

“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-*

covered Country (1999), hardly departs from that tradition. Various juxtapositions, such as the last frontier and the land of the unexpected, have become the benchmark of travel literature on Papua New Guinea.

The Undiscovered Country is undoubtedly modeled after Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902). Peter Campbell, the protagonist, is conducting research for his PhD among the Abini of the Eastern Highlands, Papua New Guinea, accompanied by his wife, June, and young daughter, Taylor. Gillison's mirroring of Conrad is obvious when Peter discovers that he is in no control of the forces that hold people and societies together. This discovery is as shocking as that experienced by Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. The utterances of people like Kurtz, and Peter and June Campbell, have created an impression of "undiscovered countries," one that postcolonial writers like Chinua Achebe have tried to erase. The district commissioner's experiences of Africa in *Things Fall Apart* resurface in Peter Campbell's experiences in *The Undiscovered Country*.

The ghost of the district commissioner in Achebe's novel haunted me as I read Gillison's *The Undiscovered Country*. One has only to substitute the district commissioner's wish to write a book for Peter Campbell's thoughts about what to write in his notebook. Writing a book, it seems, is the only way to make memorable the experiences of westerners in their quest to know undiscovered places.

In *The Undiscovered Country*, the suggestion is that the death and abandonment of the European racial myth is the only necessary precondition to understanding the cultures of non-

western societies. By preparing for the death of June Campbell in a dignified way, Peter Campbell realizes the sacrifices that go with the quest for knowledge. In a way, Gillison has reaffirmed and insisted unceremoniously that it is costly to maintain superfluous western knowledge in a nonwestern context. For Peter the realization comes too late, even though moments of recognition present themselves in more ways than one.

Such moments surface through Taylor Campbell's ability to speak and absorb Abini language and culture. Peter and June react to Taylor's easy entry into Abini culture in a moment of shock and bewilderment. Unlike Taylor, the parents continue to distance themselves from the culture, landscape, and people of Abini. Then there is the Scottish anthropologist Roy Urqhart who, after two years of field work in the Joa valley, grew a long beard in the "Highlands style and married a village woman [for which] most of the whites in Goroka avoided him" (126). Both are instances of the many ways in which the western notion of self is arrested by its own limitation. Needless to say, a break with tradition is often sanctioned by members of a community who fear compromising with those who constitute the Other.

The house that Peter Campbell built is imposing, but is also the very house where the death of June is witnessed and the power differences in competing cultures are realized. The house defines the space in which Peter Campbell differentiates himself from the Abini men; he is different, he is white, and is studying them for his doctoral research as a participant observer. Peter Campbell is, however,

disillusioned and enticed by the lure of the natural landscape to express his feelings and emotions. Peter Campbell's problem is that he just cannot see the reality of the predicament created by competing cultural systems. He has to maintain an impersonal state of mind in order to see his subjects objectively. On the other hand, he has violated the space of the Abini by building a modern house in the middle of nowhere and entering the sacred world of men and birds of paradise. Not until the Abini resist Peter Campbell's presence and activities does he come to terms with himself: "he felt its destruction like a long-separated twin feeling a twinge and knowing that somewhere his brother was dead" (218-219).

The Undiscovered Country is disappointing in several ways. Its use of terms and labels does more than damage the already polarized impressions of Papua New Guineans that are littered across its pages. Some Tokpisin words are misspelled and at times are implied without giving the actual words. My observations may be contrary to Gillison's objectives, but there is still a need for improvement in written representations of Papua New Guineans made by non-Papua New Guineans. By now one might have expected that caricatures and helpful local informants would have disappeared in both literary and intellectual representations by westerners. The resurfacing of stereotypes of the experiences of other people, whom we study, write about, and represent, is, one might add, dehumanizing to those who are studied, written about, and represented.

Good writing must also be responsible writing. Gillison's novel does not

depart far from the traditional literature in which representations of cultures and people other than the author's own are given. Peter and June Campbell fight their insecurities and fears through a process of self-justification, yet very awkwardly. If the suggestion is that Taylor Campbell, the child of a new generation, is someone who can absorb and be absorbed by the culture, people, language, and lives of the undiscovered country, then it is rather too presumptuous.

For the pleasure reader, this is a book full of excitement. For graduate students working in other cultures, *The Undiscovered Country* is ideal reading. And for students of Pacific literature, this book is disturbingly beautiful.

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Islands of the Frigate Bird, a novel by Daryl Tarte. Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1999. ISBN 982-02-0147-0, 206 pages. Paper, US\$18.

Islands of the Frigate Bird brings together Banaban, Gilbertese, Bikinian, and white colonial experiences of the twentieth century in a fictional tale of male travel and survival. Tarte sets up the story as a genealogy that links different characters and events, from the beginning of time, two and a half billion years ago, to the future 2234, and ultimately to a group of voyagers who sailed east from Southeast Asia and landed on Banaba "prehistorically." What follows is a fragmented saga of colonization, mining, world war, nuclear testing, and the woes of