Alo Makani Pōlua o ke Koʻolau

An Essay by Kīhei de Silva

Haku mele: Unknown.

Source: Samuel Kekoʻowai, *Makalei ka Laau Pii Ona a ka Iʻa o Moa-ula-Nui-Akea i Kaulana,* in *Nupepa Kuokoa*, April 5 and May 24, 1923.

Our text: *Nupepa Kuokoa*; translation and orthographic editing by Kīhei de Silva.

We have an old, illustrated copy of Thomas Thrum's *More Hawaiian Folk Tales*. We page through it regularly, but it takes an eagle-eyed Cristina Bacchillega to direct our attention to the shocking implications of the photographs and captions that accompany his tales.[1] Two examples will suffice: the first is of a Hawaiian family gathered outside its hale pili. The second is of three women sitting with their ʻumeke inside that same hale pili. Thrum's captions for the two pictures are: "Hawaiian Grass House, Exterior View" and "Hawaiian Grass House, Interior View." No mention is made of the Hawaiian people in the foreground of either picture; Thrum's captions ignore them completely; he erases them entirely from consideration.

The two photographs and their captions are emblematic of what Thrum and William Westervelt did in the first quarter of the twentieth century when they published their multi-volume collections of Hawaiian folklore. What they did was erase their Hawaiian sources completely from view. They took our stories from our mouths and our newspapers, translated and repackaged them to suit the tastes and temperaments of a western audience, and perpetuated the myth that there were no kanaka maoli writers left in the house of Hawaiian literature.

Samuel Kaiākea Kekoʻowai was born in Molokaʻi in the late 1850s. He died almost 70 years later, in 1924, at his Liko Lane home in Pauoa Valley. In the last year and a half of his life, Kekoʻowai did a remarkable thing. He went to toe-to-toe with Thrum and Westervelt. He published his serialized Hawaiian language legend of the fish-attracting Mākālei branch – *Makalei ka Laau Pii Ona a ka Iʻa o Moa-ula-Nui-Akea i Kaulana* – in the newspaper *Kuokoa*. It isn't a quaint little fairy-tale; it's a huge, sprawling, digressive, convoluted, knowledge-packed, politically aware, kūʻē-steeped moʻolelo. And if that weren't enough, the story is jam-packed with mele – over 60 in all, some of them prayer chants, some of them mele inoa, some of them mele hoʻoipoipo, some of them directly related to the Mākālei story, some of them delightful aui (digressions), some of them familiar to us, and some of them never seen or published before or since.

Kekoʻowai tells the story, through prose and poetry, of the ʻehu-haired boy Kahinihini-ʻula and his grandmother Nīʻula. Both are descendants of Haumea, both live next to Hālauwai, a spring-fed pool at the back of Maunawili valley in Kailua. When the boy is mistreated by the pondkeepers of Kawainui and Kaʻelepulu, his grandmother takes Haumea's Mākālei branch from its hiding place on a gable plate of her hale and instructs

Kahinihini‘ula in the use of its fish-attracting powers. He then leads all the fish of the Kailua ponds into hiding at Hālauwai, leaving Kailua destitute and its leadership in a quandary. Haumea herself then arrives to enlist the boy and his grandmother in an intricate plan to restore harmony to the dysfunctional ahupua‘a.

Keko‘owai died before he could bring his story to a close, but he left little doubt as to its outcome. The new ruling class is schooled in old-time kuleana, the fish are returned, and all Kailua is made aware of the active presence of Haumea and the ancient order that she represents.

Kapalai‘ula Kamākāleiakawainui de Silva’s hula kahiko presentation features four Mākālei chants that open little windows into Keko‘owai’s big story. All four are chants of invitation that extol the beauty and fertility of Kailua; they call on ancestors to attend, summon lovers to enter, bid guests to enjoy, and provide models of pono for what is now being called the “Hawaiian world view.” Kapalai, whose full name gives evidence of our family’s commitment to Keko‘owai’s message, offers the first of these Mākālei mele, “Alo Makani Pōlua o ke Ko‘olau,” as an oli. A two-parter, it opens with a description of a dark, windy, unstable land in which the motives of men are clouded by self-interest, swayed by desire, and prodded by resentment. Implicit in this description is the Hawaiian belief in the interrelatedness of “worlds.” Gods, nature, land, man – all constitute an inextricably linked whole. Thus the ‘uki sedge of the land is disturbed by dark winds that blow in concert with the uki resentments of the human heart.

Part two of “Alo Makani Pōlua” brings relief from this not-pretty picture of discord. The poet identifies himself[2] as one who dwells in the sunlight of love, in a harmonious Kailua where *neki* supplants *‘uki* (both refer to the reeds that grow on the fringes of Kawainui, but one connotes beauty, and the other, displeasure), where buoyancy displaces self-absorption (Mokulana not Keaniani), and where all things sway gently in the flower-resuscitating breath of the Malanai breeze. “Like the land,” he says, “I am ulakolako” (well-supplied, well-equipped, prosperous). “Evidence of our sexuality, fertility, and health are everywhere,” he continues, “in this land cherished by the mo‘o guardian Hauwahine.” “My hope,” he concludes, “is that you will be my lover, that you will leave the selfish attractions of Keaniani Ridge and come down to the water with me where we will be immersed in love.”

Keko‘owai offers “Alo Makani Pōlua” in the context of a celebration that precedes the marriage of Ahiki (the beloved konohiki of Kailua) and Kahauolopua (the charming companion of Haumea). Their marriage is part of Haumea’s plan to return Kailua to the harmony described in the second section of this mele. We don’t need Thrum’s or Westervelt’s highly-advanced interpretive skills to figure out that Keko‘owai was fighting, in print, for that same return of harmony, in his day and now in ours. His pen is his magic Mākālei branch: he wields it to call us to our ancestors, to encourage us to abandon the mirrors of self-interest, and to school us in the need to restore pono to land and people.

He also wields pen and Mākālei to whack Thrum and Westervelt on their heads: we still have our moʻolelo and mele, our own literature delivered by our own mouths, and pens, and laptops. And this literature is neither distant nor irrelevant; it is right here, as meaningful as ever. Lana ka manaʻo hoʻolāʻau iā ia i meʻe na mākou i ka poli o Hauwahine. Our thoughts turn constantly to Kekoʻowai as our champion in the bosom of Hauwahine.

Alo Makani Pōlua o ke Koʻolua

Alo makani pōlua o ke Koʻolau,[3]
Pō i ka ʻohu noe luna o Keaniani,[4]
Hōʻoni i ke kino, naue ke ʻuki,[5]
Naue pū nō me ka makemake,
I loko o ke kanaka ē –,
E noho nō au i ka lā o ke aloha,
E naue pū ai me ka neki o Mokulana,[6]
A ulakolako aʻe au neʻeneʻe ma–i,
Hoʻiho kāua e ke aloha i ʻeloʻelo e–a.

Nani ke alo ke kū o Olomana,
ʻO ke poʻo kapu nō ia o Ahiki,[7]
I huki kalalea ʻia e ka Malanai[8]
Aloha wale ia makani hoʻohanu pua,
Hoʻonaue i ka neki o Mokulana,
Lana ka manaʻo hoʻolāʻau iā ia,
I ipo naʻu i ka poli o Hauwahine,[9]
Me ka māpu hanuʻala o ke Koʻolau,
I ke alo o Keaniani ē,
He aniani kū kēnā, he mea kilohi,
I laila nō ʻoe a pau ka ʻai – ē,
Hoʻīho kāua e ke hoa a ʻeloʻelo ē.

Deeply dark is the windy face of the Koʻolau,
Darkened by the foggy mist above Keaniani,
It stirs the body, the ʻuki reeds sway,
Moving in concert with the inner desires
Of mankind.
But I will dwell in the sunlight of love
That sways in union with the neki of Mokulana,
I have all you need, move closer to me,
Let us go down there, e ke aloha, and be immersed in love.

Glorious is the steep face of Olomana,
It is the sacred summit of Ahiki
Drawn up into prominence by the Malanai,

Dearly loved is this flower-resuscitating wind
That sets the neki of Mokulana to swaying,
My hopes turn constantly to him[10]
As my lover in the bosom of Hauwahine
With the sweet breath of the Koʻolau
Blowing on the face of Keaniani Ridge
That is a mirror, something in which to gaze
You are there until the food is consumed
Let's go down, e ke aloha, and be immersed in love.

Notes:

1. Cristina Bacchilega, *Legendary Hawaiʻi and the Politics of Place: Tradition, Translation, and Tourism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. 94-95.

1. Or herself. Kekoʻowai gives no clue as to the gender of the poet/speaker of this mele; "he" could just as easily be "she." I use male pronouns in this essay, but only for economy of expression.

2. Windy "Koʻolau" weather is often used as a metaphor of troubled times and personal distress. See, for example, Pukui's *ʻŌlelo Noʻeau* #550: "He au Koʻolau aku ia."

3. Keaniani is the name of the inland ridge that separates Waimānalo from Maunawili. A trail over a low point in the ridge connects the two, and our mele seems to address someone who is about to enter the Kailua ahupuaʻa by this route. One meaning of *aniani* is "mirror," and the use of the word here and in lines 18 and 19 of the chant is suggestive of the self-interest/self-absorption that comes of gazing too long in a mirror.

4. The phase "naue ke ʻuki" looks like a simple description of the swaying ʻuki reeds of Kawainui. But *ʻuki* can also be read as *uki*, in which case the phrase expresses the unstable effects of uki anger and resentment. This alternate reading seems especially appropriate to "Alo Makani Pōlua" since it forms the negative half of the subsequently introduced "naue ka neki." Both *uki* and *neki* refer to the reeds, rushes, and sedges of Kawainui, but *neki* carries far more positive connotations, as in the proverb: "Pōhai ka neki lewa i ka makani. Surrounded by the reeds that sway in the breeze. Said of one handsome and graceful of movement (Pukui, *ʻŌlelo Noʻeau*, #2668).

5. The place name *Mokulana* survives only in the old poetry of Kailua. Its actual nature and location have long been lost to us although its literal meaning, "buoyant island," and regular association with neki and ʻuki place it somewhere on the fringes of Kawainui Pond. It shows up in a half-dozen or more mele for Kailua, always in the context of beauty and tranquility.

6. Three peaks comprise what is now commonly referred to as Mount Olomana. Olomana, the Kāneʻohe-facing peak, is the most prominent of the three. Flat-topped Ahiki stands on the Waimānalo side, and Pākuʻi rises between them. All three are people (as well as peaks) in Kekoʻowai's moʻolelo: Olomana is the aliʻi ʻaimoku of the Koʻolau districts, Ahiki is his konohiki at Kailua, and Pākuʻi is Ahiki's pondkeeper. References to Olomana and Ahiki in "Alo Makani Pōlua o ke Koʻolau" are thus double-layered; Olomana is not only the poʻo of the Olomana peaks; he is also Ahiki's chiefly superior and aikāne.

7. The Malanai is the best-remembered of Kailua's winds. It is always characterized, in the Kailua mele tradition, as gentle and refreshing.

8. Hauwahine was the benign mo'o guardian of the Kawainui and Ka'elepulu fishponds. She provided for the well-being of Kailua's people and required, in return, that they live harmonious lives. She often took the form of a beautiful woman bathing in Kawainui's waters and sunning herself on its banks.

9. Or herself. See n. 1 above.

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