

Jenn Fuller (2016). *Dark paradise: Pacific islands in the nineteenth-century British imagination*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press. 256pp. ISBN: 978-1-4744-1384-8. US\$115.

Fuller's project is highly creditable, constituting a necessary reflection on how empire was understood and consumed by the imperial power. The focus on Pacific islands has the potential to be particularly enlightening given the preexisting conceptions of what islands 'mean'; as the title *Dark Paradise* suggests, Fuller engages with islands' contrasting and conflicting associations. She avoids replicating preexisting ideas about islands and instead uses the clichés fruitfully to cast light on trends in the representation of Pacific islands. Fuller writes engagingly and provides much interesting detail, but her project is weakened by the lack of a clear narrative as well as by poor copyediting.

Fuller's approach is to examine texts, people and historical moments that might be said to constitute the "nineteenth-century British imagination," as her subtitle puts it. Chapter 1 examines the writings of British missionaries, which tended to represent Pacific islanders as needing education. Fuller places her analysis of these texts alongside an exploration of Wyss' *The Swiss Family Robinson*, an illuminating juxtaposition. Fuller's argument—that the missionaries' writings and the novel both see the Pacific as a site for adventure, moral didacticism and economic activity—is original and convincing. When Fuller engages with the discourses of island studies I find her less persuasive. Regarding *The Swiss Family Robinson*, she writes: "While Seeyle argues that this map shows that the 'island' in fact functions more as a peninsula, more likely such unexplored land is not an ideological choice but a simple fact of geography." I would argue that a space's representation is always an ideological choice, whether by design or unconsciously. Fuller's broader argument, though, is strong, as she provides good evidence for her assertion that Wyss creates "the indelible fantasy for the domestic reader of the unconquerable coloniser." A section about the missionary John Williams seems less pertinent to the overall project. While Fuller purports to analyse Williams' writings, she writes much more about him, which is often interesting but less relevant to her stated purpose. I also find troubling the unquestioned use of the word 'natives' to refer to Pacific islanders, as it betrays a conception of islanders as 'others'.

Chapter 2 focuses on how earlier stories that prioritised the conversion of islanders to Christianity were succeeded by adventure fiction. This change is neatly juxtaposed with the writings of George Vason, a missionary who 'went native'; his life is figured as analogous to the literary transition. Adventure fiction, Fuller argues convincingly, "focused less on the proper way to civilise natives and more on how the island spaces could provide a way to 'civilise' British citizens." Fuller's examination of *Masterman Ready* in terms of "two visions of masculinity" (Ready and the father) is interesting but seems somewhat tangential to the wider narrative. On the other hand, the idea that the novel "elevates the trader/adventurer to a higher status than that of the peaceful domestic philosopher/missionary" is incisive and relates clearly to the overall project. In her analysis of Ballantyne's lesser-known South Pacific novels Fuller is at her most original and captivating. Her analysis of 'play' in *The Coral Island* is also engaging, although it reinforces the sense of this being a collection of interesting reflections on individual texts rather than a cohesive narrative. While the use of the word 'natives' in Chapter 1 was troubling, here Fuller writes that "Marryat's island challenges the fledgling colony when of a band of savages arrive;" apart from the rogue 'of', the unproblematised use of the word 'savages' seems somewhat regressive.

Chapter 3 deals with the writings of Charles Darwin and follow naturalist Thomas Henry Huxley. Fuller paints a convincing picture of Darwin's ambivalent view of Europeans in the Pacific, but gives no account of the effect it had on the British imagination. Further, while Fuller's historical descriptions are engaging, her conclusions are not always supported by her

evidence. For example, she writes that “Huxley is more impressed by the women’s actions than their features” and then quotes Huxley’s opinion that the “island women ... were ugly enough but not quite so bad as the Australians.” In other places, Fuller fails to subject her sources to rigorous critique, instead taking them at face value. For instance, she writes that “[i]n Darwin’s opinion, the missionaries have done good work by removing this offensive tasting plant to less populated areas and replacing it with more healthful foods.” The Ava (or Kava) she refers to here has psychoactive effects and has long been used in traditional medicines of the South Pacific. The missionaries’ removal of it has an air of puritanism and a potentially destructive effect that Fuller does not mention.

In her fourth chapter, Fuller identifies an ecocritical perspective in the letters and novellas of Robert Louis Stevenson. This is convincingly argued and shows how his writings may have influenced or reflected the place of Pacific islands in the British imagination: “As a result of increased forays into the Pacific islands, the British had to reconsider their assumption that the islands remained an untamed paradise.” Chapter 5 purports to consider the writings of Pacific islanders. We are told that Queen Emma Forsayth’s writings, “along with those of her fellow islanders Lee Boo and Ta’unga, presented the British with a Pacific that is was [*sic*] both familiar and new.” This is somewhat disingenuous; in fact, the story of Lee Boo “was popularised after his death from smallpox in 1784 in a children’s book called *The History of Prince Lee Boo*,” while Fuller attributes only one quotation of unknown origin to Forsayth. Ta’unga, on the other hand, wrote his own account, which is analysed in a nuanced and original section.

In a brief conclusion, Fuller summarises her analysis of the place of islands in the nineteenth-century British imagination. Her narrative begins with islands seen simultaneously as paradisaical spaces and as sites for the expansion of British trade and Christianity. Later, islands in adventure stories demonstrated the success of the British empire and served a didactic purpose for British boys. British cultural supremacy was then questioned by naturalists’ island narratives, and popular cultural texts introduced more “villainous traders and regressively evolving settlers.” While I do not dispute this narrative, the evidence presented here is insufficient to demonstrate general trends. In fact, while the individual analyses are often accomplished and engaging, they lack cohesion and are more informative about their specific subjects than any wider discourses. The readability of the argument is also compromised by many typographical errors.

Fuller focusses on people and events (and their representations) rather than topography, and the islandness of many of the islands discussed is often inconsequential to the analysis as a result. The book comes from a Victorian Studies perspective and has as its primary concern to understand what ‘Victorian’ means (rather than what ‘island’ means). While this is not a failing it means that the book may be of more interest to Victorianists (perhaps with a passing interest in islands) than to those more concerned and familiar with the discourses of island studies.

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