

Trauma and getting on in Kate Mulvany's *The Seed* and Helen Pearse-Otene's *Ka Mate, Ka Ora*

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Could there be such a thing as an ordinary kind of trauma: a trauma that circulates in the present moment? If we are to try and figure trauma in this way it is necessarily to expand upon the prevailing contemporary narratives that conceive of trauma as an event that is predicated on the extra-ordinary, outside of the ordinary, or routine, and thus, moves or removes the traumatised subject from sites or conditions of attachment. Broadly speaking, the subject of trauma theory is always isolated, even when trauma is thought to initiate collective spheres, such as those of Holocaust survivors or 9/11 witnesses. Subjectivity is characterised within the trauma paradigm by a disconnection either between the subject and the event or between the subject and their sense of 'self'. Yet, when reading Australian Kate Mulvany's *The Seed* (2008) and New Zealander Helen Pearse-Otene's play *Ka Mate-Ka Ora* (2008), two plays about the Vietnam War's legacy of intergenerational trauma, what comes to the fore is the staging of dependency. These plays, with their focus on bonds and demonstrations of how the entwined state of trauma and survival becomes a way or will to live, suggest an alternative view for trauma theory, one in which the affective experiences, dispersals and transmissions of trauma organise daily life. Thus, this essay at once rehearses the concerns of Mulvany and Pearse-Otene's plays, deploying an optic of connectivity to analyse the dramatic themes they set out, while augmenting the dominant understanding of the traumatic condition in an effort to consider its relational bearings.

This perspective upon connectivity promises a range of operations for thinking about the ways in which trauma carries across generations and is particularly fitting for the analysis of Australian Vietnam War literature by and about children of Vietnam War veterans. This literature, which has carved a small but significant space for itself within the genre of Australian Vietnam War literature (a genre that is in itself still growing) overwhelmingly takes as its subject the emotional bonds and repercussions of war that define the veteran's parent-child relationship. This focus alone sets the Vietnam War literature by second generation authors apart from fiction, film and theatre which regard the individual experience of the soldier or veteran as the single defining narrative of the war (Bevan, Pierce). Although Donna Coates points out in her 2005 essay on the literary figure of the Australian Vietnam veteran that many of these narratives do examine the psychological and psychic effects of war via descriptive facsimiles of the clinical diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), these representations, unlike those of their children and grand children, are often pathologically solipsistic. For example in Adib Khan's 2005 novel *Homecoming*, the poor mental health of the veteran character's son is finally understood by the veteran as being related to his own PTSD at the point when his son's life might be recovered only through such acknowledgement. An end point such as Khan's becomes the very centre of the literature by children of the Vietnam War. In addition to giving an account of war's unmerciful reverberations this literature, including the plays I choose to focus on here, illuminates trauma's surprising ability to generate intimacy and belonging.

The generational shift within the genre of Australian Vietnam War literature has sympathies with the paradigmatic shift in contemporary trauma theory. The emphasis on the connectivity of trauma that I argue is typical of the work by those subjects whose fathers fought in the

Vietnam War, or, who were otherwise displaced and left Vietnam as refugees, or both as in the case of the much celebrated writer Nam Le, is also evident in the work of theorists such Ann Cvetkovich and Lauren Berlant. Cvetkovich has described trauma as ‘a central category for looking at the intersections of emotional and social processes’ (18). While Berlant claims that the traumatic event is not only that which is exceptional but also that which lurks in the ordinary as a trauma or crisis that is better described as ‘systemic crisis’ or ‘crisis ordinariness’ (10). Since the work of both of these theorists is invested in how the subject exists and belongs to the political and affective commons, their figuring of trauma as a sensation, an event, a happening that can also take place *within* the subject, offers an important counter to conventional or traditional understandings of trauma.

The aporia that trauma is an incursion on the subject has been foundational to much thinking in the field of trauma theory, and this is, to a large degree, owing to the influence of Freud’s seminal text, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Freud posits two ideas that have proved most enduring to trauma studies: the figuring of the traumatic event as an external stimuli that has shattered the organisms ‘protective shield’; as well as the compulsive and further traumatising *returns* in the form of nightmares and flashbacks to the event (38-54). An important aspect (of which there are many and they lie beyond the scope of this essay) of Freud’s analysis of trauma is the subject’s delayed awareness of the event (13). That is, the traumatised subject is always understood as only having access to their own trauma after the crisis has passed; posing the question, what exactly traumatises: the event or its memory? Moreover, this formulation insists upon a perpetual distance between the subject and event. Central figures in the trauma theory boom of the 1990s psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman and literary theorist Cathy Caruth reiterate Freudian analysis by describing it in dialectic terms: on the one hand is the condition of trauma, on the other is the condition of survival, *the crisis of death over the crisis of life* (Caruth 7). Trauma is defined, in this reckoning, to the exclusion of all that pertains to living. When Judith Lewis Herman states that trauma overwhelms the ‘ordinary adaptions to life’, she is drawing a line between the ordinary and the exceptional that forecloses their entwinement (33). Not only is ordinary normal life in opposition to the condition of trauma, but survival and healing are states exclusive from trauma. Thus the therapeutic strategy for healing and survival, as advocated by Herman, is the development of a new self—as if the traumatized subject has been reborn (196). Implicated in this assessment are the binaries of normal and pathological, inside and out, and the rather unyielding prospect that ordinary life cannot withstand ongoing negotiations with what is traumatic.

In response to the discursive assumption that trauma is an exceptional state, this essay turns to texts in which subjects hold trauma and survival in a symbiotic state and practice an attitude of *getting on*. I deliberately employ this rather awkward phrase to introduce not only the sense of the ordinary, but also because it contains a very ordinary embrace of contradiction. One just *gets on* with it, despite things being incongruent and unsatisfying in life. Significantly too, futurity inflects the usage of *getting on* in ways that diverge from the a-historical temporality of trauma, in which the subject is thought to be caught in repetition and therefore static. The subject of the child of the Vietnam War veteran has a future to move toward. Drawing from the work of Ann Cvetkovich, Lauren Berlant, and Kathleen Stewart this paper gives an account of an ordinary trauma, a trauma not left behind in the past but persisting and pervasive and to some degrees embraced. This concept of the ordinary describes a state of emergence, an attunement to the present moment. And trauma, within this rubric, is understood as a sentient condition of connectedness (Berlant 80-81).

This essay hovers over and homes in on the sites of connection that Kate Mulvany's play *The Seed* and Helen Pearse-Otene's play *Ka Mate, Ka Ora* share: bodies, transmissions and legacies. It also takes into account the plays' crucial differences, in order to acknowledge that ordinary life is not constituted in the same way for everybody but is, as Kathleen Stewart tells us, an assemblage of 'practices and practical knowledges', the special signatures of which are variable across cultures (1). Yet, both plays stage the spectrum of connective responses to trauma across generations and into daily life. *The Seed* was written for Sydney's established Belvoir Theatre and concerns the Irish-Australian Maloney family whose veteran is an immigrant conscript of the Vietnam War; while, *Ka Mate, Ka Ora* concerns the Maori Fuller family whose veteran is an Army regular. Different from the theatrical context of *The Seed*, *Ka Mate- Ka Ora* was written as part of a therapy program for "at risk" youth—many of whom made up the company that staged the play—and is to date unpublished.

In creating the trope of traumatic attachment both of these plays foreground the practices and locations that emphasise, indeed depend, on connections. To argue that trauma does not necessarily induce the severance of attachments for the individual as is most often represented, I will first trace the movement of traumatic feelings and affects as they circulate between individuals forging attachments. Next, I will read how this flow of affect and the material wounds of war register on the bodies of the children of the veterans, particularly the two female leads, and show how their embrace of trauma is indicative of survival. Finally, my argument will converge on the same point as Mulvany and Pearse-Otene's plays: the question of legacy and how such a thing is upheld or interrupted by second—and third—generation subjects of the Vietnam War and what challenges this might raise for the continuity of a family's culture.

Transmissions

In *The Seed*, there are two sets of filial relationships that play out the consequences of affective mutuality being either denied or confirmed. The primary relationship is that of Rose and her Vietnam veteran father Danny, however Danny's relationship with his supposedly ex-IRA father Brian underscores the play's interest in affective and ideological transmissions across generations. As the three characters come together at Brian's house on the outskirts of Sherwood Forest to celebrate their concurrent birthdays they battle to have their individual traumas recognised and affirmed. Danny, a taciturn character seeks emotional reciprocity with his father. In one scene he suffers a *white turn*, what is clearly an anxiety attack, and although attended to by Rose, it is to his father he turns to for empathy. There is no response from Brian, this being the first of the continuous denials that make up their exchange. The wounds of war, that should bind are not shared, however, and the transmission of affect is renounced. As a result Danny retreats into the familiar kind of isolated subject of trauma. To his daughter's request to share his story, he barks: 'Oh, fucking hell. Leave it alone Rose' (55). With Danny, Mulvany establishes the trauma dialectic that she later dismantles. Danny performs the discursive attitude that trauma cannot be spoken, and his failed relationship with his father reiterates the assumption that trauma cannot produce connections. It is against this representation that Mulvany brings into focus an alternative reading of trauma as a mode of attachment that is communicated through the language of affects.

Consider a scene that is a crisis point in the play and where affective transmission is directly addressed although rendered oblique... Rose says to her father:

I'm carrying this huge black box around on my back and it's heavy and it's weighting me down and it's full of things I need to know but I'm not allowed

to just put it down and open it! And that's why I'm asking you, Dad... Because you're the only other person that knows what's in that box! (55)

Of course this black box is all the trauma-related affects that Rose has inherited from her father which burden her in life. These affects are numerous and unnameable and as such they are imagined as an object with significant physical mass and a corresponding symbolic significance. What is striking here is the alignment Mulvany's symbolism seems to have with trauma theory's crisis of representation. One of the most influential claims made by trauma theory is that trauma is unrepresentable. This claim emerges from deconstructionist assumptions regarding the unrepresentability of language and Caruth's formulation of the traumatic event as unknowable and 'unclaimed' due to its belated awareness (Luckhurst 1-15, Caruth 2). But do symbols not also mark out the space where something—an affect, a desire—might refuse one type of communication only to appropriate another? As Teresa Brennan's study *The Transmission of Affects* tells us, affects are non-verbal, they make their passage from and into individuals via touch, tone and hormonal entrainment, in every way they can but through speech (10). And if indeed affects are pre-lingual, then theatre, dependant as it is on dialogue, makes use of the figurative to not only expand linguistic meaning but to perhaps convey its inadequacy. Mulvany's play exploits the paradoxical tension of misnaming the unnameable to represent the communication that can still take place in the transmission of affect.

Moreover, Mulvany's focus in this scene is on how this transmission is both Rose's burden and her means of survival. What Rose desires from her father is mutuality. In contrast with received understanding of how trauma is survived, namely through a concerted effort to keep things (people, feelings) out, Rose, as a traumatized subject, is intent on drawing things near (Lifton 135). Following her father around with a Dictaphone to get *his story*—that in a telling slip she refers to as *her story*—Rose assures her own traumatic survival through connection. And this is the play's crucial intervention into the representation of trauma. Rather than conceiving of trauma as being intensely individual, and of the breakdown of discreet subjectivities as a crisis that must be resisted, the transmission of affect orientates the subject to its own sense of trauma as a state of belonging.

In *Ka Mate, Ka Ora*, the transmission of affect is slightly different to the way it operates in *The Seed*, in this play it is both an indication of how the event of war can turn into a set of attitudes and how these attitudes have an intergenerational circulation and impact. Unlike *The Seed*, Pearse-Otene's play is somewhat cautionary if not critical in the staging of affective transmission. The play begins by establishing the Vietnam War as an attitude that the Fuller family has adopted: paranoia, denial and projection accompany the family member's daily behavior. These lessons are learnt from the family patriarch Hepa, a Vietnam veteran, who administers paranoid and anti authoritarian advice such as 'Don't trust anyone' (12) or 'they all turn on you in the end' (14). What is evident from the onset of the play is how the senior generation projects their negative attitudes in a manner that is colloquially known in western culture as *dumping*. This ordinary affective carelessness is shown to be significant because, as Pearse-Otene's characters come to realise, even an individual's disengagement makes demands on others. By identifying a loaded atmosphere as a transmitter of negative affect, *Ka Mate, Ka Ora* comments on how disowning feelings and denying trauma is equal to more conscious methods of transference. Brennan analyzes this very behavior when she discusses how an individual might evacuate their own unpleasant feelings by depositing them onto one who is an unconsciously compliant receiver (30-31). If this is indeed a fact, it is potentially a tragic one, for how else do children survive their home environments if not by being

compliant or attempting to attune. It is this intergenerational dynamic of the family that Pearse-Otene is tracking in her play in order to draw attention to the consequences of such tactics for survival.

Ka Mate, Ka Ora, explores how affective atmospheres shape families and determine their interconnections, whether the home is dense with feeling or a character thinly emotes, bonds are being forged in these atmospheres. The play opens with Hepa's daughter April, a single mother of two young children, living with her father and mother Patty while struggling to manage Hepa's influence over her son. However, April has Agent Orange related cancer and though she resists her father's attitudes she is dead before the scene is finished and nothing is resolved. The play moves forward in time, Hepa, in response to the catalogue of trauma in his life has degenerated into a comatose state of PTSD, while Patty cleans and chats around him as if nothing were the matter. Into this dysfunction April's children Jade and Ben grow to become conduits for the affects that percolate in their home. *Acting out*, yet another colloquial verb form like *getting on*, describes this kind of response. Such colloquialisms are the everyday phraseology of what in psychoanalytic terms is understood to be the symptoms of traumatic experience, and as such they capture the ordinary register of trauma's impact in the experiences of second- and third- generation subjects. As I will discuss shortly, teenage *acting out* brings about the drama of the play moreover, Pearse-Otene seems to be reasoning that *acting out* is an inevitable response to the hypo-arousal of a significant other's trauma.

A focus on subsequent generations' vulnerability to trauma is in itself a departure from narratives in which veteran's dissociative behavior (often explained as a manifestation of survivor guilt) is read or represented as being the effective end point to trauma (Herman 52-53). Grandson Ben may call his grandfather 'a waste of space' but even as a negative space he is still responsible for the affective arousal of others (Pearse-Otene 33). The less animated Hepa is, the more extreme the responses of his grandchildren, demonstrating how affects, even flat affects, are transmitted and mutate. Hepa's depression becomes Ben's anger and Jade's anxiety, and teenage *acting out* becomes dangerous in the absence of adult awareness of the consequences of transmission. In *Ka Mate, Ka Ora*, transmission does not operate as a message sent; rather, transmission feels more like an atmosphere created by one who wishes to forget. However, this play makes evident that we cannot dissociate from trauma. The event, the trauma, the attitude, the atmosphere gathers everyone into a textile and even when this feels like nothing for one individual it can be a terrible something for others.

Bodies

The bodies in Mulvany's and Pearse-Otene's plays do not suffer a reduced fate because of their trauma, even if that is where trauma's most unforgiving demands are manifest. These bodies do the work of getting on. In the case of *The Seed* the overt autobiographical narrative emphasises that the body is the line in theatre that holds out between the real and represented. So what are we to make of Kate Mulvany's biography and Rose Maloney's parallel dramatic circumstances? Both are daughters of Vietnam veterans, both born with Wilm's disease due to their fathers' war time exposure to Agent Orange and both bear the further consequence of being unable to have children. And since Mulvany portrayed Rose in nearly every production of *The Seed* this slippage between performance and real life lends a powerful material emphasis to the staged body of Rose. Not only that, but this strategy goes some way to creating a double presence that insist on political visibility in the face of bureaucratic denial. In 2012, on the ABC's *Australian Story*, Mulvany spoke about how her Agent Orange - related cancer has yet to be acknowledged by authorities. This echoes the struggle Mulvany's father and many other veterans have had in being granted full war service pensions (Mulvany

179). Thus, Mulvany's move to perform herself is, on one level, a defiance to the status of being unseen and unheard. Although this empowerment does not omit the possibility that this performative connection with the self might also be understood as a testament to the material burden of war and the reality of a fleshly capture. For Mulvany and Rose, the war and the traumas that arise from it cannot be displaced outside the body. In fact, illness and infertility become the signatures of attachment.

One of Rose's central monologues in *The Seed* brings together the tension of traumatic rupture and continuity. The scene concerns Rose's infertility; in it she tells her grandfather Brian how she envies, hates, mourns and feels tender toward babies and their parents. She says that sometimes when she sees a pregnant woman she thinks: 'I hope it fucking dies in you, you bitch' and other times when she sees a baby she says: 'I just want to pick it up and smell its skin and hold it to my heart'—'Is that normal?' (51) To answer Rose's question I want to consider something Peggy Phelan's muses on in *Mourning Sex*. She writes: 'Maybe bodies come to be 'ours' when we recognise them as traumatic' (18). As *traumatic*, Phelan writes, not as *traumatised*. *Traumatic* is a matter of tense; it places us in the present—the temporal ordinary. So we might remind Rose that in the ordinary present we are all just getting on. Thus, Rose's traumatic body is performing an adaption to the situation, the very thing that constitutes the ongoing work of surviving.

In *Ka Mate, Ka-Ora*, bodies enable and express the fumbling toward survival. Either that or they don't survive at all. After his mother's death we see Ben slipping away from the family and getting involved with a gang. Nevertheless, his body hovers at the edge of scenes, always saying he is going out but somehow finding his way back. Ben is suspended; he is 'at risk'. He responds to most requests and challenges with his very ordinary teenage refrain: *whatever*. Ben's ambivalent physical presence is a further expression of this *whatever*. His posture is an abbreviated grammar that tries to make only the slightest attachments but is actually desperate to be seen. *Whatever*. In Lauren Berlant's research blog *Supervalent Thought*, *whatever* is taken up as being a 'gesture of optimism at the points of life that seem impossible,' a gesture, 'that can't bear a lot, but that can indicate an otherwise that could become something stacked right above the nothing' (Berlant on-line). It is unsurprising that Berlant's thoughts on *whatever* is detailed in a blog, a platform, that Melissa Gregg calls, 'conversational scholarship' (153). The strength of a blog, according to Gregg, is its ability to fulfil some of the original aims of cultural studies, such as indicting the 'class-based elitism of academic modes of valuing' (147). Thus, we find that Berlant's blog writing is no less theoretical than her conventionally published work and her consideration of the mumbling of *whatever* that can be read in *Supervalent Thought* is a lesson in non-hierarchical attention. Here it is the content and the form of Berlant's work that focuses my own analysis on the ordinary. Berlant's ear for evolving idiom attributes significance to an expression that might have been too ordinary for consideration. And if Ben's use of *whatever* was missed, Ben himself could have been missed. However the boy and phrase cling to one another with persistence, even optimism. They cannot be ignored. *Whatever* is the refrain for the hope of survival.

For Jade, survival is a material labour. She has taken on the role of the good granddaughter, excelling at school and bringing in a little extra money from babysitting to help alleviate the family's financial burdens. Except babysitting, as only the audience or reader knows for most of the play, is phone sex work and neighbourhood prostitution. Like Rose, Jade's body cites the intimate register of survival; but whereas Rose's body is offered as a kind of proof of traumatic survival, Jade's body is the instrument for survival. In a scene where Jade sees and

talks to her dead mother and ancestor Te Rauparaha, who composed the haka from which the play gets its name, Jade's sex work is absolutely cast in terms of survival. Her mother says to her 'you are not the first person in our family who has sacrificed their own dignity or made horrible choices in order to save their loved ones or themselves' (102).

The scene allows for a full appreciation of what it takes to survive. Although spirits have appeared to tell her she can now stop the sex work, the practical expectation of just *getting on* works to under-dramatise the scene. Her mother's allusion to other family members who have sacrificed their dignity to save others is not made explicit, but if we are to assume these others are Hepa and possibly Jade's mother, then we know that for them bodily sacrifice has been their undoing. This is common in narratives of the Vietnam War, where soldiers or veterans physically break down under the weight of their choices. But my interest lies in the way Jade has taken up the challenge of surviving a war that she knows only through its repercussions and folding it into the labour of the everyday. Jade is always coping with what threatens to tear her family apart and in one way or another her body is delegated this task. In another incident Jade confronts the gang that is threatening her brother, the same men who raped her as a girl. It turns out that Jade kept those soiled clothes and uses this information as leverage to warn the gang away from her family for good. How the Fuller family's problems come to be solved through the agency of Jade's body is uncomfortable to the point of outrage. Yet, these ugly necessities demonstrate the tautological circumstance of Jade's life, that is, she is doing what she can to survive survival.

Legacy

Across the literature by the children of the Vietnam War the issue of legacy is a preoccupation. The legacy of the war is that *something* which war has brought about—dysfunction, violence, illnesses...perhaps even pride. In both plays ideology and tradition are the manifestations of legacy. The differing cultural and political context of these plays makes for radically different attachments to family legacy. Yet in both plays the struggle to maintain or dismantle legacy is attended by an acute awareness of the shared conditions of life.

In *The Seed*, Kate Mulvany sets up the bind of legacy by having the three characters in the play share a birthday on Guy Fawkes Night. Overdetermination on the one hand shows how legacy is a force that shapes familial existence and meaning, while on the other hand the impossible coincidence of birthdays suggests a kind of generational imprisonment. Both of these attitudes are contained in the play's metaphoric title. Seeds can be poisonous or sterile but also the thing that promises flourishing. Representing both possibilities, Rose, in one context says: 'The seed stops here' (51). Rose is referring to her reproductive capacities but as the play continues we understand that this statement has more generative implications, because it is her presence that throws off course the continual sowing of the family legacy—a seed of an idea about the romance of war.

While Brian is apparently committed to the Cause he is above all committed to an idea of being a soldier. He continually positions himself in a line of fighters like Robin Hood and Guy Fawkes. But while it is obvious to the audience that these soldiers are fiction and fantasy, and Guy Fawkes Night is a celebration of a failure, Brian is willfully ignorant. This is until the family erupts in a violent confrontation in which the conflation of mythology and legacy, built on the lie that Brian was a bomb-maker for the IRA, is finally exposed. And yet, from the rubble of disgraced legacy, Rose reaches out toward her father. What can we make of this hopeful gesture, this promise to flourish regardless? Danny calls himself and Rose, 'the greatest fucking fighters in the world's longest running war' (58). It must be this

attachment that Rose is acknowledging in her gesture. And with it she replaces the old legacy of military fictions with the binding legacy of a lived and shared experience of survival.

Legacy has another significance in *Ka Mate, Ka Ora*. In this play, ancestors and the notion of Whakapapa make for a fundamental discourse of survival. The play defines Whakapapa as genealogy, but indicates its more expansive meaning by asserting clear values of family, ancestry and interconnectedness by the end of the play. Takiriranki Smith writes that Whakapapa rationalizes existence, thus giving it form (53). This form and structure to living, whether named or not, also determines narrative in Maori literature. Consider Patricia Grace's classic *Mutuwhenua*, in which the main character, Ripeka's, full embrace of traditional Maori phenomena and cultural practices is a matter of life and death. In Grace's novel Ripeka deteriorates when she lives in a taboo place in the city and later after she recovers and has had a son she gives the baby to her bereaved mother to bring up as Maori. Practices such as this might seem shocking or unbelievable to a non-Maori audience but they are re-valorized in contemporary Maori theatre and literature by their representation as the entanglements of traditional and contemporary life in which hope for unknowable futures are invested (Halba 54-54). So too in Pearse-Otene's play in which Jade, the character most invested in Maori ways—whilst also being thoroughly modern and independent—is the play's life force, the literal saviour for her brother. Unlike in *The Seed*, legacy in *Ka Mate, Ka Ora* is not an unstable faith; it is the very thing that has ensured Jade's survival.

While it is clear that the enormity of Whakapapa's meaning is far beyond the scope of an analysis of a representation of second- and third- generation traumatized subjects, Takiriranki Smith explains that Whakapapa is a discourse of interconnection and identification (54). This makes a consideration of Whakapapa significant to thinking about a strategy for resisting trauma's disconnections. It also brings to light the thematic implication of the *Ka Mate, Ka Ora* a performance that is in the public domain as an icon of New Zealand and has enormous cultural resonance for citizens of diverse cultural heritages (Gray). As a celebration of survival that was composed in the nineteenth century during the colonial period and that has come to circulate in the commons, the *Ka Mate, Ka Ora* does not just symbolize connectivity, it is its very function.

Moreover, the *Ka Mate, Ka Ora* narrative of survival, no doubt part of its inspiring appeal, is iterated in Pearse-Otene's play as a counter-intuitive time signature that indicates death before life. Briefly, this haka tells of the warrior Te Rauparaha who found protection from his enemies by hiding in a kumera pit over which a woman sat to further conceal him. As Te Rauparaha heard his enemies approach, he cried, ‘“ka mate, ka mate” I die, I die, but as they moved on he sang, “ka ora, ka ora” I live, I live, and emerged back into the light’ (Sullivan 3-4). This sequence of survival is echoed in Pearse-Otene's play. I die, I live. Is this not the story of Jade and Ben? (Is it not also the story of Rose?).

Ka Mate, Ka Ora begins with darkness, hiding and death but as the young people in the play embrace Whakapapa there is a move toward the light and living and genealogical ascension. Hepa, the old veteran, dies, but his death coincides with Jade's departure for Vietnam. From this, we get the sense that something inevitable is falling into line. It is survival, but on the cosmic scale of Whakapapa.

Dominant theories of trauma conceive of the traumatised subject as being irrevocably disconnected from themselves and from others. The traumatised Vietnam War veteran has been similarly characterised in Australian literature. It would appear that this authoritative

and well-represented understanding of trauma prohibits appreciation for what else is experienced by those in trauma's grip. This essay has endeavoured to identify an alternative response to trauma. In reading *The Seed* and *Ka Mate, Ka Ora*, two plays by and about children and grandchildren of Vietnam War veterans, it is clear that the desire for connections and attachments are also indicative of what the trauma of war feels like for some. In this sense the event of war cannot be relegated to the past and rupture cannot deny that connections define our attachment to life. Rose, Jade and Ben come into a world in which trauma precedes them, their bodies gather the evidence of this traumatic damage; where this might be the end point for other narratives of trauma and the Vietnam War, these plays, (and many other narratives by children of the Vietnam War), find themselves somewhere in the middle, in some ordinary moment of *getting on*.

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