

A BREAD-AND-BUTTER NOTE
for Layne and Miri, Rotorua, New Zealand

I. "Welcome"

Miriama minced
and marshalled crisp criticism
at New Zealand's state of welfare and weather
(exonerating the state of New Zealand wit),
quipped and baited,
skirted and waited.

Miriama sidled,
sliding up her brows
(painted and plucked,
no doubt,
at the dressing table mirror
of her sophisticated Sydney flat),
sizing me up—

Then, as predictably as she had returned
to raise her children in her childhood home,
asked how I liked—
then insisted I keep the small
wood figure of a Maori chief.

II. The Visit

Geysers, rainbow deposits of lime, model Maori *pa*:
Warding off New Zealand winter
in the cape your grandma knitted,
you gave me Whaka's wonder.

You even explained how your mother
(knowing instinctive respect
would never wiggle you too near an edge)
planted you,
delighted and indulged,
beside the bubbling pools of boiling mud
(the best babysitter you ever had)
and left—to shepherd tourists
through this curious reserve.

Really, even though the kiwi
hid in the simulated nighttime of his cage
most effectively
(you'd have been the first to point him out),
could I complain?

It's one thing
to visit Whaka with a guide,
and quite another,
genial Miriama,
to walk its steaming pathways
with a friend.

III. Settlers

Shaking a warm Tahitian lagoon,
Te Arawa embarked,
and under three sails and the Southern Cross
knifed swelled souther seas
to this island of winters
which, generations later,
still make Miriama cringe.

But finding this volcanic plateau,
they stayed,
built *pas* and remembered
(while thawing in thermal pools)
the cool enticement of Tahiti's waterfalls.

And they multiplied,
bequeathing down the years
title to memories and mysteries
and this
last-of-a-series
ancestral home.

Even now Whaka belongs
to the Rotorua Maori,
Miriama's mother and myriad aunts,
light-skinned daughters of settlers,
Arawa aristocrats.

So let he tell
of opened windows in her Sydney flat,
of the Opera House— and efficiency;
let her, flip immigrant's kid,
cut and contest
the wisdom of her ancestral canoe—

She's back.
To the matriarchy.
Babysitting by the boiling mud
heirs of the *Arawa*—
multiplying on a volcanic plateau.
She's a Maori.

—KAREN MARGUERITE MOLONEY

NOTES

1. A bread-and-butter note is written by way of thanks for hospitality.
2. A *pa* is a fortified village.
3. Whakarearewa, or Whaka, is a Maori settlement and geothermal reserve less than 1.5 kilometers south of Rotorua on North Island.
4. *Te Arawa*, or "The Shark," is the name of the sailing canoe which, roughly six hundred years ago, carried from Tahiti to New Zealand the ancestors of the Rotorua tribes named after her.
5. The present-day *Arawa* are lighter-skinned than other Maoris, not, as might be inferred, from intermarriage with Caucasians, but because their pioneering ancestors were lighter-skinned than other early settlers.