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*Legendary Hawai'i and the Politics of Place: Tradition,
Translation, and Tourism* (review)

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Book Reviews

Legendary Hawai'i and the Politics of Place: Tradition, Translation, and Tourism. By Cristina Bacchilega. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. Pp. xii + 230, preface, introduction, notes, works cited, index, acknowledgments.)

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"There is no need for me to politicize cultural production about and in Hawai'i: the colonization of Hawai'i does it for me," writes Cristina Bacchilega in *Legendary Hawai'i and the Politics of Place* (p. 5). This is certainly evidenced by history. Centennial observances of the 1898 Spanish-American War produced waves of analysis and critique of the late-nineteenth-century U.S. territorial expansion in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Fueled by the theoretical impulses of poststructuralism and postcolonialism, as well as by the late-twentieth-century global political landscape of invasions and occupations, scholarship has sensitized us to the workings of hegemony and orientalism. Cristina Bacchilega's contributions to these conversations are both theoretically rich and organically grounded.

Bacchilega traces the construct of a discursive formation that she names "*legendary Hawai'i*"; its discursiveness is repeatedly underscored by its appearance in italics throughout the book. She defines *legendary Hawai'i* as "a space constructed for non-Hawaiians (and especially Americans) to experience, via Hawaiian legends, a Hawai'i that is exotic and primitive while beautiful and welcoming" (p. 5). The workings of *legendary Hawai'i* took shape in the years immediately following the 1898 U.S. annexation of the former kingdom and at the intersection of the ideology of annexation and the emergence of tourism. Its dynamics are succinctly captured in the following formulation: "If (linguistic and media) translation is the mo-

du operandi of the immediately post-annexation cultural phenomenon I am calling *legendary Hawai'i*, the novelty of photography provides it with a technological edge (while visually translating many of its narrative topoi), and tourism is its economic and ideological motor" (p. 5–6).

Although the phenomenon of *legendary Hawai'i* uses Hawaiian legends and conceptions of place, Bacchilega explicitly turns away from analyzing the contents of the legends and focuses insistently on the cultural and ideological work that their presentation does. Her argument operates from two directions simultaneously. She traces how the translation of Hawaiian legends into English—and their presentation in digested publications illustrated with photographs—created visions of Hawai'i devoid of detailed indigenous knowledge or stories about its locales. However, Bacchilega uses her own location as a literature professor at the University of Hawai'i to work from the opposite direction as well, by demonstrating ways in which places are storied with multiple layers of meaning. If complete, detailed knowledge about those stories has not always remained in active memory, awareness of the existence of rich detail—past and present—is integral to the indigenous Hawaiian experience and epistemology that are entirely absent in the *legendary Hawai'i* construct. Moreover, these Hawaiian perspectives are "counternarratives to the domesticating logic of *legendary Hawai'i*" (p. 153). The simultaneous insistence about storied places by Hawaiians and the erasure of knowledge about those and other storied places by non-Hawaiians are what produces a "politics of place." These two trajectories inform the book's organization, which is not chronological but rather begins in the contemporary era and then jumps back a century. The two trajectories also inform Bacchilega's interdisciplinary strategy of combining textual and visual analysis.

At the center of the *legendary Hawai'i* con-

struct is an analysis of the work of two translators, publisher Thomas G. Thrum and Reverend William D. Westervelt. In the early territorial era, their prolific output of Hawaiian legends in English was distinct from antiquarian scholarship aimed at documenting culture that was deemed to be on the verge of disappearance. Instead, both authors emphasized cultural decay in order to depict the Hawai'i of legends in a storied, yet static, ethnographic present removed from the living present. Bacchilega examines how the photographs used by both authors are in conversation with the concomitant emergence of a visual vocabulary in photography being used to market Hawai'i as a modern place suitable for visitors.

Bacchilega's argument for an unmaking of *legendary Hawai'i* calls for "a re-cognition of Hawai'i's stories in and of translation that attends to and respects indigenous senses of place, genre, and history" (pp. 138–40). This is accomplished in two ways. First, she analyzes work by two Hawaiian women, contemporary photographer Anne Kapulani Landgraf and early-twentieth-century scholar Emma Nakuina, as "complex, autoethnographic interventions into the preservation of Hawaiian knowledge and stories" (p. 103). Second, Bacchilega examines contemporary multicultural presentations of Hawai'i's "supernatural tales" as proverbial wolves in sheep's clothing—unwitting perpetrators of the discursive work of *legendary Hawai'i*. The organization of chapters brings new meaning to the moniker "Sandwich Islands," which was bestowed on the Hawaiian archipelago by British explorers: the analysis of *legendary Hawai'i* is sandwiched between chapters on Landgraf and Nakuina, in effect decentering Thrum and Westervelt precisely by centering them between the two Hawaiian women.

In a book that analyzes the discursive work of Hawaiian legends in English translation, starting off with the work of a contemporary photographer is an unusual choice. It is effective, however, for underscoring some of the ruptures wrought by colonialism on Hawaiian modes of knowledge, and Bacchilega tracks their persistence and continuity in a nonverbal mode of representation, namely in *Nā Wahi*

Pana o Ko'olau Poko, a volume of landscape photography published in 1994. Landgraf's photographs are deftly read as performances of a Hawaiian mode of storytelling. The inclusion of subtle details and unexpected angles will be familiar only to "insider" residents who know these places intimately. Yet Bacchilega demonstrates how these photographs invite readers/viewers to ponder their own relationships and histories in regard to these places—and to other ones as well. The ordering of the photographs as a tour through the Ko'olau Poko district (of windward O'ahu), the naming of geographic features, and Landgraf's placement of Hawaiian-language captions ahead of their English renderings clearly establish that these storied places were never depopulated, as Thrum and Westervelt would have their readers believe. Moreover, the analysis of particular registers of seeing the landscape opens readers to clearly seeing their absence in the photographic illustrations in *legendary Hawai'i* publications.

The *legendary Hawai'i* construct is set in the historical context of an extraordinary print culture embraced by native Hawaiians in the late nineteenth century. In this context, the notion of translation is turned on its head by a discussion of the 1875 Hawaiian-language publication of "Arabian Nights" in ten newspaper installments, predating English translations of Hawaiian legends by several decades. This retrospectively contextualizes Emma Nakuina's 1904 volume *Hawaii: Its People, Their Legends* as an important statement of indigenous resistance to the changeover of political power in her time, through its insistence that a Hawaiian way of knowing Hawai'i was not what was enjoying air time in the non-Hawaiian marketing of the archipelago to the United States.

Throughout *Legendary Hawai'i and the Politics of Place*, Bacchilega's analysis of place is thoroughly infused with an explicit ethics of her positionality. She resides in Hawai'i although she is not native-born, and her students include those who are native-born. This becomes the focus of thoughtful reflexivity in her pedagogical practice that alone would be valuable reading for folklorists. The continued reprinting of publications by Thrum and West-

ervelt (along with the current popularity of Hawai'i narratives packaged as "spooky tales" and "ghost stories") have worked a chilling effect on indigenous Hawaiian perspectives by their ubiquitousness in the marketplace and in folklore scholarship alike. In the context of the contemporary movement for sovereignty and self-determination among Native Hawaiians, this volume contributes importantly to the wider project of recovering and revaluing indigenous agency and epistemology, and it provides Hawai'i students with the tools to recognize and honor their knowledge about where they live.

Once upon a Virus: AIDS Legends and Vernacular Risk Perception. By Diane E. Goldstein. (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2004. Pp. xvi + 210, 1 figure, appendix, references cited, index.)

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For the study of contemporary legend to assume its rightful place at the forefront of folkloristic endeavors, scholars must venture beyond the examination of particular and idiosyncratic case studies to focus on the content and context of legend complexes. The public power of this genre is most evident through the interconnection of legends that are motivated by and that address issues of public concern. Like wolves, legends often run in packs.

Over the past quarter century, AIDS has been our diabolical companion, alternatively evil and impish. One of the great virtues of Diane Goldstein's *Once Upon a Virus* is to remind us that legends mutate as rapidly as the contagions that they track. Over twenty-five years, HIV/AIDS has impacted so many corners of our society and has sparked so many narratives that the legends about this disease can be used to provide a means for understanding the ways in which this threat is interpreted. Whether speculating on the cryptic origins of this ailment, the motivations of disease vectors (as "AIDS Harrys" are technically termed), or the threats from kisses on Caribbean beaches, AIDS is

rarely far from our minds and tongues. Whether it be fast-food employees who masturbate in the mayonnaise, women who initiate men into the world of AIDS, miscreants who slip infected needles into telephone coin return slots, or government scientists whipping up batches of the virus in their secret laboratories, AIDS stories monitor our fears. Taken together, they demonstrate the revealing fact that where public anxiety exists, folklore is to be found. Tradition is the canary in our mental mines.

Diane Goldstein is our guide as we canvass these legends, and a knowledgeable guide she is. Admittedly she is not the theorist of contemporary legend for which we might yearn. The book lacks an overarching explanation—no structural, feminist, or psychoanalytic perspectives here. Meanings are found in plain sight. Neither is Goldstein a deep ethnographer. With the exception of some research in Conception Bay North in Newfoundland (near Goldstein's home base of St. John's), this data is largely catch as catch can, admittedly a long tradition in legend research. The analysis is less definitive than probative. Yet despite these caveats, Goldstein has a comprehensive awareness of AIDS lore, and most of the major narratives of the disease are well covered. At the end, one realizes just how legends can provide an alternative, if spotty, folk history of a disease and its metaphors.

Still, an analysis that chooses to be deep rather than broad will find tasks left undone. Given that much of Goldstein's data is from the relatively small population in Newfoundland, one might have asked for a greater analysis of the oikotypes of AIDS legends. As Linda Dégh and Clifford Geertz have each argued in their own ways, narratives are locally constituted. While legends shout to populations, they also whisper to small groups. Just as Newfoundland has been used for genetic studies, "the rock" could provide a genetics of narrative. Within small populations, one can observe narrative distortions through networks, and recognizing Dégh's contributions, one can examine how certain specially constituted networks (e.g., families, interests, occupations) select particular texts to narrate and to alter.

On a more global level, AIDS narratives con-