

Māhealani Perez Wendt

Holy Ground

It is said this land
Was once called Laha ‘Āina
Land of seers and prophets
Of portents, prophecies, proclamations
Whose great chiefs of Moku‘ula
Were named for ascendancy
Through the spirit realms to heaven
Who battled, made peace
Fulfilled a nation’s ambitions
Who held fast for centuries
Against foreign incursions
Until reduced to mediating conflicts
Between fire-and-brimstone missionaries
And hell-raising whalers
The chiefs forced to build fortifications
Against whaleship forays
Opening salvos
For the further assaults
That would follow
And the eventual estrangement
Of a people
From their homeland,
Their nation.

Merciless sun
You cast your infernos upon us,
Our agency in the conflagration
Well beyond our understanding;
But we know
You are also source
Of earth’s plenitude,
Its abundance:
Vines of the forest,

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Their fruit and flowers;
The moon's grace
Her pull upon sea tides,
The coming to surface
Of Earth's springs, hidden waters
The coax of sprouting seeds:
 All that is green
 All that is fair
 Follow your light.

Great destroyer and recreator,
Annihilator and healer—
Your devouring fires
Were carried upon
The punishing Kaua'ula winds
A shadow roaring in the uplands
Infernal swath to sea
Laying waste to Lahaina
Malu 'Ulu o Lele
Shaded breadfruit grove of Lele.

Blessed be the memories
Of all who live and who have lived here;
Who held hands, gave warmth,
Embraced one another,
Bore children;
Who were watched over
By guardian spirits
In every sacred place;
Who by the grace of sun
Busied the wide shores,
The inland grasses and trees,
Built homes, carved out lives,
Gathered and shared songs
Of every signature.
We pray for healing—
That dross and ash
Will resolve to Earth's richness;

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That life's griefs, its sorrows
Will be companion
To its greatest joys.

Merciful sun,
Blessed be your bounty
Which is greater than your rages, your fires,
Greater than all of your ruin:
 All that is green
 All that is fair
 Follow your light.

O moon,
Lift the brittle white dust
The red augury of tears
Call forth the sea
Enchant its blue heart
Form this place holy
And holy again.

Note to poem: Lahaina means "merciless sun"