ceremonial exchanges. If they profit from such events, it is largely because of monetary gifts from urban and overseas relatives whose contributions are not reciprocated.

Samoan Planters does a good job of introducing Samoa, and anthropological field work in general, to the undergraduate reader. Scholars may object that the writing style is at times so simple as to suggest high-school level, but perhaps O'Meara's editors have lowered their estimation of undergraduate ability. The organization of the early chapters seems unmotivated; the short, episodic sections are apparently intended to be easily digested, but they end too soon, raising tangential issues but not adequately addressing them. One will find no quandaries here about dilemmas of representation or narrative authority. Although O'Meara is dedicated to debunking many received notions about Samoa, he seems to accept other idealizations. In the "golden years of village life"—the 1950s and 1960s, he writes, "Samoan traditions were much stronger than they are today" (67). O'Meara then details a series of contrasts between modern Samoa and life "a generation ago."

Repeatedly reminding the reader that Samoans are just like us, O'Meara emphasizes their capacity for economic calculation, unabashed self-interest, even avarice. After several such reminders, I found myself troubled by the implicit dichotomization of cultural ideology and economic rationality as motivations for behavior. To strengthen his thesis, O'Meara seems compelled to reject the possibility of any cultural behavior not founded in political-economic self-interest, at least nowadays. In the modern context Samoan cultural ideology about *matai* 'chiefs' and ceremonial exchange appears as an empty shell, a set of meaningless protocols that people use to pursue their advantage.

Like a number of junior scholars in recent years, O'Meara works in a gibe at Marshall Sahlins's 1963 "Big-Man, Chief" article, calling Sahlins's cross-cultural treatment of Polynesian chiefly ethics a "caricature." O'Meara does not address the pertinent ideology / practice issue, nor does he consider whether Samoan chiefs might have approximated Sahlins's portrayal more closely in former times, particularly if, as O'Meara asserts, Samoan life "a generation ago" was radically different from today. Similarly, the question remains whether the expectation that a family would be "broke" after an exchange event might have been truer in the pre-remittance era; such is certainly the implication of O'Meara's analysis. If so, was Samoan past cultural behavior oriented toward political-economic advantage to the same degree as it is today? Or have the Samoans only recently become "just like us"?

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Ola, by Albert Wendt. Auckland: Penguin Books, 1991. ISBN 0-14-015763-8, 347 pp. Paper, NZ$34.95.

Ola, Albert Wendt's most recent novel and his only one with a female protagonist, appears to be an attempt by the author to redeem himself for past alleged negative portrayals of women

in his novels. The story is centered primarily around a pilgrimage to Israel, the Holy Land; the trip is a birthday present to Finau, the elderly father of Ola, the central character, and Ola is accompanying him. Ola's past is woven into the story and includes such diverse settings as Samoa, New Zealand, and Japan. The novel presents many issues that are like puzzles the reader must decipher and put together: aging, dying, colonialism, sexuality, Western religion, art, hope, even quantum physics, to mention a few.

However, before engaging in the analysis and synthesis of the novel itself, one is compelled to read the novel to discern whether or not Wendt does redeem himself regarding his treatment of women. Does he portray a positive woman who doesn't die for a change? Can he really understand what it is to be a woman?

Wendt is overly conscious that this is a difficult task; he puts forth disclaimers throughout the novel, perhaps to serve as a buffer from criticism. The major disclaimer is the premise of the novel. In the foreword, he tells us that the novel is based on the contents of three beer cartons left on his front verandah by someone named Olamaiileoti Farou Monroe. In typical Wendt style, he adds parenthetically, "(a pseudonym obviously)." The contents of the cartons, "abandoned like a hermaphroditic orphan" (7), included such mementoes of Ola's life as diary entries, stories about her life, poetry, lists of things to do, and so on. With this raw material, Wendt claims to have merely rearranged "the pieces in such a way that the readers (including Ola) could see the connections, a unity" (7–8). Wendt teases us when he writes "I must admit that, at times, I've thought that sections were written by a man *pretending* to be a woman (or by a woman who was a man as well)" (8). With such provocative suggestions, the author is not unlike a magician, using diversionary tactics to get his audience to look away. While there had been a simple objective at the outset, to see what Albert Wendt has to say about women, now we are sidetracked. The task has become: is he telling the truth in the foreword, or is the foreword as fictitious as everything else in the novel?

One only has to read a few pages to have the sense that this *sounds* and *feels* like an Albert Wendt novel. Unless this Ola person has deliberately replicated Wendt's style (the parenthetical comments, the use of slashes to convey dual ideas/concepts, the long, complex sentences), the rhythms in the language, and even his common themes (vanity/guilt/criticism of Christianity), the novel is too "Wendtian" to have been written by someone else and merely rearranged by him.

That settled (for me), we can resume the initial task, to find out what Albert Wendt thinks he knows about women.

In the foreword, Wendt writes that his wife was the first person to read the final manuscript. "Powerful stuff, she said, but parts of it, especially the sexual episodes couldn't have been written by a woman—it's not the way a woman would view or write about sex" (8). This issue is confronted early in the novel, a clue that it is not the author's intention to write what a woman would normally write about sex, but to

break the taboos: "Females are *fed* to believe they mustn't use four-letter words, write/talk about sexual matters openly/frankly. For me this has been one of the most difficult taboos to break free of" (39).

One can understand and admire a sexually liberated woman, but at least one entry is too bizarre to believe it is a woman's experience. Ola and her second husband, Mark, a former Peace Corps volunteer, visit New York City and go to the Blue District in Times Square. She is disguised as a man and pays a dollar to "feel" a woman. The rest of the chapter is laden with guilt about the exploitation of women, but also about the enjoyment of that guilt. Why does a woman (a representative of the exploited group) partake of "the degradation, the violence, the filth, the decadence" (115) and indulge in the guilt? This chapter is illogical, except to suggest a latent bisexuality. Or is it another of Wendt's hat tricks? Is this one of those entries that he thought a man might have written, or a man pretending to be a woman (writing about a woman pretending to be a man, no less)?

Even acknowledging Ola's uniqueness, aren't there perspectives that are universally female, that even Ola—the outspoken, athletic, thrice-married, narcissistic, New Zealand–educated atypical Samoan woman that she is—would be privy to? For example, the experience of motherhood?

Wendt's treatment of Ola's relationship to her son is interesting—commendable but somehow lacking depth. He writes about Ola's pregnancy: "On finding that I was pregnant my loneliness vanished—just like that. He (Pita) had risen up out of my emptiness to occupy it wholly, aptly, and I sang with joy" (113). This is good, but it doesn't go much further than that.

Indeed, Pita is strangely in the background; except for the joy expressed in the above passage, the relationship between Ola and her son is more intellectual than emotional. Pita, the aspiring physicist, writes about Einstein to his mother; Ola writes to him about object-consciousness. Perhaps this emotional distance is intentional, a metaphor for the inability of males and females (even if they are mothers and sons) to empathize with each other emotionally; the best they can do is understand and respect each other on an intellectual level.

This chasm between the sexes is further illustrated in the theme of female bonding that is carried through the novel. The friendships between the women in the novel demonstrate clearly that healthy human relationships are possible. It's too bad that these positive relationships are generally restricted to the women. Of all the male-female relationships in the novel, only the relationship between Ola and her father stands out as positive and enriching. Yet, even this is sad, because the absence of any other positive relationships with men exemplifies its improbability. Ola says: "I marveled at the permanence of his love for my long-dead mother, a kind of love I had not found in my relationship with any other man, and was still searching for" (156).

Wendt does an admirable job of intellectually presenting feminist and racist issues, such as in the story of Gill, Ola's friend from her school days.

Gill has become an unhappy suburban housewife addicted to alcohol and prescription drugs. She tries to regain her sanity by confronting and proclaiming her Maori heritage, which she had previously denied. Her liberation conflicts with her husband's racist orientation and leads to the break-up of their marriage. When we read that Gill's liberation is followed by tragedy, there is an unsettling feeling about it.

The novel does not show Ola pondering the question of why Gill and her younger daughter Karin had to die; the death of a loved one, especially in a novel with strong themes of aging and dying, normally provokes that sort of questioning about the nature and purpose of life. It is missing here, and it is also missing in the resolution of the novel, when Ola's father dies.

Instead of coming to any satisfying self-revelations about love, life, and death, and thus determining the course of the rest of her life, Ola's destiny is decided for her in the bestowing of a high *matai* title on her by her dying father. But this is appropriate, an act of love that needed to be imposed on one so narcissistic and self-destructive that she would not have chosen it for herself.

Was Wendt successful in portraying a believeable and sympathetic female character with whom women can identify? No and yes. No, because the emotional dimensions of Ola's personality are too thinly drawn. Yes, but mainly at the intellectual level and in the political implications of women's status in the past (Gill), present (Ola, the confused), and future (Ola, the *matai*). Has he redeemed himself? I think so, if only to say that he tried, that the best he could do was scratch the surface of a woman's psyche, but that he did understand and respect her struggle.

Wendt does have the disclaimer, the premise that someone named Ola wrote this, rather than himself. Even so, as Ola says: "art is not life" (236). And Wendt, the artist, was given the life *(ola)* to shape into art. Therefore, the disclaimers are declared null and void.

Ola is a worthwhile read if you can set aside the mind games about who is the actual author. Among the many intriguing issues Wendt presents, it is refreshing to see a glimmer of hope in this novel's resolution.

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Christianity in Oceania: Ethnographic Perspectives, edited by John Barker. ASAO Monograph no. 12. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990. ISBN 0-8191-7907-8, x + 319 pp, tables, figures, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. US$24.50.

Christianity in Oceania is the second monograph from the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO) on the phenomenon of the Christian experience in the Pacific Islands. It is entirely appropriate that the first, *Mission, Church and Sect in Oceania* (1978), was the result of a conference that took place on the Atlantic coast of Florida. That location was a liminal metaphor for the encounter between imported Christian messages and traditional belief systems which formed the subject of that work. The papers