



Cousins

Patricia Grace

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Makareta is the chosen one - carrying her families hopes. Missy is the observer - the one who accepts but has her dreams. Mata is always waiting - for life to happen as it stealthily passes by.

These three women are the cousins of one of Patricia Grace's most popular novels. Moving from the forties to the present, from the country to the protests of the cities, *Cousins* is the story of three girls once thrown together and as women grown apart.

This is a stunning novel of tradition and change, of the whanau and its struggle to survive, of the place of women in a changing world.

Cousins Details

Date : Published 2000 by Penguin Books (first published 1992)

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Author : Patricia Grace

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zespri says

I loved this book.

I'm sure being a New Zealander gave me a head start, even though a pakeha one, as the three cousins of the title are all maori and born around the forties. The book follows the women through to the present day, with separate chapters as the women tell their stories.

I'm grateful for writers like Patricia Grace. I will never understand fully a culture that is so different to my own, but novels like this help to lift the veil a little, and allow us insight, and hopefully a deeper understanding of what it means to be maori in a mainly pakeha prevalent society.

Mariana says

This book contrasts the lives of three Maori women. Poignant!

rabbitprincess says

This is probably a case of starting a book at the wrong time but not really having a better time to try again. The beginning was rather overwhelming in the amount of minutiae piled on the reader and the slight disorientation in time and space as we try to figure out where this woman is and how she came to be where she is now. I don't doubt that this book does what it's supposed to do, namely explore the lives of three cousins who have shared a magical childhood moment, but I don't think it's really what I'm after at the moment and I've managed to put it down for almost a week without having the slightest inclination to continue. Much as I liked Tu by this author, I don't think this is quite my cup of tea. Still, I won't hold that against her, hence my not rating this book.

Nadine says

One of the best books I've read. Beautiful, sad, glorious.

Satheesh says

Patricia grace is the great author written so many books, now i am reading that books

Sara says

I really enjoyed this look into Maori culture, since I don't know very much about it. The characters were so interesting, and I loved seeing the world from all three main characters' points-of-view.

I would have liked to know the meaning of the Maori words the author used throughout the novel. And it wasn't clear to me just when the book took place. But it was a great read all the same!

Debbie says

On a miserable, cold, wet Sunday I sat down with this book and became oblivious to the weather. This story captured me and transported me. The wonder of books and storytelling is that they allow us to not only see the world from another perspective, but also to feel the emotions of the characters as if you are walking in their shoes. Books take you to places that movies can't reach because when watching a movie you are always a spectator, always on the outside looking in. A book allows you inside, looking out.

Patricia Grace is a New Zealand Maori author and her books resonate with the pain of her people. **Cousins** tells the story of three female cousins who grow up in the period immediately after World War II when there was mass migration of Maori from rural areas into cities and towns and a huge loss of their culture and identity. Mata, Makareka and Missy have very different lives and upbringings but all three are shaped by being part of a culture of conquered peoples who have to fight to retain their own language, land and beliefs in their own homeland.

Missy grows up in a strong Maori family and community, but her life is blighted by poverty which affects her schooling. Part of the poverty is caused by her grandmother punishing her mother for marrying a man not deemed suitable. Her mother's rejection of tradition and her grandmother's refusal to change make for a harsh life for Missy and her siblings. Despite the poverty Missy has her language, her culture and strong family love and support but she is not equipped to live outside this small community.

Mata's story is the saddest. Born to a European father she is left in a children's home after her mother dies when she is only 5 years old. She is brought up with no knowledge of her people or culture or language and with a strong feeling of inferiority and shame for not being white. Mata fits in nowhere.

Makareka is Mata's opposite. She is educated, cherished and nurtured by her grandmother and grows up with a strong understanding of her culture and is fluent in both Maori and English. She can straddle both worlds and becomes very influential in the burgeoning renaissance of Maori identity that takes place in the last decades of the twentieth century. But ironically Makareka is only able to succeed because she rejects an arranged marriage that her grandmother tries to ambush her into.

I became engrossed in the moving and compelling lives of these three main characters, as well as the minor family members whose lives intersect and connect with theirs. Patricia Grace is a wonderful writer and her prose is effortless and fluid. Although this is very much a New Zealand story and a Maori story, this story could be applied to most conquered indigenous peoples in most countries of the world. As someone lucky enough to be born one of the victors rather than the vanquished, this book gave me an insight into the realities of life for the people on the losing end of colonialism. I highly recommend this book.

Katewood16 says

Patricia Grace was recommended to me as one of New Zealand's foremost novelists, and this story started out in an interesting way. As the story of the three cousins living their intersecting and disparate lives progressed through time, however, they began to feel less three-dimensional and their stories became removed from one another. Grace adds further challenges to the feeling of this being a cohesive story by varying person, including using the awkward second person.

Josephine Ensign says

Lovely book and I look forward to reading more of her short stories/collections. 'Cousins' reads more like a series of linked short stories. Some of the later chapters felt forced to me, but overall I enjoyed the book.

Lisa says

I decided to kick off my first review for Indigenous Literature Week with a novel by Patricia Grace of Ngati Toa, Ngati Raukawa and Te Ati Awa descent, because she is visiting Melbourne for the Melbourne Writers Festival and the First Nations Australia Writers' Network Workshop. Grace is one of New Zealand's best known writers and has an impressive body of work which includes novels, short stories and children's books. Her best known work is probably the ground-breaking *Potiki* (1986) which I reviewed a while ago but I also enjoyed *Baby No-Eyes* which came out in 1998. (See my review). In between these two novels, however, came *Cousins* in 1992, and I think I like this one best of all.

(But perhaps I should reserve my judgement because I've just ordered her new one, *Chappy*, from Readings – and it's getting rave reviews in NZ. I also found a copy of *Tu* (2004) at Brotherhood Books, so these are treats in store.)

Cousins begins with the heart-breaking story of Mata. There are three interlocking stories, with narrations that shift to allow for differences in intimacy. We meet Mata striding along the road at night, barefoot and with nothing but the clothes on her back and a photo of her mother, who died when she was a little girl. Mata's story is poignantly told from her child's point-of-view, punctuated by her middle-aged first-person narration, which works like a barrier against revealing her feelings.

Where? Didn't want to ask where or why, or to have thoughts that lead to thinking. Only wanted hands in shoes in pockets and just herself, her own ugly self, with her own big feet and big hands, her own wide face, her own bad hair, which was turning white, springing out round her big head. One coat, one dress. Shoes on their last legs or in their last pockets, a photo in a frame, and her name. (p. 14)

Mata Pairama spent her childhood adrift from her culture. Her father refused to let her extended family take care of her and abandoned her to the guardianship of Mrs Parkinson, who offloaded her to an orphanage. Her childhood was spent in terror of an omnipotent Old Testament God, in the loneliness of a child who belongs to no one, and in confusion about her identity. She is re-named May Palmer, but that doesn't make her

acceptable to the mother of her only friend, Betty, who wasn't allowed to bring dirty, black children into the house...

To read the rest of my review please visit <http://anzlitlovers.com/2015/08/26/co...>

Michelle Boyer says

The story follows the very different lives of three Maori cousins living in New Zealand. Mata is the first cousin that we begin to learn about, and as a small child she is brought to the home of her aunt and grandparents for a visit. It becomes clear rather quickly that she does not feel comfortable in this environment because she's been raised in non-Maori customs. Mata continues to remind herself about her Christian upbringing, which leads to problems of modesty (for example, her cousins pee outside on the grass and for Mata this is seen as very inappropriate). She also thinks that everyone is always speaking "in a language she didn't understand" (p37). She's referring to members of the family that can speak Maori, so the reader begins to understand that she has not learned Maori from her mother (who has passed, we come to learn) or from her father (a Pakeha who likely never knew Maori).

When Mata considers what her grandparents' home will be like she continues to compare it to previous experiences from her paternal grandparents' home. She thinks there will be a glass verandah, big kitchens, etc., and this is not the case when she reaches the home of her Maori grandparents. Thus, we are led to believe that Mata has been raised in a situation where she does not identify with being Maori, which seems to be problematic and she has trouble adjusting to the new environment and making friends with her cousins. In fact, when she arrives she keeps saying that her name is "May Palmer" but her family tells her that her given name was Mata. As Keita tells her, "'He (her father) didn't want any Maori name or any Maori daughter for that matter, or wife. Only wanted a slave for him and a prospect of land'" (p45). This seems to be the case because her father's family is no longer interested in Mata once they realize the father cannot inherit the land--only Mata can--which leads her to become a ward in the home of another Pakeha woman.

Mata has to return "home" to where she is a ward, and never ends up returning even though it is clear that her Maori family wants to take her in as one of their own. She ends up working at a factory where she does make friends with another Maori woman, and eventually she marries a Maori man named Sonny. The relationship is strained because Mata has issues with her identity and she does not really enjoy a sexual relationship with Sonny, who eventually strays. She finds herself single and takes in a friend's child, but the friend eventually returns for the child, leaving Mata alone again. Devastated, she ends up walking the roads alone.

Makareta is the next cousin we are introduced to. She lives more of a traditional Maori life and goes into detail about birthing and mothering her child. But there is a war going on and her husband Rere is soon deployed to Europe and ends up dying there. Makareta lives with the family for some time but the elders eventually want her to marry Rere's younger brother. Unable to find interest in the arrangement, Makareta leaves and takes her daughter with her. But eventually the family comes to take the daughter back home with them so that she can learn and live her Maori heritage.

Missy is another, shorter, story about Missy's life but because of its brevity it seems to leave much to be desired. Eventually Makareta begins trying to change her community and, especially, issues the Maori are having with the government. She also finds Mata at one point and attempts to bring her home.

A wonderful story about the ordeals Maori women face in their lives and how very different those lives can

be based on where a person chooses to live, whom they choose to love, etc.

Bronwyn says

I'm a huge fan of Patricia Grace, and recommend this.

Because her books are so rooted in New Zealand, other readers might miss the intent of some cultural references but they'll be rewarded so richly by reading her.

An exquisite writer not to be missed!

Hannah says

A story about three cousins who grew up in different environments.

Maori culture is blended in with temporary political issues in New Zealand, mirrored from every possible perspective.

A good book to read if you want to learn about Maori culture.

Serendipity says

A fascinating and intriguing look at the life of Maori women from the 1940s, through the many changes to the 1970s and beyond. It is told through the lens of three cousins and in two sections. In the first section we view the childhood, teens and young adulthood of each of the three in turn. The differences of where their tales overlap are particularly telling and interesting. Mata's Maori mother, estranged from her family, has died and her English father essentially abandons her to an orphanage. With the exception of one summer visit she has no knowledge or her contact with the Maori relatives, and when she does visit it is clear she feels very much like an outsider. She struggles especially with relationships in her adult life and never seems happy or fully engaged. The values of the Christian orphanage do not equip her to feel comfortable in this rural, traditional Maori environment. Jakarta meanwhile is the chosen one, raised and groomed by the elders for a greater purpose. She is steeped in tradition but her formal education is also valued and as a teen she is sent away to boarding school. However, when the time comes to fulfil the destiny her elders have determined for her she refuses and runs away to join her mother in the city. At this point her cousins Missy, previously often ignored and living in the worst conditions, volunteers to take her place and marry the man the elders intended for her sister. The next section of the novel jumps forward in time and we get a look at Maori issues of the 1970s and 1980s such as the land march and the Kohanga Reo movement. The chapters in this section were shorter, and felt a little rushed and less satisfying as a result. I wanted to know more about the lives of the three women in this period - especially Missy and Mata. Overall I loved this insight this book gave into the lives of Maori women from the 1940s forward - a period of many changes including urbanisation, which led to a dilution of traditional ways, and the following push for revival, a renaissance of Maori language, tradition and culture, including an adaptation to a more urban setting. A telling point for me was that Mata, who was essentially cut off from her Maori roots for most of her life, seemed the least happy and successful, her return to the family at the end meant the novel ended on a positive note.

