

RECORDED HAWAI'I (THEMES OF IMMERSION)

Blaine Namahana Tolentino

i. The Kumulipo

Writers summarize The Kumulipo inline, as a passing note.

Westerners request a Genesis.

Though, we are always beginning. That's the deal
with moons and seasons and 25-year records for flooding
on the same day of the year. Or sharks filmed by drones
in clusters by the shore.

Available translations by:

David La'amea Kamananakapu Mahinulani Naloiaehuokalani Lumialani Kalākaua
(often unmentioned in metadata, King)

Lydia Lili'u Loloku Walania Kamaka'eha

(in English metadata: Queen Liliuokalani or Liliuokalani of Hawaii; no diacriticals, decorum)

Martha Warren Beckwith

(also her: Hawaiian Mythology)

Rubellite "Ruby" Kawena Kinney Johnson

(also her: Nā Inoa Hōkū, newly revised

with the help of an archaeoastronomer, if you're interested)

When I edit a manuscript

people ask: Is the Kumulipo

a book? a song? a story? a myth?

I make the Kumulipo a person. Capital "K." No italics.

An alive something that sings,

sometimes on the page, about the way

Hawaiians like to give the same name

to things that belong together.

ii. Mahina/Malama (moon)

Pictures of the full moon make divots all over

the internet. Pleasure sensors swoon

as we scroll across the earth.

iii. Kai (ocean water)

It doesn't rise. It urges outward, under itself, its blue skin husking its own blue guts.
It doesn't rise.

The body sinks. At first there is bursting, neat bins unlatching, un-crisping,
waves humming around parts.

The body is sinking when the ocean collects the form into itself,
then appared by but also a part of (the body, the ocean, each other).
All of those extra feelers (buzzing), sex (buzzing), small-hairs (buzzing).

The ocean holds the body by the neck, but the ocean doesn't care.
The ocean will hold the body by a hemisphere,
but only because it is busy making tension below, despite, without the body.
The ocean does not know the body and does not store data about its surfaces
once its momentary reaction to the body subsides.
The ocean does not decide to push wave energy through the body or,
just as easily, flood past it.

iv. Hawaiian Dictionaries

The best Hawaiian dictionary was written by Mary Kawena Pukui and Samuel H. Elbert.
Pukui, a Native Hawaiian scholar, put information into this document that is safely veiled
and relentlessly dense.

Here is the definition for "wena," the root of the name folks called her:

1. nvs. Glow, as of sunrise or fire, red. Wena 'ula, red glow.
Hō'ike 'o Pele i kona nani, ka 'ula wena i ka maka o ke ao (song),
Pele reveals her beauty, the rosy glow in the countenance of the cloud.
2. n. A close relationship, blood relative.
Hehoahānau kēnā e loa'a ai ka wena, that is a cousin in whom there is a close blood tie.

Tell me how a term for light, a color, and kinship are connected.

v. Huli (turn), Ho'i (return)

The native birds of Hawai'i share a single ancestor. Their differences are
considered adaptive radiation.
A beautiful graphic inventories resulting species by issuing rays from their shared ancestor.

Iterations of change are important in the tropics.
Sharing longitude with other places means we experience a similar amount
and frequency of light.

The ocean, though, is always doing something.
On hot days, its neat hand folds up the prism of us and, at night,
light can be heard sparked between ghosts and dead neon on old signs by harbors.
Sparks make babies, but they also break radios.

vi. Hiwa (entirely dark)

We are thankful, because you never know if the old lady you are yelling at
is your grandma's best friend from high school.

We are thankful, because horizons exist 24 hours a day
and are there for heartbreaks old and young, deserved or otherwise,
off ocean cliffs, beaches, and even from the ridges of mountains.

We are thankful, because the front door opens
and a grope of wind can pull a guest to dinner
or drinks or mangoes or flatware from Denmark.

We are thankful, because the feelings, spoked, of a home place
glide the perimeter, widening our memories, our cares.

