



COLLEGE OF ARTS

School of English and Theatre Studies

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Patrick Leary
President, RSVP
1322 Greenleaf St., Apt. 1
Evanston, IL 60202

Dear Patrick,

I received the 2012 Curran Fellowship, which enabled me to conduct research in the UK for my project, "Spiritual and Imperial Literacies: Cook Islands Writers and British Readers in the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine*." The project analyzes the affective and imperial relations established through the publication of letters and reports by converted Cook Islanders in a Victorian periodical intended for British children. In May 2012 I spent time at the School of Oriental and African Studies, reading through the London Missionary Society archives—specifically the "South Seas" boxes and their run of the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine*. Since the SOAS Reading Room is closed on Wednesdays and Saturdays, I spent those days at the British Library working on a related project: material in the *Boy's Own Paper* on "blackbirding," that is, the reported acquisition of Pacific Islanders through violence, duplicity or kidnapping for work on white-owned plantations, primarily in Fiji and Queensland, Australia.

Alphabetic literacy arrived in the Cook Islands, indeed the South Pacific generally, with the missionaries, and the "Spiritual and Imperial Literacies" project results from my discovery that a number of the earliest pieces of published writing by Cook Islanders appeared in the *Juvenile Missionary Magazine*, a periodical directed at the British child reader. My project began with Kiro, who visited England from 1847 to 1850 and whose travel journal was excerpted in the periodical, but my research trip focused also on a number of other Cook Islands writers published in the periodical, whose work I was able to copy. Some of the Cook Islands writers are the children of Papehia, the first missionary to Rarotonga (the main island in the Cook Islands), and the most famous of the Pacific Island missionaries who worked alongside, and often prior to, the British missionaries in spreading Christianity in the region. During my research I tracked down further information about Papehia's son, Isaia Papehia, who visited England from 1853 to 1856. Other research highlights were finding out more about Kiro's time in England, as well as accounts of his fellow travelers, Mamoe and Mamoe Fafine (both Samoan); finding information in the minutes of the London Missionary Society about the inspiration for the *John Williams*, a missionary ship funded by British children that sailed between Britain and the South Pacific from 1842 until well into the twentieth century (different ships, same name); and rather dramatically, opening a box to find the tapa-covered journal the missionary John Williams wrote in immediately before landing in Erromango, where he was killed by the locals, the ni-Vanuatu. I did not, unfortunately, find the original of Kiro's travel journal, written in Cook Islands Maori—perhaps it no longer exists.

The material on Kiro has been developed into a conference paper, “Kiro: A Pacific Island Christian in Victorian London,” which I gave at the North American Victorian Studies Association conference in September 2012. I plan to turn this paper into an article, but first need to track down more information on a Cook Islands songwriter whom Kiro quotes. Hopefully I can find the information on an upcoming trip to Rarotonga. The blackbirding research at the British Library resulted in both material for an Honours course taught in Winter 2013, and a conference paper I delivered at the RSVP conference in September 2012, “British Boys and Pacific Slavery: ‘The Blackbird Trap’ in the *Boy’s Own Paper*”—in fact, this is the paper I delivered outside on the steps of the conference building thanks to a bomb scare. The paper is now almost complete as an article and will be submitted for publication this summer. In addition, I have sent material from my research trip to colleagues in Pacific Island studies on the off-chance it might be relevant to their students, and have research material to take with me to Rarotonga to give to people at Takamoā Theological College and the Cook Islands Library.

Thanks so much for the opportunity to undertake this research through the Curran Fellowship. As I’m sure you realize, having a research project that spans opposite ends of the globe, while fun, is expensive! Thanks also for the vote of confidence that writing by nineteenth-century Cook Islanders is worth the attention (and funds) of RSVP and relevant to Victorian periodical studies. I was sorry to hear of Eileen Curran’s passing, but can attest to the fact that through her commitment to funding scholarship on periodicals, new work and new avenues for such scholarship will continue to emerge.

Yours sincerely,

Michelle Elleray

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School of English and Theatre Studies