

He Hali‘a Aloha no Haunani Kay Trask (Remembering Haunani-Kay Trask)

ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui
Professor of Hawaiian Literature
UHM English Department

Lu‘ulu‘u Hanalei, i ka ua nui, kaumaha i ka noe o Alaka‘i
Hanalei is burdened by the drenching rain, laden with the mist of Alaka‘i

The English Department is greatly saddened by the news of the passing of Hawaiian nationalist, po‘e aloha ‘āina, poet, and colleague, professor emerita and founding Center for Hawaiian Studies Director Haunani Kay Trask (October 3, 1949-July 3, 2021). Dr. Trask, or Haunani as many of us knew her as, was a close friend and beloved colleague to many in our Department, and with whom we shared many exciting and collaborative experiences over the decades.



*Haunani at the brand new Center for
Hawaiian Studies building, 1996*

Department Chair S. Shankar shared that, “Haunani Kay Trask was, among many other things, a poet and a cultural critic. Though she was never an official member of the English Department, she was a kindred spirit in her enthusiasm both for the expressive power of the spoken and written word and in her rigorous attention to the field of culture at large in her analytical work. Her writing, her activism, and her uncompromising declaration of truth to power have all been, from the very beginning, exemplary, inspirational and foundational to the work of very many faculty and students. She will be missed terribly in the English Department, even as her work continues to resonate and propagate powerfully.”

Former department chair Cristina Bacchilega wrote that, “Haunani-Kay Trask had a robust and lasting relationship with the English Department where her poetry, scholarship, and activism have left an indelible mark. In the early 2000s, this relationship thrived in new ways, invigorated by the presence of Albert Wendt as Citizens’ Chair in our department, Trask’s publication of her second book of poetry *Night Is a Sharkskin Drum* in 2002, and the public reading we sponsored, and the interview ‘Land, Leadership, and Nation: An Interview with Haunani-Kay Trask’ that faculty members Cynthia Franklin and Laura Lyons published in the journal *Biography* (2004). I remember the excitement that Haunani-Kay Trask generated in 2003 when, together with Martin Espada, Joy Harjo, and Kathleen Tyau, she participated in the department’s 5th Festival of Writers, “Visions of (Dis)location: Native, Immigrant, Settler”; and also another occasion in the Kuykendall Auditorium where she read her poetry with Nell Altizer, professor and poet in our department who had reviewed her first collection *Light the Crevice Never Seen*, and other women poets. Her crosslisted course on women poets in Oceania was an outstanding contribution to our curriculum.”



L-R Haunani Kay Trask, Patrick Wolfe,
ku 'ualoha ho 'omanawanui, Ty Kāwika Tengan,
Roundtable panel on Settler Colonialism and
Genocide,
UH Mānoa 2009

As the founder and first Director of Kamakakū'okalani Center for Hawaiian Studies, Dr. Trask welcomed our colleagues and students to hold and participate in many literature, culture, and political events at the Center during her tenure. Dr. Trask also graciously participated in the same kinds of events held within our department, particularly poetry readings, with visiting writers, students, and colleagues.

The graduate and undergraduate courses on literature, politics, and poetry that Haunani taught in our department in the mid-2000s, inspired our majors and drew many students from across campus. She proposed and taught a senior seminar course, Modern Pacific Women's Poetry (ENG 479/HWNST 494) and a graduate seminar in Colonial and Post-Colonial Literature (ENG 780N).

Haunani created and maintained close friendships with department colleagues such as Emerita Professor Nell Altizer (1936-2015), who introduced Haunani to poet Eleanor Wilner; Wilner assisted in getting Haunani's first poetry collection, *Light in a Crevice Never Seen*, published by Calyx Books in 1994, after the University of Hawai'i Press refused to publish it.

Haunani also participated in a reading group of critical scholarship with Laura Lyons and Cristina Bacchilega (retired), among others. She contributed to publications co-edited by colleagues such as *Inside/Out: Literature, Cultural Politics and Identity in the New Pacific* (1999), co-edited by former colleague Rob Wilson and Vilsoni Hereniko, published after MELUS 1996 was held at the Mānoa campus, and *Asian Settler Colonialism, from Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i* (2008), co-edited by colleague Candance Fujikane and Jonathan Okamura.

She shared a passion for Italy and Italian issues with Cristina Bacchilega, and contributed to a special issue of the Italian journal *Anglistica, Sustaining Hawaiian Sovereignty* (2010), co-edited by Cristina Bacchilega, Donatella Izzo, and former PhD student, now Hawaiian Studies Assistant Professor, Bryan Kuwada.

Outside the university Haunani worked tirelessly on many community projects. In the 1980s, she strategized with neighbors and colleague Steve Canham (retired) and his wife Ruth to protect the He'eia wetlands from development as part of Protect He'eia Wetlands group.

Her politics, scholarship and poetry have had huge, tangible impacts on our faculty and student research and writing for decades. After MELUS 1996, honorary department PhD Māhealani Dudoit, who had worked as an editorial assistant with Frank Stewart (retired) and Pat Matuseda on *Mānoa* journal, worked with Haunani in a 699 directed study course to create *'Ōiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal*, which I also co-founded. A number of us continue to teach her work and

incorporate it into our own research and writing. Some of our faculty, such as Assistant Professor of Creative Writing No‘u Revilla and myself were students in Haunani’s courses, and are honored to continue her intellectual, creative, and political genealogy as poets, scholars, teachers, and aloha ‘āina.

No‘u shared her mana‘o, addressed to Haunani: “Poems like ‘Sons’ are anthems to a generation of ‘Ōiwi wahine who, empowered by your creativity and unapologetic abundance, have reimagined and redefined what it means to ho‘oulu lāhui as aloha ‘āina who are also intersectional feminists as well as queer, lesbian, trans, māhū, and nonbinary kanaka. We are your “slyly / reproductive” daughters. Like you, we enrich our practices of ‘ohana and mo‘okū‘auhau to include our mentors, teachers, leaders, and haumāna. Like you, we stay behind, weaving the ropes of resistance. Like you, we ‘onipa‘a. Haunani, we carry your kū‘ē in our bones, we say it in our sleep. You will be with us in the ways we show up, fearlessly, in the ways we love our lāhui and each other.”

Assistant Professor of creative writing Kristiana Kahakauwila shared that, “I was so moved by No‘u’s words! For me, I keep re-reading these lines from an interview [by Cynthia Franklin and Laura Lyons] with Haunani Kay Trask, “Once you see somebody else engage in political work for the nation, you realize your own obligation to contribute. [...] That feeling of obligation to the lāhui, the people, is part of our Hawaiian cultural heritage. We are the only people in Hawai‘i who have that ancestral obligation to the land and the people” (*Biography* 27.1 (2004): 229). *We are the only people in Hawai‘i who have that ancestral obligation to the land and the people.* These words have been, for me, a call to action and a call home. I met Haunani in Michigan after a snowstorm, of all times and places (I have Lani Teves to thank for this incredible experience!) The snow reminded Haunani of her years in Wisconsin [in graduate school]. She told both of us, repeatedly, that after we earned our graduate degrees, we had to come home. I haven’t forgotten that.” Haunani would be thrilled that both Kristiana and Lani have returned home (Lani is an Assistant Professor in Women’s Studies).

American Studies Associate Professor Brandy Nālani McDougall, who received her PhD in Hawaiian Literature from our department, has also written extensively on Haunani’s work. She shared the following: “Haunani had a way of seeing you—I mean really *seeing* you as an ‘Ōiwi, as her student. She took the time and was genuinely interested in you, valued your story, your experience as a Hawaiian, the stories of your ‘ohana and kaiāulu, your mana‘o on our history, on politics, on sovereignty, on poetry, on everything. That alone meant so much to me. As a kumu, she was obviously an amazing intellectual with a gift for decolonial and antiracist clarity (not to mention a quick-witted, wry sense of humor), but she wasn’t interested in telling you what to think. Instead, she wanted you to reflect on and analyze your experiences as an ‘Ōiwi, name all that was holding you down, and strategize about how to fight, how to create change, how to help others—and therefore, how to heal. And she supported you and mentored you through that—gave you revolutionaries, poets, movement historians, and mo‘olelo to learn from, shared her own experiences as a movement-builder and poet-scholar-activist-teacher. She knew movements are not about their famous leaders, but about uplifting the people. As a poet and kumu now myself, I aspire to be as kū‘ē (and fearless) as she was, to speak out and to use words as powerfully and perceptively; but I also aspire to be as ha‘aha‘a, learning from others and creating spaces to uplift and empower my students.”

Haunani was my kumu and mentor throughout my undergraduate studies, and the reason I pursued Hawaiian Studies as a BA (1987-91). She cultivated my interests and writing abilities, and always said, “When you go to graduate school...” even when I had no plans to go to graduate school. She planted and nourished that seed and helped it sprout and blossom. She was an integral part of my education, a key part of my PhD education and dissertation committee, and provided critical feedback on my book manuscript. In 1993 she hired me as a GA to teach in Hawaiian Studies; despite not meeting a particular university requirement for the position by the deadline, she made it happen.

As a PhD student in 2002, she and I were guests on “Asia Pacific Forum” (WBAI FM, New York City) to discuss Hawaiian literature. In 2003 as I developed as a Hawaiian literature scholar, she invited me as a guest on “First Friday” to discuss Hawaiian literature, and *‘Ōiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal*. In 2009 I was invited to be part of a roundtable on Settler Colonialism and Genocide with her, Australian-based scholar Patrick Wolfe, and UH Ethnic Studies Professor Ty Kawika Tengan. Haunani and Patrick had previously met at an international conference in Galway, Ireland, and as a brand new professor, it was an honor to be included.

It was also an honor to carry her with me to Mauna Kea in the summer and fall of 2019, as her life partner David Stannard gifted me with one of her iconic pareu, a red and yellow Sig Zane “Kīlauea” design, which was so appropriate. Because my aloha ‘āina activism began on the Mānoa campus under her mentorship in 1985, gathering on the Mauna seemed incomplete without her. What a privilege to teach a class in the Mana Wahine tent one rainy morning under her photo the kia‘i of that space had hung.

One of my most cherished memories of Haunani is when she still lived down the road from me in He‘eia, and I’d pick her up in my little red truck, along with my husband and our nephew Lucas, who was 3, to ride in to campus. Haunani would jump in the middle with Lucas on her lap, and we’d drop him off down the road at his preschool. She would talk to Lucas the whole time, engage him in silly, fun games, and taught him a Hawaiian version of “This Little Piggy” where the pua‘a eats laulau and goes surfing. There are many, many children who have grown up adoring “Aunty Haunani,” never realizing for many years just how formidable, fierce, and internationally famous she really was. And perhaps her most treasured role, aside from nationalist, poet, and kumu, was aunty.

Haunani was also a deeply engaged intellectual. Earth Justice attorney Mahesh Cleveland recently shared on social media that when he and his family rented Haunani and David’s home when they were on sabbatical one year, he was impressed by the extensive collection of books on every subject—art, politics, poetry, literature, history—you name it, throughout the house. It was her deep engagement with the world that made Haunani such a formidable intellectual, scholar,



In the Hale Mana Wahine at Pu‘uhonua o Pu‘uhuluhulu to teach for Mauna Kea draped with Haunani Kay’s pareu, fall 2019

and professor. She was always engaged in her students' learning and development, and because



Haunani was a staunch support of Kanaka ʻŌiwi students and Hawaiian literature, and helped Māhealani Dudoit establish ʻŌiwi, A Native Hawaiian Journal

of her expansive vision for the modern Lāhui Hawaiʻi, many of us have carried her vision forward in diverse ways, at home in Hawaiʻi nei and around the world: educators, attorneys, politicians, activists, administrators, poets, editors, mahiʻai, weavers, navigators, healers who continue to be “slyly reproductive” as we continue to weave the rope of resistance she has passed on to us. She is an integral part of my moʻokūʻauhau ʻike (intellectual genealogy), and thus as a kumu, my students as well as I stand on her shoulders and carry her lifelong work on behalf of the lāhui and Hawaiʻi, as well as her beautiful words and love of poetry, literature, arts, and politics forward into the world. We join our colleagues across our campus and institution, with the Kanaka ʻŌiwi people, with the Indigenous people across Moana Nui Ākea and beyond, and all friends and allies in expressing our aloha kaumaha at the passing of Dr. Haunani Kay Trask. A hui hou me ke aloha nui loa e kuʻu kumu; he wahine mana nui loa nō ʻoe, he wahine aloha ʻāina nui loa nō ʻoe no nā kau a kau.

I haku ʻia kō lei, i koʻolua no ka lāhui, ke ʻala mai ka uka o Mānoa
Lanakoi a ke aloha hoʻopē ʻia e ka ua Tuahine

*Your lei has been woven, a companion for the people,
the fragrance reaching out from the uplands of Mānoa
Love so strong, drenched by the Tuahine rain*