The prodigal in the 'sea of stories'

Encircling the void with Armstrong Sperryand Albert Wednt

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Reading context

This paper wishes to tag a proposition to the already famous representation of the Pacific as 'sea of islands' (Hauofa). In terms of literature, "Oceania is a *'sea of stories'* that expands way beyond the horizons of the sea of islands. I am referring to the wealth of oral traditions, stories, myths, cosmologies, heroic sagas, ancient chants, oratory, and genealogies of Oceania. That sea of stories is now intensifying to embrace foreign literary artifacts like the Bible (in Oceania tongues), poetry, short stories, novels and films by islanders themselves. Such expansive literature has a certain amount of influence in the way Oceania people worship, learn, write, do politics, play rugby, and in fostering our sons and daughters, whether in the islands or in Diaspora. Oceania storytellers, orators, social scientists, filmmakers, dancers and biblical interpreters have a common ground in the way they re-story or re-tell such sea of stories. It is the indication of being Oceania, of being islanders, of being colonized and de-colonized, of being re-presented, resistance, resilience, of intellectual and spiritual emancipation, and of complying with the winds of changes, without sweeping our feet from our sea of stories.

Stories indicate inter-island acquaintances and relationships that existed for thousands of years. Islanders driftedso as their stories. Islands are connected by the drifting stories of creation, of the *tatau* (tattoo), of *Lata/Rata,* of *Tagaloa/Tagaroa, of Maui,* of the *fine mat*, of *Tonga/Samoa/Fiji* chiefly links etc. etc. Islands are also connected by histories of navigation, of colonization and decolonization, of rivalry mission societies. In modern literature, islanders are connected when they read 'Call it courage,' 'Sons for the return home,' or watching 'the laughing Samoans,' 'Once were warriors,' and Mr. Lavalava Show, among the many. This sea of stories provide Oceania writers with the confidence, courage and liberty to mount and break like waves, how we *Oceania* our views of the Bible in a changing world around us.

In this paper, Bible stories are viewed from the lenses of Oceania literature, as one among the sea of stories, not the Absolute Story. The obvious reason is that Bible stories are foreign, from a different world, time and space. To read them as the *only* story honestly leaves us with a void, a silent emptiness and incompleteness in understanding *who we are*, in such a fast changing small world. This calls for a revitalization of our own stories, ones that encircle our drifting search and struggles for some structure of meaning, and fends off a potential obliteration of humanity rising in Oceania today. As Oceania biblical scholars, our task is to encircle this void by reworking our indigenous references, symbols, values, language, performances, and our stories (literature) to reconstitute them as a changing but changeless island designs.

Method: *Talalasi* reading

Talalasi is a Samoan literary device where stories and histories are told and re-told. Its practice is often recited in the proverbial saying, *"E talalasi Samoa."*Samoan stories have many tellings. It may and can be a universal phenomenon, as Albert Wednt (Samoan New Zealand writer) acknowledges that " . . . novels are about other novels, stories are about other stories, poems are about other poems. The changes come about in the way you tell them."[1]It simply means stories have **many tellings**. *Talanoa* is the act of telling and sharing stories without dominance. *Talalasi* is when the same story or significant theme is told and re-told in different ways and varying perspectives. The telling may be influenced by the socio-political or economic context of the storyteller. Other times, the storyteller influences the telling to suit his/her own personal reality. The finest obsession of *talalasi* is that no telling is absolute. One telling fills the voids and cracks in the other telling. No

[1] Juniper Ellis, "The techniques of storytelling," *An interview with Albert Wednt* in http://www.ariel.ucalgary.ca/ariel/index.php/ariel/article/viewFile/3046/2991

telling is complete in itself without the other. *Talalasi* designates a continuing search and struggle for meaning. It unsettles dominance and paternalism in the way stories are told, received and interpreted.

In this paper, three tellings on the ever-important theme of *leaving and returning home* are explored. One is the biblical "Prodigal Son" (Luke 15: 11-32). The other is the legend of *Mafatu*, retold as "Call it Courage" by Armstrong Sperry (Sperry: 1940),[2] and third is "Sons for the Return Home" (Wednt: 1973) by Albert Wednt. Oceania stories are chosen based on their perception of the theme; "leaving and returning home," island style. The legend of *Mafatu* represents Oceania stories in the pre-Christian era while *Sons* is selected to represent modern Oceania literature.[3]Both stories made their way into the big screen for their recognition. The Prodigal Son represents the Bible. It is the iconic Jewish story of leavingand returning home in the context of the Roman Empire. Together, they represent the reality of our changing world and a changing Oceania.

This paper assumes that the Prodigal Son is a popular story and therefore no need to repeat it here. It is well commented by biblical scholars from a variety of perspectives in boththe Christian and non-Christian worlds. Sugirtharajah's appropriation reflects what happens when the prodigal "travels outside its natural Christian habitat and falls into the hands of interpreters—especially expositors who belong to other religious traditions and writers of secular fictions."[4] What I intend to do here is to expose the limitations of a single telling, and the fruitfulness of using *talalasi*to explore the complexity of the theme 'leaving and returning home.'

Leaving and Returning Home,*Island style*: The legend of 'Mafatu'

At the dust jacket of 'Call it Courage,' Sperry briefly indicated what the story is about, and where he got the story from.

> *Mafatu was afraid of the sea. It had taken his mother when he was a baby, and it seemed to him that the sea gods sought vengeance at having been cheated of Mafatu. So, though he was the son of the Great Chief of Hikueru, a race of Polynesians who worshipped courage, and he was named Stout Heart, he fear and avoided the sea, till everyone branded him a coward.*
>
> *When he could no longer bear their taunts and jibes, he determined to conquer that fear or be conquered -- so he went off in his canoe, alone except for his little dog and pet albatross. A storm gave him his first challenge. Then days on a desert island found him resourceful beyond his own expectation. This is the story of how his courage grew and how he finally returned homeexhausted in body, but strong and fearless in spirit -- truly Mafatu, the Stout Heart.*
>
> *This is a legend. It happened many years ago, but even today the people of Hikueru sing this story and tell it over their evening fires.*

Below is a more detailed summary[5] of the legend of Mafatu for our purpose.

Mafatu is afraid of the ocean. As a young member of the tribe on the Polynesian island Hikueru, a people for whom sailing and fishing are a fundamental way of life, Mafatu's fear is a major social stigma. Although he experienced the great trauma at the age of three of nearly drowning and seeing his mother die, those around him have little sympathy or understanding for his fears. Even his father is	*There is one problem with the fish trap, however, and this is the hammerhead shark that regularly raids the trap before Mafatu can get what he has caught. One day Mafatu goes out with a knife to end this trouble once and for all. When he sees the shark he grows afraid, however, and can do nothing even as the shark completely destroys the fish trap. It isn't until Uri is knocked into the water that Mafatu is*

[2] Translated into Samoan as *Alaga ia le lototele*,by Aiono Fanaafi Larkin, Apia: Department of Education, 1973 (Reprint)

[3]*Sons for the return home* is rated as the first novel ever written by a Samoan (Pacific?) writer in the English language. It is also available as a film, but this article relies mostly on the book.

[4] R.S. Sugirtharajah, "Son(s) behaving badly: The prodigal in foreign hands," in *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An alternative way of reading the Bible and doing Theology*. London: SCM Press, 37—50

[5] This summary is available on www.bookrags.com/studyguide-call-it-courage/

ashamed of the way Mafatu behaves. As a result of his inability to go out in a canoe and fish,
Mafatu is left behind to build spears, nets, and other necessary tools.
Other youth his age tease and reject Mafatu, and one night he overhears their taunts and cannot stand it any longer. He doesn't want to continue to live with his fear and his shame, so he resolves to go out alone and face his inner demons on the sea. Mafatu takes a canoe and with his canine companion Uri and their albatross friend Kivi, he heads out toward the open ocean. Mafatu has not gone prepared however, and a storm nearly destroys his canoe and sweeps away the few things he brought with him, even his clothing. Uri and Mafatu drift in the canoe for days, growing more starved, dehydrated, and sun burnt. Just as it seems all hope is lost, an island appears in the distance. The current carries the canoe towards this island, and although the coral reef surrounding it smashes the canoe, Mafatu and Uri make it to shore alive.
When Mafatu comes to, he drinks some fresh water from a stream and bandages a cut on his leg. Revived by this, he begins to explore his new surroundings. The island has thick jungle and an inactive volcano at its center, and this terrain is strange to Mafatu, who comes from an island of flat plains and few palm trees. Towards the top of the volcano there is a plateau which offers an excellent view of the whole island.
On the other side of the island from the beach upon which he landed, Mafatu discovers a clearing with a pyramid and idol in it. This is a sacred site of sacrifice for the savage eaters-of-men, a cannibalistic tribe of which Mafatu has heard terrible stories. He is extremely frightened, because although there is no one on the island now, they are sure to return at some time. However, he sees a well-made spearhead at the shrine, and knowing it will be very useful to him he snatches it up before running back to the plateau. Mafatu will use this good vantage point to carefully watch out for any sign that the eaters-of-men are returning.

Meanwhile, there is much work for Mafatu to do in order to survive and make himself comfortable on the island. All of his time on Hikueru constructing tools and perfecting those skills is now coming in very handy. He builds a fire to cook his food, and a shelter from bamboo and woven leaves. Mafatu begins to make a new canoe that he can use to return home. He creates all manner of tools, such as nets, fishhooks, bowls, and mats. Mafatu replaces his lost clothing, and creates spears and knifes from a whale skeleton he is lucky to find. He makes a raft to use until the canoe is complete, and a fish trap for catching more food farther offshore.

driven to act. He dives in to save his friend from being eaten, and stabs the shark with the knife, succeeding in killing it. Mafatu helps Uri back onto the raft, grateful to have found the courage to rescue his companion.
This is the first of several such victories for Mafatu. One day while climbing to the plateau to look out for the eaters-of-men, a wild boar charges at Mafatu. He wants to run away but instead acts quickly and uses a spear to kill the wild boar. This is a feat of bravery that even the warriors of his tribe have not succeeded in, and Mafatu returns to his campsite for a triumphant feast. He makes a necklace of the boar's teeth which he cannot wait for his tribe to see.
Once the canoe is finished, Mafatu takes it out to test it and to retrieve that day's catch from the fish trap. Unfortunately his knife falls into the ocean while he does so. Mafatu dives down to get it back, because he would hate to lose it, but is attacked by a large octopus while he is at the ocean floor by the coral reef. Mafatu stabs wildly at it, and he is quickly becoming desperate as his lungs scream for oxygen. It seems as if the octopus is going to win, when one well-aimed stab hits the creature in its eye. Mafatu makes it back to the canoe, gasping for air.
Distracted by all of these events, Mafatu did not check for the eaters-of-men that day, which was a huge mistake because they arrive the next morning. Mafatu observes the beginning of their ritual at the sacred site, trying to remain hidden, but he is discovered by four of the savages. They chase him back to his beach, where he leaps into his canoe and tries to get away. At first the eaters-of-men swim after him, but then they turn back and follow in their own canoes. They follow Mafatu out into the ocean and pursue him for over a day before finally giving up.
It would seem Mafatu is home free. However, the currents are now working against him, and he has difficulty making any progress towards his island of Hikueru. As days pass the food and water he brought runs out, and Mafatu once more grows dehydrated and weak. Finally, he notices signs of land in the distance, and realizes with great joy and relief that it is his home. On the beach, the people of his tribe have gathered to see this stranger that is approaching. Even his own father does not recognize Mafatu at first, but when they understand who he is they are amazed. Mafatu's father proudly announces his son's bravery and the tale of Mafatu's adventures is told for generations to come.

The story is about a chief's son, who left home to escape cultural harassment and stigmatization, and returned home a hero, island style. This island legend indicates that the phenomenon of sons leaving and returning home is global. Islanders were well aware of such reality before the Bible. But the story of Mafatu is unique in many ways. It is island style of leaving and returning in every detail. Sandy beaches, canoes, food, the sea and its challenges, the waves, etc.

One of the unique aspects of this island story is how the mother of Mafatu is portrayed right at the beginning. It fills a void in the biblical narrative. Mafatu's mother lost her life in the sea. She was with the baby, Mafatu, a reference to island mother economy; taking a son to the sea so he can become a *tautai* (fisherman), and risked her life for his survival. The ocean is presented as both a friend and a foe, and the idea of 'island in the sun' is obviously not an Oceania perception. The island legend provides a balanced view of the complexity of life in the oceans. Sperry never clarifies the albatross pet that accompanied Mafatu while combating the waves. The albatross (in Southern traditions) is widely believed as the souls of those who lost their lives in the sea. Mafatu always felt the presence and closeness of the motherall throughout his leaving and returning.

In the 1840's when Sperry published the island story, its impact on young people around the world was like that of Luke 15: 11-32 in the Christian and non-Christian communities. Its influence reached Hollywood, won the author (Sperry) several Book awards in the United States, and was available in many languages, even Hebrew (Sperry: 1959).[6] It has taught the world a lot about spiritual courage, not repentance and fatherly love. Its popularity, according to Peter Fonda, one of Hollywood's greatest actors, lies in the way 'courage' is portrayed in island terms, island real life, island history and cultural norms. Sperry, the writer himself was worried that island *spiritual courage* in the legend "might be too adult for (Western) children," (Sperry: 1941) but the reception of the book worldwide proved otherwise.

***Sons for the Return Home:* Island immigrant families in New Zealand**

Sons for the return home is a straightforward story, written in a form that is not of mainstream standardized prose. When the book came out in 1973, it invited a mixture of criticisms from New Zealanders, mainstream literary critics, as well as from Oceania politicians and Church leaders due to its prose and especially its parading sexuality.[7] Fiji parliament denounced it as pornography, while Samoans were outraged for its filthy language and Samoa being shown in a bad light to the outside world.

I am not arguing that Wednt is actually retelling the biblical story per se, for he is no biblical scholar. But the author himself declares that in the early years in Samoa, his reading was confined to the Bible.[8] He also penned other literary stuff using biblical symbols like "The Second Coming," and "A Second Christ," although he rejects the Church.[9] There is evidence that Wednt was influenced by biblical stories, and the prodigal son of Luke was one of them.

Provided below is a brief summary of its plot for the purpose of this paper, taken from Paul Sharrad.

Samoan family seeks wealth and education in New Zealand, land of material plenty but suspect for its secular values and the seductiveness of the palagi/pakeha *way of life. Father finds a job in a factory and becomes a deacon in the local Samoan Church, while mother holds the family together around the home. Youngest son is groomed as the one most likely to succeed: he is a skilled rugby player and is academically gifted (contrary to white expectations of Islanders). We meet him at university in the first chapter, where he is accosted in the cafeteria by a white girl trying to be friendly. She persists in the face of his taciturn reserve, and they become lovers.* *There carefree romance is offset by the attitudes of both partners' families: by white prejudice among her circle of friends and former lovers; by the self-protective circle of the*	*This she comes to regret, and she moves on to London to 'sort herself out'. Her boyfriend still loves her but is hurt by her decision. His father, already disappointed that his son will not follow his grandfather as a healer (the boy has dropped medicine to do a degree in history), can offer little comfort. In despair at losing the girl, the son takes it out on her former lover (a typical upper-class white racist) by beating him up, and returns with the family to the long dreamed of and highly romanticized Samoa.* *All along, he has sought or felt driven to stand aside from the crowd, and in the collective, parochially complacent, village world the son feels even more alienated. He does finds his grandfather's grave, a lone circle of stones in the bush, and achieves some sense of connection with tradition and with his father as they recover the story of this feared*

[6] http://www.ogram.org/sperry/papers/OnWriting.shtml. Armstrong Sperry states 14 languages when he wrote this unpublished paper in unpublished papers are available on this website.

[7] Paul Sharrad, *Albert Wednt and Pacific Literature: Circling the void.* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 2003, 39—57.

[8] Paul Sharrad, *Albert Wednt* 2003, 8

[9] Paul Sharrad, *Albert Wednt* 2003, 44

Samoan community and by the shared realization of the Maori history of dispossession. The girl discovers she is pregnant, makes her peace with her father (who, while a superficially typical pakeha settler-capitalist, has himself left the family farm and forsaken a Maori lover because of family prejudice) and goes to her boyfriend's mother for support. Ironically, she looks up to the Samoan woman as a warm, more forceful, presence than her own neurotic mother palely loitering among her cultivated flower garden. But her boy's mother is horrified that she will be unlikely to have her boy as a success-story exhibit to take home and that she will be cursed with 'half-caste' grandchildren. *The pregnant girl does not want her boyfriend to feel pressured into a wedding (her own birth having been the reason for her parents' less-than-ideal marriage), so she travels to Sydney and has an abortion.*	*pagan isolate who had 'removed the centre of his circle' by killing his beloved wife, performing an abortion on her in suspicion of her being unfaithful.* *After a fairly sordid time in the more urbanized Apia, the youth resolves to return to New Zealand. His mother, glorying in the modern palagi amenities brought back from the years away, triumphantly tells her prized son that he cannot go back to his girlfriend. Realizing that she has persuaded the girl to have the abortion, he ritually slaps her in renunciation of his connection and we see him finally suspended between the two countries, flying back to Wellington.*

Wednt relocates Luke's prodigal into the concrete life of island people in the 1970's, and the commonwealth literature of the 60s and 70s fight for decolonization.[10] However, they may have downplayed the Bible's influence. For this paper, this is the most ample commentary on Luke 15: 11-35 ever written. The prodigal is a Samoan younger son, struggling to find a place for himself in a colonial context. Wednt has challenged the biblical narrative in every way, and no stone is left unturned in the most gripping parts of the biblical narrative. This article is no place to match in detail Luke's story to Wednt's retelling. But here are the components where Wednt's retelling is very much at home than the Western interpretations of Luke 15: 11-32.

1. Immigrant **families,** prodigal **sons** and **daughters**

Wednt replaces the biblical prodigal son individualistic view with island perception of family migration in the early seventies. They left the islands for greener pastures in New Zealand. But *Sons* went further to create a prodigal son within the Samoan immigrant family to re-establish the biblical sense of individualism. He himself (Wednt) was a son of the immigrant colonial minority in New Zealand. He experienced how immigrant families faced unexpected problems when their children grew up and were instantly caught between two different cultures in their new home.

The pakeha/palagi family in *Sons* is originally from England, the Empire that turned New Zealand into a colonial space in the 18th century. Wednt may had in mind the English prodigals who left the motherland for distant places, with reference to the English literature of Jane Austen and her companions. Cleverly juxtaposed in the storyline, the two families (Samoan and English) turned out to be both prodigals in New Zealand, the land of Maui, of the indigenous Maoris. The two young lovers (Samoan son and English daughter) went back to their roots (London and Samoa) in the end.

Wednt's idea of immigrant families enriches the biblical story. It reached out to several realities of island migration and colonial movements that created prodigals in both the Empire and the islands. Colonialism, as identified by most of Wednt's literary critics, was at the backdrop of global and local movements, of discovery and re-discovery, of prodigal sons and daughters, migration and change, discrimination and misunderstandings that re-created both the Empire and the islands in the early nineteenth century.

The purpose of most islanders who left for New Zealand in the 60's and 70's was to come back home, one day, with riches. It is a bare consequence of colonialism, mimicry and desire for economic equality. The purposes of the English families who followed the footsteps of Empire were to dig for more riches in the treasure islands

[10] Paul Sharrad *Albert Wednt* 2003, 39—57; W.D Ashcroft, "The place of the Spirit": Albert Wednt's Sons for the Return Home, *New Literature Review,* 9 (1981), 26-27

and colonial spaces. New Zealand was therefore not viewed as a permanent home for both prodigals, rather, a a land of milk, money and honey, and islanders (the older generation) like the protagonist's parents, only wanted to acquire wealth, as benefactors of the colonizers education for their sons. This is more concrete and appealing to Oceania, to critique and appreciate colonization, rather than a younger son who turned his back to avoid the challenges of the colonial space.

2. The **distant** land

The name of the distant land in the biblical story is never mentioned. It is only referred to as a distant land, where the son squandered his property in dissolute living (Lk. 15: 13). If historical criticism is accurate, then it has to be a country under colonial rule of the Roman Empire. The distant country was struck by a famine, and the son began to be in need. No one gave him anything. The foreign land in Wednt's story is New Zealand. It is a dream place for islanders of the 60's and 70's Oceania. But Wednt exposed the shortcomings of the dream land in a way that was common to commonwealth and postcolonial writers of the time.

Sons is set in the context of New Zealand in the early 70's, and is "founded on a black-white dichotomy, exposing racist and colonialist discriminations and charting the main character's path towards iconoclastic self-possession in a complex and conflictual world."[11] New Zealand is a colonial space in the novel. It hosts both the colonizer (English family of the girlfriend) and the colonized (Maoris and Islanders) including the protagonist's immigrant family. In that sense, New Zealand, the distant land, is set up as a land of opportunities for both colonizer and colonized. But that is not all to Wednt's perception of places. He smartly used the perceptions of the indigenous Maori to unveil the injustices of colonization and the dispossession of the Maoris in their own backyard by the pākena. There is more to the distant land than what is indicated in the Lukan prodigal. Oceania literature teaches us a lot on this.

The overt sexuality in the novel may be taken as Wednt's exposition of the unexplained 'dissolute living' in the Lukan story. Sex is liberated into a form of self-expression and spontaneity as in the storyteller's generation of the 70's New Zealand, set up in the novel as a place of immoral sexual values—homosexuality, gang rape, and premarital licentiousness. This is obviously written from the viewpoint of Samoan parents and churchgoing islanders, permeated by Victorian missionaries in the South Seas. It resembles the view of the distant land in the gospel of Luke, a land of wastefulness and immoral living.

3. The **Return**

'Return' in *Sons* is a creative exposition of the Lukan return. Wednt offered the return of two prodigals, the island son and the English daughter. The son returned with his family to the islands with wealth from New Zealand. The pakeha/palagi girl returned to London, torn apart (inwardly) after her abortion in Sydney. It indicates the complexity of a 'return' from Wednt's view, after years in colonial spaces. This is relevant especially for the younger generation of islanders in Diaspora, as portrayed by the protagonist. This complexity of a 'return' is one of the greatest components of the Lukan story. Commentators of Luke 15 failed to see that complexity it in the light of the Returnees of the post-exilic era (That may be another article).

What I am saying here is that the idea of a 'return' is biblical, with its plethora of motives and complexities. The Return of the Samoan family was a dream come true to the parents, and not to their son. The Younger generation of islanders in New Zealand and beyond faced the same crisis. They are expected to return against their will, or that they returned expecting 'island in the sun,' instead, returned to 'island without a sun.' The 'return' to the islands according to *Sons* is not so much of a cultural miss or beloved country. It is rather an economic driven optimism. Biblical scholars of Luke have a lot to learn from *Sons*, to explore the complexity of the so-called 'come to his senses' that sparked the return in the Lukan story.

[11] Paul Sharrad, *Albert Wednt 2003,* 43-44

4. **Home:** What is home?

The image of Samoa (Home) to the younger son in New Zealand was only seen through his mother's memories and representations. The protagonist left Samoa as a young kid, and he only remembered how he participated in the slaughtering of a pig (significant reference to pigs in the Lukan prodigal). Home in *Sons* is a complicated search (opposite of 'home' as portrayed in the Lukan story) and it is Wednt's most valuable contribution to island postcolonial thinking. It signifies paradox and contradiction as indicated in the son's or the protagonist's search for a homeland. It is developed right from the beginning of the novel, and came to its conclusions in the final lines.

In the first few chapters, *silence* is a recurrent word and it is variously ". . . hostile, sympathetic, critical, awkward, fragile and healing" (Sharrad 2003, 50). This silence helps develop the two vital elements in *Sons*, "the politics of self-transformation" and the "philosophy of possibility" (Ashcroft 1981, 24). *Silence* indicates the failure of language to express the deep seated contradictions in the heart of the son's search, and Ashcroft rightly articulates, "The discovery of silence as the ultimate direction of language . . . turns the boundaries of time and space inside out. The circle of the self becomes boundless because it becomes the circumference of that silence" (Ashcroft 1981, 24). While *silence* becomes a tool of self-transformation, the place of 'home' in such search for meaning becomes fluid and opens up new beginnings, beyond island horizons. The prodigal's return with his parents to the dream home(is)land, Samoa, is such an ironical connection to his roots. He observed how his own grandfather (who committed suicide) conducted an abortion and killed his wife, thus breaking his own family lines, just like the English girlfriend who opted for abortion in Sydney.

Samoa was no longer his dreamhome(is)land. Island life is no longer paradise. There is no island homecoming. Where is the true home(is)land? To the Jewish writer of Luke 15: 11-32, homeland is where security and plentifulness is, the Promised Land. Everyone else is the 'other.' To the prodigal in*Sons*, he remains a permanent outsider until the end. Writing out of misery, Wednt seems to declare that 'he cannot find the homeland that he cannot cease to yearn for except as an Oceania that is succumbing to the rot of colonialism and capitalist greed.'[12] However, the islander prodigal in *Sons* maintained his self-respect, integrity, and confidence in his decisions. He did not want to be turned into a domesticated Islander.

At the end of the novel, the Islander prodigal was on the plane back to New Zealand, the colonial space. While he was suspended on air, he stated;

He didn't know why he was going back (NZ), but even that didn't seem important any longer. . .
He had nothing to regret, nothing to look forward to.
All was well
He was alive; at a new beginning. He was free of his dead. . .

***Talalasi* encircles voids of who we are in biblical stories**

We have tried to see the biblical prodigal in the sea of stories and what it could offer to the modern Oceania reader. Exemplifying the nature of the ocean, *talalasi* is fluid, enriching and give spaces for progress. *Talalasi* exposes injustices of colonial racism and misguided notions of island paradise in the sea of stories. It allows balance and fairness in terms of representation and self determination.

Sons and *Call it Courage* encircle the void of who we are as Oceania sons and daughters in Luke's Prodigal Son. They retell the biblical worldview of leaving and returning home in a more realistic fashion to islanders of today and tomorrow. After all, to be excluded or to be forced into a story without our own experiences is itself an indication of a void to be encircled. It is better to turn to our Oceania retellings to fill such emptiness in our

[12] These points can be detected from 'Towards a new Oceania', *MANA Review,* 1:1 (1976) 49-60 and 'In a stone castle in the South Seas', *MANA* Review 1:2 (1976), 27-29

continuing search and struggle for new beginnings. Island is and is not always home(is)land; The idea of Home today is fluid and compiex. Island as home(is)land is where we begin anew.

Ua lava na tala, e talalasi Samoa!!!

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