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Critique

Kristine Martin's study makes available the relatively little-known literature of the southern Pacific basin islands. Her article has merit because it is compared with the more widely-read African literature, and she makes a significant contribution with the comparisons. Both the Pacific selections, a recent phenomena, and the older African works are transitional literatures — striving to connect the colonized past with a post-colonial synthesis which is relevant to the author of the intended audience. As Martin shows, the audience is composed of compatriots.

Martin presents the fact that “little organized resistance or violence” was produced in the Pacific islands on the way to liberation from colonizers, an experience unique among the recently decolonized. Her excellent analysis of the similarities between African and island post-colonial literature shows that exploring this difference could be a fruitful endeavor.

Literature with an identity based on oppression is bound to be either imitative of the colonizer, reactionary, or a conscious personal, social, and political educative body of work. Martin provides us with examples of the last kind from both regions.

Martin's comparative study points out the dangers of reliance on foreign writers for an interpretation of a people and their land — or, as Mannoni phrases it, the Other. Other writers, storytellers, novelists, and travel narrators can be read in good conscience; however, one must be conscious and selective. Even if the original impetus of the writer is a

self-seeking journey, all is not lost. A case can be made to show that even the best writers are only seeking themselves; but in doing so, they illuminate both the inner and outer human landscapes no matter what or where the territory lies. Literature must be planted firmly in some soil. Even works of non-realism such as those of Jorge Luis Borges make use of spiritual landscapes which have at least been partly inherited by the writer.

Just as some African and Pacific island literature is translated into English or French, so good non-local writers translate a foreign cultural landscape. Any translation is necessarily imperfect, but the link provided makes comprehension more probable.

Margaret Laurence was in Somalia and Nigeria for seven years. Her ability to write great fiction about East and West Africa, Canada, and the British Isles is due in part to her imaginative comprehension of the Other — an ability nurtured by her experiences on the African continent.

When like can only speak for like, distortion follows. Emissaries between peoples can help give us an appreciation of human differences and shared universals. Martin has done for us what Michener and Melville were unable to do for her.

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Critique

Kristine Martin demonstrates the need for the serious scholar to address the topic of African and Pacific literature in the form of comparative analysis. She has provided a good example for others to emulate, for her study is concerned with self-identity in the formation of ethnicity.

Other readers who are unfamiliar with African and Pacific island transitional literature may question the relevance and importance of Martin's article on first reading. However, the author makes two key points which appropriately address any concerns about relevance for widening our frame of reference. First, she notes that "the major concerns of many African and Pacific writers are issues which determine their viability as members of an ethnic community." And her second major point is that African and Pacific literature provides "a focus, a means by which people can identify themselves as members of a group whose bonds transcend the maelstrom generated by the collision of transitional and technological forces."