

most ancient structures on the island. *Heiau* defined by natural features rather than by stone walls or high platforms also continue to exist. The *p haku* or standing stones that make up the Al la and Wailea *heiau* in Ko‘o-laupoko, both associated with fishing activities and themselves worshipped as gods, offer silent testimony to a past that has not been completely forgotten, neglected, or overgrown.

As a non-Hawaiian and with no expertise in Hawaiian history, I am unable to evaluate the quality of the historical essays that preface each chapter. I find them well-written, enlightening, and persuasive. Overall, and impressive as it is, the volume does have some flaws. Not all of the pages are numbered, and the appearance of different fonts and print size in the text is distracting. The archaeological survey of O‘ahu *heiau* carried out by J Gilbert McAllister between 1930 and 1933, and from which this book draws heavily, is given only sporadic mention. Lacking too are biographies or at least more extensive treatment of those Hawaiian historians who acted as “informants” for McAllister, and whose engaging pictures open each of the book’s six main chapters. These shortcomings aside, *Pana O‘ahu* is a remarkable achievement that advances an appreciation of the deeper Hawaiian past, and of the sacred sites and stones from that past that are still very much about and around.

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*Bad Colonists: The South Seas Letters of Vernon Lee Walker and Louis Becke*, by Nicholas Thomas and Richard Eves. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999.

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It must be made clear at once that the authors intend their title as telling irony. They do not oppose the figures under consideration to hypothetical good colonists; rather, Thomas and Eves use “bad colonists” to describe complex senses of failure and degeneration as recorded in the letters of two white traders on the “periphery” during the age of high European colonialism (1870–1880s). As they emerge from this volume, Vernon Lee Walker, an obscure trader in New Caledonia and Vanuatu, and Louis Becke, later famous for his “South Seas” stories, were bad at being colonists in every sense: they failed to maintain any colonial sense of purpose, they failed in their commercial endeavors, they failed at fashioning coherent senses of selfhood, and they failed as letter writers.

Because Thomas and Eves are primarily interested in expressive failures, *Bad Colonists* torques the genre of the letter collection. The volume looks traditional—half of it is composed of the letters, accompanied by handsome maps, facsimiles, biographical sketches, and commentary—but it aims at nothing less than “experimental history” (xxi). For Thomas and Eves, colonial letters—in particular the “letter-home-to-mother”—reveal nuances in what

have been called “tensions of empire.” The letters embody struggles to manage identity that reproduce “the colonist’s kinship and family ties” (4), and are thus indexes of self-fashioning, or double-writing, in which personal trauma and the frame of colonial history intertwine with inadvertent, ironic honesty.

Thomas and Eves approach these lettered failures from a variety of angles. The titles of the introduction, “Letter Writing and Colonial Selfhood,” and chapter 5, “The Apotheosis of Savagery: Louis Becke’s Pacific Tales,” suggest both the range and implied continuities within a project that not only regards the letter as a specific type of colonial artefact, but also treats fiction and letters as inter-illuminating. Perhaps because the chapters have continuities as well with work the authors have done elsewhere, the preface advises that “readers may find it useful to know” who produced each section. Thomas wrote the introduction, chapter 1 (on Walker and colonial history), chapter 2 (commentary on Walker), and the epilogue, while Eves wrote chapters 3 (on Becke, self-fashioning, and savagery), chapter 4 (commentary on Becke), and chapter 5.

Nevertheless, the volume, which often uses we, is jointly authored in several senses. Thomas and Eves deploy similar strategies of textual analysis drawn from literary studies, in ways that are something of a departure from works on Pacific colonialism that Thomas has written or been associated with. Both approach individual letters as items within a progressive narrative, and foreground correlations between the faulty lines (psychic fissures) within letters and an

emerging portrait of “the incompleteness that is almost intrinsic to settler identity” (5). Both seek to pluralize nomenclatures in the anthropology of colonialism, and, to do so, correspond in their methods of filling silences in the letters with the critic’s voice. Emphasis shifts from an anthropology of colonialism stressing the otherness of (and violence toward) others, to one emphasizing the othernesses (or estranging, splitting forces) within the colonial self.

By his own admission, the Walker who emerges out the frames set up by Thomas is “a very bad hand” at letter writing. The letters themselves are lack-luster descriptions of Walker’s business ventures, comings and goings of ships, accommodations, and activities. As he moves from the edge of genteel society to feeling “fit for nothing at home” (66), he remains lonely and disappointed, stationary in his bigotries and lack of curiosity, and overshadowed by his brother, who finally reports his death at the hands of “natives.” For Thomas, the value in Walker’s narrative of failed self-making is in its inabilities, or “in the anxiety and epistemic murk his bad hand ironically renders so intelligible” (17).

Louis Becke’s letters are comparatively energetic, hinting at the vividness of his later stories. (When a hurricane devastates his station, for instance, he describes it before inventorying the damage). More open to cultural exchange—Becke spoke some Samoan and married on Nukufetau—his relation to situations feels more buoyant than Walker’s. But his letters also record a series of reversals, as he sank into financial ruin. When he finally abandoned his ventures his

“only profit was the memories of his time in the Pacific” (132), some in the employ of the notorious “Bully” Hayes, whose legend Becke enhanced. In reading the letters, Eves stresses Becke’s self-fashioning as “a man of pluck” whose conduct reaffirms the model of the trader above “going native” or becoming a “savage white.”

However delicately managed, Thomas and Eves’ commitment to confirming the presence of this sort of narrative in every letter has inbuilt limitations. Even garden variety literary critics might consider the treatment of letters and fiction as “one body of work” (85) perilously close to “no method at all.” But a striking and powerful quality of *Bad Colonists* is that its commentary draws readers into its problematics, if only to impose alternative narratives on the letters. A deliberated partialness, that is, informs *Bad Colonists*, which in its experimental characteristics aims at enlisting the reader in the attempt at coming to (a new set of) terms with which to approach the anthropology of colonialism.

The book itself therefore can be read as a letter to the discipline. Though the title seems curtly directed at politicized scholarship that lumps white settlers as “bad colonists,” the authors reinflect such approaches with a difference. Or, as Thomas puts it, the book “presumes a critical stance toward colonial racism but has little interest in the reiteration of generalized condemnation” (5). Nevertheless, a felt uneasiness with its own critical self-fashioning haunts the book, most acutely in passages on how to regard (or even to explain interest in) figures like Walker and Becke, who can

hardly be considered subalterns in need of rehabilitation. *Bad Colonists* registers without engaging the ever-present risk of sublimating past and ongoing racisms by redirecting attention to senses in which individual whites lacked race-privilege. Thomas comments on the irony that a handful of “postcolonial” critics keep in circulation people like Walker and Becke. Perhaps the force of the questions *Bad Colonists* asks readers to ask, about what it means to do colonial anthropology, are necessarily inscribed within such awkward paradoxes.

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*The Undiscovered Country: A Novel*, by Samantha Gillison. Owl Books. New York: Henry Holt, 1999. ISBN 0-8050-6198-3, 226 pages. Paper, US\$13.

Good yarns are told when travelers return from undiscovered places. After his experiences in New Guinea in 1888, Hume Nisbet described the land as a hibiscus blossom. Since then European impressions of Papua New Guinea have been written in that tradition: Louis Becke’s *Yorke the Adventurer* (1902), Beatrice Grimshaw’s *White Savage Simon* (1919), Cecil Palmer’s *My Odyssey* (1929), N Maclaren’s *Isles of Escape*, G M Turnbull’s *Paradise Plumes* (1935), Olaf Ruhan’s *The Land of Dohori* (1957), Randolph Stow’s *Visitants*, Trevor Shearston’s *Something in the Blood* (1979), and Inez Baranay’s *Rascal Rain*. The latest novel, Samantha Gillison’s *The Undis-*