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Nite O Wateva!*

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Da Kine Shakespeare:  
James Grant Benton's *Twelf Nite O Wateva!* \*

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When Shakespeare's First Folio visited Kapi'olani Community College on the island of O'ahu in Spring 2016, the Folger Shakespeare Library's touring exhibition was introduced by a related exhibit—*Shakespeare Comes to Hawai'i*—in the lobby of the college's library. This collection of archival materials, curated by Mark Lawhorn, introduced visitors to a treasure trove of Hawaiian Shakespeareana that included a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Hawaiian translation of *Julius Caesar*, Queen Liliu'okalani's quotation of *Measure for Measure* in her autobiography, World War II-era productions of Shakespeare organized by actor and Army captain Maurice Evans, and—most compelling of all for anyone interested in creole writing—the groundbreaking Shakespeare adaptation *Twelf Nite O Wateva!* (1974).<sup>1</sup> This “slack key version” of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* by James Grant Benton (1949-2002) is both an entertaining offshoot of Shakespeare's theatrical legacy in Hawai'i and a sophisticated literary appropriation.<sup>2</sup> Preserving both the main plot and the sub-plot of Shakespeare's play, Benton revises the setting, reworks the characters, and translates the text into Hawai'i Creole English (HCE), a language called “Pidgin” by those who speak it.

Benton's *Twelf Nite* is largely what Thomas Cartelli calls a “*proprietary*” appropriation that undertakes “an avowedly ‘friendly’ or reverential reading of” Shakespeare's play (1999, 18);

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but Benton also engages in “*transpositional* appropriation” that “identifies and isolates a specific theme,” bringing “it into [the . . .] interpretive field” of his own culture. And some passages in Benton’s script involve “*confrontational* appropriation” that “directly contests the ascribed meaning or prevailing function of a” passage from Shakespeare “in the interests of an opposing or alternative social . . . agenda” (Cartelli 1999, 17). As a tile in the vast mosaic of world-wide Shakespeare adaptation and an influential classic of Hawai‘i’s local literary canon, *Twelf Nite O Wateva!* models Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o’s “globalectics”: an artistic and interpretive discourse born of exchange between the local and the global (2012, 8).<sup>3</sup> Benton’s play advances a philosophy of linguistic and cultural rapprochement, pulling together—into what Ngūgĩ calls “a mutually affecting dialogue, or multi-logue” (8)—a range of languages and theatrical elements: Pidgin, Hawaiian, Early Modern English, and 20<sup>th</sup>-century English; topical allusions to the Honolulu of the 1970s and a pointed, class-based critique of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. The richness of the play’s text and its enduring resonance onstage in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Hawai‘i make the study of Benton’s script an apt point of entry for examining several key developments in Hawai‘i Pidgin culture from the early 1970s to the present.

As an English-speaking mainland dweller, I am encouraged by “Da Pidgin Guerilla” Lee Tonouchi, who dismisses “da myth dat Pidgin is only for Local people,” insisting that “Pidgin is jus like any oddah language, anybody can learn ’em if dey hardcore enough” (Tonouchi 2005, v). The “hardcore” backbone of my analysis is thus the study of Benton’s language, introduced—in the first section below—through a survey of texts that explore Pidgin itself and the multi-ethnic local culture of Pidgin speakers, which includes both Native Hawaiians and non-indigenous locals like Benton. My second section tells the story of how Benton came to write *Twelf Nite*, the third presents an analysis of the play on the page and in performance, and the fourth surveys Benton’s

legacy. My approach is informed by intertextual reading practices, adaptation theory, and Ngũgĩ's globalectics. Attentive to the ever-shifting dynamics of reception, I consider both the 1970s, when *Twelf Nite* was written and first produced, and the decades since, in which Pidgin has developed into a literary language and non-indigenous local writers have come under attack for their complicity in "settler colonialism" (Fujikane and Okamura, 2000).<sup>4</sup> In the midst of this ferment, Benton's play and its successors have made "Da Kine Shakespeare" a beloved staple of local theatre culture in Hawai'i.<sup>5</sup>

### I – PIDGIN TALK, PIDGIN WRITING, LOCAL CULTURE

In order appreciate the globalectic "multi-logue" of Benton's script, a reader must become acquainted with the language spoken by Hawai'i's "locals." This language—which linguists call Hawai'i Creole English" (HCE) or simply "Hawai'i Creole" (Sakoda and Siegel 2003, 3)—was recognized in 2015 by the United States Census Bureau as one of the official languages of Hawai'i (Burnett 2015). Those who speak the language call it "Pidgin." Lee Tonouchi—an accomplished author of Pidgin fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama—observes that "Da ony kooky ting is dat da linguists . . . say dat Pidgin is one misnomer. Pidgin is called Pidgin but is not really one pidgin. Confusing, yeah" (2001).<sup>6</sup> In linguistics, a pidgin is defined as a "new language that develops in a situation where speakers of different languages need to communicate but don't share a common language"; it is "usually used only in limited circumstances," is "learned only as a second or auxiliary language and not spoken as a first or native language," and—in "the early stages of its development"—has a "simplified" grammar and vocabulary as compared to those of fully-developed languages (Sakoda and Siegel 2003, 1-2). Over time, however, a pidgin may develop into a "creole," that is, it may become a language

with “a full range of functions, a complex grammar, and a community of native speakers” (Sakoda and Siegel 2003, 2).<sup>7</sup> Benton’s late-20<sup>th</sup>-century Pidgin is thus technically not a pidgin, but a creole. The origins of HCE are complex, but most linguists believe that it is descended both from a pidginized version of Hawaiian that plantation workers and overseers spoke during most of the nineteenth century and from Hawai‘i Pidgin English, which developed in the 1870s.<sup>8</sup> As Sakoda and Siegel explain, HCE is one of many creole languages world-wide for which English is the “lexifer,” the language from which it takes the majority of its vocabulary; it derives its grammar, syntax, and a significant portion of its vocabulary from other languages, including Hawaiian, Cantonese, Portugese, and to a lesser extent, Japanese.

As Sakoda and Siegel explain, moreover, there are many varieties of Hawai‘i Creole English:

The majority of [Pidgin] speakers . . . can switch back and forth between lighter or heavier forms of Pidgin as required by contextual factors such as who they’re talking to, topic, setting, and formality. Many speakers are completely bilingual and can switch between Pidgin and a form of standard English. . . . [But] there is no general agreement about what really constitutes Pidgin in Hawai‘i. For some people, it means the basilect variety, with its grammatical rules that are very different from those of English. For others, it means using only the local accent and some local vocabulary items. (2003, 20)

The debate is further complicated by the fact that HCE varies from island to island, from one community to another, and over time.<sup>9</sup> Benton was sensitive to Pidgin’s constantly evolving character and place-specific variety; his friend Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak—who was a graduate student at the University of Hawai‘i in the 1970s and a board member, director, and actor

for Kumu Kahua Theatre in its early years—recalls that Benton “felt that his play needed to be completely revised” in the 1990s “because Pidgin changes and . . . the Pidgin of his 1970s play was already too dated. . . . Pidgin . . . changed so quickly; and [was] also a language of place, . . . different in Wai‘anae than in Kalihi” (2015). At the time his play premiered, Benton denied being “an authority on pidgin” but stressed the integrity of his claim to the language: “It has to be right; I lived it. . . . I grew up in Nuuanu. I went to Maemae School, then Kawananakoa, then McKinley High. The pidgin sticks” (Harada 1974).

Benton lists the schools he attended in order to certify his identity as a “local”; the term usually refers to a person who is descended from several generations of forebears in Hawai‘i—whether Polynesian, Asian, European, African, or American in origin—and who is no more than part *haole* (“Caucasian”).<sup>10</sup> When used as an adjective to modify “literature” or “theatre,” it often indicates a text written or performed in HCE.<sup>11</sup> But delineating local identity in Hawai‘i is as fraught an undertaking as defining Pidgin. “I used to torture my students by asking them to define the word ‘local,’” says Susan Schultz, a scholar and poet who teaches at the University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa:

They would quickly realize the pitfalls of talking about the word, especially to someone like me who, by virtue of her monolingual standard English and her pale face, was resolutely not local. For “local” usually referred to someone of Asian or Hawaiian descent who grew up in Hawai‘i and spoke da kine Pidgin English. . . . It was also a class marker, indicating someone who was working class, rather than the wealthier *haole* (outsider, white person). (Schultz 2011)<sup>12</sup>

Schultz pushed her students to think about the word because they were “reading ‘local literature,’ or poems, stories, novels, plays, by writers like Eric Chock, Darrell [H. Y.] Lum, Gary Pak, Marie

Hara, [and] Lois-Ann Yamanaka,” and she wanted them to “explore the ways in which these writers used local culture and language, sometimes pushing against its boundaries” (Schultz 2011). Most of the writers Schultz mentions were published by Bamboo Ridge Press, which had been founded by Chock and Lum in 1978 “to publish literature by and about Hawaii's people” (“About Bamboo”). “In the late 1970s and early 1980s,” Schultz explains, the press’s publication of local writers, and particularly of works in Pidgin, was a revolutionary move”; in the early 90s, when she was quizzing her students about the meaning of “local,” “it was still seen as suspect to teach the stuff” (2011).<sup>13</sup>

But Benton’s pioneering 1974 work was not a novel or poem seeking access to an English professor’s syllabus. As a script intended for theatrical performance, it was a work of “orature” informed by the “oral aesthetic” that Ngūgĩ identifies as a key component in globalectic resistance to literary imperialism and that Haunani-Kay Trask celebrates as central to Native Hawaiian culture (Trask 1999a, 167). Orature deploys “the multiple media of words, music, dance, drama, and ritual” as well as “story” and “riddle,” each of which “constitutes a performance genre” and often features audience/performer interaction (Ngūgĩ 2012, 73, 74, 80, 81). It is in oral performance, Schultz observes, that Pidgin writers are at their “strongest” in resisting “the dominant language and its ‘major’ literature. . . . It is the *sound* of Pidgin . . . rather than its presence on the page, which is most different from standard English” and which “breaks a silence long enforced on Pidgin speakers” (2005, 160).

As a playwright writing in what “remains primarily a spoken language” (Sakoda and Siegel 2003, 19), Benton no doubt found Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* attractive partly because it highlights its own investment in an “oral aesthetic.” Winking at the audience with its alternative title (*What You Will*) and thematizing a professional musician/comedian’s relationship with those

he entertains, the play is packed with songs, dances, and riddling. In translating *Twelfth Night*, Benton activated these late Elizabethan “performance genre[s]” for a late twentieth-century community, allowing the “content and themes” of Shakespeare’s text to “form a free conversation with other texts of [his own] time and place, the better to make it yield its maximum to the human” (Ngũgĩ 2012, 60) and the better to demonstrate the richness of local culture.

Benton, as Wichmann-Walczak notes, was not Hawaiian; he was of mixed race heritage with a “long list” of ethnicities that “included Chinese and Japanese and Filipino, and maybe Korean; . . . A number of generations in Hawai‘i with a lot of mix”; but he had no qualms about tapping into Hawaiian language and culture: “he spoke quite a bit of Hawaiian” and was “attracted to traditional forms of Hawaiian performance,” such as the *ho‘opāpā*, which Kimura describes as “a contest of wits . . . in which poetic references, partial homonyms, and vocabulary knowledge are used in chant form between two contestants to increase their individual powers and decrease the powers of the opponent” (Kimura 1983, 176).<sup>14</sup> Wichmann-Walczak recalls in particular Benton’s appreciation for the fact “that traditional Hawaiian presentation was declamatory” and “that the [non-Hawaiian theatrical forms] that resonated with those ways of speaking were things like British Shakespeare, . . . and Kabuki . . . and Jingu.”

Benton’s affinity for Shakespeare may also have had something to do with the fact that many Shakespeare plays feature boisterous ethnic humor that produces and regulates identity through “processes of self-definition and othering” (Labrador 2004, 297); for such humor is a prominent component of much local literature and performance. Introducing *Da Kine Dictionary*, Tonouchi admits, “I gave great tinkings as for whether or not for put words dat wuzn’t politically correck. My tinkings on dat is da word exists so we shouldn’t exclude ’em. . . . People get da power for reclaim words and use ’em in empowering ways” (2005, vii). He has in mind words like

“Pākē” (“One Chinese person or somebody who’s tight” [that is, tightfisted, miserly] [*DKD*, Mishan Suiso 71]) and “Pocho” (“Person who is Portuguese” [*DKD*, Delton Ng 72]), the frequent subject of jokes resembling what people on the mainland know as “Polish jokes.” The stand-up comedy of such local legends as Frank DeLima and Andy Bumatai has featured such humor from the 1970s to the present. It also played a prominent role in the sketches produced by James Grant Benton, Ed Ka’ameha, and James Kawika Piimauna “Rap” Reiplinger in their Pidgin comedy troupe Booga Booga during the 70s and is a key element of Benton’s *Twelf Nite*.

## II – “OH, BUGGER THAT”: THE WRITING OF *TWELF NITE*

The way in which Benton came to study Shakespeare reflected his status as a low-income local. UH theatre professor Terence Knapp, who had come to Hawai‘i from his native England (by way of Japan)<sup>15</sup> in 1970, recalls that, in the same year, a “mustachioed, gangly lad trotted into my office, . . . announcing himself as Jim Benton and demanding to know if I was the ‘Shakespeare Wallah of Hawai‘i’” (Knapp 2005). He asked, could “I help him understand Shakespeare. And I said, Yes, you can register as a student in day classes, can’t you? He said he couldn’t afford to do that” (Knapp 2011). When Benton asked him to form an extra-curricular reading group, Knapp was reluctant, but Benton “went on his knees, literally, in my office and begged me to have a Shakespeare reading class, yah? And I think I said, look, I’m already working my buns off, right? . . . And he said, no, please, please, please” (Knapp 2010). Unable to refuse such a melodramatic appeal, Knapp agreed to “have some Shakespeare readings in my office. And he came, and brought the Booga Booga lot. . . . And they were sitting on the floor. There must have been fifteen people in there, as well as on the sofa and on the stairs” (Knapp 2011).

During those sessions as Knapp recollects them, Benton and those he recruited to join him in the reading group “were a little in awe, first of all, of me, and then of Shakespeare” (Knapp 2010). Given Knapp’s past history as a protégé of Laurence Olivier and his status as a professional with Pan-Pacific credentials, the students may well have been awestruck.<sup>16</sup> But their teacher quickly went to work on the linguistic barriers that stood between them and Shakespeare:

We started to read the comedies, . . . and I pointed out that in Britain, [some comic] characters are . . . quite often played in dialect of various kinds, yah? I said, Welsh, Scots, Irish, Gypsy, whatever; Cockney, whatever. . . . And I said, I don’t expect you to do that. Do it in Pidgin. Read it in Pidgin. And they looked at me, kind of somewhat shocked. And I said, what’s the matter with you? And they said, oh, da teachas don’ like it. . . . Schoolteachers, they don’t like Pidgin spoken in the schools. . . . I said, . . . oh, bugger that. You’re under my tuition now. I’m telling you: Read it. In Pidgin. Well, they started to, and they were rolling around with delight within minutes; I mean, they were wetting themselves, right? And not only that, but they were finding the meaning of the script! (Knapp 2010)

When Knapp returned to Honolulu from Tokyo, where he had directed a summer 1974 production of *Twelfth Night*, Benton came to his office and handed him his Pidgin adaptation of the play.

The script suited exactly the goals of the recently-founded Kumu Kahua Theatre, established in 1971 by University of Hawai‘i Theatre professor Dennis Carroll and eight UH graduate students to produce “Plays about life in Hawai‘i, . . . by Hawai‘i’s playwrights, . . . and for Hawai‘i’s people” (“About Us”).<sup>17</sup> It was thus first staged in a Kumu Kahua production co-sponsored by Leeward Community College and performed at UH’s Kennedy Lab Theatre.<sup>18</sup> Knapp directed, and the show opened on December 26, 1974.<sup>19</sup> Benton played Prince Amalu, the play’s

version of Orsino; Ed Ka‘ahea and Rap Reiplinger—Benton’s Booga Booga colleagues—were cast as Count Opu-Nui (Toby Belch) and Lope (Feste). The play was revived in 1976 by the Hawaii Theatre Festival<sup>20</sup> and in 1980 at Honolulu’s McKinley High School (Reyes 1995). In 1986, a Kumu Kahua revival co-directed by Benton and Dando Kleuver played “to sell-out audiences at Mid-Pac’s Kawaiaha‘o Hall from May 1 to 25,” toured “to Maui, Kauli, and the Big Island,” and “returned to Honolulu to do one final benefit performance at the University of Hawai‘i’s Kennedy Theatre Mainstage” (Mattos 2002, 69-70). Later revivals included a 1995 Diamond Head Theatre production directed by Benton (Reyes 1995), a 2005 Kennedy Theatre production directed by Knapp,<sup>21</sup> and an outdoor 2013 production at the Hawaiian Mission Houses directed by Will Ha‘o (discussed in part IV below). The play had its mainland premier at East West Players in Los Angeles in 1995 (Foley 1995).

### III – “SOME GET GREATNESS”

In *Twelf Nite*, Benton translates Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* linguistically and culturally, transforming the timeless Illyria—designed to appeal to a late Elizabethan theatre audience—into the colorful O‘ahu of a spaced-out mid-1970s daydream. But the script is also a joyfully rebellious globalectic reading of Shakespeare, designed to “[break] open the prison house of imagination built by theories and outlooks that would seem to signify [that] the content” of his work is “classified, open to only a few” (Ngũgĩ 2012, 61). Including not only Shakespeare’s English and his own Pidgin, but touches of Hawaiian as well, Benton is most clearly taking aim at “theories and outlooks” that would place Shakespeare beyond his ken; but he may also be read as attempting to circumvent Trask’s objection to non-indigenous locals who use the Hawaiian language in an “attempt to replace and thereby obliterate what is indigenous” (Trask 1999a, 169). For Benton lays

claim neither to Shakespeare's English nor to Hawaiian; rather, he literally places both of these languages into a fruitful dramatic dialogue with his own tongue, Pidgin.

### 1 – Local Characters

Benton's knowledge of and appreciation for Hawaiian is immediately apparent in *Twelf Nite's dramatis personae*. The Latinate name Malvolio becomes Malolio in order keep the sound more or less intact while dispensing with the letter "v," which does not exist in the Hawaiian alphabet.<sup>22</sup> Benton also renames Maria, the "r" of her name being non-existent in Hawaiian; but rather than choose the lyrical Hawaiian equivalent "Malia," he gives her the name "Kukana" (the Hawaiian equivalent of Susanna), perhaps because it sounds more whimsical to English-speakers or perhaps—since the Hawaiian word for "male" is *kūkāne*—because she is something of a virago. Even more interestingly, Viola becomes Lahela, the Hawaiian version of Rachel; this choice allows Benton to link his play's two romantic heroines through an anagrammatic echo similar to the one Shakespeare uses in naming Viola and Olivia. *Twelf Nite's* Olivia goes by the elegant name Mahealani, "Māhea-lani" being "the night of the full moon." The name "Lahela," then, echoes some of the sounds in Mahealani's name and, as with Olivia/Viola, juggles their order.<sup>23</sup>

Two other characters' names also make witty use of Hawaiian. Sir Andrew Aguecheek becomes Mahealani's Filipino suitor, Andy Waha, who—despite his being a visitor from Manila—has a Hawaiian last name that means "mouth" or "to talk too much." Sir Toby Belch becomes the bloated Count Opu-Nui, whose name is Hawaiian for "Big Belly." The word "opu" is also used in Pidgin: *Pidgin to Da Max* defines it, with a comic flourish worthy of Uncle Toby himself, as "Place to hold beer." The accompanying cartoon depicts three men in silhouette: the first, a regular sized guy with a jutting beer-belly, labeled "6-Pac"; the second, a very big guy with an even bigger

belly, labeled “Case”; and the third, a true “Opu-Nui” too enormous to fit into his frame, labeled “Keg.”

Benton’s most interesting naming strategy, however, is his decision to turn *Twelfth Night*’s Orsino into Prince Amalu, a character played by Benton himself in the original production. For Honolulu theatre-goers at the time, the name alone would have generated a smile, for the notorious Sammy Amalu (1917-1986) was one of the most well-known Honolulu personalities of the 1970s. A con-man and raconteur, Amalu was also a journalist, a biographer of the great chiefs of Hawai‘i, and a native Hawaiian who claimed to be descended from the family of King William Charles Lunalilo.<sup>24</sup> Born on Kaua‘i, Samuel Apollo Kapiikauinamokuonalani Amalu moved to O‘ahu with his family while still a boy and attended Punahou School. His English teacher would recall his “flair for acting” and his skill in oral competitions, in which he often “spoke on Hawaiian customs, the culture and genealogy, and the royalty” (Jividen 1972, 142, 144). In late 1955, his series *The Story of Hawaiian Royalty* appeared in *The Honolulu Advertiser* under the name Kapiikauinamoku. Amalu’s account of his royal forbearer, written in grandiloquent prose and praising Lunalilo for his unpretentious ways, projects a scorn for conformity that seems to have motivated not a few of Amalu’s own escapades, from impersonating an officer to routinely writing bad checks, and—most famously—masterminding a multi-million-dollar real-estate scam.<sup>25</sup>

In 1974, every reader of the *Honolulu Advertiser* would have understood what Benton meant when he said, “I play a character called Prince Amalu, a takeoff on Sam[m]y Amalu” (Harada 1974); for Sammy was a major celebrity. Doris Jividen’s 1972 biography begins with a description of Amalu’s September 1970 return to Honolulu on parole from Folsom Prison in California, where he had been serving time since 1963, writing columns for the *Advertiser* from his cell: “Newspaper reporters, photographers, and television crews wait[ed] at Honolulu International

Airport” until, “With all the aplomb of a returning monarch, Sammy emerge[d]. . . . Dressed totally in white, he [wore] a brown and yellow lei hulu, the feather lei formerly worn by royalty” (Jividen 1972, 2). In the years that followed, he continued to write for the *Advertiser* and became the toast of the town: “Ringside tables at opulent nightclubs await[ed] him regularly while entertainers dedicate[d] Hawaiian melodies to him. Civic clubs clamor[ed] for his speeches. . . . Fan mail and letters to the editor . . . pour[ed] in” (Jividen 1972, 3, 4). By 1972, Amalu was known for hosting events at elegant clubs where he would invite people to order whatever they wanted from the bar; as his friend Carlos Rivas explained after settling the tab of a newcomer he had brought to such a gathering, “Sammy considers himself to be the host . . . , but he never pays for anything. He doesn’t have any money. We all just go along and act grateful. It’s a sort of tradition” (Winpenny 2008). Reading such accounts, one can imagine the effect when theatre-goers, attending the first production of *Twelf Nite O Wateva!* in 1974, saw at the head of the cast list the character “Prince Amalu,” played by James Grant Benton. As the play unfolds, the character is revealed to be, like his namesake, a “déclassé *alii*” (Carroll 1983a); he is a beggarly prince and a princely beggar, eloquently aristocratic and blithely errant. But a key difference between Benton’s Amalu and the “real” Sammy Amalu is that Sammy avoided Pidgin. Reminiscing about their childhood, Rivas noted that “The rest of us spoke pidgin. . . . But not Sammy. He always spoke impeccable English” (Jividen 1972, 146). In creating a “Prince Amalu” who *does* speak Pidgin, Benton appropriates for local culture two royal English speakers: both Shakespeare’s imaginary aristocrat Orsino and Honolulu’s real-life royal flâneur, Sammy Amalu.

Both *Twelf Nite O Wateva* and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* open with the lovesick lord's rapturous response to music. Prince Amalu's prose poem pulls Orsino's blank verse speech from an imagined Illyria into a fantasized Hawai'i:

If music going be da food of love, go play on, gimme mo den extra, so dat appetite going get sick and go make. Oooh, dat vamp again. It had one dying beat, and wen come ova my ear like da sweet sound dat breathes on one bank of pakalana, stealing and giving odor. Nuff, pau already. Da baga not as sweet as was befo. Ho, spirit of love, you so alive and fresh dat if you was da frolicking Pacific, I would drink you all. Auwe! So full of different forms is love dat, by himself, he is one unending purple dream. (Benton 1983, 188)<sup>26</sup>

This passage signals *Twelf Nite*'s status as a work that will tap all of the resources of Benton's culture as it emulates and challenges the text it translates.

Shakespeare's famous opening line—"If music be the food of love, play on"—lends metrical weight to the Duke's plea for protracted sound, ending with what is usually performed as a spondee and thus prolonging the duration of what would otherwise be a five-beat iambic line by one extra stress. Benton takes that sonic expansion one step further. Liberally translating Orsino's subjunctive "be" and his imperative "play" by inserting the Pidgin future markers "going" and "go," he lengthens Shakespeare's line into six iambs followed by an extra stressed syllable: "If mus[ic] go[ing] be[ ] da food[ ] of love [ ]go play[ ]on." Amalu's first line, performed by the playwright himself in the original production, thus preserves the feeling of Orsino's while insisting—from the word "go," so to speak—that the language being spoken is not Shakespeare's English but Benton's Pidgin, and the lovelorn speaker not Orsino, but Amalu.

Benton's localized poetics intensifies as the speech continues. Where Shakespeare's duke commands, "Give me excess of it that, surfeiting, / The appetite may sicken and so die" (Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* 1:1:2-3), Amalu plunges deeper into Pidgin, "gimme mo den extra, so dat appetite going get sick and go make." When the prince uses the word "make," which is pronounced "MOCK ay" and means "dead" in Pidgin (*PTDM*) or "die" in Hawaiian, his identity as a local is cemented for local audience members and readers. And the non-Pidgin-speaking reader finds that Shakespeare has become Benton's translator rather than vice versa; for such a person will "get" Benton's line without the assistance of a Pidgin dictionary only by comparing it to Shakespeare's. The next sentence of Amalu's speech translates Shakespeare's "strain" (1.4) into the jazz slang "vamp"; "dying fall" (1.4) into the modern English "dying beat," and "came o'er my ear" (1.5) into the Pidgin "wen come ova my ear." It retains almost intact Shakespeare's "sweet sound / That breathes upon a bank of violets," only replacing "violets" with pakalana, a flower brought to Hawai'i by Chinese immigrants ("Heavenly" 2001). Then, suddenly, Amalu breaks from his reverie with the brusque command, "Nuff, pau already," thus "deflating the mood with a burp of pidgin" (Carroll 1983a). But even the "burp" harmonizes with Shakespeare's text, for what is Orsino's "Enough, no more" but a pinprick deflating his own mood? The duke's abrupt shift from ecstatic pleasure in the music to insisting that "'Tis not so sweet now as it was before" (*Twelfth Night* 1:1:8) anticipates Act 5, in which he will swing instantly from delight in Cesario/Viola to jealous anger. Benton's translation—"Da baga not as sweet as was befo"—brings this implicit personification and foreshadowing to the surface; for in Pidgin, as in English, the word "baga" (also spelled "buggah" and "bugga") usually refers to a person and can have either a negative meaning ("pest") or an affectionate one ("Guy, friend") (*PTDM*).

Orsino then claims the “spirit of love” is so “quick and fresh” that it can—“as the sea,” receive all things that enter it and empty them of value (Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* 1:1:9-13). Evading this complex figure, Benton relocates and modifies a related trope from another Orsino speech, in which Shakespeare’s duke claims that his own love “is all as hungry as the sea, / And can digest as much” (*Twelfth Night* 2:4:97-98); Amalu exclaims that his thirst for the “spirit of love” is such that, were it a tropical cocktail the size of the Pacific, he would drain to the bottom. Finally, transmuting Orsino’s “fancy / . . . alone is high fantastical” (*Twelfth Night* 1:1:14-15) into language that echoes the lyrics of the popular American song “Deep Purple,” Amalu concludes that “Love . . . is one unending purple dream.” Like the lover in the song—whose “love lives on when moonlight beams” and who insists that he and his beloved will “always meet / Here in [his] deep purple dreams”<sup>27</sup>—Amalu, hopelessly in love with a princess whose name evokes the light of the full moon—asserts the everlasting nature of his dreamy purple desire.

Throughout the script of *Twelfth Nite*, Benton continues to make Shakespeare’s text his own both by quoting directly from it and by weaving in local color. The first technique allows Benton to expand his characters’ mesolectal Pidgin vocabulary by occasionally tapping Shakespeare for words that he and his classmates were unlikely to have used in the hallways of McKinley High School: words such as “pestilence,” “capacity,” “foolery,” and “valor” (Benton 1983, 189, 205, 210, 213). These moments anticipate Tonouchi’s more programmatic assault on the idea that a Pidgin-speaker who uses “hybolics”—“Intellectual kine words” (*DKD*, Lee A. Tonouchi 43)—is “haolefied”: “not Local kine no mo” (*DKD*, Kat Kam 39). Benton’s occasional use of “hybolic” words drawn directly from the text of *Twelfth Night* Pidginizes those words rather than haolefying the surrounding Pidgin. The second technique, the addition of Hawai‘i-specific details, is especially effective in lines that intensify Shakespeare’s gently satirical treatment of Orsino as

stereotypical lover and poet manqué. When Orsino claims that his “desires . . . pursue” him “like fell and cruel hounds” (Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* 1:1:21-22), he is using the Actaeon trope found in innumerable Petrarchan sonnets. In Benton’s play, the hounds become “savage pig dogs”— hunting dogs used in Hawai‘i to track down invasive feral swine (Benton 1983, 188). The Duke’s command that Viola/Caesarino “unfold the passion of [his] love” to Olivia (*Twelfth Night* 1:4:23) becomes Amalu’s suggestion of specific Hawaiian-flavored hyperboles (“tell her dat my love for her is deeper den Hanauma Bay . . . tell her she mo beautiful den down Makaha side o something like dat” [Benton 1983, 192]). And in translating Orsino’s claim that his love is “hungry as the sea” (*Twelfth Night* 2:4:97), Benton (who has already deployed that simile in Amalu’s opening speech), uses a deliberately sillier-sounding trope: “[N]o wahine’s heart so big to hold so much; . . . Dea love is like one pupu platter, and mine is like one luau!” (1983, 205). Benton “mak[es] fun of the *ali‘i*” with such satirical touches, says actor and director Will Ha‘o, “Because we have a tendency here in Hawai‘i to romanticize about the *ali‘i*, like they did no wrong. That’s not true when you see *Twelf Nite*” (2015).<sup>28</sup> Of course, Shakespeare also pokes fun at aristocrats; Orsino and Olivia are as ridiculous as commoners like Antonio and Malvolio. But Benton further levels the playing field by making his *ali‘i* speak the same working-class language as their servants.

Ethnic humor, like class-based humor, is essential to Benton’s script. In Act 1, scene 3, the Filipino Andy Waha attempts to flirt with the “Portagee maid” Kukana. Where Shakespeare’s Andrew Aguecheek greets Maria with the ill-advised, “Bless you, fair shrew” (*Twelfth Night* 1:3:43) and proceeds to misunderstand Toby’s urging him to “accost” her by addressing her as “Good Mistress Accost” (45, 48), Benton’s Andy flashes his Filipino identity: “Hui, and how you stay, my little pork adobo? Ooo, spicy.” This line and Waha’s promise to give Lope “two fighting chickens” mark him as “one dumb . . . bukbuk” (Benton 1983, 190, 207); that is, as a “male

immigrant who is fresh off the boat” and who “speaks with a ‘heavy Filipino accent’; also labeled *manong*, the *bukbuk* “often stumbles over his words or has poor word choice” (Labrador 2004, 300, 302). He is, in short, the made-to-order Hawai‘i equivalent of Shakespeare’s Andrew Aguecheek: a foreign, flashily-dressed coxcomb who prides himself on his skill as a dancer. The stereotype is captured in comedian Frank DeLima’s song “Filipino Purple Danube”: “who drives Cadillac, *buk buk*, *manong* / light show on the back, *manong*, *manong* / who wears silver pants, . . . / goes out disco dance, . . . / who greases his hair, . . . / who perfumes the air” (DeLima 2001). In *Pidgin to Da Max*, the cartoon illustration for “bukbuk” features a super-skinny Filipino dude in black bell-bottoms, platform shoes, and a ruffled tuxedo shirt, a lit cigarette between his finger and thumb; his casual pose conveys his belief that he “get one flashy back-step hula stronger den any man in Hawaii,” to quote Andy Waha (Benton 1983, 191). As the cartoon hints, the *bukbuk* stereotype is often used to portray Filipino males as “sexually predatory” (Labrador 2004, 304).<sup>29</sup> But Benton’s Andy, a defanged version of the type, is—like Shakespeare’s Andrew—utterly harmless. Indeed, he is an audience favorite. Local actor and director Troy Apostol (a second generation Filipino), framing his review of Ha‘o’s 2013 production as a dialogue between a Pidgin-speaking critic and his haolefied alter-ego, says through the former persona that “da show-stoppah, scene-stealah was [Tony] Apilado’s fresh-off-da-boat Waha. Manong’s *pinaka nakakatawang* [Tagalog for “most funny”] characterization really flavored his lines, which were some of da funniest in da show!” (Apostol 2013). A production photograph accompanying the review includes Apilado posing—arms akimbo—in a lemon-yellow polyester leisure suit with a white belt, red and white polka-dot shirt, and heavy gold chain.

Responding to Andy’s come-on, Kukana scoffs: “Spicy? Pork adobo? Auwe! I no undastand dis kine talk. Bye. [*Exits*]” (Benton 1983, 190). The Portagee maid thus plays upon

another local stereotype even as she proves it false: that is, the use of the word “potagee” as a synonym for “stupid” (*DKD*, Sung-Eun Pak 73). The “Portuguese girl,” in particular, is pegged as tending to “Talk too much, but say nothing” (Cataluna 2011). The voluble Kukana is no air-headed female; she is a *tita*—that is, “One tough wahine” (*DKD*, Keri-Lynn Paakuala 88) and—in many productions—a *tūtū*, an “older lady” (*DKD*, Alicia Matayoshi 90), one with “Plenny poi undah da bridge” (*PTDM*). Alex Rogals, praising Kati Kuroda’s Kukana in the 2013 production, finds that she makes “Kukana a recognizable Auntie whose eternal wisdom belies her cruel delight in playing a good joke on those who underestimate her” (Rogals 2013).

### 3 – His Own Stash of Li Hing Mui

Such local character types and a cornucopia of allusions to the atmosphere of the late 1960s and early 1970s contribute to Benton’s transposition of Shakespeare’s text. He includes references to such island delights as ’okolehao (a Hawaiian moonshine) and Primo (a local beer that, in the early 1970s, was at the peak of its popularity, “with 70% of the local market” [“Can”]). And through an allusion to one particular delicacy, he makes his most interesting departure from Shakespeare, “declar[ing] an adaptive distance from” *Twelfth Night* and “stak[ing] out an independent place from which to return the . . . look” of Shakespeare’s text (Kidnie 2009, 65, 66, 67). In Act 2, Scene 3 of Benton’s play, a reference to the dried plum snack called li hing mui reworks the class dynamics of Shakespeare’s corresponding scene. When Malolio attempts to silence Opu-Nui’s reveling, the Count responds with an attempt at camaraderie: “Malolio, ass all you do, o wat? Go around and check up on peopo. I mean, our R.O.T.C. days are ova. Hia, come have a pound of Li Hing Mui!” (Benton 1983, 201). He implies that when they were in school, they had to endure the rigors of the Reserve Officer’s Training Corps, a program that subsidizes

tuition in return for commitment to military service after graduation and often attracts low-income students. The acronym R.O.T.C. is pronounced—as I recall from my own college years—“*Rots-ee*.” Inviting Malolio to leave behind the high-stepping spit and polish of “rotsy” discipline, Opu-Nui sweetens the pot with a peace offering of li hing mui, which *Pidgin to Da Max* defines as “Pake munchies”—that is, a Chinese snack—“dat give you cho cho lips,” lips pursed out in response to what food blogger Pomai Souza describes as a “salty-sweet-tart blast on the tongue.” Souza explains that this “Chinese preserved plum” is eaten in Hawai‘i as “a candy of sorts” and, recalling his own youth, describes what is no doubt the coveted snack Opu-Nui offers: “The Yick Lung brand of Li Hing Mui, also sometimes called “crack seed” . . . dominated endcaps at the checkout stand at the neighborhood Long’s Drugs and Star Market . . . during the 70’s and early 80’s” (Souza 2010).

By inserting an offer of li hing mui, Benton changes the mood substantially from that of *Twelfth Night* 2:3, in which Uncle Toby makes no such gesture, but rather taunts the enraged Malvolio with, “Go, sir, rub your chain with crumbs” (110-11), telling him to get back to work polishing the insignia of his petty authority as a steward. Obscuring the class boundaries that Shakespeare’s text emphasizes, Benton provides his local audience with a treat meant just for them, not for *malihini* [strangers]. Schultz goes so far as to use crack seed as an example of local culture’s distinctive otherness: responding to a mainland editor’s facile praise of a Pidgin writer for speaking “a language we all know in our heart of hearts,” Schultz asks, “*Do* we all know this language? . . . How many of us understand references like . . . ‘li hing mui’”? (Schultz 2005, 175). Only those who do can get a taste of what Opu-Nui is offering to Malolio.

And only by noticing that nothing like that offer exists in Shakespeare’s text can a Shakespeare fan appreciate Benton’s careful expurgation of the class-bias that motivates Toby in

*Twelfth Night*. In Shakespeare's play, Malvolio speaks pretentious English larded with circumlocution: "Sir Toby, I must be round with you. My lady bade me tell you that, though she harbors you as her kinsman, she's nothing allied to your disorders. If you can separate yourself and your misdemeanors, you are welcome to the house. If not, an it would please you to take leave of her, she is very willing to bid you farewell" (*Twelfth Night* 2:3:88-93). The audience is invited to find such self-important diction intolerable and thus to share Toby's sneering disdain for a servant so audacious as to reprimand his betters: "Art any more than a steward?" (105-106). Maria goes on to bait her trap, a seeming love letter to Malvolio written in Olivia's hand, with a challenge tailor-made to appeal to his class ambitions: "Thy fates open their hands. Let thy blood and spirit embrace them. . . . [G]o to, thou art made, if thou desir'st to be so. If not, let me see thee a steward still, the fellow of servants, and not worthy to touch Fortune's fingers" (*Twelfth Night* 2:5:128-29, 135-38). When Maria's trap closes upon Malvolio, it is clear that his desire to rise above his station is a comic flaw that merits punishment. The plot of Shakespeare's play as a whole, no less than Maria's plot within it, puts Malvolio in his place.

Benton—intent, like Malvolio, on acquiring goods assumed to be beyond his reach—cannot and will not endorse this aspect of Shakespeare's text. Benton's Malvolio thus differs significantly from Shakespeare's steward. He is a malaprop, absurd not because of his desire to rise in rank but because of his laughably inadequate attempts at haolefied speech. Many of his mistakes are painfully hilarious: "fork-knowledge" for "foreknowledge"; "infests" for "manifests"; "flavor" for "favor"; and—most uproariously of all, when he responds to the summons of Mahealani, the object of his sexual and social ambition—not with Shakespeare's "Here, madam, at your service" (*Twelfth Night* 1:5:281), but with "Hia, madam, at your cervix" (Benton 1983, 195, 209, 237, 197). These errors mark Malvolio as the only thing Benton and his audience find more

contemptible than a haolefied local: that is, a local who aspires unsuccessfully to haolefication. His fault is not so much ambition as failure to appreciate the language and culture that Benton's play celebrates. Like Malvolio, however, Malolio cares immensely about how people perceive him; attempting to project an air of privilege and to prove that Opu-Nui does not out-class him, he rejects the merry count's offer of a whole pound of tasty crack seed with, "[N]o try sway me wid your Li Hing Mui, 'cause I have my own stash!" (Benton 1983, 201).

Displacing the class-based insults hurled at Malvolio by Toby in Act 2, scene 3 of *Twelfth Night* with the li hing mui exchange, Benton demonstrates that he is no mere steward of Shakespeare's estate, but a guy with his own stash of theatrical li hing mui—his own tasty blend of savory, tart, and sweet that is as much a critique of Shakespeare as a celebration.<sup>30</sup> Confirming Ngũgĩ's observation that postcolonial literary appropriations are "not derivatives," but "a synthesis forged in resistance" (Ngũgĩ 2012, 43), he extends his challenge to the Bard through his handling of a famous passage that appears three times in *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*: the litany of greatness. In Shakespeare's play, we hear the passage first in Maria's letter as Malvolio reads it aloud: "In my stars I am above thee, but be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em" (2:5:125-28). Maria encourages Malvolio to believe that, while Olivia was "born great," he can "achieve greatness" by responding to the letter's instructions, actively accepting the "greatness" that Olivia wishes to "thrust upon" him. He assumes her favor will remain ineffectual unless he conveys his grateful acceptance, so he comes to Olivia duly clad in hideous "yellow stockings" and absurdly "cross-gartered" (3:4:46-47). Egged on by Maria, he directly quotes and compliments the letter that he believes Olivia wrote: "'Be not afraid of greatness.' 'Twas well writ. . . . 'Some are born great.' . . . 'Some achieve greatness.' . . . 'And some have greatness thrust upon them'" (3:4:36, 38, 40, 42). Finally, in the

play's last scene, Feste quotes the letter back to Malvolio with vindictive glee: "Why, some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrown upon them" (5:1:358-59).

Benton not only Pidginizes but edits and streamlines the language of the false letter when Malvolio first reads it out: "In my stars, I am above dee, but no go be afraid of greatness. Some get greatness trown on some of dem" (Benton 1983, 208). Abbreviating the letter's commentary on greatness so as to preserve only the third item in Shakespeare's three-part list, Benton reserves the full catalogue for the scene in which Malvolio quotes the letter: "'No go be afraid of greatness.' Dat one was sharp. . . . 'Some stay born great.' . . . 'Some get some greatness.' . . . 'And some get greatness trown on some of dem'" (Benton 1983, 216-17). The change makes it seem that it is Malvolio rather than Maria who introduces the possibility that a low-born man may "get some greatness" for himself. When Lope quotes the letter in the play's final scene, the text is altered again, this time into a garbled conflation of accomplishment and unearned bestowal: "Why 'some stay born great, some achieve greatness trown upon dem'" (Benton 1983, 237). These variations demonstrate that the Pidgin playwright—like his characters when they quote from the text of Kukana's letter—feels no need to adhere with exact fidelity to an authoritative "original."

#### 4 – Songs of Good Life

Feste's final number—"When that I was and a little tiny boy"—is a mildly melancholy song of wind, rain, and *apatheia* that ends *Twelfth Night* on a meta-theatrical note: "But that's all one, our play is done, / And we'll strive to please you every day" (5:1:393-94). In Benton's *Twelfth Nite*, Lope's final song evokes a sunnier setting:

Sand between your toes

Feeling all your woes,

Picking ripe mangoes,  
 Baking new bread. (238)

The “new bread” that Benton has baked is a play for those who leave behind concerns about status and belonging:

You’re in and den you’re out,  
 But wat are you worrying about?  
 Go have some crack seed,  
 We’re a new breed.

The song offers the audience the *ling hing mui* of a new generation, inviting them to join in what the song calls

. . . an ol Hawaiian feeling  
 Dat keep running through us all  
 Jus a kind of laid-back breathing  
 That makes someting look pretty small.

The feeling is *aloha*: “love, affection, compassion, mercy, sympathy, pity, kindness, sentiment, grace, charity.” Given the popular belief that “haole” means “without breath,”<sup>31</sup> the song’s insistence that the “laid-back breathing” runs “through us all” is an offer to de-haolize non-locals, to allow even tourists to participate as long as they are willing to breathe with the *aloha* “That makes someting”—such as the belief that English is superior to Pidgin, or the equally restrictive belief that no haole should ever try to speak Pidgin—“look pretty small.” At a conference on HCE, Wichmann-Walczack recalls, the playwright argued passionately against the latter view:

Haole Pidgin is a very negative thing, generally. People who don’t grow up speaking Pidgin, and then try to speak Pidgin: their Pidgin just *isn’t right* and

sounds awful. . . . But [Benton argued . . .] this is actually a good thing. The attempt to speak Pidgin is an act of *aloha*; an act of *aloha* should be met with *aloha*. (2015)

For those willing to embrace the love, *Twelf Nite* opens up unlimited choice; Lope's song ends by offering "Wateva, wateva, wateva / Wateva you want" (Benton 1983, 238).

Benton's use of the term *aloha* in his defense of non-local Pidgin and the reference to "an old Hawaiian feeling" in Lope's song may legitimately be read as the "cheap misuse by the tourist industry . . . of Hawaiian cultural values" (Trask 1999a, 168). Benton most certainly aspired to be a part of that industry; at the time he wrote *Twelf Nite*, he was "wait[ing] tables daytime at the Territorial Tavern to pay the rent" and hoping that his play would "be merchandiseable on the Waikiki circuit"; he told journalist Wayne Harada both that "He need[ed] the job" and that he felt "tourists should be exposed to this genre of Hawai'i's charms. . . . 'I'm prepared to do anything—maybe even turn "Twelf Nite" into a musical—to get it off the boards in Waikiki'" (Harada 1974). As a non-indigenous local, Benton most certainly elided distinctions between local identity and Hawaiian identity. In doing so, he was part of a larger cultural tendency among non-Native Pidgin speakers in the 1970s. The term "Hawai'i's people" in the self-descriptions of both Kumu Kahua Theatre (founded 1971) and Bamboo Ridge Press (founded 1978), stresses place over race or ethnicity, a rhetorical move that—despite studied avoidance of the ethnic identifier "Hawaiian"—reflects an investment in "Hawaiianess" (Kanahele 1979) by non-indigenous locals that has proven deeply problematic when it has involved facile elisions of cultural and ethnic distinctiveness and has thus slipped from celebration and revival into "identity theft" (Trask 1999a, 169). As Trask points out, moreover, the marketing of Hawaiian culture to tourists often prostitutes that culture and the land itself; for this reason, Trask urges tourists not to visit Hawai'i (1999b, 140, 146).

Naïve as Benton was in his desire to market his play for tourist consumption, his *Twelf Nite* is in fact fundamentally geared to Pidgin-speaking audiences, including both Native Hawaiians and non-native locals. It has thus, over time, played a positive role in the “Second Hawaiian Renaissance,” a period of cultural re-awakening that began in the late 1960s.<sup>32</sup> In a well-known 1979 lecture celebrating the movement that began in the 1960s, Native Hawaiian scholar and activist George Kanehele argued that “the Renaissance does not only belong to Hawaiians” and that “non-Hawaiians have always played a large role” in the preservation and perpetuation of “Hawaiian culture and ideals” (Kanehele 1979). So, too, has the Pidgin language shared by Native and non-Native locals played a part in that Renaissance. As Hawaiian language scholar Larry Kimura pointed out in 1983, Pidgin was a valuable linguistic resource for Native Hawaiians who grew up cut off from opportunities to learn and speak Hawaiian: “The development of pidgin assured the cultural survival of Hawaiians and those who chose to identify with them as locals, when the only alternative seemed to be to completely give up a cohesive Hawaiian identity that relied on the existence of a unifying language” (Kimura 1983, 200).

Hawaiian Studies pioneer and Native sovereignty activist Kanalu Young testified to the validity of Kimura’s observations when, shortly before his death in 2008, he co-produced the film *Pidgin: The Voice of Hawai‘i* and appeared in the film speaking three languages: Hawaiian, English, and Pidgin.<sup>33</sup> Young was born in 1954 and was a *hapa haole* Hawaiian. In the film, speaking of the “new adventures” that he had as a boy when he transferred from a private school where almost everyone spoke English to a public school in which many of the students spoke Pidgin, Young explains that connecting with “the Native Hawaiian boys” who spoke Pidgin made him “a more well-rounded local boy” and gave him “a pass into a world that doesn’t give out passes unless you fit in.” That pass eventually opened the way to Young’s becoming an expert in

and advocate for Native Hawaiian language and culture; it was indispensable, he explains, because “consciousness about Hawaiian identity—indigenous Hawaiian identity—had not been restored when I was in the elementary school years. But there was a strong attachment between ethnic Hawaiianness and the speaking of Pidgin” (Booth 2009).<sup>34</sup>

Describing the role Pidgin played in his own personal and cultural development, Young evokes the spirit of the language in terms that help to clarify why Benton’s Pidgin adaptation of *Twelfth Night* is so deeply beloved by Native and non-Native locals alike:

Trying to make a place for everything and everything in its place inside of you. And that’s where Pidgin comes in: like you *do* belong. You can connect. You will communicate, and you can smile doing it. (Booth 2009).

Hearing Young’s remarks, one cannot help but recall the closing song of Benton’s *Twelfth Nite O Wateva!* with its insistence on “an ol Hawaiian feeling / Dat keep running through us all” and its dismissal of concerns about where one belongs: ““You’re in and den you’re out, / But wat are you worrying about? / Go have some crack seed” (Benton 1983, 238). Smilingly advancing Benton’s own philosophy of linguistic and cultural *aloha*, the song is a fitting conclusion to a text that explores the relationship between Hawaiian language, English, and Pidgin; that takes on issues of class and ethnicity central to local culture in the 1970s; and that successfully challenges the notion of Shakespeare as a high-culture commodity reserved for educated *haoles*.

The play’s original production in 1974 did not, however, include the song with which Benton’s script concludes. The show instead ended with “the whole cast” singing the popular Hawai‘i-inflected blues number “Livin’ On Easy” (Donnelly 1974). This traditional song had been the title track on a 1969 album by slack key guitar masters Gabby Pahanui and Atta Issacs, and the effect on Benton’s audience must have been euphoric. The piece creates what Ngūgĩ calls “a

mutually affecting . . . multi-logue,” beginning with bluesy English slang (“I’m a-livin’ on easy / With a bottle of whiskey. / I got no money / To suit my honey”) and continuing with jokes that depend on a mix of slang and elevated English diction (“She is so porky. / She has a personality / To suit my genealogy”). The final verses start with the traditional Hawaiian refrain “Ha‘ina ‘ia mai ana ka puana” [“Tell the summary refrain”]<sup>35</sup> and end by slipping into a nearly unintelligible hodge-podge of Hawaiian, Pidgin, and English that swears off all “hana” [work], declaring the singers “shua” of their laid-back “prosperity” (Pahanui and Isaacs 1969).

Karen Pryor’s Pidgin review of the original 1974 production, published in the *Honolulu Advertiser*, did not mention “Livin’ On Easy” but praised *Twelf Nite* for cutting through what is *not* easy in Shakespeare:

Eh! You know da kine Shakespeare play, all fill up wit’ poetries an’ complications, and Elizabet’ans an’ li’ dat? Hard for understand, you know what I mean? Well, some lolo<sup>36</sup> bunch guys up at da University of Hawaii wen’ make da Shakespeare play, ‘Twelf Nite,’ in Pidgin. Unberievable! Come real easy for understand about da twins and what da kolohe<sup>37</sup> guys wen’ do to dis paakiki luna<sup>38</sup> an’ all li’ dat. . . . Jim Benton da guy write it down on paper. . . . One good-lookin’ buggah, dis one, and very akamai<sup>39</sup> inside da head also. (Pryor 1974).

With a barely submerged analogy, Pryor invites the reader to see the take-down of Malolio as a metaphor for Benton’s sexy, naughty, and very *akamai* feat in knocking da Bard—that Elizabet’an *luna*—off his high horse.

#### IV – BENTON’S LEGACY

The cultural work done by Benton's text was reinforced by the young playwright's activities as an educator. Will Ha'o is a Native Hawaiian theatre professional who lives on O'ahu where he was born and raised and who appears frequently in Kumu Kahua productions, but who also spent thirty years in New York and touring the US and other countries as an Equity actor (Ha'o 2016). He recalls the life-changing impact that Benton and *Twelfth Night* had on him. When he went to see the original production as a high schooler,

I was so taken; I said, 'oh, I can do this.' It's all local people! 'Cuz, you're spoiled by TV, you know with the white people always up. . . . And so, at McKinley [High School] . . . Jimmy Benton comes in one day to help the [theatre] instructor, and that's how our relationship started, and he always said, "I don't want you to keep your talent in the closet." . . . So he was always pushing me forward. (Ha'o 2015)

Ha'o would play Sebastian in the 1986 Hawai'i Theatre Festival production, and the *Twelfth Night* that he directed nearly three decades later (in summer 2013) was costumed and styled with a 70s vibe.

Benton's theatrical and literary legacy includes not only Ha'o's production and other revivals of *Twelfth Night*, but a number of later Pidgin adaptations of Shakespeare, including *Da Taming of Da Shrew* at UH Manoa's Kennedy Theatre (1997) and *One Uddah Mid'sumamah*, directed by Jackie Pualani Johnson at UH, Hilo (2002). A 2010 Hawai'i Shakespeare Festival production of *Julius Caesar* directed by Troy Apostol was set in pre-contact Hawai'i but included an anachronistically Pidgin-speaking Casca played by D. Tafa'i Silipa, who stole the show. *Da Taming of Da Shrew* and *One Uddah Midsummah* both adapt comedies, and Silipa's Pidgin provided comic relief within a tragedy; so one might be tempted to assume that Kimura's observations in 1983 still hold true even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: "The only time that pidgin is

consciously used in print or on stage is for a comical effect” (1983, 200). But the Pidgin of Benton’s play clearly aims for far more than just laughter. In taking Pidgin seriously as the target language for a Shakespeare translation, and in using that translation to explore a variety of social, cultural and linguistic issues, Benton set a precedent that serious Pidgin writers like Lois-Ann Yamanaka and Lee A. Tonouchi have built upon and expanded.

In large part thanks to Benton’s achievement, moreover, Pidgin has an ongoing relationship with Shakespeare that transcends the realm of comic relief. One of Benton’s most accomplished heirs is playwright and director Taurie Kinoshita, whose free-wheeling adaptation *One Comedy of Erras*, produced by Kumu Kahua in 2012, blends Standard English and Pidgin, liberally adapting the plot of Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors* to follow the adventures of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century mainland Japanese-American named Kani who comes to Honolulu and discovers there his long lost twin, Kane. As Kinoshita acknowledged in her program note, *One Comedy of Erras* emerges from “a remarkable local tradition of translating the alienating specificity of universally relevant stories into a language with which we can identify. To this now burgeoning tradition of using our own language, pidgin, to engender a deeper cathartic response, I am indebted: we stand on the shoulders of . . . giants [like . . . ] James Grant Benton” (Kinoshita 2012).<sup>40</sup> Like Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors*, Kinoshita’s play is a farce with serious underpinnings. By explicitly thematizing local ethnicity, the joys and perils of ethnic humor, and the ways in which language contributes to the construction of individual and group identities, Kinoshita pays forward what she has inherited from Benton.

One memorable moment in Kinoshita’s script is an interaction early in the play between the standard-English-speaking, Japanese-American smuggler Egizu and the Pidgin-speaking customs officer Duke, who arrests Egizu near the beginning of the play for trying to sneak various luxury

consumer goods through Hawai‘i customs. While the over-dramatic Egizu—who seems stuck in the role of the doomed Egeon from Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors*—goes on and on about anticipating his own death by decapitation, the gas chamber, the electric chair, or lethal injection, the patiently realistic Duke brings him back to the reality of 21<sup>st</sup>-century Honolulu with deadpan Pidgin: “I not dakine executioner. Dis one customs hous.” Equally funny, and also very savvy in the way it plays off linguistic stereotypes, is a scene in which Kim, a Korean pawn-shop owner reacts to a mainland *haole* who mistakes his heavy Korean accent for Pidgin: “DEES NAT PIDGIN! I KOREAN IMMIGRANT YOU MORON!” But perhaps most interesting of all is the argument between the Pidgin-speaking, part-Hawaiian Adreana and her standard-English-speaking, feminist sister Lucy, which complicates and updates Act 2, scene 1 of Shakespeare’s play.<sup>41</sup>

Marlene Booth’s 2008 documentary *Pidgin: The Voice of Hawai‘i* also owes a debt to Benton for introducing the idea of translating Shakespeare into Hawai‘i Creole English. The film begins with a series of eight headshots in which each speaker recites Hamlet’s line “To be or not to be; that is the question.” The first speaker utters the line in English. The second performs it in Cantonese. Next to appear are a woman who performs the line in Tagalog, a man who speaks it in Hawaiian,<sup>42</sup> a woman who delivers a Korean translation, and a man who speaks it in Portuguese. The seventh shot shows the same elderly female speaker as the first shot, but this time speaking the line in Japanese. The eighth and final shot is of a young man with long, unruly dark brown hair who speaks Hamlet’s iconic words in Pidgin: “Stay o no stay ’As da question, e?” Throughout the first seven shots, a subtitle beneath the speaker identifies the language being spoken, but in the shot featuring the Pidgin speaker, the subtitle instead provides the viewer with a written copy of

the words being spoken. Here, and throughout the rest of the film, Pidgin speakers' words are subtitled, not in English, but in Pidgin.

Booth's documentary addresses the linguistic origins of Hawai'i Creole English, the socio-political issues surrounding its often marginalized status in the culture and educational system of Hawai'i, the strong sense of cultural identity that Pidgin helps to establish for "locals," the ways in which Pidgin functions in relation to Native Hawaiian identity, and the language's development into a rich artistic medium used seriously by many writers. In the opening sequence, the first line of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy—arguably the single most powerfully canonical line in English literature—provides English-speaking viewers with a familiar standard of literary credibility. On the one hand, the line's resonance in eight different translations might be read as a tribute to Shakespeare's supposed universality; but in context, the point of the sequence is to demonstrate Pidgin's status as a language, not Shakespeare's status as a playwright. Through the translated performance of the line by the youngest and hippest of all the speakers, Pidgin—a relatively young and often disrespected language—presents itself audaciously, and with a touch of boyish swagger, as "The glass of fashion and the mould of form, / Th' observ'd of all observers" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3:1:152-53; Ophelia speaking of Hamlet). That is, it defines itself as the smart, attractive heir apparent to seven older languages, each of which has contributed to its vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. And with the help of the subtitles that transcribe the Pidgin translation as the young man articulates them, HCE shows itself to be a language not only spoken, but written. Taking up the banner of Pidgin Shakespeare first unfurled by James Grant Benton, the film bears witness to Pidgin as a language that is vitally alive in its oral form as the voice of Hawai'i's local culture but that is also a literary medium in which serious and profound things are written and read.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> On the exhibit, see “William Shakespeare’s” 2016. On Liliu‘okalani, see DiPasquale 2013/2014.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase “slack key version”—associating the play with a beloved Hawaiian guitar style—is used in the original production’s program and publicity poster.

<sup>3</sup> Discussing the ongoing relevance of the anti-colonial reading and writing practices that he and other African scholars developed in the 1960s, Ngũgĩ coins the term “globalectics,” which combines the words “global” and “dialectic,” and evokes “the shape of the globe,” on the surface of which “there is no one center; any point is equally a center,” and “all points . . . are equidistant to” the “internal center” (Ngũgĩ 2012, 8).

<sup>4</sup> In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Bamboo Ridge Press was criticized for under-representing Hawaiian and Filipino writers and for neocolonialist appropriation of Hawaiian identity (Kawaharada 2000/2001, 189-92, 205-223); local Asian-descent writers were indicted for too often embracing “a settler ideology which facilitates and justifies non-Native hegemony (Trask 2000, 4). See also Trask 1999a and Fujikane and Okamura’s special issue of *Amerasia* journal as a whole. For overviews and re-assessments of these controversies, see Luangphinit 2006 and Schultz 2005, 15-17, 20, 25, 159-79.

<sup>5</sup> The expression “Da kine” is “the keystone of pidgin” (Simonson, Sasaki, and Sakata, 2013); it “can take da place of any kine word. . . . Can have any kine connotation depends on how you say um and who you say um wit” (*Da Kine Dictionary* 2005, Jason Nomura 21). See also Carr 1972, 135-36. Subsequent quotations from Simonson, Sasaki, and Sakata’s *Pidgin To Da Max*, an unpaginated illustrated dictionary, are cited parenthetically by the abbreviation *PTDM*. *Da Kine Dictionary* is cited as *DKD* by contributor’s name and page number.

<sup>6</sup> I use the terms Hawai‘i Creole English and Pidgin and the abbreviation HCE interchangeably.

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed overview of pidgins and creoles, see Todd 2001.

<sup>8</sup> For more detailed accounts of HCE’s history and its roots in earlier pidgins dating back to the earliest contact between Polynesian, European, and Asian languages, see Bickerton 1977, 1998, and 1999; Bickerton and Wilson 1987; Day 1987; Roberts 1999; and Drager 2012.

<sup>9</sup> For a study of how 21<sup>st</sup>-century O‘ahu residents perceive the many varieties of English and Pidgin spoken on the island, see Drager 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Definitions of Hawaiian words are taken from Pukui and Elbert 1986. While *haole* is now used primarily with reference to Caucasians, it “formerly” meant “any foreigner” or—as an adjective—“foreign, introduced, of foreign origin.” On the stock “local” question “What school you went?” see Lum; for resistance to that question as a means of establishing identity, see Kahanu 2005 and Nordstrom 2015.

<sup>11</sup> On the origins of “local identity,” see Rosa 2000. On the development of “local” as literary category, see Sumida 1991, 86-114, 226-72, 288-89n4.

<sup>12</sup> For more on the differences between Native Hawaiians' and non-Native locals' relationships with Pidgin, see Part III, section 4 below.

<sup>13</sup> On local writers' struggle for recognition within the culture of the English Department at UH, Mānoa and other "blocks" encountered by local and non-local writers in Hawai'i, see Schultz 2005, 4-20, 159-79. On efforts "to reclaim place and locality as [a] basis of subnational identity" in Hawai'i, see Wilson 2000 (esp. 104, 114-115, 120-162, 180-82). On Pidgin's marginalized status, see Booth 2009. Thanks to the output of Bamboo Ridge and other publishers such as Tinfish Press and Bess Press, Pidgin now has considerably greater cultural capital than it possessed in the 1970s-1990s. Pidgin plays produced by Kumu Kahua Theatre (especially those by Lee A. Tonouchi) have also contributed to Pidgin's status as a literary and dramatic medium.

<sup>14</sup> "The loser of such a contest," Kimura notes, "can theoretically submit his life to the winner" (1983, 176). To the ear of a Renaissance scholar, the practice sounds comparable to that of *flyting* in Medieval England and represents a Hawaiian analogue for the take-no-prisoners approach to verbal dueling by characters like Feste in *Twelfth Night* and Touchstone in *As You Like It*.

<sup>15</sup> Knapp went to Japan to study Japanese performance arts; in later years, he returned to direct Shakespeare productions there (Knapp 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Benton "adored Terry" and believed that his play would have an "impact" only with Knapp "to give it that presence" (Wichmann-Walczak 2015).

<sup>17</sup> See also D. Carroll 1983b and 2000; and D. Carroll and E. Carroll 1976.

<sup>18</sup> This venue was renamed the "Earl Ernst Lab Theatre" in 1994.

<sup>19</sup> In the playbill, the word *O* in the play's title was spelled out as *Or*; in the playbill for Knapp's 2005 production, it was spelled *O'*; in each, Benton was identified as adapter rather than author.

<sup>20</sup> This organization was renamed the Hawaii Public Theatre in 1979 (Mattos 2002, 57n16).

<sup>21</sup> Benton had died in 2002; the production was Knapp's retirement swan song.

<sup>22</sup> Benton could have converted the "v" to a "w," which is pronounced similarly in Hawaiian, but his deletion of the "v" sound helps establish his "Malolio" as a character distinct from Shakespeare's Malvolio.

<sup>23</sup> See Kimura on "the philosophy of the power of the word" in Hawaiian culture and the practice, informed by this philosophy, of taking "a single word, name, or phrase and develop[ing] a speech around it by complicated play with connotations" involving not etymology, but sound; for example, a speaker might link '*ohana* (family) to both *hana* (work) and *aloha* (love)" (1983, 176-77).

<sup>24</sup> Lunalilo had no children, but Amalu claimed the king as his "great-great-grandmother's half-brother" (Jividen 1972, 30).

<sup>25</sup> The incident made national and international news; see "Hawaiian Fairy Tale" 1962.

<sup>26</sup> For a version of this speech that pre-dates the script's print publication and contains several verbal variants, see D. Carroll and E. Carroll 1976, 67.

<sup>27</sup> Mitchell Parish wrote the lyrics for the perennially popular "Deep Purple" in 1938; the piano score had been composed several years earlier by Peter De Rose. Nino Tempo and April Stevens' 1963 recording hit #1 one on the pop charts and won the duo a Grammy ("Deep Purple").

<sup>28</sup> *Ali'i* are the Hawaiian nobility.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Fujikane 2000 and Rodrigues 2000.

<sup>30</sup> No doubt realizing what he had in common with Malolio, Benton seized the role for himself when he revived the play in 1986.

<sup>31</sup> Some (Bumatai 2015, for example) say Native Hawaiians gave this name to white Europeans in the 18<sup>th</sup> century because the newcomers did not greet one another, as Hawaiians did, by touching noses and inhaling each other's breath.

<sup>32</sup> The term "second" acknowledges an earlier renewal that took place from 1874-1887 during the reign of King Kalākaua (Williams 2014/2015).

<sup>33</sup> *Pidgin: The Voice of Hawai'i* was directed by Marlene Booth and co-produced by Booth and Kanalu Young; published by New Day Films in 2009 and originally televised that year, it was funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and Pacific Islanders in Communication. The Kanopy Streaming version was created in 2015.

<sup>34</sup> For more on "Pidgin as an Indigenous linguistic resource" and on "how the experiences associated with and represented by speaking Pidgin differ for native Hawaiians compared to those of other minority groups in Hawai'i," see Nordstrom 2015, 318, 322.

<sup>35</sup> See Pukui and Elbert 1986, "puana," noun, transitive verb, 1.

<sup>36</sup> "Crazy, stupid" (*DKD*, Kathy Lam 56).

<sup>37</sup> "Real naughty, but sexy" (*PTDM*).

<sup>38</sup> "Pa'akikī" means "Stubborn head" (*DKD*, Leomi L. Bergknut 71); "luna" means "supervisor, plantation boss" (*DKD*, Grace Lam 57).

<sup>39</sup> Academically “Smart,” like a kid who “*only read book all the time*” (*DKD*, Kay Taira 2) but also street-smart, like “Somebody who really knows the score” (*PTDM*).

<sup>40</sup> Kinoshita also mentions Lisa Matsumoto, a playwright and children’s author known for Pidgin adaptation of traditional European fairytales.

<sup>41</sup> I am grateful to Taurie Kinoshita for giving me and my students access to her script.

<sup>42</sup> Professor Puakea Nogelmeier, who translated the entire soliloquy and recorded his own performance of the translated text for the First Folio exhibit at Kapi’olani Community, “pointed out ‘for the sake of humor’ when asked to attempt the daunting task, ‘There is no term for “to be” in Hawaiian”’ (“William Shakespeare’s” 2016). Nogelmeier’s recording is available online at SoundCloud under the title “To Be Or Not To Be.”

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