

# Moeraki Hillside

by Keri Hulme



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# MOERAKI HILLSIDE

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a story & a resource

KERI HULME



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*for Keri's irāmutu —*

*Barry, Patrick, Maryann, Matthew, William, Anna, Harry*



*Onika, Jak, Larkin, Mika, Jordan, Taylor, Ben, Vittoria, Luigi,  
Penny*



*for all our irāmutu*

*with much love*

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## WHAT'S THE STORY?

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Keri in school uniform. Photo Hulme whānau.

**Keri Hulme** 1947–2021, Ngāi Tahu, Kāti Mamoe, Orkney, Lancashire, was a writer, artist and fisher, and Aotearoa's first winner of the prestigious Booker Prize, for her novel *the bone people*. She started to write *the bone people* when she was 18.

Among her archives, Keri's whānau found two stories she wrote at high school. One, 'Moeraki Hillside', is her response when asked to write an essay about any imaginary conversation. She was 13/14 and in Form 4, now Year 10.

'Moeraki Hillside' is handwritten, in an Aranui High School exercise book. The other story, 'Moeraki Hilltop', was published in *Pegasus*, the school magazine, when Keri was 16, in Form 6A, now Year 13. Both stories explore themes that she developed further in *the bone people*.

Keri's school books have been gifted to Haeata Community Campus, built on Aranui's site when the school was razed after the Ōtautahi Christchurch earthquakes.



Keri on a Moeraki beach, with hillsides behind her. Photo Hulme whānau.

In 'Moeraki Hillside' Keri imagines a conversation between a long-ago grandfather and grandson, with herself as observer. We invite you to interpret and respond to her essay, to fulfill the customary expectation that we engage actively with this kind of formal conversation.

In her essay, kōtiro Keri's ghostly speech-making looks critically at what ngā rā o mua — our history's voices and experiences — can tell us about the present, as we walk backwards into the future. It's a serious matter. But, as Keri demonstrates, it's also an opportunity to play.

Stand beside Keri on a Moeraki hilltop, listen to her kēhua, see a splintering gatepost, feel her vibe. And then talk back to her, using your imagination, your voice, your device and your art materials.

Here's 'Moeraki Hillside', transcribed exactly as Keri wrote it. It's followed by some prompts for you; we hope they will encourage you to speak up, in whatever medium suits you best. Then you'll see images of Keri's handwritten essay and some information about Keri, Moeraki and ghosts. At the end, you'll find a list of further reading, watching and listening.



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## MOERAKI HILLSIDE

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Robin Morrison (circa 1989). *Aroused Surf. Tutakabikura*. Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira. PH-1992-5-RM-6001.

I was sitting, dreaming, on the top of the hill. Below was the beach by whose edge, black rocks glistened in the surf. Gulls were screaming overhead and I could see the waves breaking over the reef, sending their spray high into the air.

A wind was blowing; the slight, cold sea-wind that gives a person a feeling of indescribable excitement that uplifts him and awakens his senses, the shivery wind of premonition.

The hilltop was sandy and covered with yellow-brown tussock. Apart from me, a solitary watcher on the sea, and the birds, it was bare.

It was a lovely place, that hilltop, and yet, it had not always been. A pa had once stood there, strong and defiant against the might of the wind and of the Maori men who sought to conquer it. Fortified against all antagonists, the pa had sheltered those who lived within it, until the Pakeha came. With his guns he attacked it from the sea, had destroyed it, it and most of the occupants.

Under the blows of the multiple forces of destruction, time, weather and the fire caused by the white man's guns, the pa had vanished, no trace of it remained.

I was thinking, as I sat, of what it might have looked like, before the Pakeha came. Tall and proud, like the people who built it, commanding the top of the hillside. I felt ashamed that men of my race had destroyed it because they wished to build their own pa there — a whaling station to make money, and more money, for them.

Suddenly, startlingly, they appeared. Two Maori folk, toiling up the hillside; men, dressed in feather cloaks and dyed-flax piu-piu. The wind bore their voices, faintly, to me.

“Aue! Aue! Tane is fallen and with him falls our people.”

“Our people yet stand-upright. When Tane falls he brings down before him, other, lesser folk. The Pakeha still stands. The Maori is not beaten.”

They had reached the brow of the hill, now. One of them was an elderly man, his hair, silver-grey and the tattooing blue on his lips and cheeks. The other was a proud young toa, with his dark hair in the warrior’s knot.

They stopped on the summit. Although I was but ten yards away, they did not seem to see me.

“Aue!” lamented the old man, again. “The pa has fallen! Moeraki-pa-manu will never rise again. The guns of the Pakeha have brought ruin to our people. We perish. His ship stands without the reef, his toa land, soon.” He pointed to east of the reef, gesturing to the younger man, to show him where the white man’s warriors would land. I looked but could see nothing.

The young man inclined his head to agree with his elder’s statement.

“Aue!” went on the elderly man. “Their Gods of War are stronger than ours. Tane did not heed when the tohunga prayed. A ball from the Pakeha ship struck the gatepost where he stood and then, he was as the dust. We are as this splintered gatepost, we the Maori people. The white man is as a young, virile tree. The Pakeha takes our land from us. We are nothing against his guns. Aue!”

The young man looked at the old man.

“Tepi, my grandfather,” he said. “Tane created the trees. Tane can bring down the trees, even the young virile ones. Our people are not destroyed. True, our pa is burnt, our Rangitera and our tohunga, our warriors and our wives are dead. But we, the Maori, have other pas. Those pas have their chief and their tohunga, warriors and women. The Pakeha can destroy one tribe — the others rise against him. We can kill the Pakeha; we can burn houses. The Maori will not fall before the Pakeha!”

“Young men are fools. They do not heed their elders’ wisdom. Listen my grandson, the Pakeha are stronger than us. He has guns and we have none. Must we destroy ourselves by fighting him?”

“What else can we do? Are we ashamed of our ancestors that we bring home no heads to honour them?”

The old man gestured.

“Listen,” he said once more, patiently, evenly. “A toa does not win everything by fighting. It is not beneath a toa’s dignity to catch pigeons but he does not catch pigeons by charging at them with his mere and saying, ‘Ho, my enemy. I kill you!’ No, he uses cunning. A warrior does not fight a woman to win her. So it must be with the Pakeha. He is stronger than us at present, with guns and ships. We must wait till we are stronger than him. We must settle old quarrels with him, come to honorable terms with him, be brothers to him until the time comes. We must wait, to conquer him.”

“Ae, the old men know what they talk of. We will wait in

cunning until we are strong enough and then we will kill the Pakeha as he has killed my father, and brother and mother this day. We kill him, kill him, kill him!" The pounamu heitiki on its flaxen cord about the young man's neck, shook with the passion of his words. The old man looked at the younger's hate-contorted face.

"Yet, we may grow to love the white man as brother to brother. Utu leads to more utu and even young men grow tired of bloodshed." He looked over the bare hillsides.

"The ruins of our pa lie before us. We go forward to my sister's pas. It is a long journey". And he turned and retraced his steps down the hillside. The young man looked after him.

"Ae!" he said and only I and the wind and the circling birds heard what he said. "It is true, bloodshed leads to more bloodshed. Yet, one cannot forget the burning of his home and the killing of his kin. The Pakeha has caused great bitterness by his greed. Maybe our people will learn to love him, as brother to brother. Maybe we will not. It is as the grandfather says, we must wait and see if he changes his ways towards us. If he does not, no matter who counsels us not to, we will fight on forever and ever. Ake! Ake! Ake!"

He too, turned and then followed his grandfather down the hill. They both vanished before they reached the bottom.

And I was left to wonder, alone, but for the birds and the sea, on top of the Moeraki hill.



Robin Morrison (circa 1989). *Tutakahikura, (the Midden Mine, Barracouta Bay)*. Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira. PH-1992-5-RM-5092.

[Teacher, in red pen] 18 [2/20] Introduction seemed to be too long — but the length of your essay justified it. Thoughtful, mature work and you have used Maori words surprisingly accurately.

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## PROMPTS

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Moeraki 1800s. Te Papa: unknown photographer (MA\_I250386).

## Questions

*Title*

How well does the title fit the essay? What kind of story did you expect?

*Themes*

An essay usually examines and evaluates a topic or issue. What issue or issues Keri is examining here? What does she suggest, or conclude?

*Imaginary conversations*

Imaginary conversations are devices used in fiction and poetry to discuss ideas. What do they add to non-fiction?

How realistic does this imagined conversation feel? What features of the story lend it authenticity?

Keri imagines herself as the unseen watcher, eavesdropper and listener to the conversation between grandfather and grandson. What does her perspective as imaginary participant add to the moment or meaning of the exchange?

What does the conversation between grandfather and grandson add to Keri's evaluation of the issue or issues she's examining?

*Language*

Note the language techniques Keri uses: the metaphors she uses for Maori ('splintered gatepost') and Pakeha ('virile young tree') ('white man') What do they convey?

How effective is the dialogue/direct speech? Is it a good way to evoke the past and the thoughts and feelings that the old man and the young warrior might have



had at that time? Why didn't Keri include more characters?

### **Your Response**

Who are these kēhua, ghosts?

What historical period do they seem to come from? What are your feelings about them? Do they feel close? Familiar? Are they scary? What do you think about them? What do you want to say to them?

What do you think and feel about young Keri, as the imaginary listener and watcher, and as the writer? What do you want to say to her?

When you encounter these ghosts, and the ghost of Keri the writer, what do your own ghosts want to say to Keri? To her ghosts? Why?

What's the best medium for your response to Keri? Why? Among the options: essay, whaikōrero, karanga, haka, pūrākau, short story, flash fiction, waiata, song, poem, Tiktok, tweet thread, imaginary texted conversation, instagram post, sculpture, video clip, drawing — abstract, animation, comic, landscape, portrait, storyboard, tattoo design— a flag, a painted or photographed image, a quilt, screenplay, a performance, essay, letter, email, postcard.

Do you want to work alone, or collaborate with others?

#kerihulmeandme

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# THE HANDWRITTEN ESSAY

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NAME KERRY A. HULME

FORM V-F

SUBJECT ESSAY



ARDUA NON VERITI

ARANUI  
HIGH SCHOOL

Essay Note

"Any Languid Conversation"

"Aoraki Hillside"

I was sitting, dreaming, on the top of the hill. Below was the beach by whose edge, black rocks glistened in the surf. Spalls were scattering overhead and I could see the waves breaking over the reef, sending their spray high into the air.

A wind was blowing; the slight, cold sea wind that gives a person a feeling of indescribable existence, that splits him and warms his veins, the stinging wind of preservation.

The hill-top was sandy and covered with yellow, brown tussock. Apart from me, a solitary watcher on the sea and the birds, it was bare.

It was a lonely place, that hill-top, and yet, it had not always been. A pa had once stood there, strong and defiant against the might of the wind and of the Maori warriors who sought to conquer it. Fortified against all antagonists, the pa had sheltered those who lived within it, until the Pakeha came. With his guns he attacked it from the sea, had destroyed it, it and most of its occupants.

Under the blows of the multiple forces of destruction, time, weather and the fire caused by the white man's guns, the pa had vanished, no trace of it remained.

I was thinking, as I sat, of what it might have looked like, before the Pakeha came. Tall and proud, like the people who

hill, <sup>it</sup> ~~had~~ <sup>must have</sup> been it, crowning the top of the hillside. I felt ashamed that men of my race had destroyed it, because they wished to build their own for them - a whaling station, to make money, and more money, for them.

Suddenly, startlingly, they appeared. Two Maori folk, toiling up the hillside; men, dressed in feather cloaks and kyi-hlas pin-pin. The wind bore their voices, faintly, to me.

"Aue! Aue! Tane is fallen and with him falls our people."

"Our people get stand-upright. When Tane falls he brings down before him, other, lesser folk. The Pakeha still stands. The Maori is not beaten."

They had reached the brow of the hill now. One of them was an elderly man, his hair, silver grey and <sup>the</sup> ~~his~~ tattooing blue on his lips and cheeks. The other was a broad young one, with his dark hair in the warrior's knot.

They stopped on the summit. Although I was but ten yards away, they did not seem to see me.

"Aue!" lamented the elder man, again. "The pa has fallen. Moeraki-pa-mau will never rise again. The gras of the Pakeha have brought ruin to our people. We perish. His ship stands without the reef, his toe lead, soon." He pointed to east of the reef, gesturing to the younger man, to show him where

the white man's warriors would lead. I looked but could see nothing.  
The young man inclined his head to agree with his elder's  
statement.

"Aue!" went on the elderly man. "Their gods of war are  
stronger than ours. Tene did not heed when the tohanga prayed. A  
ball of fire from the lakeka ship struck the gatepost when he stood and then  
he was as the dust. We are as the splintered gateposts left, we, the Maori  
people. The white man is as a young, virile tree. The lakeka takes  
our land from us. We are acting against his gods. Aue!"

The young man looked at the old man.

"Tepi, my grandfather," he said. "Tene created the trees. Tene  
could cut down the trees, even the young virile ones. Our  
people are not destroyed. Tene, our past is burnt, our kaupapa  
and our tohanga are, our warriors and our wives are dead. But we,  
the Maori, have the past. These trees have their heart and their tohanga,  
stems and roots. The lakeka can destroy the trees - the others rise  
against him. We can kill the lakeka; we can burn houses. The  
Maori will not fall before the lakeka!"

"Young man we fools. They do not heed their elder's  
warning." Tepi, my grandfather, the lakeka is stronger than us the  
he-gods and we have none. Must we destroy ourselves by fighting  
him?"

"What else do we do? Are we ashamed of our ancestors."

that we bring home no heads to know them?"

The old man gestured.

"Listen," he said once more, patiently, calmly. "A toa does not win everything by fighting. It is not beneath a toa's dignity to catch his enemies but he does not kill his enemies by charging at them with his mere and saying 'Ho, my enemy, I kill you!' He uses cunning. A warrior does not fight a moment to win his. So it must be with the Pakiaka. He is stronger than we at present, with his guns and ships. We must wait until we are stronger than him. We must entice old Gannell with us, come to honorable terms with him, be brother to him until the time comes. We must wait, to conquer him."

"Ah, the old man knows what they talk of. We will wait, in cunning, until we are strong enough and then we will kill the Pakiaka as he has killed my father and brother and another this day. We kill him, kill him, kill him!" The young man's face as his fists clenched about the young man's neck, shook with the passion of his words. The old man looked at the younger's face with a troubled face.

"Yet, we may grow to love the ~~the~~ man as brother to brother. The leaders move on and even young men grow tired of bloodshed." He looked over the bare hill-sides.

"The ruins of our people lie before me. We go forward to

my sister's has it is a long journey." And he turned and retraced his steps down the hillside. The young man looked after him.

"Ahe!" he said and only! and the wind and the circling birds heard what he said. "It is true, bloodshed leads to more bloodshed. Yet, one cannot forget the burning of his home and the killing of his kin. The Pakeha has learned great bitterness by his greed. Maybe our people will learn to love him, as brother does to brother. Maybe we will not. It is so the grandfather says, we must wait and see if he changes his ways towards us. If he does not, we rather ask councils as not to, we will fight on for ever and ever. Ahe! Ahe! Ahe!"

He too, turned and <sup>then</sup> followed his grandfather to the hill. They both reached before they reached the bottom.

And I was left to wander, alone, but for the birds and the sea, on top of the Muraaki hill.

(19)

of introduction seemed to be too long - but the length of your essay justified it.  
Thoughtful, native work and you used Maori words surprisingly accurately.

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## KERI, MOERAKI & GHOSTS

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Keri outside the whānau's Black Bach. Photo Hulme whānau.

Moeraki is a settlement on the east coast of Te Wai Pounamu, and throughout her life, Keri regularly stayed on a kaik' beach there, at her whānau's baches, sometimes for long periods.

In *Homeplaces*, Keri's rich collaboration with photogra-



pher Robin Morrison, she called Moeraki “my turangawaewae-ngakau, the standing place of my heart”<sup>1</sup> and wrote:

“ I have, one way or another, been here all my life. I am not often here, in the physical sense of occupying Moeraki-space and Moeraki-time, but I never leave it.”<sup>2</sup>

And that reality is reflected in her work. Her first collection of poetry was called *The Silences Between (Moeraki Conversations)*. At Moeraki she first dreamed of Simon, the child at the centre of *the bone people* — he was dancing on the beach; and a whole section of the book is set in Moeraki (as ‘Moerangi’).

Keri described Moeraki like this:

“ Moeraki, *is* —  
Moeraki means Place to Sleep (or Dream) by Day.

Moeraki was a complex of kaika and pa, and Moeraki is a fishing port. Moeraki is beaches and reefs, islands and volcanic dykes.

Moeraki is a motley collection of permanent homes and holiday baches (or cribs as Southern idiom has it), and Moeraki is an unmanned lighthouse, and manicured rolling hill farms.

Moeraki is sealife, and all its ghosts at night (indeed, it is the only place I know of where you can meet ghosts by day).

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1. Robin Morrison and Keri Hulme. *Homeplaces: 3 coasts of the South Island of New Zealand*. 1989. Auckland, Hodder & Stoughton, 64.

2. *Homeplaces*, 59.

Above all, Moeraki is people, from the remains in the ancient habitations and urupa and middens, to the lively family cribs.<sup>3</sup>

Some of those ghosts were very close. Keri wrote, in a typed note among her archives:

“ There is a beach, covered with gravel coloured gold and rust and apricot. There is an island, Maukiekie, and a twin-armed reef, Tikoraki. Rocks called the net-weights pin it down. There are our cribs on the beach, lamplit at night. There were bodies in the urupa behind the cribs, but they have slept to worn teeth and slivers of bone. Sometimes you feel the old ghosts come in from Khipuku [the urupa] at night, for warmth and company.

And the land itself contains its own ghostly presences:

“ The hills stand denuded of trees, but in the old days, the birds sang. Sometimes, on still nights, there are high wild cries as though some hills still remember. Why should they not cry? Once, they crewed the priest-ship Te Araiteuru; now they are desolate; to most, merely insensate ground, hard grazing for poor cattle. But all the streams have names, even Matuatiki who has dried up. And each rock, standing on tiptoe, the top of a suffocating pillar dreading high tide, knows when you call it.

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3. *Homeplaces*, 57.

In *Homeplaces*, Keri writes more about Moeraki's ghosts.

“ I joke that I grew up with ghosts for neighbours, but it is true in more ways than one. You become — not casual, but at *ease* early on with the idea that humans die, if there is a cemetery next door and the bones turn up on the beach...And, through that easiness with death-as-established-fact, you accept, from childhood on, the much less evidentially based idea that humans die and ghosts live on. Particularly when you live in an area that is full of — o dear, it sounds woolly-sided and pretentiously mystical to say ‘presences’, but that is what they are.

“ I am not a person who sees *kehua*...but there have been enough odd things happening over the years, and sufficient instances of my being aware of a — presence — for my joke about neighbourly ghosts to have a cloudy and uneasy side to it.

So I didn't do much more than mutter to myself when a friend complained mildly about the person who sat hunched up by the range fire muttering, most of the night. (I didn't see or hear anyone, the door was closed and only openable from our side and, no, that friend didn't drink or smoke at all.)

On another occasion, a visiting child said “those people must be cold eh because they just got sacks on”. She wasn't accused of lying. Instead those present checked for visitors and saw no sign of anyone. Keri concluded:

“ She’s an unimaginative kind of child and how could she know that the coarser kind of kakahu looked like sacks. And especially, how could she know that it wasn’t unusual for the people i nga wa o mua to decorate their faces, as she described, with rectilinear patterns of red dots? And tattoo with *straight* blue lines?<sup>4</sup>

Not far from the kaik’ and the family cribs there’s a beach called Tutakahikura:

“ It’s a haunted place, that beach. It is one of the few places in New Zealand that I would not visit after dark. And upon the hillside above it, near to the cemetery Uhumataitai, there is a place I wouldn’t visit even during the day.

I visit Tutakahikura every time I am at Moeraki. The place draws me again, and, despite vows and declarations not to go there, again. A beach full of whispers, a beach for the ghosts.<sup>5</sup>

It’s not hard to imagine Keri, aged 13, on that beach, on that hillside, imagining herself hearing voices, seeing ghosts?

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4. *Homeplaces*, 65.

5. *Homeplaces*, 118.



Moeraki beach. Photo Kate Salmons.

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## FURTHER READING, WATCHING, LISTENING

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Moeraki Point, by Burton Brothers circa 1880. Te Papa MA\_1681445.

Cushla Parekowhai and Marian Evans. 'Keri Hulme obituary'. 2022. *The Guardian*.

Gaylene Preston. *Kai Pūrākau The Storyteller* (video, 25 mins). 1987. Wellington, Gaylene Preston Productions.

Keri Hulme. *the bone people*. 1984. Wellington, Spiral.

Keri Hulme. *The Silences Between (Moeraki Conversations)*. 1982. Auckland, Auckland University Press/Oxford University Press.

*Keri Hulme: Our Kuru Pounamu*. 2023. Wellington, Spiral Collectives.

Keri reads her poem 'Trying to Appease Mother Earth'. 1982. Audio, 8 1/2mins.

Keri speaks about some of her childhood experiences at Moeraki in relation to her poem and art installation, 'Paua Shell Gods'. Wellington, Women's Gallery. 1980. Video, 10mins.

Robin Morrison and Keri Hulme. *Homeplaces: 3 coasts of the South Island of New*

*Zealand*. 1989. Auckland, Hodder & Stoughton. Words by Keri, photographs by Robin.



*Moeraki kaik' beach. Photo Kate Salmons.*

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&, most of all, our deep gratitude to Keri Hulme herself, for her ongoing rich-and-lively presence in Spiral's world; and to her whānau for their consistent, beautiful, āwhinatanga.





Vittoria at the beach. Photo Kate Salmons.

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## SPIRAL COLLECTIVES

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Poet Heather McPherson founded Spiral Collectives in 1975. Spiral, a registered charity, is a series of collectives, and we all work as volunteers. Today at Spiral we educate about women's storytelling practices and legacies, and awahi them with publications, exhibitions, events, moving image, websites and archives. And patience.

Almost all of our out-of-print publications are available to read and download at Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū.



