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How2 Feature on Pacific Poetries

Bound anthologies are fixed, stiffly covered, and resemble small literary nation-states; they claim authority like territories that are governed, paid fealty to, often eventually invaded. The internet anthology is something else, indeed; while there is—as here—an original site that offers a “whole” work, there is also the larger anthology given us by the search engine. That anthology is composed, re-composed, and de-composed of authors and ideas placed in other contexts, alongside other authors in other places. Such a double-anthology (fixed on site, then easily ransacked from the outside) is appropriate to Pacific poetries, and to my intention for this anthology. Like any collection of poems, this one is accidental, and thus contains many gaps. Rather than point to gaps, I will point to the “world (wide web) site that links” this anthology to others, whether they be the New Zealand Poetry Centre (nzepc) or the Tinfish Press page or *Jacket* or any number of other on-line publications whose obsessions intersect. Just now I’m also completing a joint venture with *trout* in New Zealand / Aotearoa (two of whose editors now live in Hawai`i), which is but one extension of material presented here. This is an anthology in process, less a “new Pacific poetry” than “new Pacific poetries” that are meant to be put alongside many other sites (and insights), both actual and virtual.

What could rightly be more fluid than Pacific poetries? We begin here with the work of Tusiata Avia, whose character Nafanua, based on a Samoan warrior goddess, travels in the west, to Hawai`i in particular. Nafanua meets the New World head on, driving a Triumph, watching Entertainment Tonight, meeting Mr Raytheon, avatar of the American

military machine. This is a machine we see much of in what follows. Pam Brown also writes about travel, within her home city of Sydney as “war / is / imminent,” and without it, in Auckland and the South Pacific, where she remembers “american revelations / of secret pacific tests / as late as 1991.” Faye Kicknosway’s Pacific is “an optical illusion,” frequently violent or hostile, her emphasis on the last syllable of the omnipresent Hawaiian term, “A-LO-HA,” and on the “amnesia” that signals “a wasted life / in the tropics.” One might argue an internalized violence in her work, which strikes the outsider from within, whether from disinterest or guilt, or both. Selina Marsh locates the space of her amnesia (or the amnesia of others toward her) in her viewing of the soap opera, *The Young and the Restless*, where “all you brown women” are stereotypes who fail to offer a good image to the show’s spectator. Deborah Meadows’s “TRAVELLIT” explores the history of so-called “discovery,” citing sources such as Edgar Allan Poe to call into question the “entrenched hierarchy” written into the literature of the west in the Pacific. Meadows works against the literary violence that reflects the history of colonization in the Pacific. Meredith Quartermain’s poems are set in Vancouver, a city on the Pacific, whose markers these days are consumerist. As she writes in “Vancouver Centre” (knowing full well that Vancouver is hardly “at the center”): “At Pacific Centre mall, red and gold characters on stilts sidle around marquees—what’s the Pacific, the grand pacifier, doing in the centre of Vancouver?” Quartermain calls up buried histories of the place, takes us back from the touristic “Thai Palace” restaurant to the indigenous origins of this part of what is now British Columbia. Barbara Jane Reyes, whose book *Poeta en San Francisco* opens San Francisco up to the Philippines, Vietnam, and to English, Spanish and Tagalog, writes here out of a desire to name and rename places

“across the pacific’s rivers.” Shin Yu Pai’s poetry invokes computer-generated language, the rift it emphasizes between “education & learning,” between systems and their errors, between heartland food and net “cookies.” Hazel Smith’s lines meditate on a volume entitled *The Erotics of Geography*, which she means to “reinvent . . . as an Australian classic” (Smith moved to Australia from England in the late 1980s and thinks often of her relationship to those different traditions in englishes altered by geography). Where Kicknosway writes about an amnesia induced by the tropics, Teresia Teaiwa composes a sequence of “Amnesia” poems based on her own mixed heritage, asking, among other questions, “What do you get / when you cross / an American / with / a Pacific Islander?,” to which the answer comes back, “Amnesia.” Where America meets Micronesia, there we locate forgetting. Finally, Zhang Er’s prose poems brood on travel (to Europe, to South America, to Asia) and on what by now seems a major thread in this weave, “the question of inheritance.”

Questions of inheritance are at once evoked and elided in an anthology such as this one. Elided are genealogies of poetry in particular places and by members of particular cultures; evoked are those that join diverse writers through their methods, their obsessions. I hope to show by presenting these various writers on one site is that poetries across the Pacific, whether by Samoan/New Zealand writers or by Canadian or California poets are “consumed” by crucial subjects such as the violence of “discovery,” violence perpetuated by the American military, the effects of tourism and capital on places like Vancouver and Sydney and Honolulu, and the ceaseless movement of people and goods across the Pacific. Those of us who read poetries of the Pacific deal with all these

threads, can find in mixed genealogies a way to intervene in violence by way of our many languages and our “prayers,” as Barbara Jane Reyes would have it.