Maning's Little Tale

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In his revisionist study The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict (1986), James Belich proposes that the problem of European dominance of the historical record may contain the seeds of its own alleviation:

A considerable amount of Maori evidence was received and recorded by the British. It was not taken on board, but dismissed as a romantic curiosity and used to provide anecdotes rather than alternative interpretations. Thus a short history of the Northern War, written by the early settler F. E. Maning but largely based on Maori accounts, has frequently been reprinted and quite widely read. But it is usually dismissed as a fanciful invention of Maning's, and not taken very seriously as a document. Yet on several important issues it is more accurate than the received version.¹

'Embalmed evidence' of this kind, Belich continues, 'is like a package, which is preserved, passed on, and perhaps admired by the historiographically-dominant side, but which remains unopened. We can open it when we choose' (p. 334).

F. E. Maning was no ordinary early settler. Among other career highlights, he took up arms with his adopted Ngapuhi hapu on the side of the government when fighting erupted in 1845-46 and his History of the War in the North Against the Chief Heke (1862) appeared anonymously as one of the earliest published accounts of the conflict. This text is, as Belich suggests, a significant but less-than-straightforward historical source. Drawing on Maning's own experience and on

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information gathered from Hokianga Maori, the *History* adopts the perspective of a kupapa or ‘pro-government’ chief: it is written in the manner of an oral testimony which has been, as its subtitle avows, ‘Faithfully Translated by a “Pakeha Maori”’. This narrative method serves as the main vehicle for Maning’s satirical purpose and has produced considerable confusion, causing the text to be held at arm’s length by a number of subsequent commentators. When, for example, James Cowan remarks in *The New Zealand Wars: A History of the Maori Campaigns and the Pioneering Period* (1921-22) that some surviving accounts of the conflict ‘are hardly written with the impartial air of the historian’, Maning’s *History* is his almost-palpable referent.2

At the other extreme, Maning’s account has been viewed as a lens offering unmediated access to Maori perspectives of events of the 1840s; it is treated by Marshall Sahlins as ‘an enchanted account of the war’ which was ‘given to Maning by an anonymous chief of the Ngapuhi’.3 Several other commentators, too, have lacked an ear for Maning’s humour. Nigel Prickett, for instance, cites the *History* to support his own admiring contention that British soldiers were well-disciplined:

> Great, indeed, was the fear of the Maori when they heard of these soldiers, for all the pakeha agreed in saying that they would attack any one their chief ordered them to attack, no matter whether there was any just cause or not; that they would fight furiously till the last man was killed, and that nothing could make them run away.4

In some cases, deadpan readings echo through successive generations of commentary. Describing a sortie by defenders of Puketutu pa, Lindsay Buick uses Maning as his source:

> A number of the red tribe [i.e. Imperial soldiers] who had not joined in the attack on our pa came at our people with a horrible rush [...] yelling horribly, grinding
their teeth, and cursing [...] Alas, it was a fatal mistake. We never tried that move again. Once was quite enough. But it was wrong of the red tribe to curse us. We were doing no harm; we were merely fighting them.5

Buick takes liberties with Maning’s syntax but the sentiments themselves remain faithful; when this passage is reprinted in Tim Ryan and Bill Parham’s The Colonial New Zealand Wars (1986), Maning’s mocking tone is again on the wind.6

To date, Belich’s The New Zealand Wars has been the most influential revisionist analysis of frontier conflict in this country. Since Belich specifically refocuses critical attention on Maning’s History, this paper considers his treatment of the text and traces its impact on subsequent commentaries before offering a reading of its own. Unlike Belich’s study, the present discussion is interested in Maning’s History for literary as well as historiographical reasons; in examining the complexities of Maning’s narrative, it is not concerned to determine how fanciful an invention this narrative might be. It is also wary of Belich’s apparent confidence that there is an obvious and definitive way of unlocking any given text—a confidence at odds with his own argument that reading and interpretation are historically and culturally specific practices, and with his recognition that the History itself is particularly problematic. Like Belich’s study, though, the present discussion does take Maning’s History seriously as a source which has travelled through time in instructive ways, and it is interested in the possibility that the text might offer a platform for reconceptualising the northern conflict.

In a recent discussion of literary treatments of the New Zealand wars it has been argued that scholarly concentration on ‘exemplary foundational texts’ such as Maning’s has resulted both in the advancement of an ‘ahistoric’ structure of Pakeha identity and in the overlooking of lesser-known sources by other authors.7 It is not the primary intention of this paper to debate
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the politics of the local literary canon; while, as Franco Moretti has proposed, the development of models for producing more ‘rational’ literary histories is overdue, it also remains clear that not all texts experience—or necessarily should experience—the same kinds of afterlife. Writings like Maning’s—with their unstable narrative voices, fractured perspectives, marked fluctuations in tone, and self-conscious use of paratextual and metatextual devices—open view-shafts onto cross-cultural relations within the context of the nineteenth-century Pacific. Such writings are foundational precisely in that they explore and enact problems associated with European settlement, providing key contexts for future treatments of their subjects; as Ian Wedde has suggested, Maning’s work has, if anything, gained potency as a contemporary force. In recent decades, Old New Zealand (1863), the publication for which Maning is best known, has begun to sustain richly nuanced interpretations. By contrast, however, while the History has repeatedly been reprinted alongside Old New Zealand and while it has gained the attention of anthropologists and historians, it has attracted virtually no analysis from a literary quarter—despite being identified as the first work of lasting literary merit to be published in this country. This paper is interested in Maning’s History, then, because it complicates tidy notions of canonicity, and because its disrupting of conventional boundaries between history, fiction, ethnography and satire has the potential to shed light on what ‘living with history’ might mean in practice in a place like this.

Belich’s The New Zealand Wars declares its revisionist ambition in its opening sentence. This study emerged at a time when settler culture was actively beginning to reshape the signifying contours
of the past,\textsuperscript{14} and when changing responses to colonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand—ignited in part by highly publicised Maori protests over Treaty of Waitangi grievances—had begun to give the wars of the nineteenth century potent contemporary relevance. Defining his analysis in progressive terms against earlier histories, Belich undertakes to reappraise Maori success and to demonstrate that the conflicts inaugurated a proud tradition of indigenous resistance to colonisation. As a cornerstone for this project, he mobilises Maning in order to overturn conventional understandings of the outcome of the northern conflict, arguing that the rebel Ngapuhi forces, led by Hone Heke and Te Ruki Kawiti, won the war by defeating Colonel Henry Despard's Imperial troops in battles fought at Puketutu, Ohaeawai and Ruapekapeka.

Belich’s deployment of source material from Maning is, however, heavily circumscribed. Maning is identified on a number of occasions in the main body of Belich’s text as the author of acerbic sentiments expressed in personal correspondence. ‘The govt. have proclaimed peace to be established but a more ridiculous thing cannot be imagined’, scoffs Maning in a letter dating from March 1846:

\textit{[...]} anyone to read Despard's despatches would think that we had thrashed the natives soundly whereas they really have had the best of us on several occasions. I really begin to think that it is perhaps all a mistake about us beating the french at Waterloo I shall always for the rest of my life be cautious how I believe an account of a battle [...].\textsuperscript{15}

‘Here in the north there is no more hope of establishing the supremacy of the law than there is of flying in the air’, he warns in another from July 1864: ‘Without a successful war of absolute conquest there is no more sign of the natives having any inclination to submit to British law than there was twenty years ago not so much indeed’.\textsuperscript{16} Belich is not concerned to use
statements like these to trace changes in Maning’s attitudes over time or to consider how they may frame the History’s composition history. For Belich, Maning’s melodramatic scaremongering is useful because it extends in temporal terms the prospect of effective Maori military resistance to colonisation. While Maning’s sentiments are at once serious and cynically humorous, their meanings appear clear; these quotations can be lifted with ease from their source contexts and can be attributed safely to their author who is not—on these occasions—masked by a pseudonym or throwing his voice.17

Belich’s dealings with the History itself, however, are decidedly fraught. ‘This work was compiled and partly written by F. E. Maning’, Belich explains in his initial footnote to this text, ‘but in the present writer’s opinion it incorporated at least one genuine Maori account. It is cited hereafter as War in the North, without author’ (p. 341). Underestimating Maning’s role in crafting the narrative as he overestimates its truth value as a transcribed oral history, Belich becomes the next in a long line of commentators to attempt a ‘straight’ reading. The closest he comes to conveying the tone of the History is in citing the wry comment that Heke was ‘a man of many thoughts’ (p. 58), although he does not hear the chuckle which seems to accompany Maning’s judgment that Puketutu was a ‘very weak pa’ (p. 43). Both of these phrases are reproduced without hint of awareness that a larger pattern of irony may be operating in Maning’s text.

The New Zealand Wars draws on Maning’s History in ways more pervasive than inspection of its footnotes might suggest. Its ‘valueless pa’ theory (p. 64) comes directly from the History, as does its discussion of the quality of military leadership which approvingly offers the contrary to the contention made by Prickett, emphasising that although normally well-disciplined, Maori warriors reserved the right to withdraw support from a chief before or during battle.18 Belich’s description of the British army as a collection of ‘military tribes’ or ‘warrior guilds’ with their own ‘customs, emblems, and traditions’ (p. 23) also adopts
an extended metaphor developed in the *History*, although with no apparent recognition of the fact that Maning may be concerned to underscore the un-alikeness of Maori and European martial institutions. As Alex Calder has noted, too, much of Belich's wider 'revisionist' analysis is already implicit in Maning's description of the objectives and tactics of Heke and Kawiti.\(^{19}\) Formal footnotes show Maning's text being sifted for evidence to corroborate technical details. Belich is interested in movements of Maori leaders and in descriptions of Maori fortifications—especially those associated with the innovation of the pekerangi or inner palisade. He also uses the *History* to expose bias in the official record: Europeans did participate in the sack of Kororareka; wounded soldiers as well as dead ones may have been abandoned after battle; British assessments of the numbers of Maori participants and casualties were exaggerated.

Maning's *History* supplies the basis for Belich's discussion of tribal aspects of the northern war, too. Acknowledging the possibility that the conflict was 'three-sided' (p. 30) or that it contained 'a war within a war' (p. 35), Belich goes further than previous historians in distinguishing between the objectives of the rebel Ngapuhi chiefs and those of the Ngapuhi allies of the government led by Tamati Waka Nene. Recognition of the conflict's tribal dimension is supported by discussion of the 'forgotten' battle of Te Ahuahu—an engagement which Belich explains has been dismissed by most previous historians as a minor skirmish since it had no European participants. While Belich acknowledges this as a 'significant' and 'substantial' action and proposes that Maning's account of the episode—the only one which survives—'is by no means as fanciful as is sometimes assumed' (p. 45), he maintains that it is not possible to reconstruct the course of the action. It swiftly becomes clear, too, that his real interest in the campaigns of the north lies elsewhere.

Among other difficulties for Belich, sustained concentration on tribal aspects of the conflict would detract from his focus on

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indigenous resistance to European expansion. It might also risk destabilising his argument that—as the grand clash of the country’s two peoples—the wars of the nineteenth century were a nation-defining event, ‘as important to New Zealand as were the Civil Wars to England and the United States’ (p. 15). Te Ahuahu itself upsets the case made by Belich for the rebel chiefs’ victory streak in the north, since Heke lost this battle decisively. As a combat fought ‘in the style of the Musket Wars’ (p. 46), it also constitutes a retrogressive step in terms of the argument that the defeat of British troops in the northern war was a result ‘of the rapid and radical adaptation of the Maori military system’ (p. 70). Most likely for these reasons, the brief discussion of this action is nested within a chapter devoted to the battle of Ohaeawai. If Ohaeawai is, for Belich, ‘the most important engagement’ of the northern conflict (p. 45), the climax of his analysis nevertheless centres on the assertion that the British did not win the deciding battle of Ruapekapeka. This conclusion rests on the intimation in Maning’s History that Heke made a deliberate tactical withdrawal, luring the soldiers into a prepared ambush beyond the rear of the pa where they might be ‘as easily killed amongst the canes as if they were wood pigeons’.20 Belich cites at length the History’s account of the planning of this trap in order to drive home his point.

In the two and a half decades since it first appeared, The New Zealand Wars has attained official recognition and popular and commercial success. Its own historiographical dominance is suggested in the fact that it has sold tens of thousands of copies, won awards, spawned a high-rating television series, inspired the publication of new fictional treatments of its subject and field-guides to the battlefields, and served as the key source-text for displays at the Auckland War Memorial Museum and at Ruapekapeka. In critical terms, Belich’s stated achievements in dismantling myths, uncovering past interpretative deficiencies, challenging and overthrowing orthodox interpretations and producing alternative understandings of frontier conflict have
generally been applauded, and the fact that his study would occupy a significant place in this country’s historical canon has never been in doubt. ‘If ever a work was justifiably called “seminal” it is this one’, proclaimed one early review; this is ‘a sustained scholarly polemic which will literally make it necessary to date all writing on New Zealand race relations as either pre-Belich or post-Belich’, pronounced another.21

From the outset, however, the study has provoked grumblings on various methodological grounds. Commentators have noted that The New Zealand Wars overstates the flaws in earlier histories and that it is not as original as it claims to be. Cowan had already stressed the importance of the adaptations made to pa structures, says Keith Sinclair, and Cowan and Buick had both been concerned to acquire a better understanding of ‘the Maori side’ of the story.22 Further complaints include the fact that the study offers cartoon-like treatment of key figures, especially European ones; that it does not delineate carefully enough the social and economic background to the conflict; that it overstrains its case at times—to the point where its argument about the use of rhetorical strategies to achieve paper victories could be turned reflexively upon itself.23 The study has been faulted, too, for the fact that it misunderstands and misrepresents the importance to Maori of land and religion as factors in the conflict, that it virtually ignores Maori oral traditions, and that it advocates ‘merely adopting new approaches to old evidence’;24 it is generally said to show up the need for more far-reaching ethnographic interpretation.

These latter few criticisms are no doubt fair, although it could be added that Belich’s study does not recognise the potential of its selected source material such as that derived from Maning. The study is more similar to earlier histories, too, than has generally been acknowledged; that is to say, its revisionist aims are distinctly limited. Despite demonstrating awareness of the development of a dominant framework for dealing with frontier conflict in this country, it nevertheless perpetuates the terms of
this framework. As a ‘military history’ (pp. 11-12), The New Zealand Wars is constrained to reconstruct ‘the other side’\(^2\) of the story as the flipside to the European one: while it tilts the story of the northern war in favour of the rebel chiefs, it does not acknowledge that fundamentally different understandings of such a story may be produced by peoples whose worldviews do not neatly coincide, and is therefore unable to reach towards what Nicholas Thomas has termed different kinds of ‘historical imaginings’ altogether.\(^2\) The subversive potential of the study is also restricted by the fact that—like earlier publications such as Cowan’s—it is invested in demonstrating that episodes like the northern war marked a foundational moment in Maori-Pakeha relations, ‘a watershed in the history of the country as a whole’ (p. 15).

While Belich’s revisionism has had widespread influence on scholarly and popular approaches to this country’s history, it has fuelled discussion in two particular directions. Operating in a postcolonial and deconstructionist mode, one of these lines of discussion examines the wars as a touchstone for settler identity. Annabel Cooper, for example, has analysed how the television series based on Belich’s study has wrought changes in Pakeha collective memory, arguing that because it encourages Pakeha identification with Maori, the view ‘from behind the palisades’ has come to seem ‘peculiarly our own’.\(^2\) The other line of discussion, mounted from trenchantly conservative flanks, has produced a vigorous and sustained campaign against The New Zealand Wars. Refuting Belich’s trap theory as ‘myth-making’, military historian Christopher Pugsley has maintained that the vacating of the pa at Ruapekapeka signals the rebel chiefs’ defeat. Like Belich, Pugsley too uses Maning’s History as the key source for his claims: he insists that Ruapekapeka was not surrendered and that Kawiti ‘fought grimly to keep it’.\(^2\) These myths of the battle, both of which are derived from Maning’s History and neither of which is conclusively authorised by that text, have been hashed and re-hashed in the public domain, achieving

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This emphasis on untangling the ‘mystery’ of Ruapekapeka and on appraising Maori military genius and tactics in Eurocentric terms has effectively stalled the scope of the conversation. The present discussion takes the view that there may be more productive ways of focusing debate, more revealing uses of Maning.

Surviving correspondence indicates that Maning began writing his History in 1845, conceiving of it both as a corrective to convey the ‘many things worth telling’ which were being excluded from official accounts, and also as an ‘amusement’. The context of its publication in 1862—after fighting had broken out in Taranaki and when armed conflict in the Waikato seemed imminent—suggests that it also came to be intended as an intervention of sorts, ‘a warning to new settlers who complacently underestimated Maori capacity to wage war’. Maning explains in its preface:

This little tale is an endeavour to call back some shadows from the past: a picture of things which have left no record but this imperfect sketch. The old settlers of New Zealand—my fellow pioneers—will, I hope, recognize the likeness. To those who have more recently sought these shores, I hope it may be interesting. To all it is respectfully presented.32

Within the main body of the text, Maning’s narrator directs his story to an intended Pakeha ‘you’ and employs the personal pronoun ‘I’, although the most frequently-used pronoun is the inclusive ‘we’: the narrator speaks for a broader Ngapuhi constituency, too. The use of this perspective enables the exposing and deriding of British follies, failings and ‘superior’
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modes of understanding. At the same time, however, Maning seeks to poke fun at what he perceives as the ‘primitive’ or ‘inferior’ worldviews held by Maori. To achieve this dual purpose, he inverts one of the conventions of satire in which an urbane speaker remarks insightfully from a superior vantage point. The narrator of the History is set up as a naïf: serving to some extent as the butt of authorial humour, he is deliberately made to function as an unreliable source, to misunderstand and misrecognise aspects of British conduct and behaviour, to possess a shortfall of knowledge. The audience is, however, supposed to appreciate that he perceives considerably more than he professes to grasp, or to sense that his strings are being pulled by a puppeteer. When the narrator uses mock-deference in order to criticise the haphazard bombardment of Ohaeawai pa, for instance—‘[w]e Maori did not think the soldiers did wisely [...] but they may have had some reason for it which we could not understand, for we don’t know much about big guns’ (p. 56)—and when he undermines official accounts of the conflict with his seemingly innocent suggestion that Ohaeawai was occupied by the soldiers with ‘as much uproar as if the place had been taken by storm’ (p. 66), it’s as though Maning is aiming a sly wink directly at his implied reader.

One of the main effects—or perhaps side-effects—of Maning’s use of this narrative perspective is that it draws sympathy towards Maori points of view. Rather than simply destabilising the European military interpretative framework, his text steers its audience towards understandings which have been excluded from dominant modes of historicising. The History appears to have exceeded Maning’s intention in this regard and it becomes unclear whose mouthpiece the narrator really is. Authorial notes and a concluding section added after the central narrative was written index changes in Maning’s own attitudes over time. Introducing an explicitly hostile tone, it is these notes which have led subsequent commentators to presume that Maning simply transcribed an oral history. In some senses,
however, this supposition pinpoints a crossover within the text: attempting to rein in his narrator, Maning signals that his History has acquired a force of its own. The authorial notes are intended to re-distance the narrator from the imagined Pakeha audience, establishing a dynamic of ‘them’ (Maori) versus ‘us’ (Pakeha). Providing a counter-ethnographic perspective on the narrator, the notes call into question his dependability and alternately apologise for and caricature his ‘mistakes and misapprehensions’ (p. 34). Rather than effecting the kind of push-and-pull which Maning seems to desire, these comments serve, as Calder might argue, to re-inscribe the text’s ‘central obviousness’: that there are profound differences between Pakeha and Maori cultures. They can also be seen to heighten rather than to diminish the narrator’s achievements, serving as a marker that a text which was intended to operate on a satirical level has become, somewhere along the line, something else instead.

The narrator’s adopting of an ethnographic approach is one of the History’s key satirical techniques. Going further than merely parodying European modes of understanding other peoples, the narrator turns these conventions back on European culture itself: Pakeha are presented as an alien race, made strange through descriptions of their appearances, actions and so on. By de-naturalising European cultural norms in this way, the History is able to ridicule seemingly-obvious military customs such as the soldiers’ obedience to their commanders, their carrying of stretchers onto the battlefield, their shooting of wounded men and deserters, and their abandoning of the dead and injured. As a corollary to its strategies of reversal and distancing, the History posits Maori worldviews as familiar and normal. The facts that the soldiers are ‘quite ignorant and inexperienced in omens’ (pp. 27-8) and have no tohunga to provide spiritual guidance, for example, are said to astonish the narrator. For Maning’s satirical purpose, these superstitions are supposed to function as signs of Maori credulity, but in practice they supply a pervasive logic within the text. Supernatural explanations are repeatedly offered
for the outcomes of battles—the Ngakahi spirit, for example, is said to blow away rockets fired at Puketutu, while the tohunga’s chanting of karakia enables Heke to escape the fighting at Te Ahuahu by rendering his bearers invisible to the enemy—and as matters of course, the narrative presents descriptions of prophesies and visions, the rendering tapu of pa and warriors, the performing of victory songs and funeral rites, and the removal of flesh and scalps from corpses ‘for food’ (to reduce the mana of British) and for divination purposes (p. 65). Explanatory information is sometimes necessitated by the occasion—by the fact that the narrative is addressed to a Pakeha audience—but the History is by no means consistently self-conscious about its inclusion of these elements.

Throughout the story, the narrator strives to make sense of events with reference to the terms supplied by his own system of belief. Supposed to function in ways which show the distance between Maori and Pakeha and which register the limits of the narrator’s worldview, this technique again evades a straight satirical function, enacting a reversal of the dominant lexicon used to make sense of the conflict. At each stage of his story, the narrator assesses whether certain actions are tika or ‘just’ in accordance with Maori codes of behaviour. Discussing the soldiers’ firing of shots at Maori who were quietly (and ‘rightfully’) plundering Kororareka, he supposes they might have thought their chief was dying and fired a waipu or volley for his sake (p. 30), and he speculates that the British ‘have perhaps the same thought as some of us, who say that the best lamentation for a Toa is a blow struck against the enemy’ (p. 67). Because Maori figures are positioned at the forefront of the text, multiple perspectives are able to be registered. The narrator repeatedly uses an equivocating formulation (‘Some of us thought this; others said this; others thought that . . .’) to show Maori striving to make sense of Pakeha motives and actions. Again, this technique is supposed to support Maning’s satirical intent, providing for the lampooning of Maori ignorance and self-
interest—as well as internal squabbling and the canny hedging of bets—but again it pervades the text, allowing complexities associated with Ngapuhi motivations for joining the conflict, for instance, to be foregrounded.

More generally, too, the History testifies to intricate sets of relations—concreds, differences, rivalries, alliances and obligations—between various iwi and hapu groupings. While the narrator expresses disappointment at the end of the war that Heke’s people have not been starved and scattered, he and his allies are said to fear for the defenders during the bombardment of Puketutu and he describes as foolishness a young warrior’s proposal to eat the flesh of the dead at Te Ahuahu, making it clear that ‘we were all Ngapuhi together, and more or less related to each other’ (p. 50). This fluidity between the two sides is enacted in the History’s narrative perspective. Although supposedly aligned with Waka Nene, the narrator expresses admiration and sympathy for Heke and is able to cite speeches made by the defenders at Ohaeawai and Ruapekapeka, and he is pleased to be able to assess the full strength of the soldiers in the final battle (an authorial note pushes this point further, making it clear that the kupapa chiefs are sizing up British capabilities in case they should elect to switch sides).

Indeed, rather than presenting tribal aspects of the conflict as a complicating axis or a subplot, Maning’s History suggests these were—in large part—the main event. The narrator notes that daily fighting which occurred after the sack of Kororareka led Heke to express concern that too few men would be left to fight the soldiers, and he describes Te Ahuahu as ‘the greatest battle in the war’ (p. 49). Beginning with the death of Hauraki, Maning’s friend and brother-in-law, this climactic sequence reaches its own climax when Heke’s reaction to the death of Te Kahakaha, an esteemed elder, causes his downfall: ‘being mad with haste, and rage, and grief’, Heke is said to break the sacred rules of war by touching ‘the bloody spoils of the slain’ (p. 51). Satire falls away at this point and the surrounding prose is notable for its
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intense and evocative language. Heke’s heart is said to roll about ‘in the hollow of his breast’ when he hears of Te Kahakaha’s death (p. 50), while the tohunga is said to try in vain to bind a flowing river of deserting warriors.34 Unlike the subsequent descriptions of the fighting at Ohaeawai and Ruapekapeka, which are stilted and awkward and have confusion as their dominant motif, the action in and around Te Ahuahu is related with ease and pace. In this instance, all participants operate under a shared set of beliefs and protocols—they all know the rules, even as, in Heke’s case, they may transgress them.35

Fundamentally, then, Maning’s History calls into question the centrality of the soldiers to the northern conflict. Having established an expectation that a grand clash of cultures is to transpire, the History revises the role of the British in its narrative because they fail to fill the place which has been open to them; its point is not merely that these men are outmanoeuvred or outclassed, as Belich suggests. Unwittingly helping to trigger the key sequence of events at the story’s heart, the soldiers become dumb with the loss of their interpreter and eventually disappear, and the remainder of the fighting at Te Ahuahu is intentionally conducted in their absence; as the narrator explains, ‘Heke was very desirous to destroy Walker [Waka Nene] in one fight before the soldiers should return; and Walker, on his side, wished to show that he could fight Heke without the aid of the soldiers’ (p. 49). Woven into the fabric of Maning’s text and going beyond the bounds of satire, then, is the strong sense that the soldiers are irrelevant to the unfolding drama, or relevant only inasmuch as their presence exacerbates existing tensions and hampers what would otherwise be a straightforward tribal conflict. Not only are the soldiers unable to read signs—the absence of noise from a pa, for instance, which might indicate that it has been deserted—but they fail to understand the protocols of the engagements in which they participate. They are, if anything, a liability for the Ngapuhi who fight on their side: they make bad decisions which cost lives. One of the most telling features of the History’s

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narrative is its identification of heroes. Other than Lieutenant Philpotts, the naval officer whose scalp is considered desirable for divination purposes, Europeans remain largely anonymous. The distinguished participants in the conflict are from the ranks of the iwi and hapu on both sides, a dynamic made explicit in the account of Te Ahuahu where Waka Nene and Tao Nui line up against Heke and Te Kahakaha.

Maning's 'little tale', then, suggests that the northern war furnishes a story of indigenous agency and resistance considerably more potent than Belich's revisionism is able to admit. The authorial notes added to the History by Maning attempt to reverse the grain of the story and to re-inscribe the primacy of a European perspective. While these notes succeed in creating a screen or diversion, they remain largely powerless to overwrite or undo the ideas advanced in the main body of the text. Allowing settlers to glimpse what may in fact lie behind the palisades, and raising one of the most threatening spectres imaginable for a settler nation, the History offers the basis for an interpretation of the northern conflict which is unlikely ever to be permitted to become historiographically dominant since it subverts the possibility that any foundational myth of settlement might be fashioned from an episode of this kind. This story isn't really about you, it provocatively suggests to its intended Pakeha audience.36

Notes

2 James Cowan, *The New Zealand Wars: A History of the Maori Campaigns and the Pioneering Period, Volume I: 1845-64* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1922-23), p. v. Cowan later mentions Maning as the author of *Old New Zealand* and his account appears to draw on Maning’s *History* in sketching the battle of Te Ahuahu, in dismissing the rumour that British corpses were tortured with kauri gum, and in discussing the ‘skillfully laid ambush’ at Ruapekapeka (p. 85), among other things.


5 Lindsay Buick, *New Zealand’s First War, or the Rebellion of Hone Heke* (Wellington: W. A. G. Skinner, Government Printer, 1926), p. 118. Comparison of this passage with its source in the 1862, 1876, 1884, 1893 and 1906 editions of *Old New Zealand* reveals the extent to which Buick has brushed up Maning’s prose.


7 Philip Steer, ‘History (Never) Repeats: Pakeha Identity, Novels and the New Zealand Wars’, *JNZL*, 25 (2007), 114-37 (pp. 114-5, 117 and 131). It should be clarified that Maning’s *History* is not mentioned in this analysis; the text with which Steer takes issue is *Old New Zealand* (1863).

Herman Melville's *Typee* (1846), for example, is a comparably complex text emerging from this region and period, and one whose reception as 'a true history' suggests parallels with Maning's work. See Sophia Hawthorne, cited in Alex Calder, "The Thrice Mysterious Taboo": Melville's *Typee* and the Perception of Culture', *Representations*, 67 (Summer 1999), 27-43 (p. 27). Italics in the original.


Alex Calder, 'Introduction', p. 5. Limited discussion of Maning's *History* can be found in Calder, 'Introduction' and *The Settler's Plot*, E. H. McCormick, *Letters and Art in New Zealand* (Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1940) and *New Zealand Literature: A Survey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959); and David Colquhoun, *Pakeha-Maori: The Early Life and Times of F. E. Maning* (unpublished MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1984). Since the *History* has repeatedly been reprinted under the umbrella title of *Old New Zealand*, it is possible that citations have not always been clearly flagged.
The question of whether settler culture lives with or without history has been debated in a number of recent publications including Stephen Turner, ‘Settlement as Forgetting’, in Quicksands: Foundational Histories in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, ed. by Klaus Neumann, Nicholas Thomas and Hilary Ericksen (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1999) and Steer, ‘History (Never) Repeats’, and is part of a larger discussion about remembering and forgetting which finds early expression in Belich’s The New Zealand Wars.


While it may seem comparatively more straightforward, Maning’s correspondence is—like his major published writings—uneven in tone and sentiment, and it evinces shifts in his sympathies over time. See for example his communications with museum officers in The Centennial History of the Auckland Institute and Museum, ed. by A. W. B. Powell (Auckland: Auckland Institute and Museum, 1967).

On the ‘valueless pa’ theory, for instance, see Belich, The New Zealand Wars, pp. 24-5, 63-4 and 67-8; and Maning, Old New Zealand and Other Writings, pp. 56-7.

Old New Zealand and Other Writings, p. 81. Belich’s understanding of what he terms the ‘brilliant but risky’ approach taken by these chiefs in managing the British at Kororareka ‘as two matadors might deal with a bull’ (p. 43), for example, is no doubt underpinned by the History.


See for example Bronwen Douglas, [untitled review], *The Journal of Pacific Studies*, 24.1 (April 1989), 120-22; Norman Etherington, [untitled review], *Victorian Studies*, 31.4 (Summer 1988), 574-5; Mark Francis, [untitled review], *Political Science*, 40.2 (Dec 1988), 88-90; Syd Melbourne, [untitled review], *Landfall*, 41.3 (Sept 1987), 355-8; and Sinclair [untitled review].


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30 Old New Zealand and Other Writings, p. 211.
31 Calder, The Settler's Plot, p. 75.
32 Maning, Old New Zealand and Other Writings, p. 18. Subsequent references appear in brackets in the text.
33 Calder, 'Introduction', p. 10.
34 The limited commentary that exists on Maning's prose style in the central passages of the History has been divided: McCormick praises the effect as being 'reminiscent of the best prose translations of Homer' (Letters and Art in New Zealand, p.84), while Colquhoun suggests that in its sentimental presentation it draws heavily on Victorian literary conventions (Pakeha Maori, p. 193). Colquhoun does make it clear, however, that the episode reflects the emotion felt by Maning at the death of Hauraki.
35 The suggestion made by the younger warriors that they should eat the flesh of the dead 'raw at once' (p. 50) is the single exception, but this is swiftly brushed aside by the narrator as youthful exuberance.
36 Author's note: I would like to acknowledge with grateful thanks the Kate Edger Educational Charitable Trust, whose support—in the form of a Dame Joan Metge Postdoctoral Award—made possible the completion of this paper. Thanks also to Alex Calder, who offered helpful comments on an early draft of aspects of the argument developed here.