

Daniel McKay. *Beyond Hostile Islands. The Pacific War in American and New Zealand Fiction Writing*. Fordham UP, 2024. Pp. 272. ISBN: 9781531505165.

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Beyond Hostile Islands. The Pacific War in American and New Zealand Fiction Writing is a comprehensive, well-informed and persuasively argued study of North American and New Zealand fiction produced from the 1960s to the present and set during the Pacific War or its aftermath. The book's originality and interest lie, firstly, in its focus on the Pacific Theatre, overshadowed by the more numerous scholarly works exploring narratives of the Second World War set in Europe. The varied corpus of primary texts outlined by McKay in the introduction already confirms his first claim that "the Pacific and Southeast Asian theatres of operations were destined to occupy a detached category in the historical and literary imagination" (3). The specificities of these war narratives, then, deserve the meticulous analysis carried out by the author throughout this book. The more specific aim of this monograph—and one which is perhaps not fully evident from its title—is to focus on the "ideological dimension" (McKay 4) of the war and the ensuing stereotypical depictions of Japanese subjects. The overall objective is thus to explore how the selected texts variously "sustained, retired, or resurrected the racially-charged ideologies of the war years" (McKay 4) in contexts marked by Cold War geopolitics, the rise of Japan-bashing sweeping through the anglophone world in the 1980s, or the events surrounding the 1995 commemoration of the end of the war. Adopting a genre-based approach, *Beyond Hostile Islands* is organised into five chapters which consider an impressively diverse corpus, including combat novels, corporate thrillers, stories of internment, Far East Prisoners of War (FEPOW) narratives and Manhattan Project novels set in various locations across the Pacific. The author demonstrates a sound knowledge of these genres, their traditions and their narrative conventions, and skilfully fleshes out how they shaped the various iterations of the "hostile island" trope.

The second reason why this book is a welcome addition to the existing scholarship on literary depictions of the Second World War is because it is the only monograph of its kind to establish a conversation between Pacific war narratives coming from the US and New Zealand, two very different (and seldom compared) literary traditions. The author is aware of the pervasiveness of US war narratives in the popular imagination and of the more limited impact of the stories originating in New Zealand, which makes the sections devoted to these lesser-known works the most fascinating. McKay reads these New Zealand works as cases of “ideological coproduction” (8), not completely free from the pervasive influence of US narratives, but at the same time “less disposed to the tropes and ideologies commonly found in American writing” (4) because of their geographical and sociocultural uniqueness. The downside of matching such different traditions—one so solid, the other sparser—as acknowledged by the author himself in the introduction, is that the discussions of the selected works are on occasions slightly unbalanced.

Chapter 1, “Revelations and Comedy: The Combat Novel” (McKay 25–54), engages with representations of American or Japanese combatants in two late samples of the format: James Jones’ *The Thin Red Line*, a US novel fictionalising the Guadalcanal campaign from the perspective of US soldiers, and *An Affair of Men*, in which the New Zealand author Erroll Brathwaite narrates the experiences of a Japanese Captain during the New Britain campaign. The chapter explores how the respective island settings become testing grounds to reinforce the features of each party: exploring the disintegrating effects of the war on US soldiers, while perpetuating visions of the Japanese as anonymous and featureless characters in Jones’ novel; or reinforcing stereotypes of the Japanese and the Pacific Island characters for “an increased or redoubled comic effect” (McKay 46) in the case of Brathwaite’s narrative.

Chapter 2, “Camera Men: Postwar Japan-Bashing” (McKay 55–80) moves away from military conquest and “island combat to multinational business corporations and their ‘takeovers’” (McKay 11) in works featuring Japanese businessmen and tourists produced in the 1980s and 1990s, coinciding with Japan’s economic miracle and rising anxieties of its “technological supremacy” (McKay 60). The chapter explores these fears as reflected in Michael Crichton’s corporate thriller, *Rising Sun*; analyses Ruth Ozeki’s *My Year of Meats* as a response to these Japanophobic discourses; and then discusses, somehow succinctly and inconclusively, the New Zealand version of these stereotypes in two short

stories by Keri Hulme (“Kaibutsu-San”) and Vivienne Plumb (“The Wife Who Spoke Japanese in her Sleep”).

The next three chapters shift focus from war or post-war narratives of conflict and combat to discussions of memory, apology and redress. Chapter 3, “Captive Memories: Internment North and South” (McKay 81–105) goes back to the war context to explore the tradition of internment narratives, largely studied in relation to the experiences of Japanese-American and Japanese-Canadian authors, but hardly ever considered as a “Pacific-wide practice” (82). This Pacific-centred approach is applied to David Guterson’s *Snow Falling on Cedars*, focusing on the internment of Japanese-American civilians, and, a New Zealand YA novel, Wendy Catran’s *The Swap*, discussed after an interesting section on one of the less-known episodes of the Pacific War, the internment of Japanese civilians on New Zealand soil. Both novels place former internees and war veterans in conversation, encouraging readers “to step back from partisanship and observe the historical position of the veteran without necessarily acceding to him” (McKay 103).

Chapter 4, “The Poetics of Apology: FEPOW narratives” (McKay 106–31) moves on to address Far East Prisoner of War narratives, looking at US author Jim Lehrer’s *The Special Prisoner* and a New Zealand novel, *Lucky Bastard*, by Peter Wells. McKay sees these novels as departing from the well-established British canon of captivity narratives, which tended to embrace war propaganda in the depiction of Japanese captors, and intervening in debates of historical revisionism by problematizing FEPOW memories. Lehrer’s novel depicts the exchanges between a surviving FEPOW and a veteran of the Imperial Japanese Army and is read by McKay in relation to the controversies ensuing from the 1995 commemorations of the end of the war and subsequent debates over public apologies. Wells’s work is written in agreement with the premises of oral history (McKay 107) and focuses on the efforts of two siblings trying to understand their father’s traumatic war experiences by coming to terms with the unresolved tensions between private recollections and public memory.

Chapter 5, “Scientists and Hibakusha: Project Novels” (McKay 132–62), deals with narratives of Manhattan Project scientists and Japanese survivors of the atomic bomb (*hibakusha*). It first offers an overview of earlier US Project novels the plots of which tended to centre on the scientists’ moral or ethical dilemmas, to create “an American story that exists in isolation from historical junctures on the other side of the Pacific”

(McKay 135). The chapter then continues with a brief discussion of New Zealand responses, which the author defines as “lifeboat” novels (McKay 146): works which imagine the country as a safe space in the context of a nuclear apocalypse, foreseeing its global status “as a bastion of anti-nuclearism” (McKay 134) consolidated from the 1980s. The chapter concludes with the juxtaposed analysis of James George’s *Ocean Roads* and Dennis Bock’s *The Ash Garden*, both unique in granting equal narrative attention to scientists and survivors, although, as McKay concludes, these portrayals are still reductive inasmuch they rely on previously gendered and sexualised depictions of *hibakusha*.

The book concludes with a coda, entitled “Oceanic Sympathies” (McKay 163–71), which tackles the omission of Indigenous Perspectives, not only in non-Indigenous literary renditions of the conflict—which mostly contribute to the perpetuation of colonial stereotypes or the sidelining of Indigenous voices—but in most present-day scholarship on the Second World War. This coda offers an overview of how Indigenous Pacific authors have engaged with the war and its aftermath, including the damaging legacy of nuclearisation in the region, and is thus a welcomed counterpoint to the rest of the book (where these Indigenous perspectives are hardly addressed). This exclusion is coherent given that the central aim of the book is to explore representations of Japanese and non-Indigenous Pacific peoples; however, adding these final pages as an afterthought does little to minimise the marginalisation of Pacific voices that the author condemns at the beginning of the coda. Moving some of these considerations to more central parts of the book would have helped to combat these gaps more efficiently.

All in all, *Beyond Hostile Islands* is an engaging, solid and well-researched study which reveals an extraordinary knowledge of the Pacific War and the various narratives it generated, and which will be of interest to scholars working in various fields.

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