REVIEW ESSAY

Elizabeth Wood-Ellem, ed. *Songs and Poems of Queen Sālote* (translated by Melenaite Taumoefolau and foreword by HRH Crown Prince Tupouto'a). Tonga: Vava'u Press, 2004. Pp. xxvi + 422, essays, songs and poems, illustrations, genealogies and notations, glossary and indices, and bibliography. ISBN 982-213-008-2. NZ$100 hardback.

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THIS VOLUME IS probably by far the most comprehensive work on the combined history of the life of Queen Sālote and her artistic and literary works. However, there have been some wide-ranging scholarly works on her social and political life (e.g., Hixon 2000; Wood-Ellem 1999) and her artistic and literary creations (e.g., Kaeppler 1993; Māhina 1992, 1999, 2003, 2005; Māhina and 'Alatini 2007; Māhina, Ka'ili, and Ka'ili 2006; Moyle 1987). Apart from the helpful lists of illustrations, genealogies and notations, and glossary and indices, the volume is by and large centered on four essays and a collection of some 114 songs and poems of Queen Sālote. Unequivocally, the lists of illustrations, genealogies and notations, and glossary and indices provide the readers with efficient means for a better comprehension and appreciation of the essays, songs, and poems, specifically the extended discussions by the essayists of the cultural and historical conditions in which they were produced as works of art and literature.

Written in Tongan and English, this book is edited by Elizabeth Wood-Ellem, translated by Melenaite Taumoefolau, with essays by HRH Princess Nanasipau'u Tuku'aho, Adrienne Kaeppler, Elizabeth Wood-Ellem, and Melenaite Taumoefolau. Melenaite translated the song texts, including her

own essay, from Tongan into English, while Helen and Siupeli Taliai and Lata ʻAkauʻola Langi translated the other three essays from English into Tongan. The compilation of the extensive and detailed glossary by Melenaite is to be commended. There is a tendency to regard the book as having been written in both Tongan and English. However, the title, dedication, foreword, and preface have eluded translation from English into Tongan. Given the division of functions with respect to editing, compiling, and translating as well as the equal weight thought to be given to both Tongan and English, requiring parallel formal expertise in both languages, it therefore raises the intellectual and political questions of merit and fairness as to its editorship. Should Elizabeth and Melenaite, then, have been coeditors of the book?

The songs and poems are broadly classified into seven Tongan poetic genres, ranging from *hiva* (songs) and *ʻūpē* (lullabies) through *laulau* (recitals) and *tutulu* (laments) to *maʻuluʻulu* (ecology-centered poetry [my translation]), *lakalaka* (sociopolitical poetry [my translation]), and *faiva fakatātā* (drama). Such generic classifications seems to preclude a number of popular literary forms such as *taʻanga hiva kakala* (love poetry), which featured with some prominence in the poetic activities of Queen Sālote. What is termed as faiva fakatātā is better regarded as *taʻanga fakanatula* (nature poetry). I find the title of the book, *Songs and Poems of Queen Sālote*, translated into *Ngaahi Hiva mo e Ngaahi Maau ʻa Kuini Sālote* (my translation), somehow incomplete, especially when many, if not all, of her poems were put to both songs and dances. I would suggest that *ngaahi haka* (dances) should have been included in the title.

While the title of the book, *Songs and Poems of Queen Sālote*, firmly points to the songs and poems as works of art and literature, the overall orientation of the essays is geared largely toward the social and political life of the Queen, characterizing the cultural and historical contexts in which her poetic works were executed. On another level, we are also dealing with art history and artwork, that is, what art does and what art is, where the former is external to her songs and poems as works of art and literature, while the latter is internal to the artistic and literary productions themselves. In other words, art history deals with the social organization of art and literature as a form of human activity, and artwork is concerned with the aesthetic process of art and literature as a form of disciplinary practice. While the concerns with the historical and cultural realities in which art and literature are conceptualized and practiced in the productive and creative process are important, they nevertheless tell us very little or nothing about their aesthetic qualities, connected with the rhythmic production of symmetry, harmony, and beauty. If we are to take the artistic and literary

merit of the aesthetic works of Queen Sālote seriously, then our preoccupation with the aesthetic process of art and literature must take the lead over that of their human organization.

Collectively, all the essayists reflect on differences and commonalities in both the life of Queen Sālote and her works of art and literature. By reflecting on the life of Queen Sālote, the authors delved deeply and broadly, in different modes and lengths, into the social, cultural, historical, and political milieu in which she produces her works of art and literature. As an interest of some common bearing, the essay writers pay attention on the superficial level to the Tongan artistic and literary device *heliaki*, which is effectively albeit creatively deployed by Queen Sālote in the creation of her poetry. Herein, heliaki is variously defined as saying something in an indirect way, a mode of saying one thing and meaning another, a puzzle, and a symbolism. In addition to symbolism, Melenaite also classifies heliaki into two types, universal and culture-specific heliaki, where the former is eagerly understood by a general audience and the latter strictly confined to the successive speakers and members of Tongan language and culture.

Of all the definitions, the one offered by Melenaite is akin to the abstract dimension of heliaki, which literally means the interlacing, in this case, of two closely related objects, events, or states of affairs. There exist two kinds of heliaki: the qualitative, epiphoric heliaki and the associative, metaphoric heliaki (see, e.g., Māhina 2004a, 2004b, 2008a, 2008b), which run parallel to what Melenaite calls the universal and culture-specific heliaki. Whereas the qualitative, epiphoric heliaki refers to the exchange of qualities of two directly related objects, such as the freely blowing winds for freedom and the naturally occurring cycle of day and night for the inevitability of death, the associative, metaphoric heliaki highlights the culturally and historically intertwining association of two situations of some social, economic, and political significance, as in the case of the "chiefly," sweet-scented kulukona trees of Tavakefai'ana for the acclaimed aristocrat 'Ulukalala of the village of Tu'anuku on Vava'u and the renowned mound of Sia-ko-Veiongo on Tongatapu for the ruling Tu'i Kanokupolu dynasty.

On the philosophical level, however, heliaki can be commonly portrayed as an artistic and literary device for the intersection of two strictly connected yet opposed things, conditions, or occurrences. Quite simply, heliaki is symbolically saying one thing and actually meaning another. For example, *la'ā* (sun) for *tu'i* (monarch), *la'ātō* (sunset) for *mate* (death), and *Taulanga-Tuku-Mo-Failā* (City-of-Sails) for Auckland. The *tā-vā* (time-space), *fuo-uho* (form-content), and utility-led frictions at the interface of these objects, events, or states of affairs are mediated by means of *tatau* (symmetry) and *potupotutatau* (harmony), transforming the ordinary language from a

situation of crisis to a state of stasis, that is, *mālie* (beauty). The internal aesthetic qualities symmetry, harmony, and beauty impact on performers and audience alike in terms of the external emotional states *māfana* (warmth), *vela* ("fieriness"), and *tauēlangi* (climaxed elation). Heliaki is central to poetry in the same way that *tu'akautā* and *hola* (literally, "escape"), respectively, lie at the heart of music and dance. In the case of music and dance, the intersecting tools tu'akautā and hola, like the poetic apparatus heliaki, involve time-space, form-content subdivisions within coordinated tempo-marking sets of *vaa'itā* (tones) and *vaa'ihaka* (bodily movements) successively. The term hola is often interchanged with the words *kaiha'asi* or *haka-funga-haka*, both of which refer to the act of inserting an extra dance move in between two defined line-producing bodily movements.

Poetry can be generally defined as a special language within a language, which can normally be understood, as in the case of Tonga, by a select few, such as poets, orators, and traditionalists. The possession of skills in effectively decoding the intricacies, nuances, and imagery profoundly entrenched in Tongan poetry requires a critical knowledge of the modus operandi of heliaki, where objects, events, or situations are mutually exchanged qualitatively transculturally and associatively monoculturally. These pragmatic and epistemic requirements are demonstrated extensively in the essays, as are obvious in the intrinsic, aesthetic qualities of Queen Sālote's poetry. She is regarded as one of the few great contemporary poets that Tonga has ever produced. Her artistic and literary forte is underlined by a unique sense of capability, sensibility, and originality in the treatment of her subject matters, transforming tensions within them into a unified form, content, and function through sustained symmetry, harmony, and, above all, beauty.

While Melenaite's translation of the works of Queen Sālote is highly regarded, her effort nevertheless shows that translation strictly remains a real struggle, both intellectually and practically. As a way out of this impasse, the new general tā-vā theory of reality (see, e.g., Ka'ili 2005, 2007; Māhina 2002, 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Māhina, Ka'ili, and Ka'ili 2006) can be used to inform translation specifically, not to mention art and literature generally. Based on the pan-Pacific concepts and practices tā and vā, which, as previously mentioned, can be transliterated into English as time and space, the theory has a number of tenets. Some tenets, inter alia, include that ontologically, time and space are the common medium in which all things are, in a single level of reality; that epistemologically, time and space are differently arranged socially across cultures; that time and space on the abstract level and form and content on the concrete level are inseparable in mind as in reality; that all things stand in eternal relations of exchange

across nature, mind, and society, transforming to either order or conflict; and that order and conflict are of the same logical status in that order is itself a form of conflict.

Tongan art and literature can be broadly divided into *faiva*, *tufunga*, and *ngāue fakamea'a* (i.e., performance, material, and fine arts). Both terms, faiva and tufunga, literally mean doing-time-in-space. They exhibit an expression of tempo marking of space, where faiva is body centered and tufunga non–body centered. However, *tufunga liliulea* (transliterated as the art of translation; more broadly, translated as the material art of changing language) and *faiva fakatonulea* (which is literally translated as the performance art of correcting language) are more enigmatic. The former is applied to the written and the latter to the spoken. The Tongan terms *ta'anga* (poetry) and *maau* (poem), like faiva and tufunga, are a temporal, lineal, or formal demarcation of space. In a Tongan context, poetry is taken to be a collection of poems. The words ta'anga and maau (which indicate "place-of-beating" and orderly fashion, respectively) can serve as a basis for the development of a general time-space theory of poetry, where language is a medium for delineating space temporally, rhythmically transforming it in a systematic way from the hectic to the static.

Generally speaking, language is as much a collective tool of human communication as it is an art form. As such, language, like poetry, engrosses the rhythmic patterning of sound into symbols, which are then commonly assigned shared meanings for social communicative purposes. But poetry is an art form of a temporally and spatially intensified character. In practical terms, there cannot be a perfect translation; rather, there can be only a proximate translation. Translation can, thus, be loosely defined as a relation between the translator and the translated. By the same token, translation engages a conversion of one language to another, where a mediation of their spatiotemporal, substantial-formal, and functional conflicts are altered symmetrically, harmoniously, and beautifully. Sound is the common medium of both language and poetry, with symbolized human meanings as their collective content, formally and substantially defined by intertwining lineal and spatial tendencies. Similarly, sound is the medium of music, with its content characterized lineally and spatially in terms of tones. Music, unlike language and poetry, is devoid of human meanings.

Like all social entities the world over, language is arranged differently across human cultures. By implication, the form, content, and function of languages vary accordingly. For example, in Tongan culture, both utility and quality of art and literature coexist, like those in all forms of social activity. Not only are art forms made to be useful, they are also produced

to be beautiful. As far as the linguistic variations are concerned, spatiotemporal, substantial-formal, and functional oppositions exist at the crossing point of languages, where translation is concerned primarily with their mediation. The less that time-space, form-content, and utilitarian strains mediate this event, the better it is as a translation. Conversely, the more that spatiotemporal, substantial-formal, and functional tensions function as an intermediary in the process, the poorer the translation. Therefore, the success of this book as a work of translation can be measured by the degree to which both the complementary and opposed time-space, form-content, and pragmatic relationships between Tongan and English are rigidly negotiated in the process.

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