

Abstract

The three Polynesian women writers – Florence (Johnny) Frisbie (b. 1932, Cook Islands), Patricia Grace (b. 1937, New Zealand) and Sia Figiel (b. 1967, Samoa) – represent three key stages in the development of Polynesian literature in English that are intrinsically linked to the transforming post-colonial context.

Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka: The Autobiography of a South Sea Trader's Daughter by F. J. Frisbie, published in 1948, is being defined as the founding text of this new literature. The autobiographical work is set in the Polynesian colonial background. Patricia Grace belongs to the first generation of Polynesian authors writing in English. She participates with them in the so-called “Maori Renaissance” that is embedded in the larger pan-Polynesian movement of resistance against British colonial hegemony and of indigenous cultural revivals started in the 1960's. Sia Figiel is a leading writer in the already established Polynesian contemporary literary scene of the 1990's. The region is almost entirely independent by now.

The privileged literary themes and the linguistic choices of these three indigenous authors, together with their selected narrative techniques, reflect the on-going political and cultural emancipation of the autochthones. The writers increasingly liberate themselves from the norms of Standard English and of European novel writing and integrate their native languages, the indigenous oral tradition and cultural heritage into these imported tools. Thus, they blend or “syncretise” the autochthonous and the European inheritances and innovate them. This “syncretism” is the proclaimed creative principle of the emerging literature and of Polynesian post-colonial cultural and identity reconstruction.