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Spring 2020

H(u)ina

Hokulani Rivera

Western Washington University

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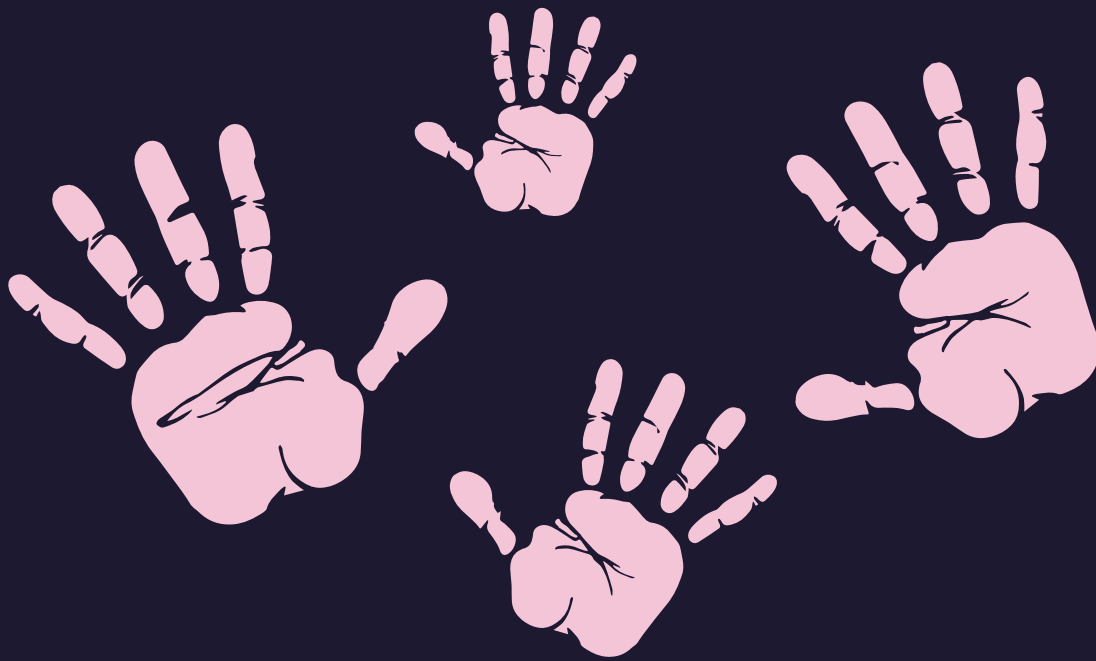


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H(U)INA

HOKULANI RIVERA
SPRING 2020 HONORS CAPSTONE
ADVISOR: PROFESSOR JANE WONG

Dedicated to Hina Ka'ana'ana and Mary Waianuheā Keolewa.

‘A’ohe hana nui ke alu ‘ia – No task is too big when done together by all.

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Natal

I was born into this world tethered |
to an island, my kaikua'ana |
elder sister whose |
mountains impress my vertebrae |
pull me vertical, feet |
planted in the mud home of our |
brother |
Haloa of the fluttering leaves |

I was born
into this world the turtle
thrust up for – breath – from amniotic tide
salt crystals – clinging – fin and
shell – clasped in seaweed
wind-soaked and searching – craning neck
to crashing
wave

I

was born
into this world rooted in sun
and mist and
dirt and moon I am
every marrow of
every fiber of
my grand mothers
and fathers
I am

Without

Without a nation. Without foundation. Without
a slack key guitarist to follow
me around with those soothing island lullabies. Without dreams.
Without waking up rested.

Without apple juice or toilet paper – those simple
comforts, whose only jobs are to beckon me back to
a temporary home.

Without permanence.

Without solid lines and definitions and who's who. Without federal recognition.
Without the need for validation from a colonial government – contingent on my
disappearance. Without a community strong enough to dispel assholes.

Without the will to be the one, to correct every asshole.

Without going a day where someone doesn't attack
one or maybe a few identities of mine.

Without anyone to 'ōlelo with.

Without energy.

silver lining

I gave a man ten dollars today

Biscuits and gravy, just biscuits and gravy

I trusted him, but I didn't need to.

He could've lied,

it doesn't matter.

comfort could've been the sanitized burn of the cheapest vodka

or the embers of a lit cigarette tonight that'll promise him the sun tomorrow.

Or some good ol' fashioned biscuits and gravy

He decided to live today – isn't that something?

I walked past, head bowed to my hesitance.

Felt the lightness of my own jacket pocket

found comfort in a three-dollar bowl of

Lavender ice cream, please

cream-colored and as bitter as its roots: the reminder that you're right here. Alive.

The earthy aftertaste sent to tether my soles to the ground.

A frozen extract to cleanse and calm my grated throat,

chaotic thoughts dispersed to the margins of

my consciousness the way pepper flees from dish soap.

And when it was gone.

And when spoon scraped the fired glass of the little bowl,

I smelled purple.

I left town with a dollar in my pocket, but

I decided to live today – isn't that something?

Run to Chinatown at 5 a.m.

Taste the muted sweet of a new day's air
before cars can belch and the homeless can take their morning whizz – before
the sun shines –
before you remember exactly what these sidewalks and
brick buildings were built on
top of – in
place of – right,
on, over
This is your nation now.

Grab the grease-flimsy box from the sides (never the bottom!)
Check your order –

- three sweet potato
- six pork
- three curry – *Did you know 'manapua' is a bastard?*

Born from the stir of 'mea 'ono pua'a' (Pork Dessert)

*Bao wobbling on your palm and
bearing displaced labor full of... love, and steam,
and defunct plantations, rich in trauma-bonding*
This was your nation then.

Cut each bun in half and let the steam pour
out. Watch a dozen become two but
each one become less, feel your sagittal crest.
Remember you were split in
half once too –
so will you be again, between your people and
your will-appointed mission but for now
Nourish them both.
This is/was/will be your nation.

Wai Puna

I am sorcery's grand daughter – the latest one
The last one, from the longest line of unknown.
From the tradition of

unseen

I am the darkness at the
beginning of light, the dim rocking of placental shade
I am

untapped.

I ka 'ōlelo no ke ola. I ka 'ōlelo nō ka make.

I am the life my grandmothers, whispered
Through the cracks and canals of our kulāiwi

E Kaila'ahiwa

E Nalunui

E Maka'ole

E Elizabeth Miliama

E Hina

E Mary Waianuhea

I am the deaths my grandfathers grew fond of in
war chants and proclamations, plantations, ships, roads, and mountain-sides

E Kekoa

E Na'ea

E Palau

E Lui

E Samuel

~~A 'o 'oe—the despicable one.~~

~~The one who still weighs in my marrow~~

~~who shall not be passed on.~~

These are the currents of each stone-
bending waterfall into
its keiki
stream.

This jaw inscribes itself into mirrors and
memories I have never lived, the clenched reminder that no child of the earth is
ever alone.

We are with them.
They are with us, in the warmth of
beds and stiff sheets
of military camps defunct just a
decade ago – now repurposed for housing
Kanaka Maoli children on their huaka'i to revived
forests
ancient lava flows as native as them.

I find you all at the tip of an 'o'o thrust into
our honua. A new nesting ground for our future –
the transformations of canopy-scapes embedded in each
keiki koa
stem and root and leaf
the size of baby pinky toenails.

E Na'ea – I thank you for your
service, steadfast warrior – Your
blunt edge, the wisest tool and guard –
sharp sight that pierces – through the veil.
Focused silence.
I wonder the lessons you still carry – the
ones you passed down from piko to piko, and
through century-old wrinkles. Just like your grandson.
My dad.

E hahai i ke ala o ka hana pa'akikī.

I saw you all in the forests before—
I knew I was never that
good a forager and yet, the most intact and shining plants.
I knew I wasn't *that* good at lei-making, and yet when Kumu went silent
Watch and learn, so I don't have to talk.
I had nearly finished!

I saw you, and I didn't. I hear you, and yet I
don't. I know that one foot
is planted –
here – in a foreign land so far and yet nuzzling our beloved ocean –
and one remains in the wao akua.
Home.

*'O ka hā'ule nehe a nā lau lā'au, he
hāwanawana ia i ka po'e ola.*

I saw you all before my skull hardened, vision
blurred – body trained
only outward, shackled
to this realm and freezing.
But I am sorcery's grand daughter
and the product of beaten generations.
Bleeding still through seven life times.
And yet, you all have kept
me in mind.

E Kaila'ahiwa – I
am, because of you – from the earliest
generation on record, the first to be solely written, nearly
forgotten

.
Your ancestors, the last of whom to be solely spoken. Remembered
by 'ōlelo and forcibly forgotten, but
I have a promise to you, O sacred,
black sea. For your name will be as never-

ending as your rolling tides. As I am
the generation of your foresight
in life,

you are the generation I honor in mine.

You are alive in my backbone, holding me upright
and steady for the next line of mo‘opuna – a card of eight fruit-
bearing branches

Aloha nō

Aloha nō

Aloha nō

Hānai ke keiki, ola ka lāhui

I didn't know you were rearing me
through the clouds. Glimpses of mystic.
Where bodies and skin move through the unbound ones
Unaware – yet grasping tether.

Where we
are formed
planted after breath

You were the ancestors always
there, always just out of
reach – the mist / sliced
through by the owl's
lithe wing
gliding in updraft – demanding presence among branches
and droplets.

I've seen you again and again
and again – so close, yet
trapped within the veil of childhood
stigma and the monotony of adulthood

E Hina –
For all of my ancestors,

for every grain of dirt and drop of capillary river
for our kulāiwi
for you
I hope to always be the warrior, the
thinker, the kāhea, the native woman,
The matriarch,
the granddaughter of magic. Mana unrestrained
Unbroken and without a master to possess
it.

But, I wish I could see your face,
see the widow's peak on your forehead to match mine –
just to be *extra* sure.

I don't always know what I'm doing, but
If you meet me halfway – I'll do my best to race you there.
And on my hope, on my
darkest days,
when the world seems to be caving in – (but really
it's not) – I hope you
send a messenger on the wind to remind
me:

I am the granddaughter of
our source of life
of waterfalls and rocks
and Mana, with a dash of 'anā'anā

E mālama 'ia nā pono o ka 'āina e na 'ōpio.

I am the grand daughter
of the heartbeats that shook all of your ribcages
and the heartbreaks your children endured.

I am the keeper of this story, both lost in words
and yet never un-
attended. Swaddled in all the fibers of

my being, our legends rest,
grow, in the peripherals of my consciousness, and,

*E ho'okanaka 'oukou,
'a'ole e ho'onāwaliwali ko 'oukou no'ono'o mana'o.*

E Hina –
I see you now in the shadows and sparks
behind my eyelids. In
the waiting room of my reality, but the door is jammed.
Please lend a crow bar.

E Na'ea –
can I borrow your spear?

E Kaila'ahiwa –
Have you passed on a key?

for now, I endure the dreams and nightmares
with shots in the dark
to call interpretation –

The red-eyed eagle stuck in a field of mud, now escaped,
flapping and diving, who opens its talons at me –
drops two silver jingles. Don't jump to conclusions.

The baby seal flopping onto the boat, hitching
a ride from a kind sailor, searching for a new
vessel. Look out for our young.

Empty streets. Anxiety. Weight.

E Mary –
I swear, whenever I see an silver-haired Hawaiian tūtū
in my dreamscapes,

I know it's you.
You, the only ancestor I've met, and yet, when
I was too young to take memories and hold them tight.
If I could just have had a day in my childhood to hear
your real voice, to attach to a
face both unknown and entirely familiar. You with that
classic, family heirloom of a jaw line.

I know you lived with hurt, and shame, all your life,
a Kanaka Maoli woman who knew the nature of occupation
in too many ways. But I am here, fighting, because of you.
And I am here
to say, none of it was your fault. We are the women at risk
in a violent world, and amidst violent people – the tyranny
of greed.
We are the women the systems forget to protect
forget to search for –
It wasn't your fault
wasn't your fault
at all.
You did not give.
You were stolen.

I am the mo'opuna to survive trauma – to deprive it,
to dispel the guilty from our stories.
I am the daughter to surpass inherited expectation, and
I hope you can rest in power and peace knowing this.
(But I also hope you can cheer me on.)

*Lili'i ka 'ohiki,
loloa ka lua.*

And when trauma comes from those meant to protect us,
from parents,
And when the world forget to
see me, I know who
I have in my corner when I slay
dragons on my own.

Strength.
The Seven of Pentacles.
The Two of Cups.
The Three of Pentacles.

E Na‘ea.
E Mary.
E Kaila‘ahiwa.
E Hina.

I am the granddaughter
of immutability.
of resistance,
and resilience.

And even when the skies crash and open

Uwē ka lani, ola ka honua.

I am not alone.

Mahalo nō– Mahalo nō– Mahalo nō.

Aukahi

Honi ka lā i ka hālāwai a me
kou lauoho i ke kakahiaka kēhau.

Kēia lauoho, hili ‘ia me kou mau kūpuna mai ke kinohi loa, i nā milo e wehe ‘ana. I
kekahi milo āpau, kekahi wili oho –

Aia kou wā mamua, kou ‘ānō, kou wā mahope mōhala. I kou
lauoho e kama ‘ia ma ka wēkiu o kou piko

Eia kou mana. Eia kou ea. E ho‘okia‘i ia. ‘A‘ole oki kou lauoho, i‘ole nalowale kou mana e hānau i ka wā
kahiko. Eia nā mea no‘eau mai nā kūpuna, mai ka wā kuapapa. Mai ko kākou hō‘ea.

Mai pōina.

E kupu kou lauoho.
E kupu kou mana.
E kupu kou ‘uhane.

E Hina

‘O kou mo‘opuna kēia keiki. Ke kāhea nei ‘o ia.
E ‘olu‘olu, e ho‘olohe mai. E ‘olu‘olu, eō mai.

When she balances along branches of koa canopies, and searches,
beyond that valley
beyond that city
beyond that glittering sea –
when she strains across the horizon for
the pu‘u/wai of her nation

Mauna a Wākea –

she can’t help but fill imagination with you. However intangible,
imperceptible – magic.

*E ku‘u kupunahine, did your lauoho flow deep
brown like the waters of the wet season, cracked by lava in just
the right lighting? Did the filaments of your eyes
snare the sun? Or was that*

your ‘anā‘anā,

*stirring every shadow, every pō – just like in the
beginning? Did you find your future in your mother’s embrace? And your birth in your
daughter’s?*

Eō ka ‘anā‘anā i ke keiki. Kanu ‘ia ka mana i kēia pua.
E nāueue ana ka hōnua me ka wahine.

Your silhouette sways through the mist caught
in adolescent koa leaves – she grasps

at the fog, finds a pueo feather in your place.

It's been six years now.
She carries it with her, still, anything
to tether – herself
to you
to the mauna
– vibrating
with each pound in a sea of
pahu drums, and steadfast soles,
and kāhea, and heartbeats, and hae/Hawai'i

And she wonders if
you're watching.

*E ku'ū kupunahine, are your eyes the stars themselves? Should I
be looking for you there?*

*Are your hands the sweet winter winds, coaxing us back
to the homelands – elders that never left us? Coaxing us here,
to the base of our nation – E ku'ū kupunahine,
'auhea wale 'oe?*

Flow [United]

*The sun kisses the horizon and
your hair in the dewy morning.*

*This hair, braided with your ancestors from time immemorial, in unfurling curls. In
every curl, every strand*

*There is your past, your present, your blooming future. In your hair, wrapped [with magic] at the summit
of your head [center]*

*Here is your power. Here is your sovereignty. Guard it. Never cut your hair, lest you lose your power born
in the ancient times. These are the lessons from the elders, from the oldest time. From our arrival.*

Don't forget.

*Grow your hair.
Grow your power.
Grow your spirit.*

Thanksgiving for Lent

What are you willing to give up?
For the air you don't realize
you're breathing, or
the fresh waters and lands you've taken
for granted.

Are you watching?

The ice hasn't returned this year,
nor salmon, nor moratorium so what
are you Willing to give up?
We thank you for the land
acknowledgements, still rich
in empty promises, and

we thank you for the sponsorships, the new holidays.
We thank you for refraining from store-bought fish.

Please, feel free to keep
your religious practices
to yourself. Keep Lent.
Give up the structures you've settled with,

the ones that commend you

for mediocrity. Give up Thanksgiving – forever.
Are you ~~willing~~ willing to give that up? Along with your plastic
bags and straws?

And while you're looking for ways to
(r)ally – are you willing to give up capitalism too? The
Wal-Marts that keep you

comfortable? The PFDs

that keep you complacent and convenient?

Are you w illing to give up the value you've placed on a cotton-
based paper? Those
coins stamped with the white men of our desecration?
We thank you for recycling,
but what
Are you *willing* to give up? Time?

To sit in, stand up, walk out?

Speak truth?

And to us who WILL inherit the stories –
displacement, survival, resilience, origins –

Are we will
ing to give up good graces from
elders too hurt too
beaten to see their respect has

turned sideways

turned neutral

turn
ed
to
ward
our
opp
ress
ors?

When they tell us

sit down, you're

disrespecting our guests, disrupting

our pipe dreams –

when they lecture us on bad behavior, what

are we then,

willing to give up?

When our backs

burn with the eyes of the internally disgraced,

displaced chiefs, are you

willing to give up the peace with me?

Are you willing to give up your individualism,

exceptionalism, your negligent masochism?

Willing

to bind your liberation to mine?

Will you tether
yourself to all
our relations?

~

Because, my comrades, if not, then
I must believe,
You must be will-ing
to give me
up,
al
one.

Resistance. . . is my survival

Heels clack
arms *click*
past on white clocks the seized seconds
of her life

In the line of duty –
and no, I don't mean military hungry more
like
arming the youths of the damned of all the shit they must
crawl out of
grow up from
try not to fall
back
behind bars busting open black
and brown bodies –

In this line of duty

The lifespan of the occupied,

yet persistent womxn...

is about 45 years...

how 'bout that...

I look over to the smoking womxn
eyes a caged fire, hair neatly
folded chugging slowly

slower

She breathes the gospel,

'And the Lorde once said 'Caring for myself is not self-indulgence,

it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare'

She's 41-years-old

and staring into the barrel of MAGun unhinged
filled with bullets of ICE, Can't Breathe, *tick-tock*
and the acrid strangulation
of the next forest
fire

We see her through each other's trembling skulls
Pen shakes on paper under 'patriotism' drowned in power, but
The essence of June binds us

*'Poetry is a political act because it involves
telling the truth'*

bound in a power of our own
Surging *beneath our skin* from the matriarchs who looked
death in the face and spat

'I am deliberate, and afraid of nothing'

like the womxn before us,
the womxn who stands
before us

we are here

We are alive and armed
masks on

six feet but present on these streets –

war chants on our young, and heavy breath *'My survival... is resistance'*

Dedicated to Breonna Taylor

Quotes from Audre Lorde, Jamaica Osorio, and June Jordan

With

With shitter vision than last year. With sitting next to a stranger, who also forgot his glasses. With watching

a shooting star, going too slow. With realizing it's the international space station. With a new lesson: not all that glitters is stardust. With stars. With a fish hook that others only see as a scorpion's sting.

With stinging. With misperception. With missed perception. With looking into billions of years passed and yet, tonight. With boarding a late bus, opening every app on a busted phone, and finding a future of fractals. With sunsets, and sunsets, and

sunsets.

With an unending case of pet hair on black jeans, and wads of human hair caught in my sweater sleeves.

With eating seaweed, fish flakes, and sesame seeds as a late-night snack. With a healthy fear of being bitten in the dark. With that fucking fly in my room, again.

.

.

With feeling at home so far away so

long as I hear someone chanting. With calling the ancestors

through story, even if I could never have known them. With obscuring

potential truths behind magic, because I don't know you any other way. With

hearing a settler demand to know why salmon and orca are human rights issues, and knowing he'll never understand. With needing the reminder that my breath

holds

more

worth, and

weight

than I give it credit.

With holding it.

With letting Becky go off – get 'em! With sitting in a settler audience.

With watching them, desperate for attention

Validation

Absolution

Salvation, while taking

space – from their idol-for-a-day, the *native* director.

With the *look*. With the subliminal *I know right?*

With a side that wants the world to burn quickly just so I can haunt billionaires in turn, arms crossed and glaring, whispering, “We all told you so,” when the empty in their stomachs open so large no amount of cash or fame will fill it. With cackling at the stinging irony. Stinging irony. With another side that can’t not show up to protests and marches

Anyway.

With being inspired to exist as a strong, native woman, out of spite.

With learning (slowly) to take inspiration from love and loving.

With loving indigenous. With intergenerational weaving, despite broken histories.

With delete. With erase. With gritty remnants on dusty paper.

With blue cornmeal cookies, juniper ash, and the threat of Loco Mocos. With rosy cheeks, standing together next to that old oven.

With taking our futures, without being afforded them. With “Be a Good Ancestor.”

With radical stickers and decals on laptops to show every white kid and professor We are still here.

With braiding hair as a symbol of strength– and love– and tenderness.

With finally finding the spirit of these mountains that aren’t mine. With the rush of wind through trees once abandoned by its leaves. With eagles landing on

Power lines. with Power Lines. With hindsight. With an uphill destiny. With mana.

With exhaustion, with

If not me, though, then who?

With a healthy skepticism of group projects. With a burden the size of an entire island chain.

With *if not now,*

When?

I Think I Love Amnesia

I thought, I was walking, into the living room, but I've lost, my way,
you were my last sure step.

Tears slid down my flustered cheeks, all at once and then,
not at all

You were the sobering silence.

I ordered take-out to stuff my blubbering mouth

You'll, be the fiber remnants, of the unlucky fortune, that'll fumble through the wash, twice.

When he admitted, he was tired, of the universe, and I felt the earth
crack, the ribcage crunch, the teeth grind You

were the homework due the next day, and the next, and the next.

When she betrayed my trust, but shame on me You were the grocery
run. We're out of milk, again. And bread.

And when all the highlights of my worst moments ricochet from temple to temple

You are always the empty Tylenol bottle.

Dammit... I just got home.

But, at least I'll never forget,

You will also be my morning bell that scares all this hell out of me,

and you will be the tender kiss of a concerned lover

and a stupid pun that just gets me

and pictures of baby lions

and a month-old square of milk chocolate that just hits the spot,

and someday soon, when I'll rediscover long-lost faces, and things, and places

You will be my featherweight

smile.

Cosmology

Find every book in your house that you've never read – skimming

doesn't

count.

Arrange them in the corners of your closet, and keep them there until you're ready. You'll know when.

If a title tugs at your attentions after the stacks have been built, take it out and place a penny, quarter, that commemorative golden ticket or coin you got for that thing you did – any thin thing – between any two pages. Read until you see that face again.

Is the story worth its weight in bookmark?

Take a piece of parchment paper and your favorite sharpie.

Write your best memory.

I'll give you a moment to think about that.

Count to five with the fingers on your left hand – unless you have more or less fingers

When it dries, dunk it once in the water cup on your nightstand.

Whatever happens to the ink stains, why was your best so hard to remember?

Drink the rest of the water in the cup and pray for retention.

When you're ready, tell a friend.

Tell them to knock on your door only once, tomorrow morning,

but not to expect an answer one way or another. Have you ever felt the weight of a prayer?

You can choose whether to answer.

In the meantime, take out the books. Lie down in front

of your front door, then build and balance as many stacks of books as you can on your body. Be strategic. Never

forget the purpose of a stable foundation again.

Hold your position for as long as you can, feeling the
thud-
ness
of the floor beneath your head.

Have you ever felt the weight of history textbooks? Crushing, isn't it?

Try to sleep there – have that sharpie nearby to hold when you start dreaming.

.

.

When your friend knocks, don't answer. Hold
your breath. What are you when no one's there to witness?

Stand up.
Don't catch the books.

My Loves: you know who you are

~~the colonized womxn~~

To the ones who bead and bead and bead

and cackle

~~Always~~

and bead

Thank you

To the ones who hug and ask you if that's

~~TOO~~

okay

If their tenderness

is okay

Thank you

~~Much~~

To the ones who hair flip, hip sway and

side

eye

and

aren't afraid of being called bitches for their inconvenient

~~& never~~
truth

~~enou=~~

To my lovely, resilient,

tita bun and feisty bitches

my Fist Up High, Know Your Rights bitches

my exacting,

and loving bitches

Thank you

Special Additions

The first poem in this micro-collection is a black out poem. This was something I had never tried before, so I wanted to showcase it!

The second poem was meant to show different ways that love can manifest when looking at it after a collection like this. In contrast to my other poems, the second poem is focused more on romantic intimacy that can be achieved just through words.

I also wanted to showcase this poem because it was recently published in the 56th issue of WWU's Jeopardy Magazine.

Mahalo!

We are the Delicacies – A Blackout Poem

The Smith's Tropical Paradise Luau

a unearth the pig – cooked to perfection underground Enjoy
a buffet
of
Hawaii, Tahiti, Samoa, Philippines, New Zealand,
(complete with erupting bloom s open
your eyes as you
call Hawaii home.

Copied from: <http://adventureinhawaii.com/kauai/smiths-tropical-paradise-luau/>

palms wrapped in the night
silk of your hair alit
only by the koa tangle in mine let
me nestle in the furrowed den of
your thumb and pointer
let me show you the way with

mine

he kaiulu, he kaiāulu

and i hope, love, the next time you
see water, you think of me, and the salmon, and just how far we'd travel
to replenish your stomach with
all the love you've given away to the ones who've needed it – now it's you
you who shares her warmth in a seeping cabin
you who buys the strange girl a stiff drink
you who stifles the urge to kiss her and admits it when she's left,
you / well

a hui hou / until we meet again

The Poetics of Rhizomes

“A rhizome has “neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows.” We may think of rhizomes as roots that grow in time, with that growth a testament to the progress of time. But the rhizome’s new shoots entangle the old, forming new knotty formations. This is how the past (partially remembered) and the present come together.”
-Laura Ogden, *Swamplife*

Rhizomes can teach us a lot about time, and reality. They aren’t linear. Neither the connections nor growth they make together are ever or always surface-level – transparent. Still, in all these underground, magical innerworkings, plants still break the surface. Bloom. Mature. Wilt. Bloom. Poetry is like that. For poetry is constantly bewildering, entangling, obscuring, and yet these bundled words may impact entire ecosystems, in any and all directions. Rhizomes do the dirty work the way poets do – slithering deeper and broader into the soil in search for new found connections to coil around, transferring sustenance and ideas (yes, there’s proof plants talk to each other) – all for the fruit, the corm, the leaves.

The Kalo plant – one of Hawai’i’s most crucial canoe plants – is, in fact, a rhizomatic plant, as many types of kalo have roots that reach out to any nearby relatives. Yet, when the muds and waters are especially thick, kalo must use their own intuition to reach out one way or another. These roots also represents the entanglement of past, present, and future to Native Hawaiians. In our origin story, two of our gods Wākea and Ho’ohōkūkalani have a still-born named Hāloanakalaukapalili – Hāloa of the fluttering leaves. He was named this, because when his parents buried him, a kalo plant grew in that very place. The next child of this union was named Hāloa, after his older brother, and he was the first

Hawaiian to walk the islands. Today we tend what little is left of our traditional lo‘i systems, after over a century of foreign interests determining what is done to our lands. This plant reminds me always of connection to time in the generational sense, place, and our relatives, human and non-human alike. These connections are what I focus most on in thinking of, and writing a poem. In fact, there is a saying: “I maika‘i ke kalo i ka ‘ōhā.” The goodness of the taro is judged by the young plant it produces. Similarly as people, we can be judged based on how we raise and support our youngest. This proverb is an excellent example of how, even though we look nothing like the plant, it’s always important to see the environment around us as leading by example. Despite common thought, we are not the experts, nor masters of our surroundings. With this in mind, I know that when I de-centralize myself, I can dedicate more of my focus on the lessons our world may be lending, even when no one is listening or watching.

In nature, we also find incredible repetition and repurposing. The stream water in a lo‘i system first feeds its river-dwellers, then it carries nutrients to the kalo. Next, the kalo cleans the water as it flows further down to the loko i‘a where it nourishes the fish with particles from the lo‘i. Then, the water finds its way back to the sea to start the cycle again. Whether it turn to rain, or a rising tide, the water of the islands go through their own natural recycling process. All this follows the pattern of carbon as well: the carbon that I am made of was not created with me, but was rather passed down after millenia of use. Similarly, in my poetry, I look to the roots of words and the modifiers. How do modifiers link words whose roots are not the same? Just from the beginning of this paragraph, I used the words re-petition, and re-purpose. Separately, we see two words with distinct definitions, yet when put together in one context, they inform each other’s own meanings.

I am new in terms of my personhood, but my parts are not. In my poetry, I focus on these patterns of relation not just in content, but context. Thus, one of my most used devices is, in fact, repetition. This,

coupled with litany, creates its own ecosystem through rhizomes of etymological meaning. Yet, my poetry can't be considered created if no one is around to hear or read it. In this way, our language and We are in a symbiotic relationship, just like our mitochondria and the rest of our cells, or even the trees and plants and fungi, and ourselves. Arts and sciences; day and night. On this thought, I once again return to *Huina* – sum. We are the sum of our parts, however, we can't simply think of our parts as being within the body. Rather, our parts are just about every thing! And so, I write about everything. I will return to this thought again.

The kalo's tetherings to one another, like the rhizomes Ogden observed in her research, are never symmetrical. Especially in love, the people or things we connect with may impact us more than we will every impact them, or visa versa. I write to map these asymmetries, and I write as a part of this map. As Ogden writes also in *Swamplife*, "*A key characterization of the rhizome is that it is a map, not a tracing. Maps, unlike tracings, allow for multiple 'entryways' and practices of modification*" (29). In the same vein, when I write poetry about my loved ones, I cannot help but find the multiple entryways using the polyvocality of voice and experience. These maps that we find ourselves entangled in were never meant to have a center – just intersections – and thus I find *myself* having to use different perspectives, and languages. Thinking about myself and poetics is difficult, because it's not just me. It's everything!

And yet, no matter how far my rhizomes stretch, it seems like all I ever write about is politics, love, and being Hawaiian. But, like Chen Chen writes in their poem "Poem in Noisy Mouthfuls," "*No, I still write about everything-*." It's just that, everything is hair, generations, manapua, de-/colonization, kaona, stars, black magic, translation, mountains,

willingness, questions, roots.

So far.