The Rise of Pacific Literature: Decolonization, Radical Campuses, and Modernism
Maebh Long and Matthew Hayward (paperback)
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In the first and sixth chapters of *The Rise of Pacific Literature,* Maebh Long and Matthew Hayward land on the familiar shores of Samoan writer Albert Wendt's "Towards a New Oceania." Each visit brings a welcome pedagogical light to Wendt's manifesto, published in the 1976 "first standalone" issue of *Mana*, the equally landmark Oceanian journal (174). "New Oceania" famously rejects any idea that Indigenous Oceanian creative forms are antithetical to modernity's aesthetic demands. Instead, Wendt calls on Pacific writers to blend living traditions with contemporary innovation: "Our quest should not be for a revival of our past cultures, but for the creation of new cultures … based firmly on our own pasts" (qtd. on 59).

"New Oceania" is a founding text of Pacific literary studies, and increasingly canonized in global modernisms. Less acknowledged, however, is how it manifests what Long and Hayward call "a creative scholarship in and of the classroom" (27). "New Oceania" builds on Wendt's context at the University of the South Pacific (USP), where he "wrote, taught, and compiled curricula" after joining its Faculty in 1974 (60). In the 1970s, USP teaching staff not only built a literature program for their young university but also restructured that program, following similar innovations at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG). At UPNG and then USP, course sequences first changed to include Pacific and postcolonial literatures alongside Euro-American ones and then flipped the standard Eurocentric canon, placing Oceanian, Commonwealth, and Third World literatures *before* Euro-American modernists. Such Oceania-centric curricula aided "the swelling of a self-supporting literary infrastructure hitherto unseen in the Pacific regional context" (181): "Mana" (a section in *Pacific Islands Monthly*) and then *Mana* (an independent journal) nourished curricula when they featured on USP syllabi, and Oceanian students found inspiration in their peers' innovations.

Long and Hayward's retelling of this moment in Oceanian literary history captures one of their core contributions: through extensive historical research and nuanced close readings, *Rise* illuminates literary decolonization embodied in what Rachel Sagner Buurma and Laura Heffernan call the "teaching archive." *Rise* is a history of First Wave Pacific literature, the period from roughly the 1960s to the 1980s in which Oceanian writers created an unprecedented literary-cultural flowering, fuelled by Pacific anticolonial independence movements. Long and Hayward argue that literature teaching at UPNG and USP in the 1960s and 1970s fundamentally shaped this surge, especially by linking Oceania with African, Indian, Caribbean, and Euro-American modernisms. *Rise* "retells the rise of Pacific literature as a story of

inventive curricula, of writer-scholars and teacher-editors, of student activists, graduate leaders, and subversive staff" (4). Their classrooms and writing "made inventive use of transnational modernist ancestries to produce a literary movement at once globally affiliated and singularly Oceanian" (3).

Rise is a beautifully realized capstone for the Oceanian Modernism project, which Long and Hayward founded with Sudesh Mishra in 2014. As with their earlier co-publications, this book steps gently into debates about applying modernist terminology to Oceanian contexts: they caution that any "Pacific modernism … must be a *Pacific* modernism, with the adjective taking ownership of the noun, rather than being subordinated to the ever-proliferating catalogue of '*x* modernism'' (15). As an alternative, *Rise* anchors discussions of modernism in Oceanian paradigms, particularly "ancestry or genealogy—gafa in Samoan" (1). Taking their cue from Wendt, Long and Hayward track authors who saw an "encompassing kin line of Oceanian literature," inviting postcolonial and "palagi modernist authors to Pacific networks" when they offered useful tools and connections for *Pacific* purposes (2).

The heroes charting this literary genealogy are Pacific "writer-scholars," a term Long and Hayward draw from Papua New Guinean writer Steven Winduo, describing "Pacific authors engaged in unwriting old colonial narratives, interweaving oral histories and stories, and repurposing the styles of modern novels" (26). Teachers and students share the torch in *Rise's* loosely chronological chapters. Chapter one explores why Euro-American modernists like Eliot, Yeats, and Conrad were useful for Oceanian teachers turning literature classrooms into engines for cultural decolonization. Modernism's allusiveness, fragmentation, reweaving of old and new, and resistance to singular readings, "for all its limitations, gave writers across decolonizing nations a language, imagery, and form through which to explore the chaos of colonization, the tumult of decolonization, and the uneven development of modernity" (43).

Chapter two turns to program structure, tracking how instructors at UPNG in the late 1960s and early 1970s tossed the "Beowulf-to-Brontë" literature education model off the boat (65). Instead, they structured a decolonial program that started with courses in Oceanian oral literatures before progressing to modernist "literatures of decolonizing countries" (65). By introducing modernisms via Africa and India, and afterwards via Europe and North America, UPNG's innovative program not only "foreshadow[ed] the approaches of what would come to be called global modernism" (66), but also offered students "models … of the ways that the local and the Western could be grafted together to form aesthetically minded and politically focused texts" (65).

Subsequent chapters trace the "intricate literary gafa" (6) UPNG curricula helped shape. Chapter three probes "the complex figure of Ulli Beier," the German professor-writer-editor who exercised outsized influence on postcolonial literature in Nigeria and then Papua New Guinea, including by publishing with Indigenous pseudonyms (94). In

contrast, chapter four explores how Niuginian student writers John Kasaipwalova and Russell Soaba used tools from Beier's courses to write contrapuntal visions of Oceanian modernities.

Rise shines when it weaves immersive accounts of curricular structure with attentive readings of poetry and prose inspired by those courses. In chapter four, we see Kasaipwalova remaking Eliot's allusive aesthetic for his anticolonial long poem *Reluctant Flame*, which marshals a global army of Black Power and Black modernists into "fuel from these brother flames" (qtd. in 123). Tonally contrasting but equally epic, in chapter five, Vanessa Griffen recasts Hemingway's spare masculinism as a Fijian grandmother's daily heroism in "Marama." Whereas chapter six documents the triumphant years surrounding "Mana's" 1973 launch, focusing on its interplay with USP literature curricula, chapter seven stares into the shadows of celebratory regionalism, exploring how Subramani wields modernist Gothicism honed in the Caribbean to narrate unhealed wounds of Indo-Fijian indenture. *Rise's* coda shows us how the First Wave's *gafa* continues expanding in contemporary Oceanian literatures.

Rise speaks most directly to Oceanian literatures and global modernisms, but I heartily recommend it to any postcolonialists committed to critical pedagogy, curriculum, and teaching. Long and Hayward dialogue with studies - including Ben Conisbee Baer's *Indigenous Vanguards* and Buurma and Heffernan's *The Teaching Archive*. To this list, I would add Danica Savonick's *Open Admissions*, which explores liberatory poetry and teaching in Toni Cade Bambara, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, and Adrienne Rich. Scholars committed to Oceanian literature's transnational networks will also want to note *Rise*, particularly for its careful attention to global Black modernisms, which pairs strongly with recent studies like Quito Swan's *Pasifika Black*.

This is exemplary scholarship: meticulously researched, fluidly written, and committed to global modernisms rooted, first and foremost, in literatures for local liberation. In maintaining this regional focus, *Rise* also reminds us why university literature teaching matters—to liberatory politics, to cultural life, and to what Paulo Freire called "education as the practice of freedom."

Works Cited

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