
REVIEWS

Harriet Ne, *Tales of Molokai: The Voice of Harriet Ne*. Collected and prepared by Gloria L. Cronin; illustrated by Terry Reffell. Laie, Hawaii: Institute for Polynesian Studies, Brigham Young University-Hawaii; distributed by University of Hawaii Press, 1992. Pp. xliii, 171, illus., index. US\$12.95 paper.

Reviewed by June Gutmanis, Mountain View, Hawaii

Tales of Molokai is a collection of stories about life on the Hawaiian island of Molokai, from ancient to modern times, as related by Harriet Ne. Told with countrylike simplicity, they evoke the sweet sense of nostalgia of tales shared while sitting on an old front porch. The tales as collected by Gloria L. Cronin may provide an evening or two of light, pleasant reading and perhaps be the basis for some retelling; but the collection, more importantly, provides an interesting example of the present state of evolving, native Hawaiian literature.

Mrs. Ne, who was known as a *kumu hula* (*hula* teacher) and for her knowledge of Hawaiian culture, was also an entertaining storyteller. Early in the 1980s Cronin became interested in the tales told by Ne and, between 1982 and 1988, she collected forty-three of them. They are wide-ranging, from Hawaiian traditions of creation and manifestations of humans who could take many forms to stories of *'aumakua* and night marchers, as well as tales of the Mu, Menehunes and famous chiefs, and homilies with a moral. Whether based on ancient or modern happenings, the stories reflect Ne's own approach to life, minimizing violence and avoiding duplicity. To Cronin's credit, the stories always remain Ne's.

The book is divided into five sections. The first two, "Tales of the Beginning" and "Tales of Naming," contain stories largely involving

supernatural beings and set in some vague ancient time. As indicated by the title, "Tales of Naming" tell how various Molokai place names came into being.

The section called "Tales of Long Ago" are largely stories about Kamehameha I and Kamehameha V. Molokai people will not be surprised to find that tales of Kamehameha V, who maintained a home on Molokai, receive more attention than those relating to Kamehameha I. In Ne's eyes Kamehameha I was less than the larger-than-life hero usually portrayed by other storytellers. In "The Attack of the Three Hundred Canoes," for instance, Ne tells of a battle between Kamehameha's forces and the people of Molokai, who counterattacked using slings and stones. Not familiar with this technique, Kamehameha lost the battle. In "The War Strategy of Kamehameha I," Ne says that more than once, Molokai ingenuity outwitted Kamehameha in other battles, but in time the people of Molokai "loved him and they submitted to him" (p. 59).

The remaining sections are mixes of stories based on the exploits of ancient supernatural beings and of historical personalities, as well as the experiences of Ne, her family members, and acquaintances. In these stories Ne, as do many traditional storytellers, gives authority to her tales by often adding, "I myself have seen, or heard . . ."

About midway through the section titled "Tales of the North Coast," the book becomes increasingly personal; and the stories found in the latter part of the book are the best of the collection. Typical of the incidents Ne recalls is a passage from the story "The Valley of Pelekunu" where she describes the clothing commonly worn by the people who were living in the valley when she was a child. "The women wore 'taro-patch pants,' the trousers their husbands had worn through at the knee which the women cut shorter and wore with a rope tied around the waist or with suspenders. On the top they would wear *pale 'ili*, or short-sleeved clinging cotton shirts, also borrowed from their husbands" (pp. 95-96).

As with many Hawaiians of an older generation, Ne thought of the Menehune not as mystical, night-working, little people given to disappearing before sunrise, but as a people of small stature who had come to Hawai'i before the Hawaiians and who were often friends with local families. According to her, once, while visiting on Kaua'i, she went to a cave where the Menehune were said to live. After waiting for a time, she met a group of Menehunes returning to their home. She described them as being short and quite fair. Both men and women wore long hair made into pugs with sticks through them.

On another occasion, while visiting a Mrs. Johnson in Puna, Hawai'i, Ne met two Menehunes who came to visit her friend. As a favor, they

caught a special kind of fish for their hostess. Ne relates that when the Menehune were talking together, they spoke in a strange language that she had heard before.

Unlike some, Ne's family had a friendly relationship with the *huaka'i po*, night marchers, and did not hide from them. She tells of twice witnessing marches, which she said occurred regularly during October and November. The first incident Ne tells about happened one evening when she was helping her school teacher. Hearing the marchers approach, the two sat on the floor by the classroom door and watched as they went down the trail that passed the schoolhouse. In keeping with tradition that the night marchers always follow the same route and never turn to the left or right, they marched right through a house that had been built across the path to their fishing grounds. Sometime later, after an aunt had purchased the same house, Ne celebrated her birthday by watching the ghostly ones, with torches ablaze, march and chant their way through the kitchen. At the same time her mischievous brother, lying on the floor, tried to grab the legs of a marcher as he went past. The marcher just lifted his leg higher and kept on marching.

This collection, when compared to that made some seventy years earlier by Laura Green, provides a basis for exploring changes in Hawaiian storytelling techniques, content, and subjects. Green's collection was based on stories from Mary Kawena Pukui and the Reverend L. K. Kalawe, published in 1923 and 1926 as *Folk-tales from Hawaii* (Poughkeepsie, N.Y. : Vassar College). The two collections deal with the same range of stories: "myths, legends, and folk-tales." Looking through some older traditional stories such as those collected by Abraham Fornander and even older stories that appeared in Hawaiian-language newspapers, it appears that this style of brief stories draws upon incidents that on occasion might have been included, abbreviated, or left out of longer stories, at the whim of an individual storyteller.

A generation apart, the tales collected by Green are slower moving than those of Ne and have a hint of formality while Ne's stories, despite their nostalgia, have a brisk feeling and more "modern" speech patterns. Some of this difference in styles may be due to the fact that the tales collected by Green were recorded mostly in Hawaiian and later translated by Green, while Ne's stories were told in English.

Comparing the two collections, both adhere to the same concepts of acceptable social behavior and the possibility of transcending measurable reality. Ne's stories, however, include more details taken from her own personal experience, such as her Christian beliefs, than the stories collected by Green. On the other hand, Pele is the focus of many of the stories told by Pukui and Kalawe, but is mentioned only in passing in

the stories by Ne, who does deal with a wide range of other beings. Interestingly, only one tale shares the same identifiable story line. That is the story of a woman who loved a man who at night took the form of a caterpillar and ate the people's crops. In both versions, the man is destroyed to save the crops. Ne's story is set on Molokai and is titled "Pe'elua Hill," while that collected by Green is set in Ka'u, Hawai'i, and is titled "The Women Who Married a Caterpillar."

On the average Ne's stories are much shorter than those in the earlier collection, with only the details necessary to make her points, points frequently those that might have been found in a fable by Aesop. Although brief, the details in Ne's stories often provide clues to some aspect or the other of Hawaiian culture. For example, in the first story of the collection she tells of the path of "flight" used by Hina, the Mother of Molokai, when visiting that island. Today, Hina's path is observable as that of the rain as it moves from Pelekunu, over the island, and then out to the ocean. Two other examples of this type of information can be found in the story of Puakea. There the heroine discovered that *'awapuhi* ginger is an effective and pleasant shampoo when the hero, rudely if gently, hits her on the head with a ginger stalk. In the same story her father explains that sugarcane needs a full year of growth to be effective as medicine. Still another story describes a bit of gift-giving ritual, when a chief gives a piece of white tapa to a newborn child. "As was the custom, he [the chief] breathed upon the tapa, then gave it to the lesser chief [the father], who, in turn, breathed on it" (p. 48).

Those looking for historical and anthropological facts may be frustrated with Ne's manner of storytelling, for she freely mixed time periods, ancient and modern aspects of culture, and fact with fiction. At times she also combined two or more traditional stories or created completely new tales.

An example of how Ne moves back and forth in time, much as in science-fiction script, can be found in the "The Old Warrior of Hanakeakua." There Kailau, a friend of Ne's, meets the ancient warrior of the title in the Kipu area. For months Kailau visits the old warrior, whom he always found "sitting on the side of a little hill, puffing on *kapaka*, a cigarette made from a roll of tobacco leaves" (p. 121). As their friendship grows, Kailau gives the warrior a special stone, which the older man wears as a neckpiece. One day when Kailau goes to visit the old warrior he finds him gone and goes to the village of Hanakeakua to look for him. There Kailau is told that the warrior had been killed in a battle two weeks earlier. The battle had obviously taken place long ago as when Kailau went to look for the old warrior, he found the battlefield scattered with bones that from the description must have been

there a very long time. Identifying the warrior's remains by the stone he had given him, Kailau gathers them up and takes them to the hillside where he buries them. Sometime later, while Ne was riding with her parents and Kailau, the old warrior appears, sitting in his usual place on the hillside. But only Kailau, Ne, and her mother see the warrior. Kailau explains why Ne's father cannot see the old warrior: "Your mother can see because she is Hawaiian, but your father is a true Christian. He cannot gaze on the past and the present for it has no importance to Christianity" (p. 123).

In several stories that seem to be set in ancient times, relatively modern articles appear: goats, coffee, pots and pans. Stories that also seem to be set in ancient, *kapu* times, a period during which women never cooked, have women busy preparing food.

Cronin's preface, though brief, provides an excellent capsule introduction to traditional literature. She explains how Ne's stories illustrates both the traditional Hawaiian classification of literature--as *ka'ao*, "a category of stories in which the imagination plays an important part," and as *mo'olelo*, "stories about historical figures and events" and which "now includes tales of gods" --as well as the Euro-American categories of myths, legends, and folktales (pp. xii-xiii). Throughout the preface, Cronin also weaves reminders of the important role of storytelling in human culture: "All artistic and human endeavors, including story-telling, are attempts to understand individuals and cultures," says Cronin (p. xiii).

The introduction is a personal history of Mrs. Ne, based on interviews by Cronin and Dr. Kenneth Baldrige. The two used a question-and-answer format to lead Ne through her life story. And it is a unique story. The granddaughter of two Hawaiian women, one married to a Chinese man and one to a *haole* ship's captain, Ne's life was an interesting blend of her three-culture heritage. At various times she lived with her parents, grandparents, uncles, brothers and sisters, a Chinese godfather, one or the other of three husbands, five children, various grandchildren and great-grandchildren, in homes in remote Pelekunu valley and Kalua'aha on Molokai, and on O'ahu at Pauoa, in Kaimuki, and Pawa'a, and later back on the homesteads at Kalama'ula, at Ho'olehua, and Kamalo. She taught hula, worked as a babysitter and an assistant to a dental hygienist, cared for the retarded, developed photographs, worked at a blood bank and for the cancer society, was ordained as a minister, taught Hawaiiana in elementary schools and adult education classes for Kamehameha Schools and Maui Community College, was commissioned as historian for Molokai, and worked with 4-H clubs for nearly twenty years. But the real difference was her approach to life.

She did not blame, envy, or complain. Every event was an adventure and those that were unpleasant she reports so briefly that they may be missed before she continues on with another story. Her philosophy of storytelling is an obvious outgrowth of her philosophy of life. She says, "I like to tell stories with a moral to them. I especially like to tell stories about family love and reconciliation in the community or about obedience. . . . I want them [our young people] to be proud of being Hawaiian, and to accept the traditions and the *kapus* of old and apply them in modern life" (p. xxxvii). Ne also understood the techniques of communications, saying that "the good storyteller speaks with his eyes and motions with his hands. His eyes must reflect sadness and joy at the right time. . . . A storyteller is also a sort of teacher and preacher to the Hawaiian society. He is a teacher because he has to do research to get the specific information he needs. And then he preaches. Sometimes there's no existing story, but the tale-teller gets information, puts it together, and makes a new story out of it. . . . You combine the history and the traditional elements of story" (p. xxxix).

While the introduction fulfills Cronin's wish that it provide the "context for a fuller understanding of the tale-teller, her tales, and her culture," one is left wishing for even more details of Mrs. Ne's life, especially her training in hula, and Molokai's hula traditions.

Although Baldrige contributed only a portion of the interviews with Ne, which were the basis for the Introduction, it seems he might have also been credited on the title page. His name is mentioned only once and that is in Cronin's preface.

The illustrations by Terry Reffell are happy companions to Ne's stories. Reffell uses small areas of well-executed, finely detailed drawings contrasted to comparatively large blank spaces. They suggest rather than shout.