

DIPARTIMENTO DI ANGLISTICA

Saggi e Testi

*

THEORY AND PRACTICE OF
THE SHORT STORY:
AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND,
THE SOUTH PACIFIC

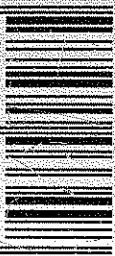
Edited by

Angelo Righetti



UNIVERSITÀ DI VERONA
MMVI

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INTRODUCTION

Late in 2003 professor Maria Teresa Bindella and I, with the support of the English Department, University of Verona, first thought of organizing a colloquium on the short story, colonial and postcolonial, as a result of shared interest in a genre to which Australian, New Zealand and South Pacific writers have given a universally recognized contribution. Also, we believed that an international colloquium would give us and our colleagues the opportunity of exchanging reading experiences and reflections on the critical debate about short fiction and would possibly help us formulate hypotheses on a specific theory of the short story, taking advantage of recent speculation on the subject carried out especially by John G. Kennedy (ed.), *Modern American Short Story Sequences. Composite Fictions and Fictive Communities* (1995), Maggie Dunn - Ann Morris, *The Composite Novel. The Short Story Cycle in Transition* (1995), not forgetting the monumental labours of Charles E. May (ed.) *Critical Survey of Short Fiction* (2nd revised ed., 7 vols., 2001). All this is important work but deals mainly with the development of British and American short story writing and only May touches briefly on the colonial and postcolonial contribution.

To date, the basic studies on the areas covered by the colloquium are: Peter Summer (ed.), *The Story Must be Told: Short Narrative Prose in the New Literatures in English* (1986); William H. New, *Dreams of Speech and Violence. The art of the Short Story in Canada and New Zealand* (1987); *Jacqueline Baroloph* (ed.), *Short Fiction in the New Literatures in English* (1989), and *Telling Stories. Postcolonial Short Fiction in English* (2001). As regards *Australian and New Zealand short fiction*, its bibliography has been recently enriched by Bruce Bennett's relevant book on Australian Short Fiction. *A History* (2002), and by Lydia Wewers's substantial chapter on the *New Zealand short story* appearing in Terry Sturm (ed.), *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English* (2nd ed., 1998).

The proceedings of the colloquium that was eventually held at the University of Verona on 20, 21, 22 April, 2004, combine the contribution of writers "in conversation" with internationally acknowledged scholars and critics (Laurie Renghan, Bruce Bennett, Lydia Wewers, Claudio Gortler), and are meant as a celebration of the creative efforts of short story writers and scholarly research. The papers that were read after the writers' conversations and presentation of their work in response to the stimuli of the critics offer case studies, but also

12. The need to reflect on island-centered theorizing within the postcolonial text is reflected in R. Edmond and V. Smith (eds.) *Islands in History and Representation*, Routledge, 2004.

13. As illustrated in "Oral Traditions and Writing," a paper read by Hau'ofa at a Pacific Writers' Conference, London, 29 October 1988. The paper, consisting of twenty-two typewritten pages is conserved at the Hamilton Library, Honolulu. The overtly self-reflexive character of the first four paragraphs not only prepare the audience to expect an autobiographical narrative; they also deal with the paradox of having to "speak" out of a "written" paper, which applied to the unnatural "relationship between oral telling and the short story"; the topic he was asked to speak about. He therefore announced: "I [...] thought, as only one abysmal ignorant could do, that the topic was a piece of cake [...] utterly undigestible. [...] My tale is told with the intention of killing two birds with one stone. The narrative is written, which qualifies it as literature of sorts, I hope, and it will be read out, which is oral telling." In his concluding remarks he sadly portrayed himself as a "writer" of stories, the oral teller of tales having being "silenced in an alien environment of books and scholarly discourse" – and yet the indigestible cake, somehow, had been digested: "Writing was inevitable, for by then it was the only way I could tell my stories with a measure of confidence. And I think I have just come to the end of one." The paper itself turned out to be a piece of oral telling, 'told' as it was to the conference audience, and a written story about storytelling, the latter being the twenty-two pages typescript out of which he had been reading.

14. V. Hereniko, "Indigenous Knowledge and Academic Imperialism", in R. Borofsky (ed.), *Remembrance of the Pacific Past*, cit., pp. 78-92.

15. "Our Sea of Islands", cit., p. 35.

16. V. Hereniko, "Representations of Cultural Identities", in *Inside Out*, cit., p. 160.

YVONNE BEZRUCKA

Albert Wendt's Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree: Contagious Infection and Regional Dissenting Bodies

I.

I would like to begin my paper by illustrating some issues implicit in the title. I have chosen to carry out my 'anatomy' of the body because in postcolonial literature it is a major signifier, if not the signifier that needs to be investigated. The body has often been adopted by colonial ideology/culture/literature and constructed as an 'implicit' marker, assuming that its phenotypical features can disclose 'truths' about its identity.¹ Actually, travel literature and ethnographic works written in the late eighteenth century developed from accounts of different cultures into accounts that made use of the appearance, the observable features of people, i.e. of their bodies, to set up politics of difference and racial discrimination, deliberately shifting their concerns from the ethnic to the racial/racist field, and claiming scientific objectivity for their shift from the cultural to the biological and genetic ground.²

This move from culture to nature was backed up by the "new science of human taxonomy":³ Linnaeus used the term 'variety' and Blumenbach (1790) subdivided the human type into families, Buffon did not hesitate to use the term "race",⁴ while Hume and Kant,⁵ had their share of contributing to such taxonomic mappings and racialisation of peoples. Racial theories put forward in the eighteenth century therefore purported to read moral worth in the genetic characteristics of peoples and used invalid scientific classifications that promoted racism.

Yet the connection I want to highlight in my paper is of another more oblique type, as it deals with the supposedly 'immaculate' field of aesthetics. What I want to focus on is the use of the body as an 'aesthetic object', its reification, so to speak, for ideological purposes.

How does the body become a signifier in aesthetic discourse? In this context the appearance of Johann Caspar Lavater's study of physiognomy, *Physiognomische Fragmente* (1775-1778) is a case in point. Through this work incorrect scientific categories acquired aesthetic

status. That is, figural features became, in Lavater's study, underhand and insidious 'aesthetic' categories, used to back up, once more, the supposed superiority and validity of the 'Greek' ethnic type. This originally regional but later universally acknowledged canon of beauty had till then been promoted within an aesthetics of the beautiful that in the course of the eighteenth century extended its domain to include 'strange', 'alien' strands that were pressing for recognition (take for instance the 'magnetic' appeal on visitors of the Alps and other manifestations of nature). New aesthetic feelings were thus incorporated in the magisterial recovery of the aesthetic category of the sublime in its revival through Burke's *Enquiry* in 1757 which drew heavily on Pseudo Longinus's *Peri Hypsous*. The sublime remains, in my opinion, in the binary predicament producing only a counter-category which confirms the hierarchy it implies.⁶ The real revolution was more the birth of the aesthetics of the picturesque,⁷ the third and novel category of "irregularity", engendered by Gilpin in 1743 and defined in its theoretical, i.e. 'regional' implications, by Francis Grose in 1788.⁸ The actual birth of a 'regional aesthetics' – which marks *tout court* the birth of modernity (an implicit aesthetics of 'character', through William Hogarth and Henry Fielding's common aesthetic project, launching realism as a style, also already underway since 1743) brought forth the dramatic necessity to control the relativism it entailed, in order to salvage as far as possible the mechanisms of authority – order and degree – hitherto safeguarded by the "chain of being" analogy. At this stage, the discriminating authority of the Platonic aesthetics of beauty, needed to be strongly reasserted.

This need to re-state the canon of 'universal' beauty and the idea of perfection it ideologically entails, passes through the body. It goes along the reassertion of the standards of beauty of 'a' body, which is, nevertheless, the 'Greek' body-type, once more promoted as a 'universal' standard of perfection with no regard to the miscegenetic nature of its ethnicity. That is, beauty had to be reasserted from a hidden ethnocentric standpoint which supports the myth of universality, the notion of a homogeneous human nature concealing its regional differences and coincident with "a primary strategy of imperial control as it is manifested in literary study".⁹

One main terrain of the reassertion of an aesthetics of the beautiful came, as has been said, from Johann Caspar Lavater's work, *Physiog-*

nomische Fragmente (1775-1778)¹⁰ with its optimistic subtitle: *Zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe* ("For the Promotion of the Knowledge and the Love of Mankind"). This nearly forgotten work is for me a key text for literary studies and my current research is aimed at dismantling its influence. Indeed, Lavater's work did a lot of harm, albeit obliquely, as it provided racists with an imaginary and ridiculous taxonomy that claimed to read ethical worth in external appearance, a pseudo-science widely used in fiction, though, tellingly, less in the eighteenth than in the nineteenth century.¹¹ In other words, the fiction that paved the way for and connived with physiognomy, the familiar theory¹² according to which identity could be assumed from outward features: the nose, mouth, forehead, eyebrows, chin and God knows what else, of people. Skin colour as a trait marking difference has an even longer history but it also became a biological matter, a scientific matter, during this time. Profiling became thus a rule.

The fact is that combined with the Whig interpretation of history that coopted Darwin's teleological and progressive myth of evolution, the phenotypical reading was used to back up and prove the colonial theory based on the hypothesis that genetic backwardness of those 'other' peoples, which were not interpreted as simply having and using 'different' cultural codes, but which were textualised as 'inferior', 'savage' and 'barbarian' peoples – bodies, in short, that needed to be 'civilized' and 'named'. These ideological projections and judgements found allegorical evidence in the markedly different phenotypical characteristics in an authoritarian – should one say racial? – aesthetics of beauty, one that supported both by physiognomy, phrenology and pathognomy – provided a pseudo-scientific contribution to the playing down and 'belittlement'¹³ of everything that simply by being 'other' becomes 'ugly' and, as in Lavater's case, a sign, or rather, a stigma of 'evil'. If this sounds scandalous, one should remember that Plato was the first philosopher to state that beauty (aesthetics) was an 'implicit' guarantee of goodness (ethics). This essentialism, I think, forces one to highlight the place of origin of the traditional aesthetics of the beautiful, which would render us complicit with the ideology it veils. Postcolonial literature therefore, is bound to use strategies which either criticize and possibly dismantle such obsolete aesthetic assumptions still at work today.

Physiognomy thus contributed to the climax of the British colonial enterprise which paraded itself as bringing 'light' to those places of the earth where 'darkness' reigned (see Kipling's "The Recessional")

Between an aesthetics of the beautiful and the maintenance of an aesthetics of the sublime that only confirms the binary structure of hierarchies and the entrapment on which it is founded, probably the third way of a 'regional aesthetics', which is not a dialectical fusion of the previous ones, but an aesthetics of its own – the aesthetics of the characteristic – is for me a viable epistemic category. I am therefore going to read Albert Wendt's *Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree* (1974)¹⁴ as a sort of manifesto for the regional aesthetics of the vast heteroglossic¹⁵ region of Oceania, a key-text of an aesthetics of post-colonial literature in that it textualises and discusses ethnic difference by promoting its own peculiar regional aesthetic grammar as an alternative to imported and supposedly universally valid beauty canons.

To those who currently think that a regional aesthetics can be a questionable perspective I would like to respond that ideas of ethnic difference are inherent in postcolonial literature whose primary task is getting rid of and rejecting the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants' *regional* model that has been presented to them as the *universally* valid standard. The body, the individual's perspective of history, its *petite histoire*, should be considered the site that bespeaks the moves attributing authority based on ethnicity, and goes hand in hand with regional, cultural, feminist, and gay-lesbian studies.

Therefore the literature of Oceania must protect its *genius loci* with its rich, mythical, oral tradition, whilst coming to terms – dialogically – with the influence of Western literacy, and becoming one the many 'new' or, as I prefer to call them, regional literatures of the post-colonial era.¹⁶ Oracy, *tatau*, and recently acquired literacy, besides all other forms of art, are in fact the genres to which the memory of Oceania is entrusted.

The use of a Western textualisation of South Pacific literature, according to Subramani, began in the 1960s.¹⁷ The last of the Commonwealth regions to develop a literature in English can be seen, in Wendt's own words, as "the youngest literature [in English] in the world"¹⁸ – if a tinge of immaturity were thus not implied – but, reversing the perspective, I prefer to see it as the region most reluctant to add foreign codes to its own semiotic tradition. Material culture, oracy and tattoo, or *tatau* in Samoan – are for Pacific cultures comparable to writing¹⁹ – that is, their specific genres for the transmission of cultural memory/tradition.

One autochthonous genre of the culture of Oceania is tattoo, the prestigious writing on one's body – an art which turns the body into a meaningful aesthetic object demanding interpretative attention; a body that is made into 'text' and a body which reacts to its Western interpretation. It is no surprise then, that for Albert Wendt, the full-body tattoo, the male *tatau* and the female *malu* have become 'political' signifiers, or as he describes them: "defiant texts or scripts of nationalism and identity", icons of a besieged identity²⁰ which cannot be erased, albeit "threatened with extinction by colonialism." (*T* 403).²¹ Ironically, if not ludicrously, tattooing has turned into Western 'mimicry', and this mostly testifies to the ignorance of the correct use of the regional code. *Tatau* used simply as ornament indicates the appropriative tendency of people who, happy in a world of appearance, mark their body, unawares, with icons that betray and signal, like a 'scarlet letter', their, from then on unerasable, appropriate tendency.

The fact that the common name of *tatau* is *pe'a*, "flying-fox", as Wendt points out (*T* 402), indicates that the flying-fox of the title story of the collection should be symbolically connected to this cultural background.

The *tatau* are thus the 'dissenting', resisting bodies of my title, the living texts, living body-art, in a contradiction of terms, living aesthetic objects that foreground the ideological implications of aesthetics by "printing or scripting a genealogical-spiritual-philosophical text on the blood" (*T* 409). The *tatau* is a human body that "stories" (*T* 409) and historicises itself by marking through the 'embodiment' of its genealogy its peculiar relation to time (the present) and to a particular *aiga*²² (the extended family containing the past and the future), writing on the body the timeless responsibility for its well-being and in so doing, and through diaspora, bodies become symbols of the unseen and unacknowledged interconnectedness of people.

The accountability for one's lineage, the *gafa*, is marked by narrating one's story and one's relation to history using a semiological code that is in itself the emblem of a culture and its *genius loci*. (*T* 409). Therefore, the tattooed body is also a *sega imiti*, a body "proclaiming" its irreducible and "unique identity" (*T* 411). It is no mere coincidence that Albert Wendt reads the *tatau* as a symbol of South Pacific postcolonial literature, "the postcolonial body (...) is a body 'becoming', defining itself, clearing a space for itself among and

alongside other bodies (. . .) it is a body coming out of the Pacific, not a body being imposed on the Pacific" (T 411). It is, in other words, as I understand it and as suggested above, a regional body with an aesthetics and an ideology of its own.

Also, according to Foucault, commenting on Nietzsche,

The body is the inscribed surface of events (. . .) the locus of a dissociated self. (. . .) Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body.²³

So the body is the site of the attempted but unsuccessful erasure of its regional culture which is indeed a death-menacing 'infection' but can be rewritten and played down in turn, as "influenza", according to Wendt — etymologically, as simple influence.

For the genealogist, Foucault and Nietzsche's historian of the *wirkliche Historie*²⁴ — i.e. Albert Wendt — "the body — and everything that touches its diet, climate, and soil — is the domain of the *Herkunft*".²⁵ It unveils its origin, but following Foucault, it must search for its "descent" showing its "heterogeneity" rather than "erecting (. . .) foundations".²⁶ The recovery of the *tatua* — i.e. genealogy — by Albert Wendt as a trope of the aesthetics of Pacific cultures is precisely motivated by this intention. In Wendt's poetry collection *Inside us the Dead*,²⁷ heterogeneity is represented as a spatial self, resulting from the criss-cross of many countries and nations or *ethnoi*, and the criss-cross of all the past and future in one single person symbolised by the *tatua*.²⁸

As a consequence, Wendt's answer to assimilation is not found in a nostalgic or reactionary revival of a pre-*palagi* (pre-whites) past,²⁹ but in the promotion of a new Oceania and its cultures,³⁰ a variety of sub-cultures, within a larger transnational, yet definitely regional context.

Thus *tatuing* (and the analogy it stands for, the encoding of Oceanic culture) should be considered a privilege to be granted to a *palagi* (in that it marks affiliation with an *aiga*); otherwise the price to pay for it is the Hawthornian scarlet letter, the mark of the appropriation of the Pacific, historically carried out also by Western writers who have contributed to creating a Western Pacific mythology, an appealing paradise populated by noble savages.³¹

The *pe'a*, the flying-fox, and tattooing in general, as Wendt suggests, can become a mark of seizure as "the bat is Dracula is Bauman

is vampirism is leeching", thus a transnational coloniser's mark, hinted at by the reference to Dracula the 'reverse' colonizer. *Tatuing*, that is, can also issue in a "reversed"³² infection (Wendt tellingly mentions Aids), in that contact, the mingling of people, can produce indissoluble bonds, as was the case with Stevenson or Gauguin. Symbolically, nevertheless, as Albert Wendt points out, the blood of *tatuing* is related to the interconnectedness of the various lineages of a culture which dismisses purity and foregrounds miscegenation. And Wendt goes on to say that the danger lies in the fact that the equivalent of "blood" in Samoan translates "earth, soil, mud" (T 409) as well — words that can only too easily be connected to a *Blut und Boden* ideology, if one does not shave off such calamities by invoking a 'critical' regionalism, respectful of tradition but ready to negotiate and accept meaningful but diverse innovations. A regionalism that can issue forth in 'blend' rather than in 'hybridity', as Wendt points out³³ (FF 411), a blend witnessed by Pacific cultures in their genealogical and cultural 'heterogeneity'. In Wendt's words: "*tatuing* the blood, the self, you are reconnecting it to the earth, reaffirming that you are earth, genetically and genealogically" (T 409), thus simply earth, the common *kepes* of the planet, that comprises all its geopolitical regional versions.

That is why Wendt's collection can be interpreted as a highly meaningful instance of a literary and aesthetic regionalism.³⁴ It is an example of the literature of those cultures that are fully aware of the seductive influence of Western systems of thought, but manage to maintain their specificity without their identity exhausting itself into an unproductive 'mimicry' of the all too ready-made global-system models of thought. But they are also cultures which refuse to rely on a nostalgic and new-synthetic — if not even downright reactionary — local-colour dimension. So a double perspective is adopted here: a specifically regional consciousness and memory negotiating with 'global', dominating culture. This negotiation can be referred to a theoretical architectural model (where problems related to global anonymity and local identity issues acquire, visually, a leading position) by assuming Kenneth Frampton's definition of critical regionalism³⁵ which underlines exactly the necessity of negotiation between diverse standpoints. Critical regionalism discusses questions of identity — the protection of cultural specificity, but combining it with a highly critical attitude, fully aware that if appropriated from an essentialist po-

sition, such discourses may inevitably lead to an ethnocentric or purist position which cannot be exempted from finding, as indeed it has found in the past, its outcome in racism, xenophobia and eugenics. And such abysses of history can be forestalled only if a viable concept of identity is defined because supposed "universality"³⁶ – most probably the regional perspectives of the manipulators of multinational world economy – is always 'relative' to someone; but the historical being of peoples cannot be forgotten either, nor can it be overridden and become subsidiary to any ahistorical ideal type (the line of research I pursue and try to link to aesthetics). The adjective 'critical' cancels, from the start, the possible cooption of regionalism to all supposed vanities of those essentialist positions from which one posits 'difference', which entail, in short, the still possible cooption to geopolitics.

Regionalism is a specific perspective that recognizes its culturally contextualized way of seeing in critical terms, safeguarding what needs to be safeguarded but attempts to negotiate the relations between cultures and the ongoing conflict between tradition and change, between a meaningful past and the opportunities offered by global culture. In this challenge lies the possibility of a fertile synthesis rather than in a dichotomous identity/alterity contrast. Regionalism is thus a new way of looking at questions, a double perspective which can overturn stale and inveterate and dangerously engrained tropologies. What should be emphasized is that to speak of Oceania instead of Pacific Islands instead of the South Pacific, as E. Hau'ofa warns us,³⁷ is analogous to using United Kingdom instead of Great Britain or Briannia or England.

Regionalism finds its definition in Wendt's image of Pacific post-colonial literature as he exemplifies it in the *body* of the young, well-built Samoan "striding up the streets in blue sport shorts, blue T-shirt, short, cropped hair, Reeboks, eating a hamburger and parading his *tatau*" (T 411). Taking pride in *tatau* is, according to Wendt, the icon of "what we are in post-colonial literature" (T 411), the site of a blend of local and global issues, a local revision ready to be infected and in its turn, to infect, global ideas.

Albert Wendt's writing records these conflicts reacting to appropriate moves by recording and juxtaposing a mythic past with the present. But he is not a nostalgic writer, as he is highly critical of the inequality of the older mores of his society but, conscious as he is of their importance as a sign of identity for his peoples, he refuses to de-

spise them as obsolete and outdated traditions. At the same time, he is also critical of imported attractions and lures since that the old pre-contact, pre-*palagi* pagan myths and beliefs have for him an immutable value, and act for him as a "non-invented" tradition³⁸ which has been 'produced', but has produced in its turn, a proud people who cannot just simply and enthusiastically accept imported ways of life that Westerners unproblematically define as 'progress'. These are just other traditions which have been developed in different contexts and environments: "Pacific Islanders should write their own histories, their own versions of their history. Histories written by outsiders, no matter how fair they've been, are still views of foreigners, still views of other people about us. In many ways, those histories have imposed on us views of ourselves that have added to our colonization." (IO 90)

In Wendt's collection *Flying-Fox*, the spokesmen for the protection of specificity are, interestingly, easily recognizable people, in that they are "bodily" characterized – their bodies, that is, are a living sign of their different, regional beauty, and denytify "universality", by pointing to the 'regionality' of Western aesthetic conceptions which actually champion the classic but, alas, "Greek" ideal type.³⁹ Tagata and Pili are respectively a dwarf and a very tiny man, as Lemigao in *Pouliouli* will be club-footed, men people will make fun of, not realizing that they are the icons of a new regional beauty. In fact, they are dissenting bodies, unaccommodating people who, as their eighteenth-century religious predecessors, do not conform to established authority. Their critical attitude and their dissent is made evident by their bodies, words and acts, and they indigenize all external influence. Symbolically they are flying-foxes. They adopt the new grammar of looking at the world upside down, i.e. reversing the expected perspective, just like the flying-fox naturally does.⁴⁰

The flying-fox – the inhabitant of the liminality of two worlds⁴¹ – stands as the symbol of all regional dissenting bodies who through ethnicity, class and gender are discriminated against by a so-called universality which has made them 'tiny' and strategically 'belittled', and yet claim an autonomous, specific 'aesthetic' status.⁴² Tagata, the flying-fox, cannot achieve it, but he commits suicide as a supreme act of dissent and opposition. And yet, by pointing to the flying-fox as a solution, and forcing Pepe to write about him and the culture of *pe'a*, the *tatau* he stands for, Wendt and his character presage the *so-ga'imiti* status, the age of independence of Oceanic literature.

Tagata, his brother, has hanged himself from a mango tree, leaving a letter as a testament for Pepesa, claiming dissent through mocking laughter: "the Flying-Fox has nothing to leave in this my will, but, 1001 laughs, as the movies say, which I desire you, Your Excellency, to laugh one laugh every night from now on until you die." (FF 141). The infection they laugh at is the infection of the picture screen and the cartoon life that Tagata and Pepe refuse to comply with: the celluloid world,⁴³ promoting the "plenty-idea" and the "business-idea" (FF 146) people "make fire with": against which their laughter, despising "father (. . .) the Romans (. . .) the I.M.S. (. . .) the modernaitu (. . .) the Police (. . .) the Judge and bad breath" (FF 142), rings out clearly. An idea, altogether "too dry too dead for it all in head" (FF 148) as the last character of the short story explains in pidgin.

In his will, Tagata tells Pepe he has been born into a body that does not correspond to the man inside him: a "flying-fox with an eagle in the gut" (FF 141) a metaphor for the neglect of outside standards of evaluation of inward meaning. Tagata's lifeless body hangs on the mango tree — "the freedom-tree — can ultimately be interpreted as symbolic of the use of vernacular to express the resistance of the natives, the use of a voice that the peoples of the world would find difficult to understand. Therefore Tagata's body is also both the symbol of this most terrible sacrifice — the loss of one's regional language — but also of the most daring reverse infection, the use of English to express Pepe's still regional style, or as he puts it: "my style". This then is the symbolic dissenting 'wealth' Tagata — "the free man who got the right to dispose of his self" (FF 141) — sole possessor of his untamed, regional dissenting body, leaves to his brother Pepe, who will translate the *tatau*, the *pe'a*, "the story of "the world of Sapepe, which my father destroyed by changing it" (FF 14) into, reversely, infecting 'English' literature.

II.

The title story of the collection, *Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree*, tells the body-history of a first person narrator, Pepe, a failed poet, who is in hospital dying of TB. He has decided to become a *tastata*, a teller of tales like Robert Louis Stevenson, one of the Western writers of the

Pacific, the writer he wants to emulate and, secretly, to challenge. (FF 104) The tale Pepe is going to tell is, he makes clear from the start, is 'local', because Pepe is: "local-born, local-bred, local-educated" (FF 105), and the novel is going to be, as he tells us: "about my life". Pepe, lying in hospital, can see what happens to the body-parts of people who become simply offal to be burnt or eaten by animals if nobody takes care of them, symbolically, if they do not write about their lives and let others write them.

Pepe knows he has only a few days to write his story "about the self" and his autobiographical stance reveals his independence and the consciousness that 'his' story is, indeed, meaningful, and that he is willing to make use of every means in order to make himself heard: "Here we go English-style, Vaipe-style. My style." (FF 106)

The story recounts analeptically how Pepe as a child is taken by his father Tauliopepe to Apia, in the Vaipe area, to live with his uncle Tautala, in order to attend school there. Tautala boasts he knows English and that he is a civil servant. He lives in a real house, a *palagi* home with windows, tables and a radio, and not in a *fale*, and the father sees him as a model to be followed by Pepe, but Tautala's children make fun of Pepe, owing to his poverty.

Pepe is sent to the government primary school where there are six white teachers and only two Samoan teachers. Here he meets Tagata, the dwarf, who soon becomes his life companion, the friend who "is not afraid of anyone, not even *palagi*" (FF 114). Tagata, the dwarf, though not tattooed, refers to himself as "flying-fox", implicitly as a *tatau*, a regional dissenting body. Strangely enough, nobody dares laugh at his "ugliness" (FF 115). Tagata, the dwarf, whose outside appearance does not correspond to the "eagle" he feels within himself, is then, — if we take Wendt's analogy of the *pe'a* with Pacific literature seriously — the condition of this regional culture. The dissociation of his personality and the impossibility of externalizing what he really is eventually, leads him to commit suicide, a supreme act of freedom and a sign of mute resistance. But the suicide causes the outspoken disapproval of Pepe while it forces him to find *his* personal and unique style in order to tell the story of Tagata and rescue it from oblivion, to prevent the self from falling into the darkness that menaces him: "I have only my darkness and my self living in my world" (FF 131).

Over the years, Pepe's father — a failed theological student who had been expelled from Malua College — becomes the most powerful and

rich man in Sapepe, as the owner of the thriving "Leaves of the Banyan tree" plantation.⁴⁴ Taulio, Pepe's father, is therefore soon able to buy a large house in Apia, the previous property of a German plantation owner, and restores it, while a *fale* is set up for the servants. The father buys liquor and books he does not read and puts on parties for *palagi* and afasaki people that members of his *aiga* are not allowed to attend, because he is ashamed of them, whereas Pepe, his son, is engaged as barman. His mother Lupe wanders in the garden like a bird looking "for a nest which it can never find" (FF 119). Both are humiliated by Taulio's fascination with the glittering *palagi* world.

Pepe, dissenting from his father's way of life, manages to get himself expelled from high school and teams up with Tagata, the son of the market's owner. They make as much as they can of the *palagi* world and go to the movies every night. They wear jeans, drink "yankee coca-cola" and talk like Chicago gangsters. One night they set the Protestant Church Hall on fire. In so doing, they see themselves as the *aitu* (ghosts, evil spirits) of Apia. They also steal money from Pepe's father's office. In order to save Tagata, who, being a dwarf, cannot run fast, Pepe attracts the attention of the police and is recognized. Pepe's father is by now extremely rich; he owns shops, buses and houses. Pepe, according to his standards, the "worthless son" (FF 122), is his only heir. Pepe knows his mother is happy Taulio has been robbed. When the police arrive Pepe to humiliate his father confesses to the robbery, though the father tries to protect him. Pepe swears on "their" Bible, as he calls it, that he has committed arson, robbery and assault single-handedly. When his mother goes to the prison to try to convince him to retract, Pepe, remembering her happiness in Sapepe, is overcome by hatred for his acquisitive father, as he sees in him the embodiment of the destruction of the Sapepe world, so that he does not comply with his mother's request.

In court, Pepe refuses to acknowledge his biological father (and through Oedipus, all imposed authority), invoking a chosen genealogy, declaring in Samoan to the English-speaking New Zealand judge: "My name is Pepesa, son of Sapepe and the gods of Sapepe" (FF 129). It is interesting to examine the reality of the invented lineage Pepesa claims to belong to. Sapepe, both the name of his village and the name of a god is Pepe's hero, as he is the man who challenged all the gods and won. The reference to his mythical "dissenting body", a sort of Miltonic creature who defies authority and wins – a

myth that contests both Christian belief and the metaphysical qualities of the gods – sets a bodily theogony of man. Pepe, that is, claims his connections with a mythic past, but a mythic past that privileges man's capacity for intervention and change, founding a tradition of freedom he claims for himself and his family: "my *aiga* is one of the main branches of the Sapepe Family who founded the village and district of Sapepe in long ago times." (FF 106).⁴⁵

When the judge asks "why son of the gods?" Pepe answers that this is his chosen "genealogy", a genealogy, we cannot fail to note, that he sets in locality. The village of Sapepe, and its *genius loci*, which in Samoa is considered the land of the gods, is orographically protected from *palagi* influence. In the same way, Tagata becomes Pepe's chosen "brother" (FF 137), so again he disclaims blood kinship. Tagata, for his part, declares Pepe's genealogy by proclaiming him the illegitimate son of the Gods (FF 141). This mythic homeland is nevertheless not seen through the perspective of an "antiquarian history" that would aim at its restoration, but rather, as Foucault's reading of Nietzsche claims: "It takes the continuities of soil, language, and urban life in which our present is rooted, and [. . .] tries to conserve for posterity the conditions under which we were born" but, by doing this, it "reveal[s] the heterogeneous system which, masked by the self, inhibit[s] the formation of any form of identity".⁴⁶ In short, it defines tradition as un-nostalgic belonging.

After telling him that in the twentieth century there is only one God, the judge asks Pepe whether he knows who the missionaries are, and he answers: "They break through the skies of our world and bring guns and the new religion and the new God and drive my gods into the bush and mountains where they live today." (FF 129) The judge protests that they brought the Light to Samoa. When asked if he is a Christian, Pepe answers he has the darkness, and his own self: "Therefore I am my god" (FF 131). When the judge repeats there is only one God, Pepe muses that if the "world now is their world" (FF 131), there is still "a world between us" (FF 131), and is condemned to four years' hard labour.

In the next subchapter "Lava" Tagata comments on the world that the *palagi* have brought to Samoa. This make-believe world people think they "want so much" is true, he says, only in the movies. With this celluloid world of commodities and beauty myths he contrasts the characteristic beauty of the lava fields of Savaii which take no ac-

count of appearance and where lava "can be nothing else but lava" (*FF* 132), a genuine place where all kinds of physiognomies and people, dwarfs, men, giants and saints, are simply what they are, "equal" (*FF* 132). In this world there is still the possibility for beauty to appear, when miraculously "you see small plants growing through the cracks in the lava, like funny stories breaking through your stony mind." (*FF* 132).

Tagata falls ill and Pepe does his job for him. Pepe feels that like the flying-fox Tagata is despised by the other birds because he "is not what a bird should be" (*FF* 137), implying that the pressure for conformity in aesthetic and cultural matters is inevitable. For a time Tagata takes up the London Missionary Society's religion and Pepe is worried. He leaves for six days and comes back saying he has found his own self again in the Lava fields "the only true thing left" (*FF* 140), and announces that religion is a lie. In the evening, when Pepe comes back from the market, he finds that that Tagata, his brother, hangs from the mango tree after leaving a letter as a testament for Pepesa, claiming dissent through mocking laughter, the telling of funny stories which break through our "stony" minds.

1. Cp. "Tipo universale e tipi nazionali" in Y. Bezručka, *Genio ed immaginazione nel Settecento inglese*, Dipartimento di Anglistica, Università di Verona, Collana "Saggi e Testi", 2002, pp. 116-18, and in Y. Bezručka, *Oggetti e collezioni nella letteratura inglese dell'Ottocento*, Aves, 2004, pp. 147-61.

2. See for example John Ogilby, *Africa: being an accurate description of the regions of Aegypti, Barbary, Lybia, and Biliendulgerid, the land of negroes, Guineæ, Aethiopia, and the Abyssines, with all the adjacent islands* [..]. *Collected and translated from most authentick authors*, T. Johnson, London 1670. In this context the relevance should be pointed out of travel-writing narratives examined from a postcolonial perspective: cf. for instance Mary Louise Pratt's watershed-study *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Routledge, 1992, or *Writing Women and Space. Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*, by Alison Blunt, Gillian Blunt (eds.), Guildford, 1994. For the Victorian period see the study by Laura E. Franey, *Victorian Travel Writing: British Writing on Africa, 1855-1902*, Palgrave, 2003.

3. See the excellent study by N. Hudson, "From 'Nation' to 'Race': The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 29 – 1996, p. 238.

4. Linné subdivided the category *homo* into: *Europeæus*, *Americæus*, *Asiaticus*, *Africanus* in his *Systema Naturæ* (1753), whereas Buffon in his *Histoire*

naturelle (1749) shifts from the category *homo* to its classification in terms of 'race', cp. Hudson, cit., pp. 252-53.

5. Cp. Y. Bezručka, *Genio ed immaginazione*, cit., pp. 117-18.

6. Nevertheless, as shown by Giuseppe Sertoli in his "Presentazione" to Burke, *Inchiesta sul Bello e il Sublime*, Aesthetica, 1985, pp. 9-49, *passim*, with its positive reception of that territory marked as being behind the border of the aesthetic of the beautiful, it is the most influential work. This also due to its canonical formal structure – in terms of the acceptance of "difference", even despite, as Sertoli underlines, Kant's recovery of rationality against its explosive openness.

7. The picturesque is indeed a far more disquieting category than the countercategory "sublime" which, by the way, had been present in aesthetics since Pseudo Longinus's *Peri Hypsous*, the treatise (Ist c. A.D.) on the rhetorical, sublime style.

8. Cp. my treatment of Francis Grose's "regional aesthetics" in *Genio ed immaginazione*, cit., pp. 118-23.

9. Cp. Elke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, Oxford UP, 1996, p. 55.

10. Johann Caspar Lavater, *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschlichkeit*, Orell Füssli, Zürich 1968-1969 [1775-1778] first translated into English in 1792 as *Essays on Physiognomy*. Lavater's work defined features according to "national characteristics" without hesitation attributing small eyes to Italians, light-coloured, wrinkled eyes to Germans, open, steadfast eyes to the English and dull eyes to the Swiss. A well-known nineteenth-century work on physiognomy that also comprised phrenology was Henry Frith's study *How to Read Character in Faces Features and Forms. A Guide to the General Outlines of Physiognomy*, Ward, Lock, 1891, a work showing a marked preference for the Greek type and the fair complexion that although generally connected with weakness is nevertheless the main characteristic of the "intellectual" type presenting "mental superiority" so that "the weaker one in intellect become the servants" (cf. 14) concluding, in disquieting social Darwinistic terms, that: "the White Man is the only animal which migrates to all climates. His skin acts the best; in this 'respiration of the cuticle' he excels all other species. So, thus fitted for changes of climate, and possessing also intellect, the white races naturally rule. It is Nature's law. The fittest survive." (p. 15)

11. For the relation of physiognomy to the nineteenth-century novel see Graeme Tyler's study, *Physiognomy in the European Novel. Faces and Fortunes*, Princeton UP, 1982, and my analyses of one of Conan Doyle's short stories and one of Bram Stoker's in *Oggetti e collezioni*, op. cit., pp. 147-64.

12. One work on physiognomy has been also attributed to Aristotele (*Physiognomica*). Cf. G. Tyler, *Physiognomy*, cit., ch. I, pp. 3-34.

13. Cp. Above, Bindella's paper on E. Hau'afa.

14. Albert Wendt, *Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree and Other Stories*, Longman, 1974, hereafter referred to as *FF* in brackets, followed by page numbers. Albert Wendt was born in Western Samoa, his collection *Flying Fox* was published in 1974 and has recently been republished in 1999. It consists of 8 stories.

15. To set the transnational mark of the Asia/Pacific cultures "heteroglossia" has been used in the highly relevant study by Rob Wilson and

- Arif Dirlik (eds.), *Asia/Pacific as Space of Cultural Production*, Duke UP, Bound-ary 2 Special Issue, 1995
16. I thus paraphrase the title of Sushela Nasta's (ed.) collection: *Reading the 'New' Literatures in a Postcolonial Era*, Essays and Studies of The English Association, vol. 53, D. S. Brewer, 2000, a collection that includes Briar Wood's essay: "Shamanism in Oceania: The Poetry of Albert Wendt", (pp. 129-144).
17. Cp. Subramani, *South Pacific Literature. From Myth to Fabulation*, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1992
18. This is how Albert Wendt defined it in in Vilsoni Hereniko, Rob Wilson, *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific, Rowman & Littlefield, 1999, p. 1.
19. Cp. A. Wendt, "Afterword: Tattooing the Post-Colonial Body", in Vilsoni Hereniko, Rob Wilson, *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*, cit. (hereafter referred to as *IO* in brackets, followed by page numbers), p. 403, where of this first Fijian, then Samoan, art form he says: "The tatau and malu are not just beautiful decoration, they are scripts-texts-testimonies to do with relationships, order, form, and so on" representing ways of life "stories about you and your relationships". This essay will hereafter be referred to as *T*. This reading of tattooing enables Wendt to propose the interesting analogy between tattooing and post-colonial literature in that both codes had "to survive the onslaught of missionary condemnation and colonialism." (*T* 400) Tattooing is also an art form that developed in two aiga: "Aiga Sa Su'a (Upolu) and Le Aiga Sa Tulou'ena (Sava'i)" (*T* 404) in which the tuituga ta tatau (the tattooer) evolves his own style within the framework of the code (cp. *T* 408)
20. Stuart Hall in "Who Needs Identity?", Stuart Hall, Paul du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Sage, 1996 registers the impasse into which the term identity is locked after the deconstructive process of erasure it has undergone (p. 1), "the deconstructive approach put key concepts 'under erasure'. This indicates that they are no longer serviceable - 'good to think with' - in their ordinary and unreconstructed form. But since they have not been superseded dialectically, ad there are no other, entirely different concepts with which to replace them, there is nothing to do but to continue to think with them - albeit now in their detotalized or deconstructed forms"
21. As Albert Wendt writes, "the London Missionary Society, condemned tattooing as the 'mark of the savage'" and did not accept tattooed people as their deacons or pastors (cp. *T* 403). Tattooing has thus become a defiant sign of a threatened identity and has witnessed a resurgence in nationalistic movements as the Mau Pule of 1908 and the Mau of the 1920s, as well as since 1962 after Samoa's political independence.
22. The South Pacific extended family.
23. M. Foucault "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader. An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, Penguin, 1984, p. 83.
24. *Op. cit.*, p. 90.
25. *Ibidem*, p. 83.
26. *Ibidem*, p. 82.
27. A. Wendt, *Inside us the Dead*, Longman Paul, 1976.
28. Cp. Briar Wood's essay: "Shamanism in Oceania" . . . cit., p. 140.

Something similar is confirmed by A. Wendt who, in a 1992 interview with Vilsoni Hereniko and David Hanlon "Interview with Albert Wendt", in *IO*, p. 94 states that his novel *Ola* also, is about "a generation" coming from different nations: Israel, America, Samoa, Japan, New Zealand.

29. From Wendt's perspective the so-called "true" forms of the past appear as ridiculous as the supposed "foreignness" of Christianity and the Rule of Law which, according to him, provide the "authentic pillars of our cultures". In his 1992 interview with Vilsoni Hereniko and David Hanlon "Interview with Albert Wendt", in *IO* 97-98, Wendt states: "If you took away the Christian Church today from Samoa, a lot of the fa'a Samoa (Samoan culture) would collapse. Our people took another religion from outside and put it into their system. You shouldn't blame the missionaries, like I used to when I was younger. Our people took the missionaries' god and put it in the place of the ancient priests and accorded the missionary and the pastor the same power. Why blame the missionaries? Of course, the missionaries took advantage of our people's belief in religion. Religion is in Samoa a social custom like it used to in pre-Europan times", thus taking a much gloomier look at things rereading the pre-palagi past as a far from Edenic past, the site of an endemic ever-present, Nietzschean, will-to-power struggle.

30. See A. Wendt's 1976 essay "Towards a New Oceania", in *Mama Re-nata*, 1, 1976.

31. The list is a long one and should comprise Melville, Maugham, Stevenson, Gauguin, etc. Cp. also Wendt's leg-pull in *Flying-Fox* when he speaks of the women tourists coming to Apia in search of the "Polynesian noble savage with the mighty club" (*PF* 133).

32. See S. Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin du Siècle*, Cambridge UP 1996, pp. 107-132.

33. In *T* 411 Wendt speaks of "blend" rather than "hybridity" because this latter term is, he says: "of that unmodded body of colonial theories to do with race (. . .) Hybrid (. . .) still smacks of the racist colonial."

34. Cp. my work on regional cultures/voices in Y. Bezruka (a c. di), *Regionalismo e antiregionalismo*, Luoghi/Edizioni, 1999, pp. 99-116, Y. Bezruka (a c. di), *Forme e caratteri del regionalismo. MittelEuropa ed oltre*, Luoghi/Edizioni, 1999, for the birth of "aesthetic regionalism" in my *Le identità regionali e ?Europa*, Luoghi/Edizioni, 1997 and extensively in *Genio ed immaginazione nel Settecento inglese*, cit.

35. The critic who first spoke of the concept of "critical regionalism" was K. Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance", in Hal Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Cultures*, Pluto, 1983, pp. 16-30. See Y. Bezruka, *Literature and 'Critical Regionalism'*, forthcoming.

36. Hegel's dream of a teleological progress of history culminating in "the possibility of absolute knowledge", cf. M. Foucault, *A Foucault Reader*, cit., p. 96.

37. Cp. Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands" (*IO* 31), who, commenting on the use of the terms Pacific Islands and Oceania says: "The first term, *Pacific Islands*, is the prevailing one used everywhere; it denotes small areas of land sitting atop submerged reefs or seamounts. Hardly any Anglophone economist, consultancy expert, government planner, or development banker in the region uses the term *Oceania*, perhaps because it sounds grand and

somewhat romantic and may denote something so vast that it would compel them to a drastic review of their perspectives and policies. The French and other Europeans use the term Oceania to an extent that English speakers, apart from the much-maligned anthropologists and a few other sea-struck scholars, have not. It may not be coincidental that Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, anglophone all, have far greater interests in the Pacific and how it is perceived than have the distant European nations. Oceania denotes a sea of islands with their inhabitants." This highly important essay on the Pacific cultures was published in 1993 and it followed the 1976 manifesto in the *Mana Review*, by Albert Wendt, who there envisioned a movement "Towards a New Oceania".

38. Cp. Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge UP, 1984 [1983], pp. 1-14.

39. A case in point here is the reading of Polynesian nature performed through Melville's classical scopic regime in his novel *Typee*, really only a "peep" into Polynesian culture, as the subtitle confirms, which significantly contributed to the romanticising of the Pacific into a set of stereotyped cognitive images. Cp. H. Melville, *Typee. A Peep at Polynesian Life*, Penguin, 1972, pp. 133-35.

40. The flying-fox belongs to the bat family, and hangs head-down from tree branches, not rarely disrespectfully unmaking on those beneath. A. Wendt in "Afterword: Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body", in *IO* 402, defines it from the point of view of its reversed perspective: "a combination of rat and furred bird who perceives the world from an upside-down position".

41. The condition of the flying-fox seems to be for Albert Wendt the condition of the Samoan people who have lived through this "blending" process and – for those to whom tradition still makes sense – live liminally and are torn between tradition and innovation. This condition of betweenness, but also of fertile miscegenation, is shared by Albert Wendt's condition too: a man belonging to a plurality of worlds: the German world of his ancestors on which his Samoan identity has been grafted, being thus, as he himself writes, a "totoluha" an "afakasi", a mixed blood which, as he has ironically pointed out, at a conference in 1999, is the condition of all people in Samoa. Besides, having won a government scholarship to study in Auckland, Aotearoa (New Zealand), Wendt can be further connected with those post-colonial "nomadic" identities (one for all, V. S. Naipaul) that revise space notions in terms of countries-of-the-mind standards, intending them in a new geocultural and anthropological rather than geopolitical way, which enable them to explore and investigate places according to transnational *genius loci* categories rather than as map-defined political territories.

42. Cp. Maria Teresa Bindella's essay "Stories as Islands: Epehi Hau'ofa's *Tales in the Tikong's*", in this collection.

43. Tagata writes: "The papalagi and his world has turned us, and people like your rich but unhappy father and all the modern Samoans, into cartoons of themselves, funny crying ridiculous shadows on the picture screen. Nevermind, we tried to be true to our selves. That is all I think any man with a club can do." (*FF* 141)

44. The history of this plantation and of Pepe's father's capitalistic ambition are told in A. Wendt's novel *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*, Penguin, 1980

[1979], a book which stages the clash between Pepe and Tauliopepe's economic models of life.

45. Sapepe, we are told, is separated orographically from the rest of Samoa, a fact which preserved its history and different customs till the time when the papalagi arrived.

46. M. Foucault "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", cit., p. 95.