

THREE NEW ZEALAND LEXICAL ITEMS

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1 AWETO: A LOST LOAN WORD?

The expansion of Empire in its sundry colonies and successive phases bred its stereotypes, its legends and its myths. These may differ in their particulars, but differ little in their processes. So too the categories which settlers generated to give order to the variety of their experiences. Among those is one category, The Wonders of Nature.

New Zealand contributed to this category the moa and the Pink and White Terraces among other wonders, of which one was the creature reported by Maoris to Richard Taylor (1872: 97):

... the Tarepo, a very large bird which lived on the top of Hikurangi, the highest mountain on the East Coast, and that they made their fish-hooks from its bones. I then enquired whether the bird was still to be met with, and was told that there was one of an immense size which lived in a cave, and was guarded by a large lizard, and that the bird was always standing on one leg.

Yet *tarepo* seems not to have fascinated people for long. The *aweto* had a longer power over the imagination. It continued in the public domain (as it were) at least to the end of the nineteenth century.

Morris entered it to his *Austral English* (1898):

Aweto, n. Maori name for a vegetable-caterpillar of New Zealand.

Morris (1898: 12) quotes E. Wakefield, *New Zealand After Fifty Years* (1889) on 'the *aweto*, or vegetable-caterpillar, called by the naturalists *Hispialis virescens*' which is 'a perfect caterpillar in every respect, and a remarkably fine one too, growing to a length in the largest specimens of three and a half inches and the thickness of a finger.' Wakefield went on to explain that the caterpillar was taken over by 'the spore of a vegetable

fungus *Sphoeria Robertsii*'. He also noted that it was always found at the foot of a rata tree.

Aweto was sometimes known as *awheto* or as *hotete* or as *awhato* or *aweta*, as the 'vegetable caterpillar' or as the 'vegetating caterpillar' and also as the 'Bulrush Caterpillar'.

1.1 The vegetable caterpillar in literature

Almost the earliest appearance in print of this creature is in a footnote which Edgar Allan Poe¹ put to his 'The Thousand-and-Second Tale' (1845: 63):

Mr J.B. Williams, of Salem, Mass., presented the "National Institute" with an insect from New Zealand, with the following description:- 'The *Hotte*', a decided caterpillar, or worm, is found growing at the foot of the *Rata* tree, with a plant growing out of its head. This most peculiar and extraordinary insect travels up both the *Rata* and *Perriri* trees, and entering into the top, eats its way perforating the trunk of the tree until it reaches the root, it then comes out of the root, and dies, or remains dormant, and the plant propagates out of its head; the body remains perfect and entire, of a harder substance than when alive. From this insect the natives make a color for tattooing.

With amendments this story appears substantially again in a footnote to J.E. Ollivant's poem *Hine Moa: The Maori Maiden* (c. 1880) on the authority of F. Buckland and his *Curiosities of Natural History*, which was available in several printings after 1858. The caterpillar (given as *Sphoeria Robertsii*) is named as *hotete* or *awheto*, found under rata trees, used (with kauri gum) for tattooing purposes. Buckland, pace Ollivant, says it is the victim of a fungus which develops within the form of the caterpillar, then 'throws out a shoot, and this is always at a certain fixed spot, namely at the joint at the back of the head.' (1880: 132-3). About the same time a different view could be expressed. Emilia Marryat, *Amongst the Maoris* (1874: 292-3), gave *hotete* a location, the Waikato, and had the caterpillar eat the seeds of the rata from which the "plant" develops, 'growing from its tail was a stalk of several inches in length, at the tip of which was a kind of flower, like a bulrush, only very small'. This is a product more of hearsay than observation.

Hochstetter (1867: 171) had earlier been sufficiently taken with what he called 'the Vegetating Caterpillar' to

illustrate it as the 'Aweto or Hotete', again as 'Sphoeria Robertsee', and spoke of examining 'hundreds of specimens' of which all but one had the fungus outcropping between the head and first ring of the body. Emilia Marryat's 'flower like a bulrush' is better noted in James Buller (1880: 18) as 'from the head ... a long fungus grows out, with seed-spurs at the end of it.' Reischek (who was not Englished until 1930) recorded it as *Aweta* (1933: 70):

...under the rata roots I also found the Aweta, or plant-caterpillar, which to change into a chrysalis creeps underground, and in many cases instead of becoming a moth becomes - a mushroom! This is caused by a spoor bearing stem which sprouts up between the head and first ring of the caterpillar's body.

Reischek was a professional collector of curiosities working (and plundering) the country in the '80s. In that decade Augustus Hamilton lectured on the Vegetating Caterpillar to the Hawkes Bay Philosophical Society (1884: 464) and Colenso (1879: 105) had resurrected Richard Taylor's paper of 1842 on the 'Bulrush caterpillar', which was 'found only at the foot of one particular tree, the Rata, the female Pohutukawa', another instance of predilection for inexact science, or otherwise tribute to credulity. As *awhato* the caterpillar was mentioned by Frank Cowan, another devotee of extraordinary science, in his poem 'The Terraces of Rotomahana' (1885: 43-4). Cowan in his notes says that *awhato* was a Ngapuhi (i.e. North Auckland) Maori name, *hotete* a Waikato (i.e. south of Auckland) name. He calls the caterpillar *Cordiceps robertsii* and describes it as a fungus which takes over a larval form, grows to twelve or sixteen inches, and issues from a point near the tail of the grub. It is said to have been called 'the bullrush caterpillar'.

Jane Mander who was familiar with North Auckland mentions it in *The Story of a New Zealand River* (1920: 64-5), linked with the folk belief which appears by way of reference to 'the strange history of the rata vine, the powerful forest parasite, and by good luck [Mrs Brayton] found one of the chrysalis worms from which it is said to grow'. Mander does not introduce the "worm" by name, although she makes use of other loans such as *rata* and *totara*. One suspects that she did not know *aweto* or its kind. It will be noticed that, although in her novel's context the scene is an as yet unmilled forest, the "worms" are suggested to be uncommon. In R.L. Bacon's novel *Along the Road* (1964: 129) the *awhato*, which is also referred to as the *vegetable caterpillar* and as *Cordyceps*, figures briefly. The

schoolteacher of the story is given this information by a naturalist who tells him too that *awhato* is more than one kind of caterpillar, that these kinds have a subterranean phase and that they eat the spore of the Cordiceps fungus which proceeds to grow 'reed-like'. When found the caterpillar is 'almost petrified'. The schoolteacher says that the local people know nothing about *awhato*. Again, the point is advanced that the caterpillars cannot be common, nor are they widely known even by hearsay. The schoolteacher himself has heard of the *vegetable* caterpillar but not of *aweto* or *awhato*.

The late James K. Baxter referred to the *vegetable caterpillar* in 1968, without crediting it with any Maori name. Baxter at that period was increasingly inclined to make use of Maori words although he had not as then reached his greatest enthusiasm for bringing them into his writing. Still, it strikes me that had he known *aweto* or one of its variants he would have capitalised on his knowledge in the article in which he presents the *vegetable caterpillar* as a curiosity of 'the slopes of Mount Egmont' (1968: 12).

1.2 The vegetable caterpillar in nineteenth century science

Moved by excitements of the Romantic taste and impelled by a sense of science which rather looked back to Erasmus Darwin than forward to Charles Darwin, people of the earlier nineteenth century were not uncommonly moved to wonder at the works of great creating Nature. Richard Taylor seems to have been fascinated (and he was not alone in this) by vegetable caterpillars or the like. He recorded a paper given in 1836 to the Bristol Association for the Cultivation of Science, on a vegetating wasp of the West Indies. Taylor mentions that in 1837 he remitted a plant-insect from the Murrumbidgee riverbanks to Hooker who courteously named it *Sphoeria Taylori*. Dominica yielded a vegetable fly, Britain was known to have 'A small vegetating caterpillar', the Chinese had one which was similar, and Tasmania produced another. Taylor (1855: 424) quoted the Reverend Nicholas Collins's description of 'a certain zoophyton in the Ohio county' which began life 'in an animal state' but immobilised itself and became 'a stately plant, with a stem issuing out of its mouth'. The Jamaican wasp, in Taylor's words, took a 'retrograde step in nature, when the insect, instead of rising to the higher order of the butterfly, and soaring into the skies, sinks into a plant, and remains attached to the soil in which it has buried itself'.

Taylor's excitement is evident as he begins to write about the *aweto*:

This singular plant, which is a native of New Zealand, may be classed amongst the most remarkable productions of the vegetable kingdom.

Wonder is pressing hard against the restraint which insists that he call it outright a plant, although he cannot help remarking further that 'It certainly forms one of the most surprising links between the animal and vegetable kingdom yet noticed, and, as such merits as circumstantial a description as our present imperfect acquaintance with it will allow'.

He called it the *Bulrush Caterpillar*. He identified it as *Sphoeria Robertsia*, and credited it with a 'Native name, *Aweto-Hotete*'.

At the same time Taylor was prepared to distinguish between *aweto* and *hotete*. This he attempts in another part of his book (1855: 649). The parasite, *Sphoeria Robertii*, changes its nomenclature, and 'is said to be parasitical' upon *Sphinx convolvuli*, the sphinx moth caterpillar, which (Taylor says) is untrue. The sphinx moth is called *aweto*, the vegetating caterpillar is called *hotete*. Taylor's effort at distinction is bothersome rather than helpful, but that is hardly his fault. He is obviously reflecting his informants in these names, on which Williams (1971: 24) throws some light. The primary form is *awhato*, with *awheto* listed, signifying '*Cordiceps robertsii* and other *Cordiceps* species of parasitic fungi which infest the larvae of certain insects; the "vegetable caterpillar".' *Awhato* is the fungus, with an alternative name, *horuhoru*. But a secondary meaning of *awhato* is 'A large caterpillar, larva of *Sphinx convolvuli*' for which the alternative name is *hotete*. The *hotete* is plainly the "Hotte" of J.B. Williams and E.A. Poe, their "Perriri" is plainly *puriri*, so J.B. Williams's report is about what is called the *ghost moth* or *puriri moth* larva, subject to fungal attack and thus apt to become a *vegetable caterpillar*. The *puriri* or *ghost moth* which was until recently called *Hepialus virescens* was previously *Hispialis virescens*, which is what Wakefield identified as *aweto*.

Aweto was an adaptable name, but confusingly so, a referent which was less than desirably efficient in discriminating but more inclined to become an accommodate *aweto* 'vegetable caterpillar', partly because at least three of the reportedly nineteen species of *puriri moths* are among the species parasitized.

Whatever currency *aweto* had remains uncertain. Indications in print may be misleading but they suggest that *aweto* was used until about the turn of the century. Such specimens as I have collected after that period seem to suggest that while

vegetable caterpillar (but not *vegetating*?) remained available *aweto* did not. I cannot recall ever hearing it used, which is perhaps because my experience is mainly of the northern North Island. Nor have I noticed it listed among borrowings by, for instance, Sidney J. Baker or G.W. Turner. Yet Morris was persuaded to publish it. His advisers in New Zealand were all but one from the further south of the South Island, the exception being Edward Tregear whose base was Wellington but whose experience included field work in Taranaki. Tregear is not always reliable in his writings but is probably to be depended on in his *Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary* (1891) where he lists *awhato*, *awheto* and *hotete* with cognates, but not *aweto*.

One question needs to be advanced. How likely were people to come across any "vegetable caterpillars" as *vegetable* or *vegetating caterpillar* or as *aweto*? On the one hand Taylor and Hochstetter assert no lack of specimens, whereas Mander and Bacon and Baxter (all interested intelligent people but not markedly scientists) indicate that they are uncommon. The notable G.V. Hudson when he first published his *Manual of New Zealand Entomology* in 1892 identified the 'curious "vegetable caterpillar"' as 'probably' belonging to the subterranean larvae of the puriri moth family, but his first paragraph on this is echoing Taylor and his last hints that he is unfamiliar with the *aweto* or *hotete*, and even more remarkable is his statement in the same chapter that he was at the time 'unacquainted with' *Sphinx convolvuli*, the sphinx moth. Yet it is the sphinx moth which S.P. Smith refers to as *awheto* in *The Peopling of the North* (1898: 65) when Smith says that he supposes that this moth 'is nearly extinct in New Zealand', and Smith, who was raised in Taranaki, was widely travelled in the North Island in the course of his field work as a surveyor.

If Hudson was little knowing and if Smith is implying that chances of sightings are diminishing, then the chances of common knowledge of vegetable caterpillars were not strong, so even less so the likelihood of knowing *aweto*. The name had no usage comparable to loans such as *tui* or *totara* or made-over words like *kit* or the obsolete slang *hoot* 'money'. It stays available to those who learn Maori but only as *awheto*, only as second choice to *awhato*. From local enquiry among scientists it appears that *aweto* is gone, and long gone. That same enquiry says that if you want to see vegetable caterpillars in relative abundance Taranaki is the place to go, particularly Mount Egmont. Enquiry around the mountain may tell us if *aweto* is wholly lost from New Zealand English².

Jane Wordsworth is a New Zealand novelist whose writing is usually unpretentious and fairly faithful to her people's occasions and their language. In 1972 her *Four Women* was published, set in the Bay of Plenty somewhere between Waioeka and Te Araroa. Her story's settlement is 'Te Ngaio'. Although one would not wish to identify Te Ngaio too closely, it has some resemblance to Te Kaha.

Two of Miss Wordsworth's women early in the story are collecting *kina*, the sea urchin or sea egg, *Evechinus chloroticus*: 'They picked up the load of kina, transferring it to the shelter of a quicks bush nearer the road and out of the sun ...' (p. 18). Later (p. 30) a sort of gloss is offered on *quicks*: 'A foal ... dashed through the barrier of quicks'. There follows a paragraph where the author, apparently struck by the unusual term, draws attention to it, and offers something which is part explanation, part speculation:

The spiney quicks bushes spread like crouching tortoises along the fore-shore. They were vibrant with green, yet somehow, perhaps because of their shape and the thorns they bore, she could never envisage them except in mental terms of grey. Janet had often wondered how they came by that odd local name. They were in fact box-thorn as far as she knew. She had read of quick-set hedges in England. Perhaps the term had been imported in the early days and picked up by the Maoris. It seemed to be a Maori name if not a Maori word. No one she knew had ever been able to tell her anything about it.

This registers *quicks* as an oddity to an educated person (the author is plainly speaking through her character here), and as something localised. She indicates that its currency is more Maori (two of the four women of the story are Maori, the settlement is largely Maori) than pakeha, although guessing that it may be British from the pioneers but now (we gather) passed out of the New Zealand English of the district. The relationship to 'quickset' is plausible, but *quick* or *quicks* is well attested in the *English Dialect Dictionary*, favouring northern England, and in the *O.E.D.* where examples suggest it as old-fashioned. It relates to thorn hedges whether, for example, *quick-thorns* 'prickly bushes for hedge work' or *quick-thorn* 'hawthorn'. Although *quicks* as such is not listed the examples given in the dictionaries show *quicks* as a form.

Some enquiries were made of Bay of Plenty people of British

stock who travel the district including those parts east of Opotiki. *Quicks* does not register with them, which seems to bear out the point that the word is not only localised but is also unlikely to occur in educated New Zealand English even in the locality. It may however be offered, as Miss Wordsworth advances, among Maori people using English among themselves or with a pakeha with whom they are on very close terms.

Mr Matiu Te Hau who is deeply informed about the language and settlements of the Bay of Plenty kindly provided some further information. He agreed about the usage being localised and offered an opinion which had something to do with local tradition, that *quicks* stemmed from two pioneer families (whom he named) who enlarged and dispersed. Reputedly Presbyterian, which may connote northern English, part of their dispersal followed from marrying into Catholic families, with the reduction of whatever was peculiar to the original enclave on that coastal strip.

Mr Te Hau did not at first recognise *quicks*. His first response for *thorn* or *hawthorn* was a Maori form, which he gave as *kuiki*, then recalled *quicks*, but modified that response to say that he thought people were more likely to pronounce the word in English as "queeks". This may be the strength of Miss Wordsworth's Janet observing that 'it seemed to be a Maori name if not a Maori word'.

The restriction to which Miss Wordsworth and Mr Te Hau separately testify is borne out by Professor Bruce Biggs who says *kuiki* is not known at all to him.

3 BACH AS A NOUN, AND ITS COGNATES

Bach, sometimes *batch*, as a verb has to do with being a bachelor. It apparently appeared about the mid-nineteenth century in the United States. One may judge from the American dictionaries which vary their first attestations from the late 1850s to the 1870s that it was not commonly in print. The two spellings persist into the twentieth century, even into the 1960s (and probably continue), from which it may be inferred that the connection with 'bachelor' was not and still may not be grasped. (Alternatively that people's ability to spell 'bachelor' was as uncertain in the nineteenth century as it is today.) The practice of placing *bach* or *batch* in double quotation marks suggests that some writers regard the verb as either slang or as a local and peculiar usage. For example, Traver (1968: 97):

Danny lived by himself - "batched" in the U.P. idiom - in one of the wildest and remotest areas of the country ...

This sets out the bachelor connection, without the author grasping the fact of the contraction and the origin of what he seems to regard as probably a singular property of language in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. In 1925 the Canadian novelist F.P. Grove wrote of one of his characters, 'He and Bobby were "baching it" in the shack...' (p. 159) which catches the bachelor connection and makes an association with 'shack' or 'cottage', as will be seen in another quotation from Grove (1927: 278) from his *A Search for America*, where the hero is offered a cottage and says ' "I could bach it there." ' *A Search for America* was probably rewritten about 1920, but the first draft dates possibly as far back as 1894. The story is set in the 1880s in the United States Midwest. The absence of quotation marks in the second example may suggest that *bach* was more familiar in the earlier phase of Grove's experience. (Grove was not Canadian born or British in origin, but eventually settled in Canada and is especially associated with Ontario, so his *bach it* or *baching it* may be more American than Canadian. The *Dictionary of Canadianisms* (Avis *et al.*, 1966) does not recognise *bach* any more than Morris did in his *Austral English* (1898).

Other westward examples can be taken from Willa Cather's *My Antonia* (1918) who has of Nebraskan usage 'two men who were "batching" ' (p. 36) and 'the young men who "batched" with him' (p. 107), which depart from the solitary male to several bachelors under the one roof. At one time I collected several examples of *bach* (verb) from the novels of Hamlin Garland from about the turn of the century, again westward usages from, for instance, Wisconsin³.

Wherever *bach* developed, it apparently established itself most in the Midwest and what lay not too far further west. The verb got into Canada, but was apparently regarded as an Americanism. As I shall show, it also reached into the eastern seaboard (or at least, its cognates did). Whatever the dissemination by print, *bach* as a verb could also be spread by word of mouth. In the New Zealand context oral transmission would be more likely to affect northern New Zealand than southern, through contact in the later nineteenth century with the United States Pacific seaboard, and with migratory timberworkers (of whom two parties of Canadians were brought into North Auckland), whereas miners on the move were more likely to affect the South Island West Coast. In view of the Midwestern factor mentioned above, we should remember too that interest in Midwestern

Populism was strong for a period, again more in northern than southern New Zealand.

The New Zealand idiosyncrasy which is claimed is that, in the words of Baker (1940: 54-5) 'it has been left to this country /at least I have not discovered an earlier use elsewhere/ to turn the term into a noun. As a result we now find *batch* and *bach* used widely' for, for example, a seaside cottage. The absence of *bach* as a noun except in New Zealand (but little if any use of the noun in the southern South Island is well known) has long been puzzling. More so, since a *batch* (noun) did in fact develop in the United States, for housing.

It occurs in one of the novels of John Dos Passos, *The Big Money* (1936). The setting is Pittsburgh. The association is with miners, and with substandard housing. The time is the 1920s. Dos Passos writes of 'the troopers in their dark gray uniforms moving in a line down the unpaved alleys of company batches, beating up men and women with their clubs, kicking children out of their way, chasing old men off their front stoops.' (p. 842). Any number of photographic records testify to the substandard character of the housing of the low paid workers (it is the low paid people on strike who figure in this scene) and substandard is the common factor which Baker adduces for *bach* in New Zealand in its early use: 'Originally it was used for a small shack or *whare* in which a man or men lived alone.' The sense in Dos Passos is a conflation, from "company baches" which were substandard and for unmarried men, to substandard company housing which included families. The basic bachelor referent has to be deduced, since it seems not to have been recorded.

If my memory serves correctly one of the examples which I took from Hamlin Garland was another noun, *my bach* 'the fellow with whom I shared bachelor quarters'. A comparable usage existed in Newfoundland, comparable too with Dos Passos' usage. That is *batcher*, glossed in the notes to ballads from Bell Island, Conception Bay, Newfoundland, for a ballad collected in 1972-3 dated by the informant to c.1910. The collector, Peter Neary, explained *batcher* as 'a mainland man boarding in company owned houses with resident families ... expected to provide part of the family provisions.' (Neary 1975: 45). This is a *batcher* 'bachelor boarder'. One may wonder, but doubt, if *ba(t)cher* was ever used in New Zealand. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that *bach/batch* 'bachelor substandard dwelling place' was not developed in North America, given *company batches*. *Bach*, noun or verb, deserves a more intensive study.

American examples in the dictionaries show that *bach* (noun) apparently antedates *bach* (verb) and the verb compounds such as

"to keep bach" 'to maintain bachelor quarters'. As a noun *bach* in early instances is commonly linked with 'old' i.e. *an old bach* 'an elderly bachelor'. The usage, as by Garland above, of a house mate and contemporary, was a later development and like *batcher* it probably did not reach New Zealand.

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NOTES

- 1 I am indebted to my colleague Ms M.A. Edgcumbe for drawing my attention to this example.
- 2 Among Auckland scientists I am most indebted to Dr Barbara Segedin, Department of Botany, University of Auckland, for her co-operation. I must acknowledge the help of Mr Frank Rogers who in December 1977 made enquiries about this matter at a gathering of Rover Scouts reportedly "keen on nature", men of mature years. Some present knew of *vegetable caterpillars*, none at all knew *aweto*.
- 3 Unfortunately my notes on Hamlin Garland have been misplaced. The dates for the examples were c. 1890-1910.