INTRODUCTION

This course is an intensive examination of the writings of Samoa’s renowned writer and one of the Pacific’s pioneers in literature—ALBERT WENDT. It is writing intensive and has a strong ethics focus. According to Paul Sharrad,

“Albert Wendt is the most prolific and influential contemporary writer of the Pacific Islands—of his native Samoa in particular, but including greater Oceania and New Zealand as well. He has four books of verse, three collections of short stories, five novels (two of them made into films) and three major anthologies of Pacific Literature to his name. There are, besides, playcripts, interviews and essays. While there have been several important figures in the promotion of creative writing from the region, it is Wendt who has consistently covered the widest range of activity, from teaching texts in school and reshaping university syllabuses, to running writing classes, publishing new writers, and providing international commentary on the dynamics of modern culture in the Pacific.

“Wendt’s ever-expanding vision of Oceania, including New Zealand, as his adoptive home, contentiously espouses indigenous rights to land and cultural self-determination while refusing a limiting view of tradition that would insulate local identity from the complex interactions of global modernity. His output ranges from social realism through modernist mythologizing to experiment in postmodern textual surfaces of arbitrarily assembled contending narratives. Though he has won national and international prizes, Wendt has not had the attention given to many ‘postcolonial’ authors from other regions, like Africa, India or the Caribbean.”

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

This course is a tribute to Albert Wendt in recognition and appreciation of his contribution to our understanding of ourselves and the world in which we live—the world known as Oceania. For this purpose, we use an interdisciplinary approach to trace the evolution of the man as a person and as a writer; to examine the traditional and modern contexts in and from which he has drawn and developed his characters, plots, and themes, and through which we can also understand how these contexts have transformed under the dictates and demands of local and global activities. Readings and lectures on the histories and cultures of Europe, Samoa and the Pacific are critical
aspects of this course. They provide insights into why Wendt’s frustration with and hope for his piece of the earth—Oceania—permeate through his writings; on the other hand, they challenge us to consider whether Wendt’s representations of the people and places he writes about are realistic, responsible, or useful. It should invoke a curiosity into his motivation to write—a temptation to psychologize him and his work which, while possible, should not limit the scope of analysis to cause and effect.

TOPICS AND THEMES

Central in Wendt’s writings are the effects of a (mis)representation or negative imaging of Pacific islanders by Euro-American writers of the 19th and 20th centuries. In the context of colonial history and politics, and postcolonial transformations if not reinventions, the key issues raised in class are:

• How competing notions of right and wrong are facilitated, particularly since global initiatives continue to demand a one-size-fits-all definition of such things as human and civil rights. These dynamics resonate loudly in the works of Albert Wendt.
• Students will learn that Wendt’s motivation to write poetry and fiction was to point out the negative stereotypes against Pacific islanders promoted by early Euro-American imaging of Pacific peoples and cultures.
• Specifically, the issues addressed by Wendt in the first phase of his writing include matters of inequality in the ways literary and academic texts portrayed islanders as pawns in New Zealand’s importation of Samoan labor in the fifties, sixties, and seventies; and in the ways modern institutions such as government and church corrupted people in power; how a transition to a cash economy corrupted families and violated sacred ancestral values and principles in gender and generational relationships. Sons for the Return Home, Leaves of the Banyan Tree, Pouliuli, and the collection of short stories known as Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree are lead reads in understanding these issues.
• A lack of representation of women in Wendt’s writings has been posed by certain critics, thus issues of gender representation become central as Wendt himself attempts to address this criticism. His writings in the second phase of his work reveal such an effort as in Ola and later in The Mango’s Kiss. In this case, one may ask, is Wendt seeking solutions to gender issues in traditional philosophies and mythological beginnings? Why?
• Throughout Wendt’s writing career, he has been a strong voice against Pacific islanders romanticizing their cultures and running the risk of emulating the very practices that they have been accusing Westerners of. Issues of race and discrimination are discussed throughout the readings of his critical essays “Towards a New Oceania” and “Tatauing the Postmodern Body, and by theses about his crippled cosmos by Subramani (1992), and Paul Sharrad’s (2003) Albert Wendt and Pacific Literature: Circling the Void.

Through an integration of the utilitarian, fair and just, and right or wrong approaches to the study of ethics, students will discover, analyze and draw their own conclusions on the causes and effects of the injustices of colonialism; on the ambiguities if not the confusions of both traditional and modern systems of governance in the postcolonial Pacific, and its (southeast) Asian neighbors. In other words, about 80% of the course contents will be devoted to critiquing through both small group and whole class discussions, as well as written assignments, the ways Wendt and some of his peers have portrayed or presented themes of inequality, sexism, and
corruption, from the colonial period to the present. Since a fair amount of his writings focuses on Samoa’s cross-cultural encounters, discussions will also focus on the impact of such experience on personal and group identity, migration, and self-esteem. Just as important to include is whether Wendt’s use of literary constructs to interrogate both outsider and insider representations of the lives of Samoans at home and abroad, are themselves ethical and moral, fair and just.

Overall, Wendt’s writings largely focus on the Samoans since the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; but they also privilege ancestral beginnings for possible (re)solutions for issues in contemporary life such as corruption, greed, racism, sexism, to name a few. A critical component of this exploration concerns the migration experience of Samoans abroad, particularly in places like Hawai‘i and New Zealand in terms of how their encounters with diverse populations and foreign worldviews have affected their ability to adjust. Through this corpus, students will compare the migration experience of the Samoans who went to Aotearoa with those who came to Hawai‘i. They will also read about how kanaka maoli in these places have fared across the centuries since the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom and the Treaty of Waitangi in Aotearoa. Ultimately, literary explorations into the history and geography of colonialism, decolonization, development, and globalization will frame our understanding of the issues of sovereignty and dependence, of race, ethnic, and gender relations, and their effects on the human condition around the islands.

KEY QUESTIONS
The following are guiding questions for this course:

- What motivated Wendt to write in the literary genre?
- Why is it important to understand the local and global political, economic, and cultural forces that provide the historical backdrop for the authors?
- Do the readings help to clarify/confirm/alter your opinions or views of the islanders being represented in the texts?
- Are the portrayals and representations of the Samoans and other islanders fair or biased? How so?
- Are the tools and methods of representation appropriate, and who should say if they were or not?

TEXTS
We hope to get to as many of these texts as time permits; however, we may linger over particular texts as necessary. Obviously, Wendt has written a lot. We will discuss in class a practical format with which to do justice to his work and in which our learning is effective and fun.

PLAYS
Comes the revolution, (1972)
The contract, (1972)
The Songmaker’s Chair, (2004)

NOVELS
Sons for the Return Home, (1973) also made into feature film
Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree: And Other Stories, (1974) - also made into feature film
Pouliuli, 1977
Leaves of the Banyan Tree, (1979)
Ola, (1991)
Black Rainbow, (1992)
The Book of Vela, (2010)

ANTHOLOGIES
Lali: A Pacific Anthology, (1980) (edited)
The Best of Albert Wendt's Short Stories, (1999)

POEMS
The Birth and Death of the Miracle Man, (1986)

INTERVIEWS
An Interview with Albert Wendt, Vilsoni Hereniko and David Hanlon (2002)
An Interview with Albert Wendt, Christie Michel (1997)

ESSAYS
"Towards a New Oceania" by Wendt, in Mana Review (Suva, Fiji), January 1976
“Tatauing the Postcolonial Body,“

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Sharrad, Paul and Peacock, Karen M. In The Contemporary Pacific - Volume 15, Number 2, Fall 2003, pp. 378-420, University of Hawai'i Press

CRITICAL STUDIES
WEEKLY SCHEDULE

A. FIRST HALF OF THE SEMESTER
Week 1-2. E1 and E3

Topics and Themes: Conceptualizing the Course: establishing space and time in Wendt’s texts and within which he writes, with specific focus on Samoa, Aotearoa, and Hawai‘i, through maps, movies, and narratives; “modern,” “literature”, and “Samoan;” history of contact, colonialism, post colonialism, neo colonialism; modern and postmodern; diaspora and cross cultural experiences; problematics of ethics in traditions and encounters.

Methods:

❖ Slide Presentation

1. LOCATING THE VĀ—SAMOAN SPACE AND TIME

✓ GPS, geographic landscapes: latitudes and longitudes, climate, cultural and political boundaries, colonial and postcolonial re-scaping of the islands--Hau’ofa’s concept of a “sea of islands”; types of islands;

Sources: Google maps:

✓ Historical landscapes: Migration theories relative to or in contrast to local cosmogony; conceptualizing: vavau (the past before the papalagi), fa’avavau (the past in the present (evolution since colonialism); circular movement to and from ancestral home; traditions and encounters

Sources:

Patrick Kirch (2002), On the Road of the Winds: An Archaeological History of the Pacific Islands before European Contact
George Turner (1884), Samoa a hundred years ago and long before, together with notes on the cults and customs of twenty-three other islands in the Pacific ... With a preface by E. B. Tylor
Albert Wendt (2004), Samoa’s Cosmogyny in The Songmaker’s Chair

✓ Fa’apalagi: First Contact, Capitalism, Christianity, Colonization

YouTube images of Samoa during the colonial period

✓ Fa’aneionapo: Postcoloniality in Samoa; Territorialism in American Samoa

❖ Workshop I.

✓ Map quiz – teacher-made

✓ Establish cardinal and intermediary directions in both Samoan and English

✓ In-class writing assignment: Define and share the following terms in your own words and provide examples for each: Samoan, colonialism, postcolonialism, neocolonialism, sovereignty, modern, postmodern, diaspora, urban migration, return migration, capitalism, religion, traditions, encounters
2. CRITICAL APPROACHES TO LITERATURE

- **Slide Presentation**
  formalist criticism, biographical criticism, historical criticism, gender criticism, psychological criticism, sociological criticism, mythological criticism, reader-response criticism, deconstructionist criticism
  [http://home.olemiss.edu/~egibp/spring97/litcrit.html](http://home.olemiss.edu/~egibp/spring97/litcrit.html)

- **Workshop II. CRITICAL APPROACHES TO LITERATURE**
  - In pairs, read and identify hints of any of the critical approaches above in the 2 model reviews--Robert Sullivan’s review of The Songmaker’s Chair and Robin Kauka’s one for Sons for the Return Home.
  - Find another pair and share. This should prepare you for a review of one of the migrant writers below.

3. FRAMEWORK FOR THINKING ETHICALLY

- **Slide Presentation**
  The disciplinary approach(es) used in the class will give students tools with which to determine whether the behavior of various characters and systems portrayed in the readings were ethical or otherwise and whether definitions of ethics or ethical behavior differed from culture to culture—if so, how and why.
  Source: Markkula Center for Applied Ethics

- **Workshop III. ETHICS: DEFINITION AND WHAT IT IS NOT**
  - Read handout on what is not ethics as defined by the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics ([http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision/framework.html](http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision/framework.html))
  - Whole class: Compare Markkula’s definitionas with Samoan notions of ethics or ethical behavior: how do they stack up against the models provided by Markkula

🪄 WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS (ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION—DUE A WEEK LATER)

Choose ONE of the writers in the list below and provide a critique of the work: issues or problems affecting the lives of their characters, and issues/problems are representative of the human condition in the landscapes in which the selection is set. The review should reflect any or some of the critical approaches previously studied, and an evaluation of how author’s and/or character behavior adhere or contradict the ethics discussed in class. At least 5 pages.

Migrant writers and Expatriate Perspectives:
The Beach at Falesā (R.L. Stevenson)
Salamasina (Kramer)
My Samoan Chief (Fay Calkin)
The Coming of Age to Samoa (Margaret Mead),
The Happy Isles of Oceania: Paddling the Pacific (Paul Thoreaux);

RE(A)D ALERT:
❖ Read (NOW) Sons For The Return Home FOR THE MIDTERM EXAM in Week 5, and The Songmaker’s Chair for the FINAL.
❖ Choose (NOW) one of Wendt’s texts listed in Week 8 – 14 schedule below and prepare a seminar on it at a time to be determined later.

Week 3-5. E1and E3
Topics and themes: Setting the Stage for the Emergence of Albert Wendt and other Pacific islander writers
❖ What motivated the Pacific islanders to write?

Methods:
❖ Slide Presentations
4. EUROAMERICAN IMAGES OF ISLANDERS SINCE THE 18TH CENTURY
Readings:
Movies: Return to Paradise, Hawaii, Velvet Dreams
Previous weeks’ papers
❖ Workshop IV: group discussion, in-class writings
• Share your review of a migrant writer with the rest of the class. Some questions to ask: How did you feel after reading the book? Why do you think the writers wrote the way they did? How much of their representations resonate with your own truths on your identity as a Pacific Islander or Samoan?
• Watch clips from the movies “Return to Paradise” and “Hawai‘i,” in contrast with “Velvet Dreams,” a docudrama critiquing Euroamerican images of PI/Samoan. Write a short summary of the issues detected in each clip and discuss the directors’ motivation in undertaking such productions, and whether in light of colonial constructions, Velvet Dreams does a fair job of pointing out the dangers of romanticism and objectification of people in the arts.
• As you watch the clips, keep these questions in mind:
  a. Who do the characters portray?
  b. Are they believable?
  c. Are the representations fair?
  d. What do we learn about people’s choices and behavior in the islands at the time of production?
  e. Is the critique that is Velvet Dreams relevant to the other features?
• Tcherzekoff takes issues with his contemporaries’ perceptions or (mis)representations of Samoans. What is his response to de la Perouse’s observations that Samoan women appeared to be “mistresses of their own favors?” Almost two centuries later, Mead’s observations appear to be in
line with such earlier views. Given your own experience of growing up Pacific, what would your response be to one of these writers/directors? Do you think your views would be fair or right? What justification would you offer?

5. PACIFIC RESPONSES: THE PIONEERS
   ❖ Slide Presentation
   Sources:
   Simanu-Klutz (1996), “Pacific Literature, what canon is that?”

   ❖ Workshop IV. In-class jigsaw and discussion
   Readings:
   John O’Carroll, (1992), Pacific Literature: A Sketch of a Problematic Mana (1992) Interview with Konai Thaman (Tongan poet)
   Mana (1992) Interview with Arlene Griffen (Fijian poet)
   Vilsoni Hereniko (1999), Representations of Cultural Identities

   a. In groups of 3s, read and draft a powerpoint presentation of ONE of the articles/interviews above. Identify each pioneer’s motivation to write, topics and thesis, supporting research or refutation, resolutions, etc. Identify biases in their points of view, and whether they do justice to the same subjects about whom their Euroamerican predecessors wrote. Compare their representations with those of the migrant writers each of you previously studied. Share your powerpoints with the rest of the class in the next class session.

   a. Out of class writing: Journal: What was clear/not clear about the contents of today’s work. At least one page. Due next class session.

6. SAMOAN RESPONSES: INTRODUCING ALBERT WENDT AND PROTEGÉS
   ❖ Talanoa (Talk Story): Albert the Man
     a) Biographical
     b) Movie: Sons for the Return Home
   ❖ Slide Presentation: Albert the Writer
     c) Evolution: From an angry young man to a mellow grandfather: 3 phases of Wendt’s writings
     d) Wendt’s Crippled Cosmos--Subramani
     e) Influence on 3 generations of writers: written and electronic presentations
        o Eti Sa’aga
        o Ruperake Petaia
        o Noumea and Tate Simi
        o Makerita Va’ai
        o Epi Enari
        o Tili Afamasaga
        o Apelu Aiavao
        o Luafata Simanu
Workshop V: YouTube sampling of the above writers
a. Seek a YouTube reading by two of the above writers and talk about their topics, themes, etc.
b. Categorize the above writers into the three phases of Wendt’s writing journey. In a couple of paragraphs, discuss what of Wendt’s influence resonates in their writings.

Readings:
Subramani (1992) Wendt’s Crippled Cosmos (In South Pacific Literature)
Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl, Paint ourselves into existence: An interview with Albert Wendt
Albert Wendt (1987), Towards a New Oceania

Anthologies
Lali: A Pacific Anthology, (1980) (edited)

Week 6: Midterm
• Book and Movie: Sons for the Return Home
1. Having read the book and watched the movie, answer the following questions
   a. Using biographical and psychological approaches to literary criticism, compare the lives of Wendt the author with Sione the main character. Embed your discussion in the historical context of the story and its effect on the psychology of both the writer and the characters he created. Draw illustrations from both book and movie.
2. Racism and jealousy are recurring themes in the story. What, do you think, accounts for the parents’ attitudes towards the relationship between Sarah and Sione? What was ethical or not ethical about these attitudes?
3. The raids on suspected overstayers of Samoan ancestry took place in the 1970s. Explain the historical context of these raids, and the impact on the psyche and attitudes of the Samoans then and now. How did the family in Sons deal with it? You may want to google this part of the history for more details and see what the New Zealand government did to remedy relations between Samoa and New Zealand. In your view, how does each side justify the rationales they offered. Do you feel each side’s response was justified? How are the two societies dealing with this piece of history today? How useful is this story for future relationships among people from different cultures?
Week 7: Preparing for Individual Seminars and Final Paper on Albert Wendt’s Writings

- Lecture on themes below

**Topics and themes:**

- Hybridity, dislocation, and return migration; issues of adjustment, adoption, and syncretism.
- Love, greed, modernism, individualism, corruption, identity issues, gender relationships, conflicting or contradictory political, social, cultural understandings for the diasporic.
- What issues does Wendt encounter growing up during the colonial period in Samoa?
- What issues or problems does he encounter while in diaspora?
- What issues does he encounter upon returning to Samoa/Pacific after growing up in New Zealand between ages 13 and 34?
- How does the system of ethics you learned earlier in the semester compare with Sione’s mother’s sense of right and wrong.

Readings: An Interview with Albert Wendt, by Vilsoni Hereniko and David Hanlon (The Contemporary Pacific)

SECOND HALF OF THE SEMESTER

Week 8-14 E1 and E3 TRACING THE EVOLUTION OF WENDT THE WRITER THROUGH INDIVIDUAL SEMINARS AND TERM PAPER

- The seminars will follow the three phases of Wendt’s writings as suggested by Paul Sharrad: early, middle, and present.
- Format: 2 presentations per class for the next six weeks
- Presenters will meet with the instructor a week before respective presentations to plan how to conduct the seminar and to see what handouts are needed. Students are expected to use powerpoint slides and powerpoint handouts for the presentations. For assessment, students will provide input in designing a rubric for peer assessment.
- Term Paper: this is an extension of the powerpoint presentation: develop paper before the seminar and then edit and submit it at the end of the semester to include but not limited to the following topics: 1) identify ethical and moral issues and discuss their centrality to the cohesion of the text, 2) discuss issues in the context of time and space, and 3) determine whether such issues are universal and illustrative of contemporary life for Samoans and others.
- Presentation Schedule: TBA as selections are confirmed

STUDENT SEMINARS IN THREE PHASES:

Week 8 & 10 Phase 1 Early Writings: Responses to colonial and modernizing forces

- *Comes the revolution*, (1972)
- *The contract*, (1972)
- *Pouliuli*, 1977 NICA 03/1
- *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*, (1979) GERALDIE 03/01
Week 11 & 12  Phase 2  Middle: Experiments in postcolonial representations; gender, genre, science fiction

- *Shaman of Visions*, (1984) ELISA 03/08
- *The Birth and Death of the Miracle Man*, (1986) ELISA
- *Ola*, (1991) RONIA 03/08
- *Black Rainbow*, (1992) JACK 03/15
- *Photographs*, (1995) MATHEW 03/15
- *The Best of Albert Wendt's Short Stories*, (1999) VAI /03/22
- *SPRING BREAK*

Week 13 & 14  Phase 3 Present: the discursive totality of Wendt’s crippled cosmos

- *The Adventures of Vela* (2009) NISE 04/19

- Basic questions:
  - What is the book about?
  - Where is it set—time and place
  - Who is the protagonist and who are the supporting characters?
  - What are the central themes of the book?
  - What literary approach are you using to critique this book?
  - What issues and trends are portrayed in the book?
  - How do the characters resolve their issues?
  - What of the Samoan experience is portrayed in the book?
  - How are issues of right and wrong, fair and just portrayed?
  - Other

Week 15

- Movie: *Flying Fox in the Freedom Tree*

- Discuss in 3 pages the following questions about the movie:
  - What of the human condition is/are depicted in this movie?
  - What issues or problems exit in the society being depicted?
  - What historical factors provoked/invoked such issues?
  - What are the resolutions portrayed through the characters?
  - What is Wendt’s purpose for writing the text upon which this movie is based?

Week 16-17

- Documentary: *Fa’asamoa: the Samoans in New Zealand*, narrated by Wendt
- Playreading: *The Songmaker’s Chair*

Week 18
• Final Exam: The Songmaker’s Chair
• Term Paper is due (on the book presented in class)
• Complete evaluations

CONGRATULATIONS TO THOSE GRADUATING THIS SEMESTER
HAPPY SUMMER TO ALL