

The history of visitors to islands in the Pacific raises the issue of the poetics of imperialism and the process of translating beings constituted elsewhere into the signs of the receiving culture (see also "**The Visitor**," later in this volume). "**The Equation**" draws on the historical record to show that such encounters can go terribly wrong. In the first part of this relationship, a visitor ruptures the island rules governing hospitality — classic Polynesian behavior expressed in this instance through probing conversation and a meal specially prepared for a visitor who refuses to eat out of the categories of his own culture and therefore refuses to honor the reciprocity that contains all such hospitality — at minimum including the obligation to receive and in the long run to reciprocate. In the second part, he pays for his transgression. His rejection is the rejection of an imposing culture and a determination of his place in the Polynesian schema. The following pieces in this sequence, "**Journal Entry**" and "**Bartzholter's Map**," represent different voices and genres of information from other times and places. Discovered fortuitously in the midst of some scholar's archival sweeps, they offer at least two possible conclusions to problems launched in "**The Equation**." The Reverend Fishburne draws on his own culture's myths of colonial superiority and the need to translate Others into the familiar idiom of savagery, on the one hand, and his tapping of the great "lost at sea" myth, on the other. What was from the Polynesian view a colonial offender becomes in the dominant culture of the times a victim, and the cultural turf of the savages is threatened with erasure in the name of God and other aspects of the beholder's culture as a result. Such is the headstone, the epitaph, and the history of cross-cultural collisions everywhere colonial cultures have carried their big sticks. The map — a special kind of text of great interest to historians and mariners alike — rewrites the story in important ways.

Nanafatu Island, Central Pacific, June 17, 1874

## THE EQUATION

### I.

*Sit down with us here next to the candles and the lamps  
 this is my sister and her child Nanafou she is older than  
 my son Fetuu but not as good with a spear eat what you see  
 we have plenty on this island life is strong for us entwined  
 like reef to wave mother to child fish to sea some people  
 have more guns than gods we have no guns our gods our  
 ancestors still live here and speak to us and counsel us  
 when we share tasty fish or snails with them or taro  
 pandanus breadfruit sago crab sometimes mangoes eels and  
 pork the food on your plate go ahead eat your fill it is good  
 for you good for gods why do you resist are you afraid of  
 the blood you must eat this bounty or we will be shamed  
 this is our net for catching good will for smoothing  
 roughness for quieting disharmony for rescuing wayfarers  
 the shipwrecked and the lost a web for living as one in the  
 chain of islands that is our birth and continuation our wind  
 all who come ashore in peace are welcome do you not  
 understand the gift of giving this is our life the fruit of  
 handlines seines and gardens the sap of the tree and you  
 must eat it in honor eat now and wear the flowers of  
 solidarity the shells of beginning my wife is watching you  
 so are the elders and children huddled in the bushes  
 breathe deeply inhale the spirit of the gift the mana and  
 grace the sunsets of this magic creature the turtle we save  
 for chiefs offer to you eat it now eat it all...*

*We can talk eat and keep the mosquitoes away with fans  
you say your dog disappeared in a boating accident mine is  
still a good sailor where is your tall village do villagers  
steal land in England do they grow their own food have a  
smoke take two want some barracuda my mother's brother  
went to Tabiteuea to weep his son died on a ship they had  
a dog on that ship I don't think it was yours here is  
another kind of meat for you bring him the octopus some  
fermented coconut milk to stir his appetite the whole  
family is sad over the death of my mother's brother's son  
very expensive too can we have some money where is your  
money he hit his head in a storm and just died right there  
on the deck he didn't drown eat your fish and turtle did  
your dog drown I can look for him if you ask me we know  
how to find lost things in the spirit world can you pay me  
for that where is your money do you like my tattoos how  
do you like our village my daughter our island we are not  
afraid to die we only fear the death of our way of living  
are you a soldier where is your war eat that fish drink the  
toddy light your smoke we can still talk you must be  
hungry by now are you sure you need nothing more what is  
more than nothing you haven't eaten anything what is  
wrong too tired you say you need sleep you have work to do  
when the cock crows you'll count coconuts but drink none  
rebuild the cross on the beach counsel our women on  
clothing we can give your food to the animals start anew  
tomorrow.*

## II.

**Wake up** you sack of entrails or I'll thunder your skull as you lay the truth is we killed and ate your bony dog when it washed ashore in the storm we stole your money and your gun last night while you slept we took your bullets and your little book and buried them at sea and you are next you are such an arrogant fool you know nothing this is not a naked smelly place a sea tide of savage darkness the underbelly of your better life it is not odd like me to you or you to me your island is the odd one your paper is odd your mother ashamed of your birth your breath shallow and rank your brow always wet and wrinkled like an unfurled sail on an angry ship your eyes afraid of the noise of the night even your gun shoots the wrong things your war is a hungry whore inside your head who sucks out the spirit of island people and fills you with the ghostly marrow you eat my thoughts gobble my soul but dare not touch my food so here pigface hungry man from a cannibal land here is another plate for your copra company another chance at another gift for your church before you leave you can eat my words my old words my odd words the name of my dog the names of my gods you can eat the ceremonies of renewal we shared with you eat the dancing instead of the dancers you might even lick the color off the moon while it sits in the lagoon maybe swallow the islands in my mind these are your foods cannibal man your stomach is as dead as your soul were you born dead are you the living dead nothing is worse than a hungry corpse except perhaps for one that refuses to go away when there is no more blood to drain or that refuses the gift of true life...

*We cannot fill your hunger here you must leave us and know that no island god will have your selfishness no island people will receive you or your stalking plans your hearth has no heart you are death incarnate and you don't know it you must leave us forever this canoe of mine will lead you to the middle sea the home of ferocious spirits eat **them** if you can and drink what the sea splashes in your face or pray for rain try to find something to share when no one is there and then eat it all yourself do you think your god will care you take what you want when it is not offered you refuse what is offered when it is different you do not know how to give or receive you do not know what to take or when to take it you are death on a foul wind a slimy red and dangerous whirler you must turn away from us and never look back take the canoe but no coconuts you can feast on the honor you have ripped from us sip from your pantry of stolen virtues and when the sail fails and the sun splits your lips boils your excrement and blinds you to the stars perhaps you will learn to swim in the wake of your own refusals perhaps your righteousness will float you like a hand hewn hull your piggish head point the way to conquerable land before you are yourself conquered and sunk by the weight of your silver cross I am shamed by you the run of your blood in the sea will be my tears drink them as my final gift share them with the fishes the sharks the gods of the sea go now to greet them **get off my island!***

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