoriness" (278). His grandfather projected his belief in Maori

inferiority “on [Joe] for being like [his grandmother], for being dark, for speaking Maori first, all sorts of things...” (278). His grandfather’s influence taught him that it was wrong to be Maori and right to be Pakeha.

However, Joe’s “dark” physical appearance denied him the right to *choose* which culture strangers would assume he belonged to. It is wrong for Joe to be Maori, according to his grandfather, but also wrong for Joe to claim his Pakehanness because external, visual language marks him as *entirely, exclusively* Maori. As a result, Joe is unable to unfailingly identify with Maori culture or Pakeha culture. Guilt haunts Joe because he *looks* like a unified self. Seymour’s claim that Joe “is outside society with no desire to be a part of it as it is currently constituted” is therefore untrue (128). Joe wants to be *either* Maori or Pakeha, but Joe’s real, divided self is hidden under a mask of pure Maoriness that he cannot take off.

Joe has a deep fear of uncertainty because of his cultural confusion. His desire to believe that Simon is “spooked” stems from a generalized desire for simple answers to complex questions. Purity would bring Joe easy answers. If Joe were pure, “proper Maori,” he would automatically assume a defined course of action established via cultural tradition. Conversely, if Joe were entirely European, he would not question his use of medicine to soothe Simon’s insomnia.

Rather than seek a solution to his uncertainty or accept his internal divisions, Joe chooses present a superficially coherent self. If he were pure, his cultural background would instill a defined set of morals that would then translate into a stable and undeniably ethical course of action in response to any threat. Joe needs this certainty to ground him mentally, but his grandmother rendered him incapable of trusting his own judgment. Instead, Joe relies on external assurance of morality.

Before meeting his wife Hana, Joe had “started training as a seminarian” (*The Bone People* 281). Once he met Hana, Joe left the church. In leaving, Hulme exposes Joe’s lack of commitment to a singular moral framework. His lack of commitment to religion indicates a willingness to accept whatever external value system his circumstances allow. Joe drifts in search of steady ground.

Hana anchored Joe during their marriage. She was not only kind, but a nurse as well. Therefore, Hana is associated with healing. Joe allies her with knowing what is right, knowing how to fix things. While beating Simon after he visits Binny Daniels, Joe wonders, “Why should I feel guilty?” (167). Unable to answer himself,

He shrugs his heavy shoulders.

What else can I do, Hana? What else is there to do?

He hits the boy until he grovels on the floor, gone beyond begging for it to stop.

(167)

In death, Hana is a goddess and no longer a fallible human being. Hana’s death reduces her from living, breathing human with dynamic opinions to an authoritative ideal of an all-knowing, all-healing nurse. Without her at his side and with the aid of alcohol, Joe can effectively delude himself into believing he is not at fault for hurting Simon. Although Kerewin’s personality bears little resemblance to Hana, Hana is forced to bear the role because she and Hana share the base category of “woman.” Joe reduces Kerewin to an archetype and constrains his expectations of her because she is *there*; she is a convenient crutch.

Joe and Hana’s comfortable happiness as husband and wife created his perception that conventionality and morality are equivalent. The certainty of their situation ameliorated

the uncertainty in Joe's mind, but its unexpected evanescence brought the collapse of Joe's external moral framework. Joe sees Kerewin as a possible moral crutch because she can replace Hana and recreate another conventional nuclear family with Joe and Simon.

Following his confession to Kerewin that he feels has lost his Maoriness, Joe seems struck by his own revelation. As if in a trance, "[h]e [shakes] his head and [sighs]" before he professes that he "never said that to anyone before...[n]ot even to [his] wife" (76). Joe believes he has found a kindred spirit in Kerewin. Once Kerewin beats Joe for abusing Simon, Joe begins looking to her for moral guidance:

"First things first," he says slowly, and Kerewin thinks, Yeah, here it comes, you were lucky and all that crap, but he goes on, "I'll tell you all the why of the past whenever you want to hear it. Meantime I swear, on his head," hand motioning to but not touching the child's bright hair, "not to hit him again. If he deserves it, I'll tell you and you can decide...I mean that, that if, uhh God—"

"Assuming I am willing to assume some responsibility for him," she interrupts coolly.

The man gazes into the fire.

"Yes."

"I sort of hoped," he adds, and falls silent again. (238)

Kerewin's fondness for Simon and Joe results in reluctant acceptance of "[s]ay a smidgen of responsibility, a scantling, a scruple of responsibility" (238). However, Joe's reliance on her troubles Kerewin:

I [Kerewin] bethought you [Joe] grim and forty, but now I doubt you're much older than me. Maybe not as old as me.

The lines on his face seem drawn by an inward corroding bitterness, not age. A carelessness of life, an abandonment, death of wife and death of him, she thinks, as her answering smile begins. (63)

The new information illuminates Joe's dependence on Hana. Hulme's narration stresses that "death of wife and death of [Joe]" are inextricably linked by neglecting use of any divisive punctuation such as a comma or parenthetical separation of "and death of him." This structure further supports the idea of Joe's dependence on Hana by contributing to the quick rhythm of Kerewin's internal monologue. The couple becomes a single item in a list rather than multiple items with discrete identities.

Kerewin's cognizance of this leads her to try and maintain some measure of distance between herself, Joe, and Simon, but it is not enough. The loss of Hana and Timote, Joe's infant son, is *not* the true cause of Joe's "inward corroding bitterness." The bitterness comes from the same insecurities Joe has harbored since childhood; Hana and Timote's deaths only deprive Joe of his pretend stability yet again. Joe effectively attempts to resolve his lack of a personal moral framework by adopting Kerewin's. However, this demands ignorance of her basic human fallibility. Both Kerewin and Joe have the same dysfunctional impulse toward physical violence. Furthermore, Kerewin continually refuses to fulfill the convention Joe is desperate for. She is uninterested in sex and has no desire to become Joe's wife.

Kerewin's resistance leaves Joe to his own devices and he continues the abusive pattern of his relationship with Simon. Though Seymour claims that "Joe is outside societal norms in part because he is Maori, but specifically because he has been so damaged by his personal history that he has become a child abuser," he actually abuses Simon out of anger caused by a desire to fulfill social norms (127). Joe's development is arrested at the same

point it has been since childhood because Joe never evolved to embrace a different idea of right and wrong than what his grandparents showed him. Rather than connecting, Joe and Simon's personal spirals of development are stunted. Neither is able to understand why the other acts the way he does, leaving them doomed to languish in the harmful status quo they have established.

Unlike Joe, Simon does not believe in ethical courses of action because he does not feel bound to reflect his morals in his actions. Hulme offers little detail of Simon's past, but Joe once calls Simon "jetsam" (*The Bone People* 63). Though Kerewin notices "[t]he deep lines round [Joe's] mouth are charmed into emphasis for his smile" as he speaks, "his eyes glint, belying the callousness of the flippancy" (63). When directly addressed by Joe after this comment, "Simon smiles a bland smile that somehow makes his face seem empty" (63). Both men are discomfited by the reminiscence, but Simon's subdued response exposes his reluctance to perform the lighthearted reply Joe's sardonic comment demands. Simon relents to promote harmony. The tense moment passes quickly, yet, in it, Hulme begins to illuminate the critical divide between Joe and Simon's moral frameworks that breeds later conflict.

Simon's worldview is structured by an acute fear of abandonment. The calculated indifference Simon displays when slighted by Joe contrasts deeply with the desperation Hulme stresses desperation while Joe relates his knowledge of the child's past to Kerewin. When Joe found Simon, the boy "[clung] like a leach to [Joe's] hand all the time he could" (106). Though "[s]cared as hell," Simon's attachment forced Joe to "[stay] the night with him, because [Simon] was upset whenever [Joe] stopped holding his hand" (106). Hulme subverts the idea that this could be typical behavior of a frightened young child by providing Simon's perspective of the shipwreck in *The Bone People's* prologue.

Simon's recollection of the moments before the wreck is marked by terror: "In the beginning, it was darkness, and more fear, and a howling wind across the sea" (5). The phrase "more fear" suggests that fright is a foundational element of Simon's life although he is approximately 3 years old. He is also struck by "[t]he voice. The nightmare voice. The vivid haunting terrible voice, that seemed to murmur endearments all the while the hands skillfully and cruelly hurt him" (5). Lack of identity reinforces the voice's spectral quality, amplifying the horror of Simon's situation. Simon demonstrates possession of a great capacity for forgiveness when Joe or Kerewin treat him unkindly. Therefore, his inability to ascribe anything but fear to life with the shipwrecked couple implies severe neglect, at best, and constant abuse.

Despite being victimized by these caretakers, Simon's greatest fear centers on the possibility of abandonment:

It is happening again, and like the time before, there is nothing he can do to stop it. It will take away the new people, it will break him, it will start all over again. He cannot change it. And worst of all, he knows in an inchoate way that the greatest terror is yet to come. (5)

Together, "new people" and "[i]t is happening again" suggest that Simon's biological family abandoned him. Joe later confirms this when he tells Kerewin the people travelling with Simon were "definitely not his parents" according to analysis of "blood groups" (107).

Moreover, the passage's ambiguity strategically aligns Simon and the reader. Hulme's insistent repetition of "it" creates a frantic rhythm that underscores Simon's anxiety, and the ambiguity of "it" deprives the reader of information outside of what Simon observes. Simon is left at the mercy of an unnamed force made more menacing by the harsh sounds in

Hulme's language, like the monosyllabic "take" and "break." Both the reader and Simon are left without agency. The identification fosters empathy, allowing Hulme to expose what Simon truly fears: change.

Via Simon's perspective and Joe's conversation with Kerewin, Hulme shows that Simon's life has been defined by suffering. He has been transferred from a careless heroin-addict father to another careless drug smuggling couple who "murmur endearments" yet readily think "Why not leave [Simon]?" when faced with disaster (*The Bone People* 5). In this context, it is clear that Simon clings to Joe out of a need for stability.

Though Simon readily accepts Joe as a source of comfort in the hospital, adoption does not resolve psychological problems that have resulted from earlier trauma. Hospitalization, a radio broadcast concerning a shark attack, Citroen cars, and flames trigger intense negative responses from Simon. He is theoretically capable of speech, "[b]ut if he vocalizes, he throws up, and violently" (*The Bone People* 206). Even when Joe and Hana have "looked after him for over a year," their struggle to temporarily separate Simon from his beloved beads results in his being "too frightened of [them] to trust [them] for a while" (108).

Joe and Hana effectively serve as vehicles for Simon to maintain his life's established trajectory. The two are more kind and loving than Simon's previous guardians, but incidents of mistreatment and difficulty dealing with Simon's peculiar behavior persist. When Hana and Timote's deaths destabilize Joe, the overwhelming need for stability causes Simon's acceptance of his own physical abuse.

Simon is always anticipating the straw that breaks the camel's back. His loyalty is born out of the terror of being left alone. Though Joe's beatings are nightmarish, Simon favors the security of sameness to safety and potential happiness. In tolerating Joe's physical

abuse and remaining loyal to his father, Simon maintains a sense of agency. He can do what he pleases and knows that as long as he is willing to suffer the consequences he has assurance of love. Change is the enemy rather than pain, so Simon adapts. Violence and love were already aligned in Simon's mind because of earlier experiences. Simon would then understand Joe and Hana's kindness as an exception to the rule and adjust without extreme difficulty to the return of the paradigm established before he met Joe.

Stephen Fox's article "Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*: The Problem of Beneficial Child Abuse" misattributes Joe's violence to Simon's misbehavior. Fox's assertion that "[Simon] manages to maneuver other people by using his body" is partially true, but falsely positions Simon as a masterful manipulator. Though he is only about 3 years old when Joe and Hana informally adopt him, Simon already has an established frame of reference in which love and violence are conflated. Child abuse has always shaped Simon's frame of reference and, as such, it is unreasonable to expect Simon to reject violence. Simon cleverly instigates anger in Joe and Kerewin for calculated purposes, but he cannot be entirely culpable for his abuse when it is all he has ever known. Simon is a child whose life has left him with the understanding that maintenance of a status quo is more important than happiness.

Simon's spiral is stunted by his childhood so he does what he must to survive with some semblance of security. He is amenable to Joe's abuse because the guilt it creates in Joe keeps him obligated to Simon. There is no real incentive for Joe to change his tactics for dealing with Simon's misbehavior. However, this does not validate Leanne Zainer's concern in *Enduring Violence: Representation and Response in Contemporary Fiction*. Zainer writes,

Violence is also shown to be endurable because it is associated with—is considered a part of—love, which is perhaps the most disturbing and uncritiqued view in the novel. Simon sounds like many women explaining why they tolerate domestic abuse: ‘home is Joe, Joe of the hard hands but sweet love. Joe who can comfort. Joe who takes care. The strong man, the man who cries with him’ [...] Not surprisingly, Simon wants to be home rather than in a hospital cared for by strangers with ‘impersonally gentle hands’ [...] The message Simon—and readers—do not get is that gentle hands need not be impersonal, that love need not be accompanied by harshness. (Zainer 102)

Father and son see no need to understand why the other acts the way he does, but this lack of communication keeps Joe restricted to his own perspective and is obviously unhealthy.

Hulme illustrates this via the spiral: Joe’s stunted development makes him use violence to control Simon like his grandparents did during his childhood.

Joe harbors the dangerous conviction that control is a function of love. He tells Kerewin, “I don’t think she [Joe’s grandmother] ever wanted me for myself, just to show my father who was boss” (278). Joe grew up a glorified pawn. He was treated with inconsistent compassion, producing a pathological need for established ideology, and raised by demanding figures, causing him to look outwards for said ideology. Together, these conditions have convinced Joe that to love someone is to impose one’s own values onto them.

Joe imposes his values onto Simon via physicality because his body was the stage for a philosophical argument between his grandmother and grandfather. “[W]hen [Joe] was seven or so, [he] came down with something like polio” and suffered as a result of his grandparents’ dueling medical philosophies (279). Joe’s grandmother “was a great one for

traditional medicine and avoiding Pakeha doctors” (279). She believed “the old ways and the old treatments were best, even for new diseases” (279). The psychologically scarring experience was made worse because Joe’s physical body was his grandparents’ battleground. He could not even walk without help and was thereby completely at their mercy.

The corporeal element to their philosophical battle taught Joe that the body is the natural site for enforcing ideological control. In Joe and Simon’s case, the need for control is even more pressing because of their undeniable physical difference. There is no base sameness to build off of. Their relationship must be constructed firmly inside since it cannot be changed outside.

When Luce relates gossip to taunt Joe in a scene at a popular bar, he tells his cousin “I’ve [Luce has] only been here two days, and already I’ve heard the most *fascinating* things...Sharon told me a little tale yesterday, for instance. The dear saw sweet Simon over at you know who’s...following in his father’s, well maybe *not* footsteps but you’ll gather my meaning hmm?” (164)

Though Luce refuses to explicate the nonspecific perversion implied by his juxtaposition of Simon’s “sweet[ness]” with “his father’s...footsteps,” the insinuation in a popular community bar is enough to rattle Joe. Luce couches his teasing in the language of childlike wonder, using words like “*fascinating*” and calling the news “a little tale,” but his exaggerated display of innocence suggests the gossip is significant. The diction, however, equates the information with fiction, reducing its importance and thereby mocking Joe’s wariness. After alarming Joe, Luce deepens his cousin’s fury by identifying “you know who” as elderly pedophile Binny Daniels.

Hulme elucidates the source of Joe's anger in his reactionary interrogation of Daniels. Daniels tells Joe that "[Simon] was scared about some money stole in school," and Joe wonders, "Christ, when's *that* going to surface?" before returning to the matter at hand (165). Joe's increasingly harsh language mirrors his escalating frustration at the thought. Simon becomes "the little bastard" and Daniels "this stinking old faggot" (165). The scene crucially indicates that Joe is more concerned with Simon's reputation than his livelihood. Joe is bothered by Daniels' knowledge of Simon's thievery rather than the action itself. Daniels is an outsider in the community, so his familiarity with Simon's misbehavior illustrates how widespread unfavorable perception of Simon is (165). Additionally, the label "little bastard" is part of a trend in the exchange. Rather than refer to Simon by name, Joe defines the child in relation to himself. This denies Simon autonomy. As Joe's child, Simon is an extension of Joe.

Hulme reinforces this idea when Joe justifies his subsequent violent punishment of Simon by insisting "[the beating] was for [Simon's] own good" because the child must "learn to do as [Joe] say[s]" (167). Joe's authority is compromised because "[he] didn't tell [Simon] not to go there" (168). In his defense, Joe warns Simon that "[he] could get really badly hurt" (168). Joe's cognizance of his hypocrisy does not stifle the violence because Joe believes that actions are external representations of who you are, but beating Simon does not change his behavior because he does not share Joe's belief that actions are meant to reflect morals.

Joe nevertheless continues abusing Simon as a subconscious plea for catharsis. Joe projects his own insecurities onto Simon. In a flashback, Luce taunts Joe by saying that Simon laughed at news that Joe was once engaged in a relationship with a young man named

Taki. Joe beats Simon for the slight, but notes that it was one of many occasions where “it doesn’t even seem like him [Joe is] hitting” (212). After drunkenly belting Simon, Joe is left

Muttering “Fallen boy, fallen boy,” and remembering the sadsweet months with Taki. I [Joe] knew it was wrong, I know it was unnatural, but he was gentle, he was kind, I loved him and it was good.

And why why why did he [Simon] have to *laugh* at it? (*The Bone People* 213)

Though Joe and Taki’s relationship occurred before Joe met Hana and adopted the goal of convention, he is at a psychological standstill. In *Reading Pakeha*, Christina Stachurski suggests that Joe’s violence is designed to purge his pedophilic desire for Simon, but Joe is actually compelled to retroactively punish his behavior because not doing so would threaten to reveal his divided self.

Joe and Simon have both been incredibly damaged by their personal histories. Joe is so fettered to his internal conflict that he projects it onto Simon and reenacts the same violence he was subjected to as a child. Simon is likewise fettered to the belief that suffering is a constant and change is an enemy. By compartmentalizing love and violence, criticism of *The Bone People* has effectively played the same role as its central father and son; it presents closed perspectives that misidentify the root of essential problems and thereby offer no solutions.

Hulme’s spiral is powerful because it reminds us that nothing exists in isolation. Instead, it offers coexistence wherein one is aware of their problems and capable of change through active development. Joe, Simon, and Kerewin are not healed at *The Bone People*’s end—that would be reductive, suggesting that it is possible to easily shirk a whole lifetime of messy, imperfect beliefs; to shed one’s old self and begin anew. What the spiral offers is the

recognition one needs to enact change. When her characters last come together, they hear “Ka ao, ka ao, ka awatea...” in Maori, or “it is dawn, it is dawn, it is daylight” in English (545). The refrain expresses a hope born of possibility. The sun will rise, yellow, like a sign along a winding road: proceed, with caution.

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