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The Undiscovered Pacific

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In this digital age, scholarly work is accessible as never before. A large number of publications are available to researchers around the world with just a few mouse clicks. However, in spite of the availability of this scholarship beyond the physical holdings in a traditional library, work in what one might call rather marginal research fields, including that concerning Australia and the Pacific, is often only read by those researching and writing in the same field. That is the case even though the findings of work on certain topics might also benefit those from areas that are – at least geographically – much further removed. In that sense, the value of some of the scholarship of and on Australia and New Zealand – of the Pacific – has yet to be discovered, including by many of those working in American studies.

I discovered the value of much of this work by virtue of living in Australia and being exposed, almost coincidentally, to some of the scholarship on Indigenous peoples produced there and in New Zealand. Most recently, I have drawn on scholarship on writing and speech for what I refer to as an ethnohistorical analysis of Native American letter writing in the removal era. While I would have been able to conduct this project without Australian and New Zealand scholarship on Indigenous writing, the works that I did read from that part of the world opened my eyes to phenomena I might have otherwise missed, and that also benefited my analysis in a number of other ways that, one might say, describes my very own "Pacific Turn."[1]

One of the most important books on Indigenous writing in Australia and one which influenced my own work on Seneca and Cherokee letters in the removal era is Penny van Toorn's *Writing Never Arrives Naked: Early*

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[1] This article is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of the literature but merely looks at those contributions that I found most valuable in my own work.

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Aboriginal Cultures of Writing in Australia.[2] In it, Van Toorn suggested that literacy is culturally situated, arguing, "Writing and reading entered Aboriginal life-worlds clothed in the ideas and information supplied by white acquaintances, but always these alien elements were understood within Indigenous frames of reference."[3] This argument is made most successfully when analysing a letter by Bennelong, an Australian Aboriginal man who had been in close contact with the Governor Arthur Philip, and in 1792 had even travelled to England with him. Following Nicholas Thomas, Van Toorn calls this letter an "entangled object," by which she means "a product of intercultural engagement."[4] She contends that

> Bennelong drew on existing models of language, genre and social etiquette when orally composing his letter. To take on the role of the author of a letter, he must have had some idea of what kinds of objects letters were, what kinds of work they could do, why people exchanged them, what kinds of topics they customarily raised, and the manner in which the recipients of this letter might expect to be addressed.[5]

In other words, even though he himself was not able to write, Bennelong had some understanding of the conventions involved. However, it also emerged from Van Toorn's analysis that the fact that he composed a letter, and drew on some settler conventions to do so, did not mean that Bennelong had surrendered his own. To the contrary, as Van Toorn reveals, he had composed a letter that "could potentially both fulfil his traditional Indigenous social obligations, and work in his favour in the gift economies of both British patronage and Aboriginal trade relations."[6]

Writing Never Arrives Naked foreshadowed some of the arguments made so impressively by Lisa Brooks in her *The Common Pot*, published two years after Van Toorn's study and focussing on Native Americans in the northeastern United States.[7] It was mainly these two books that have shown what can be hidden behind words and through writing, and also the fact that the mere use of alphabetic writing did not necessarily mean that all Indigenous ways had been erased in those doing the writing.[8] Brooks, for instance, revealed

[2] Penny van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives Naked: Early Aboriginal Cultures of Writing in Australia* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006).
[3] Ibid., 21.
[4] Ibid., 54. See also Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1991).
[5] Van Toorn, 55.
[6] Ibid., 5.
[7] See Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
[8] See, for instance, Christopher B. Teuton, *Deep Waters* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); Nancy Shoemaker, *A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); David Martinez, ed., *The American Indian Intellectual Tradition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

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that the self-deprecating tone of Native petitions should not be taken too literally.[9] This is how I came to scrutinize Cherokee and Seneca letters for diplomatic and other Indigenous traditions and Native American customary law.[10] It also became clear to me through the work of Van Torn and Brooks (and many others) that not everyone who contributed to something written necessarily had to put pen to paper themselves. There is also what I have termed "oral writing."[11] Native Americans literally made writing their own by finding ways of incorporating illiterate members of tribes into the writing process and thus adapted it to their needs. By adopting such methods, Native American letter writing in the removal era can thus be seen as a Native American literary tradition. Brooks, Robert Warrior, David Martinez and others have called attention to the fact that such traditions have often been missed or ignored.[12] However, in the US, few beyond Brooks have conducted the kind of analysis that, like parts of Van Toorn's, also significantly emphasizes the Indigenous elements of Native American writing.[13] This particular aspect of Native writing has often been overlooked or even denied, as many otherwise worthy and insightful analyses focus mostly on what was said rather than on how it was said.[14]

[9] See Brooks, 225.

[10] See Claudia B. Haake, "Appeals to Civilization and Lost Middle Grounds: Iroquois Letters Written during the Removal Crisis," *Wicazo Sa Review*, 30, 2 (2015), 100–28; Haake, "'In the same predicament as heretofore': Pro-removal Arguments in Iroquois Letters in the 1830s and 40s", *Ethnohistory*, 61, 1 (2014), 57–78; and Haake, "Iroquois Use of Customary and United States Law in Opposition to Removal, 1830–1860," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 36, 4 (2012), 29–56.

[11] I define oral writing as a process where more tribal members than just the scribe were able to contribute to the argument, sentiment, and form of the letters sent to members of the federal government. Through this process, which took the form of deliberations in meetings and councils, members of the two tribes made alphabetic writing quite literally their own. This process of oral writing determined the content and at times the form of the letters. The illiterate people who contributed in such a way recognized the power of writing and the need of their tribe to use it as a tool or a weapon, be it to shape removal or to try and avert it.

[12] Brooks, xxxi, 13; Martinez; Robert Warrior, *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

[13] One might also mention Eve Tavor Bannet's chapter on Samson Occom in her *Transatlantic Stories and the History of Reading, 1720–1810: Migrant Fictions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), as well as the work of Christoper Teuton, Daniel Heath Justice, and Joshua Nelson.

[14] See, for instance, Hilary E. Wyss, *Writing Indians: Literacy, Christianity, and Native Community in Early America* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000); Wyss, *English Letters and Indian Literacies: Reading, Writing, and New England Missionary Schools, 1750–1830* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Bernd C. Peyer, ed., *The Elders Wrote: An Anthology of Early Prose by North American Indians 1768–1931* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1982); Peyer, *The Thinking Indian: Native American Writers, 1850s–1920s* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007); Lisa

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Another aspect of Indigenous writing that appears to be a universal one is the denial of Indigenous writing, whether this be by deeming writing a non-Indigenous skill that Native peoples could never truly possess, or by viewing its adoption as a surrender of indigeneity. Brooks and many others have pointed out that even now Native writing is seen as a sign of inauthenticity, of supposedly having surrendered one's indigeneity.[15] While a number of scholars have called attention to this phenomenon, no one has explored it quite as elegantly as another Australian scholar, Inga Clendinnen.[16] In her "Reading Mr Robinson," she writes about how George Augustus Robinson, the chief protector of Aborigines in the Port Phillip District of what is now the Australian state of Victoria, steals – or "takes" without feeling the need to ask – a pencil he finds with a group of Aborigines. Clendinnen deduces from this action that Robinson feels that the "instruments of literacy belong to him."[17] Hilary Wyss has similarly determined that New England Missionary schools wanted to create readerly but not, as she terms it, writerly Indians who "used written discourse to manage their own sovereignty."[18]

Other Australasian scholars have contributed to the exploration of Indigenous claims to literacy as their own and as a tool in their fight against colonialism. For instance, in 2006, the same year that Van Toorn's book came out, New Zealand scholar Lachy Paterson published *Colonial Discourses: Niupepa Maori 1855–1863*.[19] In this work, he showed how Maori turned Maori-language newspapers by Pakeha (settler) editors into something they could treat like speaking in a traditional *marae* (meeting ground).[20] Maori, Paterson explains, wrote many letters, including to each other, and often incorporated oral styles.[21] The presence of oral styles is something I was also able to trace in the letters I analysed. For instance, Seneca letters in the removal era were at times still written in the style in which wampum, belts or strings made from shell beads, had traditionally been used. These letters included a retelling of the history of interactions and old agreements

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Philips, "Unexpected Languages: Multilingualism and Contact in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century North America," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 35, 2 (2011), 19–41.

[15] Brooks, xxxi; Wyss, *Writing Indians*, 3; Martinez, xxii.

[16] See, among others, Brooks, xxxi, Wyss, *Writing Indians*, 3, Martinez, xii; Teuton, 10.

[17] Inga Clendinnen, "Reading Mr Robinson," *Australian Book Review*, May 1995, 39. Clendinnen, of course, was someone who read even more widely than many, if not indeed most, other scholars of her generation. Starting out as a Latinamericanist working on Indigenous peoples in Mexico, following a grave illness she turned to Australian Aboriginal history as well as to the Holocaust. At least for the study of the former but likely also the latter, she was able to turn necessity into a virtue, managing to make highly original contributions informed, to a greater or lesser degree, by her former work.

[18] Wyss, *Writing Indians*, 7.

[19] Lachy Paterson, *Colonial Discourses: Niupepa Maori 1855–1863* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2006).

[20] Ibid., 31.

[21] Ibid., 44.

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between parties, which had once been a way of retaining the knowledge of such events and of reinforcing their continued validity. Other letters appear to have originated as speeches, and often included the repetition of fixed phrases, such as, on one occasion in 1855, some Cattaraugus residents exhorting Commissioner of Indian Affairs George W. Manypenny to "Listen while the Senecas speak," and used "brother" to address him, almost as if they were facing him over a council fire.[22]

The newspapers analysed by Paterson were also a place where one could find out about Maoris' sentimental attachment to land, something I also found for the letters I was working with, which at times pointed to birth places and burial sites to explain an unwillingness to move away.[23] Paterson was thus able to show through a number of concrete examples that the adoption of writing and even the participation in European publications cannot necessarily be interpreted as a surrender of indigeneity and thus of Maori authenticity.

Like Van Toorn's book, Paterson's also at least partly anticipated some elements of a study that was to be published in the United States on a topic related to Native American writing. Four years later, Phillip H. Round published *Removable Type: Histories of the Book in Indian Country, 1663–1880*.[24] Like Brooks, Van Toorn, Paterson and others, Round argued that Native Americans were not always the victims of literacy.[25] Drawing on literary scholar Arnold Krupat's work, Round argued that all texts can be seen as (bicultural) composites, something like Van Toorn's entangled objects.[26] Looking at Native memorials, he pointed out that these "were often corporately written texts that employed oral and written, Native and non-Native discourse practices."[27] However, he did not go into as much detail as Paterson or Van Toorn when it came to actually identifying these Indigenous practices.[28] And while Paterson highlights Maori agency in his book, Round's generally fine analysis somewhat more conservatively situated Native Americans as walking a fine line between sovereignty and submissiveness, potentially

[22] Joshua Turkey and others to Commissioner of Indian Affairs George W. Manypenny, 19 Feb. 1855, M234/588, National Archives and Record Administration (USA).

[23] Claudia B. Haake, "Civilization or Savagery in the West? The West in Native American Letters Written during the Removal Era," *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, 62, 1 (2017), 51–66; and Claudia B. Haake, "Civilization, Law, and Customary Diplomacy: Arguments against Removal in Cherokee and Seneca Communications to the Federal Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Native American and Indigenous Studies*, 4, 2 (Fall 2017), 31–51.

[24] Phillip H. Round, *Removable Type: Histories of the Book in Indian Country, 1663–1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

[25] Ibid., 11.

[26] Ibid., 16.

[27] Ibid., 140.

[28] See also Robert A. Williams Jr., *Linking Arms Together: American Indian Treaty Visions of Law and Peace, 1600–1800* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999).

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overlooking important aspects of Indigenous agency from within Native American customary diplomacy, such as the appeals for pity he refers his readers to in the example discussed.[29]

When it comes to what constituted and, more importantly, what did not constitute submissiveness, taking inspiration from an example from New Zealand might again lead to a more nuanced analysis. Historian Lyndsay Head's article "Wiremu Tamihana and the *Mana* of Christianity" emphasized that the mere adoption of Christianity cannot necessarily be interpreted as surrender or even loss of authenticity or as submission. While she acknowledges that Christianity was very much the face of empire, Head also holds that belief

> in the primacy of God in the affairs of men gave a culture and a voice to resistance to the colonial Government. Most pointedly, it provided the King Movement with an exit clause in the contract with England: if the English failed to honour divine law and precept, Maori had no further obligation in the alliance.[30]

Like writing, Christianity was something that Indigenous peoples could instrumentalize and that could help them fight for what they saw as worthy of preservation. The adoption of Christianity by Indigenous peoples in New Zealand, Head's analysis makes clear, was not a sign of submission, as long as it was undertaken by choice. In the Seneca and Cherokee letters I have analysed in my most recent work, I have found the same to be true in another area as many of the letter writers seemed to have genuinely wanted to keep elements of what was at the time referred to as civilization.[31] However, they steadfastly reserved the right to make such choices themselves and refused to allow the US federal government to dictate these to them.

Writing, in whatever form it took, was one of the ways Indigenous peoples around the world could make their decisions known to government, and also a means to explain their choices to the recipients. As another New Zealand scholar, Tony Ballantyne, has argued, "Talk and print were threads that began to reconnect native and newcomer in the colonial public sphere."[32]

[29] Ibid., 143. See also Haake, "In the Same Predicament as Heretofore."

[30] Lyndsay Head, "Wiremu Tamihana and the Mana of Christianity," in John Stenhouse, ed., *Christianity, Modernity and Culture: New Perspectives on New Zealand History* (Hindmarsh, South Australia: ATF), 58–84, 69.

[31] See Haake, "Iroquois Use of Customary and United States Law"; Haake, "In the Same Predicament as Heretofore"; Haake, "Appeals to Civilization and Lost Middle Grounds"; Haake, "Civilization or Savagery in the West?"; Claudia B. Haake, "Civilization, Law, and Customary Diplomacy: Arguments against Removal in Cherokee and Seneca Communications to the Federal Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," forthcoming in *Native American and Indigenous Studies*, 4, 2 (Fall 2017).

[32] Tony Ballantyne, "Talking, Listening, Writing, Reading: Communication and Colonialism," the Allan Martin Lecture 2009, Australian National University, 26.

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As this statement suggests, speech and writing are not as far removed from one another as is at times believed. "For Maori," Ballantyne has pointed out, "the spoken word was valued because it was creative, performative, and had the power to sway and even transform the listener."[33] It is thus not surprising that Indigenous peoples sought to make use of these strengths of the spoken word in their writings as well. The letters and petitions by Cherokees and especially Senecas show evidence of some elements of traditional speeches, such as repetition through recycling and recasting, and the use of fixed phrases and stylized repetition.[34] This was even the case for the supposedly so very civilized Cherokees. For instance, on an occasion when bicultural chief John Ross was not involved in composing the letter in question, the message sent showed signs of having evolved from a speech. In June 1838, Assistant George Lowery, Thomas Foreman and others sent a letter to Major General Winfield Scott, who was initially put in charge of removing the Cherokees from their homelands, to try and dissuade him from removing them at this time of year and in such haste.[35] In a manner reminiscent of a speech, which significantly departed from the civilized form of a letter, thus potentially marking them as "savage," the authors of this message kept reiterating the term "Sir" within the body of the letter, using a "civilized" terminology in a traditional way.[36]

All of this is not to say that an investigation of Native American letters in the removal era could not have been conducted without "Pacific" or "Australasian" scholarship, nor that others could not succeed without taking this scholarship into account. But without the above and other examples, my work would have been much the poorer. I am also not claiming that Australasian scholarship was the only source of knowledge and inspiration that I drew on – the vast majority of it was from US scholars and focussed on Native Americans. On Indigenous nonfiction writing in particular there is much excellent work that has been and is being done in the US, even though the majority of it has so far focussed on the eighteenth century and may at times lack the deep involvement with writing's Indigenous elements that marks some of the best work in and from Australia and New Zealand.[37] Much excellent work in the area has also been done elsewhere,

[33] Ibid., 11.

[34] Haake, "Appeals to Civilization and Lost Middle Grounds." See also Michael K. Foster, *From the Earth to Beyond the Sky: An Ethnographic Approach to Four Longhouse Iroquois Speech Events* (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1974).

[35] George Lowery, Thomas Foreman and others to Major General Winfield Scott, 9 June 1838, NARA, HR26A-G7.1.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Scholarship on indigenous nonfiction writing has increased in the last 20 or so years, but is still largely dominated by literary scholars. For North America, these include Brooks, *The Common Pot*; Wyss, *Writing Indians*, Martinez, *The American Indian Intellectual*

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and especially so in or on Mexico.[38] On a cursory examination of the impact, it appears to have been as limited as the work done in the Pacific, in spite of the geographical distance and the fact that much of it has been written in English.[39] While at times seen as something almost exotic, work by UK scholars on the United States has been appreciated somewhat more in the US, and in connection to Native writing one might mention especially David Murray's contribution.[40] However, at a recent conference of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA), where Australians formed the largest minority, attendance at panels on Australia, New Zealand, or the Pacific more generally drew a noticeably smaller audience than those dedicated to the US (or even Canada).

Of course, the problem of highly selective consumption of scholarship due to publication pressures that is likely at least part of the reason for the neglect of scholarship from the Pacific is not one limited to the US and American studies alone. Another part of it may be a somewhat insular sense of what constitutes the discipline, and of who does and who does not matter there. Again, this is not something that is limited to American studies. When I was training as a Latinamericanist in Germany and then moved, temporarily, to the US, I was struck by how little of the work done in Germany from within Latinamerican studies was read there. At the time, I thought this was because the majority of publications would have been written in either German or Spanish. However, Latinamericanists the world around speak – and especially read – Spanish. Largely ignoring almost an entire area of scholarship could not be said to have been an accident or a coincidence. It

Tradition; Maureen Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations: Native Intellectuals and the Politics of Historiography, 1827–1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Janice Schuetz, *Episodes in the Rhetoric of Government–Indian Relations* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002); David Murray, *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing and Representations in North American Indian Texts* (London: Pinter, 1991); Laura J. Murray and Keren Rice, eds., *Talking on the Page: Editing Aboriginal Oral Texts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Laura J. Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren: The Writings of Joseph Johnson, 1751–1776* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998); Drew Lopenzina, *Red Ink: Native Americans Picking Up the Pen in the Colonial Period* (Albany: SUNY, 2012); Lisa Phillips, "Unexpected Languages: Multilingualism and Contact in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century North America," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 35, 2 (2011), 19–41; Peyer, *The Elders Wrote*; and Peyer, *The Thinking Indian*. Scholars who have made important contributions to other types of Native American writing include Robert Warrior, Philip Round, and many others.

[38] See, for instance, the special issue of *Ethnohistory*, 62, 3 (July 2015).

[39] See, for instance, Frank Salomon and Sabine Patricia Hyland, guest eds., *Graphic Pluralism: Native American Systems of Inscription and the Colonial Situation*, special issue of *Ethnohistory*, 57, 1 (2010).

[40] Murray, *Forked Tongues*; David Murray, *Indian Giving: Economies of Power in Indian–White Exchanges* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).

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may be that a certain inward focus within the US is actually linked to a self-understanding of the United States as the center of scholarship, something that has also happened in other countries.

Wherever one is based and what area of Indigenous studies one is in, it is commendable that Indigenous writing is now a growing field of study internationally. Traditionally, it was not an easy area of study to choose. As again Lyndsay Head has observed, writing "may not be an easy strategy to warm to when the defiance of '*ka whawhai tonu matou, ake ake ake*' (we will fight on forever) echoes down the years, but it may be that colonial chiefliness lies in the courage to continue to engage with the state."[41] Head contends that most scholars are attracted more to the study of those taking up armed resistance, a method much more spectacular than writing. At least now scholars the world over have the courage to study how Indigenous peoples engaged with the states they came to be encompassed by.[42] If we can add to this courage a determination to look beyond national boundaries, we might in the future reap the benefits of transnational Indigenous studies. As sketched out above, Indigenous peoples across the world often faced similar challenges, such as the denial of their ability to write without surrendering their authenticity. The transnational study of Indigenous responses to this and other challenges can help scholars to spot similar phenomena elsewhere and open their eyes to dimensions they might otherwise have missed. What we will find out in the resulting studies may help to inform and inspire future generations of activists and scholars. This is why we owe it to our area of study to cast the net wide and look for excellent research around the world. That is why everyone needs to finally discover the Pacific.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Claudia B. Haake is a historian who has lived an worked in Germany, the US, Canada, the UK, and Australia, and who is a regular visitor to New Zealand. She has published books and articles in the field of Native American history and especially the removal era.

[41] Head, "Wiremu Tamihana", 83.

[42] See James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

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