



TE AO MĀORI (/NEWS/TE-MANU-KORIHI) / ENVIRONMENT (/TAGS/EN

Whanganui River to gain legal personhood

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In a world first, a New Zealand river will be recognised as a person.

Hanui-Thompson, 2017



Whanganui River Photo: 123RF

The Whanganui River Claims Settlement Bill was passed today, giving the Whanganui River the same status as a legal person.

Te Urewera, the former national park, was granted the same status when Tūhoe settled with the Crown in 2014.

In Whanganui they have a saying: 'Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au' - which translates into English as, 'I am the river and the river is me.'

The river will now be the first in the world to have such a status - but for the iwi of the river, it recognises something they say they have always known.

Te Tai Hauāuru MP Adrian Rurawhe said some people might find the concept strange but it was completely normal for Māori.

"The river as a whole is absolutely important to the people who are from the river and live on the river.

"I'll repeat something that [MP] Chester Burrows said in [Parliament] today - it's not that we've changed our world view but people are catching up to seeing things how we see it." (a Māori world view)

Treaty Negotiations Minister Chris Finlayson said the new law would work just like a charitable trust or an incorporated society, with trustees for the river legally required to act in its best interest.

"There some precedents for it overseas - there had been a lot of talk that this is actually a really good way of ensuring that the particular resource is able to have representative to address the kind of environmental degradation that so many natural resources suffer from."

Mr Rurawhe said iwi had been fighting for over 160 years to get this recognition for their river.

"From a Whanganui viewpoint the wellbeing of the river is directly linked to the wellbeing of the people and so it is really important that's recognised as its own identity," Mr Rurawhe said.

Mr Finlayson said the legislation recognised the deep spiritual connection between the Whanganui iwi and its ancestral river and created a strong platform for the river's future.

Nice quote!

The critic [...] speedily becomes aware of the fact that there are two kinds of literature: there is the kind that, with considerable plausibility, he can account for on his methods, and there is another kind whose essence seems to be quite unanalysable. It is, of course, this latter kind for which the critic has the most respect: he refers to its 'genius', a word indicating the complete breakdown of his critical apparatus. The essence of a good Tchekhov story has this kind of elusiveness, and so has this story by Miss Katherine Mansfield.²⁰

Sullivan's claim here is that a writer's worth can be measured by the difficulty a critic has to account for his or her work. The good Chekhov story is elusive, and 'Je ne parle pas français' is too. Mansfield had not attracted significant attention by April 1920 – that came with the publication of *Bliss and Other Stories* in December that same year. Sullivan manages to turn the critical neglect of Mansfield's writing into evidence of her greatness, and Chekhov's own example supports his case.

Sullivan is likely to have known that making the Mansfield-Chekhov connection would please his boss, mainly because it was one he was apt to employ himself. In a letter to Mansfield dated 19 January 1920 Murry mentions a visit to H. G. Wells' house during which Jane Wells 'warmed [his] heart' by 'speaking enthusiastically' of her and Chekhov in the same breath: 'The association of the two, as you know, will always seem to me to show real insight.'²¹ Just under three weeks later Murry wrote to her again: 'You are a big writer. You are a classic as Tchekhov in your way.'²² Murry appears to have hit upon the Mansfield-Chekhov connection as early as March 1918. In a letter to Mansfield he counsels her against using the name 'Eddie Wangle' for Bertha's husband in the story 'Bliss': 'It is a Dickens touch & you're not Dickens – you're Tchekhov – more than Tchekhov.'²³ Sullivan's review of 'Je ne parle pas français' may have irked some more eagle-eyed literary insiders – Virginia Woolf, for one, cried nepotism in her diary²⁴ – but to everybody else the Mansfield-Chekhov comparison must have looked like one made at arm's length. Critics read and are influenced by other critics; Chekhov was invoked for comparison with Mansfield eight months later by Desmond MacCarthy in the *New Statesman and Nation*, Conrad Aiken in the *Freeman* and Malcolm Cowley in *The Dial* when *Bliss and Other Stories* appeared.²⁵

A seed sown soon became too much pollen on the wind; it became a critical reflex to associate Mansfield with Chekhov so quickly that Richard Church began his 1927 review of Murry's posthumous edition of Mansfield's *Journal* by noting that '[i]t is usual to compare her with Tchekov, and indeed the likeness is obvious'.²⁶ It was enough to make Murry – the very man who had, according to S. S. Kotliansky, turned Mansfield into an 'English Tchekhov'²⁷ – attempt to check its spread. In the 'Introduction' to the *Journal* Murry recalibrates the