
REVIEWS

John Charlot. *Classical Hawaiian Education: Generations of Hawaiian Culture; Moses Kuaea Nākuina: Hawaiian Novelist; and Approaches to the Academic Study of Hawaiian Literature and Culture*. Honolulu, HI: Pacific Institute, Brigham Young University-Hawai'i Campus, Lā'ie, Hawai'i, 2005. Pp. 902. CD-ROM, distributed by the University of Hawai'i Press. ISBN 978-0-939154-71-5

Reviewed by George M. Williams, California State University, Chico

Professor John Charlot has written a book that far exceeds the promise of its title. First, it is an electronic book of 902 pages divided into six chapters, copious endnotes, eight appendices, and a huge bibliography. Then there are two additional essays: "Moses Kuaea Nākuina: Hawaiian Novelist" (57 pp.) and "Approaches to the Academic Study of Hawaiian Literature and Culture" (37 pp.). Both essays are gems in totally different ways: one a masterpiece of literary and cultural criticism and the other a practical proposal and guide for a profound understanding of Hawaiian culture and language.

Getting Started

Classical Hawaiian Education (hereafter, *CHE*) represents a lifetime's study that is both masterful and artistic. A review of a thousand-page tome might overreach even if it only attempts to suggest the usefulness, content, and perhaps even its place in the history of a discipline.

I would suggest that the reader might well be served by beginning first with the two essays because *CHE* situates one in so complex a topography

that the two essays help set the scale and adjust the perspective. Charlot is a first-rate literary critic as evidenced in his analysis of Moses N. Nākuina. First, Charlot knows Nākuina as few can unless they have spent a lifetime with Hawaiian literature. Charlot's nine-hundred page book is nothing if it is not specific, providing one example after another and concrete instances of each nuance and context that he wishes the reader to appreciate, or at least to know they exist. Why so thorough? Perhaps, so that no one with any education can never again utter the old stereotypes: that Native Hawaiians had no real culture to lose, no literature worth preserving, no language the equal of English, and no values that could not be better replaced with those of the modern, globalized present. (I remember with sadness a retired University of Hawai'i political science professor who said the best thing for Native Hawaiians would be to stop wasting their time learning a language incapable of aiding scientific thought and "join modern, globalized, English-speaking culture." Charlot's book should more than counter this chauvinism.)

Digital Publication

Before summarizing the content in the constraints of a review, let me suggest what I think is a historic moment in academic publication. A major scholar has entrusted a lifetime of study to a genre, digital publication, that as yet is not totally accepted in the academic community. An academic book publisher gladly would have published *CHE* if Charlot had condensed the book by two-thirds. But he persevered and the Pacific Institute published this ground-breaking edition as an electronic book. It is odd that this technology, which has been around for several decades, is so underused in academic circles. The Pacific Institute implemented this task well and is to be commended.

First, this book is electronically searchable; and since one can follow instances of Hawaiian word usage in varying contexts, one can experience aspects of the language in new and profound ways. It is also a dynamic translation guide. It preserves themes and issues that meet the test of intercultural understanding; when interpreting in English (or any other language), can this notion be said in Hawaiian? And conversely, what is lost when Hawaiian is no longer used?

CHE may contain more than a hundred pages of representative literary sayings in Hawaiian plus innumerable individual words carefully defined and used as illustrations of points being made. A searchable electronic (digital) book with this amount of Hawaiian examples could be considered a Hawaiian language thesaurus, a concordance as well as a repository of literary samples.

The very publication of *CHE* is a testament to digital publication of resources that could not be published economically in any other form. Modern publishers cannot afford to bring out multivolume works that are this specialized. Yet, despite this degree of specialization, this book remains available to a larger readership than might have been anticipated. (There are developments in digital publication of books and digital reading devices—eReaders—that are currently on the horizon. Thus far, they are being controlled by commercial interests and are still proprietary; hence, they can generate a monopoly in the production of content for their devices. Perhaps a new generation of eReaders that are open-source will encourage the use of this technology for academic publications—well beyond the proprietary limitations of the Kindle.)

Content

Classical Hawaiian education (chapter one) can be characterized by two main foci: family and place (*āina*). The cultural vision is captured in the notion that “Life is *ka ʻimi loa* ‘the great search’ that involves all aspects of sensitivity, perception, intelligence, and action” (2).

Charlot must bridge the gap between the object of his study, classical Hawaiian education in an oral culture, and a methodology that will reveal that nearly extinguished oral tradition and its institutions. His method is simple and direct; there are thousands of extant records: manuscripts, books, and newspapers written in Hawaiian with varying degrees of desire to preserve precontact language, history, and culture. Charlot mines these treasures in a way that calls into question the lack of use of these primary resources in much of what has been written, but Charlot is almost too gentle in his implied criticism of works on Hawaiʻi that neglect these sources.

Charlot explicates a vast Hawaiian vocabulary on education, specifying how these words are used—literally and metaphorically. It is a richness of contextual meanings that begins to emerge with the sheer number of examples that Charlot provides. Concepts are placed in contexts that illustrate the richness of language and an intrinsic demand for proper usage. (Again, this is afforded because of the digital book publication that uses inclusion and not exclusion as its organizing principle.)

Hawaiians were trained to grasp what they had heard (*ʻapo* or *ʻaʻapo*) and then to place it in long-term memory by silent rehearsal, so as not to be heard by unauthorized ears. Items should be organized into groups, categories, or classes.

Classical Hawaiian education was a major factor in the formation of Hawaiian character, and many of the personal qualities described by early

visitors to Hawai'i can be ascribed to it: "the Hawaiians' alertness, intellectual curiosity, quickness to learn, and tenacious memory" (19).

Charlot's description of the intellectual and educational environment of Hawaiian oral culture (chapter two) is richly illustrated with a particular interest in precise vocabulary and the notion of a literature of education. Against those who maintain that only a literate culture may have a literature, Charlot demonstrates that an oral culture can have a literature as well because it has been preserved by postcontact authors (ʻĪʻĪ, Kamakau, Malo, Nākuina, Poepoe, Pukui, etc.). In fact, Charlot does not even argue this but proceeds to literatures of family and place, because each area raises its children as *kamaʻāina* (children of the land) with unique stories, descriptions, and even vocabularies. What is interesting is that a well-educated Hawaiian was expected to know about all these other subcultures and their oral traditions through storytelling, travel, sightseeing, and their intellectual games of riddling, *kākāʻōlelo* (word-fencing, oratory) and *hoʻopāpā* (contests of wits): "The high level of knowledge in the general community set high standards for expertise and performance. To be outstanding in any field demanded considerable achievement" (76).

Hawaiian views of education (chapter three) reflected the culture: individualistic with a high degree of difference and variation, competitive, and ready to judge degrees of practicality and perfection. A genealogical view of the universe saw membership in a universal family, with resemblances between words and things, between species both plant and animal, even between animate and inanimate. Charlot alludes to all this as a nonanimistic worldview where "there was no supernatural beyond the universe" and "nothing purely immaterial" (89). He adds, "The Hawaiian view of the materiality of human activity—perceptions, emotions, and thought—avoided also the separation of the human mind from the world it contemplated and modified" (89). Despite how one might access this in terms of Western notions, one cannot but agree with Charlot that Hawaiian education has proved its usefulness in the centuries "of pre-contact Hawaiian life and has preserved and inspired invaluable cultural treasures from that time until today" (91).

The ideals of Hawaiian education included its practicality; its being powerful (*mana*), religious and moral (*pono*), industrious; its goals of perfection and completeness; and its capability of being displayed. It was this very display of knowledge that produced its esthetics as evidenced in the presentation, recognition, and pride of that education. Recognition (*mahalo*) was appreciated with prestige and reward.

The practice of this classical, oral education (chapter four) began with observation, not questions and answers. Children, even rulers (*aliʻi*), must

listen and remember. Memorization was aided by silent repetition (there was a *kapu* about repeating lessons aloud because lessons were specifically for that learner), memory aids, and games; and formal learning structures were built into the language. These included assonance, canonization of vocabulary, regularity of oral literary forms, and close parallelism between the form of composition and a method of memorization. Charlot profusely illustrates each of these linguistically and in translation. The richness of classical Hawaiian education in mastery of language skills can be illustrated by the preference for a list with its ideal of completeness rather than a general or generic term for an entire type or class. Charlot notes that “[i]n translating the Ten Commandments, it was found they had about twenty ways of committing adultery” (113). This level of specificity required that the list be complete without anything being left out, demonstrating one’s mastery of the subject, one’s excellent memory, and the proper and precise use of the Hawaiian language. Christian missionaries found it necessary to express a general prohibition “in another way, by ‘Thou shalt not sleep mischievously’” (113). This was intended to counter the need of complete and specific knowledge, accurately and beautifully listed.

The love of appropriate lists to locate one in the universe, in the family and in one’s place (*‘āina*) produced a culturally specific form of classification: “objects can be divided, *mahele*, into sections, groups, or divisions, *‘āpana* or *papa*, by their type or character, *‘ano*. Individual items are selected, *‘ohi*, for a category and inserted, *ho‘okomo*, into it as are subordinate levels under higher ones. An item is counted, *helu ‘ia*, as belonging to a category” (227). At its ontological level, this classification entailed opposites, dualities, or dichotomies (sky/earth, land/sea, male/female, night/day) to symbolize the wholeness of the universe as well as its harmony and beauty.

At this point, Charlot introduces the oral literary forms: prose and poetry; narration, cautionary tales, trickster stories, stories that contrast smart and dumb or good and evil persons; historical reports; genealogies; chants. The subject areas and the bodies of knowledge—from fishing to martial arts, from medicine to religion—were all part of the general education that Hawaiian society could enjoy and evaluate their mastery in the *ho‘opāpā*. Charlot provides an enormous service because he describes how the contests of wits function in their variety of tests and strategies. (This section could easily become required reading for students who wish to understand any oral culture and those in Pacific or Hawaiian studies.)

The fifth chapter deals with Hawaiian educational institutions. The strength of this chapter arises from the wealth of postcontact descriptions of precontact institutions and surprises us with the range of knowledge that these institutions taught. Yet this points to a weakness, not of this study, because it has done exactly what it has proposed, but that this study begs to

be combined with future studies of the archaeology of classical Hawaiian education locating the *heiau* of each educational institution—the medical *heiau*, the astronomical *heiau*, the fishing observatory, etc. Just as Charlot has brought an entire body of literature from obscurity into the light, so also more must be done for the preservation of the places where classical Hawaiian education actually took place—before there are no actual remains left.

Charlot's own evaluation of this literature is correct, it would seem, from the sheer volume of specific examples he has given us: "Despite its problems and limitations, post-contact historiography remains one of the greatest achievements of Hawaiian culture. Hawaiian historians preserved a vast amount of history and ethnography, defended the value of their past and thus their culture, provided a context in which Hawaiians could understand themselves and the rapid changes of their time, and articulated a critical yet supportive image of themselves" (547).

The final chapter on the encounter with Western education is a needed aside to prove an implicit notion: that precontact Hawaiian culture was of inestimable value. Charlot concludes, "However much Hawaiians have learned from the West, they still have their culture to teach the world" (663).

This tome is highly recommended for every university and college library and for every public library with any interest in Hawaiian studies. It should also be a required reference for both Pacific and Hawaiian studies programs.