



# Oriori – A Legacy

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*Nāu mai e tama, Welcome O son. With these four words that open the ancient oriori ‘Te waiata o Tu-Tere-Moana’, so too is a doorway opened to a world of tradition, wisdom, and aroha. Let us take a glimpse into the kaupapa of oriori, what they are and their profound purpose.*

Respected Kaumatua Amster Reedy (2008) describes oriori as being a verse, lullaby or chant that is recited to children as they enter the world, he goes on to describe the content of oriori as being an oral history detailing where the child is from, where he or she entered the world whilst also describing the child's ancestral achievements.

Tā Apiriana Ngata and Pei Te Hurinui Jones compiled a four-volume collection of Mōteatea (traditional Māori song) in the Māori language and accompanied each Mōteatea with elaborate translations in English (2004A, 2004B, 2004C, 200D). First published in 1928, this collection features a total of 393 waiata (song/s) where the first waiata in publication 1 and last waiata in publication 4 are known as Oriori. By their placement to open and close this important collection, we can immediately see the status and importance of oriori.

In his 2009 thesis, Wayne Ngata observed oriori as being the most important waiata composed for children destined to become leaders within their iwi and hapū. In their report Te Mana Ririki (2011) Jenkins and Harte describe waiata oriori as lullabies that were sung to babies to reinforce the purpose and the spiritual nature of the child's life spoken of as beautiful poems composed to edify and mould the child into their purpose as valued members of their whānau and hapū.

In their introduction to the subject, Lee and Pihama (2022) write of oriori as being not only a language of love but also as a point of reference around the position of children within the whānau in pre-contact Aotearoa.

Although oriori were composed for a singular child, the waiata was recited and learned by the collective surrounding the tamaiti who would go on to share the waiata in various settings which allowed for the waiata to be learned at scale and in most cases, preserve the waiata over time.

Te waiata o Tu-Tere-Moana is an example of such an oriori. This waiata was composed by Ngai Tara Tohunga Te Whata-Horo who resided in Te Whanganui-a-Tara now known as Wellington.

In anticipation and observation of the birth of his grand-nephew, Te Whata-Horo starts his waiata with a welcome:

**“Nāu mai, e tama, kia mihi atu au”.**

Welcome O son, let me greet you.

**“I haramai rā koe, i te kunenga mai o te tangata”.**

You have indeed come from the origins of mankind.

The second part of this verse goes on to draw a picture of the origins by which he is descended starting from the connection to the celestial heavens through to his biological connections at birth.

Throughout the first sections of this waiata, Te Whata-Horo describes the process of Tu-Tere-Moana growing inside his mother's womb and once fully formed and strong enough to make his entrance to the world, Te Whaka-Horo beckons him into the waiting arms of his parents:

**“Haramai, e tama, whakaputa ia koe”**

Come now, O son, show yourself

**“Ki runga te tūranga mātua”**

Upon the threshold of your parents abode

The waiata composed for Tu-Tere-Moana consists of one hundred and thirty verses in which we are taken on a journey of genealogical aspirations, words of encouragement, words of caution, knowledge to be attained and prophecies to be fulfilled by coming generations.

This alongside traditional waiata holds great significance for us today because it affords us the opportunity to glimpse traditional practice and allows us a moment to reflect on thematic similarities that still hold true in society today.

Te Waiata o Tu-Tere-Moana can be seen as a structural guide and an indicator of what we might say in an oriori written by us for our own mokopuna. A greeting, a beckoning, a welcoming, recounts of journeys past and journeys to come, stories of mythical genealogy and ancestral heritage, pearls of wisdom, a list of characteristics to be aware of and characteristics to mimic, words of affection given by kin, proclamations and prophecies over the long and wonderful life this tamaiti will have.

In summary, within the rich whāriki of Māori culture, the oriori stands as a sacred curriculum for a child's growth and development, woven with threads of ancestral heritage, aspirations, and blessings for the journey ahead — a narrative of identity and purpose — a profound welcoming into this world.

**“Nau mai, e tama...”** Welcome O son

**“Haramai, e tama...”** Come here O son

**“E tama, ē i.”** O son of mine.

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