

was published. The book imparts an understanding of the Banabans' situation as a special case for aid from the other nations that have benefited from phosphate, since the Banabans have "fallen between the cracks" and do not benefit from aid given to either Fiji or Kiribati, the political entity under which their homeland of Banaba now falls.

The editors have accomplished an admirable feat in collecting a wide range of stories and arranging them into such logical and compelling order. *One and a Half Pacific Islands* is a significant contribution to the literature on history from the Islanders' points of view. Through these unforgettable stories, the reader confronts in a highly personal way a largely overlooked society victimized by twentieth-century politics and industrialization.

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The Songmaker's Chair, a play by Albert Wendt. Directed by Dennis Carrol, Kumu Kahua Theatre, Honolulu, 16 March–15 April 2006.

The family name of the characters in this play, Sa-Peseola, has been glossed as "a health giving song." It is synonymous with the term "songmaker" on different levels. Albert Wendt's 1991 novel *Ola* has a revealing quote: "I've often felt, with some dread, that instead of being the fisher I've been fished up, a creature born out of the imaginations of the creatures in the refuse heap; that I'm their captive taulaitu/songmaker/shaman, the vehicle for their awakening" (9).

One gloss of the term "taulaitu" is "anchor of the spirits." I have drawn on the quote from *Ola* because it places the taulaitu on the same spectrum as the songmaker and the shaman. *Ola* is a very self-reflexive work and orients Polynesian culture within world cultures. The use of the star maps at the end of *The Songmaker's Chair* hints at its broader contexts as well.

The pese, or song, in this play comes through a variety of media, including the ghetto blaster that plays religious and popular Samoan songs in Samoan, and the live singing voices of the aiga (family) who voice the traditional song in Samoan as well as the Peseola-ized rap in English. That rap is a miniature of the play—one of the family sagas that has played out in a variety of Wendt texts, including the sagas of the Tauliopepe and Malo aigas in *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* (1979), of Faleasa Osovae's aiga in *Pouliuli* (1977), and of the Mautu aiga in *The Mango's Kiss* (2003), each set in Sāmoa, and also in glimpses in Wendt's latest collections of poems, *Photographs* (1995) and *The Book of the Black Star* (2002), partly set in Ponsonby, Auckland. *Sons for the Return Home* (1973) is also a relevant work in regard to migration. One of the poems in *Black Star* reads, "We Will Read the Star Maps Our Ancestors forged across the heavens and learn the paths of one another and alofa [love, affection]." The paths of the individuals within the aiga are various, as in the drama: paths of struggle and of material success. The coherence brought to this play is created by its sense of family, which swirls around the parents, especially Malaga. (Because I don't believe in

New Criticism, I think you can also see influences on the strong roles for women in this play in Wendt's 1991 autobiographical story, "A Genealogy of Women" [reprinted in *The Best of Albert Wendt's Short Stories*, 1999].)

A remarkable aspect of this play is the continuing unity of the Sa-Peseola aiga, even in a strange country that has "not treated them well." The two grandchildren have anchored themselves in their respect for Malaga and Peseola. The grandchildren might have been raised by them. They actively dislike their squabbling parents, Nofu and her Māori husband Hone. The depictions of the two sons—Mau, a headmaster, and Frank, a young writer—perhaps draw on Wendt's own experience as a headmaster and writer. The family argument over the matai title (the title of the head of an extended family) echoes other Wendt works, including *Leaves* and *Pouliuli*. Lillo is a spirit figure; she has been hurt by the police and by the military. She carries wounds that are not fully explained in the play—they remind me of the wounds of colonialism in Wendt's 1976 essay "Towards a New Oceania" (reprinted in Paul Sharrad's *Readings in Pacific Literature*, 1984), because the wounds are inflicted by agents of the state.

The family is the central character of the play. A major concern is the passing on of the family title to the oldest son Mau from Peseola. Another, of course, is the missing granddaughter. The Māori character Hone is an orphan; in a sense he has been taken in by the Sa-Peseola aiga, while in the next generation a child is left out of the aiga—a supremely ironic trade. The tragic presentation of the granddaughter's separation

from the family, and her mother Lillo's wounds, indicates that everything is not perfect with the transplantation of the aiga into New Zealand. On lighter and deeper levels the family culture is changing; dope and alcohol feature prominently in family gatherings; Mau's wife Joan is Papalagi (white), which creates tensions with his sister Lillo about the encroachment of Palagi ways onto the role of the matai. In the first act we learn that Peseola has been playing the same songs for the last thirty years; his sense of the culture is different from that of the next generation, a nostalgic view among a range of perspectives on Samoan culture and identity in the play.

The role of the church in the Sa-Peseola family remains important. As an aside, I admire how *The Songmaker's Chair* does not belittle religion in any form, whether pre-Christian or Christian; there is an acceptance of the importance of the spiritual realm in whatever form that takes.

The migrants' story was repeated by many Māori families as well. There was a huge amount of internal migration after the Second World War; Māori transformed from a predominantly rural people to a mainly urban population. In the play, Hone Roberts is an orphan, but he fits more comfortably into the aiga (despite his claim that he isn't a "good" member of the aiga), in contrast to Mau's wife Joan, who carries a lot of cultural and colonial baggage. Yet Joan is fluent in Samoan and has clearly made extra efforts to fit in. Hone's way of fitting in is by his heavy drinking with Peseola. Both Joan and Hone are accepted by Peseola and Malaga; it is Lillo who is out on a limb.

The chair is a constant ghostly presence: it doesn't speak, but it is quoted from often. It represents a family position: the burden of a title, the warmth of a family, it has a confessional symbolism that connects it with the spirit world, a silent wisdom handed down from the previous songmakers. The play begins with a chant, one of creation, the cosmogony of Sāmoa, out of the vanimonimo (the space that appears and disappears, outer space)—that space between (as Wendt describes the va in "Towards a New Oceania"), and which other theorists have labeled the differend (*The Differend*, Jean-François Lyotard, 1998), the third space (*The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha, 1994), or liminality.

The chair is a representation of the va—a cultural space; it emits an energy that the family itself expresses through such mediums as song and storytelling. The lineage the chair represents is an anchor, both for spirits like a taulaaitu, and for the family. For instance, in the playscript when Pese finds out about Lillo's child, he hugs himself in the chair; thus we see its role as refuge.

The three-quarter staging of the Kumu Kahua production emphasized the silent significance of the chair. The piercing cries of the owl, via the theater audio system, were the only sounds that emerged out of the va. I believe that the owl's significance is as a kind of family god or guardian creature (Māori kaitiaki, Hawaiian 'aumakua); I say that it comes from the va because the owl also comes from this ancestral and spiritual plane.

In death Peseola is oriented toward the chair, in the shadows behind it, with his photo on the wall, and we

hear singing in the Samoan language about the beauty of the ancestral homeland.

The great achievement of this play is that it generates so many levels of engagement with traditional, contemporary, and migrant culture, as well as New Zealand society from a Samoan perspective. The family spirit engendered by the drama remained for me well after the play had ended. Judging by the very warm audience responses at the two performances I attended, this play was a very successful production, crossing as it did from the southern to the northern Pacific.

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See also Melani Anae's review of the 2003 Auckland production of The Songmaker's Chair in The Contemporary Pacific 17:270-273 (2005).

Samoan Wedding, 97 minutes, 35 mm, color, 2006. Written by Oscar Kightley and James Griffen; directed by Chris Graham; produced by John Barnett and Chloe Smith. Distributed by South Pacific Pictures, New Zealand.

No. 2, 93 minutes, 35 mm, color, 2006. Written and directed by Toa Fraser; produced by Philippa Campbell, Tim White, and Lydia Livingstone. Distributed by Colonial Encounters, New Zealand.

The Hawai'i International Film Festival—regarded as the premiere film event in the Pacific—screened two New Zealand feature films during the October 2006 film season in Hawai'i—*Samoan Wedding* and *No.*