



'Our multiform, our infinite Pacific'

Editorial

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This special issue of the *International Journal of Scottish Literature* takes as its organising inspiration Epeli Hau’ofa’s description of the Pacific as ‘our sea of islands’. Whereas earlier, colonial, anthropological work had represented Pacific Island societies as isolated, backwards, disconnected and in need of Western ‘development,’ Hau’ofa stressed their interconnected histories, shared (and astonishing) legacies of migration, travel and exploration, and the great, polyglot, tangled sprawl of *communication* from island to island, culture to culture. The peoples of the Pacific Islands today are, Hau’ofa argued, engaged in new forms of ‘world building,’ bringing ideas, language and culture along with food and clothes in their luggage as they trace new travel routes from Apia to Auckland, Nuku’alofa to New York.¹

A specifically *literary* response to Hau’ofa’s expansive and inspired sociological vision is, we hope, visible in what follows. Where can Scotland be located in this ‘sea of islands’, our ‘multiform, our infinite’ Pacific? Earlier generations of postcolonial and socialist criticism were driven, admirably in our view, by a political desire to write back to and against ‘guys like Gauguin’ (the title of a poem by Selina Tusitala Marsh) and their racist, colonial dominations of narratives of the Pacific, and, indeed, the territories and sovereignty of Pacific nations themselves.² This colonial process, initiated, as the history of the Wakefield scheme reminds us, as much in Edinburgh as London, is one part of the Scottish Pacific; reminders of dispossession and cultural devastation abroad ought to warn against easy adoption of sentimental talk of the Scottish ‘experience of colonialism’ in nationalist rhetoric.³ That ‘experience’ was usually as one of the colonisers.

Yet postcolonial criticism, for all its political motivations, produced a strangely individualised and psychological method of reading, ‘the colonial encounter’, with all the uniformity and singularity that use of the definite object implied, being reproduced in reading after reading as discrete, spare, cultures facing each other. But the beach, whether at Falesá or elsewhere, is the site of messier, more complex exchanges.⁴ As Jonathan Lamb’s contribution suggests, the Scottish Pacific was produced, at first, not by official channels but through informal encounter, sexual exchange and cultural assimilation, as Scottish whalers, sealers, sailors, traders and others found themselves amongst and, eventually, within Pacific cultures and settings. Reflecting on his recent attempts to uncover and comprehend his ancestors’ various nineteenth century journeys from Scotland to New Zealand, via Australia and the Pacific Islands, Rod Edmond notes,

I came to realise what a blunt and indiscriminating category this ['the coloniser'] was in much postcolonial writing. Many colonisers were displaced people who left Britain because it had no place for them. [...] I came to understand that missionaries were more than just agents of cultural imperialism, although they were of course that. [...] I became interested in the personal and cultural dislocation experienced by missionaries themselves as well as the disruption they caused in the places they went.⁵

Indigenous writers, in recent years, have turned to investigating aspects of their own Scottish heritage, integrating it into specifically Pacific tales, as Michelle Keown explores in her essay for this special issue. Older postcolonial methods of criticism, separating out settler and indigenous voices and views, seem ill-fitted to this kind of internal communication and cacophony. A looser, more expansive approach is required.

We want a Scottish Pacific made up of *connections* across the sea of islands and across time, joining recent scholarly work, from Katie Trumpener's *Bardic Nationalism* (1997) to Margaret Cohen's *The Novel and the Sea* (2010) and Rosalind Williams' *The Triumph of Human Empire* (2013), in looking beyond and between national traditions to writers and literature in movement. One strange sort of motion is traced here by Jane Stafford, considering a 'Scotland of the mind' as the English poet Arthur Hugh Clough is read, in New Zealand, to produce some new Scottish Pacific. A different trajectory altogether is uncovered by Michelle Keown, whose account of Maori-Hawaiian novelist Cathy Koa Dunsford stresses the intersection of Maori, Pacific, and Orcadian mythologies in her depiction of environmental threats to the Orkney Islands, 'locating the discursive encounter between Scotland and the Pacific in the northern hemisphere'. Such work continues the project, developed in this journal and elsewhere, of, in Robert Crawford's phrase, 'devolving English Literature'.

Robert Louis Stevenson is, unsurprisingly, at the heart of this collection. His 'ambiguous, hectic ghost', as Ian Wedde names it in his classic novel of the Scottish Pacific, *Symmes Hole* (1986), runs about in many of the essays here, and is the central focus of essays from Anne Maxwell, Roslyn Jolly, Taku Yamamoto, and Sylvie Largeaud-Ort ga. In Stevenson's multifarious Pacific writings, Scotland and the Pacific constantly abut and collapse into each other:

I was standing out on the little verandah in front of my room this morning, and there went through me or over me a heave of extraordinary and apparently baseless emotion. I literally staggered. And then the explanation came, and I knew that I had found a frame of mind and body that belonged to Scotland, and particularly to the neighbourhood of Callander. Very odd these identities of sensation, and the world of connotations implied; Highland huts, and peat smoke, and the brown swirling rivers, and wet clothes, and whisky, and the romance of the past, and that

indescribable bite of the whole thing at a man's heart, which is—or rather lies at the bottom of—a story.⁶

Near the beginning of *In the South Seas* (1896), Stevenson proclaims, 'I must learn to address readers from the uttermost parts of the sea'.⁷ Our Stevenson, as children readers and then, later, as researchers and writers, has always been a Pacific writer, located in these 'uttermost parts'; if a sense of his international reach and significance has grown over the last few decades, the essays collected here will, we hope, suggest further ways of reading this complex, contradictory figure.

The *IJSL* was set up to encourage new ways of reading Scottish literature as a discipline and project as much as a set of texts, drawing in comparative and international contexts to set up new encounters with familiar writers and problems. Looking for Scotland on a map of the Pacific is part of that project, forcing us to pay attention to the different kinds of cartography cultural location demands. One example: 'work as if you live in the early days of a better nation,' now a free-floating slogan for a certain kind of a liberal nationalism was, in Alasdair Gray's first use of the term in *Lanark*, always more complicated, linked as it was, and as Gray made clear, to Dennis Lee's rather grim *Civil Elegies* (1968). The Canadian poet's tone and voice were made possible, in turn, by a chance encounter with lines from New Zealand writer Denis Glover's 'Threnody'.⁸ National contexts cannot contain these poetic links, but the links would make little sense without an awareness of their place in national conversations and poetic traditions. It's in this sort of exchange – messy, unclear, ongoing – that we seek to locate the Scottish Pacific: 'how marvellously descriptive! And incomplete!'

Our thanks to all of the contributors, who agreed to write for this special issue and then showed great patience through a protracted peer review and revision process; to the reviewers across four continents who helped assess and comment on our essays; to Scott Hames at the *IJSL* for his encouragement, enthusiasm and good humour; and to our colleagues Liam McIlvanney, Linda Hardy and Jane Stafford for suggestions and help along the way.

NOTES

1 See Epele Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), especially part one.

2 We cite here, as one ancestor among many, Bill Pearson's unjustly neglected *Rifled Sanctuary: Some Views of the Pacific Islands in Western Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

3 The influence of Scottish Enlightenment thought on Wakefield's project of 'systematic colonisation' is extensively discussed by Mark Hickford in *Lords of the Land: Indigenous Property Rights and the Jurisprudence of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

4 See Greg Denning, *Beach Crossings: Voyaging Across Times, Cultures and Self* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2004).

5 Rod Edmond, *Migrations: Journeys in Place and Time* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2013). Edmond's earlier work, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), is another important point of origin for our current work.

6 *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford Allen Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994-5), vii, 91.

7 Robert Louis Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, ed. by Neil Rennie (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 5.

8 All traced, with admirable clarity, by Harry McGrath, 'Early Days of a Better Nation', *Scottish Review of Books*, 9.1 (2013). <http://www.scottishreviewofbooks.org/index.php/back-issues/2013-03-27-15-25-26/volume-nine-issue-one/533-early-days-of-a-better-nation-harry-mcgrath> [accessed 5 November 2013].