Maebh Long and Matthew Hayward. *The Rise of Pacific Literature: Decolonization, Radical Campuses, and Modernism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2024. Pp. 312.

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Maebh Long and Matthew Hayward might seem to be chancing their hand with just how far the category of modernism can be stretched with *The Rise of Pacific Literature: Decolonization, Radical Campuses, and Modernism*. The work they discuss in this book was largely published between 1960 and 1990—challenging even the most generous periodisation of modernist writing—and was written far from centres of industrial modernisation, primarily by poets and novelists living in Papua New Guinea and Fiji. There is, however, justification in identifying the Pacific writing considered here as distinctly modernist and not merely modern. While the book does, as one might expect in the age of the new modernist studies, "position Oceanian writing within an extended history of global modernism," it pushes further than this, providing a well-considered examination of the ways in which the teaching of modernist literature in the Pacific helped to produce a writing scene that was ambiguously modernist in character.[1] At the heart of *The Rise of Pacific Literature* is the story of two university English programs and the impact of pedagogy on the development of postcolonial literary identity.

Between 1960 and 1970 the University of Papua New Guinea and the University of the South Pacific became hotbeds of literary experimentation and political activism. Long and Hayward suggest that the

> establishment of the new Pacific universities brought together people, facilities, and anticolonial, emancipatory politics, as well as the energy and momentum to create a collective literary movement" which "drew schoolteachers, civil servants, doctors, and, in the villages, farmers and fishers into the writing scene. (23)

The literature that emerged from this scene was modernist, Long and Hayward argue, in no small way because the curriculum at the University of Papua New

[1] Maebh Long and Matthew Hayward, *The Rise of Pacific Literature: Decolonization, Radical Campuses, and Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2024), 6. All subsequent references cited parenthetically.

Guinea and the University of the South Pacific was grounded in modernist and postcolonial literature. As they put it,

> modernism arises as a particularly appropriate movement to teach in decolonizing countries, where students needed above all to navigate and articulate tensions between the traditional and the modern—or more accurately […] between multiple traditions and multiple visions of modernity. (41)

The book provides a compelling examination of Pacific literature's shifting dialogues with a modernist canon that is wide enough to include T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, James Baldwin, and Henry Miller.

A good deal of *The Rise of Pacific Literature* is an historical account of the English programs of the University of Papua New Guinea and the University of the South Pacific and of the impact these programs had on the literary culture of the region. If the book has a shortcoming it is that, at times, lengthy discussions of curriculum take up space that might otherwise have been devoted to close readings of Sia Figiel, Albert Wendt, Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe, and other major figures under consideration. This is foremost a study of the literary and educational climate that contributed to a mid-twentieth-century flourishing of modernist writing in the Pacific, rather than of the modernist aspects of individual works, and the book should be approached with that in mind. The premise is convincingly argued that teaching modernist texts helped to destabilise the hegemonic power of settler-colonial literature in the very act of teaching it:

> Yet if, as we have outlined, modernism's principal lesson was that everything is up for question, so, it follows, was European modernism: it could not lay claim to the last word or be readily crammed for exam regurgitation. When Pacific writer-scholars took up the modernist text, therefore, they did so with the dissector's knife and not the novitiate's zeal. (49)

Long and Hayward set themselves the ambitious task of mapping the territory that Pacific modernism occupies, and it is a goal that generally leaves them little time

to convey more than a fleeting sense of the individual landmarks within that landscape.

The English program at the University of Papua New Guinea in the 1960s and 1970s is a particularly radical example of the way that the teaching of modernist literature in Pacific contexts had direct implications on the development of regional writing. At the University of Papua New Guinea, the English degree was structured in a way that "began with oral literature, which was followed by the literatures of decolonizing countries and then by modernist literatures, with an emphasis on Europe" (65). Long and Hayward suggest that by establishing a platform of traditional Pacific literary forms and then moving immediately to modernist rupture, the university program at the University of Papua New Guinea primed students to confront colonial modernity in distinctly modernist ways:

> A typical English literature program introduces modernism as a late development, stressing its radical departures from the literary conventions of the nineteenth century. As any literature lecturer knows, these departures can be bewildering for students, and it is often only when their disruptive functions are explained in the context of literary history that techniques such as fragmentation, nontemporality, and bricolage begin to appear meaningful. (75)

At the University of Papua New Guinea, modernism was not so much explained in the context of literary history as it was explained in the context of colonial history. The result of the curriculum was that "students were confronted with writing and analysis that simultaneously reinforced and undercut Western dominance and that closed certain doors to modernity to them even as it opened others" (78). Modernism's capacity to disrupt the colonial project in complicated and often unexpected ways proves to be a productive lens for Long and Hayward, particularly in the sections dedicated to the work of Crocombe, John Kasaipwalova, Russell Soaba, and Subramani.

Long and Hayward's argument that modernism served as both a legitimising and a destabilising force on Pacific colonialism, while also challenging purely traditional notions of Pacific identity, is most satisfyingly realised in chapters three and four of the book. The first of these, titled "Traveling Editors and Indigenous

Masks," is a well-considered examination of the role that the German poet and scholar, Ulli Beier, played in driving literary innovation at the University of Papua New Guinea in the 1960s. A troubled figure, Beier at once worked to provide Pacific writers with the "formulae for authenticity and individuality" and "continu[ed] his practice of literary fraud," using pseudonyms such as Obotunde Ijimere and M. Lovori (103). Beier is a figure who could both criticize "the cathedral in Port Moresby for sporting 'a mock *haus tambaran*, a crude imitation of a Maprik initiation house, the traditional designs copied onto the concrete walls by a European hand'" (107), and engage in just this kind of imitation. Beier's various literary personas represent "the work of an experienced European writer and teacher masquerading as work by a Niuginian student writer and by comparison making the actual student writers seem amateurish" (108).

The chapter discussing Beier is followed immediately by "Black Power and Pacific Existentialism: John Kasaipwalova and Russell Soaba," in which Long and Hayward further examine the contradictory ways modernist writing influenced the development of Pacific literature. The chapter focuses on two texts, Kasaipwalova's long poem, *Reluctant Flame* (1971), and Soaba's campus novel, *Wanpis* (1977). Long and Hayward observe that in Kasaipwalova's poetry the English language is "bent to Niuginian will: in a poem resisting the suffocating nature of white fog, poetry's kinship with orature is prioritized while the written word is reclaimed" (122). Nevertheless, "Kasaipwalova came under fire for making his interconnections too plain" (122). By comparison, Soaba's conflicted relationship with European, postcolonial, and traditional influences amounts to a dramatic climax for the first half of *The Rise of Pacific Literature.* Unlike *Reluctant Flame*,

> *Wanpis* is not a text designed to rouse a nascent Black nation but to stimulate individual consciousness, and it is fundamentally opposed to impassioned calls to arms: while resounding with challenges to educational and civil structures, it is suspicious of collective revolt, seeing it as replacing loyalty to one structure with blind adherence to another. (124-125)

In Soaba's novel, "protest awakens a nation to the evils of colonization only to demand subservience to the nationalist program," and "neither radical groups nor

university authorities are seen as offering paths for individual advancement" (125). The juxtaposition of Beier, Kasaipwalova, and Soaba in this middle section of *The Rise of Pacific Literature* itself provides sufficient grounds to recommend the book to anyone with even a tangential interest in the history of modernist writing or postcolonial literature.

Where other writers have wielded the tools of European culture as a weapon, Soaba is depicted as a figure who draws upon the intellectual tradition of existentialism to explore the implications of colonial modernity for indigenous self-identity. Long and Hayward suggest that the

> novel's three sections map stages of identity, from that of a "lusman," a loser or rootless loner, to a "split-egg nostalgic" who thinks that all contemporary ills can be healed by a return to the village, to "wanpis," one who realizes that neither the traditional past nor a Westernized modernity can provide easy answers, and instead finds difficult answers on his or her own. (127)

Soaba's references to Camus, Baldwin, and Kasaipwalova are treated with diligence and insight throughout. In many respects, Soaba's novel is presented as the apotheosis of modernist writing at the University of Papua New Guinea.

The second half of *The Rise of Pacific Literature* is primarily concerned with the literary community that developed around the University of the South Pacific in the 1970s and 1980s. The scholarship here is equally strong, but the narrative does have the disadvantage of following on from the positively electric discussion of Beier, Kasaipwalova, and Soaba. Long and Hayward note the distinction between the two writerly communities:

> At UPNG, Beier offered empowering if problematic guidance, but at USP the small body of young writers—[Shashikant] Nair, [Anirudh] Singh, [Raymond] Pillai, and [Vanessa] Griffen, as well as Sister Mary Stella, Karuna Prasad, Sulochana Devi, Udaraj Prasad, John Haydon, and Neal Engledow, a group largely but not exclusively Indo-Fijian—had to find their own ways of relating and responding to the texts they studied and discover their own ways of seeing these responses into print. (150)

This is not to say that the contributions made by the writers discussed in this section are any less important to the field of Pacific literature. After all, Wendt was teaching at the University of the South Pacific in the 1970s, and the university played a crucial role in providing the region with its foremost literary publication, *Mana*.

The story of *Mana* is central to Long and Hayward's engagement with the literary community in Fiji. They argue that "[i]n or around March 1973, Pacific literature changed," when an "eight-page literary segment appeared under the heading 'Mana' in *Pacific Islands Monthly*, an Australia-based magazine founded in 1930 to share news and information across the colonial territories of the Pacific Islands" (164). The project was led by Crocombe, and around three years later *Mana* became a literary magazine in its own right, based at the University of the South Pacific. The establishment of a venue by and for Pacific Islanders is depicted as a triumph for the region's literary ambitions, and the "1976 relaunch of 'Mana' was symbolic as a reclamation and expansion of its medium" (189). The voices championed in the pages of the journal coalesced to form a coterie that was at once regional, nationalist, and international in its aspirations.

The penultimate chapter of *The Rise of Pacific Literature* considers the role of the gothic in shaping the writing of Subramani. Titled "Subramani's Sugarcane Gothic," the chapter is very timely, given criticism's current preoccupation with gothic literature, but it would have benefitted from being better integrated with the broader narrative of the book. Long and Hayward justify the inclusion by observing that modernism "played a foundational role in the development of postcolonial literatures, but so too did the gothic, despite or even because of its colonial associations" (194). The chapter does provide a well-informed account of Jean Rhys's influence as a late modernist on the gothic cane plantations of Subramani. The argument runs that

> Transposing the wintry northern gothic evoked in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) to the brilliant landscape and flora of Jamaica, Rhys presents a model of literary engagement triangulating gothic, modernism, and the postcolonial that has been immensely influential for postcolonial scholars and writers—Subramani included, we contend. (200)

The contention holds, but does run the risk of feeling auxiliary to an otherwise clearly-structured work of criticism.

With *The Rise of Pacific Literature*, Long and Haward have made a foundational contribution to understanding the place of Pacific literature in international responses to the conditions of colonial modernity. As they suggest, "Wendt, [Epeli] Hau'ofa, Helu Thaman, and Subramani are now central to the Pacific curriculums that they helped inspire with their pedagogies and their literature alike", and these writers "are nodes in a genealogical network extending back into the Indigenous past and forward into the future to come" (224). The book navigates the relationship between colonialism, education, and modernist literature, and provides a new and valuable way of situating Pacific writing in the context of twentieth-century literary experimentation. In his introduction to *The New Modernist Studies* (2021), Douglas Mao observed that "in seeking new modes of analysis, scholars of the 'new modernisms' aligned with scholars in the studies fields upon which they drew" in an effort "to change the interpretive and evaluative lenses through which texts are read".[2] *The Rise of Pacific Literature* demonstrates that, whatever challenges humanities departments face in the current political climate, such developments in modernist studies continue apace.

[2] Douglas Mao, "Introduction: The New Modernist Studies," in *The New Modernist Studies*, edited by Douglas Mao (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 3.