

A World of Insight and Wisdom that Came for the Pacific: or, Epeli Hau'ofa on All Our Human Follies

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ABSTRACT: Epeli Hau'ofa (1939-2009), the Tongan scholar and cultural reformer of South Pacific cultural policies and international relations, was Australia-educated, and focussed on Armidale, NSW at a most significant time in his life. That developing sensitivity did not change in the rest of his life. His early and most widely accessible comic writing is both Rabelasian in its surface plots, and deeply ironic as it endeavours to interpret the human consequences of policies seemingly well intended but disastrous in the event—this being the new 'Glorious Pacific Way'. At the moderate end of the satiric spectrum, his moralistic fictions rely on laughter, wit, irony, irony, and milder forms of ridicule. The great crimes for the Ocean people are those of pretense and omission, and the thrust of his writing is to question so much that is not traditional, selfless and gentle. Starting as a folklorist and satirist, Epeli Hau'ofa would broaden his vision to become a social and religious thinker of vital significance for all the small nations of the southern Pacific as they enter the twenty first century.

Prologue

Epeli Hau'ofa's life (1939-2009) and work has already been treated in various print and electronic formats since his sad death in Suva in January, 2009. In this present reflective account, much reference is made to the memorialist's personal experience—over much of his own lifetime—of the distinguished Pacific scholar, humorist and folklorist, someone in whom these 'core' strands were co-mingled from an early stage.

The International College

It was recently commented by a returning visitor to Armidale—a member of another University of New England College in the 1970s—that his strongest perception of Wright College¹ then was that it was remarkably 'international', and, indeed, the initial group of Fellows had, in various degrees, antecedents in: Austria; Canada; England; France;

¹ The writer and E.Hau'ofa were both members of this College for many years.

Germany; New Zealand, with the wartime convoys to Russia; Scotland and its intellectualism; or with Wales, and its almost religious cult of Rugby, and with a considerate staff (often British-born) from the New Zealand universities. This general and obviously extrovert internationalism of staff/more senior students was matched almost equally in the diverse student body—various refugees from apartheid in South Africa; a trickle of English migrant students, and others from India, or North America.

The most obvious influence on the student catchment was the highly imaginative Colombo Plan, producing many of our members from Malaysia, Indonesia, India and Thailand. Another significant and contemporary input was when a group of Fijians arrived in 1961. Because of the link with the Rev. Richard Udy in Suva and his brother, Dr Jim Udy—the Methodist pastor and University chaplain in Armidale—several young Fijian students and a few male Tongans would come to the still very small University of New England at about the same time. They would study here for a number of years, often taking the last part of their high school training in Armidale, before the University of New England. As remembered, all were quiet, dignified and strong men, with a nice sense of humour, who fitted into 'Wright' particularly well in 1963, as did Tupeni K. Baba, the hugely impressive Osea T. Gavidia and the fine athlete, Jon K. Galinadi, both to do Science, all competent athletes, very much musically talented, and quiet yet very sociable men, who were usually billeted in town with Methodist families in the vacations, to return to Fiji in due course, becoming both prominent and highly influential figures in the slow but steady modernization and democratizing of that country; and to Tonga in the case of Epeli Hau'ofa. Often their influence was a counterweight to precipitate political action in the lands of their nurture.

Osea, the chieftain figure, soon became very prominent, as he still is, while Jon, after working for long employed in the area of interest of Colonial Sugar, had a recent prominence as the force behind the economically important expansion of the kava industry because of its potential development in the provision of a range of pharmaceuticals and as a corrective to uncertainty in the marketing of more traditional crops. His Excellency, Jonetani Galuinadi has been in Parliament for a number of years, and a staunch nationalist, his clustered portfolios including: Agriculture, Sugar, and Land Resettlement; Public Enterprises and Public Sector Reform; and, more recently, he has served as Minister for Agriculture, Business Development and Investment. His addresses, like that to the World Food Summit in Italy in June 2002 for example, are fine pieces on behalf of 'the idea of establishing the global coalition against hunger' and the way to set up the various benchmarks to be

achieved at national and regional levels. All the above have the strongest loyalty to Australia.

On the other side of that country's politics has been Wright's former student, Dr Tupeni Baba, who has had a long career as educationalist in Fiji—with several years in Auckland away from its tumultuous politics of more recent years. He was the founding vice-president of the Fiji Labor Party in 1985, as well as himself founding the defunct New Labour Unity Party. He had served as Minister for Foreign Affairs, on occasion contemplated taking over the prime ministership, and served as Deputy Prime Minister, as well as being involved in both the 1987 coup and that of 2000. On the last front, he was co-author with 2 others of the book, *Speight of Violence*. He has been more than a public figure, having been the Professor of Education at the University of the South Pacific, a fine broadcaster, and an orator in a different mould to the traditional style.

Also in Alpha Block, with Tupeni, was Epeli Hau'ofa, a Tongan lad who was brought up in New Guinea by his missionary parents. Rather than elaborate on his Pacific career, there is now appended what is one of the earlier and much more first hand responses to his fictions—for there have been many that are somewhat obscured by others' unnecessary critical jargon. And, so, if one may quote one's own earlier, now slightly modified, responses—

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Epeli Hau'ofa's Polynesian Human Comedy

All my fiction writing is very serious; the [surface] humour is there lest my anger at the tragedy should make me go mad.

Epeli Hau'ofa

Rabelais' concern to propagate certain ideas and attitudes is not in any way at variance with his sense of relaxed amusement. ... Unexpectedly, this leads Rabelais ... to expound through myth and laughter his belief in divine inspiration. The ways of laughter can lead directly to the ways of Rabelais' God and to the words and signs through which he reveals his truth to enlightened men...

Michael A. Screech, *Rabelais*²

Epeli Hau'ofa was by stock a Tongan, although born (1939) in Papua New Guinea to missionary parents. He told the present writer long ago

² Interview with Hau'ofa in the ABC Radio 'Books' programme, 19 January 1989; Michael A. Screech, *Rabelais*, London: Duckworth, 1979, p.13.

that, as a little boy, he had laid on him by his Queen a certain task of commitment and of concern for his people. Despite a career of study and work which would take him to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the Caribbean and elsewhere,³ he remained true to that charge, even if his range of stewardship included Fiji, Samoa, and the general life-style of island Polynesia.⁴ In order to improve his English, he attended high school in Armidale, New South Wales, where he studied much history and geography, while his B.A. at the University of New England (1961-63) included double majors in History and a minor sequence in English.⁵ This was followed by an Honours year (1964) with a reflective dissertation entitled 'The Australian Pacific Islands Policy, 1901-1919: from a strategic point of view.' Hau'ofa's research Master's at McGill University (1965-68) involved a thesis concerned with Trinidad and Tobago entitled 'Channels of Communications between Rural Communities and the Agencies of the National Government'. He spent 1968 to 1970 as Senior Tutor, Department of Anthropology, University of Papua and New Guinea, while also doing the fieldwork⁶ for his PhD for the Australian National University. The thesis was concerned with the impact of 'civilization' on a hitherto isolated community to the near west of Port Moresby, to which it was then being connected by road for the first time.

Its book version (A.N.U. Press, 1981) is entitled, *Mekeo: Inequality and Ambivalence in a Village Society*. Meanwhile, he had published in 1977 *Our Crowded Islands* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific), while he was a Fellow at that University, at the Centre for Applied Studies in Development. He was living in Tonga from 1977 to 1983, first as Deputy Private Secretary to the King, and then (1980-83) as the (Tongan) Rural Development Centre Director for the U.S.P. In 1979 he had published, again through the A.N.U., *Corned Beef and Tapioca Food Distributions Systems in Tonga*.

Further, he had maintained a steady stream of publications, both learned articles⁷ and essays in collections, as well as creative writing,

³ Consultancies on development matters have taken him to such further places as Manila (much as happens to Ole in *Tales of the Tikongs*), while he has attended literary gatherings such as the one for Commonwealth Writers in London in November 1988. His later conference appearances were innumerable.

⁴ Much of the text from here had appeared in *New Literatures Review*, 20 (Winter, 1990), 32-40. With permission. A convenient summary of his early formal career is included in the entry on him in *Contemporary Authors*, Detroit: Gale Research, 1988, vol. 124, p. 204. See also J.S. Ryan, "The Burgeoning Career of Epeli Hau'ofa", *Faculty of Arts Research Committee Newsletter*, University of New England, Number 18, 1989, pp. 9-10.

⁵ He studied Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and savoured its 'shocking' qualities. He also admits debts to Dean Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

⁶ The present writer had seen him there, explored the then Australian bureaucracy of Port Moresby with him, and was later able to assist Hau'ofa in various matters concerning the completion of his doctoral thesis.

⁷ As in the *Journal of Polynesian Society*, 80(2), 1971, or in *Oceania*, June 1975.

including pieces in *Mana Review* (three in 1976,⁸ and two in 1978; poems, etc.), and in the bilingual *Faikava, A Tongan Literary Journal*, of which he was founder and co-editor in 1978. In 1984 had he co-edited *Education for Development in the South Pacific*. As may be guessed by now, the line between his creative writing and scholarly reports is somewhat arbitrary, since all are concerned no less with the social, cultural and moral, than with the narrowly economic, aspects of aid/development, trade, migration and all aspects of change, his writings endeavouring always to interpret the human consequence of policies which may be/ seem completely well meaning.

As a man, as a scholar and as a writer, Hau'ofa was always an excellent listener and reflective student of accepted social behaviour and of what various societies deem appropriate formal etiquette. Further, his literary studies, the skills of a born raconteur, and great gifts of humour, of seriousness and of compassion were able to develop continually by both his formal career and by the pattern of his life experiences.

Tales of the Tikongs

The best introduction to the uninhibited nature of his wit we may well deem to be his popular *Tales of the Tikongs* (1983),⁹ for although it consists of twelve separate short stories, it may profitably be considered a chronicle¹⁰ or fictional history, a series of vignettes of contemporary life on the mythical island of Tiko—'a tiny country, so small that mankind is advised not to look for it on a classroom globe'. (p. 68) In many social details, Tiko parallels the life-styles (of yesterday?) on Tonga. Its inhabitants, the Tikongs, are the exact opposite of Americans who like 'to walk tall' despite their lifestyle of

Energy crisis, rising unemployment, falling skylabs, policing human rights, and carrying other heavy global responsibilities benefiting a member of the Greatest Nation on Earth. (*ibid.*)

The Tikongs are described most helpfully in this same homily/essay, 'Blessed are the meek,' as people who: live long; 'walk short'; have 'no global responsibility', and yet dwell in a place 'where everything is simultaneously possible and impossible'. Thus a 'vivacious, wilful and outspoken girl', after the traditional and necessary marital slapping, becomes 'a soft-spoken, sedate lady who obeyed, respected and loved

⁸ Some appear in *Tales of the Tikongs* in polished form.

⁹ First published in Auckland by Longman Paul; later issued by Penguin N.Z. in Auckland, 1988. All references are to this edition.

¹⁰ Its twelve carefully ordered sections comprise an epic (is this an unintended?) structure, or even a *Via Cucis*, although they were written separately and the first published in 1977.

her husband', often joking about these and 'her beloved's other just visitations' (p. 69).

The fine ironies of Hau'ofa's narrative fictions are nowhere better illustrated than in the later parts of this tale, in the person of the youngest child, Puku Leka, who has been even more thoroughly 'moulded' by physical chastisement and continuous threats of 'the Lord's punishment' and of the threatened 'Eternal Roast' (p. 70). As a result of his 'excellent training in bowing and bending and crawling' at home and at church, he always displays exemplary courtesy to the high chief: 'he would drop on all fours and creep to him with proper respect and self-abasement ... often dragging behind him some heavy gifts' (p. 70). As he had been continually beaten at school, so he lives down-trodden as an adult, in a miserable vermin-infested thatched house, 'traditionally dark, and traditionally damp ... appropriate for a man of his lowly station.' Due to the rights of primogeniture, he inherits nothing, has no job tenure, is made a part-time slave to his married siblings, is required to contribute generously to the Church, suffers continually, and is assured of 'eternal rewards in Life Hereafter' (p. 74).

We are told, finally, that: 'In the judgment of his people Puku Leka is a good man and a noble example of what a Tikong should be... patient and long suffering, and devoid of personal ambition.' Both the writer's moral exasperation and the Christ-like nature of Puku are affirmed by the last paragraph, where it is said that he 'carries the burden for his family, church, village and country without complaint and without much expectation of earthy reward'. (p. 74)

Epeli Hau'ofa Projected Through Manu

In one of his many moments of confusion he seeks out the wise Manu who expounds this 'less than just world of ours' and suggests the (morally) positive course that one be sorry for 'the poor sods and not for yourself.' In this ambivalent sequence, it is clear: that Puku is a self-less, caring person; that Heaven is widely believed to be for the wealthy; and that Puku's suffering must occur 'for the continued stability of the realm of Tiko' (p. 74)—or so it is widely believed.

Manu, as he appears in several of the other tales, is a somewhat enigmatic figure, a wise counsellor, who in 'The Glorious Pacific Way' seeks to warn another innocent, Ole Pasifikweki, of the Mephistophelean bargain that he is about to strike with suave diplomat and dispenser of international aid funds, Mr Harold Minte, at the office of MERCY (the Ministry of Environment, Religion, Culture and Youth). Once Ole is lured into these corrupt organizational structures, 'transformed', he turns on the kindly Manu, snapping: 'You're wasting your time and mine, Manu. You belong to the past; it's time to make up to the future.' (p. 88)



Epeli Hau'ofa at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, University of the South Pacific

This exchange and others in the whole text make it very clear that Manu is the grave face of the authorial persona which questions the prescribed and seemingly inevitable economic and political future for Tiko; development. Poor Ole's original innocent aspiration for a typewriter has been so horribly transformed by the end of the book that he: has acquired V.D. while conferencing abroad; has devised nineteen totally unnecessary national committees; has fooled the Great International Organization;¹¹ has swindled various international agencies¹² out of \$14 million; and, in the book's last words, 'has assumed ... his new, permanent role as a first-rate, expert beggar'.

This last formidable indictment is the final assault on the spurious goal of development which has been a thread in all the earlier stories, where: 'those in government had been concerned with 'National Development'' (p. 3); the government 'must ... import the Protestant [work] Ethic' (p. 5); 'the Poultry Development Scheme¹³ [is] funded by an agency of the Great International Organization' (p. 26); the continued mischievous intrusions of unscrupulous 'old colonial hands'—presumably returning officers of Her Majesty's Colonial Service—occur (p. 54); or obsessive development projects are substituted for familiar respect (p. 63).

Of course, the shrewder native officials do sometimes manage to counter their own exploitation by developing their exploiters, as when Sailosi exports a totally incompetent and false 'expert' from South India 'to Australia where he now contributes brilliantly towards that country's development' (p. 54). But the swarming agents of development who are

¹¹ A pointless, unstoppable juggernaut which owes much to the U.N.O. or to the F.A.O./ UNESCO style of seemingly well-meaning activities.

¹² Including several criminal ones (p. 92). There are many attacks on the (American-sourced) international gambling and prostitution cartels endeavouring to corrupt Polynesia.

¹³ This is one of the many interfering and largely abortive schemes dubbed as 'aid' by paternalistic New Zealand. It had, of course, been exported elsewhere, as by Australia to South Vietnam, or, even earlier, to Indonesia.

the prime targets of the writer's attack are ubiquitous—the arrogant Merv Doolittle from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Canberra (p. 4); the blundering and remarkably stupid New Zealand Aid Delegation (*passim*); the rapacious Mr Charles Edward George Higgin-botham of the British Civil Service (pp. 14 ff.); Alvin (Sharky) Lowe of Alice Springs, Australia, who with his 'lifelong experience in handling natives' terrorizes 'every frightened, small-time, part-time fisherman on the beaches of Tulisi' (p. 21); the imperial running dog, Mr. Eric Hobsworth-Smith, Director of the Bureau for the Preservation of Traditional Culture and Essential Indigenous Personality (p. 48). Both individually and collectively they are alarming in their vulgar philosophies and unscrupulous behaviour. Equally dubious in purpose and person are the Australian Aid Scheme and the shallow members of the Australian Parliamentary Delegation (pp. 66–67).

As the last section will make clear, the general mode of expression relies on the satirist's armoury—laughter, wit, irony, bizarre juxtaposition, mocking and the milder forms of ridicule. These continually slide, one into another, so that it is, perhaps, easier to handle the greater themes of this carefully wrought text.

Religion or Traditional/ Original Wisdom

The Church temporal is presented as the older external dominant conditioning force on the island of Tiko, where there are 'four times as many churches as all other public establishments combined' (p. 2), and Sundays involve 'work eighteen hours non-stop for God' (p. 4). As Manu tells us early on, 'Religion and Education Destroy Original Wisdom' (p. 5), and we soon find that church colleges, however unintentionally, teach "sophistication" (p. 7) and criminal courses; while the clergy and church trustees are capable of acts of (unpremeditated?) fornication (pp. 16, 82), embezzlement (pp. 9, 77 ff), political chicanery, manipulation of gambling (p. 81) and of pronouncements of their own infallibility as interpreters of the (British-derived) Constitution. Its practical morality also encourages a typical civil servant to be 'semi-honest and half-trusted' (p. 9) Such is the seeming indictment of Establishment in the *Tales of the Tikongs*.

Yet this satire is only part of a subtle text which affirms lovingly so much of the old and simple in the lives of the people. Many of the story-sections have Christian associations—desperately sincere for all the complex irony—such as: 'Old Wine in New Bottles', 'A Pilgrim's Progress', 'The Wages of Sin',¹⁴ or "Blessed are the Meek". Compassion is the outstanding overall quality of *Tales*. Hau'ofa's love of the simple

¹⁴ Perhaps partly influenced by Hau'ofa's liking for the film, *The Wages of Fear*, he long savoured this form of entertainment and of moral relection.

people is never more apparent than in the account of how every Tikong ‘likes to make new things look very old ... before he can love them dearly’ (p. 12); or in this appraisal of Tikong good breeding: ‘in Tiko if you give less you will lose more and if you give nothing you will lose all’ (p. 26); from his love of family (p. 45); or the persistent ‘jolly’ quality of the people (p. 87) which militates against the dubious ‘aid’ that achieves universal moral corruption.

Apart from the wise Manu, there are many authorial figures.¹⁵ All are consistently tolerant of odd foibles, of the obvious enjoyment of sexual intercourse by the young and not so young, and of small thefts or other peccadilloes. The satire only becomes wrathful when organised religion, pretentious government, or the sham aid agencies victimize or exploit the touchingly simple island people.¹⁶ The sins of omission are damnable in this warm-hearted community, and those of commission are more the consequence of their generous, tactile and gregarious lifestyle. Hau’ofa’s sympathetic interest in the life and culture of ordinary people is, of course, reflected in his then recent role as Secretary to the Tonga Traditions Committee. Echoes of this phase of his life may be found in ‘The Glorious Pacific Way’, where Ole Pasifikwei is introduced thus: “Ole had spent much of the spare time from his job as Chief Eradicator of Pests and Weeds collecting oral traditions ... in seven years he had covered a fifth of his island country.” (*Tikongs*, p. 83).¹⁷

Kisses in the Nederends

In 1987, Hau’ofa had published, through Penguin Books (New Zealand), what was then his most controversial work, *Kisses in the Nederends*, a piece of somewhat enigmatic prose¹⁸ prefaced by several lines from T.S. Eliot’s ‘Little Gidding’, ending in:

¹⁵ More or less equivalent in age, education or attitude to Hau’ofa, as are also Noeli (p. 27), Tevita Poto (p. 43), Sailosi Atiu (p. 49) or Sione Falesi (p.50). The debts to Sterne, Cervantes, Fielding, and to other favourite authors are both subtle and complex.

¹⁶ Australian readers may have heard Dr Hau’ofa speaking on ABC radio ‘Saturday Saints’ programme many years ago in his dislike for the neo-feudalism practised at that time in Tonga—an aversion arising from his experience as Deputy Private Secretary to the King. It is also to be argued that Epeli has profited from his years of friendship with Russel Ward, both in the then Department of History, and, of course, in Wright College.

¹⁷ Other activities at that time included writing poetry and such serious essays as ‘The Migration Issue’, in B. O’Dwyer (ed.), *Australia and the South Pacific*, Canberra: ANU, 1983, or ‘The Future of our Past’, in R.C. Kiste and R.A. Herr (eds.), *The Pacific in the Year 2000*, Honolulu: Center for Pacific Island Studies, 1985. This essay is parodied in various millennial jokes in the fiction under discussion: e.g. *Kisses in the Nederends*, pp. 26, 118.

¹⁸ Structured in ten chapters and totalling 153 pages.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of our exploring
Will be to arrive from where we started
And know the place for the first time.

As this might imply, the novel/autobiography/quest is plotted about the human anus, usually regarded as 'a part of the body ... bad and repulsive' (p. 99), but, as a yogi tells the protagonist sufferer, 'as good, as beautiful, as worthy of lyrical poetry as any. The anus is the most maligned, most unjustly loathed and abused part of the body' and the significance of the anus is then explained as being 'like the lower orders of society. It does the most unpleasant jobs' (p. 100).

The plot is autobiographic in that the writer himself had suffered from searing pain in that humble region, had discovered it was a fistula or growth, and after some four tormented years, was relieved of his agony by an operation, performed in New Zealand, like the one needed for his protagonist, Oilei Bomboki. Perhaps necessarily, the novel opens with an account of the onset of Oilei's complaint, accompanied with amazing accounts of his farting, or *poof poof*, particularly when he is dosed with various strange herbal 'cures'. For the other autobiographic/ factual aspect of the text is that the sufferer, like many others in Tipota (or, seemingly, Fiji), is compelled to consult traditional medicine, since that provided by the West is too expensive and ordinary folk are afraid of hospitals (pp. 6, 128, 135), where 'people die like flies' (p. 143). Finally, he is cured by a 'transplant' operation in Auckland.

These are the two salient aspects of the prose discourse (for novel it is not). Other significant aspects of the torrent of words may be listed. There is an exuberant treatment of language, colloquial, native, evangelical, outrageous; a bizarre and satiric mix of names on Tipota, 'the Crown Jewel of the South Pacific' (p. 28), boasting its University of the Southern Paradise,¹⁹ the Hula Skirt Convention Centre (p. 26), or the Green Coconut Club. The text offers amazing but peculiarly engaging Tristram Shandean digressions, as on: politics at the University of the South Pacific (p. 8); farting (pp. 11-12); on the old gods (p. 24); on the medical conference (pp. 26 ff); on witchdoctors (pp. 40 ff); on Oilei's marriage night (pp. 61 ff); on germs (pp. 86 ff);²⁰ on the Constable's attempt at bribery (pp. 130 ff);²¹ as well as rumbustious yet somehow gently lambent passages of ludicrous exaggeration: the bursts of

¹⁹ Clearly modelled with enthusiastic derision on the University of the South Pacific in Fiji and its various out-centres.

²⁰ This pseudo-ethnographic section appears to be in part based on some of Patricia Wrightson's little spirit people, or perhaps on the somewhat elusive Polynesian lore of such lost people in the farthest corners of the quietest archipelagos. Cp., the 'Hobbit' partial skeletons found on the Indonesian island of Flores in 2003.

²¹ He reminds us at some points of Sterne's Corporal Trim.

compulsive wind emission;²² the incompetence of the chief sociologist at USP—this last something of an in-joke as a self-portrait;²³ the strange subjects of specialized research; or, the distasteful and totally inappropriate foreign intervention in University departments (p. 8 ff). Another feature is the sudden and tumultuous catalogue—of conference delegates; of piled-up participles; of thesaurus-like equivalents of the dubious and malodorous; of sorcerers; of medicinal plants; of the diseases of politicians, etc. Clearly Epeli had savoured his reading of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Of course, the most remarkable and collectively memorable aspects of the book are the hordes of characters, mostly but venal, many incompetent, many vitriolic in abuse, some engagingly loyal to their friends, particularly those in the outlying villages, with their poignant trust in the most rascally or implausible *dottores* who threaten dire physiological consequences if their ludicrous prescriptions for possible cures are not followed in every detail.²⁴ These people are almost impossible of categorization and that should not be attempted, since the writer's concern is with the torrents of words, events, thoughts and (evasive) actions of genuine and spontaneous people.

While there occur at intervals the old targets of the church and of development (e.g. p. 130), the more interesting aspect of the text is the mythology of the body, with the feuding 'Uppertuks of the brain region and the Lowertuks of the anal and genital territories' (p. 87). The hatred of the anus is shown as preventing our awareness of the threat of nuclear annihilation,²⁵ an 'obscene' spectre, which 'blinds us to the beauty of creation: that is, the love, trust and respect that we can have for one another' (p. 104). As Oilei is told by a wise old man, a way towards world peace, to which all can contribute, is 'to spread the gospel that every part of the human body is beautiful and sacred' (p. 105).

Oilei, the chosen one, is made to suffer great physical and mental agony, and yet he has his pain modified by successfully keeping his sense of humour and blaming no one for his recurring and occasional self-pitying agonies. Similarly, all his apparently quirkish compatriots retain their village innocence from their pervasive joy in other people, in therapeutic laughter, and in sheer enjoyment of all that is about them. Since we are told that Fiji is 'the hub of the South Pacific, and the Pacific will become the hub of the world' (p. 18), we must assume that the writer's message is for us all—and in particular the many Australians he

²² Some remind us of Geoffrey Chaucer, long one of Hau'ofa's favourite authors, especially for the more bawdy of the *Canterbury Tales*.

²³ Actually Hau'ofa himself.

²⁴ Some lines suggest Ben Johnson's *The Alchemist*.

²⁵ 'One country', presumably New Zealand, is praised for avoiding the 'purveyors of terror', (p. 105) which would seem to refer to that country's resistance to ships that are atomically powered.

has known. He has used the anus, which must be loved before it can bestow its greatest blessings, as a metaphor for love, beauty and purity, necessitating that we thrust aside all our squeamish, moralistic and hypocritical personal taboos. The transplant of a white female anus for the diseased black one confronts and vanquishes the petty issues of racism and sexism, enabling the reader—and Oilei—to ponder anew the meaning of love, purity and inner harmony, as we consider the issue of the sharing of organs in acts of love and sacrifice.

The many extraordinary attempts to 'cure' Oilei's body are not unlike the many intrusive/ destructive cultural missions (witness the *Tales*) concerned to help/develop/exploit the Third World, in so much more obviously cynical a fashion than those of the colonialism of earlier days. (From time to time it is easy to hear echoes of the writing of a like colonial protest by Achebe.) More significant, however, is the traditional spiritual healing which seeks to liberate modern (Pacific) man from the imported shams and (sanctimonious) superstitions that have imprisoned him in recent times. While many current art forms are burlesqued—specifically shallow and simplistic Hollywood films—there is retained a vast delight at creative gossip, sexual curiosity, knock-about humour, and the innocent cunning of ordinary folk. The purpose is always to entertain, to take us on a voyage of (self-) discovery of the sheer richness of island folk life, as the writer parodies every pretentious western custom inflicted upon the people. Caring is what counts on Tipoti, and that may well be the source of the hoped for 'Pan Pacific Philosophy for Peace' (p. 153)²⁶ in the next (i.e. the twenty-first) century. Meantime, the characters, for all their oddities, are only meaningful and truly memorable in their concern for others. Hard work, loyalty to one's mate and to the older customs, living life as *homo ludens*—such is the old way that Oilei and Epeli both endorse for us on the last page of this overwhelming and torrential text.

And what of Christianity?

Despite the book's excursion into exotic forms of spiritual belief and the exhausting and satirised fundamentalist religious observances of both Tikongs and Tipotans, there is a basic affirmation of Pacific Christianity, since the people love their neighbours, prefer beauty, and revere their ancient traditions. Hau'ofa, like Rabelais, is an author of harmony, of high seriousness balanced by huge delight, even as he shows how humane laughter can drive out fear and despair. His love of the sinner and the simple man, and his avowed agnosticism, must not blind us to

²⁶ This 'PPP' may well be a parody of the PPE solution to 'modern' problems, the University of Oxford's Honours School of Philosophy, Politics and Economics—one originally created for American Rhodes Scholars.

his moral concerns and to his hope that Pacific ways will survive all assaults to remain to become the keys to civilization's survival. Blasphemous as many characters are, and more than weak on formal theology, their creator yet finds in the Bible his major source of jests and his wisdom. To deny Ole, Oilei and the others their often sorely tried God is to remove the core of their being. To do the same to Hau'ofa is to remove from his writing its love, forgiving and infinitely compassionate, which rises triumphantly over the momentary bursts of exasperation. The ultimate meaning of his last tale (and all preceding fiction) is given us by its long-suffering protagonist; 'to the extent that one would kiss [the most lowly] ... that would revolutionize human relations the world over' (p. 113).

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Some Background Details

Epeli Hau'ofa had completed his high school education in Armidale, N.S.W., and lived in Wright College, during which years he would be exposed to persons of a very different religious code, or no religion at all. This period made him the first Tongan ever to complete such a course. In due time he would do his PhD in sociology on the impact of economic and social change on an isolated New Guinea village, a prospect discussed with the present writer in Port Moresby in 1969.

Relatively early on he had married Barbara Brown of an Armidale Methodist family, and so he came back to Wright at various times, with many somewhat enigmatic tales of his experiences in folklore work in Tonga as both Keeper of Palace Records and when doing secretarial work for the King, before working for the University of the South Pacific in its outreach, first on Tonga, and then on the main campus in Suva, to finally hold in turn there (and oddly familiar), the positions of the Head of the Sociology Department and then Head of the School of Social and Economic Development.

He would become a Fijian citizen and, in 1997, would found the catalyzing Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, within his University, and long direct it. This Oceania Centre aimed and aims to promote the development of contemporary Oceania visual and performing arts that transcend national and ethnic boundaries.

In addition to the texts discussed above, he wrote many witty and parable-like (and oddly familiar) pieces on change, development and the evolution of particular democracies, for his essays may be held to transcend national and ethnic boundaries. He remained fascinated by small communities and the richness of experience which they could afford while his *Tales of the Tikongs* has been deemed a 'South Pacific

Under Milk Wood, others hold that much of his best material came from his seminal years in Wright College and the mentoring of those studies.

Without further comment there are now appended some of his summarized and pondered-on later web-posted reflections on (Tongan/more general Oceanic?) society and progressive/potential change since the 1960s:

[For 'Tonga(n)' read 'Australia(n) ?]

'This paper focuses on the changing social environment in which the call by an increasing number of commoners... for a truly democratic form of Government has emerged. Although movements for democracy are a world-wide phenomenon, each society exhibits characteristics peculiar to its development because of its distinctive historical and social environmental circumstances... circumstances inherent in our social system that I wish to address.

I begin with the notion that when the control of social and economic forces in a [society]... shifts from one section of the community that had traditionally held it, it... is inevitable that the newly empowered unit begins to assert... institutionalised authority commensurate with its strength.

Conversely, when the ruling section of a community loses control of the ... social forces in the society, its ability to govern effectively for the welfare of the community weakens accordingly... In the end it will have to adapt to the changed and changing environment either by agreeing to a new re-allocation of rights...

The re-alignment of forces within... today reflects closely the pattern of change... the commoner section is gaining power from which position of strength it is demanding a commensurate share of the rights to decide on matters that concern its interests and welfare...

Thus... from the late 1960s with the rapid expansion in the public and private sectors of our society... most strategic posts in the public sector went to commoners...

And because they were expected to be the managers of production within their territories, to actually rule their people, and to defend them against external aggression, only the fit and able could succeed...

Apart from birth order, the only other criterion related to... succession is a negative one, the disqualification on the ground of imbecility...

The development of the monetised sector of the national economy from the late nineteenth century and through the first half of the present century was an alien development controlled by a relatively small number...

When the commercial sector of the economy was thrown open... after the Second World War, in part because of the emigration... it was the commoners who had been seasoned with toil, and who had looked to education and skills training as avenues for their social salvation, who were equipped to move into that sector to establish themselves... Thus with a few exceptions, the wealthiest and the most economically powerful... today are commoners.

In the past, the aristocracy monopolised the entire field of cultural and technical knowledge... available in the country. Commoners were referred to as they still are sometimes... Thus the new knowledge and training in new skills, was eagerly sought after by... commoners leaving the aristocracy to nurse the kind of knowledge that were increasingly... This voracious appetite for knowledge remains today, and has in fact earned for our people a reputation among our other fellow islanders.

Most of the factors that have contributed to the structural weakening of the aristocracy have also... Our progressive absorption into the world economic and cultural system has supplied the specific means for the rise of the ordinary people in our country... commoner class... comprising ninety nine percent of the population, this class, by virtue of its sheer numerical supremacy, commands the pool of talents needed... it is from this pool that the call for a renewed national covenant has come. The call has come from the ranks of those upon whom the country depends for its social, economic and spiritual [advance]... from the ranks of those who actually hold the strength of the nation.

Some of his conclusions then may serve as his abiding reflections:

My intention has been to analyse some changing structural features of our society in order to deepen our understanding.

(1) Like their ancestors past and present, the common people serve the nation in ways that no one else can; and therein, I believe lies their great and continuing importance. They are the foci of our culture and our identity as a single people, ... [as] well as being the signposts of our historical continuity as a nation.

(2) Perhaps we have been expecting too much from them. Nevertheless, they are part of us as we are part of them, and have always been so. And although developments in the past decades have brought us into confrontation with some of them, we ... have maintained a sense of profound respect and an abiding affection for them.

And so:

That is why I have a certain degree of confidence that in the near future we will get together with our leaders and work out a new national consensus that will take us into the next century as a revitalised community and a stronger, even more united people.

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An Addendum and a Merited Summation

Much is yet to be written about the long term significance of the career and writings of the late Professor Epeli Hau'ofa, but, for the present, we may add that his later challenging text of some 8,000 words, 'The Ocean in Us', published in *The Contemporary Pacific* (10.2, Fall,

1998, pp. 391, ff.), is exciting and profoundly satisfying, the official abstract of it reading as follows

The development of a regional identity for Pacific Islanders involves efforts to instill a strong sense of belonging to a region for sustained co-operation. Solid regional identity can be achieved with collective interests in the protection of the ocean for the general good. Diversity is necessary for the struggle against homogenizing forces.

That essay—like his ongoing concern—was striving to enhance the region's chances for: 'a reasonable survival in the century that is already upon us; self-enrichment; cultural diversity and resistance to globalism, as well as to any neo-colonialism; and placing their common heritage—the ocean—and commitment to it above political ties.

These purposes had been the driving force in the creation the previous year (1997) of the Centre for Pacific Art and Culture, the drive for that enterprise being that—

All our cultures have been shaped in fundamental ways by the adaptive interactions between our people and the sea that surrounds our island communities.

A following, and similar, reflection there was phrased thus:

And for a new Oceania to take hold, it must have a solid dimension of commonality that we can perceive with our senses... A creation of countless people in all walks of life. Artists must work with others, for creativity lies in all fields... and besides, we need each other.

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Further, one of the fairest assessments of him, in print soon after this, is that proffered in 2000 by David Welshman Gegeo in a review for the journal, *Pacific Affairs*, of *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politic, and Identity in the New Pacific*, a volume edited by Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson, from which the following may be excerpted—

Besides the postcolonial/ poststructuralist mode of inquiry, the power and literary sophistication with which this book speaks can be attributed to other factors as well. For example, all the contributors know the Pacific 'inside out' by virtue of their being Pacific Islanders and/or Pacific Island scholars. Epeli Hau'ofa (chapter 3) is among the Pacific Islands' finest contemporary indigenous scholars. His writings on colonialism and social change in the Pacific are not only of the finest

scholarship but have also been used as texts in schools and universities both in the Pacific and elsewhere.

... the contributors represent not only literature but other fields as well, such as anthropology, history, political science and cultural studies... [and] their 'lived' experiences under colonialism. (p. 479 of this review in *Pacific Affairs* (73. 3, Autumn, 2000).

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**Perceptions of Place: English Place-Name Study and Regional Variety
An international conference to be held in association with the English
Place-Name Society
at the Institute for Name-Studies, University of Nottingham
Wednesday 23–Sunday 27, June 2010**

This event is a timely (and so vacation-like attraction for southern hemisphere)/for all scholars of place names, since it is to offer many new close and broader perspective papers, as well as a bus tour of areas of topographical, historical, and onomastic interest in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire (towards the peak District National Park). Also of interest is the way in which the EPNS—with its headquarters there—is keeping so many volumes in print, selling them at very modest prices, and so, perforce, rousing the interest of all as to just why names were bestowed far away, and the associations of names so remembered. It is also the case that the social and historical aspects of names are coming more to the fore, rather than just the philological ones as had long been the case.

The full programme, costs and booking details will be available from the end of March at www.nottingham.ac.uk/english/events/index.aspx or from the conference administrator—Rebecca Peck (rebecca.peck@nottingham.ac.uk). The whole is subsidised by the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the United Kingdom. An anecdote of typical significance for many of our readers—Why is a part of the Rocky River goldfield adjacent to Uralla in Northern New South Wales called Saltash? Well, this can be discovered easily in Volumes LVI-LVII of the same English Place Name Society volumes, now selling at 5 British Pounds each, and available from the same contact point. [J.S.R.]