

## Reading the Literatures of Hawai'i Under an "Americanist" Rubric

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*If I perceive my ignorance as a gap in knowledge instead of an imperative that changes the very nature of what I think I know, then I do not truly experience my ignorance. (Barbara Johnson 1987: xi)*

### I. NOTES FROM THE SCENE OF "INSTRUCTION"

In 1893, following the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, U.S. President Grover Cleveland, after whom no high schools are named in Hawai'i, deplored the fact that:

By an act of war, committed with the participation of a diplomatic representative of the United States and without authority of Congress, the Government of a feeble but friendly and confiding people has been overthrown. A substantial wrong has thus been done which a due regard for our national character as well as the rights of the injured people requires we should endeavor to repair. ("President's Message Relating to the Hawaiian Islands – December 18, 1893" in Scudder 1994: p. 32)

Rather than repair the wrongs, Cleveland's successor, William McKinley, after whom a high school in Honolulu is named, claimed the islands as a U.S. Territory. More than a century later, as Haunani-Kay Trask argues, it comes as a surprise to most Americans that Hawai'i is an American colony: "the ideology that the United States has no overseas colonies and is, in fact, the champion of self-determination the world over holds no greater sway than in the United States itself" (Trask 1993: 180). This desire to *not know* about Hawai'i in specific cultural and historical ways remains the norm on the continent (U.S.) even in the wake of Public Law 103-150, "Apology to Native Hawaiians on Behalf

of the United States for the Overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii," a Joint Resolution of Congress signed by President Clinton in 1993 (text in Scudder 1994). The apology, it should be noted, has been followed by a decade of lawsuits attacking Hawaiian "entitlements," and on their heels the Akaka Bill, which offers Hawaiians "Native American" status and "self-determination" *under the plenary power* of the Board of Indian Affairs.

Most English teachers who arrive at the State's flagship campus (faculty at UH-Mānoa are predominantly continental *haole* [whites] like myself) are initially held by the convenient ignorance through which Hawai'i is unproblematically and irreversibly assimilated into the U.S. Those who feel an ethical imperative to begin "decolonizing" their thought through study of the grounds they teach on, are led by the process to reassess pedagogical practices in ways that are not simply extensions of (post)national reconceptualizings of fields and disciplines. In Hawai'i, where the indigenous people continue to struggle for a land base, critical introspection about how one's teaching of "American literature" reproduces or creatively displaces colonial poetics involves consciousness of *place*, or *knowing one's place* in terms of the post-annexation history of education. This involved a concerted program of imparting "American civilization" to ethnic minorities (Fuchs 1961: 283) and a systematic repression of Hawaiian ways of seeing and knowledges (Benham and Heck 1998).

The differences in the cultural poetics of texts produced in and about Hawai'i in such an educational/political climate inform contemporary divisions among Hawai'i's famously diverse population, and can themselves be foregrounded in "American literature" (AmLit) classes. Juxtaposed with representative texts in the expanding field of American Studies, they serve as a means of turning what might be a scene of displacement into an occasion for exploring the situatedness of reading practices, as well as the problem of students' often double-consciousness inducing relation to the U.S. imaginary. Texts produced in Hawai'i may themselves in turn be illuminated by exploring their relation (or opposition) to residual or emergent U.S. paradigms. For instance, a founding "local" work like Milton Murayama's, *all i asking for is my body*, a novel in which the nisei narrator escapes the confines of a Maui sugar plantation, can be read as an embodiment of the Americanist paradigm of self/society, or as fitting models of generational paradigms for immigrant fiction, or as a text in which an oppressed settler group, in part by identifying with a competitive American ethos, elides or displaces the indigenous people.

This sort of multi-perspectival approach requires initial, reductive taxonomies, which can only be touched on here by way of establishing contexts for a located pedagogy in Hawai'i, among the following epistemo-cultural traditions:

1. *Haole* settler culture, whose heritage in the islands is largely rooted in colonial legacies, eurocentric views and/or their critique, including canny oppositional regionalisms in a reenvisioned Asia/Pacific that fractures the "nation state imaginary" (Wilson) and a turn among longtime Hawai'i residents toward "local" and Hawaiian themes (raising questions of propriety, misrepresentation, appropriation).
2. "Local" communities, in one version, Asian-led and cohesively conscious of a journey up from a plantation heritage; in other versions, rooted in an awareness of indigenous priorities (Sumida 1992), and/or "post-local" and/or bonded through alternative communities, and/or affiliated with other sites of settler creolization and resistance.
3. Indigenous Hawaiian culture, with its sometimes primordialist poetic and historiographic articulations (Trask 1999) assertions of family relations among a pan-Pacific community, and more hybrid articulations.

"Literatures of Hawai'i" (LOH) refers to all of the above, and more, and is thus a sum of contestations; Hawaiian literature refers to writings by persons tracing their genealogy to before European contact.

Among these posited divisions "local" is demographically largest, hardest to define, and most internally fissured. As products and in turn purveyors of colonial education, with its dismissive attitude toward indigenous and "local" traditions, many "locals" identify as "Americans," ambivalently or not, and pursue self-inscription within "mainland" markets or paradigms. Others assert the "local" as a linguistic group whose language has long been repressed by schools and ignored by mainland publishers (Tonouchi 2002), or as a geo-ethno-"working-class"-anti-colonial identity resistant to inscription within "mainland" subjectivities (Okamura 1996). In some versions this emergent "local" sensibility resembles "American" regionalisms (the South, with its conflicted memory, structural class shifts, oral-based storytelling, or a certain Southwest with its consciousness of a tri-cultural base). In other versions, the "local" asserts a sub-national status, analogous to the ethnic cultural nationalisms that emerged out of Civil Rights movements (Fujikane 1994). From the point of view of the latter, the regionalistic Hawai'i amounts to feel-good nostalgia that fetishizes "small-kid time"

(and is thus arrested at an early stage in a developmental narrative) and feeds American reconfigurations, and the sub-nationalistic amounts to a claim upon Hawaiian lands, or legitimization of Hawai'i as Asian or multicultural settler state. The exclusion and/or stereotyping of Tongan, Samoan, Filipino (locals) and Hawaiians by local-Asians within this posited multiculturalism has itself caused much contentiousness, as is effectively discussed in *Whose Vision? Asian Settler Colonialism in Hawai'i* (eds Fujikane and Okamura 2000).

Worth noting in order to understand the present situation is the fact that, however linked Hawai'i's literary movements may be to global transformations, colonial poetics are now subject to critique and counter-narration within a range of public institutions, including the university system and its traditionally colonial English departments. The Hawaiian language, banned as a medium of instruction by the Provisional Government (1896) and long in critical condition, is being rejuvenated in immersion schools (*Punana Leo* or "language nests" and Charter Schools). The Hawaiian Renaissance that began as a spiritual, cultural and political movement in the 1960s has produced both a varied contemporary body of writing, extending the possibilities of expression (collected in several anthologies, and in the Hawaiian journal, *Oiwi*), and a vital scholarship that refocuses attention on the richness of nineteenth-century writing, much of which first appeared in the hundreds of Hawaiian language newspapers that circulated before the overthrow among a population with one of the highest literacy rates in the world. Such newspapers, begun as a medium through which American values were imposed on the islands, became a forum for native resistance as well, so that colonialism and anti-colonialism often work through them at the same time. HCE, the first language of 700,000 people in the state, derogated for a century within Hawai'i's schools, has flourished as a literary language, and often links "local" and Hawaiian forms of expression (as in Lisa Kanae's *Sista Tongue*, Kathy Banggo's *4-Evas*, *Anna*, or Joe Balaz's *Electric Laulau*). Local and Hawaiian, that is, were not always as contentious as they sometimes appear in contemporary formulations (Morales 1998), and Hawaiians often assert identification with both without contradiction (Okamura 1996).

## II. OF "AMERICANIST" RUBRICS

Given the contexts sketched above, and the movement from left to center to dialogize U.S. curricula, one must ask what in the line of Americanist rubrics and methods resonates in Hawai'i? Here surveys –

and the anthologies they are organized around, sustain, and are sustained by (the industry shows no signs of closing shop) – might be taken as tropes for the "field" to ask on what terms AmLit remains conceptually viable, or whether, surveyable or not, AmLit can be creatively *engaged*. In this chapter, which emerges out of personal quandries in designing core, Intro/AmLit classes, and which does not refer to courses with primarily postcolonial, regional and/or Hawai'i/Pacific-centered content, I approach the above questions by imagining AmLit surveys (as long as we are called on to teach them) as sites for subjecting "national narratives" to an anti-colonial scrutiny that acknowledges their historic and *ongoing* relevance in Hawai'i without reifying nation-building assumptions.

In this I resist the temptation to begin courses catalogued under AmLit with a statement like, *There is no such thing as American literature*, as Gregory Jay advocated a decade ago. Jay's solving of the problem of the referent "America" by dissolving it is a compelling gesture, since regarding "America" as legitimate referent *does* to some degree return one to "neo-nationalist" paradigms, call them *Heath* or New Americanist, which, located nowhere in particular, are winning the field. For me, however, teaching at a university built on *not*-postcolonial, ceded Hawaiian land, the evacuation of Americanist rubrics without an actually pulling out (at least of courses labeled AmLit from the catalogue) seems, if not disingenuous or premature, then not sufficiently (de)constructive.

Such "new" paradigms are "neo" in the sense that, while insisting on "America" as a Humpty-Dumpty of a referent – and providing materials for competing and even anti-nationalist constructions to emerge – their framing implicitly reinscribes regionalist tropes (in Phillip Fisher's sense of American Studies as characterized by a shift from "myths" to "rhetorics") in which the (post)nation's exceptionalism now resides in rhizomatic cultures played out against, under, around, in spite of a common enemy, the white mythology of Schlessengeristic America and its institutional manifestations in the State. Underlying this conception is the practice of extending U.S. citizenship (with due multicultural "difference") retroactively to the arts of annexed lands so that, once a people's territory has been seized through military force, or once a border has crossed people, their arts become anthologizable as AmLit. Only through such thinking, of course, could the "Colonial Period" or the texts narrating the scramble for and establishment of what Howard Mumford Jones called the "future U.S." have ever been considered U.S. Writing. Of course, it is also importantly the case that, without such "inclusiveness," one is liable to have the sorts of exclusive,

Eurocentric anthologies that for years simply erased the workings of colonialism, and the historical complexities of cultural clash and exchange in the Americas.

Hawai'i, however, remains tellingly peripheral to all such rubrics, and thus a vantage point from which the imperial dynamics of U.S. poetics, including internal colonization of and by settler groups, are readily visible. For instance, except for a few poems by two Asian American poets (Garrett Hongo, who left Hawai'i at age nine, and Yale Younger Poet award winner, Cathy Song) there are no Hawai'i writings in the *Heath*. This cannot be attributed to a scarcity of materials that might have represented Hawai'i in ways consonant with the *Heath's* refinements of what qualifies as "literature" and/or "American," or its reenvisioning of AmLit as multicultural from (before) its putative origins. Nearly every entry in the *Heath* could have some counterpart from Hawai'i, from explorer narratives to sermons to indigenous chants, stories, and excerpts from any of a number of nineteenth-century Hawaiian novels. The point of this observation is *not* to lobby for the inclusion in AmLit anthologies of texts "from" Hawai'i (or to criticize the *Heath*, which I regard as the best of the AmLit anthologies). Rather, the virtual erasure in the *Heath* of Hawai'i as a place rich in textual production manifests anxiety about how to think/not think about Hawai'i within the parameters of U.S. literatures. Imagining Hawai'i as naturally part of the U.S. (as in the widespread use of the word "mainland" for the U.S. continent), but culturally "American" only on certain terms, fulfills political, economic, and psychological needs, which split around "Hawaiianess."

However, while Hawaiian culture has the status of fantasy from the "mainland" U.S. position, multicultural literary Hawai'i is increasingly assimilable to neo-American paradigms, continuing senses in which Hawai'i, since the "drive toward statehood," has been promoted as a proto-version of American ethnic pluralism. Thus, Jamie James in *Atlantic Monthly* lauded the arrival of the "Hawaiian Bard" in the form of Asian-local Lois-Ann Yamanaka, and an essay in the "progressive" *Honolulu Weekly* invoked James as confirmation of a "renaissance of Hawaiian literature" without referring to a single work of Hawaiian literature (Coleman 1999). The diversion of multiculturalism into "safe channels," that is, as Ang and Stratton have argued of the U.S. and Australia, cannot include indigenous peoples in an "image of consensual unity-in-diversity without erasing the memory of colonial dispossession, genocide, and cultural loss and its continued impact" (155).

In short, in my view neither the attempt to "extend canon and curriculum" (Lauter *et al.* 1990: xli), which seems poised to take in a certain Hawai'i, nor Jay's desire to "uproot" AmLit's "conceptual model" (Jay 1991: 264), nor the attempt to re-"route" AmLit sufficiently engages socio-poetic conflict in Hawai'i. Global/local or "Americas cultural studies" (Cheyfitz 1995) approaches, for all their usefulness in drawing out both colonial and early Americas rhizomatic diversity, and their flexibility in describing post-modern flows of capital and identity, sacrifice purchase in Hawai'i on questions like ownership and administration of land, funding for social and cultural programs, or control of the media and school systems. To consider evictions or prison demographics in Hawai'i, for instance, is to recall continental racism, and at least consider Eliot Butler Evans' assertion that "Rodney King was beaten as a member of an American minority, not as a member of the black diaspora" (quoted in Wong 1995: 18). The point here is not in turn to minimize senses in which Hawai'i is and has been subject to globalizing forces, but to suggest that a force-field of "American" ideologies continues to attract, shape, and hold students in Hawai'i. To that extent, the *Heath*, taken as an index of structural and institutional transformations in the "Americanist" field, remains an appropriate and useful rubric under which – using supplemental LOH readings – to locate a pedagogy in Hawai'i.

### III. ASPECTS OF A LOCATED PEDAGOGY

To practice a located pedagogy means to approach a given topic (here, AmLit and how it speaks in/to Hawai'i) in relation to the cultural priorities, conversations, histories, and narratives of a particular place. Implicitly or explicitly, a located pedagogy opposes the imposition of (trans)national agendas (including critical/methodological ones) upon a regional, local, and/or indigenous population. Located pedagogy prioritizes the histories of a place, and, in terms of cultural analysis, becomes *critical* by attending to ways in which these *vertical* or historical structures engage *horizontal* or contemporary movements along the evolving horizons of the regional (Asia/Pacific or Pan-Pacific), national-state imaginary (U.S.), and global.

My own attempt at "located pedagogy" involves three aspects, conceived of as interanimating rather than sequenced:

1. A tracking and interior critique ("inside narrative") of American institutions and self-imaginings as they emerge, are consolidated, and circulate through "American" writings and out into the Pacific

from the time of Euroamerican–Native contact through White America's "process of organizing American coherence through a distancing of African[ist]" and other "presences" and idioms (Morrison 1992: 8).

2. An exploration of how attention to the contingencies or "location" of aesthetic response, as well as an appreciation of the difficulties of reading – let alone reading interculturally – might keep one's politics in the classroom (relatively) honest.
3. The introduction of the multiple and competing traditions of the "Literatures of Hawai'i," indigenous and endemic in particular, as complicitous with U.S. hegemony, or as counter-texts to orientalist and U.S. national narratives, and/or as alter/Native poetics.

My first emphasis is based on a belief that, whether in the Western psychoanalytic sense, or in a Hawaiian sense of "*ho'oponopono*" (to make something right through healing discussion), creative understanding and engagement must include an engagement of the sources of the present situation. This is not, in my view, simply the task of "Early American literature" courses; rather, the more contemporary a text the more massive the histories behind it. Most of my students *are* American and it is appropriate that we clarify our relations to U.S. teleologies. I have found it valuable, for instance, to begin AmLit classes with the double-edged question, "How did Hawai'i become part of the United States?" (through what political processes and military acts, and with what effects to the consciousnesses and self-narration of people in Hawai'i), and to suggest over a semester how an answer might be augmented by an assessment of both centuries of continental ideological formation, and the linked and analogous cultural dynamics through which a colonizing power's importation of labor to a native place contributed to a contentious multiculturalism and hybrid subjectivities, expressed textually through competing or conflicted claims upon Hawaiian locality.

Of initial value for anatomizing American Pacific Orientalism, and encouraging a located "historical sense" of U.S. imperialism long missing from the study of American culture (Kaplan 1993), are works like Edgar Allan Poe's fetishistic *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) and Herman Melville's psychosomatic *Typee* (1846). Poe's text exemplifies ways in which scientific racism underlies a nascent American capitalism linking factions of the U.S. to each other and to the Pacific islands and Asia, while *Typee* (in addition to a number of vicious swipes at Hawaiian royalty) at once perpetuates the touristic, escapist tradition of literary perceptions of the Pacific (that persists powerfully) and inaugurates a

subversive, anti-imperialist critique that matures into the vision of American exploitative labor-relations in the conquest of the resources of the Pacific in *Moby-Dick*. In ideologically saturated "travelogues" like these, and subsequently elsewhere, images of islanders, African Americans, and Native Americans were increasingly interconnected, so that during the drive to annex Hawai'i, U.S. cartoons represented Queen Lili'uokalani as African American.

My second emphasis, on reading, develops connections among aesthetics, ideology, and location, while acknowledging both the anti-mimetic strangenesses and artful mobilization of culturally varied forms through which language relates the world. In one sense, I follow Barbara Johnson's recuperative aesthetics in regarding literature as a mode of language "where impasses can be kept and opened for examination, where questions can be guarded and not forced into a premature validation of the available paradigms" (Johnson 1987: 15). At the same time, the holding open of texts happens within coordinates, and one responsibility of located pedagogy is to foster vigilance about how texts position readers along outsider/insider continuums, in particular through their regimes of naming. Only with such awareness can students consciously position texts, and analyze how canons and methods disenfranchise and disorient populations by encouraging them toward semiotic grids that resist or conscript them. There is considerable force in demonstrating the workings of "rhetorical county" in literature, or the textual borders beyond which explanation becomes required, and then considering, alternatively, the possibilities of achieving a widened syntax of being through modes of textual travel.

My third emphasis involves both a comparative and multiperspectival mode, juxtaposing LOH texts with continental texts at all levels and phases of AmLit courses, while considering the positioning of LOH works themselves in relation to Hawaiian issues, forms, and expressive traditions (as in Rodney Morales's uses of Hawaiian shark tales in *When the Shark Bites* or Gary Pak's sense of Hawaiian cultural forms as underlying the healthy construction of "local" communities in *The Valley of the Dead Air*). In the multi-perspectival mode, one might approach Hawaiian writer John Dominis Holt's tri-lingual (English, HCE, and Hawaiian) novel, *Wairimea Summer*, as a pastoral text in the continental coming-of-age tradition, as a more localized expression of divided subjectivity and allegiance within interlinked multi-and mixed-ethnic communities, or as a text whose heart remains steeped in the Hawaiian culture it only seems to flee from in the end.

The comparative mode emphasizes the contingency of literary status and the ethics of canons and representation. For instance, reading Jack

London's "Ko'olau the Leper" alongside Pi'ilani Ko'olau's "The True Story of Kalauiko'olau," and comparing the two in terms of even familiar Western categories like stylistic richness, emotive force, characterization, and thematic demonstrates the potential violence of teaching texts like Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* or Hemingway's "Indian Camp" without teaching countertexts from the perspective of those represented. That many Hawai'i-educated students have read London, and few have heard of Pi'ilani, brings home the shameful dynamics of a colonial education, a point effectively argued in essays by Ku'ualoha Ho'omanawanui and Dennis Kawaharada.

Today the comparative approach seems ethically and aesthetically necessary. As Rob Wilson writes, "post-modern justice demands" a court of consciousness in which the *mo'olelo* (Hawaiian story) as expression of another system of creativity, belief and *praxis* can not only get a hearing but "be preserved, and circulated for alternative knowledge" (Wilson 2000: 210), including knowledge about the value of stories. In fact, without alternative forms of knowledge and ways of seeing, one's experience of a *mo'olelo* will be superficial. As with other indigenous literatures, each story is packed with references, each with a story behind it that alludes to further stories, so that "one story is only the beginning of many stories" (Silko 1981: 56). Such stories, as Leslie Marmon Silko puts it, are in multiple-sense "maps" (64), full of thoughts on ethical leadership, spiritual values, and stewardship of land. To start an Early American Literature class with a reading like Dennis Kawaharada's of the Hawaiian, "He Mele No Kane," suggests to students opening the *Heath* to a Native American chant some of the kinds of cultural knowledge one would need to begin, in Langston Hughes' phrase, to "listen fluently," and suggests that such knowledge surrounds Hawai'i's readers in storied landscapes. Kawaharada frames his essays with a discussion of his own departure point from realizing that he had learned nothing about "Hawaiian traditions during [his] colonial education in Hawai'i" and was thus in a sense a "third-generation tourist traveling through a tropic landscape, ignorant of [its] stories" (Kawaharada 1999: 5). Becoming aware of such stories, and of what is lost when one thinks of land by the colonial name rather than the indigenous one ("Chinaman's Hat" rather than Mokoli'i), can be a stimulus for students to rethink their relation to the land they grew up on or occupy.

The sense of Native Hawaiian literature as informed by an alternative epistemology and frame of reference, and thus requiring modified reading practices, can be initially overwhelming with a text like S. N. Hale'ole's *La'ieikawai* (1864). The novel calls in its Preface for a Native

Hawaiian literature that would look superficially "like those of the foreigners," at once claiming and modifying the form in its attempt to preserve things Hawaiian for future generations. The ways in which Hale'ole's text is embedded in its historical period are complex, and the text rewards the reader in some proportion to knowledge of Hawaiian culture, drawing the reader far enough in at each phase to run up against further complexities. To look at its mentions of particular birds, topographical features, winds, and to feel that there are further stories behind each reference, can step up and frustrate the desire to know. *La'ieikawai* abounds in magical scenes (a girl followed by a rainbow), marvelous contests (one champion's *mo'o* biting off the ears of the other's fighting dog), and visual images (a woman balancing on the wings of a bird), but it is so textured with figurative language, puns, and references that a reader like myself feels at once enticed and productively disabled.

Particularly enabling to local students (and instructors) for conceptualizing the ongoing potential of texts like Hale'ole's to modify habits of perception and reading is Richard Hamasaki's essay, "Mountains in the Sea," (1993) which presents a *verticalist* vision of Hawaiian traditions as percolating up and through and sometimes synthesizing with the various sedimented layers of post-contact history (including the records left by explorers, missionaries, whalers, colonialists, immigrants). Such a vision never denies the potential value of what crosses the beach into Hawai'i, but recurrently insists on the precondition to any ethical and informed assessment of the epistemological stakes behind the encounter of attending to the indigenous. Those providing scholarly resources for hearing where indigenous works *come from*, and for decolonizing reading practices, insist that all epistemological contestation within representation is importantly contemporary, and that any postcolonial analysis of Hawaiian or "local" literature not grounded in the vertical will tend toward committing the violations it ethically deplores: ungrounded critiques of globalization's effect on the "local," that is, tend to serve the ends of globalization itself.

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