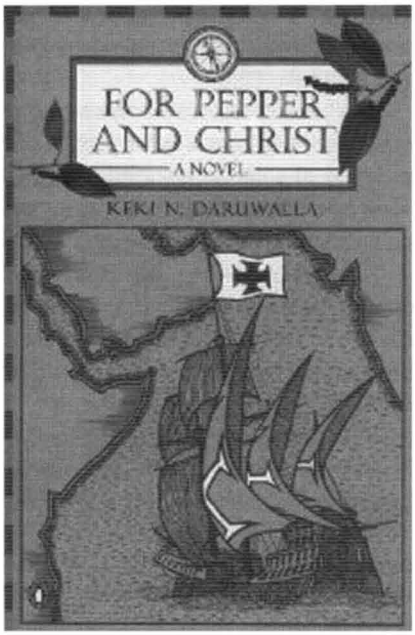

Historiographic scepticism notwithstanding, Daruwalla is unable to resist the temptation (and in a work of fiction, understandably so) to effect what Sanjay Subrahmanyan, in *The Legend and Career of Vasco da Gama* (Foundation Books, New Delhi, 2004), calls 'the meeting of two "celebrities" of the past from two quite different domains' (123). Persuaded by the judicious taking of hostages by da Gama, the King of Malindi brings aboard with him Ibn Majid, 'the greatest navigator that the Arabs have ever produced.' When informed that the mission of the Portuguese was to discover the Indian coast, Ibn Majid laughs loudly and asks in return, 'Have the Indians discovered you?'

Nevertheless, in the novel, it is not Ibn Majid who pilots the Portuguese to India; he disembarks leaving behind his protégé Taufiq on whose young shoulders rests the onerous task of sailing the fleet across the Indian Ocean. Taufiq, from Oman, has already made two voyages to the southern coast of India. Through his eyes and those of Brother Figuero, Daruwalla brings the fleet to the Malabar coast. What follows is the familiar story of the near-farcical Indo-Portuguese encounter: the meeting with the Samudriya Raja of Calicut, the translation of Dom Manuel's letter and the hopelessly inadequate gifts that the Portuguese bring with them; not being Moors, Hindus are taken for Christians by default and their temples are taken for churches.

Taufiq, who goes back to Portugal and returns on subsequent missions with both Cabral and da Gama, is witness to the depredations wrought upon both coast and shipping by the Portuguese who engage in corsair trading and piracy in the name of Christ. The Maulvi, who taught him in Oman, would punish him with a stick but always on the left side. 'The right hand commits the error and the left hand pays' he would say, 'That is what the world means by even-handedness.' In the end Taufiq, haunted by guilt and by the horrific scenes he has witnessed, devises his own punishment as atonement.

Daruwalla's Indian Ocean of the fifteenth and sixteenth century has been the cynosure of historical interest as a key moment in the making of Empire. Idle though it may be to draw such long parallels through history, the world of *For Pepper and Christ* is fraught with the familiar tensions of a more contemporary time: for Daruwalla, born in 1937 and growing up in the Partition, the themes of displacement, religious and racial tension, the desecration of shrines and, above all, the reduction of the world into a Christian/Islamic binary. The Daruwalla of later years, in the Indian police force and eventually a Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on International Affairs, would be no stranger to the Indian Ocean as a strategic sphere where nations jostle for maritime resources and naval supremacy, where blockade and piracy are weapons of both war and commerce. But there is a third Daruwalla in there, the poet who closes the book pensively saying, 'They would have come in here all the same, by sail, ship or steamboat ... There is something inexorable about history — also about gunpowder and gunboats.'

Nicky Marsh

'Headless': From The Public Record 2009

Goldin + Senneby

'Uneven Geographies: Art and Globalisation', Nottingham Contemporary, 8 May–4 July 2010
www.nottinghamcontemporary.org

Goldin + Senneby's 'Headless' installation at Nottingham Contemporary's 2010 'Uneven Geographies' exhibition is arranged as an unattended event: two smart office chairs face one another on a small platform in front of a range of neatly aligned chairs. Between them is a glass table, adorned only with the two parts of a recently published but as yet incomplete novel. The set insists on anonymity and absence: the chairs await both speakers and audience, the slides projected behind the speaker's chairs move without prompting, the floors and walls are neutral and untouched. This sense of withdrawal stands in stark contrast to the exhibition which surrounds it, an exhibition dedicated to exploring a wide range of possibilities for visually realising the enormous disparities and reach of globalisation. George Osodin, in 'George Osodi's Oil Rich Niger Delta', uses photojournalism to depict the lurid violence of an industry that sustains poverty, environmental destruction and lawlessness; Mladen Stilinović's 'Nobody Wants to See' translates the fact that the three richest men in the world own as much as the six hundred million poorest into simple piles of paper; Bureau d'Etudes' disarmingly pink cybernetic diagrams map the chilling interconnections of global capital flows and nation states. The Headless project, conversely, appears to offer very little. As people tentatively enter its space they are initially met only by a gentle wash of *muzak*, the sound of Brian Maudlin's 'WAVES relaxation — smooth piano and the sound of the sea'. The combination of anodyne corporate

confidence and domesticated fantasy of escape is disquieting to the point of parody.

The viewer who is willing to enter the space of the project – to sit as a speaker and read from the novel or sit among the audience and read from the powerpoint slides – is given more clues. The notes, the novel, the powerpoint presentation and the recorded interview that eventually follow the artificial soundtrack, guide the participant into the difficulties of understanding and representing the contemporary offshore: the shadowy existence of international money and high finance that appears to exist in largely unregulated and anonymous forms. The notes accompanying the installation indicate that it is part of a larger inquiry into 'an apparently real company called Headless Ltd, registered in the Bahamas'. The unnerving parallels between the mode of investigation and the object of enquiry are apparent in this carefully designed office set. The slideshow images combine the promotional material of an offshore company, the curriculum vitae of an academic emissary for Goldin + Senneby and a visual map tracing the sprawling interconnections of the broader project. The corporate images are taken from the homepage of the Sovereign Corporation, the offshore financial company with which Headless is registered and they include glamorous women, empty beaches and men without heads. The slides describing the project itself both explain and reinforce these enigmas, offering huge entangled networks that demonstrate – like the minutely detailed diagrams of Mark Lombardi that are also part of the Nottingham exhibition – that the offshore confounds easy mapping or visual representation. Goldin + Senneby are concerned with an industry that offers only the powerful withdrawal of agency: it is this that the emblematic headless man suggests. In the Headless project, escape functions as both a leitmotif and an alibi for global capital. The elevator music turns out to be quite instructive: it offers not only escape but cover, rendering inaudible the noisy machinery and muting the inequities of global capital that allow only the very few to be elevated.

This installation is a small part of a complex and multivalent series of texts and events that constitute Headless. As the notes accompanying the installation inform us, Goldin + Senneby's search has generated 'its own web of confusion, concealment and fiction' as the pair act 'somewhat like CEOs, employing and enlisting various specialists – economists, authors, curators etc – to carry out aspects of their business.' The installation has been given a series of alternative articulations, including three solo exhibitions: 'The Power Plant', Toronto (2008), involving the production of a documentary and a series of sombrely staged pedagogical texts; 'Index', Stockholm (2009), involving the publication of the second half of the novel, *Looking for Headless* and Kadist Art Foundation, Paris (2010), involving the recreation of the offices of a mid-century Russian Bank which first originated the offshore Eurodollar market. The outsourced projects that form part of the broader canvas of these exhibitions include a travel blog, a series of site-specific presentations and events (a walk around the City of London, a talk given in a Parisian wood) and a growing number of academic lectures and critical essays (For further details see: http://www.goldinsenneby.com/gs/).

These different and unstable versions of the Headless enquiry are held together in the form of a still unfinished novel, attributed to John Barlow. This text is a complex experiment in meta-fiction. Barlow is its author, but he ghost-writes for the fictional novelist, Kate Dent 'K D', who, in turn, has published her own account of the events of the novel in the catalogue that accompanies 'The Power Plant' exhibition. The two overlapping texts enact, and comment upon, the various events that surround the Headless project from two very different outsider positions: K D works in offshore finance and understands it, but not the conventions of contemporary novel writing and for Barlow the opposite is true. Yet the dichotomy between these competing voices and positions – the naively excited diarist voice of K D and the cynical, self-reflexive voice of Barlow – is constantly interrupted by the presence of other kinds of expertise, which include the art critics' discussion of the Headless project and the mysteriously powerful 'Catherine Banks' who is investigating those who ostensibly seek to investigate Headless. The range of authorship positions taken up, and deflected, in these texts is almost vertiginous. It is almost impossible to be sure who is speaking and, as importantly, who they are speaking for. The novel, like the installation pieces, is driven by tensions regarding the wavering distinctions between the public and private, the owned and the free, the known and unknown, the secret and shared. Readers, viewers and even protagonists (in 2010, Christie's auctioned the possibility of becoming a character in the third part of the novel) are consistently positioned beyond these dichotomies.

This textual play, like that of the overall project, is confident in its referencing of its various metatexts. One of the starting points for Senneby + Goldin's enquiry into Headless was their hypothesis that the corporation is a contemporary incarnation of *Acéphale*, the secret society initiated by Georges Bataille in the 1930s and celebrated in his short-lived review of that name. The reference to Bataille, an early twentieth-century French philosopher with close links to the Surrealist movement, reoccurs throughout the project and the rich ambivalence of his conception of both sovereignty and the general economy are revealing. Bataille's destructively nihilistic notion of sovereignty – 'the refusal to accept the limits that the fear of death would have us respect in order to ensure, in a general way, the laboriously peaceful life of individuals' – outlined in his essay, 'The Schema of Sovereignty' (*The Bataille Reader*, Oxford UP, 1997: 318), offers a way of addressing the irony that an offshore company seeking to evade

the sovereign laws of the nation state should name itself 'Sovereign'.

This dialectical notion of sovereignty captures the powerful equivocation of that which exists only in the destruction of the deadening 'laboriously peaceful life of individuals'. The idea is commensurate with Bataille's notion of a general economy, in which expenditure (or consumption), rather than production (or labour), is made the primary object. For Bataille, economics has failed because it disregards the 'excess energy, translated into the effervescence of life [...] the ebullition I consider, which animates the globe, is also *my* ebullition' (*The Accursed Share*, Zone Books, 1991: 10). This excess, or waste, is a source of vitality for Bataille that exceeds the instrumental restrictions of the bourgeois order, opening the 'globe' to nothing less than the sun. Yet it is a profoundly ambivalent vitality, encompassing both the wanton violence of war and the potlatch or gift that subverts notions of industry and accumulation.

As a frame for reading the offshore economy, then, this theoretical vocabulary retains the ambiguity apparent in the office set in the Nottingham Gallery. It recognises the offshore as a point of departure from the closed economies of the nation states, particularly in the Bretton Woods era in which it first appeared. Yet it leaves entirely open whether this 'effervescence' – the beautiful beaches and moored yachts of the offshore promotional iconography – is productive or destructive. The sense of irony that accompanies the *muzak* of Brian Maudlin remains unresolved by further *Looking for Headless*.

The ambivalence of that which is both non-productive and excessive can, of course, also be discerned in the very artistic projects which seek to make it explicit in regard to the offshore and the suggestive parallels between the two worlds can as easily imply a critique of the former as of the latter. There is a Duchampian quality to the Nottingham set: the banal office chair is rendered art by virtue of its location in an art gallery and this self-reflexivity about the status of its own critique pervades the project. In the conclusion to the second part of K D/Barlow's novel, for example, Barlow realises the destructive qualities of its metafictive structure:

> When he found himself at the very heart of his own story, the telling of it has become obscured, out of control, blurred to incomprehension [...] until now there is nothing left but a strangely palpable absence of control, an author-void: the artist as an empty vessel. (198)

The parallels between the art and the offshore worlds are at their sharpest when Goldin + Senneby's hyperrealist painting of a headless man jogging on a deserted beach, 'Nassau 6am', is shortlisted for the Sovereign art prize (http://www.sovereignartfoundation.com/art-prizes/europe/gallery/?year=2008). This international prize is sponsored by the offshore company with which Headless Ltd is registered and aims to raise 'money to help disadvantaged children using the arts as rehabilitation, education and therapy' (http://www.sovereignartfoundation.com/what-we-do.php). Barlow's novelistic account of attending the award ceremony, of witnessing Goldin + Senneby as both patrons and critics of the offshore, is illuminating. The clarity of his initial critique, 'this is Sovereign's attempt to show itself as cultured *and* caring' (133), is immediately offset by the narrator who observes of the author, 'tonight you're like a clever adolescent who has just worked out there are layers of truth and contradiction in the world [...] the party strikes you as egregiously hypocritical, yet at the same time you feel somehow jealous that you will never be part of this arty, tax-free Champagne guzzling-world' (134). The intimacy of the excesses of the art and offshore economies are laid bare and one immediate effect of this is that its consumer, sitting in the hard plastic chairs of the Nottingham exhibit, is made even more unsure of precisely where they are being located. As the text's omniscient voices chide, 'ask yourself this: How do you express yourself? Where do you ask questions, where is that dialogue played out? Where is it that you are *you*?' (134).

Jenny Newell

Pacific Islands Writing: The Postcolonial Literatures of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Oceania

Michelle Keown

Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, hb
192pp ISBN 0 1992 7645 5 £45.00
www.oup.co.uk

'All that sailing in the blood, all that moving in the family. Migratory birds, circling the great water, looking for the other shore, a place to land.' (Caroline Sinavaiana-Gabbard, *Alchemies of Distance*, 2002)

Michelle Keown's *Pacific Islands Writing* is a tour de force. She navigates us, with clarity and energy, through the complex dynamics of postcolonial Pacific writing. Her intimate understanding of Māori literature and the identity politics of Aotearoa/New Zealand creates a strong current throughout, punctuated with stops at the literatures of other islands. Her use of a canoe metaphor for the book's journey reflects the roving, waterborne histories and contemporary identities of Pacific peoples, engaging with the growing hold of a 'sea-of-islands' consciousness. She situates writers and genres clearly, delineating the cultural legacies of colonial pasts and persistent fault lines of imperialism, the grapplings with local dynamics of cultural identity, gender politics, the tug-of-wars between tradition and innovation, and between home and diaspora. While she makes frequent recourse to those greats of the modern Pacific, Albert Wendt and Epeli Hau'ofa, she is wide ranging in her selection of examples of writers, texts, genres, and languages, including theatre, film and the ongoing influence of