

Lost in Translation: *He Kumulipo*

A Senior Honors Thesis Proposal

By Annika Daisy Mendoza

Mentor: Wendy Kawabata

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction	3
Literature Review.....	4
Methodology	10
Timeline	10
Materials	12
Material Costs	14
Bibliography	15

Abstract

This creative thesis will address my project based on *He Kumulipo*, a Hawaiian chant. *He Kumulipo* has been long revered as the genealogy and history of the Hawaiian people and culture. This is due to the verses in the chant that speak about the beginning of the universe until it reaches the beginning of human life. The chant consists of over two thousand verses; however, the second half of the chant was lost during the annexation of Hawai‘i. This project will focus on the sixteenth era, the story of Maui. Three translations spanning from 1897 to 1981 were published for *He Kumulipo* by Queen Lili‘uokalani, Martha Beckwith (American folklorist), and Rubellite Kawena Johnson (a Hawaiian Historian); however, only one was most recognized while another was unsupported causing discrepancies. This thesis seeks to expose the lesser-known history behind *He Kumulipo* by starting a conversation through mixed media drawings which will utilize various aspects of Kapa, such as the designs and stamping techniques. This project will be a collection of three 29 ½ by 41 inches drawings. Each drawing will represent the three translations. The use of Kapa is to connect the artistic process with Hawaiian culture. The materials used will consist of Conté crayon, chalk pastels, and ‘ohe Kāpala (Kapa ink) made of kukui nuts (Hawaiian candle nuts). Handmade Kapa stamps will also be used other than the chosen traditional drawing materials which are Conté crayon and chalk pastels. The project should result in three complete drawings to tell the story of *He Kumulipo*’s sixteenth era about Maui that creatively express the contrasting translations.

Introduction

This creative thesis will address my project based on *He Kumulipo*, a Hawaiian chant. This thesis seeks to connect the lost Native Hawaiian history by representing *He Kumulipo*

through a collection of mixed media drawings that reference the forms of Hawaiian art. Native Hawaiian history and how it has been lost through inadequate or limited translation from works in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i will be addressed in this paper. *He Kumulipo* has had many attempts to be fully translated; three who have done so were Queen Lili‘uokalani, Martha Warren Beckwith, and Rubellite Kawena Johnson. The article “Mo'okū'auhau versus Colonial Entitlement in English Translations of the Kumulipo” written by Brandy Nālani McDougall, discusses the issues that may arise from Beckwith translating *He Kumulipo* and her familial background that may have influenced her recognition as a translator for *He Kumulipo*. This became a driving point for the purpose of this project and paper.

Beyond this issue was a personal connection I made while developing this project. I realized the gradual loss of knowledge and understanding of *He Kumulipo* correlated with my family's gradual loss of knowledge and understanding of our Hawaiian heritage. This inspired the project to focus on this development of losing history by using the story of *He Kumulipo* while connecting it back to my own history.

Literature Review

The Hawaiian creation chant, *He Kumulipo*, has been long revered as the genealogy and history of the Hawaiian people and culture. This is due to the verses in the chant that speak about the beginning of the universe until it reaches the beginning of human life. The chant was originally composed by Lonoikamakahiki, a relative of Queen Kapiolani, King Kalakaua's wife (1978, 18). This song was sung in celebration of the arrival of Captain Cook who the Hawaiians thought was one of the four chief gods, Lono (1978, 16).

Prior to the 19th century, the arrival of Captain Cook and missionaries when the Hawaiian language was only a spoken language, *He Kumulipo* was only sung. In 1889, King Kalakaua wrote and published *He Kumulipo* (1978, 10). This was later translated into English by Queen Lili‘uokalani during her imprisonment in ‘Iolani Palace in 1895. It was later published in 1897 (McDougall 2015, 755). However, Queen Lili‘uokalani’s translation went out of print that same year until it was “republished in 1978 by Pueo Press” which is “an independent Hawaiian-run press with limited distribution” (McDougall 2015, 757). As a result, “most students have been able to see the book only in library rare-book sections” (1978, 10).

Discrepant with Queen Lili‘uokalani’s translation, another was published in 1951 by Martha Warren Beckwith, an American folklorist (McDougall 2015, 749). Unlike Queen Lili‘uokalani, Beckwith does not come from Hawaiian lineage. Instead, she is the cousin of Lorrin Andrews Thurston who played a significant role in the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom (McDougall 2015, 758). Her familial ties allowed her an education at O‘ahu College which is now known as Punahou High School furthermore allowing her to become the author and folklorist she is known as now. Beckwith’s role as a translator of *He Kumulipo* replaced the prominence of Queen Lili‘uokalani’s translation. Beckwith’s translation is “often thought to be the only available translation” (McDougall 2015, 749).

In “Mo'okū'auhau versus Colonial Entitlement in English Translations of the Kumulipo” Brandy Nālani McDougall discusses his perspective on the translation limitations of Queen Lili‘uokalani and the freedom that Martha Beckwith had with her translation. While McDougall uses historical references in his claims, his overly passionate tone and agency that he hoped to give Hawaiians provides a more biased or subjective perspective. Nonetheless, his claims are worth exploring as a key to the discussion my drawings are portraying.

Rubellite Kawena Johnson provides the most recent translation to *He Kumulipo* making it the third in total. Her translation was published in 1951. Johnson is a Hawaiian historian who has translated a variety of Hawaiian chants and written books about Hawaiian history, art, and mythology. Her perspective and translation of *He Kumulipo* should be considered despite the translation's lack of exposure because of her status as a Hawaiian historian.

The creative project will contribute to critical research on Hawaiian art and art techniques. My inquiry has led me to Kapa (tapa). Kapa is a type of bark cloth used as fabric for mats, clothes, and much more. Kapa comes from plants such as “māmaki, oloa, ‘akala, hau, and most frequently the Chinese paper mulberry, wauke” (Arbeit 2011, 270). Among the islands in Oceania, Hawaiian Kapa is known for the “varieties of texture and colored designs” that were not used elsewhere (Peter H. Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa) 1957, Reprint of bound volume:166). Kapa designs are stamped or beaten using a Kapa beater which is a koai‘a (Acacia koaia) hardwood tool (Peter H. Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa) 1957, Reprint of bound volume:169).

Arts and Crafts of Hawaii by Peter H. Buck or Te Rangi Hiroa details the use of Kapa in Hawaiian history including their clothing and furniture. The book, *Links to the Past* by Wendy S. Arbeit describes the patterns of different Kapa beaters. Both books will be used as sources for the creative portion of my project. Arbeit's book additionally illustrates the individual geometric designs from Kapa for further study. This art technique has been chosen to represent *He Kumulipo's* translation visually and physically using Hawaiian approaches.

I have not been the only Hawaiian to create an art piece based on *He Kumulipo*. In the “‘Ai Pohaku, Stone Eaters” that has been up since January 22nd at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa main art gallery, two pieces are titled “Kumulipo.” The first piece is titled “Mo‘okū‘auhau o Kumulipo” by Kau‘i Chun created in 2017 using discarded metal shelves,

masking tape, kai from Kaiwi Coast, and rust from Hawaiian air. This piece is considered mixed media since the artist used multiple types of mediums. The second piece is titled “Kumulipo” and was created by ‘Imaikalani Kalāhele in 1989-1999. Visually, it is similar to my idea of mixed media painting on canvas. From my observation, the second piece may be about the goddess of lava and fire. Since *He Kumulipo* is a chant with over 2,000 verses.

I plan to focus my project on the story of Maui. In the three translations, Maui’s story differs slightly. Below are the first seven lines of Maui’s story written by Queen Lili‘uokalani:

From which Hina became pregnant, and by fire brought to life a fowl.
 An egg was that child, which Hina brought forth.
 Her husband was not a fowl,
 Yet a chicken was brought to life.
 When the child cooed Hina asked
 I have no husband, yet a child is born
 A brave child is born to Hinaakeahi (Hina of the fire). (1978)

Martha Beckwith’s translation:

Hina-of-the-fire conceived, a fowl was born
 The child of Hina was delivered in the shape of an egg
 She had not slept with a fowl
 But a fowl was born
 The child chirped, Hina was puzzled
 Not from sleeping with a man did this child come
 It was a strange child for Hina-of-the-fire (1951)

And finally, Rubellite Kawena Johnson translates:

Hina-a-ke-ahi conceived, born a warrior bird, a moa,

The egg of a moa the son Hina conceived,
 Not ever had she slept with a moa,
 A moa indeed she had borne;
 (When) the child crowed, Hina asked
 “How is this child born from sleeping with a man?”
 A child of awesome power the son of Hina-a-ke-ahi (1981)

Johnson’s variety of books based on Kumulipo breaks down the stories beyond their mythologies, adding mathematical and scientific perspectives. In volume one of *Kumulipo: The Hawaiian Myth of Creation* by Rubellite Kawena Johnson, calculates the Hawaiian calendar, explores themes of dualism, breaks down number symbolism, the “Cosmic Spider” and much more (1981). The translation summaries and theories that Johnson came to in Maui’s section compared him to constellations, “He is defied in various parts of the constellations Ophiucus, Sagittarius, and Hercules, while tools of his trade are in Scorpius and three brothers in the canoe of the Belt of Orion on the opposite horizon, trying to fish up an island from the bottom of the sea with a fishhook in Scorpius suspended in the Milky Way over regions south of Tahiti” (2000, 171). She continues to go into detail breaking down each line and relating it back to the constellations as mentioned above. I have decided to base Johnson’s drawing off constellation motifs. The overall drawing should be expected to look like an image in the stars or relating back to the stars.

In Beckwith’s translation breakdowns, she takes a more straightforward approach as compared to Johnson, comparing his story in this Hawaiian chant to those of New Zealand’s version, “Stories of the Maui brothers are by no means local to Hawaii alone, but the name Maui-of-the-loin-cloth for the trickster hero is used, so far as I know, only here and in New Zealand; Maui-tikitiki” (1951, 128). She goes into detail the similarities and differences between

the two versions, as well as the possibility of his story coming from another myth, “Perhaps the myth of drawing the sun from its underworld hole in order to lighten a darkened world, told in Hawaii of the famous demigod Kana, was the original and more elemental adventure upon which have been imposed such embellishments” (Beckwith 1951, 135). Beckwith then states that, “the lovemaking is developed as a comic relief to the drama of strife against the gods” giving me the idea that she views his story as that of a movie or play (1951, 132). Even going out of her way to call it a play. It was because of this I decided to draw Beckwith’s version with shots of his love story in a comic style while keeping the serious battle scenes extremely illustrative and dramatic. The overall drawing will be a collage flowing through various key scenes from his story.

As I have yet to find any translation notes from Queen Lili‘uokalani, I plan to keep hers the most straight forward with an illustration of Maui in the middle and motifs that relate to him such as the fishhook and the lasso of the sun surrounding his figure. His figure will not only be drawn like a portrait but be stamped in with shapes used in Kapa. These stamps will mainly build his clothing and his surroundings.

Throughout my inquiry and creative process, I will be comparing and contrasting these three translations of *He Kumulipo*. It will not be limited to the lines I used above but will span Maui’s complete lifeline. Additionally, the two translations Johnson and Beckwith have written about their translation process and the explanations of why they translated certain words and stories differently from previous translations. Their perspective of the stories will be an additional and primary focus for the drawings in terms of style and composition.

Methodology

Timeline

May: Review proposal with mentor, Professor Wendy Kawabata, and submit the proposal.

June-July:

- Continue researching and broadening understanding of Kumulipo by reading books written by Hawaiian Historians (Rubellite Kawena Johnson).
- Find other art pieces done on Kumulipo and connect to those artists for inspiration and advice.
 - Search up artists my mentor has recommended me to look up and possibly contact.
 - Artists:
 - Nikau Hindin
 - Nanea Lum
 - Kahi Ching
 - Questions worth asking:
 - Why did you do a piece about *He Kumulipo*?
 - Why did you choose to represent it in this way?
 - How did you learn about *He Kumulipo*?
 - If you had to use a translation to read it, which translation did you use?
Why?
- Connect to Hawaiian artists that specialize in the making of Kapa.
 - Learn firsthand how these are made.

- Record the making through either video, notetaking, or photography.
- Organize data in a Google document and Google Drive to hold visual media.
- Determine whether you can create your own tools, substrate, and ink from scratch or borrow the tools used in these art practices.
 - Keep in mind the timeline to ensure enough time to make any tools, ink, and substrate necessary.
 - Tools from scratch:
 - Determine how historically accurate the tools and process should be.
 - What alternatives could there be that aren't traditional?
 - Using a saw, wood burner, and sandpaper to create Kapa stamps and beaters.
- Research pattern names and meanings. (Find from other artists, historians, and books)
- Correlate patterns with Maui's story.
 - If it results in a large number, narrow down the choices to no more than 5 and no less than 3.
- Update literature review as needed.

August:

- Begin experimenting with the different techniques in Kapa.
 - Stamping, painting, washing, and restamping.
- Develop a composition that correlates with Maui's story.
- Draw thumbnail drawings of possible compositions and end results.

September-October:

- Begin first piece
 - First piece will be based on Queen Lili‘uokalani’s translation

October-November:

- Finish first piece.
 - Update methodology as needed.
- Begin the second piece.
 - Based on Martha Warren Beckwith’s translation

November-December:

- Finish the second piece
 - Update methodology as needed.
- Begin the third and last piece.
 - Based on Rubellite Kawena Johnson’s translation.

Spring 2024:

- Finish creative thesis
 - Update any changes that occurred
- Submit thesis
- Graduate in May

Materials

My specialty and interest lie in mixed media drawings, ink, and watercolor. This is not traditional media used for Kapa. Through my tests so far in my art classes, Sumi Ink has appeared to be a highly pigmented rich black medium which is ideal for this project that relies

less on color but more on delivery and results. Kapa traditionally was limited to black and red (Peter H. Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa) 1957, Reprint of bound volume: 207). I would also like to include shades of red and brown due to their technique of washing the cloth after printing to get a variety of shades of pigment (Peter H. Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa) 1957, Reprint of bound volume:207). The red color will be done using pastels. The brown shades will be done using Conté crayons. Any other color that Kapa uses will be done in pastels.

The substrate is limited to how you want to represent the piece, what media you will be using on the substrate, how much money you plan on spending on the substrate, and how big or small will you be going. Art professors teach their students using a variety of substrates and go into further detail about what substrates are good alternatives for cheaper options. Because of the nature of the medium, I will need to use a thicker substrate. The brands that are highly recommended by art professors are Arches, Strathmore, Canson, and Stonehedge. I have decided on using Arches, 300 lb, cold press. I have worked with this paper before and is proven to be durable for ink but may need more testing which will be done in August.

My tests so far have been on Arches 140lb hot press paper. This is the substrate used for watercolor. Hot press paper is thicker and has a rough texture. Cold press is thin with little to no texture. The poundage determines the thickness of the paper. For watercolor, depending on how much water and ink is being used, the thicker the pounds the better. I bought 140 lb paper because of the price at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa bookstore and the available options the bookstore has.

Material Costs

Budget plays a key role in the limitations of this project. Below is my tentative budget and a list of the cost of materials. This may change depending on sales and possible access to these materials from other locations locally or online.

Budget = \$300

- HWST 222 Class Fee: \$40
 - Class that will teach me how to make Kapa stamps
- Substrate: Arches white watercolor paper
 - Source: dickblick.com
 - Size: 29 ½” by 41”
 - Cold press
 - 300lb
 - Prices:
 - Single sheet = \$30.86
 - Bulk of six = \$168.30 (shipping is free of orders of \$59 or more)
 - (A single sheet becomes \$28.05)
- Medium: (Buy as needed)
 - Kukui nuts for ink (can be found around campus)
 - Conté crayon
 - 2 count = \$4.50 at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM) Bookstore
 - 4 count with white, black, bistre, and sanguine = \$7.45 on Amazon
 - Sumi ink 180ml = \$1.50 at Daiso

Bibliography

Arbeit, Wendy S. 2011. *Links to the Past: The Work of Early Hawaiian Artisans*. Honolulu:

University of Hawaii Press.

Beckwith, Martha Warren. 1951. *The Kumulipo, a Hawaiian Creation Chant*. Chicago:

University of Chicago Press.

Johnson, Rubellite Kawena. 1981. *Kumulipo, the Hawaiian Hymn of Creation*. Vol. 1. Honolulu,

Hawaii: Topgallant Pub. Co.

Johnson, Rubellite Kawena. 2000. *The Kumulipo Mind: A Global Heritage : In the Polynesian*

Creation Myth. 1st ed. Honolulu: publisher not identified.

Lili‘uokalani. 1978. “The Kumulipo: An Hawaiian Creation Myth.” Edited by James Kimo

Campbell. *Pueo Press*.

Liliuokalani. 1978. *The Kumulipo: An Hawaiian Creation Myth*. Kentfield, Calif.: Pueo Press.

McDougall, Brandy Nālani. 2015. “Mo’okū’auhau versus Colonial Entitlement in English

Translations of the Kumulipo.” *American Quarterly* 67 (3): 749–79.

Peter H. Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa). 1957. *Arts and Crafts of Hawaii*. Vol. Reprint of bound volume.

Bernice P. Bishop Museum Special Publication. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press.