

SPLAYED; WATER-WORN

Hope Matsumoto

“Splayed; Water-Worn” features cascading passages of Ho‘oulumāhiehie’s detailed accounts of Hi‘iaka, Wahine‘ōma‘o, and Lohi‘au’s encounter with Kamō‘ili‘ili as portrayed in *Ka Mo‘olelo o Hi‘iakaikapoliopele*. Conceptually, this poem is shaped by my own personal lived experiences along the flowing waters of Ka Papa Lo‘i ‘o Kānewai in Mānoa and the mornings I spend along the contours of the ‘auwai clearing debris from the path for the water to flow. Along with the sounds of water moving through landscape amid cardinal birdsong and the shimmer of sunlight across my own dewy footsteps, these experiences blur with my mourning rituals after the death of my paternal grandparents as plumes of brown smoke rose from the fire late in the year of 2023 that burned through the forests of Waikakalaua and Kīpapa. During this time, I walked nearly daily with the water, knowing that many elders and kūpuna have walked this footpath before. An important lesson I have learned is to ask kūpuna for guidance and listen as the stories flow forth to feed the imaginations of future generations.

As I walk barefoot across scattered, smooth, jagged, fractured stones of the ‘auwai, I notice that each layer of rock, sediment, clay, limestone, concrete, and pebble is transformed over time by the growth and regrowth of ferns, sprouting trees, weeds, medicine, grass, buildings, and flood. Even to scratch the surface of understanding the mo‘olelo of Kamō‘ili‘ili requires

me to descend into converging currents and to allow myself to be carved by the cold water. Aloha 'āina changes my body: My fingers callous from the shovel, a sweet pua in my ear softens my sweat, and my eyes adjust to watch flashes of humming dragonflies in quick-witted flight. Water-worn stones surround me.

What constitutes the body of Kamō'ili'ili, who is named in a state of being undone by Hi'iaka? Ho'oulumāhie notes that while this version's Kamō'ili'ili is wahine, other versions of this mo'olelo gender the mo'o as kāne. The changes of a shifting landscape perhaps indicate a representation of characteristics present in the Mō'ili'ili karst, a vast network of caverns and underground passages that allow for the subterranean movement of water. The process of limestone eroding from acidic rainwater is a form of unbecoming that Kamō'ili'ili embodies. Yet even through this process of erosion and becoming undone, the widening of a porous karst belly grows the land's capacity for life and allows for the passage of water. As the winds and rains come, these stories continue to unfold like bodies un/becoming.

The water teaches me that unbecoming sunlight and shadow means becoming reflection, which is the intermediary space this poem inhabits between opposite chasms of the gender binary. Refracting within prisms of contradictions, visions for new worlds beckon among arcs of rainbows that shapeshift like my shadow along riverbanks to supersede external expectations. Like a mirror, recognition is two-sided and multifaceted when fractured.

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

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Kamō‘ili‘ili was rendered the rubble of water-worn pebbles
 heaped among the leaking barrier of an elbowed creek

uwē ka lani, ola ka honua

we shelter ‘ohā in acrid rains bitter from wild fire
 splitting river forking tongue alive again in sea spray
 the bifurcation of a fragmentation is a mana of a mo‘olelo
 (dis)splayed across paralleled hūlili turned kuahiwi
 by the slain backs of my ancestors, this bridge to nowhere

but my true self, my
 binary jaw widened in plumes of rising dead
 bodies of coral beds reanimated
 by their names seeded beneath river bank

he ‘ano ho‘olu‘u ‘ōlena ‘o mua o ke alo ma kekahi wahi

a mai ke po‘o iho a hō‘ea i ka umauma he ‘ano kekea ka ho‘olu‘u
 winds whistling through splayed caverns parched for kahawai
 land slides and flooded droughts collapsing red simulacra of akua

the mouth of this valley is guarded by rusting 'ōlena stone faces
sheared from the sharpened teeth of my grandmother's jaw
a new island emerges in the Lā'aupau light of my grandfather's death
omens glowing ember among the awāwa of Waikakalaua and Kīpapa

wehe ke ā luna

wehe ke ā lalo o ua mo'o nei

pulelo nō ho'i kona mau lauoho i hope

'a'ā nā maka a kekē nā niho

a piko is a seed sprouting at the interstices of our intertwined spines watered
by every fluttering vertebral breath of fallen laua'e adrift again in 'auwai
the wind becomes more than just a voice echoing in the uwē 'a'aka
of a swollen 'ōpū fed broken glass, spilling cemented concrete pillars
adrift again as our bodies become undone layers and strata of the earth
slipping back into the darkness of a sea verdant with teeming coral beds of papa
to be dislodged in shallow 'auwai leaking like tears from closed pores of loose stones
or roots furrowed in the forgotten passage of another descent into gravity's core

there are no bridges in the heavy Ho'oilō sky, only bellies of cloudbanks
slick from overturned kuāuna drowning in dredged histories

'o kona hīu a'ela nō ia i ka pā'ū o ia nei

puehu li'ili'i ana ke kino o Kamō'ili'ili i 'ō i 'ane'i

'o kēia mau 'āpanapana o ke kino o Kamō'ili'ili i lele li'ili'i a'ela

ma muli o ka loa'a 'ana i ka 'ehu pā'ū o Hi'iaka

he mo'o wahine ia
 with swollen belly and red water advisory
 remains of ancient mo'o 'ōlelo widening 'ōpū becoming landscape
 un/differentiated like water and air and acid filling belly
 what will we birth in the bleached aquifers of the firstborn?
 long before the first hatching—a body laid down for this vision
 a tongue already tasting sweet water's shadow
 a reflection of unbecoming with each resurfacing of breath.

disoriented without the direction of an unobscured day,
 i turn, searching for my shadow.

instead, i am met with my reflection.

in my right ear: an imperative poem
 in my two palms: dialectical tension in the second moon face

Hi'iaka winks as she walks beside my self down Kapa'akea street
 before departing into the lifting kakahiaka light
 and Wa'ahila rain.

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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.

