for the furthering of the discipline of Transcultural Indigenous Studies, while still retaining an ability (at least in my mind) to relate and communicate to the hearts and minds of their readers.


RAPATA WIRI
*Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiārangi*

*Whaikōrero—The Māori World of Māori Oratory* by Poia Rewi is the first comprehensive book on Māori oratory to be published. *Whaikōrero* is an important element of mātauranga Māori ‘Māori knowledge’ and is one of the dynamic ways in which mātauranga Māori is still practised and reproduced in the 21st century and articulated on marae throughout New Zealand. Māori orators are revered in Māori society and are likened to maunga kōrero ‘speaking mountains’ and as manu kōrero ‘talking birds’. In this book, Rewi captures the essence of the art of whaikōrero and provides an easy to read, step by step guide to whaikōrero from a pan-tribal Māori perspective.

The book provides an important and valuable contribution to our understanding of whaikōrero. The structure of the book is very practical and provides clear, concise explanations and interpretations of fundamental aspects of Māori knowledge, customs and beliefs. The book starts with the questions of what, how and why? Then it delves into the symbolism, content and structure of whaikōrero.

The book begins with a chapter entitled “What is whaikōrero?” Rewi examines the origins of whaikōrero and then gives a precise definition of the functional essence of whaikōrero. Rewi then turns to discuss the innate meaning of the term “whaikōrero” through the content and themes of whaikōrero. The chapter is interesting and provides some insightful comments by renowned Māori orators which Rewi balances well with academic definitions of whaikōrero. Chapter Three discusses “How to learn whaikōrero” and explains how whaikōrero was taught in pre-European times, and how it is taught now in contemporary times. This chapter also provides an interesting discussion of the transfer of Māori knowledge. Chapter Four looks at the rituals of encounter and protocols around whaikōrero and the symbolism of the marae, the courtyard where whaikōrero are performed. Rewi concludes with a discussion about formal and informal whaikōrero, and the conduct, identity and connectedness between hosts and visitors. This chapter includes a discussion on the role whaikōrero plays in bringing these two groups together.

Chapter Five turns to the topic of “Who can perform whaikōrero?” The discussion begins with the role of whakapapa or lineage in whaikōrero and then turns to the controversial topic of whether women are allowed to perform whaikōrero on the marae. Rewi has handled this topic well by drawing upon interviews with 34 different elders about their views on women and whaikōrero. He talks about the ways in which Pākehā have condemned Māori oratory for being sexist, but emphasises how men and women have different roles on the marae. Chapter Six analyses the skills that are needed for the performance of whaikōrero: a sound knowledge of the language, the
Reviews

proverbs and the genealogies, and fluency in the expression of ideas combined with good voice projection. Rewi argues that the use of poetic expressions, metaphors and similes in Māori and the style of delivery are also important in the performance of whaikōrero. This is a very interesting chapter and contains some fascinating photos of Māori orators in action.

Chapter Seven looks at the “Mana of whaikōrero” and the esoteric nature of Māori oratory. Rewi discusses the relationship to the spiritual world, its tapu or sanctity as a treasure of Māori, and how the ability of a person to whaikōrero can enhance their mana and improve their standing within the community. Chapter Eight discusses the protocols of place and the seating arrangements for Māori oratory on the marae and within the wharenui or ancestral house. The chapter provides a descriptive account of speaking patterns; of how different tribes have different models for whaikōrero and how different orators have different postures and standing styles when they speak.

Chapter Nine analyses the structure of a whaikōrero for hosts and visitors and breaks down the format and content of a whaikōrero from the introductory whakaaraara or tauparapara ‘opening chant’ through to the conclusion. Rewi draws upon the interviews and notes of famous orators and scholars, and provides readers with some examples of speech from different tribal areas. This is an excellent chapter for learners of whaikōrero and provides some insights into how to use different structures to perform and recite whaikōrero. The final chapter looks at the future of whaikōrero and traces the changes in whaikōrero since the advent of colonisation and Christianity. The impact that language loss and Māori knowledge has had on whaikōrero is also discussed here. Rewi concludes the chapter with the assertion that whaikōrero is not stagnant and that the survival of the language and culture is pivotal to the survival of whaikōrero in the future.

The content of the book provides a well-balanced and well-researched view of whaikōrero by comparing traditional and contemporary views of whaikōrero. The book is well written and provides some excellent quotes recorded verbatim as they were expressed in Māori language which capture the true feelings and perceptions of Māori elders about whaikōrero. The research methodology and the way in which the author has brought together information about this topic is impressive and he compliments this well with personal anecdotes.

This is an important book for many New Zealanders who may be struggling to come to grips with Māori culture in the 21st century. The book is easy to read, informative and gives a clear understanding of Māori oratory in the traditional and contemporary context. It is fortunate that Rewi has been able to capture the true essence of whaikōrero in this book and provide a Māori view of the subject that is not too anthropological or too academic in its focus. Many of the elders interviewed in this book have since passed on, but their wisdom and knowledge has been retained in this delightful book. The book demonstrates that whaikōrero is a living and breathing treasure of the Māori people and that its future is in danger.

Nā reira kia ū ki te reo me ōna tikanga kia kore tēnei taonga te whaikōrero e waimeha
May the Māori language and culture survive so that the treasure of Māori oratory will never fade.