

Looking Past the Covers: Exploring the Three Subtypes of Hawaii's Literature and the Outside Effects

Kyla-Marie K. Turner
(University of Hawaii, USA)

Abstract: In Hawaii's history of literature, most pieces of work were considered all to be "Hawaiian" literature. However after further observations into the people being represented in these works, the literature in Hawaii was spilt into three considerable subtypes: literary tourist literature, local literature, and Hawaiian literature. While delving into pieces from each respective subtype of Hawaii's literature, it is clear that though each subtype before Hawaiian literature has made many contributions to the preservation of many stories and histories in Hawaii, it has also led to much of the stereotyping of Hawaii, as well as the isolation of local and Hawaiian voices. Outside of the literary world, the views, connotations, and stereotypes written about Hawaii and its people in these earlier pieces of work led to some negative effects to Hawaii, such as seen with destructive tourism and the erasure of local and Hawaiian voices. It is through the separation of the subtypes that has allowed for a more accurate depiction and the correction of false and negative stereotypes of Hawaii and its people.

Key words: Hawaii, literary tourist literature, local literature, Hawaiian literature, effects of literature

1. Introduction

When it comes to literature in Hawaii, there are three subtypes of literature that can be found: literary tourist literature, local literature, and Hawaiian literature. Up until quite recently in Hawaii's academia, all three subtypes of literature were considered to be Hawaiian literature. However, when looking deeper into the voices being represented and the authors who were publishing, it was later spilt into these three separate subtypes of literature. It is through this spilt into three separate subtypes that we can see the importance of labeling each as they were, as well as the long-term effects they have had on both inside and outside the literary world.

2. Literary Tourist Literature

Literary tourist literature is the subtype of Hawaii's literature that comprises of literature written in Hawaii or about Hawaii by literary tourists, or writers who have no (geneological or ethnic) ties or connection to Hawaii, and write about it after visiting. These literary tourists include but are not limited to James Cook, Isabella Bird, and Mark Twain. Historically, literary tourists have contributed greatly towards the preservation of Hawaii's history and traditional culture, capturing in great detail the ways of Hawaii in their writings as they traveled throughout the islands, taking note on the "peculiarities" of the people and culture. However, their outside

Kyla-Marie K. Turner, BA English and Anthropology, University of Hawaii; research areas: Hawaiian culture, Hawaiian history, Hawaiian literature. E-mail: turner20@hawaii.edu.

perspective and commentary on the native people and culture has also led to some misunderstandings and miscommunications on the attitudes the native people had towards certain events or things that took place, mostly due to these practices and culture being so unfamiliar and unlike the western culture. Yet, despite this lack of understanding at a deep level for these cultures, this subtype of literature in Hawaii dominated the narrative of Hawaii for many years until quite recently, and it can be speculated that a reason why this may be is all due to one famous work of literature in Hawaii.

The anthology *A Hawaiian Reader* by A. Grove Day and Carl Stroven is a collection of thirty seven works, only five of which were written by Hawaiians scholars or writers. This can be seen right at the beginning in the table of context, where it is seen that the very first piece of work is none other than an account from Captain James Cook and his time in Hawaii. The rest is much the same, save for the very end where those five big time Hawaiian writers can be finally found, seemingly “slapped” right at the end for the sake of “representation”. This is one of the reasons behind this anthology's controversy, due to the lack of diverse representation in this anthology to accurately depict Hawaii according to multiple perspectives and lenses, especially that of the native and local peoples. This is somewhat talked about in the introduction, which was written by James Michener, the author of the controversial novel *Hawaii*. In the introduction, Michener mentions the lack of local sources, especially those by “oriental” writers, thus justifying the chosen works from mainly tourist authors.

This anthology does a great job at capturing Hawai'i as literary tourist will see it, but not as local and Hawaiian people see it. However, because Day and Stroven's intended audience is Americans — which technically at the time in 1959 the local and Hawaiian people were not yet — as a way to educate the American public on Hawaii before its Statehood, this is the Hawaii the “mainland” has come to acknowledge. Yet, as the local and native people of Hawaii will have people know, this is not an authentic Hawaii, and definitely not the Hawaii they know. This Hawaii is commercialized towards tourists with narratives and connotations of “paradise”, seen well in many novels like Michener's *Hawaii*. In *A Hawaiian Reader*, the views are that of someone from the outside looking in, while in romanticized novels like *Hawaii*, the Hawaiian people, local people, and Hawaii itself are portrayed and commercialized to fit the standards, norms, and ideals of the American people, as well as what they think Hawaii and its people are like. This representation and the connotations of Hawaiians and local people, the language(s) including botched pidgin, and culture by tourist authors contributes to a false narrative of the people. For some, novels like *Hawaii* also justify why Hawaii should become more colonized and “civilized”, in order to contribute to more “rag-to-riches” stories, and weed out the lazy. This is why the piece selections in *A Hawaiian Reader*, alongside the other works that perpetuates generalizations and stereotypes of Hawaiians and local peoples in Hawaii are great indicators of how tourist authors' portrayal of Hawai'i and its people should not be taken as a sole resource.

3. Local Literature

Local literature came to be technically due to the writings of tourist authors such as Michener. Local authors, writers, and scholars like Arnold Hiura, Stephen Sumida, and Milton Murayama directly challenged the claims and stereotization of Hawaii and local writers in many different ways. Looking at Hiura and Sumida's annotated bibliography “Asian American Literature of Hawaii: An Annotated Bibliography”, this was published in 1979 and contains works of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino people written between the 1920s and 1970. The annotated bibliography is considered to be a direct response to Michener's claim of a lack of “oriental” sources in

the introduction to *A Hawaiian Reader*. This directly showcases for readers that there was in fact a ton of local or "oriental" sources for Day and Stroven to use, and that they just either chose not to look or lacked the skills or resources to do so.

Alongside "Asian American Literature of Hawaii: An Annotated Bibliography", there is a plethora of creative works like Milton Murayama's *All I Asking For Is My Body*. This work specifically not only directly challenge authors like Michener in their portrayals of Hawaiian and local characters, but also gave voice to people that up until the 1950s and 60s have gone unheard. With this initial response from local writers like Murayama is where we see Bamboo Ridge Publications emerge. Bamboo Ridge is a publication company started in 1978 in Hawaii (one year before Hiura and Sumida published their annotated bibliography), and it promotes local writers. During this time period of Murayama, Sumida, and Hiura, it really opened up an avenue for local voices to speak about Hawaii from their perspectives and experiences, dispelling many of the stereotypical narratives created by tourist authors.

One such release from Bamboo Ridge was the introduction by Darrell H.Y. Lum from *The Best of Bamboo Ridge: Growing Up Local* anthology called "Local Genealogy: What School You Went?". In this piece, Lum describes the local culture of asking a person what school they are from to establish a connection with people, rather than asking directly where they are from and how they might know each other. Lum explains how this local cultural practice derives from the Hawaiian cultural practice of asking a person genealogical and geographical questions (such as "who is your family?" and "where are you from?") to understand that person better, showing how closely tied Hawaiian culture and local culture truly is.

This representation was fresh to Hawaii's literary scene, especially following a literary tourist dominated narrative of Hawaii and its people. With local literature and its authors taking back the narrative, it allowed for a more authentic picture to be illustrated of the diverse culture and backgrounds that lived and thrived in Hawaii. However, as Bamboo Ridge became more and more vocalized in Hawai'i and Hawaii's literary scene, there is an absence that can be found of one group's voice who plays a key role in Hawaii, its history, and culture: the Hawaiians. This is where we start to see Hawaiian writers come into play, and their writings would come to define the last subtype of literature in Hawaii.

4. Hawaiian Literature

Hawaiian literature historically was once defined as any literature produced in or about Hawaii, but as we've seen with the other two subtypes, getting specific has allowed for a more accurate and genuine representation and portrayal of Hawaii and its people. Hawaiian literature today is defined as literature produced by Native Hawaiians, and usually centers around themes or topics of native identity, Hawaiian rights, (de)colonization, gentrification, and so on. One such Native Hawaiian is Haunani Kay-Trask, one of the most well-known and respected activists, writers, and educators to date. Many of her works, such as *From A Native Daughter* challenges the history which has been taught and marketed as the truth, going back in detail in her introduction of this work to talk about Hawaii's history and present. Her introduction gives an extended history of Hawai'i from a native perspective, gives facts on the events and circumstances that led to the overthrow and "annexation" of the Hawaiian Kingdom, and explains how these acts still affect Hawaiians to this day. This showcases Trask's fierce and unafraid nature when it came to herself and her knowledge Hawai'i and its history, and this attitude carried into all of her work. The introduction can also be viewed just as Hiura and Sumida's annotated bibliography was: a challenge to

the shallow justifications of Michener in *A Hawaiian Reader*, and to the lack of understanding of many when it comes to the history and cultures of Hawaii and her people. She uses her introduction as an opportunity to educate her audience on Hawaii from an ōiwi and kanaka maoli standpoint. In doing so, Trask shows tourist authors the intelligence of Hawaiians, and local writers the necessity of the Hawaiian voice when comes to (academic) literature in Hawaii, so as to not lose Hawaii completely.

Alongside Trask and her work reclaiming the Hawaiian voice in academia and literature was John Dominis Holt, a Native Hawaiian writer, poet, and cultural historian who was well-known for his pieces that explored the Hawaiian identity and experiences. Whereas Trask is credited to be a leading voice for the Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement and her work in both academic and creative literature, Holt is credited with being one of the founders of the Hawaiian Literary scene or movement within the Hawaiian Renaissance, due to his exploration of his Hawaiian identity through writing. One such piece by Holt where he explores his identity is “Rainbows Under Water”, in which Holt tells the story of his family home and how it was there in Kawela Bay that he had discovered pieces of himself as both a Hawaiian and a person of Hawaii. This exploration of the Hawaiian identity wasn't really done before, and for Holt to do it within publications and platforms like Bamboo Ridge, which had seen a lack of Hawaiian writers previously, was huge.

It is due to Trask's and Holt's scholarship, as well as that of many other Native Hawaiians during and after the Hawaiian Renaissance that we see a new generation of writers, such as Dr. Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio, emerging. It is writings like this that have inspired the continuation of Hawaiian voices to be heard and spoken through the written word, fighting against the erasure of the Hawaiian people and culture from their own homes.

5. Holding The Narrative: Effects of the Subtypes

Each subtype of literature in Hawai'i has contributed greatly to the historical preservation of Hawaii's culture, traditions, and stories, hence why each is super important when it comes to understanding Hawai'i in a fuller and more authentic point of view. However, despite how the separation of the three subtypes has started to “correct” the different issues of the subtype before them, it is important to note in a deeper context the effects of these subtypes outside of the literary world. There are definitely connotations and views of Hawaii that have become deeply-rooted due to the ways in which Hawaii's people, events, and places were written about.

Thinking first towards literary tourist literature, I already mentioned how this subtype of literature dominated the narrative of Hawaii for many years and how because of this, the portrayals of the people versus the place vary quite starkly. When it comes to Hawaiian and local people, their portrayals were often negative or false, creating false and negative connotations and stereotypes to emerge about them. However, when it comes to the portrayal of Hawaii itself as a place, that image has become overtly commercialized towards tourists with the propaganda of Hawaii being a “paradise” and a vacation destination, rather than a place which is a home full of rich history to its native and local people.

This contrast between the portrayals of people and place as written by tourist authors creates for a somewhat toxic dynamic between Hawai'i and her people in these types of literature. It also creates weird connotations of what Hawaii and its people are like or should be like for other tourists whose only knowledge of Hawaii prior to visiting is that it is the 50th state and of tropical climate. This is put very well in the *Kīpuka: Finding Refugee in Times of Change* journal article “I. Messed. Up” by Mark Panek. In this article, he talks about the dangers of these serious effects in the form of destructive tourism, seen in tourists like “Baltimore Brett”, whose only view of

Hawaii has been the playground for their vacation until they mess up so badly to the point where the wrath of the people of Hawaii fall upon them, forcing them to see Hawaii a bit differently. Even then, the extent to which they actually feel remorse for their actions, mindsets, and feelings can only reach Hawaii so far, because a lot of the time their remorse is most likely fueled by pressure, not understanding of wrong doing.

However, as Panek remarks, the blame cannot fully fall on them, because even though they made the mistake — which they should of course take accountability for — they did so because the picture they have of Hawaii in their minds is the result of years and years of Hawaii being portrayed as that “paradise” seen in many movies such as Elvis Presley’s movie “Blue Hawaii” or “50 First Dates”. Decades of the “paradise” narrative being the dominate narrative of Hawaii has led to decades of malpractice by the tourism industry and the State of Hawaii when it comes to tourism and real estate. The government has allowed much lax in tourism management since before statehood and utilizes it as a top economic contributor in Hawaii’s economy. This shows that not only has Hawaiian and local voices been pushed aside in literature, but also physically in their own homes as well.

Within this danger of isolation towards both local and Hawaiian people exists the danger of isolation for Hawaiian voices even further. As previously mentioned, the emergence with Hiura, Sumida, Murayama, and Bamboo Ridge led to the voice of local people becoming more and more heard, allowing for a more authentic Hawaii to be seen. However, through this, the danger lies in the encompassing of all the cultures that exist in Hawaii into one culture (local culture) without acknowledging origins. In a way this is similar to the amalgamation of culture in America “fusing” in a sense into one culture, though what it really is is the combining of multiple. Local culture in Hawaii is the amalgamation of the cultures of the different immigrants who came to Hawai’i with Hawaiian culture, and though this fusion of culture is definitely not a bad thing, when readers, tourists, and even its own people forget that, it can led to the erasure of Hawaiian culture and traditions as a separate being.

Without meaning to, this lack of separation can and already has in some ways contributed to the erasure of Hawaiian voices, which is why it was vital and important that Bamboo Ridge started publishing Hawaiian authors like John Dominis Holt. Without these authors, Hawaii’s local literature may have further contributed to the erasure of Hawaiian culture and traditions, or at the very least the Hawaiian voice. This is why the creation of the separate subtypes was important, because by separating local and Hawaiian literature, we are able to see fully the voices of the local and Hawaiian people thrive in their storytelling. This allows both to take ahold of the narrative of Hawaii, combatting to decolonize the “paradise” narrative of Hawaii and correcting the issues presented by literary tourist literature piece by piece, while also allowing for a more accurate Hawaii to be presented to the world from the viewpoint of Hawaii’s people.

6. Conclusion

The separation of Hawaii’s literature into three separate subtypes has allowed not only for more representation in Hawaii’s literature scene, but for more accurate depictions of local and Hawaiian people, as written by themselves. However, due to the years in which literary tourist literature dominated the narrative of Hawaii, supplementing the “paradise” narrative of Hawaii as a magical tropical landscape, the effects of literary tourist literature run deep. This is why it is more vital than ever for the next generation of local and Hawaiian writers to write and fill the narrative even more with our voices. The conscious taking back of the narrative, as well as the consciousness of the narratives that are created today will set forth the next big ideas on how each

subtypes of Hawaii's literature will look to future generations. Hence why it is vital not only to understand the importance of the separation of the subtypes, but also the current narrative that is in place. Only then might we start to understand how to look past the covers.

Acknowledgements

This work originally was a final term paper done for the English 323 Literature of Hawaii summer session class at UH Hilo, assigned by Professor Mark Panek. Later the paper was edited and the research was presented at the Second Hawaii International Conference on English Language and Literature Studies. The author would like to thank Professor Panek as well as her peers who had a hand in helping her shape the paper to what it is. Special thanks to Pohakalaokeaolani Van Veen and Rebekah Ke'alohe Wang for encouraging the author to submit the paper to the conference. Without their support and confidence in the author, this all would not be possible.

References

- Day Arthur Grove and Carl Stroven (1959). *A Hawaiian Reader*, University of Hawaii Press,
- Hiura Arnold T. and Stephen H. Sumida (1979). "Asian American literature of Hawaii: An annotated bibliography", *Japanese American Research Center*.
- Holt John Dominis. *Rainbows Under Water*, Bamboo Ridge.
- Kay-Trask Haunani (1993). *From A Native Daughter*, University of Hawaii Press.
- Lum, Darrell H. Y. *Local Genealogy: What School You Went?*, Bamboo Ridge.
- Panek Mark (2021). *I. Messed. Up*, Bamboo Ridge.