

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND TONGAN

POETRY: REFLECTION ON

'THE SONG OF FLOWERS'¹

'Okusitino Mabina

Introduction

Professor J. A. Passmore, in "Psycho-analysis and Aesthetics," writes "[the] existence of any relationship between aesthetics and psycho-analysis is dependent upon these forms of investigation having certain community of interest, i.e., on the partial coincidence of their fields. The problem for consideration is to determine the extent of that coincidence."² Generally, this paper will examine the degree of this partial coincidence, specifically in the context of the relationship between psychoanalysis and Tongan poetry. Their partial coincidence can be evaluated in terms of form and function. As forms of investigation of mind and beauty, defining their respective subject matters, psychoanalysis and poetry have a common generative, communicative or therapeutic function. Thus, psychoanalysis and poetry, in both formal and functional terms, have important theoretical and practical implications for health. The use of psychoanalysis in the discussion rests on its close spatio-temporal affinity to poetry, both of which are investigative and transformative in character. By way of transformation, whereby time and space are altered and ordered in the process, psychoanalysis and poetry involve a time-space shift from consciousness to unconsciousness and from representation to abstraction respectively.

Psychoanalysis: form and function

Formally, psychoanalysis and poetry, taken as forms of investigation

of mind and beauty, involve the examination of the working of thinking and language; and, functionally, by means of *ta-va*, or what we may translate from Tongan as 'time-space' transformation, they restore some kind of balance or symmetry to the continuous physical, social and mental states in nature. Freud, following Nietzsche, is given credit for having first recognised the continuity of body and mind, in a way parallel to that for which Darwin is credited for his recognition of the nature-society continuum.³ Psychoanalysis grew out of the work of Freud on hysteria, and its predominantly Germanic origin as a positive science has been the subject of some idealist interpretation informed mainly by the German intellectual and philosophical tradition and its remnants elsewhere.⁴

This exercise is not an exposition of the nature of psychoanalysis and poetry; rather, it is an attempt to explore the extent of their coincidence as forms of investigation having beneficial and healing effects. Both psychoanalysis and poetry commonly subject mind and language to an analytical framework that, in separate ways, reveals forms of unconsciousness or sub-consciousness and other levels of nuances or meaning. This revelation is itself a kind of spatio-temporal transformation, i.e., a form of liberation. In psychoanalysis, it is a formal mental shift from the conscious to the unconscious and, in poetry, a linguistic change in rhythm, symmetry and symbolism from the ordinary to the 'divine'. It is, therefore, in these formally related but altered contexts that both fields come to be of some extreme functional, communicative or therapeutic value.

Tongan ta'anga poetry: Form and function

The term *ta'anga* is Tongan for poetry. A literary genre, *ta'anga* can be addressed in the broader context of *faiva*, the Tongan composite performance art, which literally means to do time and space, i.e., a form of *va-ta*, spatio-temporality or four-sided dimensionality.⁵ Literally, the word *ta'anga* means a place of beating, pointing to language as the place for beating time. This provides us with a working definition of poetry as the symmetrical beating of language in order to produce harmony and beauty.⁶ The beating of language, in the case of Tonga, is called *heliaki*, meaning to say one thing and mean another. Its opposite is *hualela*, a mark of bad works of art and literature. Formally, *heliaki* involves the effective exchange of existing symbols on the basis of re-arranging the associative and qualitative links between the objects that such symbols represent, thus producing another

level of language, *ta'anga*, a "divine" instrument of communication marked by the intensification of time.⁷

For example, in the poem I shall discuss in depth here, *beliaki* involves the exchange of *mahina* or moon and Tongan Queen Salote's sweetheart, Tungi Mailefihi, a high chief of the Tu'i Ha'atikalaua dynastic line, made in terms of re-ordering the physically and socially associative and qualitative connections between the radiating rays and chiefliness, or between the shining moon and her aristocratic sweetheart. Thus, in both physical and social ways, her aristocratic sweetheart, Tungi Mailefihi, is now her symbolic shining moon, the very subject of her unrelenting love. The exchange of symbols generates, in rhythmic ways, the spatio-temporal transformation of language from the forgettable to the unforgettable, creating a type of freedom with beneficial effects.

Tongan poetry has a number of genres, one of which is called *hiva kakala*, literally songs of (sweet-scented) flowers. The basic aesthetic and social theme of *hiva kakala* is 'ofa love, which is, in its ultimate physical sense, the union between lovers. In Tongan *hiva kakala*, when a poet metaphorically wants to *mate* or die, he / she is actually in love. That is, love and death, as physical, social and psychological tendencies, are symbolically one and the same thing. In poetry, love conquers all barriers, including death, the ultimate expression of freeing oneself from the repression of the socially prescribed to realising 'ofa in its ultimate physical dimension. As a poetic genre, *hiva kakala*, quite apart from its communicative value, can be a form of inquiry into the working of the human mind. Similarly *fakakata* or *fakaoli*, i.e., humour, can be deployed as a work of mind in human *absurdities* (or contradictory human situations). Queen Salote, in addition to her use of poetry as a work of mind in language, deploys it as a means of introspection, i.e., of enquiry into her own state of mind.

Hiva kakala Song of flowers: Tongan love poetry

To further illustrate the point, I take the following *hiva kakala* by Queen Salote, entitled "*Loka Siliva*", "Silver Lock", which is representative of the best that has been produced and can be found in the existing Tongan literary traditions. This applies not only to the works of Queen Salote but also those of other great Tongan *punake* or poets whose literary creations cannot be discussed here for lack of time and space. It is said that Queen Salote, who reigned in Tonga from 1918 until 1965 as Tupou III, composed this *hiva kakala* around

1913, when she was about thirteen years old, for Tungi Mailefihī, her sweetheart at the time, whom she married in 1917.⁸ The poem, translated by the author, is as follows:

"*Loka Siliva*"

1. *He mabina si'ene baluni*
Huelo ha 'i he loto tabi
Langanoa boku 'atamai
Manatu 'o fakatupu tangi

2. *Uisa! He fabina si'ene hopo*
He fihinga maile laumomo
Ko hoto kahoā tuku 'i loto
Tē u tauleva 'o 'ikai ke to'o

3. *Lose moto he taukakapa*
'Oku fotu he ngoue kakala
'Oku ha he seiti ne tapa
He 'imisi koula tokotaba

Tau:
'Amusia pe 'a e matangi na
'Oku ne angi fa'iteliba
Ka e hopoate pe kita
He 'ofa 'oku loka siliva

"Silver Lock"

1. Dearest moon is shining
Its rays radiating on the deep sea
Aches senselessly in my mind
Recalling it, stimulates weeping

2. Alas! Dearest ripe *fabina*⁹ pops out
From the bundled, fine myrtle leaves
It's my garland placed in the heart
I'll forever guard, never to be yielded

3. The budding rose is beyond reach
Standing tall in the garden of fragrance
It mirrors the jade that lit up
The golden image, the one secluded

Chorus:
Blessed you are, gust of winds
For you blow freely and unrestrained
But self-imprisoned, am I
In love, that is, a silver lock

Queen Salote structures her subject matter *ofa* in a powerful and dynamic manner, conceptually and linguistically intertwining the multiple tensions within it into a unified theme and form. Her subject matter is undoubtedly social in character, but the point of major aesthetic interest is the actual thematic and formal production of *tafua* (rhythm), *tatau* (symmetry) and, most importantly, *potupotutata* (harmony) and *malie* (beauty), by means of powerful *beliaki* (imagery) in the treatment of her topic. This is, of course, the universal concern of art and literature¹⁰.

Spatio-temporal transformation: rhythm, harmony and beauty

A continuity of idea and imagery runs through the whole composition, connecting the verses and chorus in a *oneness* of theme and form. The idea of utter helplessness/powerlessness on the part of Queen Salote, herself totally engulfed by love, pervades the entire poem. With the intensification of *ta* or time and the re-arrangement of *va* or space, by means of rhythm and effective imagery, we discover

harmony and beauty in this composition. Basically, this involves symmetrically 'beating' the ordinary Tongan language that produces harmony and beauty. That is, the idea of powerlessness, as an expression of the love in her heart, is rhythmically subjected to a flowing stream of linguistic images, nuances and symbols that amplify the poem in effectively proportional ways.

In this love song, Queen Salote, actively, though, in a helpless fashion, grappled with her own unconsciousness in regards to her unrelenting *ʻōfa* for Tungi Mailefihi, the very source of her creativity. The transformation-based outcome of her creative mind, namely *malie*, heals the human spirit, of both the producer and consumer alike. Queen Salote's ongoing battle with love takes place on two fronts, immediate and remote: immediately, Queen Salote versus nature, symbolic of Tungi Mailefihi, and, remotely, Queen Salote versus Tungi Mailefihi, the subject of her undying love. Put simply, the latter is a mirror image of the former.

The tensions between Queen Salote and nature, and, for that matter, Queen Salote and her sweetheart, Tungi Mailefihi, are really an opposition between the social and the natural, the normative or prescriptive and the amoral or mindless, or domination and liberation. Cleverly, Queen Salote, via *tafua*, *tatau* and *heliaki*, poetically transforms her immediate world, i.e., herself and Tungi Mailefihi, further symbolically extending it, as well as her own helpless or powerless self, to a remote world, i.e., herself and nature. This gives rise to harmony and beauty, which, by their very own nature, console the human soul. These counterpoising, conflicting tendencies are set in motion within and across the stanzas, including the chorus.

Queen Salote symbolises Tungi Mailefihi by means of the shining moon, the ripe, popped out *fabina* fruit, the budding rose and the freely blowing winds, situating themselves in their very own way independently behaving in the domain of nature. In opposition, she allegorises her love for Tungi Mailefihi, anchored in captivity by her aching mind, her sense of social duty in guarding in her heart her garland made of finely bundled, sweet-smelling, myrtle leaves, her precious jade lightening up her one and only secluded golden image and her self-imprisonment in love, all socially prescribed to her by the fact that she is heir to the throne and future Queen of Tonga. Given the basic theme of *biva kakala* as a literary genre, this love song is, on the proximate level, about love, and, on the remote level,

about sex, the social, emotional and physical union between men and women generally and lovers specifically.

The social, emotional and physical entities defining love and sex are subject to *heliaki*, which formally and practically involve the exchange of the symbolised qualities of associated objects given in the ordinary language that produces a special, highly unintelligible language of a different symbolic dimension. There is, then, a complex metamorphosis in rhythm, syntax and semantics or, simply, a radical shift in beat, form and meaning, all deriving from the symmetrical beating of the common, everyday language to acquire *potupotutatau* and *malie* of some "divine" inspiration. This is poetry, a language within a language, spoken with mastery and fluency by a select few, mainly *matapule* orators, *punake* poets, and committed people having a burning interest to learn, understand and speak it in terms of its behaviour, exactly like learning, understanding and speaking the rules of a foreign lingo.

However, the aesthetic quality of *malie*, internal to all good works of art and literature, produces a number of continuous mental states of a therapeutic kind: *mafana* warmth, *vela* burning fire and *tauelangi*, literally 'reaching the sky'. As outcomes of *malie*, these psychological states are simply external to works of art and literature, though internal to the creator or performer and appreciator. As a form of climaxed elation, however, *tauelangi* has an orgasmic effect. Futa Helu, amongst a few scholars in the field, has consistently confused these mental qualities, proposing that they are intrinsic to works of art and literature. J. A. Passmore and 'I. Futa Helu and their former philosophy teacher John Anderson had difficulties in determining the exact nature of these intrinsic qualities.

However, my own observation of Tongan *faiva*, a form of *ta-va*, time-space continuum, can offer some assistance. In the case of *ta'anga*, the linguistic production of the qualities *potupotutatau* and *malie* are dependent on those of *tafua*, *tatau* and *heliaki*. All these qualities are internal to the actual creation, where language is its medium. Generally, both harmony and beauty lead to a peculiar re-ordering of *ta* and *va*, time and space, i.e., the intensification of time in terms of rhythm, symmetry and imagery and re-arrangement of space by way of subject matter. The temporal qualities are universal to all works of art and literature, while those of the spatial are specific to subject matters, such as sound, language and body in the forms of music, poetry and dance respectively. In these contexts,

their therapeutic outcomes, be they *mafana*, *vela* or *tauelangi*, are merely external to poetry, music and dance.

Given the prescriptions of her social position, Queen Salote is forced to live in a world of fantasy, while at the same time aching in her heart weeping for love in the real sense. In this fantastic realm, Queen Salote is imagining an actual love affair with Tungi Mailefihi, role-playing or simulating in her thoughts the beauty of sex, a human noble sentiment expressed by the physical and emotional unity between people, men and women or lovers. This imagined state of affairs which is a multiplicity of opposed physical, social and mental tensions, is wrapped up in symbolic trappings borrowed from nature. These include the shining moon, radiating on the huge open sea, and unbearably aching the mind with weeping memories, the sweet-scented, ripening *fabina* fruit popping out of the bundled fine myrtle leaves, which made a garland jealously guarded in her heart, and the out-of-reach, fragrant budding rose, and an eternally treasured jade illuminating the only one golden image kept alive and well in her fantastic thoughts.

But the Queen finally comes back to her senses in the chorus, realising the inevitable but unwelcome fact that this perceived love affair is an actual impossibility. Blessed are the winds, a symbol for Tungi Mailefihi, in Queen Salote's view, for they go about in their own natural way blowing freely unrestrained, wishing only that they might have a mind of their own to know about her actual mental strivings, placed in love's solitary confinement. Her symbolic self-imprisonment in *'ofa* in its true physical and emotional sense, or the social repression of her natural qualities as a person, of her state of innocence and virginity, is in the form of a *loka siliva*, a silver lock, symbolic of purity and chastity.

Like the domains of myth and dream, everything is possible in the world of fantasy, where the two-way flow of traffic between the imagined and the real, the symbolic and the actual, or structure and agency is rhythmically and symmetrically mediated in poetry, specifically via the medium of *beliaki*, involving the transcendence of, as it were, language from the earthly to the eternal or the secular to the divine. The recognition by Queen Salote of the dual inevitability of natural limitations and social expectations which are, in this poem, both transposed to the world of fantasy, where they become purely possible, is a mark of a good work of art or literature. In all, this points to poetry, like psychoanalysis, hypnotism and humour, as a

form of investigation, either of mind or of any subject matter, including mind. As for hypnotism as a form of psychoanalysis, it utilises both the investigative and transformative tendencies commonly underpinning myth and dream, i.e., it begins with a myth and ends with a dream, reinforced by an environment without causal relationships via total concentration and complete silence.

Psychoanalysis and Tongan poetry are found to have a compatible investigative, aesthetic and therapeutic basis, in terms of their formal and functional relationships, both as forms of investigation of mind and beauty and as types of social communication and generation. Such a basis is commonly found in myth and dream as expressions of unconscious mind and hypnotism and humour as forms of enquiry into mind and human absurdities. Clearly, we witness the fact that psychoanalysis and poetry share in common multiple physical, social and mental *transformation* capacities of a peculiar *va-ta*, spatio-temporal character. Not only are they formally *investigative*, they are also functionally *communicative* or *generative*. The origins of such transformation capacities are reconstituted in a unique arrangement of *ta* and *va*, or time and space.

Acknowledgements

A longer, draft version of this paper entitled "Psychoanalysis and Tongan poetry: Their aesthetic, investigative and therapeutic value" was presented on several occasions: Lo'au Research Society (LRS) Conference, Sydney, Australia, 2002; Association of Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO) Conference, Auckland, New Zealand, 2002; Philosophy Weekly Seminar Series, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand, 2002. I found many of the critical comments on the paper on all these occasions extremely useful. I must thank the University of Auckland and Creative NZ for their financial assistance, which enabled me to conduct research in Tonga and elsewhere on Tongan poetry, especially the highly significant literary works of Queen Salote. For this reason, I must thank the many Tongan people, mainly punake and those knowledgeable in the subject, who willingly gave their time in support of my inquiry. Last but not least, I wish to thank Mele Ha'amoā Mabina for her reading and commenting on several aspects of the paper.

Notes

- 1 Although a much shorter version of "Psychoanalysis and Tongan poetry: their aesthetic, investigative and therapeutic value", it continues to examine psychoanalysis and poetry as forms of social activity having a

- common investigative and communicative character.
- 2 Passmore J.A. "Psycho-analysis and Aesthetics," *Australian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy*, 1936; XIV (2): 127-144.
 - 3 Anderson J. "Psycho-analysis and Romanticism," In Anderson J. et al (editors) *Art and Reality: John Anderson on literature and aesthetics*, 1982; Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, pp. 61-65.
 - 4 Passmore J.A. "Psycho-analysis and Aesthetics," *Australian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy*, 1936; XIV (2): 127-144.
 - 5 Mahina 'O. "Theory and Practice in Anthropology: Pacific Anthropology and Pacific Islanders," *Social Analysis*, 1999a: 43(2): 41-69.
 - 6 MahMahina 'O. "Tufunga lalava: the art of lineal and spatial intersection." In Rees S. (ed.) *Genealogy of lines: Hoboko e tobitohi*, 2002; New Plymouth: Govett-Brewster Arts Gallery, pp. 5-9, 29-30..
 - 7 Mahina 'O. "Theory and Practice in Anthropology: Pacific Anthropology and Pacific Islanders," *Social Analysis*, 1999: 43 (2), 41-69.
 - 8 For some examples of Queen Salote's poetry see: Hixon M. *Salote: Queen of Paradise*, 2000; Dunedin: University of Otago. Wood Ellem E. *Queen Salote of Tonga: The story of an era, 1900-1965*, 1999; Auckland: Auckland University Press. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
 - 9 A white pandanus fruit.
 - 10 Mahina 'O. "A consideration of *t_fua* 'rhythm', *tatau* 'symmetry' and *heliaki* 'symmetry' in Queen Salote's *ta'anga* 'poetry'". Paper presented to the Anthropology Seminar Series, University of Auckland, 2001.

References

- Anderson, J., 1982. "Psycho-analysis and Romanticism," in Anderson, J., C. Graham and K. Lycos (eds), 1982. *John Anderson on literature and aesthetics*. Sydney: Hale & Iremonger.
- Calder, A., J. Lamb and B. Orr (eds), 1999. *Voyages and Beaches: Pacific Encounters, 1769-1840*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Hixon, M., 2000. *Salote: Queen of Paradise*. Dunedin: University of Otago.
- Mahina, 'O., 1999a. "Theory and Practice in Anthropology: Pacific Anthropology and Pacific Islanders," *Social Analysis*, 43:41-69.
- _____. 1999b. "Myth and History," in A. Calder, J. lamb and B. Orr (eds), *Voyages and Beaches: Pacific Encounters, 1769-1840*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- _____. 2001. "A consideration of *tafua* 'rhythm', *tatau* 'symmetry' and *heliaki* 'imagery' in Queen Salote's *ta'anga* 'poetry'," paper presented to the Anthropology Seminar Series, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.
- _____. 2001 "Ta, va and faiva: The Tongan conception of 'time', 'space'

and 'art'," paper presented to the Philosophy Conference on "Language, Thought and Reality: East-West Perspectives", Chico State University, Chico, U.S.A., and Anthropology Seminar Series, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.

Passmore, J. A., 1936. "Psycho-analysis and Aesthetics," *Australian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy*, XIV (2): 127-144.

Wood, E. H., 1999. *Queen Salote of Tonga: The story of an era, 1900-1965*. Auckland: Auckland University Press.