

Te Awaroa (The Valley of the Long River)

Serie Barford

Molly traversed the ocean on a sailing ship
that floundered on sandbars within sight of land

she spilt with horses, fruit and other pale faces
into a river valley drowned long ago by the sea

and weighted by her buttoned boots
sank beneath the wails of migratory birds

fish unpinned her knee-length hair
flicked their tails through her petticoats
kissed her hands and lips farewell

but what everyone remembers
is the waves carrying Molly ashore
and how her husband knelt beside her

polished an apple from the capsized cargo
on the left pocket of his torn, briny shirt

then sliced it in half with a bushman's knife
to reveal the five-pointed star of Venus

when he pressed it gently against her cheek
the eggshell-white skin of his face
was so tightly stretched over the bones
it appeared to be on the verge of tearing

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THIS POEM IS IN RESPONSE to *Albert Wendt's novel The Mango's Kiss (Auckland: Vintage, 2003)* and the italicized lines are quoted from page 91 of that book.

The Contemporary Pacific, Volume 22, Number 2, 328
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