

Māhealani Perez Wendt

Nu‘u

You spoke once of running through sands of thorn
Through gauntlet of kiawe trees
Prized for the savors of their wood fires
An island boy who could not abide shoes
No matter the stain
Here again, that same course ground —
Thorns, kiawe, their kindling shade
And a surround of names inhospitable—
Pu ‘u Māneoneo, arid, barren;
Lae o ‘Āpole, volcanic and cindered;
Lapehu, swollen, afflicted;
But not far away
A broad, healing meadow
Green respite for the wary —
These are kinder times
Warning signs are posted
For visitors, their tires
Far from the fires.

Oceanward, a detrital bay
Bordered with accretions of sand
Boulder and stone
Once hoisted on broad shoulders
For the building of ancient heiau,
Temples, oracle towers,
Lanau‘u mamao
And the second sacred elevation
Called Nu‘u
Platform for the consecrated
And deified
Their images perhaps incised
The ones outlined with red ochre
The red reserved for chiefly ones

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Upon the inland basalt steep
The ancient glyphs of Nu‘u:
See ke kūkini, the chief’s messenger;
Ke koa, his spear-wielding warrior;
Temple dancers poised, ‘ai ha‘a;
A mother and child, beatific;
Quarried animals, pigs, dogs;
Starfish, stingrays, turtles;
Gods who were birds,
Birds who were human
All were here
With their prayers, chants, stories
Fishers, farmers, hunters, gatherers
Skilled navigators, negotiators
Who survived the caprice
Of rival chiefs
Their internecine wars
Back and forth
Across the ‘Alenuihāhā
Channel of great billows smashing
The ancient inscriptions
Mo‘olelo, stories
Also bearing witness
To gods in the temporal realms
As when the companions
Kāne and Kanaloa
Scion of water
Scion of sea together
Summoned forth
The sacred springs
Of Nu‘u
‘Oiana!
Nu‘u’s sweeping winds blow heady
This way and that
Surly and affecting as chiefs
Their inconstancy joined with winds
Of surrounding Kaupō
Ka ‘āina o ka ua pe‘e pā pōhaku

**Behold!*

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Land of the rain that makes one hide
behind rocks
The rains' indifference, intermittency
A fitful source of replenishment
For Nu'u springs
And dreams that the Ae'o, 'Alae Kea,
Koa'e Kea
The white-tailed tropic birds
Will return
Their fluttering and nestling noises
Below Luaia'ilua
Place of peace
And double enjoyment.
Beyond the teeming village
A scintillate sea
Its precipitous depths, hāuliuli
Dark and unfathomable
Surround of bay, shining cliffs
Boulders, escarpments
Rise along the flanks of Haleakalā
To its summit
This too is Nu'u's meaning:
An exalted realm
Of white floating clouds
Of white-tailed tropic birds
Where Maui reposes in the calm
Of blossoming sun.

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