

Book and Media Reviews

values and aesthetics as a paradigm for researching and interpreting 'Ōiwi action and writing, and focus on complexity and context, Brown has produced an important work of scholarship that offers much to Hawai'i's past, present, and future.

RONALD WILLIAMS JR
University of Hawai'i-Mānoa

* * *

Auē Rona, by Reihana Robinson. Wellington, NZ: Steele Roberts Publishers, 2012. ISBN 978-1-877577-85-7, 68 pages, artwork, notes, acknowledgments. Paper, NZ\$25.00.

Between the Kindling and the Blaze: Reflections on the Concept of Mana, by Ben Brown. Auckland, NZ: Anahera Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-473-26385, 50 pages, glossary, CD track list, CD. Paper, NZ\$27.99.

Entangled Islands, by Serie Barford. Auckland, NZ: Anahera Press, 2015. ISBN 978-0-473-33082-8, 86 pages, glossary. Paper, NZ\$24.99.

Night Swimming, by Kiri Piahana-Wong. Auckland, NZ: Anahera Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-473-24555-9, 50 pages, notes, acknowledgments. Paper, NZ\$25.00.

Pacific Islander poets have long imagined and reimagined stories of origin, land, ocean, and gods in ways that mirror the complex relationships we have with one another and our place as people of this ocean. Reihana Robinson's debut collection, *Auē Rona*, is a stunning example of the power of imagination and the importance of

recasting Pacific stories. Robinson's collection directly addresses the Māori story of Rona—the woman in the moon—in a voice that is powerful, unapologetic, and cutting. Through reimagining the voice and desires of Rona, Robinson sheds a nuanced and unwavering light on gendered constructions of will, desire, and power in the context of Māori storytelling.

Robinson centers her collection on the character Rona, whom she briefly introduces in the collection's glossary. In this explanation, the story of Rona "opens as she is collecting water for her children," and, as "a cloud covers the moon; [Rona] falls, spilling the water, and she curses." As punishment for cursing, Rona is "torn from earth and taken to the moon" (64). This first depiction illuminates the multiple positions Rona inhabits, from mother and provider to lover and abandoner. The overview of Rona's story in Robinson's glossary not only functions as an access point for readers unfamiliar with the Māori story but also poignantly presents some of the key commentary, images, and themes that the poet sustains throughout the collection. Rona's story is paired with the first poem of the collection, entitled "How it all began," and the relationship crafted between glossary and poem reveals Robinson's prowess in creating complex commentary on the gendered constructions of stories, archetypes, and power, all of which unfold in the spaces of Robinson's poetic recasting.

"How it all began" sets the tone and force of this retelling by rendering the voices of Rona and her lover, the moon. The moon watches Rona as "Husbandless, she / bends her will,

grabs / a calabash, heads off / through the ngaio trees / and mamaku ferns.” Rona’s response to the moon is both familiar and biting, as she replies, “*Stuff you, moon, / boil your pea brain with pūhā*” (8; italics original; pūhā is a sow thistle commonly used as a potherb). These first images—a woman bending her will, speaking for herself—establish the kind of work each piece of Robinson’s retelling does throughout the collection. Robinson’s poems reframe the archetype of the woman in the moon and, in so doing, add new layers of voice and complexity to a female archetype of Māori storytelling. Robinson wields the power of her own unsentimental exploration of Rona’s character in order to create a voice where there was no voice, a curse where there needed to be cursing, and a desire where there needed to be desire, unapologetic in its manifestation.

While Robinson illuminates female voice and gendered constructions of power in her recasting of a specific Māori story, Ben Brown also enacts a recasting as he explores mana in his debut collection, *Between the Kindling and the Blaze: Reflections on the Concept of Mana*. It is in the spaces “between” that Brown approaches definitions of mana, and he works with and within multiple “betweens.” There is the space he creates as he alternates between poetry and prose; the space between his renderings of past and present; the spaces between his use of te reo Māori (Māori language) and multiple Englishes; and the space between retellings of historical figures and recountings of everyday conversations on streets and in bars. Glimpses of each of these elements

are present in the very first two pieces of the collection—the preface and the poem “Mana.”

In the preface, Brown establishes a specific relationship between three entities—a rock, a tree, and a man. Brown narrates the consciousness and memory alive in both rock and tree, which in turn point to the responsibilities the man must recognize as he builds a house using wood and stone. In this relationship between rock, tree, and man, Brown illuminates what must be acknowledged and respected between beings—the mana that endures across both time and form. Brown traces mana across the page and over to the first poem, “Mana,” where instead of attempting to show what mana is, he moves to directly define it in lines such as, “Mana is my grandfather,” “Mana is his right to deafness,” and “Mana is the man who does without saying” (2). The repetition and variation of what “mana is” in this first poem mirror larger thematic movements across the collection as a whole; Brown maintains the space between defining and describing mana.

Brown’s work establishes the depth of consideration, connection, and reflection that are required in any attempt to articulate mana. In later poems such as “Taniwha” and “A conversation between a rangatira [hereditary Māori leader] and his slave,” as well as prose pieces “Dogtown” and “Prayer for Ashes,” Brown moves between providing multiple, direct definitions of mana and rendering it through portraits of memory, relationships, and experience. Throughout this collection, Brown is always working on the

shape of mana—what it is, what it might be, where it lives, who holds it, who defines it, and how it moves across time. Brown's poems act as the "between" invoked by the collection's title—they are Brown's way of mediating "between the kindling and the blaze," the spaces between mana's potential and its manifestation.

Examinations of betweenness are also enacted in Serie Barford's newest collection of poetry, *Entangled Islands*. In her introduction, Barford tells a small portion of her family history. This history in turn contextualizes the way she approaches "entanglement," locating herself in the midst of colonial histories and spaces as a woman of Samoan and European genealogies. Barford explains how her identities are "entangled with colonial expansion, suppression, intermarriage, migration and migrants' dreams of a better life for their children on the islands where they live" (2).

The contextual work of the introduction is immediately reframed in the first poem of the collection, "Entangled Islands." Each stanza provides a small glimpse of the collection as a whole. The poem begins, "I want to make a fala su'i for my bed / to brighten the cold side of the house" (5), which is followed by ten more sets of two-line stanzas. Barford defines fala su'i in her glossary as the "decorative pandanus mats embroidered with wool . . . used for beds and often distributed at weddings (Samoan)" (6). With this image of Samoan mats—which are themselves physical representations of carefully crafted entanglements—Barford establishes her collection as a poetic fala su'i of her own crafting. Whereas the beginning

of "Entangled Islands" establishes the major metaphor for the rest of the collection, the last seven stanzas of the poem serve as brief glimpses into the seven distinct "frames," or organizing sections, of the entire work, all of which are labeled in Samoan from one to seven.

From the smaller workings of each poem, short story, and frame to the overall effect of the collection itself, Barford's work is beautifully and meticulously crafted. She creates vivid moments through her constructions of dialogue, characterization, and narrative while also working across the space between each poem and short story. In each piece, there is always a trace—a stitch, a word, an image—of the piece before. The placement and repetition of these connecting images—from cuttlefish spines and knitted herringbone sweaters to references to Billie Holiday and Amy Winehouse songs—do not cause Barford's poetry and prose to fall into a predictable pattern. Instead, her careful use of repetition and variation evoke the specificity of particular moments while still contributing to the overall cohesion of the collection. Barford extends the fala su'i imagery of the collection through carefully woven frames that portray her memories of growing up, becoming a mother, caring for her children, traveling between islands, and dealing with the loss of her beloved dog, Sirius. The resonances between the specific, detailed images of the first poem, "Entangled Islands," and the larger, fleshed-out frames of each section create an overall sense of continuity and purpose to Barford's collection. It is the deftness with which she holds the complicated and often

contradictory elements of a Pacific Islander identity that make Barford's work so poignant.

While *Entangled Islands* relies on the fala su'i as its guiding image, poet Kiri Piahana-Wong's debut collection, *night swimming*, focuses on multiple, sustained images of water in each of her poems. From cups of water to the waves of Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa—the Pacific Ocean—Piahana-Wong sustains multiple images and textures of water, using its multiple forms alternately as thematic, formal, and stylistic inspiration. This saturation and movement of water within and across each poem effectively creates the sense of tidal movement that permeates *night swimming*.

Piahana-Wong is not only a poet but also editor, publisher, and founder of Anahera Press. Her poetry embodies the mission of the press itself, which strives to publish and feature the work of Māori and Pasifika writers who are navigating spaces between multiple cultures and identities. Sustained depictions of water (and at times, the lack thereof) throughout her collection indeed open up space for her to take readers along beautifully shaped meditations of loss and creation, love and contemplation, space and healing. Each poem of *night swimming* is expressed with a discerning, meditative voice. There is a delicacy present in each poem that is crafted, revealing the careful precision with which Piahana-Wong deals with the shape-shifting, ubiquitous nature of water. Her poems each evoke their own space, exploring love, leaving, distance, writing, reading, self-contemplation, and the connections between them, all with the kind of seamless

precision that directly calls to mind the way shifting tides craft the texture of a shoreline.

Key examples of this can be seen in her poems "Four Paintings" and "Continental Drift." Though the two poems differ in form and style, they both exemplify how Piahana-Wong crafts her guiding images of water and color to render portraits of romantic attraction and distance between lovers. "Four Paintings" is a series of brief vignettes in which each line (and line break) mimics the stroke of a brush in rhythm and placement. The content of the poem traces different points in time between two lovers, each portrayed in a still moment of two to three stanzas. The lines, colors, and images of the poem are brief—they are not meant to be full renderings but only quick glimpses of light and color. Piahana-Wong is deliberately sparing in her words and descriptions in a way that invites readers to piece together what each painted scene means. She intentionally creates space for contemplation between sections, paintings, lines, and the lovers themselves, which readers can fill in with their own understanding of romantic connection.

In "Continental Drift," the subject matter remains similar, but the use of water—this time that of the ocean separating continents—creates a sense of movement between the speaker of the poem and their lover. The form of the poem mirrors its content, where the lines continuously flow away and back toward the right side of the page, just as the lovers themselves slowly drift apart. The sense of quiet, yet inevitable movement—juxtaposed with the consistency in the movement of tides washing in and out—exem-

plifies the way Piahana-Wong deals with each major theme throughout her collection. Water and color are always present in each piece, though the speed of each poem's thematic and emotional movement is always shifting, along with varying levels of saturation in color and imagery. The overall effect of *night swimming* can perhaps be illustrated in a line from the poem "Tidelines," in which Piahana-Wong's writing style and poetry is water itself. She writes, "I walk and I string words in long lines in my head / I write and I skip words across the page like stones" (47)—a line exemplifying some of the guiding patterns of beautifully crafted rhythm, imagery, and self-contemplation that define the collection as a whole.

Though these collections are crafted with a style unique to each poet's connection to place, identity, and genealogy, together they contribute nuance and detail to what it means to be living and creating in the Pacific. Robinson, Brown, Barford, and Piahana-Wong are each, in their own way, reshaping older stories with new life and voice, naming different spaces of betweenness, and weaving entangled histories, stories, identities, and emotions. As such, these collections resonate with one as new and important additions to Pacific literature, expanding the ways that poetry can chart identity, knowledge, and connection in Oceania.

LEORA KAVA

University of Hawai'i-Mānoa

* * *

Kanu Kaho'olawe: Replanting, Rebirth. Burke Museum, University of Washington, Seattle, 15 October 2016 through 7 May 2017.

Kanu Kaho'olawe: Replanting, Rebirth is a visual art exhibit hosted by the University of Washington's Burke Museum in Seattle. It features photography by Jan Becket and mixed-media paintings by Carl F K Pao. The exhibit, whose opening marked the fortieth anniversary of the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana campaign to stop the bombing of the island and reclaim it, focuses on the lasting effects of US military occupation and weapons testing on the island as well as the work of Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians) to reconnect to and revitalize Kaho'olawe through community efforts.

In the exhibit, Kaho'olawe's militarized history is told through two contrasting yet complementary perspectives. Pao is a Kanaka Maoli artist who has not yet visited the island, and Becket is a non-Native photographer who has made several visits to Kaho'olawe. Pao's paintings and Becket's photographs are displayed in pairs that are thematically in dialogue with each other. The pairing of painting with photograph allows each work to enliven and enhance the other. The harmony produced by the differences in the artists' experiences reinforces the central message of the exhibit: hope for the revitalization and regrowth of the 'āina (land).

Between the two artists' works there is also dramatic contrast, evident in the choices they made regarding the use of color. Becket's photographs in black and white capture important scenes—