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Immigration, Diaspora, Transnationalism, and the Native—The Many-Mouthed Bird of Asian/Pacific American Literature in the Early Twenty-First Century*

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Abstract

This is a “teacherly” paper, as it springs from my own experiences of teaching Asian/Pacific American literature since 1981. In this paper, I analyze Asian American literature in three distinct yet interrelated paradigms: the Asian American literature of immigration, the Asian American literature of diaspora, and the indigenous literature of Pacific America, namely of Hawai‘i. I argue that the diasporic model has not entirely displaced or replaced the immigration one in the United States and in Asian American literature in spite of compelling historical evidence that by now the earlier established paradigm should have shifted into a background. I also speak of the third paradigm, of Pacific Islander indigeneity in literature, and about how

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this category especially is impacted by the other two paradigms and by trends in transnationalism as well. I make references to various Asian/Pacific American literary works whenever appropriate not only to suggest the many faces of Asian/Pacific American literature as a corpus of creative and scholarly production but also to pinpoint the critical significances it continues to bear on us as we wade through the twenty-first century.

Key Words: Asian/Pacific American literature, immigration, diaspora, transnationalism, indigeneity