

*Ka'ōha nui i tu'u hōa
o te fenua 'enata,
Sam.*

HAWAIIAN LITERARY STYLE AND CULTURE

Hawaiian Language

BY

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LITERARY style has been studied increasingly of late,² but style has only infrequently been analyzed specifically in the light of a total culture. This study is based on an analysis of about nine-hundred pages of Hawaiian tales read in the original Hawaiian.³ These tales were collected by Hawaiians during the period 1870 to 1890, and were printed anonymously in Hawaiian newspapers. In 1917 and 1918 many of them were translated freely and not very accurately, and published in both Hawaiian and English.⁴ In this paper, the style of Hawaiian oral literature will be compared with the culture as manifest in its various aspects and interests, considering such features as hyperbole, metaphor, symbolism, humor, names, details, nonsemantic elements, and delineation of character; while the structure of the language as related to style and culture will also be considered.⁵

Culture.—Descriptions of Hawaiian culture depend principally upon the writings of Hawaiians, explorers, and missionaries; these are supplemented by works by anthropologists on various aspects of the ethnography. Religion is treated by these writers with considerable detail, but other subjects, such as interpersonal relations and child training, have not as yet been studied. The cultural picture in this study is therefore based principally on the writings of four Hawaiians (Malo,⁶ Kepelino,⁷ Kamakau,⁸ Pukui⁹), two explorers (Cook,¹⁰ Vancouver¹¹), two missionaries (Ellis,¹² Stewart¹³), three anthropologists

¹ A somewhat briefer version of this paper was read at the meeting of the American Folklore Society at Bloomington, Indiana, on July 28, 1950. During the preparation of the paper, Professor George Herzog of Indiana University offered many stimulating suggestions which are gratefully acknowledged. Constructive criticism was offered by colleagues at the University of Hawaii, including Kenneth P. Emory, Alfons L. Korn, Leonard E. Mason, Saul H. Riesenberg, and Carl G. Stroven, of the departments of anthropology and English. Miss Margaret Titcomb of the Bishop Museum also made helpful comments. The entire study has benefited by many discussions of Hawaiian folkloristic, cultural, and linguistic matters with Mrs. Mary Kawena Pukui, and I am very grateful to her for tutelage and help that has extended over many years.

² Shimkin, 1947; Reichard, 1947; Voegelin, 1948; Bascom, 1949.

³ Tales available only in English were not deemed suitable for stylistic analysis. Cf. Sapir's comment, 1910, p. 471: "A myth obtained only in English may sometimes be more complete as a narrative than the same myth obtained in text, but will nearly always have much of the baldness and lack of color of a mere abstract." Also see Boas, 1911, p. 62.

⁴ Fornander, 1917, 1918.

⁵ Beckwith reported on these stylistic features in 1919 (pp. 313-331): names, analogy, word play, antithesis, repetition, synonyms.

⁶ Malo, 1903.

⁷ Beckwith, 1932.

⁸ Kamakau, 1866.

⁹ Pukui, 1939, 1942, 1949.

¹⁰ Cook, 1784.

¹¹ Vancouver, 1801.

¹² Ellis, 1828, 1853.

¹³ Stewart, 1839.

(Handy,¹⁴ Emory,¹⁵ Beaglehole¹⁶), and on first-hand discussions with one Hawaiian, Mary Kawena Pukui, who has a very wide knowledge, tenacious memory, and a remarkable ability to look objectively into two cultures.

Study of the ethnological sources reveals that the old culture was predominantly aristocratic. The great power of the chiefs was maintained through inherent mana and elaborate taboos. The culture was too complex, however, to be described by a single term. Other features of the culture were shown in the interests of the society. These interests or preoccupations may be grouped into four large categories, physical, intellectual, emotional, and ethical. Included in the physical group are interest in the body, in rank, in sex, in nature, in games, dancing, and war. The second interest, the intellectual, finds outlet in humor, debate, wit, punning, symbols, figures of speech, and—of great importance—trickery. The third interest, emotional, is expressed in affection, love, and feeling. The fourth consists of certain “ethical” ideals, principally hospitality, keeping of vows, and revenge.

In the ensuing examination of style, passages quoted have been retranslated, and Hawaiian names have been rewritten phonemically (i.e. the glottal stop is represented by an apostrophe and vowel length by a macron). Space permits mention of only a few of the many examples that have been collected. Most of the references are from Fornander.

Hyperbole.—Exaggerations afford an overt picture of cultural values. Descriptions of the heroes of Hawaiian tales are embellished with hyperbole: their huge size or their tiny size, their giant war clubs that reach the sky and are carried by four thousand porters, their slaughter of twelve thousand men at a single blow. These heroes have great powers: they drink the sea dry, leap from island to island, or transform themselves into fish or animals. Their flawless bodies are so beautiful that strangers hasten to wait on them, “beaming with joy.” They are served by runners so swift that they complete the circuit of an island in a few moments. The invulnerability and immortality of the hero (or in the event of death his resurrection) are the supreme hyperbole.

Metaphor and simile.—The richly elaborated figurative language of the tales shows the cultural interest in nature. A bride is a flower, a child a lei, ignorance “intestines of night” and wisdom “intestines of day.” Anger is “a rising sea,” a beautiful girl has “a back like a cliff and front like the moon.” A marriage of a girl from the mountains and a man from the seashore is called “mingling of fragrant grass of the shore with that of the uplands.”¹⁷ Spears thrown headlong at a hero are refreshing to him as the water of a bath. An old man “becomes withered with age, with red eyes watery as a rat’s, soft as a pandanus leaf, arrived at the age of painless decay, confined to a net on a pole.”¹⁸ Death is “vanished twilight.”

¹⁴ Handy, 1927, 1930, 1931, 1933, 1934, 1936, 1950.

¹⁵ Emory, 1933.

¹⁶ Beaglehole, 1937.

¹⁷ Green and Pukui, 1936, p. 12.

¹⁸ Fornander, 1917, p. 433.

Symbolism.—The source of much symbolic expression is nature. The cool, life-giving rain is mentioned frequently in songs, to some extent because of the attractiveness in a hot country of the cool rain, but also because of the symbolism of growth and fertility. The following examples are from songs:¹⁹

The fine rain, the rain that perfumes the forest.

Lush verdure high on Lani-Huli,
Wetted in the quiet creep of rain.

I am wet in the rain,
The mountains are tight with rain,
Misty fine rain,
Adornment of the forest spreading over cliffs.

Symbolic acts occur in the tales: the unknown son seeks the father he has never seen and establishes his relationship by presentation of tokens and by sitting on his father's lap, which symbolizes close relationship. Eight and multiples of four are favorite numbers, with the term for eight occurring in other expressions as indicative of wisdom or vast quantities.

Humor.—Two types of humorous expressions predominate in the tales, word play and scatological jokes. Punning is a form of aggressive competition between heroes. In one tale the challengers name various canoe parts containing the term *huli* "turn, overturn." The hero triumphs by countering with names of three types of men containing the same term: the baldheaded man whose face has been "overturned" to the top of his head, a blind man with "turned" eyeballs, and a lame man with "turned" ankles.²⁰ These examples illustrate quick repartee and subtlety, as well as fascination by physical aspects of the body, even such unpleasant phenomena as baldness, blindness, and lameness.

Scatology as a type of humor in the tales may also be correlated with the sacredness of the body, and to the taboo on exposure of the genitals. Adultery and lechery are not sources of humor in the tales because of the lack of taboos on this kind of behavior. It is to be noted, however, that in present-day conversation much humor is based on sex; perhaps partial acculturation to Euro-American sex mores is beginning to make their infringement a source of laughter.

Sarcasm as a source of humor is somewhat less frequent. A boy hero who is asked where he learned his long repertory of chants, replies saucily that such things are known to all the children of his island.²¹ A pig-man demigod ridicules

¹⁹ Metaphor and symbolism are not easy to distinguish. The distinction advocated by Brooks and Warren, p. 386, is adopted herein. Both devices involve transfer of meaning. "In the simplest terms, we may say that metaphor has to do with the word (or the idea) and symbolism with the thing (or the action)." The transfer in these songs is from the immediate object (the rain) to the natural process (growth and generation).

²⁰ Fornander, 1917, p. 583.

²¹ Fornander, 1918, p. 91.

his dog opponent with this teasing chant, as translated literally by J. W. Dykes:

Bristlin', eh?
 Bristlin'!
 Kinda mad, eh?
 Kinda mad!
 With claws a scratchin',
 And tail a switchin',
 The eyes a glarin',
 Even the teeth a showin',
 Nearly me a bitin',
 Into me a cuttin',
 Into me a cuttin'.
 By you the dog is this a doin',
 By me the hog is this you a killin'.²²

Names.—A striking feature of Polynesian mythology is the fondness for names. Hawaiian tales conventionally begin with the names of the dramatis personae and the places, as follows:

Wahi-a-Wā is the father; Kū-Kani-Loko the mother. Ka-Uka-Ali'i is the mother of Kū-Kani-Loko. Hale-Mano (next to Lihu'e at Wai-Anae) is the place. From the union of Wahi-a-Wā with his wife, Kū-Kani-Loko, are born their six children, four boys, two girls. These are the names of their children: Māeaea the oldest, a male; Kai-Aka next; Anahulu following; Hale-Mano is the baby of them; Pule-'Ē a female; Laenihi, a godlike female.²³

Names of individuals are sometimes mere stock or family designations; more often they are words or phrases that suggest an event or condition at time of birth. The names of people quoted above may be translated as follows: Place-Son-of-Noise; Upright-Singing-Within; The-Royal-Uplands; Countless-Houses; Stench; Shadowy-Sea; Ten-Days; Previous-Prayer; Razor-Fish. The name of the mother is stated three times, that of the father twice. So much pleasure was taken in repeating names that pronouns are often avoided in narration and replaced by the name. Note that in the following passage the narrator gives the name Hale-Mano four times, rather than use the pronoun "him": "While Hale-Mano is chanting, Kama-Lālā-Walu comes this-way, looks at Hale-Mano. Meanwhile strong her desire to go back to Hale-Mano, due to the looking at Hale-Mano."²⁴

Genealogies were carefully memorized and recited as a means of establishing rank, and because of pleasure in the recitation.²⁵ The creation chant is in

²² *Ibid.*, p. 333. Use of the alveolar nasal /n/ in place of the velar /ŋ/, as in *bristlin'*, *scratchin'*, etc., is a device showing the bantering, colloquial, and inelegant nature of the original.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

²⁵ Beckwith reports that in early missionary days the "begats" in the Bible were held to be the most choice portions of the Scriptures; 1919, p. 313.

the form of a genealogy; one variant lists eight hundred matings.²⁶ The obsession with names is a reflection of the interest in rank and in the body, and is correlated with a belief that use of an individual's name imparted a certain control over that individual. Places are named with as much care as people. In a three-page tale, 14 persons and 37 places are named.²⁷ In some tales, every stopping point on a trip is listed. Favorite or important objects of chiefs, such as war clubs, are also named.

Details.—The use of detail in a literature is of interest to the student of culture. Hawaiian tales frequently mention body parts, especially eyes (*maka*), variously qualified as soft and tender, softly fragrant, winking flirtatiously, piercing, bright, bulging, inflamed, raging. This is in keeping with the cultural interest in the sacred body, as mentioned previously. Physiological processes are also described in some detail. Of a man frightened on the battlefield, the narrator says that his "flesh chills with the cold damp of fear."²⁸ Exchange of insults by heroes was a conventionalized prelude to battle, and great ingenuity and variety are displayed in these. Verbal facility was no less admirable than physical. One hero tells his challenger that if he is to have any chance at all he needs two helpers. The challenger, furious at such a "haughty" boast, points to a child as worthy competition. The hero, enraged, prays to his god for victory over this "uncircumcized person."²⁹ Other insults include slurring references to ancestry,³⁰ to the unattractiveness of the homeland (as lacking fish or fresh water),³¹ to previous misdeeds,³² to physical repulsiveness (the volcano goddess is taunted as stiff and lame; she then lashes back with a lascivious tirade about her opponent, the pig-man god: his nose is pierced by a cord, excrement drops behind him, his penis is close to his belly, his tail wags behind).³³

Nature is referred to with the most persistent attention and wealth of detail, a reflection in part of the religion of the people. This fine passage shows nature's tribute to a chief:

The crowd inland shouts about the handsome man, Kila; the ants weep, birds sing, pebbles rattle, bivalves mutter indistinctly, birds wither, smoke lies low, the rainbow arches, thunder roars, lightning flashes, rain rains, rivers flow, the sea roughens, waves break, the horned coral and the *puna* coral fly up upon the land, the mournful cry of spirits wails loud, burying grounds awake, an unintelligible babbling awakes, trees are angered, hairless dogs appear, numberless gods come, a temple assembly of gods, a column of gods, everything These are the witnesses of a great chief.³⁴

Nonsemantic elements of style.—Some stylistic elements seem used less for their meaning than for aesthetic or cultural reasons. Antithesis, repetition,

²⁶ Beckwith, 1951.

²⁷ Fornander, 1918, pp. 177-181.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

²⁹ Beckwith, 1919, pp. 385-389.

³⁰ Fornander, 1917, p. 107; Fornander, 1918, p. 59.

³¹ Fornander, 1918, pp. 81-83.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 335.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 335-339.

³⁴ Fornander, 1917, p. 169.

and catalogues are the most prominent of these features that seem to a large extent to be aesthetic embellishments, as well as means of pleasing the gods by prolonging the prayers and ritual, and as mnemonic aids for perfect repetition of long ceremonials. The great length of many of the chants in the tales makes their faultless repetition an intellectual triumph, proof that intellectual virtuosity was much esteemed in the culture.

Antithesis is a feature of nearly every myth. In a chant about the winds, the contrasting pairs little and big, long and short, successively qualify waves, a canoe paddle, and a canoe bailer.³⁵ An expedition consists of big men, little men, big canoes, little canoes.³⁶ Banality is avoided by almost enigmatic use of antithesis, as in this way to describe a complete education:

When this (hero) goes to Kohala, (he) learns from the mother all of everything, of above of below, of inland of seaward, of day of night, death life, sin righteousness; (he) becomes expert in everything.³⁷

Long catalogues or lists provide aesthetic satisfaction and afford desired length, as in the case of a triumphant recital of sixty-one victories,³⁸ or a list of one hundred eleven winds and where they live.³⁹

Repetition of key words in successive verses is much admired, and this may be combined with antithesis:

One rain from the uplands,
One rain from the lowlands,
One rain from the east,
One rain from the west.⁴⁰

Synonyms are used to secure balance, as "a query, a question."⁴¹

Treatment of character.—The most frequent type of tale treats of a hero. His grandeur is enhanced by hyperbole and metaphor, his authenticity and high rank documented by a plethora of names, his divinity attested by his mastery of the supernatural and the efficacy of his prayers. He is a witty and skilled punster who is victorious in every debate and riddling contest. He speaks in long chants filled with semiveiled references to his victories, and sometimes gives long lists of his triumphs. He may mould the landscape into its present form with his club or spear. His superiority over the perturbations of ordinary men may be shown by his slight interest in sex and his amorality. Tricksters when they appear in the stories show the stress laid by the culture on deception; they circumvent morality. Commoners enter with much less frequency than tricksters. Their roles are either to illustrate a virtue, such as hospitality, or to wait on or applaud a chief. The slave class is completely un-

³⁵ Fornander, 1918, pp. 87-89.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

³⁷ Fornander, 1917, p. 575.

³⁸ Fornander, 1918, pp. 349-51.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 93-103.

⁴⁰ Fornander, 1917, p. 359.

⁴¹ Emerson, 1909, p. 257. How the structure of the language favors antithesis and repetition is described below under *Language*.

represented. The heroes may transform themselves into animals, but otherwise animals rarely enter the tales; and they do not, like the commoners, dramatize a virtue. The subordinate role of commoners, the omission of slaves, and scarcity of animal characters, are further evidence of the aristocratic domination of these literary forms.

The intellectual base of the culture, and the realistic elements in the literature, find further expression in a stylistic antithesis of character. Heroes are not heroic on all occasions, nor are villains always base. Courage is frequently balanced by fear, might by weakness, chivalry by treachery. The strength of the social pattern is consistently clear. Hero and heroine are always of high rank; a Hawaiian Cinderella could not hope to marry a prince. The sudden weaknesses of the hero, the fact that his *mana* occasionally fails, his fears and temporary setbacks, are realistic touches that serve as devices for heightening suspense and enhancing dramatic appeal.

Language.—The effectiveness of some of these stylistic features is enhanced by certain structural aspects of the language that are difficult or impossible to translate. The interest in place, and particularly of antithetical place, is expressed in Hawaiian by the constant use of contrasting words indicating direction that somewhat correspond to the English terms up and down, inland and seaward, east and west, toward the speaker and away from the speaker. These are used far more frequently, however, than any English equivalents.

A system of classification of all objects possessed is largely based on their proximity to the body, indicative of the importance of the body. Parts of the body, clothing, a lei that is worn, a canoe in which one sits, one's progenitors and siblings, are in one class. Most possessions not in intimate contact with the body, one's progeny and spouses, and one's actions, are in another.⁴²

The presence in Hawaiian of only eight consonants (*p, k, glottal stop, h, m, n, l, w*) and only five long vowels and five short vowels, makes alliteration and repetition easy and effective; the rather large number of homonyms also facilitates punning.

Many words in Hawaiian are preceded by particles. Those occurring with the greatest frequency are probably *ua*, "completed action or state," which marks verbs, and *ka* or *ke* "the," which mark nouns. Note how effectively these particles are repeated in this chant:

Ua pa'ihi o luna.
 Ua malo'o wai 'ole ka nahelehele.
 Ua ho'i ke ao a ke kuahiwi.
 Ua ho'i ka makani a Kumu-Kahi.
 Ua ho'i ka 'opua a Awa-Lua.

⁴² Hawaiian speech does not make some of the distinctions found elsewhere in Polynesia. In Kapingamarangi a false tooth is considered "alienable," contrasting with the "inalienable" real tooth; the possessive classifying form shows this distinction. Elbert, 1948, p. 21.

Ua ho'i ka pauli makani kualau.
 Ua ho'i ka wa'a ho'oulu he kaiko'o.
 Ua ho'i ka wa'a i ka lae makani.
 Ua ho'i ke kai ka wai a Manawa-Nui.⁴³

An accurate translation should retain some of the cumulative effect of this repetition, yet without sacrifice of the clarity and smoothness of the original. English word order is less flexible than Hawaiian, so that it is difficult in translation to keep the repetition of words in the same order:

The above has cleared.
 The growth has dried waterless.
 The cloud has returned to the hill.
 The wind has returned to Kumu-Kahi.
 The image-containing cloud has returned to Awa-Lua.
 The deep-blue wind with showers has returned.
 The canoe plunging in strong seas has returned.
 The canoe has returned to the windy cape.
 The sea and water have returned to Manawa-Nui.

A structural feature of the language that favors repetition is the prevalence of reduplicated forms, such as *holoholo*, *mehameha*, *nahelehele*. The directional particles are repeated far more than is possible in English translation. Poetry is further embellished by euphonic particles that have no meaning, *ē* being the most common.

Rhyming is not used in Hawaiian poetry. Stress is usually on the next to the last syllable, and since the final syllable is freely voiceless, the rhyming of final syllables is difficult. Another structural factor contributing to the absence of rhyming may be the paucity of distinctive sounds and the shortness of the words, which would give to rhymed words a frequency bordering on banality. Quantitative verse, however, is as important in Hawaiian as in Greek verse,⁴⁴ perhaps due to the role of vowel length, the lack of consonant clusters, the fact that all syllables are open, and that stress is most frequently placed on alternating syllables. That the chants were usually accompanied by beating on drum, gourd, or stick, explains the importance of rhythm.

Summary and conclusion.—Hawaiian literary style, strikingly different from that of non-Polynesian cultures, perhaps owes its distinctiveness to special features of the culture out of which it has come. Many of the stylistic devices glorify the hero of the tale, who in the culture corresponds to the chief. Hyperbole and metaphor enhance his attractiveness and his deeds. Rich use of personal names and place names adds verisimilitude. Rocks and valleys and mountains in today's world are described as having been created or modified by him during his adventures and deeds of might. Other stylistic devices that

⁴³ Fornander, 1918, p. 91.

⁴⁴ Sapir, 1921, p. 244.

may be correlated with the interests of the culture are a decided preference for figurative expression, for the veiled, symbolic, and clever, rather than the blunt, literal, and banal. Nature, which in Hawaii is beautiful and spectacular is anthropomorphized in the tales as a similarly beautiful and spectacular being. The structure of the language, moreover, favors the development of certain of the stylistic features, such as an interest in place as shown by words indicating direction, the importance of the body by possessive classifiers, alliteration and repetition favored by a paucity of distinctive sounds and the high frequency of occurrence of certain particles, and reduplications.

Patterns in language and in culture have often been described. It is hoped that this study may show how literary style can also take patterned form, and that these patterns to some extent parallel patterns traceable in the culture and in the language, affording a vivid and sparkling reflection of these configurations. Style, traditionally isolated and analyzed as a series of abstractions, may be examined as a concrete illustration of man's values and preoccupations. Critic and ethnologist may thus benefit by each studying the findings of the other, and of the linguist.

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