

Preface

How superb in reality, fragrant in retrospect, for those who love and understand.¹

Daniel Defoe, Robert Louis Stevenson, Herman Melville, Robert Michael Ballantyne and Louis Becke—as a young man, I had never read these authors’ famous and fantastical tales of adventure and savagery in the Pacific Islands. On the contrary, my Pacific education was based on the American film *Castaway* (2000) and a *Lonely Planet* guidebook. Yet, for Australians of the early twentieth century, these writers loomed over the Pacific, overshadowing the accounts of explorers before them and informing and inspiring new generations of Australian-born who were more literate and more mobile than their forebears. As I read the novels and magazines that those Australian children would have consumed, as well as the subsequent travel accounts of Australians who had realised their dreams of a Pacific odyssey, I was captivated by their recollections. I was especially fascinated by the moments of expectations meeting reality, and the subsequent choices that were made to reconcile fact with fiction.

My travel experience in the Pacific Islands was profoundly liberating. Eager to leave behind the familiar for an adventure promised by the unknown, I went to Weno Island (in Chuuk Lagoon, in the Federated States of Micronesia) to volunteer at a Catholic high school for 12 months. I relished my isolation and freedom from the outside world. I was energised by my new-found independence. I was only 18 years old and was naive and impressionable, and I remember the joys and frustrations of cross-cultural exchange. It was a formative period in my life and, like

1 Alan John Marshall, *The Black Musketeers: The Work and Adventures of a Scientist on a South Sea Island at War and in Peace* (London: William Heinemann, 1937), 295.

Australian zoologist Alan John Marshall, in 1937, strove to convey to my family and friends the powerful influence of my Pacific encounters and the depth and intensity of the emotions that moved me.

Writing was an important process during my travels: the nightly ritual of reflection in my journal, the weekly emails to parents, the monthly letters to grandparents and the periodic updates to my online blog. For me, writing was a simultaneous activity of reflection, communication and chronicling. Each text served a specific purpose—to reassure, to document, to argue, to entertain, to advertise, to question and to project—and each was always written with a certain audience in mind. I struggled to articulate my personal experiences in a way that moved others to empathise and understand. As the years passed, my reminiscences became romanticised and nostalgic. I travelled further afield, beyond the Pacific Islands, to chase those fragrant memories. In doing so, I returned with a desire to search for that same sense of connection in Australia that I had found elsewhere. It is this experience that underscores my passion for the Pacific Islands and writing.

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