Sad joke on a marae – Apirana Taylor

Tihei Mauriora I called
Kepe Paikea Te Kooti
Rewi and Te Rauparaha
I saw them
grim death and wooden ghosts
carved on the meeting house wall

In the only Maori I knew
I called
Tihei Mauriora
Above me the tekoteko raged
He ripped his tongue from his mouth
And threw it at my feet

Then I spoke
My name is Tu the freezing worker
Ngati D.B. is my tribe
The pub is my marae
My fist is my taiaha
Jail is my home

Tihei Mauriora I cried
They understood
The tekoteko and the ghosts
Though I said nothing but
Tihei Mauriora
For that’s all I knew

Tihei Mauriora – means ‘breath of life’

The Maori list is of Maori ancestors – note the capital letters. The use of the list suggests there are many ancestors.

The use of ‘I’ personalises the situation to the man, Tu. ‘Them’ creates a separation and distances Tu from his ancestors.

‘wooden ghosts’ represents his ancestors.

Strong verbs – ‘ripped,’ ‘raged’ and ‘threw’ – all suggest anger

Personification – used to make the ancestor seem alive and angry. We can identify now with how the ancestor feels.

The ‘threw it at my feet’ links to the challenge issues in Maori custom. He is challenging Tu to find his culture.

Repetition of ‘is my’ proves the point that everything he is, is not Maori.

Structured like a mihi – an introduction. Everything he identifies with is not Maori, which further emphasises his separation from his culture.

He is almost a stereotype.

The use of ‘cried’ suggests a desperation, a longing for help, perhaps a cry for forgiveness.

‘They understood’ shows that his ancestors understand.

‘All I know’ is repeated – shows that he has lost his culture and with it, part of his identity.