

Rhema Hokama*

Shakespeare in Hawai‘i: Puritans, Missionaries, and Language Trouble in James Grant Benton’s *Twelf Nite O Wateva!*, a Hawaiian Pidgin Translation of *Twelfth Night*¹

Abstract: In 1974, the Honolulu-based director James Grant Benton wrote and staged *Twelf Nite O Wateva!*, a Hawaiian pidgin translation of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. In Benton’s translation, Malolio (Malvolio) strives to overcome his reliance on pidgin English in his efforts to ascend the Islands’ class hierarchy. In doing so, Malolio alters his native pidgin in order to sound more *haole* (white). Using historical models of Protestant identity and Shakespeare’s original text, Benton explores the relationship between pidgin language and social privilege in contemporary Hawai‘i. In the first part of this essay, I argue that Benton characterizes Malolio’s social aspirations against two historical moments of religious conflict and struggle: post-Reformation England and post-contact Hawai‘i. In particular, I show that Benton aligns historical caricatures of early modern puritans with cultural views of Protestant missionaries from New England who arrived in Hawai‘i beginning in the 1820s. In the essay’s second part, I demonstrate that Benton crafts Malolio’s pretentious pidgin by modeling it on Shakespeare’s own language. During his most ostentatious outbursts, Malolio’s lines consist of phrases extracted nearly verbatim from Shakespeare’s original play. In *Twelf Nite*, Shakespeare’s language becomes a model for speech that is inauthentic, affected, and above all, *haole*.

Keywords: *Twelfth Night*, Reformation studies, puritanism, pidgin and creole languages.

* Singapore University of Technology and Design, Singapore.

¹ I would like to thank the audiences at the 2016 Asian Shakespeare Association’s conference in Delhi, members of the 2017 Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association’s annual conference in Honolulu, and faculty members from Chaminade University and the University of Hawai‘i for offering excellent feedback and encouragement on early versions of this argument. At Singapore University of Technology and Design, my colleagues Alastair Gornall, Gabriel Tusinski, Samson Lim, and Sandeep Ray provided illuminating comments and suggestions on a later draft of this essay.

In 1974, James Grant Benton (1949-2002), a local Honolulu director, actor, and stand-up comic, took Illyria—the mythical backdrop of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*—and reimagined the island in terms of contemporary Hawai'i. Benton's adaptation was staged that December in Honolulu at the University of Hawai'i's Kennedy Theatre in collaboration with Kumu Kahua Theatre, and the play has been performed several times in Hawai'i and once in Los Angeles during the past four decades since Benton's first production.² Benton's play is unique in that it is written entirely in Hawaiian Creole English—or what locals from Hawai'i simply call pidgin, or Hawaiian pidgin. Benton titled his play the irreverent *Twelf Nite O Wateva!*—the pidgin rendition of Shakespeare's original title, *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*. In *Twelf Nite O Wateva!*, linguistic mobility along the pidgin spectrum is linked with social mobility in contemporary Hawai'i. In Benton's translation, Malolio (Malvolio) becomes a pivot for the play's exploration of class, race, and language tensions on the Islands.³ In his efforts to woo his mistress Princess Mahealani (Olivia) and marry up in the Islands' social hierarchy, Malolio alters his native pidgin in order to sound more *haole*—the Hawaiian term for foreigner, or more generally, a white person. While Malvolio speaks more or less like the other characters in Shakespeare's original play, Benton's Malolio is wholly subsumed by his quest for linguistic self-fashioning as he struggles to give up his native pidgin for a language that he thinks resembles standard English.

In *Twelf Nite O Wateva!*, Benton deploys both historical and linguistic models in crafting Malolio's pretentious behavior and speech patterns. My argument in this essay is two-fold: first, I demonstrate that Benton characterizes Malolio's social aspirations within the interlinking contexts of religious conflict in both early modern England and in post-contact Hawai'i; in particular, Benton aligns historical caricatures of radical puritans with cultural views of Protestant missionaries from New England who arrived in Hawai'i beginning in the 1820s. Malolio's character is palimpsestic, bearing the traces of two interposed historical moments of confessional identity and conflict. In the second portion of this essay, I argue that Benton reaches back to the early modern world not only to reimagine the roots of Anglo-American religious radicalism but also to reimagine Shakespeare's original language within the linguistic and social context of contemporary Hawaii. In Benton's play, echoes of Shakespeare's own

² Since its inaugural 1974 performance, *Twelf Nite* has been performed in Honolulu at Mid-Pacific School/Kumu Kahua (1985-1986 season), Diamond Head Theatre (1994-1995 season), the University of Hawai'i's Kennedy Theatre (April-May 2005), and the Hawaiian Mission Houses (August 2013, August 2017). It has been produced once in Los Angeles by the East West Players (May-July 1995).

³ In discussing the two plays, I use Shakespeare's original character names in reference to *Twelfth Night*, and Benton's Hawaiian-inflected names in my treatment of the equivalent scenes in *Twelf Nite*.

language resurface in surprising moments—most prominently in Malolio’s haughty gripes about the other characters. What is surprising about Benton’s translation is that Malolio’s most pretentious and verbose moments of speech are often comprised of phrases that are extracted almost word-for-word from Shakespeare’s original rendering of the lines. In *Twelf Nite*, Shakespearean language becomes a model for what inauthentic, scolding, affected, and *haole* language sounds like. Religious radicalism compounded with Shakespeare’s own language provide the unlikely historical and linguistic scaffolding for Benton’s creation of a modern Malolio, a character who enables local audiences to reflect on what it means that the way one speaks often determines class privilege and economic advancement in contemporary Hawai‘i.

Pidgin, Race, and Privilege in Hawai‘i: from the Nineteenth Century to the Present

A discussion of *Twelf Nite O Wateva!*’s historical and linguistic frameworks must begin with an overview of Hawaiian pidgin. It is important to note that Hawaiian pidgin is distinct from the Hawaiian language itself, which is the language that the Native Hawaiians—or *kānaka maoli*—spoke prior to contact with Westerners, and what some Native Hawaiians continue to speak today. By contrast, Hawaiian pidgin has its origins in Hawai‘i’s plantation economy and is a creole language that bears the linguistic features of Hawaiian, English, and the languages that immigrant plantation workers brought with them from throughout the Pacific Rim. The first sugarcane plantation was established in Hawai‘i in 1835; in subsequent decades, immigrant laborers began arriving from China, Japan, Okinawa, the Philippines, Portugal, and Puerto Rico to work in the Islands’ plantations (Sakoda and J. Siegel 3-14). Pidgin developed in response to the language pressures of these multilinguistic working conditions, in which Native Hawaiians and recent arrivals found themselves laboring alongside each other in Hawai‘i’s sugarcane and pineapple fields. Marleen Booth and Kanalu Young offer the following definition of the language in their 2009 documentary film *Pidgin: The Voice of Hawai‘i*, produced by Pau Hana Films:

Pidgin one language we talk in Hawai‘i. Mo den half da peopo hea. Different from Hawaiian. Maybe a little bit like English, but get all kine stuff from odda kine languages mix in. Like from Hawaiian, Cantonese, Portuguese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino—you know, all da peopo wen work da plantations.⁴

⁴ Additional details about *Pidgin: The Voice of Hawaii* can be found at <http://pidginthevoiceofhawaii.com>, and DVD copies of the documentary can be purchased directly through the website. An opening selection of the documentary can be found on

Pidgin was born out of these multicultural social and labor conditions. Pidgin—first one that was based primarily on Hawaiian, and then one based primarily on English⁵—provided a common language through which the workers could communicate with each other and the *luna*, or plantation overseers. These *luna*, like the workers, were also non-*haole* immigrants to the Islands. While Hawai‘i no longer relies on a plantation economy, which has been supplanted by international and domestic tourism, pidgin is still spoken to some degree by a majority of residents of Hawai‘i. One estimate attributes pidgin usage as a first language to about half of the state’s 1.4 million inhabitants (“Ethnologue”),⁶ and pidgin continues to remain the primary language of Hawai‘i’s working class.

Most Hawai‘i locals are bilingual, and can speak to some degree both pidgin and standard English. That Benton chose to undertake a pidgin translation of Shakespeare was unprecedented, considering the language’s history of being vilified and suppressed in Hawai‘i. Discrimination against pidgin speakers in Hawai‘i has long been a covert mode of racial and socioeconomic disenfranchisement, both in the work force and in the public education system. Kent Sakoda and Jeff Siegel, linguists at the University of Hawai‘i, have described the stigma attached to pidgin usage on the Islands: “While recognized as being important to local culture, [pidgin] has at the same time been denigrated as corrupt or “broken” English, and seen as an obstacle to learning standard English, the official language of the schools, government, and big business” (18). Beginning in 1924 up through the 1960s, territorial Hawai‘i implemented a two-tier public school system comprised of English standard schools and district schools. In order to gain enrollment in the English standard school system, children had to pass examinations demonstrating oral proficiency in standard American English; those who spoke English as a second language or pidgin English were often relegated to an alternative district school system for students who could not pass the standard English language exams. Judith Hughes (70-1), of the University of Hawai‘i, has noted that the two-tier school system was motivated as much by race and class anxieties as it was by concerns over educational quality, in that the alternative school system kept pidgin speakers segregated from children whose families spoke proper American English. Even after the dismantling of the English Standard School system, contention remained over pidgin use in Hawai‘i’s classrooms. In 1987, the Board of Education (BOE) of Hawai‘i proposed a policy on language use in the classroom, which sought to ban the use of pidgin in the public schools

YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7X9AAeDCr4>. Accessed October 26, 2017.

⁵ For a discussion of the transition from a primarily Hawaiian-based pidgin to an English-inflected one, beginning around 1875, see Sakoda and J. Siegel (5-6).

⁶ For an illuminating discussion of this statistic, see Alia Wong’s 2015 *The Atlantic* essay on the stigma facing Hawaiian pidgin speakers.

(Lippi-Green 168). In the workplace, pidgin likewise has been perceived as a professional liability. In 1985, Hawai‘i-born meteorologist James Kahakua applied for a broadcast position with the Honolulu office of the National Weather Service. While the weather service found Kahakua qualified, his interviewers told him that his pidgin English disqualified him for the job; ultimately, they hired another candidate from Ohio, who had less meteorological experience than Kahakua. Two years later, the same year that the BOE proposed outlawing pidgin in the classroom, the state’s ninth district court heard Kahakua’s case. Kahakua lost the lawsuit (Lippi-Green 182). As Kahakua’s attorney described the situation: “The employer did not want Kahakua on the radio because [he] did not sound White” (Hearn; qtd. in Lippi-Green 184). To speak pidgin in Hawai‘i has been, and continues to be, grounds for discrimination in every phase of one’s life—from the schoolyard to the workplace.

As a result of longstanding attempts to suppress the use of pidgin in the classroom and in professional contexts, pidgin speakers still face social stigma in contemporary Hawai‘i. Writing in 1938, John Reinecke, a sociologist at the University of Hawai‘i, described how the desire to speak standard American English in Hawai‘i often embodies a desire to become more *haole*—or white—and to partake in *haole* privilege. What Reinecke wrote in 1938 remains an astonishingly accurate description of perceptions of language and social class in Hawai‘i today:

The emotion-charged attitudes associated practically everywhere with the use of different levels of speech take on additional significance in Hawaii, for there the type of English spoken is connected with race as well as with class differences. The only persons to whom standard English is native are (roughly speaking) the few Americans and British, locally known as Haoles, who occupy an envied position of economic advantage. Good English and the Haole are associated in the popular mind. “A Haole,” defined a Japanese girl, “is a person who speaks a beautiful language.” To be like a Haole has been, by and large, to share in his economic and social advantages, to feel one’s self more closely approximate to that state of a “real American” which the schools and press glorify. Yet at the same time it implies being “haolefied,” dissociating one’s self from one’s class and racial group. Therefore the use of “good English,” always a class fetish emphasized by the pedagogic mind, becomes in Hawaii doubly a fetish, about which play ambivalent sets of attitudes. (Reinecke 783)

One ramification of this past and ongoing discrimination against pidgin speakers in Hawai‘i is that there is only a small albeit growing body of literature written in Hawaiian pidgin.⁷ Although a small number of Hawai‘i-born writers have

⁷ In recent years, writers from Hawai‘i—including the novelist Lois Ann Yamanaka, the slam poet and essayist Lee Tonouchi, the short story writer Darrell H. Y. Lum, and

begun publishing both literary and scholarly writing in Hawaiian pidgin in the decades since Benton's production, *Twelf Nite O Wateva!* was one of the first attempts to reimagine pidgin as a language suitable for literary writing. *Twelf Nite O Wateva!* is a translation into the vernacular, an attempt to make Shakespeare's language come alive for an audience who speaks pidgin as their native language. The pidgin of Benton's play is vigorous yet agile, and his language captures the range of emotions, settings, and moods that Shakespeare's original version evokes. In writing *Twelf Nite*, Benton elevates pidgin to the literary stature of Shakespeare's original language, while at the same time questioning the claims to privilege and exclusivity that this literary inheritance represents for local audiences.

Much like contemporary Hawai'i, Benton's pidgin translation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* contains a multitude of pidgins.⁸ In *Twelf Nite O Wateva!*, the pidgin English of Benton's characters not only reflects their actual social standing but also their social aspirations. Indeed, while all of Benton's characters speak pidgin to some degree, the heaviness of their pidgin differs according to their social class. Dennis and Elsa Carroll, theater critics at the University of Hawai'i, describe the play's various pidgins as such: "[t]he most pretentious, inflexible, and studied characters ... [use] the lightest pidgin; the most unpretentious and spontaneous characters, ... [use] the heaviest and most free-wheeling" (67).⁹ Among all of Benton's characters, however, Malolio alone makes a concerted effort to remake his language in his efforts to direct his social and economic fate.

Benton's Malolio grapples with the legacy of a language that has been stigmatized. He despises pidgin, even as he speaks it himself. He tries to

the poet Joe Balaz—have published literary works in Hawaiian pidgin. In 2000, the first translation of the New Testament was published under the title *Da Jesus Book*, the culmination of thirteen years of translation work by the Pidgin Bible Translation Group, a local group of twenty-seven pidgin speakers and biblical studies scholars. Additional details about *Da Jesus Book* project can be found at <http://www.pidginbible.org/> and a reading from the pidgin translation of the Lord's Prayer from Matthew 6: 9-13 can be watched on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9_V5BXaXJc. Accessed on October 26, 2017.

⁸ According to Sakoda and J. Siegel, "Pidgin remains a primarily spoken language, and it is spoken in a variety of ways. Some people speak "heavy" or "strong" Pidgin, which is very different from English. (Linguists call this form the "basilect.") Other people speak a "lighter" form of Pidgin, which is close to standard English. "This is called the "acrolect.") The majority of speakers speak varieties in between (the "mesolects") and 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" (19-20).

⁹ For a discussion of the registers of the pidgin in *Twelf Nite O Wateva!*, see also Dennis Carroll's editorial note to Benton's play (185).

suppress pidgin speech—both in others and in himself. In Benton’s version, as in Shakespeare’s original, Malolio chastises Count Opu-nui (Sir Toby Belch), Sir Andrew Waha (Sir Andrew Aguecheek), and Lope (Feste) for their boisterous revelries. But in Benton’s adaptation, Malolio takes offense not just at the loudness of the holiday merriment, but also at the language in which that merriment is being expressed. Consider what he says to the raucous trio here, in both Shakespeare and Benton’s respective versions:

Malvolio: Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? (Greenblatt et al. 2.3.82-3)

Malolio: You bagas crazy, o wat? You no mo brains, manners, o honesty except but to *babble like women who pound poi* at dis time of da night? (Benton 200)¹⁰

In Shakespeare’s play, Malvolio likens the trio’s noisy merriment to the clanging of tinkers, or itinerant metal workers who repaired pots and pans for customers as they traveled from town to town. But Benton’s Malolio describes this ruckus with a striking comparison that seems to have little to do with the Shakespearean original, likening their babbling to the sound made by women who pound poi—a food staple in Hawaiian culture, made from the pounded and fermented tubers of the taro plant.

Interestingly, the Hawaiian word for pidgin is *‘ōlelo pa‘i ‘ai*, which means literally, “pounding taro language.” It is uncertain as how that term came to be, but what is clear from Malolio’s screed is that he takes offense not just at the loudness of the revelers, which is the import in the original Shakespearean comparison; rather, he rails against the language in which those revelers are expressing themselves, which is pidgin. Malolio hates pidgin. He hates how it sounds and he hates its social association with Hawai‘i’s working class. He hates pidgin, even as he—and perhaps especially because he—speaks pidgin himself. So he works to eradicate all traces of pidgin from his own language, even as he struggles to figure out exactly how proper English should work. As Malolio struggles to assimilate the *haole* language of the Protestant missionaries into his native pidgin, Benton explores his character’s language anxieties against the backdrop of early modern English religious conflict.¹¹

¹⁰ I cite all further references to the play parenthetically by page number, as Benton’s prose translation does not make use of line numbers.

¹¹ In a parallel case study, the anthropologist Webb Keane (*Christian Moderns*; and “Sincerity, “Modernity,” and Protestantism”) has argued that religious belief often manifests itself in material and linguistic markers of identity—what he terms a “semiotic ideology.” In studies of Dutch Calvinist missions to the Indonesian island of Sumba, beginning with the Dutch East Indies ventures, Keane argues that the arrival of Protestantism on the island shaped the Sumbanese sense of subjectivity and agency. I thank Gabriel Tusinski for these references.



Two men pounding *poi*, a Hawaiian food staple made from fermented taro. Waimea, Kauai. R. J. Baker (c. 1912). Hawaii State Archives Collections.

English Puritans and New England Missionaries in *Twelfth Night*

In Shakespeare's play, Maria describes Malvolio's killjoy tendencies using the language of radical confessional identity: "Marry, sir, sometimes he is a kind of Puritan" (2.3.129). In her assessment of Malvolio, Benton's Kukana offers blunter commentary: "Well, I know dat he is one Puritan," she insists (201). Upon finding Maria's letter with its cryptic reference to M. O. A. I., Shakespeare's Malvolio reveals his conviction that he has been favored by Jove—a conviction not unlike the Reformed belief in election.¹² He exclaims: "Jove and my stars be praised. ... Jove, I thank thee!" (2.5.150-55). In his adaptation, Benton plays up Shakespeare's original confessional elements, translating the interjected references to Jove in ways that highlight Malvolio's religious fanaticism and

¹² David Bevington (328) has noted the similarities between Malvolio's conviction that Jove has his economic interests in mind, and Reformed views of personal election.

delusion. While a 1606 act of Parliament banned the practice of using God's name on the secular English stage,¹³ Benton's adaptation is, of course, not limited by religious and political attempts at censorship, leaving him free to reimagine Shakespeare's lines as an unmistakable profession of Malolio's Protestant faith: "Praise da Lord and my stars. ... Tanks again, eh, God" (209). In Shakespeare's version, Malvolio's final line appears: "I will smile, I will do everything that thou wilt have me" (2.3.154-5). In the original, he addresses Olivia, professing that he will do exactly as she purportedly commands in her letter: "Thy smiles become thee well. Therefore in my presence still smile, dear my sweet, I prithee" (2.3.152-4). But Benton cuts the lines about smiling, thus rendering Malolio's final line as a kind of prayer, a direct address to God: "I going do everything dat you like me do," he says (209). Malolio reemphasizes his new-found certainty that he has found favor with God at the end of Act 3, after misreading his mistress' reaction to his sartorial decision to don yellow garters: "dis is God's work, so tanks, eh, God. ... Nutting can come between me and Mahealani except air. One mo time, tanks, eh, God" (217). More so than in the Shakespearean original, Benton's Malolio traces the source of what he believes will be his good fortune to divine providence. As Malolio senses that he is on the cusp of moving up Hawaii's social hierarchy, he begins pandering to the God of the *haole* missionaries.

Past productions of *Twelf Nite O Wateva!* have dramatized Malolio's particular brand of religious fervor. In the 1995 production of *Twelf Nite* at Honolulu's Diamond Head Theatre, which featured Benton himself as Malolio, Benton has his character flash God the shaka sign—a local gesture of solidarity, born out of Hawaii's surfing culture. Benton's Malolio, in Benton as Malolio, is certain that he has God on his side (Ardolino 23). That same year, the Los Angeles's East West Players staged the only continental United States production of the play to date, directed by Brian Nelson (Foley). Nelson visually tracked Malolio's growing religious preoccupations by having him sport an oversized silver cross, a reference to multiple and overlapping cultural contexts: Nelson's cross is a visual marker of the puritan antitheatricalism that posed threats to the Renaissance stage, the Protestantism brought to Hawaii by the New England missionaries in the 1800s, and the variety of contemporary American evangelical fundamentalism that attacks religious and cultural diversity.

¹³ William P. Holden has interpreted Malvolio's prayers to Jove as indication of his religious hypocrisy: "A stage Puritan would not lightly traffic with the heathen Jove, nor with the Christian God" (125). However, Holden's argument ignores the constraints imposed by the Parliamentary prohibition against using God's name on the secular stage. For a discussion of the parliamentary act, see Jeffrey Knapp (1-21).



James Grant Benton as Prince Amalū (Orsino) in the original 1974 Kumu Kahua production of *Twelfth Night O Wateva!* Directed by Terence Knapp. Kennedy Theatre, University of Hawai'i archives.

Religious fervor, in both Shakespeare and Benton's plays, is inextricably linked with a particular culture of reading. Shakespeare's Malvolio suffers from a tendency popularly associated with early modern English puritans—a penchant for reading so literally as to distort the cultural and inherited meaning of texts, especially scriptural texts. In his convoluted interpretation of Maria's forged letter—his attempts to decode the cipher-like M. O. A. I.—Malvolio employs the contorted textual reading practices that the English cleric Richard Hooker criticizes in the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. According to Hooker, puritans abuse “the word of God, whether it be by misconstruction of the sense of by falsification of the words” (1:99, 304).¹⁴ In his study on Reformation reading

¹⁴ Referenced in Maurice Hunt (“Malvolio, Viola, and the Question of Instrumentality” 282). For an expanded version of Hunt's argument about stage portrayals of Puritans in light of Hooker's ecclesiastical theology, see Hunt's chapter by the same title

practices, James Simpson echoes Hooker's frustration with reformist reading habits that seek to interpret texts outside of their larger historical and cultural traditions. Simpson has argued that radical puritan encounters with texts attempted to repudiate all textual ambiguity—even as those Reformed readers relied on textual ambiguity to further their own scriptural interpretations:

For all the intensity and ambiguity of this reading experience, the converted reader must, however, simultaneously become a tireless reader, and yet deny the possibility of ambiguity in scriptural reading. The plain, evident simplicity of Scripture is perhaps the most insistent theme of evangelical polemic in this period... Evangelical writers must make this commitment [to the literal sense of scriptural text] for many reasons, not least because, if a movement is to ground itself on a text, the text must be unambiguous. If evangelical polemic must insist on the plainness and easy legibility of the literal sense, however, it must also strenuously repress its moment of origin in the reading of ambiguity. (90-91)

It is precisely this habit of radical puritan reading, one that erases existing social and cultural contexts to pursue a self-serving textual interpretation, that characterizes Malvolio's tortured attempts to extract meaning from what turns out to be an inherently nonsensical text.

In staging Malvolio's fall, Maria crafts a trap perfectly tailored for a reader with puritan literalist tendencies. In attempting to make sense of the cryptic assemblage of letters referenced in the Maria's letter—M. O. A. I.—Malvolio acknowledges that the letters do not quite appear in the sequence that they should in his own name. Regardless, he insists on extracting an interpretation from the text to justify his belief that he has been predestined, not to a heavenly elect, but to a social and economic one. In his interpretation of the letter, Malvolio adopts a specious reading practice that is reminiscent of puritan literalism: “M. O. A. I. This simulation is not as the former. And yet to crush this a little, it would bow to me, for every one of these letters are in my name” (2.5.122-4).¹⁵ Malvolio is intent on “crushing” the text to make it conform to his prior interpretation, to render textual ambiguity decidedly unambiguous.¹⁶

(*Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness* 73-96). For an earlier readings of Hooker's response to Puritan literalism in light of Malvolio's narrow reading practices, see also Simmons (182); and James F. Forrest (261-2, 264).

¹⁵ Benton's translation of the lines reads: ““M. O. A. I.” Dis meaning no stay da same; and yet, if I wen bend da letta, da бага would bow to me, because every one of dose lettas stay in my name” (208).

¹⁶ The resonances between Malvolio's tortured reading practices and Reformation literalism has been documented by critics. For a partial list, see Maurice Hunt (“Malvolio, Viola, and the Question of Instrumentality” 282-3); Hunt (*Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness* 78-9); Bevington (328); Paul N. Siegel (222-4); J. L. Simmons (182); Donna B. Hamilton (97); and Aaron M. Myers (32). In finding historical models

In Benton's play, Malolio is reviled by the other characters in large part because of his bookish tendencies and aspirations—a detail that is entirely Benton's own development. In *Twelf' Nite*, Kukana criticizes Malolio's tendency to parrot what he's read from books, not insignificantly, within the context of the fact that he, like her, is a mere laborer:

Kukana: Da devil of one Puritan dat he is, and everything he say to peopo he wen read from one book; and *when he do his work around da house and you look at him, he tinkin*, “*Dese guys love me and wat I do.*” So because we got his ack wired, dis is how my revenge going fo work. (202, emphasis mine)

Maria: The devil a puritan that he is, or anything constantly but a time-pleaser, an affectioned ass that cons state without book and utters it by great swaths. The best persuaded of himself—so crammed, as he thinks, with excellencies—that it is his grounds of faith that all look on him love. And on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work. (2.3.135-41)

Kukana scorns Malolio on account of his status as a laborer, in lines that have no precedent in Maria's parallel speech in Shakespeare's original version. Malolio is a worker, like the others, in a wealthy woman's house, which marks him as a part of Hawai'i's working class. It is the contradiction between what Malolio is—a blue-collar hospitality worker—and what he aspires to be that infuriates Kukana. Another difference between the two versions of the play is that while Shakespeare's Malvolio reads books written in his own vernacular English, this isn't the case for Benton's Malolio. For Benton's local audiences, it would be clear that Malolio's books are written in standard English, not the pidgin of everyday conversation. With a few exceptions—including Benton's own play—pidgin has never been a written language with its own orthography. It is not a stretch to see that Kukana's attack on Malolio's bookishness is a barely veiled attack on his aspiration to “talk *haole*.”

Kukana's criticism of Malolio's pretenses encodes a suspicion that his variety of puritan-like behavior is an excuse for his efforts at social advancement. Her economic argument against the legitimacy of Malolio's bookishness resonates with caricatures of the stock puritan character in early modern stage plays, which attributed radical reformist tendencies to those who were overly eager to scale the social strata.¹⁷ As Paul N. Siegel has pointed out,

for Malvolio's alleged puritanism, Hunt (*Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness* 78) has noted similarities between Malvolio's excitement over the cryptic M. O. A. I. and the preference among some Reformists for using hieroglyphs and cyphers to chronicle their spiritual progress. On this point, Hunt cites William Haller (97).

¹⁷ For an overview of the stock puritan figure in early modern performance, see Holden (125); and Hamilton (94). The hypocritical puritan character remained a stock role on

contemporary charges against puritans often hinged on claims that their religion served as a front for their own economic and material self-interests:

This was a standard charge made against Puritans: they do not really believe in their religion or any other religion but use it as a means to hide the evil they perform to advance their material interests... When Maria says, therefore, that Malvolio is not constantly a Puritan or anything else but a “time-pleaser” (that is, one who adapts his conduct to the opportunities afforded by time), she is merely making the charge that was made against Puritans generally: they are concerned with their religion only insofar as it serves their profit. (218)

In Benton's adaptation, Malolio's new-found interest in books is directly linked to his desire for economic and social advancement. He sees reading books as a direct means to bettering himself, to proving in practice that he is the socially elite person that he already believes that he is elected to become:

Malolio: I going be proud, I going read smart books. I going baffle Count Opu-nui, I going remake myself; I mean, I going be one champion boy. I no tink I fooling myself, because every reasoning points to dis, dat my lady love me! (209)

In his reimagining of a Hawaiian Illyria, Benton reworks early modern caricatures of puritans as social climbers hungry for material and social gain, and also as bad readers who misinterpret texts and their contexts. In Benton's dramatization, Malolio falls into a trap that is custom made for someone who aspires to be more bookish, but who, as a native pidgin speaker, finds written language both baffling and obscure. When he comes upon the letter that Kukana has written, he reveals his own unfamiliarity with the mechanics of how written language works: “Ooo prose, gotta conscioustrate,” he proclaims (208). He misreads the written letter, and it is his very reliance upon written language that eventually leads to his temporary incarceration.

For Malolio, it is written texts—and specifically, books written in standard English—that embody true social capital. Malolio wants language to be absolutely unambiguous, and for that, it needs to be written down and standardized—de-pidginized, so to speak. In the process of doing so, he strips that language of its wider cultural contexts. His desire to start reading in order to improve his language and his ability to speak standard English—the English of the Protestant missionaries and the American mainlanders—is opposed to the Hawaiian language, which had no written equivalent prior to contact with

early modern stage, making appearances in the drama of Ben Jonson, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Middleton, William Cartwright, and Jasper Mayne—among others. For an illuminating discussion of Shakespeare's treatment of puritans within the context of early modern antipuritan stage satire, see Knapp (51).

outsiders. And of course, his desire to learn to speak from books runs contrary to the orality of Hawaiian pidgin, ever changing to suit the needs of Hawaii's diverse population. Written language promises what Malolio feels that pidgin, with its plantation roots and oral heritage, can never offer: the promise of social mobility and *haole* privilege.

Malolio and Linguistic Self-hatred

In his efforts to speak like the books he reads, Malolio unwittingly commits a number of social and linguistic gaffes. Indeed, much of the comic relief of Benton's play centers on Malolio's unsuccessful attempts to speak standard English when he is trying to prove his social superiority before the others. But for Benton's audience members who are familiar with Shakespeare's own play text, these moments of comic buffoonery are striking in that they jangle with phrases from the original. In other words, Benton creates Malolio's pretentious language by incorporating unadulterated lines from the Shakespearean text, which against the pidgin of the play, sound comical and pretentious. An example of Benton's tendency to do this occurs in 1.5, in which Malolio chastises Princess Mahealani (Olivia) for taking delight in Lope's (Feste's) antics. Here is what Malvolio says about Feste in Shakespeare's version:

Malvolio: I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal. I saw him put down the other days with an ordinary fool that has no more brain than a stone. Look you now, he's out of his guard already. Unless you laugh and minister occasion to him, he is gagged. (1.5.75-9)

Compare the lines above to Benton's version, in which I have italicized the phrases that are verbatim Shakespeare:

Malolio: I tink dat *I marvel* dat you *take delight* in one *barren rascal*. I saw om make facetious wid one regular *fool dat had no mo brain* den one piece of black coral. Look at him, he no can tink already. *Unless you laugh and minister occasion to him*, he get stuck throat. (194, emphasis mine)

Benton's literary strategy in crafting Malolio's inauthentic language is to lift phrases directly from Shakespeare. In a surprising application of Shakespeare's language, Benton has Malolio appear at his most pretentious precisely when he's speaking Shakespeare's own language, leaving his audience to assume that at least some of the books that Malolio is reading include Shakespeare's own works. In *Twelf Nite O Wateva!*, Shakespeare's language serves as a model for

pretentious, inauthentic language—the very kind of language for which Malolio is mocked, both by the other characters and by Benton’s audience of Hawai‘i locals. There is a word in pidgin to describe Malolio’s pretentious language: “hybolic.” One local pidgin reference book from the Islands humorously defines it as an attempt to “talk like one intellectual-kine *haole*”—or in other words, to try to sound like an educated, upperclass white person (Johnston, “Hybolic”). When Benton wants Malolio to come across as most “hybolic,” he leaves Shakespeare more or less intact.

Malolio is not the only character who speaks verbatim Shakespeare, and not all of Benton’s verbatim uses of Shakespeare come across as sounding ludicrous. Indeed, some of the play’s most moving lines are those that correspond most closely with the original text. For example, in Benton’s rendition, Lahela (the equivalent of Shakespeare’s Viola in disguise as the boy Cesario) presents a powerful meditation upon the accidental comic-tragic mix-up, as she realizes that Mahealani has fallen for her—the mere messenger—instead of falling, as planned, for her master the Count Amalu (Orsino):

Lahela: I mean I know Prince Amalu neva give me no ring ... I must be da man. If it be so, poor lady, she would be betta to love one dream. [...] You know, as women, it’s our frailty dat is da cause—not we—fo dat’s wat we made of, and such we be! [...]

 (199).

For the most part, Lahela’s pidgin is a direct rendering of Shakespeare’s verse:

Viola: None of my lord’s ring? Why, he sent her none.
I am the man. If it be so, as ’tis,
Poor lady, she were better love a dream.
...
Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,
For such as we are made of, such we be. (2.3.23-25, 30-1)

Benton’s version is an expertly calibrated pidgin equivalent of the original language. Considering how unusual it is to hear and read pidgin in literary and poetic contexts, Benton understood that lines like these would astonish native pidgin speakers encountering them for the first time. At the same time, Benton was unwilling to leave the translation intact, and he inserts abrupt pidgin interjections into Lahela’s speech:

Lahela: I mean I know Prince Amalu neva give me no ring ... I must be da man. If it be so, poor lady, she would be betta to love one dream. *Ho, ass why so hard!*¹⁸ You know, as women, it’s our frailty dat is da

¹⁸ *Ass why hard*: That’s why hard. Pidgin equivalent of “Tough luck.”

cause—not we—fo dat’s wat we made of, and such we be! *Ass not fair!*¹⁹ (199, italics mine)

What are we to make of the unevenness of Benton’s rendition, of his tendency to suddenly veer away from the original into pidgin colloquialisms?

Benton’s tendency to insert pidgin interjections into otherwise luminous translations of Shakespeare has been viewed not as indication of Benton’s iconoclasm, but as evidence of his play’s literary flaws. For example, according to Frank R. Ardolino, a theater critic in attendance at the 1995 Diamond Head production, the play’s pidgin rendering posed an aesthetic failure on Benton’s part to fully incorporate pidgin into the original, or to find an equivalent for Shakespeare’s language: “Benton’s most extensive and important linguistic changes involve the finding of pidgin equivalents for Shakespeare’s poetic images. ... but sometimes Benton’s pidgin awkwardly deflates the tone of Shakespeare’s words” (24). Dennis Carroll and Elsa Carroll offer a more generous interpretation of the disruptions caused by Benton’s pidgin interjections, arguing that Benton deliberately retreats from Shakespeare in the name of comic relief:

Benton repeatedly used a tactic of deliberately blaspheming against some of Shakespeare’s poetry, first setting the audience into a misleading mood of sanctification by evoking the original through near-quotation, then comically deflating the mood by an obstreperous burst of pidgin or by a four-letter word. (Carroll and Carroll 67)

In intentionally disrupting the cadence and progression of Shakespeare’s language, Dennis Carroll maintains that Benton “stresses the more farcical aspects of the original model” (185). Nevertheless, what both Ardolino and Carroll overlook is the fact that there are passages where Benton retreats from Shakespeare’s language into the familiarity of pidgin that are not quite accounted for by either of their proposed explanations. Contrary to Dennis Carroll’s view, the comic insertions in Lahela’s speech are entirely unique to Benton; there are no equivalent lines in Shakespeare. Furthermore, Benton’s heavy pidgin interjections are not awkward, as Ardolino maintains in his disapproving review, but masterfully incorporated. Something else must explain Benton’s decision to veer away from Shakespeare in these pivotal moments in the play.

Benton’s retreats from Shakespeare seem to suggest that there is something suspect about the original; that in undertaking his pidgin translation, he was doing what his character Malolio was trying to do, to upgrade his pidgin English. In short, in translating Shakespeare for a pidgin-speaking audience, Benton nevertheless remained deeply uncomfortable letting the original

¹⁹ *Ass not fair*: That’s not fair.

language stand unaltered and unquestioned. Consequently, even when Benton finds a pidgin equivalent for the Shakespearean original—as in his translation of Viola’s speech—he refuses to sustain those lines for more than a few fleeting moments. Although Benton remained keen in his translation to elevate pidgin to the literary status of Shakespeare, he could not but feel uneasy about using Shakespeare’s language as a benchmark to measure his own literary output. It is this tension that produces some of the most fascinating and jarring moments in the play, and captures the larger political and cultural tensions surrounding language and social mobility in contemporary Hawai‘i. In his efforts to demonstrate that pidgin can evoke what “high literature” purports to do for its audiences, Benton also revealed his sense that this literary inheritance is something that must be resisted and overcome. Even as Benton strived to emulate Shakespeare’s poetic power, the play’s pidgin nevertheless perpetually works to undermine its literary benchmark.

What Benton ultimately does with Shakespeare’s language mirrors what he has his characters say about Shakespeare’s language in the play. Paradoxically, as Benton worked to reinterpret Shakespeare’s poetry for contemporary audiences in Hawai‘i, his characters reveal decidedly anti-poetic sentiments. There are two telling instances of the play’s anti-literary suspicions. First, when Lahela (Viola), approaches Mahealani (Olivia) with yet another proposition from Count Amalu (Orsino), she greets the lady with a line that is nearly verbatim Shakespeare:

Lahela: Aloha to you lady, may da heavens rain odors on you.

Andrew: Dis бага is full of tirty-cent poetry. “Rain odors”—well! (211)

As in the original play, Sir Andrew Waha dismisses Lahela’s fawning attempts at flattery. Yet in a divergence from the original, Benton reimagines Andrew’s retort as a critique of Lahela’s pretentious language, which he dismisses as “tirty-cent poetry.” The 30-cent poetry that Andrew mocks, of course, is no other than Shakespeare’s original language. The second example comes from Act 1 of the play, in which Lahela describes the prepared speech she has written for Mahealani as real poetry: “[T]ook me long time fo write dis speech, and besides, dis is real poetry, you know.” What Mahealani says next might be read as a comment upon the political and sociolinguistic uncertainty of Benton’s literary project: “Ass all I need to hia—one nodda poet” (196). Mahealani’s response is unique to Benton’s version, and there is nothing in her response in Shakespeare’s version that reveals any animosity whatsoever toward poets and poetry. The play harbors a deep distrust of “real poetry” and the poets who write them, and Mahealani and Andrew’s sentiments seem to encode a larger suspicion about standard or proper English—the kind of language for which Shakespeare himself becomes an avatar in the play.

Pidgin and Social Mobility in Contemporary Hawai‘i

At the end of *Twelf Nite O Wateva!*, Benton’s Malolio—like his Shakespearean counterpart—is harshly punished for his social aspirations and for his viciousness toward the other characters. In addition, Benton’s Malolio is also punished for his hatred of pidgin, and for his desire to erase his own cultural identity. Like the early modern puritans, Benton’s Malolio works to uproot language and texts from their wider social contexts, and for this he is viciously punished by Kukana and the others. However, although Malolio is the only one who is punished for his social aspirations at the end of the play, he is not the only character who expresses those aspirations in *Twelf Nite O Wateva!*. Indeed, Princess Mahealani refuses to marry Count Amalu because “she no like his rank, she no like his land” (191). The issue of land ownership in Hawai‘i is a fraught and contested subject, and is directly linked to political and economic power in the Islands. Mahealani’s desire to move up the Island’s social hierarchy by marrying up and into—or rather back into—the land that was taken away from the Native Hawaiians mirrors Malvolio’s desire to scale the Islands’ social ladder by ascending its linguistic one. Malolio is consequently not alone in his class aspirations, and Benton’s play forces his audience to contemplate whether Malolio deserves the severity of his punishment for expressing social aspirations that many of the play’s characters share in common. After all, in Benton’s linguistic economy, Malolio has managed to gather something of value from his recent attraction to written language. Malolio’s ability to write is his saving grace, and his facility with written language is what enables him to secure his freedom at the end of the play.

In Shakespeare’s play, Malvolio convinces Feste to fetch him a candle, pen, ink, and paper by leveraging whatever remaining social capital that he has left: “Good fool, as ever thou wilt deserve well at my hand, help me to a candle, and pen, ink, and paper. As I am a gentleman, I will live to be thankful to thee for’t” (4.2.76-8). He makes the same entreaty later in the scene, again using the same argument: “Good fool, some ink, paper, and light. And convey what I will set down to my lady. It shall advantage thee more than ever the bearing of letter did” (4.2.104-6). He leverages the promise of future gain a third time: “Fool, I’ll requite it in the highest degree” (4.2.112). On the contrary, Benton strips Malolio’s pleas of any form of class privilege or promise of future financial gain; in his entreaties, Malolio makes an appeal to something else—the promise of friendship: “Eh, pal, I like you do one favor for me. Can you get me one candle, one pen, one ink, and one paper ... please. I one true friend and if you help me, you neva going regret it” (228). Benton’s Malolio makes the same promise later: “Please get me da pen, paper, and light. I promise I be your friend” (228).

In pleading for his freedom, Malolio is asking to be perceived for his potential qualities as a friend, rather than for any social advances he can proffer on Lope (Feste). In Benton’s version, it is this definition of himself as a friend—not as a superior—that convinces Lope to fetch the light, pen, ink, and paper that will enable Malolio to write his way out of confinement. While Benton’s play is rooted in Hawai‘i’s class hierarchy and culture, its ending is nevertheless quintessentially American, with its implicit fantasy of a sense of self that transcends class boundaries or identities: Malolio first and foremost wants to bestow his friendship, not his social advantages as a gentleman—a title that Shakespeare, of course, was deeply invested in acquiring for himself during his lifetime. However, Malolio’s promise of friendship quickly comes to naught once he gains his freedom and learns that Lope, like the others, was a co-conspirator in the plot:

Lope: Why “some stay born great, some achieve greatness trown upon dem.”
 I was involved in dis too, but dat’s pau.²⁰ ...
 Malolio: I going revenge da whole pack of you. [Exits] (237)

The class-consciousless friendship that Malolio described while imprisoned in the cage fails to translate into reality at the end of Benton’s play. At the close of *Twelf Nite O Wateva!*, it seems that Malolio’s final attempt at self-erasure has backfired.

Benton’s paradoxical Malolio embodies the political and social contradictions of what pidgin means for locals from Hawai‘i. Malolio is reviled for trying to speak something other than pidgin, but he also models the process of linguistic reinvention that nearly every local from Hawai‘i must undergo in order to achieve professional success in the Islands or on the mainland United States. While Malolio’s social and linguistic pretensions, blunders, and insecurities lie at the heart of the play’s comic moments, his aspirations are understandable—and some might argue, economically justified—in contemporary Hawai‘i. Benton intended for his audience to laugh at Malolio’s expense, to mock him for his language mix-ups and errors as he tries to speak standard English. Yet to be able to laugh at Malolio’s slips and mistakes assumes a bilingualism on the part of Benton’s audience, who must know both pidgin and standard English, to be equally conversant and comfortable in both. In other words, Benton’s audience must have already moved up the linguistic and social hierarchy, to have already done what Malolio now desperate wants to do himself. In doing so, Benton turns the tables on his audience, forcing them to acknowledge the ways in which their own social aspirations and advancements mirror those of Malolio. *Twelf Nite O Wateva!* is a meditation on the role pidgin

²⁰ *Pau* – Native Hawaiian word for “finished,” or “done.”

plays in defining an individual's social standing in Hawai'i, and Benton's often conflicted relationship with Shakespeare's original text illuminates Hawai'i's paradoxical place within the Anglo-American cultural and literary tradition. If the play's treatment of pidgin is contradictory, those contradictions are telling of the complexities surrounding social life and status on the Islands. The best and most memorable scenes from *Twelf Nite O Wateva!* emerge from these contradictions and capture the core issues surrounding social power and identity in contemporary Hawai'i.

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