

Introduction

1880s *Haole* Satire and Political Insurrection

The copy of Sanford Bradford Dole's sixteen-page satirical play *Vacuum: A Farce in Three Acts* (1885) that I read at the University of Hawai'i–Manoa's special collections includes a handwritten note identifying the real-life referents of the play's characters. Most important of these are "Skyhigh—Emperor of the Coral Reefs and Sand Banks of the Big Blue Sea," a stand-in for Hawaiian King David Kalākaua, and "Palaver," leader of the emperor's advisers, a fictionalized version of the notorious government minister Walter Murray Gibson. The emperor's other advisers are dubbed "Their Extravagancies the Incompotents." The play mocks the supposed ineptitude of Kalākaua's government and especially his ministers. Indeed, the *Hawaiian Gazette* (Honolulu) described the pamphlet as "a political sketch. The characters are evidently representing the ministry and their surroundings. The gold law and the government party are happily satirized."¹ In the first act, they all respond idiotically to a fire in Honolulu, in part by instructing the fire company to blow air onto it; this is particularly damning because Kalākaua had, in his younger years, been a firefighter. In the second act, Emperor Skyhigh learns from "Their Extravagancies the Incompotents" that the Hawaiian treasury is out of gold, an incident satirizing a controversy over recently produced Hawaiian silver coins. In the third act, the Incompotents rack their collective brains to come up with some new policy, any new policy. Palaver/Gibson proposes the policy of "keeping in office" and supports

it with a sleazy, self-revealing monologue about his schemes to gain power. He soliloquizes, in part:

At last my hopes are realized; the toil and the disappointments by the way are past; I have reached the goal of my ambition; I have power, and with that I care not for friendship nor the confidence of men, for I have that with which to compel their obedience or their submission. I am the real ruler; our Emperor over there thinks that he is sovereign and that I am his devoted servant, but he is mistaken without knowing it, and he will never find it out; as long as he is humoured with money, state ceremony, salutes, flags, royal orders, and other fol de rol, he is happy and imagines he is governing the empire.

The other Incompetents respond enthusiastically to this monologue, one through snippets of Brutus's speech from *Julius Caesar*, but the play abruptly ends shortly after they receive a letter from Emperor Skyhigh that they have been dismissed.²

Less than two years later, this satire's author would help to make his play's fantasy of the cabinet's dismissal come to pass. In 1887, Dole, whose cousin James Dole founded the pineapple company that would later become Dole Food Company, drafted what came to be known as the Bayonet Constitution, which was forced on King Kalākaua and required the dismissal of Gibson and other ministers. A few years later, during an 1893 coup that overthrew the kingdom entirely, Dole helped to draft the accompanying declaration and was named president of the Provisional Government of Hawai'i. A year later, he became the president of the Republic of Hawai'i, which ran the country until it was annexed by the United States in 1898. Most political histories of Hawai'i feature Dole but do not mention this satirically self-fulfilling prophecy delivered through farce. Studying the play alongside the subsequent uprisings in Hawai'i adds nuance to historical study of this tumultuous time period.

Vacuum: A Farce in Three Acts was one of three emblematic pieces of popular print satire—besides this dramatic farce, there was also a burlesque operetta and a set of mocking ballads—about politics in Hawai'i that appeared in print between 1885 and 1887, just before a group of *haoles* (foreigners) forced Hawaiian King David Kalākaua to accept a new constitution and dismiss his head minister. Together, these

works of humor reflect and comment on the volatile political environment in the decade-plus preceding the United States' 1898 annexation of the Hawaiian Islands, a period in which multiple factions representing diverse international interests vied for political ascendancy on the islands. These satires demonstrate the surprisingly key roles that humor and satire played in perceptions of and debates about US presence in the Pacific world during the nineteenth century. Reconstructing debates through readings of satires written and circulated in Hawai'i during this time helps contextualize the crisis of authority there in the 1880s. Though all three pieces mock Hawaiian King David Kalākaua and his adviser Walter Murray Gibson, their multidirectional attacks—on Hawaiian monarchs, American ministers, British meddlers, and missionaries' descendants—also use humor to rail against other competing power centers' interference in Hawaiian politics and social life while justifying their authors' own interference in these realms.

Another of these satires, *The Grand Duke of Gynbergdrinkenstein: A Burlesque in Three Acts, Respectfully Dedicated to the Public of Duchy*, is a versified Hawaiian parody of Jacques Offenbach's operetta *The Grand Duchess of Gerolstein*. Soon after its publication in 1886, the *Hawaiian Gazette* described the pamphlet as revealing "how utterly absurd the affairs of this kingdom are."³ Like *Vacuum*, *Gynbergdrinkenstein* satirizes King Kalākaua (here known as the Grand Duke of Gynbergdrinkenstein) and his cabinet, especially Gibson (here known as Nosbig), as a gallery of rogues. And like *Vacuum*, it fantasizes a scenario that its authors would later help to enact. In the burlesque, the Duke, Nosbig, and other government ministers plot to commit graft from the public treasury even after being warned by Herr Von Boss—a stand-in for Claus Spreckels, Hawai'i's hugely influential sugar baron—to be more thrifty. They sing, for instance, a song set to the tune of "Jingle Bells" and called "Jingle-Em," which begins, "Dashing at expense, like a one horse little State," and whose chorus is:

Jingle 'em, jingle 'em, jingle all the day,
It's nice to spend the public cash in a free and easy way.
Jingle 'em, jingle 'em, jingle all the day,
Never mind the piper or the man who has to pay.

The end of the musical offers a reverie of the administration's demise, as the pilfering of the Duke and his ministers is discovered, and they

abscond quickly. The Grand Duke sings on the last page, “The Opposition braced right up, we didn’t stay to fight.”⁴

Authorship of both *Gynbergdrunkenstein* and the *Gynberg Ballads*, a satire that I discuss shortly, has been ascribed to either one or both of two people: Alatau T. Atkinson, a Kazakh emigrant via Britain and the *Hawaiian Gazette*’s editor, later the general inspector of schools, and/or Edward William Purvis, a British émigré who served as the vice-chamberlain of the royal household until he resigned in August 1886. In 1887, Atkinson would join Dole in the opposition as founding member of the Hawaiian League, a secret organization formed soon after the publication of *Gynbergdrunkenstein* that would, with the help of the Honolulu Rifles, force the Bayonet Constitution on Kalākaua.

A sequel to *Gynbergdrunkenstein*, titled *The Gynberg Ballads*, was published in San Francisco before being distributed in Honolulu in May 1887. Unlike the two dramatic farces, this illustrated pamphlet eschews narrative in favor of eight separate ballads, each treating a folly of the Kalākaua administration, including a scandal about the distribution of opium licenses and a misguided attempt to make Hawai‘i an imperial power by creating and sending a one-boat navy to protect Samoa. Several of the ballads, like *Vacuum* and *Gynbergdrunkenstein*, mock Kalākaua’s alleged weakness for gin, a charge elsewhere leveled at Kalākaua in the sobriquet “The Merry Monarch.” The image accompanying one of these ballads, “The Order at the Bar” (fig. 1), puns on “bar” as both a legal term and a site for drinking. In it, bottles of champagne, wine, and gin fill the shelves, while Kalākaua stands next to a giant decanter of gin and uses a huge wine-bottle opener as a staff. Kalākaua is dressed in a loin cloth decorated with a graven image of himself, presumably a caricature of his image on newly printed Hawaiian currency.

In *The Gynberg Ballads*, Gibson, once again called “Nosbig,” is similarly dismissed as a “rascal of the deepest dye—unmitigated fraud!” Also echoing *Vacuum* and *Gynbergdrunkenstein* is *The Gynberg Ballads*’ foretelling of the administration’s, and especially Gibson’s, downfall. One ballad warns Nosbig, “Already you have lost your hold, fast waning is your star, / Go—clothed in nature’s meanest garb—a human ‘pariah.’”⁵ This pamphlet was immediately popular, despite the fact that copies arriving from San Francisco were briefly held in customs in an attempt to stop their circulation. Atkinson’s *Hawaiian Gazette* wrote in late May



FIG. 1 “The Order at the Bar,” from Alatau T. Atkinson and Edward William Purvis, *The Gynberg Ballads* (San Francisco, 1887). Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

1887, “The ‘Gynberg Ballads’ have gone off like hot cakes. Nearly every one not feeling right till he had a copy in his possession, and then retired to a quiet nook to have a good read and a hearty laugh over the subject matter and the ‘quaint’ cuts with which the work is embellished.”⁶ Given this report of the ballads’ widespread readership and the timing of their publication—about a month before the Hawaiian League and Honolulu Rifles forced the Bayonet Constitution on Kalākaua on June 30, 1887—this pamphlet may have helped sway public opinion in Honolulu against the administration and in favor of the so-called reformers, though it is impossible to measure or prove such influence.

Despite the wide circulation of these satires as well as the political prominence of their authors, most histories of Hawai‘i ignore them or, at best, only mention them in passing as they narrate the swirl of political crises in the kingdom in the mid- to late 1880s. For instance, Ralph S. Kuykendall’s mammoth, three-volume *The Hawaiian Kingdom* (the third volume, on the Kalākaua Dynasty, itself weighs in at over 750 pages) does mention all three satires but only in four paragraphs over a page and a half. Kuykendall concludes only that “the obvious purpose of all this propaganda was to convince the public that the administration of the kingdom was not only corrupt and unworthy of trust, but also ridiculous.”⁷ This assessment is, of course, true, though Kuykendall has come under fire for ignoring not only Hawaiian-language sources but also, largely, Native Hawaiians in his tome.⁸ Indeed, in recovering and studying these works, their authorship and context of production, and their circulations, we could do much more; that is, we could use satire to track public opinion on the Hawaiian Kingdom while underlining the centrality of humor and satire to serious political discussions in late-nineteenth-century Hawai‘i.

There are larger, methodological stakes for humor scholars here as well. These related satires reveal the importance of using print archives to study humor and satire as a way to track the circulation of political debates during heated historical moments that fostered a surfeit of satiric output, leaving notable traces in the archival record. Bob Nicholson, a historian of Victorian England, reminds us why we should be looking for and at long-lost humor in the first place. He writes that, because jokes traffic in references that their audiences are “expected to recognize,” “even the briefest of one-liners are often encoded with the attitudes, knowledge, and experiences of their intended audiences.” Analyzing jokes, Nicholson concludes, allows scholars to more fully “access the minds” of their audiences.⁹ As Nicholson implies here, we can, and must, lean on history in order to help us get the joke. But, just as important, studying humor that is gathering dust in archives can help us to reconstruct better cultural histories, especially those involving political quarrels carried out through humor and satire. Putting the works of humor and satire that we find in archives into conversation with each other enriches the study of complex historical moments. This is the project of *A Laughable Empire*, which attempts to make sense of the significant archival footprint left by nineteenth-century American humor about not just Hawai‘i but the entire Pacific world.

Comedy as Contact

In the essay “American Humor and Matters of Empire: A Proposal and Invitation,” Judith Yaross Lee issues a call for humor scholars to consider the complex relationships between American humor and “matters of empire” through transnational approaches that counter and “expose the nationalist bias behind the genteel-vernacular binary that has framed American humor studies since 1925.” For Lee, considering American humor and US imperialism together can teach us more about both. “Understanding the vernacular tradition in the context of imperialism,” she writes, “not only highlights the deep cultural significance of the comic conventions themselves . . . but also suggests a larger schema of imperial relationships.”¹⁰ In RSVPing to Lee’s invitation, *A Laughable Empire* considers both the comedy *of* contact and, for the vast majority of Americans who never traveled to and through the Pacific but gobbled up humorous accounts of it in print, comedy *as* contact. Surfacing the surprisingly globalist elements inherent in nineteenth-century notions of US identity helps to undercut notions of US exceptionalism that still persist into what has been dubbed the “Pacific Century.”

Along the way, I offer historicized and theoretical insights into the social mechanics of widely circulating humor in the nineteenth-century United States. An article titled “Immortality of Jokes,” which the English-language newspaper the *Honolulu Polynesian* reprinted in July 1854 from the *Portland (ME) Transcript*, gushed about the power and “ubiquity of jokes”: “They are as universal as John Smith and a great deal more popular. The same joke that moves to cachination the lantern jaws of the Yankee, has also tickled the bluff Englishmen, delighted the sprightly Frenchman, moved to mirth the phlegmatic German, and softened the sombre Spaniard. Oh, a glorious ‘institution’ is a joke. Jokes must be immortal. We’ll ask the spirits!”¹¹ Though the article is probably a bit too sanguine (or ethnocentric) in its assumptions about the universal appeal of a particular sense of humor, its excitement about the “immortality of jokes” reflects nineteenth-century assumptions about the ability of humor to unify across national and cultural divides. As the article points out, jokes and other forms of humor tend to get repeated across different eras, ethnic groups, belief systems, and nations. Studying humor with attention to both form and specific historical context(s) can reveal how it works over and across time either to connect people through shared laughter or to separate them through us/them othering.

Take, for instance, a rather pedestrian joke in Mark Twain's 1880 travelogue *A Tramp Abroad*. Twain writes, "Foreigners can't enjoy our food, I suppose, any more than we can enjoy theirs. It is not strange; for tastes are made, not born. I might glorify my bills of fare until I was tired; but after all, a Scotchman would shake his head and say, 'Where's your haggis?' and the Fijian would sigh and say, 'Where's your missionary?'"¹² This joke certainly reproduces the stereotype, which I analyze in detail in chapter 3, of the Pacific Islander cannibal devouring a well-meaning missionary. But there is also a cultural relativism and cross-cultural identification at work here that undoes, or at least undercuts, the work of the othering stereotype. The doubleness of humor allows its practitioners to signify on stereotypes in ways that force its readers and auditors to consider connections or parallels across cultures, making the familiar seem foreign and the foreign familiar.

If stereotypes are, as Homi Bhabha argues, "a major discursive strategy" of colonial rhetoric, jokes can also render stereotypes patently ridiculous, or at least culturally relative.¹³ By mashing together seemingly incongruous cultural signifiers, jokes like this *are* contact zones, as defined by Mary Louis Pratt in *Imperial Eyes*, where she uses the term to describe spaces of "imperial encounters" in which "peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict." "Contact," for Pratt, involves not just domination but also "the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by accounts of conquest and domination told from the invader's perspective." Contact zones are chaotic, often violent, and feature unequal power relations, but all parties are indelibly changed through the exchange. In focusing on contact, Pratt advises, scholars should consider exchanges between travelers/colonizers and the colonized "not in terms of separateness" but rather "in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, and often within radically asymmetrical relations of power."¹⁴ In researching this project, I have found time and again (admittedly, because I was looking for it) the inextricability of comedy and contact. When alien cultures come together and regard each other, for the first time or in subsequent meetings, each side looks at the other through the time-honored lens of its own ethnocentrism and epistemological assumptions. And when we judge other cultures on the basis of our own dress, speech, and customs, they can seem hilarious. In Herman

Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), Queequeg puts his luggage in a wheelbarrow and then lifts and carries the wheelbarrow; when laughed at for his misunderstanding, he tells a story about a white sea captain unwittingly using an *awa* calabash as a finger bowl at a banquet on his home island.¹⁵ Similarly, Captain Cook wrote in his journal about a play that Tahitians put on for Cook and his crew; he was not sure what was happening in the play, but he was pretty sure that it was making fun of him.¹⁶ (I revisit both of these examples in more detail in chapter 5.)

Such shifting perspectives and social relations, especially between sides with an imbalance of power, are apparent not only in physical contact zones but also in the mechanics of humor. Immanuel Kant writes in *Critique of Judgment* (1790), "Humour in the good sense means the talent of being able voluntarily to put oneself at a certain mental disposition, in which everything is judged quite differently from the ordinary method (reversed, in fact)."¹⁷ Other scholars have emphasized how humor forces us to see people and situations in a new light. In *Coyote at Large*, a study of humor in US nature writing, Katrina Schimmoeller Peiffer sees perspective shifting as an essential element of humor. As Peiffer describes the perspective-shifting process, "Humor jogs us to step partly away from ourselves in order to see our situation clearly" and "enables us to escape habits of perception that condition our responses and reduce our flexibility." Peiffer extolls humor's ability to force us to temporarily inhabit "the view of the outsider" while retaining our "customary" identities and perspectives. This shift does not just "unsettle our previously held perspective" but can also "clarify it," because "humor allows us to become an outsider to ourselves."¹⁸ Umberto Eco, in his essay "The Comic and the Rule," similarly describes the psychological process of humor engendering a perspective shift that leads to identification with instead of estrangement from the other. He points to moments in humor in which he "no longer feel[s] superior" to the butt of the joke but, on the contrary, "begin[s] to identify with him": "I suffer his drama, and my laugh is transformed into a smile."¹⁹ Because such identification can be used either to justify violence or to facilitate mutual understanding, whether humorous perspective shifting actually results in any concrete social change is an open question. Some humor theorists, like Elliot Oring, cite humor's "fundamental" ambiguity as the reason that, though humor certainly conveys social messages, precisely what those messages are, and whether their intention is ultimately serious, is less clear.²⁰ Divining the sociopolitical intent

of some pieces of humor is probably impossible. But by contextualizing the historical moment and publication contexts in which a particular piece of humor was consumed by its audience, humor scholars can at least make educated guesses about that humor's impacts on the attitudes of its contemporary audiences.

In the nineteenth-century United States, jokes, comic anecdotes, and bon mots about Pacific islands and Pacific Islanders attempted to make the faraway and unfamiliar either understandable or, on the contrary, completely other and unassimilable to American readers. They were used to justify as well as to critique US and European Pacific imperialism, colonialism, and missionary efforts. *A Laughable Empire* characterizes humor and satire as a comic contact zone between the United States and the Pacific world, demonstrating how jokes and other humor functioned sometimes in the service of and sometimes in resistance to the United States' pre-1900 imperial ambitions. I consider how nineteenth-century Americans and Pacific Islanders alike used humor to employ stereotypes or to question them, to other the unknown or to interrogate, laughingly, the process by which othering occurs and is disseminated. In a humorous cultural exchange, the ensuing chapters argue, some humorists mapped familiar American traits onto Pacific Islanders, whereas Pacific Islanders laughed at foreigners whose acts and appearance were at odds with their own epistemologies.

Viral Jokes and the Culture of Reprinting

The newspaper squib "Immortality of Jokes," discussed earlier, celebrates not just the "immortality" of humor but also the power of the press as a medium for that immortality:

Somebody, we believe it was Colesworthy—once said, "a printed thought never dies." If he had said a joke, printed or unprinted, never dies, he would have come nearer the mark. A joke is the most vital of all earthly things. Not only does it never die, it never grows old, or rather it is ever renewing its youth. Here, for instance, in the first paper at hand, is the joke about Jona's [*sic*] feeling rather down in the mouth while in the whale's belly, which we laughed over in our boyhood. Regularly, every year or two, it comes up again fresh, and good as new. There is just as much laugh in it as ever. So the joke of two Irishmen who reckoned they had ten miles to go, it was just five

miles apiece, is as old as the poles, but comes round to us yearly as jolly as ever. Thus jokes go the rounds of newspapers, get revamped and rejuvenated, and flourish in immortal youth!²¹

Instead of bemoaning the fact that a particular joke reappears “every year or two” as it makes “the rounds of newspapers,” “Immortality of Jokes” celebrates that repetition. The article’s author reasons that, each time jokes are reprinted, they are “fresh, and good as new” because, through their updated publication contexts in newspapers, they “get revamped and rejuvenated.” Two decades earlier, another newspaper (again excerpting a different newspaper) delighted in the evolution and “newness” of reprinted material as it circulated over time and space. In March 1831, the *Rutland (VT) Herald*, quoting the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, claims, “It is amusing to watch the progress of newspaper articles, and light stories, as they travel the grand rounds, and the changes of attire which they from time to time assume as they once in some half a dozen years or oftener start forth anew before the public, and travel the whole newspaper circle, with as bold a swagger as tho’ they had never been seen before.”²² Apparent in both these accounts is a probably self-serving—given editors’ penchants for reprinting material gleaned from other sources—but boisterous joy regarding the continued vivacity of material, especially “jokes” and “light stories,” as they appear and reappear, “as jolly as ever,” “with as bold a swagger as tho’ they had never been seen before.” *A Laughable Empire*, particularly in chapters 2 and 3, utilizes a unique methodology of comparative, contextualized readings of reprinted jokes and humorous excerpts to explore the swaggering, “jolly” reappearances of humorous, mid-nineteenth-century US treatments of the Pacific and Pacific Islanders.

Nineteenth-century Americans were addicted to newspapers and magazines, which circulated widely and cheaply throughout the nation. But so were many Pacific Islanders. Just as European visitors like Alexis de Tocqueville described the “immense” sway of newspapers over Americans, Native Hawaiians, too, were known as “poe pui nupepa”—“a people who craved newspapers.”²³ Midcentury US postal laws allowed for the free exchange of newspapers between editors, and newspapers could be mailed anywhere in the country at a maximum postal rate (which had been set in 1792) of one and a half cents, free if delivered within thirty miles of where the newspaper was published.²⁴ News accounted for approximately 95 percent of the total weight of US mail

by the 1830s, by one estimate.²⁵ Such statistics demonstrate the massive circulation of news throughout the nineteenth-century United States, creating what Meredith McGill has labeled the “culture of reprinting,” wherein the content of newspapers was largely culled from other newspapers.²⁶ But only in recent years have scholars begun to examine literature and entertainment in periodicals with special attention to their circulation. This new scholarship shows that “circulation itself was an essential, organizing technology that mediated experiences of textual production and reception,” which in turn leads to new understandings of nineteenth-century US literature and culture.²⁷

Of course, periodicals did not just house news, opinion pieces, and poetry; they also abounded in humor. The 1870s saw a “tremendous expansion” in humor appearing “across the entire range of newspaper and magazine publishing,” featuring cracker-box philosophers like David Ross Locke (Petroleum V. Nasby), Mortimer Thomson (Doesticks), Henry Wheeler Shaw (Josh Billings), Robert Henry Newell (Orpheus C. Kerr), and Edgar Wilson Nye (Bill Nye), many of whom relied on dialect and cacography for their humor.²⁸ But character-driven comic sketches had been finding homes in newspapers since the 1830s with the advent of Seba Smith’s Jack Downing and continuing with pseudonymous creations like Frances Whitcher’s Widow Bedot, Sarah Payson Willis Parton’s Fanny Fern, and Benjamin Penhallow Shillaber’s Mrs. Partington. Walter Blair has situated newspapers as a midcentury medium for comic circulation that carried “humorous material into every part of the nation,” often through humor writers on newspapers’ staffs.²⁹ In addition to the comic character sketches of such literary comedians, nineteenth-century newspapers ran regular columns of humorous miscellany featuring circulating jokes, anecdotes, and excerpts from mostly anonymous sources in addition to well-known comic lecturers. Jokes and bon mots provided filler in newspaper columns, constituted regular “Wit and Humor” sections, or commented pithily on adjacent news items. Such comic ephemera were very often reprinted by editors, a form of journalism often referred to as “scissors-and-paste journalism.” Ryan Cordell lists “regional humor” as one of the “prominent threads” of reprinted material identified by the Viral Texts Project’s algorithm.³⁰ Newspaper accounts of comic lectures delivered by comedians initially made famous through their newspaper and periodical humor, such as Mark Twain, Petroleum V. Nasby, and Artemus Ward, also demonstrate

the self-perpetuating circulation at work among the various comic genres discussed throughout this book.

Tracing reprints of comic material in periodicals unearths popular nineteenth-century American humor and reveals the populace's contemporary fascinations and fears through the jokes it read and recycled. In addition, focusing on reprinted humor enables us to identify comic material that mattered most to nineteenth-century Americans, not just what has passed the test of time. Such attention suggests a marked shift away from humor study's usual focus (to which I plead guilty in some parts of this book) on now-canonical humorists. Partly due to a continued investment in the concept of authorship, most humor scholars have paid more attention to sketches attributable to well-known comic authors such as Samuel Clemens (as Mark Twain), James Russell Lowell (as Hosea Biglow), Sarah Payson Willis Parton (as Fanny Fern), and David Ross Locke (as Petroleum V. Nasby) than to the print circulation of anonymous jokes and sketches. This commitment to the author function has led critics to value the sustained productions of individual humorists over the quick and scattershot dissemination of jokes and bon mots. The omnipresence of such humor in all formats, however, implies that nineteenth-century readers did not share these prejudices in their laughter. Throughout this book, especially in chapter 2, I seek to reverse that bias by focusing largely on ephemeral, "network authored" humor appearing and reappearing across multiple, cheap media. Such a shift in emphasis is made possible by increased access to digital archives of periodicals as well as by recent scholarship in periodical studies urging the reconsideration of "viral texts" that circulated widely in nineteenth-century print.³¹

As Nicholson has pointed out, newspaper jokes and other ephemera were not nearly as ephemeral as we might think. Whereas political and financial news, he writes, "depreciated by the hour," jokes and other more timeless content in newspapers "enjoyed a remarkably long lifespan. Many of them circulated for decades."³² In studying jokes, we study the circulation and prominence of ideas and attitudes; by reconstructing their referents, we reconstruct, according to Nicholson, the "characters, situations, and attitudes that millions of readers were expected to recognize in order to 'get' the joke." Analysis of humor offers insights into how people and politics were received and conceived of by everyday readers, who, Nicholson notes, tend to be "under-represented in the historical record."³³

The Pacific World in the US Imagination: Methodologies and Motives

For Euro-American travelers and readers since the 1700s, the Pacific was simultaneously completely other, both geographically and culturally, and, because it offered key ports and stop-offs in burgeoning global trade and Enlightenment exploration, increasingly familiar. Pacific islands were inaccessible but also constantly visited and written about; for Europeans and, by the nineteenth century, Americans, these islands were at the ends of the Earth but in the middle of everything. In 1513, the Spanish explorer Balboa crossed the Panama isthmus and dubbed the ocean he found on the other side the “Sur de Mar.” A few years later, Magellan came up with the name “Pacific.” For nineteenth-century Americans, the term “South Seas” usually meant the South Pacific Ocean with its myriad islands, but it was sometimes a stand-in for the entire Pacific Ocean, including Pacific Rim countries, as well. This book follows Matt K. Matsuda’s “Oceanic approach” to Pacific history, concentrating less on the Pacific Rim economic powers of Japan, China, Korea, and the Americas and more on the historical imagination of and about “small islands, large seas, and multiple transits.”³⁴ Nineteenth-century Americans were fascinated with this island world, imbibing travel narratives, missionary accounts, and fiction that offered alluring portrayals of Pacific islands and their peoples. Paul Lyons has noted the pervasiveness of portrayals of Pacific Islanders in nineteenth-century US culture. A list that Lyons provides shows just how fully the imagined Pacific permeated US literature and culture in the 1800s. Serious and comic representations of the Pacific and Pacific Islanders appeared in “newspaper items, trade and consular reports, magazine articles, missionary and explorer narratives, paintings, plays, poems, material artifacts in museum exhibitions from the Smithsonian to Barnum’s hooplaed Fiji cannibals, scientific and pseudo-scientific monographs, photographs (Barnum’s ‘cannibals’ posed for photographer Matthew Brady in 1872), sensational pamphlet novels, popular lectures by authors such as Herman Melville or Mark Twain, and ballads, such as the enormously popular ‘King and Queen of the Cannibal Islands.’”³⁵

Americans’ fascination with the Pacific peaked in the middle decades of the century, especially in the years immediately after the US-Mexico War and after the Civil War, when US fantasies of westward expansion, annexation, and filibustering came to include Hawai‘i and other

Pacific islands. Edward Sugden has detailed how, beginning around 1848, Americans began to view the Pacific world “through the lens of” Manifest Destiny, assuming as inevitable “the colonization of the Pacific by US forces, and the subsequent establishment of their own nation-state there.” Sugden coins the phrase “the Pacific 1848” as a historical marker of the moment that the Pacific Ocean became a relatively stable, US-dominated “cultural system” that emerged from the confluence of several circumstances, including US expansion to the West Coast, US imperial ambitions, the rise of San Francisco as a global port, and a gold rush in California. This new geopolitical dynamic became apparent in several, sometimes interrelated, international events that took place in the 1840s and 1850s: the end of the first Opium War in China in 1842, which opened up China to British trade; the 1847 Tahitian War of independence, which led to French colonial rule there; the 1848 Māhele in Hawai‘i, which imposed Western notions of property rights on Hawaiian land; and the 1854 Treaty of Kanagawa (also known as the Japan-US Treaty of Peace and Amity), which opened up trade and diplomacy to the Western powers for the first time. These occurrences and others saw “Western interests, whether through trade, colonization, or missionary societies, increasingly entering into the ocean.”³⁶

In the United States, increased interest in the Pacific centered on the acquisition of the Hawaiian Islands as a gateway to the rest of the Pacific world. The fact that newspaper accounts in the 1860s and 1870s consistently asserted Mark Twain’s credentials as an expert on Hawai‘i on the basis of his popular seriocomic lectures and letters to the *New York Tribune* about the islands and their inhabitants shows just how intertwined serious and comic accounts of the Pacific world were for American readers. Indeed, in the mid-nineteenth century, rampant jokes captured the air of international intrigue that accompanied constant periodical chatter about US designs on Hawai‘i. For example, in 1852, the *New York Lantern* printed an extract from the *New York Times* while chiding its editor, who had recommended that Admiral Perry and his US Navy fleet abandon their attempt to force Japan to open up to trade with the West and instead focus on acquiring Hawai‘i. The *Lantern* offers its serious critique through bad puns: “Our young friend [*New York Times* editor Henry Jarvis] RAYMOND has strange notions of morality. He doubts the policy and morality of nibbling at *Japan*, but recommends swallowing a *Sandwich*. The Ministers evidently intend to put the *Sandwich* into the *Japan case*, when they get it—or when the Commodore returns from his *Perry-grinations*!”³⁷

A similar pun equating eating a sandwich and annexing Hawai'i, reprinted from *London Punch*, made the rounds of US newspapers in late 1854 and early 1855: "The London Punch says: 'It appears that the Sandwich Islands have recently become annexed to America. The natives, no doubt, knew from conviction on which side their bread was buttered, and asked the United States if they would like to take a Sandwich.'" ³⁸ This joke, which inaccurately assumes an imminent US annexation of Hawai'i, appeared in magazines such as the *New York People's Organ*, *Gleason's Pictorial*, *Country Gentleman*, *Arthur's Home Magazine*, and *Musical World* and in newspapers such as the *Richmond (VA) Daily Dispatch*, the *Terre Haute Wabash (IN) Courier*, the *Middletown (NY) Whig Press*, the *Norwich (CT) Examiner*, the *Alabama Planter*, and the *Bath (ME) Eastern Times*. It even appeared, in August 1855, in the *Honolulu Friend*, a temperance newspaper for sailors, and in several Australian periodicals. Its dumb pun reveals not only the global circulation of nineteenth-century humor but also the geopolitics of a moment when European powers such as Britain, France, and Germany vied for imperial ascension in the Pacific along with an emergent United States. Such jokes, it seems, resurfaced whenever Hawai'i reentered public and congressional conversations as a target for annexation. For instance, thirteen years later, in July 1868, the *Wheeling (WV) Daily Intelligencer* quipped, "Everybody wonders, seeing Secretary Seward so hungry for more territory, why don't he take a Sandwich. The big earthquake, which has lately convulsed the principle [*sic*] island, is just the tonic for his greedy annexing stomach."³⁹ The endurance of such jokes about consuming the Hawaiian Islands demonstrates the role that levity played in the popular press's treatment of Pacific imperialism.

Indeed, if this book seems overstuffed with examples of popular humor about the Pacific world, it is because this underexplored comic archive is, in part, the argument. Despite the prevalence of such jokes and their relationship to serious Pacific policy proposals, no scholarly study has considered in any depth how humor adumbrated the Pacific for American readers, guiding their understandings and misunderstandings of these far-flung parts of the world. As a recent "Pacific turn" in American studies has augmented other "transnational iterations of American studies," such as the transatlantic and hemispheric approaches, scholars across several disciplines have begun to study US literary and journalistic treatments of the Pacific world.⁴⁰ But in doing so, they have largely ignored humor.

In researching this book, I combed through countless nineteenth-century periodicals, jest books, almanacs, and travel narratives, in which I often found jokes and bon mots about the Pacific world right alongside more serious, descriptive, geographical, and ethnographical treatments of Pacific islands and Islanders. To give just one brief example, the Honolulu newspaper the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*—an English-language, pro-American newspaper founded in July 1856 by Henry M. Whitney, the son of one of the first New England missionaries in Hawai‘i—ran a regular column (titled “What They Say About Us”) that excerpted and commented on US and European newspaper items about Hawai‘i.⁴¹ The February 22, 1873, column was published at a time when speculation about the Kingdom of Hawai‘i’s future was rampant, after the death of King Kamehameha V led to questions about succession. This column, in the space of a few paragraphs, does all of the following: (1) it offers faint praise of Mark Twain’s recent *New York Tribune* essay on Hawai‘i, reporting that Twain “so eloquently and somewhat truthfully discoursed about us”; (2) it reprints a bad pun from the *New York Tribune* about claims to the Hawaiian throne; (3) it complains about “the blundering statements of the various editors” who “seem to think it very witty to speak of us as ‘the cannibal islanders,’ and in the same connection to allude to the stereotyped ‘baked missionary’”; and (4) it reprints a dialogue between the *London Standard* and the *New York Tribune* about whether England would seek to acquire Fiji if the United States were to annex Hawai‘i.⁴² Taken together, these excerpts demonstrate the global politics of multinational entanglements in the Pacific as well as the combination of gravity and levity with which they were treated in popular print media. This sometimes startling juxtaposition of comic and serious treatments of the Pacific has led me to hypothesize that such humor helped its readers to express, then dismiss through laughter, their anxieties about contact with non-European peoples who held entirely different epistemologies. Learning about these people and places showed Americans just how much larger the world was than the urban apartments or parlors and rural farmhouses in which most of them read these accounts.

Despite, or maybe because of, Americans’ thirst for information about Pacific islands and Islanders, nineteenth-century Americans tended to conflate the disparate peoples and cultures that dotted the Pacific. It is true that, as the title of Lisa Kahaleole’s essay in a special 2015 issue of *American Quarterly* on the Pacific phrases it, “Hawaiians and

Pacific Islanders are not Asian Americans, and all Pacific Islanders are not Hawaiian.”⁴³ But the average nineteenth-century American reader tended to view Fijians, Māoris, Marquesans, Samoans, Tahitians, and Hawaiians through the same lens and applied to them the same stereotypes, many of them propagated through humor. Many Native Pacific Islander scholars also see and celebrate cultural connections across Oceania. Most famously, Epeli Hau’ofa, in “Our Sea of Islands,” labels Pacific Islanders as “Oceanic peoples” who share a “kinship across vast distances because of migration.”⁴⁴ T. Damon I. Salesa has coined the term “Brown Pacific” (adapted from Paul Gilroy’s “Black Atlantic”) to describe the movements of nineteenth-century Pacific Islanders from one island to another as a “Pacific island circuitry that was filled with people who were not white, nor European, nor American.”⁴⁵ The historian Gary Okihiro connects the islands and continents of the Pacific through the shared geology of tectonic plates, arguing that Pacific islands “are more related than seen in the customary view at sea and shore level.”⁴⁶ In treating comic depictions of separate, though culturally and genealogically connected, peoples and cultures, I seek to recognize important differences among Pacific Islander cultures while understanding that most Americans did not.

As I explore in more detail in chapter 1, most popular humor about the Pacific islands and Islanders works by connecting the unknown and exotic to the known and classifiable through stereotypes. By transferring, say, prevalent Native American or African American stereotypes to Pacific Islanders, as was often the case, humor could enable its readers’ imperial gaze, satisfying their curiosity about the exotic other without making them think too deeply about it. As Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon put it in their reception history of the South Seas, those who traveled to and wrote about the Pacific “went forth not so much to ‘discover’ but to ‘find,’ and to reinforce ideas they had assumed to be true.”⁴⁷ Lyons describes how stereotypes function as colonizing representations that “paradoxically” alter “essentializing appraisals . . . from generation to generation” to serve the evolving requirements of nationalist and imperial narratives. Even with these changing needs, Lyons points, out, the twinned conceptions of the Pacific that have persisted for Americans are, first, that Pacific islands are “stepping stones” between the United States and Asia and, second, that Pacific islands constitute an out-of-the-way escape from civilization, modernity, and morality. Lyons writes, “The double logic that the islands are imagined at once as places to be civilized and as escapes from civilization” produces what

he labels “American Pacificism,” a kind of “American Pacific Orientalism.”⁴⁸ In analyzing nineteenth-century American and Pacific Islander humor, this book seeks to unmask how the stereotypes of “American Pacificism” were reified and disseminated (and sometimes resisted) through humor.

In doing so, it is important that I do not unwittingly replicate these misinterpretations, a common danger in anthropology, history, and cultural studies. Matsuda bemoans the overprevalent, “concurrent major narratives” about the Pacific, “those of ‘fatal impact’ and ‘paradisical exoticism.’”⁴⁹ Scholars should take care not to oversimplify contact into pat binaries of domination and helplessness. Nicholas Thomas explains how critiques of imperialism tend to reinscribe “precisely the distancing and silencing of the Other that is identified in colonialist texts.”⁵⁰ David Wrobel, in his book on travel writing and US exceptionalism, laments the “glut of postcolonial studies” that figure travel writers as “the architects of imperial visions, commodifiers, and objectifiers of colonized ‘others,’ the agents of empire.” Travelers and travel writers certainly did play these roles, but, Wrobel argues, postcolonial critiques too often have “the effect of flattening the discourse about empire in travel writing” by ignoring these writers’ ambivalence about or resistance to empire, sometimes in the very texts that served empire’s purposes.⁵¹ In what follows, I continually seek such tensions, ambiguities, and vexed relationships to the project of empire. That said, of course, I must analyze in good faith what the archive presents, and, as chapters 1–4 demonstrate, that archive overwhelmingly relies on and reifies stereotypes of Pacific Islander otherness to excuse or extoll imperial interventions in the Pacific world. I do not condone the epithets (such as “savages”) and other racist language (such as the n-word) that are all too commonly employed by many of the archival sources I examine throughout this book.

Travel writing was an important source for American readers’ information about the Pacific world. Between 1830 and 1900, about two thousand travel books were published in the United States; accounts of travel also regularly appeared in newspapers and magazines. Much of this output, according to Jeffrey Melton, narrated travel to the United States’ West Coast and to Pacific islands. Reading about these destinations was a popular pastime for Americans in part because, according to Melton, these islands “embodied the Edenic possibilities of the New World in much the same manner as the eastern coast beckoned to the early explorers, and the West itself offered evidence of America’s

supposed manifest destiny.”⁵² Some studies of nineteenth-century travel narratives have examined the comic techniques of Pacific travelers and canonical authors such as Twain and Melville. Melton and James Caron, building on the work of previous scholars such as Alexander Grove Day, Walter Frear, and Don Florence, have conducted persuasive readings of Twain’s 1866 travel letters from Hawai‘i to the *Sacramento Union* and his adaptation of that material to his travelogue *Roughing It* (1872).⁵³ Meanwhile, the Melville scholar John Bryant has developed a comprehensive theory of amiability in Melville’s humor, including in his early novels *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847), fictionalized travel accounts of Melville’s roving through the Marquesas, Hawai‘i, and Tahiti.⁵⁴ Kim Leilani Evans has also written compellingly about the cultural relativism and “skepticism” of “Melville’s South Seas laugh.”⁵⁵ Because this ground has been ably covered by scholars of humor and travel writing, this book focuses more on equally popular but largely unrecovered humor as it appeared in mid-nineteenth-century joke books, almanacs, newspapers and magazines, and exhibits.

Some scholars of travel writing miss or misread the ambiguities of its humor and thereby risk oversimplifying humor’s relationship to the imperial project. For example, Christopher McBride, in his book *The Colonizer Abroad: American Writers on Foreign Soil, 1846–1912* labels Herman Melville’s *Typee* and Mark Twain’s 1866 letters from Hawai‘i as patently imperialist narratives, and he suits his close readings of those texts to that conclusion. Of course, it is not necessarily wrong to identify imperialist elements in both texts; they are there. But McBride reaches his conclusions largely by eliding, ignoring, or misinterpreting humorous or ironic passages (and there are many of them) in those texts. To give just one example, McBride mistrusts Twain’s description of Bill Ragsdale, a *happa haole* (of mixed Hawaiian and European ancestry) translator for the Hawaiian legislature whom Samuel Clemens befriended during his time on O‘ahu. In McBride’s reading, “Twain consciously foregrounds Ragsdale’s dual racial status—a biological trait that would equate him with Southern mulattoes for his readers.” McBride arrives at this conclusion through his interpretation of Twain’s account of Ragsdale’s impish translating style. Twain playfully calls Ragsdale a “rascal” because, in offering his translations, Ragsdale would, Twain notes with relish, “drop in a little voluntary contribution occasionally in the way of a word or two that will make the gravest speech utterly ridiculous.” McBride uses this passage as evidence that Twain “seems intent on

disparaging this man who possesses more foreign language skill than he does, by calling him a ‘rascal’ for this unfounded accusation.” For McBride, the motives for this alleged derogation are plain: “As a man of mixed race, Ragsdale must be denounced, for he represents one of America’s greatest postbellum concerns: racial mixing. Ragsdale is not of pure Hawaiian or Western blood, so Twain must actively asperse his character.” Ultimately, in McBride’s thinking, Twain disparages Ragsdale for imperialist ends: Twain’s depictions of both Ragsdale and the Hawaiian legislature are meant to make clear that, in McBride’s words, “if the natives cannot govern themselves, then some ‘civilized’ Western power, preferably America, will have to take over.”⁵⁶

The problem with this interpretation is that it misconstrues Twain’s comic praise of Ragsdale as straightforward attack. Yes, Twain calls Ragsdale a “rascal,” but the context of this epithet is how impressed Twain is at Ragsdale’s ability as a translator to hoodwink both his Hawaiian and Euro-American auditors. Biographical evidence also shows Twain’s joshing of Ragsdale to be all in good fun. Clemens had so much respect and affection for Ragsdale that in the 1880s, he began (but did not finish) a novel about him; he later mourned Ragsdale in his 1897 travel narrative *Following the Equator*. There Twain writes that, when he returned to the coast of O’ahu during an around-the-world tour, “I asked after ‘Billy’ Ragsdale, interpreter to the Parliament in my time—a half-white. He was a brilliant young fellow, and very popular. As an interpreter he would have been hard to match anywhere. He used to stand up on the Parliament and turn the English speeches into Hawaiian and the Hawaiian speeches into English with a readiness and volubility that were astonishing. I asked after him, and was told that his prosperous career was cut short in a sudden and unexpected way.” Twain then tells a tragic story of Ragsdale’s “loathsome and lingering death” by leprosy.⁵⁷ Twain’s assessment of Ragsdale’s mischievous translations might actually hew closer to what Yunte Huang has called “counterpoetics” than to McBride’s application of postcolonialism. Huang, in his reading of Ragsdale’s mischievous translations, emphasizes that “translation that is slightly off-key changes the nature of a speech” in ways that lay bare “the uneven exchange of material objects and cultural beliefs between the natives and the whites” as well as the continual negotiations and misunderstandings inherent in such exchanges.⁵⁸

Samuel Clemens and Herman Melville are certainly guilty of cultural tourism and some amount of ethnocentrism, akin to the “seeing man”

who embodies what Pratt has called an “anti-conquest” stance, her label for representational strategies through which Euro-Americans “seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony.”⁵⁹ But Twain’s and Melville’s Pacific writings also both express through the playful double meanings of their comic irony a critical awareness of their own fraught subject positions. In this way, they mock their *narrators’* touristic ethnocentrism and foreground their sense of complicity in the missionary and commercial takeovers they are leery of, while denying a laugh of superiority to either themselves or their readers. (McBride also conflates author and narrator in his readings of both authors.) But too many scholars, in missing the joke, also miss the thought-provoking ambiguities, anxieties, and cultural contradictions that these jokes reveal.

McBride is not alone in reifying notions of Pacific otherness in his attempt to identify colonialist impulses in nineteenth-century depictions of the Pacific and Pacific Islanders. Lyons notes that, even when the goal is to critique imperialism, well-meaning scholars and artists have sometimes “misperceived, misrepresented, disrespected, or ignored Oceanian institutions, perspectives, humor, and ways of knowing (and narrating), attempting to subsume indigenous categories into their own.”⁶⁰ Alternatively, focusing on the ambiguities of humor in Americans’ writings about travel, empire, and foreign lands can unearth not just how imperial domination works but also “processes of negotiation, transculturation and even exploitation by ‘native’ peoples.” Attention to the comedy of contact allows scholars to see contact and continuing encounter “as involving exchange and contestation rather than compliance, submission and imposition,” as Tim Youngs urges in *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*.⁶¹ *A Laughable Empire* examines how both representations and misrepresentations of the Pacific world were spread through popular nineteenth-century humor. I have tried to do so without revivifying those perceptions, instead seeking to foreground ways that humor “bound together” Pacific Islander and Euro-American histories through mutual possession, as Lyons and the historian Greg Dening have emphasized in their scholarship.⁶²

This book, I hope, performs a decolonial gesture that avoids the oversimplifications of colonizer/colonized dichotomies and recognizes the sometimes “manifold incompatibilities that exist between Euro-American and Native Pacific Islander epistemologies.”⁶³ Another way to avoid reproducing US domination of Pacific islands and Islanders in my study

of American humor about it is to answer J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's call for scholars working in American studies to "engage Native Pacific studies" as a "productive lens" through which to view imperialism, colonialism, Indigenous concerns, cultural studies, and more.⁶⁴ This is something I have sought to do throughout this book, particularly in chapter 5. Finally, though Pacific histories have tended to portray contact as "inherently violent or destructive," the study of humor may serve to emphasize what the historian I. C. Campbell suggests is more common in "culture contact": interactions that are "nonviolent" or "mutually advantageous," that occur "in a context of situational equality rather than of asymmetry of power."⁶⁵ As Campbell's formulation implies, contact involves not just domination and violence but also commerce and comedy. In what follows, I draw on humor theory, the tools of literary criticism, and lessons from Native Pacific studies to highlight the power of humor and laughter to other as well as to unite peoples during the historical era of the United States' early imperial ambitions in the Pacific.

Overview

Chapter 1, "The Backwoodsman Abroad: The Pacific Imperialism of Nineteenth-Century American Humor," considers how and why American humor—most notably almanac humor, sea yarns, jest books, and literary comedy—appropriated Pacific geography and culture into its comic mythology. The chapter shows how comic exaggeration supported or questioned westward expansion not just to the shores of California but beyond, into the Pacific. In tall tales and sea yarns, I argue, the Pacific functions as a setting wherein rustic, sometimes superhuman, comic Americans engage in playful exploits that serve as a stand-in for imperialist urges.

Chapter 2, "Comic Currents: Polynesians in Periodicals," limns the circulation of several popular jokes, bon mots, and humorous anecdotes about sailors, missionaries, and Pacific Islanders that were widely reprinted in nineteenth-century US newspapers, periodicals, and jest books. Midcentury periodicals mixed comedy and serious content in their treatments of the Pacific, offering to their readers visions of Pacific islands and Islanders as both curiosities to explain and raw material for American humor. I trace how such items evolved with shifting print and sociopolitical contexts as they were reprinted in different newspapers and journals. Through a unique methodology that performs

comparative, contextualized readings of reprints of jokes in their shifting contexts, I consider the cultural stakes of such items' popularity and circulation in terms of what McGill has called the nineteenth-century United States' "culture of reprinting."⁶⁶

Chapter 3, "'Cheering for Ye, Cannibal': The Politics of Boiled Missionaries," features cultural close readings of "cannibal-and-boiled-missionary" jokes that were ubiquitous throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. My analysis demonstrates how cannibal jokes are encoded with anxieties about Pacific Islanders' otherness in ways that disseminate Western stereotypes of Pacific savagery. But these jokes also allow their tellers and auditors to question imperialism by laughing at the death of missionaries. As I demonstrate, there are two butts to every cannibal-and-missionary joke: the ferocious cannibal and the meddling missionary.

In chapter 4, "Collecting the Pacific: A Cabinet of Comic Curios," I analyze burlesque exhibits of Pacific objects and objectified people, as well as comic responses to those exhibits in the popular press. I focus extensively on P. T. Barnum, a larger-than-life figure in mid- and late-nineteenth-century popular entertainment whose exhibits mocked his audiences' fascination with authenticity regarding the Pacific and its relics, playing on the spectacle of the other and the potential for exotic conquest.

Chapter 5, "'Didn't Our People Laugh?' Humor as Resistance," analyzes humorous moments in missionary and travel writing to detail the subversive power of Pacific Islanders' comic resistance to imperialism. I attempt to responsibly identify, recover, and situate accounts of Pacific Islanders' humor in response to contact and continued connections with Euro-American sailors, adventurers, and imperialists, mostly by rereading comic moments in Euro-American-authored travel narratives against the grain.

In the conclusion, I outline several other methodologies that scholars might use in attempting to perform responsible scholarship—as free as possible from the unconscious ethnocentrism implicit in interpreting other cultures through one's own epistemological assumptions—on the humor of Pacific Islanders and other subjects of humor and empire.