

WAIKŌLOA: HEADWATERS OF KA‘ALA MĀUNUUNU

Hope Matsumoto

“Waikōloa” was written after meeting Mahealani Perez-Wendt in a creative writing graduate seminar I took under Kristiana Kahakauwila at UH Mānoa. Soon after, I was offered an opportunity by Donald Carreira Ching (we met as graduate students in the English department) to interview Mahealani as part of a larger oral history project. In honoring the practice of sharing breath with someone whose voice is phenomenally powerful, I shared this poem with Mahealani as means of my introduction and showing gratitude for the tremendous contributions she has made to Hawai‘i as a poet and through her work at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, where she first began working in 1978. Reflected in the lines of this poem and in the surface of lo‘i kalo are visions of aloha ‘āina at daybreak. This poem’s imagery is fed by my experiences at Ka Papa Lo‘i ‘o Kānewai and imagining the ways that my aloha ‘āina is shaped by my relationship with kalo and mo‘olelo of Hāloa. For more, see Mahealani’s poem, “Nā Wai Eā, The Freed Waters: A Story of Ko‘olau Moku, Maui Hikina.”

“Māunuunu” shifts to the southern shore of O‘ahu and offers a submerged perspective of Ke Awalau o Pu‘uloa. The Pearl Harbor Naval Complex has been a Superfund site since its inclusion to the National Priorities List in 1992, and the oxymoronic dualism of collapsable binaries is a current that runs through this piece because inevitably, life finds a way. The binary

between life and death, too, can be complicated and speculated through afterlives and glimmers of fugitive life. The form of the poem is influenced by my childhood, watching trails and glimmers of light playing along the wet sands and roaring coasts of Honouliuli. Rhythms of tides, cycles of breath, movements of constellations are familiar māhū cadences. Stasis shifts with the sands. Across my poems, the cold northern wind associated with Ka‘ala named Waikōloa is held in duality with the southern sea wind Māunuunu. For further reading on the importance of winds, see Noenoe K. Silva’s 2010 *Hūlili* article “E Lawe I Ke Ō: An Analysis of Joseph Mokuohai Poepoe’s Account of Pele Calling the Winds.”

In calling these seemingly oppositional winds and directions together, these poems world-build to break the contradictions of imperial binaristic divisions. Pronouns deconstruct gender, proper nouns disassemble constructions of humanism. Names invoke layered meanings, and mo‘olelo open worlds in which poetry is liberated to play. These poems become openings to worlds where pronouns emphasize relationality over gender, where misgendering and deadnaming are nonexistent, where cisheteropatriarchal norms are inconceivable. With each day that passes, I lose myself more and more amid long stalks of kalo growing in my Honouliuli garden, fluttering in the breath of mountain winds.

CORRESPONDENCE MAY BE SENT TO:

A. Hope Matsumoto

Email: ahmats@hawaii.edu

Hūlili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being Vol. 12 (2026)

Copyright © 2026 by Kamehameha Schools.

WAIKŌLOA: HEADWATERS OF KA'ALA

i. ho'okō 'ia

Waikōloa is more of a story
 than a wind
 of the north

no one can deny the 'ie'ie
 in our hair so we wear our best
 weaving as she tells us stories

water pulling far means
 stretched beyond means of
 gravity as grasped by the full moon's pull

ka mahina kōnane guides
 movements of strategic politics
 we eat the same stones smoothed by ko Kāne lo'i

we transpire syllabic resonance
 in every velvet tender-hearted lū'au
 in the springs where the sun dries dew from quivering fingertips

in the wai a Kāne a me Kanaloa shared as breath
 in every pause of memory pulsing through wahi pana
 ma 'ane'i au e noho iho ai me ka mahina a'o Mahealani e 'ō'ili mai

on an unobscured night we carry shimmering
 visions of mo'opuna where the high waters fall in mists
 here at the reflection of living wai the moon appeared summoned by her voice

o o o o

ii. spinal fluids

standing in the stream of the ‘auwai, we
 receive woven slivers of hau branches
 where roots guard the passage of Hāloa in braids

of eight. eyes guard the heavens in heavy
 passing of pāpio-colored ‘ilima when adorned
 in sunset ‘ilikai; little do they know that justice

is governed by shades of pā hau
 laden by another descent of ‘aila seasoned
 with relish of ‘inamona-painted trails of nitrogen.

slendered skin of kukui bark dappled by
 bug-borne constellate alignment to the sun’s shadow
 drops again. we remound the pu’e by feeling for a root

without oxygen and overturn the lepo by hand
 until the last descendant loses sight of that wilted pink
 precisely because the water is gone.

but the rounded moon has come out
 to play—there is no stopping the forces of flood even as
 the shadows lengthen again for the second time tonight:

‘auwai carved by tears dripping imperceptible
 across neck, the strung niu needle with the strength to
 bear the weight of four-fold grief and barren teeth

ground into the sands fed by Mauna Ka‘ala.
 fed by the groundwater, fiending manō lingering
 for their fresh ‘awa delivered in ‘apuwai, seen first in lā‘au kou

whose outer bark is peeled by adze rains
 to reveal sinking pūnāwai where the ‘auwai has dried
 for now.

o o o o

iii. kākā kea

the sweetest-throated birdsong of the morning
 belongs of the crimson-faded cardinal whose head tilts
 at the rising sun 'ehu at the crown of cloudbanks clinging mauka

even as we begin another day of approaching summer
 heat, sipping nectar from pua 'ōhai sweetened by another
 advance of our elder sibling's goldenrod rays of light, death

is a spring, and we cannot bear another clatter of
 clenched spine as we stretch to where we lived
 at the far ends of these shores, only to be brought together

by forces that reek of jet fuel and plane engines.
 in an ocean away lives a spring that once lived, then was
 eclipsed in reddened sunrise. eyes strung in the nets of clouds

as we release the weight of the sky through a
 swiftness of a shoulder, all light cast in the stars that
 clutch to dawn skies. dreams of interwoven circumstance—

what other way to know that this vision
 is just a mirage? a trick of the morning light on
 our waking eyes, littered with deadened leaves and burst seeds.

we woke up first a shadow, then a reflection.
 first sun, then inevitable bloom for the entire sacred
 night washed upon this shore at high tide, balanced between

two ridges of kuahiwi. bent backs accustomed
 to the slanted rain and poet's tongues acquainted
 with the rumble of irreversible landslide, each tidal moon

rises to the precarity of the sharpened peaking
 of hollowed trunk turned taproot of haole koa.
 with precision incised into tracks of tongueprint, we

repudiate shattered glass and search
 crystalline shards for a word to describe how
 water beads among leaves of kalo and refracts the stars of

Ho'ohōkūkālani in the late morning sun.
 another leaf tears in the wind—another rainbow
 fragments as the sea winds expand with the rain break.

MĀUNUUNU

black ink swirls as they peer into the water, viscous
 from convergence of two currents: downstream and
 southern winds of Pu'uloa. tonight the moon slips
 thin Kāne as footsteps approach the windswept
 sand dunes, patterned by breath of makani.

 they sling moonbeams, strung taut between
sinew and bone of two crouching shoulder blades.

blown by Māunuunu wind of Honouliuli, my
 scent lifts above surface of water, peeling scaled skin
 from body. warm vapor, salted by 'ehukai reflecting
 silversword shadow in centripetal spray, lingers.

 their tongue licks the tail-end of a current, my
trail dripping from coalescing naupaka
blossoms gathered by fingertips, pressed into
 honey. sweet as cartilage. seeing how my shadow
 stirs the depths of the water, they move closer.

 respiration drawing nearer as the winds strengthen,
 gathering limu 'ele'ele in kīhene to plait until my
footsteps begin to fade. the storms of Waialua rage.
 patiently they wait, sucking marrow from valley mouths.

chiefs waged wars at these enclosed shores, threatened to
disturb the sacred winds gathered below darkened sky.
my body slips to the water, an angled dive through open-
woven strands of estuaries heavy with salted sediment,

polished glass serrated with new teeth, fractalating façade of
ultraviolet reflections, runoff engulfing unhinged bivalve.

heartbeat etched in fingerprints as i carve a new path to
opening, iridescent pearls as wake. deep heart hue of
uliuli lagoon undeniable to my sure-footed gaze, this
lounging harbor becomes a shoal of desire, and we wait.

the first of the fires begin as a ghostly procession, lurking just
above the horizon. except this fire is cold, and burns sweet blue.

my blood, mistaken for sugarcane, blossoms fields of pōhuehue
hydrocarbon oil slicks. gasoline, propane, methane: their
undoing. kerosene-infused dreams leaking

from sleep. waters once-laden with riches weep sheens of jet
fuel that they lap down their throat, swollen as a scattered pua hau.
visions in fallen red mists:

for once, the sea is silent.

the stars distant, cold
blue beneath black horizon

fires ablaze

REFERENCES

- Fujikane, C. (2021). *Mapping abundance for a planetary future: Kanaka Maoli and critical settler cartographies in Hawai‘i*. Duke University Press.
- ho‘omanawanui, k. (2014). *Voices of fire: Reweaving the literary lei of Pele and Hi‘iaka*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Ho‘oulumāhie. (2006). *Ka mo‘olelo o Hi‘iakaikapoliopele*. Awaiaulu Press.
- Kahikina, K. (2024). No ka māhūi aloha: Unsettling homo/hetero-nationalist logics of belonging. *American Quarterly*, 76(3), 515–540. <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2024.a937116>
- Kumu Pono Associates LLC. (2013). *He mo‘olelo ‘āina—Traditions and storied places of Honouliuli, district of ‘Ewa, island of O‘ahu (Documentary technical report)*. https://www.kumupono.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/1chusohuu_113806.pdf
- Mose, M. (2002). *Keaomelemele* (P. Nogelmeier, Ed.). Bishop Museum Press.
- Nakuina, M. K. (2005). *The wind gourd of La‘amaomao* (5th ed.; E. T. Mookini and S. Nākoa, Trans.). Kalamakū Press.
- Osorio, J. H. (2024). Abolition dreams from a resurgent pu‘uhonua. *American Quarterly*, 76(3), 645–668. <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2024.a937121>
- Perez-Wendt, M. (2022). Nā wai eā, the freed waters: A story of Ko‘olau Moku, Maui Hikina. In K. Jetñil-Kijiner, L. Kava, and C. Santos Perez (Eds.), *Indigenous Pacific Islander eco-literatures* (pp. 67–77). University of Hawai‘i Press.
- Silva, N. K. (2010). E lawe i ke ō: An analysis of Joseph Mokuohai Poepoe’s account of Pele calling the winds. *Hūlili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being*, 6, 237–266. https://kamehamehapublishing.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2020/09/Hulili_Vol6_11.pdf
- The Navy’s ‘superfund six.’ (1991). *Environment Hawai‘i*, 6(2). Retrieved April 28, 2025, from <https://www.environment-hawaii.org/?p=3935>
- Westlake, W. K. (2009). Manifesto. In M. M. Siy and R. Hamasaki (Eds.), *Westlake: Poems by Wayne Kaumualii Westlake (1947–1984)* (pp. 225–227). University of Hawai‘i Press.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hope Matsumoto was born and raised in Honouliuli, ‘Ewa, fed by the mountain view of Pōhākea and the sea winds of O‘ahu’s southern shores. Matsumoto is a PhD student in the Department of English at UH Mānoa, where they received an MA in English with a concentration in cultural studies, and is also a graduate of Kamehameha Schools Kapālama and Pitzer College with a self-designed major in Indigenous studies. Currently they work as a graduate research assistant at Hawai‘i Papa o Ke Ao Native Hawaiian Place of Learning Advancement Office.

As a lover of the Wa‘ahila rain, they spend their free time searching clouds for rainbows and cultivating gardens at home in Kānehili.

