Book and Media Reviews
uncompromising ambiguity, the pace of the movie, at least for me, is slow. At 93 minutes, it is too long by one-third for the classroom, where it might be put to good use in courses on the environment, Māori studies, and, of course, Pacific ethnology. I would urge the director to release a re-edited version, one hour long, which would be much more manageable for teaching purposes.

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The attention that environmental historians and critics have directed toward the effects of ecological imperialism on the land is now being turned toward the sea. Viewing the ocean as a vibrant, connective being, teeming with threatened life forms and ecosystems, Teresa Shewry in Hope at Sea engages Oceanic literary texts as both sensitive registers of ecological devastation and regenerative sites of thought and advocacy.

Hope at Sea approaches Oceania as a region where “sweeping environmental changes have reshaped life possibilities” (2) and where writers are correspondingly attuned to the relations among human lives and water cycles, watersheds, the ocean, and its inhabitants. Through countering the destructive logics that lead to pollution, climate change, overfishing, water diversion, and water shortages, the authors that Shewry selects model hopeful possibilities for thinking about ecological futures. In approaching Oceanian literatures, she limits herself primarily to writers living in anglophone settler colonies—Hawai‘i (Michael McPherson, Māhealani Dudoit, Gary Pak, Cathy Song, Robert Barclay); Aotearoa/New Zealand (Hone Tuwhare, Kerry Hulme, Cilla McQueen, Ralph Hotere, Albert Wendt, Ian Wedde); and Australia (Richard Flanagan). While Shewry marks the positionalities of these authors and notes their connections to social movements, settler colonialism itself is largely bracketed as the contentious sociopolitical setting out of which most of the texts she discusses have emerged. To the degree that native-settler relations are discussed, it is in terms of their alliances and the shared senses found in environmental writing of “threatened, appreciated reality” (57).

Shewry reads her “archive” in ways meant to evoke hope as a critical analytic and mode of engagement, sparked by “damage and struggle” (6). The environmental hope expressed in and through literary texts realizes itself actively both against its opposites (fatalistic or escapist ecological views) and against vulnerable aspects of its own conceptual structure (false, imperialistic, vague, flawed, unrealistic, individualistic, and outright destructive forms of hope). Formed “in the Shadow of Sorrow” (as the introduction is titled), such hope is uncertain about prevailing and uncertain about what prevailing might look like, given a commitment to open futures. Along
the lines of Jonathan Lear, Vincent Crapanzano, and, significantly for the region, James Clifford on “Hau‘ofa’s Hope” (Oceania 79 [3]: 238–249), Shewry appreciates how hope takes shape within different traditions, in ways that require that it not be something assumed that can then be applied but that it aim over its own horizon or present perceived limitations. Culture-based thought systems are in turn unsettled to the degree that an inbuilt speciesism reduces the agencies of nonhuman beings.

In contrast to colonial visions of island utopias, which imposed violent transformations on both the natural and human world (in part by not recognizing the two as connected), Shewry posits openings for hope at the interface of human-nonhuman relations. She recurrently moves from blue postcolonialism (contrapuntal readings of the colonial archive) toward a bioethical commitment to consubstantial living with nonhuman marine beings. Against colonial developmentalism, whose aggressive linearity threatens the ability of “being, as well as its potentials, to exist across time,” Shewry’s chapter 1, “Endurance, Ecology, Empire,” reads Hulme’s The Bone People (1984) as committed to a “language of endurance and survival that animates” the physical world and to characters who “attempt to secure viable forms of environmental life” (23, 50).

Chapter 2, “In Search of Rain: Water, Hope, and the Everyday,” furthers the concern with water itself and aspects of its being, emphasizing “hydrosocial relations.” Juxtaposing Pak’s short story “Language of the Geckos” (2005), which celebrates the return of water to a community from which it had been diverted, and Song’s poems about plantation life from Picture Bride (1983), in which water figures as “an element ideally capable of kinship . . . able to wrap around and pass between people’s bodies” (75), Shewry suggests how living deliberately with water refreshes ecological hope. Chapter 3, “Hope in the Poetry of a Fractured Ocean,” emphasizes the transnationality and ceaseless interconnection of modes of being through readings of Tuwhare’s images of the flight and return of birds in Shape-Shifter (1997), McQueen’s tracings of aluminum production and consumption across borders in Markings (2001), Hotere’s reuse of “exhausted” materials in his Black Rainbow paintings, and Wedde’s critique of the anthropocentrism of “environmental imaginaries” (89). The sea itself is “multi-lingual” (Tuwhare quoted, 87), with inhabitants who converse across distances, perspectives, and embodiments.

The potential for interspecies connection is highlighted in chapter 4, “In a Strange Ocean: Imagining Future with Others,” in which Shewry reads Flanagan’s Gould’s Book of Fish: A Book in Twelve Fish (2001) as “smuggling hope” for a future “nourished by assemblages of beings, human and nonhuman, and sentient and nonsentient” (118). In reading a convict’s illustrations of fish as a coming-to-greater care for fish and ultimately a becoming-fish, she prefigures an overturning of the metaphysics of “us” and “them” in relation to nonhumans. Human treatment of the marine world as “other” is at its most destructive and
fissured with nuclear testing, whose aftermaths are described in chapter 5, “Utopia Haunted: Loss and Hope in the Nuclear Pacific.” Drawing on the insight that theorists of hope work in places “where people face heightened loss, hurt, and danger” (149), Shewry reads Wendt’s Black Rainbow (1992) as a critique and extrapolation of the utopic genre, whose logic of social engineering exacts concomitant effects on the physical world. In Barclay’s Melal: A Novel of the Pacific (2002), the desiccated reefs and shantytowns of Ebeye Island heighten fears that the futures planned for the region by the US military will extinguish the hope that ancestral beings and knowledges may continue to guide human-nonhuman relations. In each text, hope is challenged to fight displacement and loss, and to address “communal hurt in ways that affirm the . . . potential for creativity” (174).

For Shewry, hope in these contexts is not simply another chapter in the modernist narrative of ruin and rupture as generative; rather, Hope at Sea shares the conviction of contemporary ecocriticism that rising tides, garbage patches, and acidified waters present challenges of a different epistemic kind. In response, Hope at Sea reconstructs the philosophy and practice of hope as paradoxical, radically unsettled and unsettling: hope for one group or life-form may shade toward destruction for another. In the anthropocene, with governments apparently unwilling or unable to mitigate corporate devastation of the biosphere, Shewry finds it neither viable to leave nature to its own selections nor ethical for humans to close down the forms that possible ecologies might take. Even conservationist projects, she argues, can be moments of capture and delimitation.

Hope at Sea effectively suggests how literary texts can be affirmatory and active without imposing directives. The book is energetically argued, eclectic, and surprising in its juxtapositions. Certainly, there would be a fuller representation of Oceanic literature if writers and ecocritics from Melanesia, the francophone Pacific, and independent Pacific nations were more fully engaged; however, one measure of the book’s commitment to expanding articulation is its implicit invitation to readers of Oceanic literatures to form their own archives and hopeful ways of engaging the ecological crises that writers from all areas agree threaten the region.

What stands out for me in Shewry’s approach is the copresence of the lyrical, plaintive, yet hopeful sensibility she brings to reading, in which “thoughts, feelings, and practices are connected” (178), and her strong sense of social injustice, in which racism, dispossession, and the ongoing scramble for Oceanic resources are shown to underwrite all phases of colonialism. Against this wounding ontology, Shewry conveys how enlivened relationships with winds, rain, and especially seas and their nonhuman inhabitants become more viable and possible when all beings are regarded as interconnected and possessed of their own modes of awareness and rights to endure.

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