

Nanumea Island, Central Pacific, September 6, 1842

WHEN YOU WERE HERE

Morning sun lingered in the lagoon

 Replacing afternoon for three days

 Replacing darkness until midnight

 Replacing the cock's crow at dawn

Coconuts climbed down the trees on the backs of lizards

 And gave themselves to the crabs and me

 And gave themselves to thirsty Tongans

 And gave themselves to the sea at night

Tapa cloth leapt out to sea one playful day

 And made the fish prettier

 And made the dolphins dance upright

 And made the fishermen paddle hard to catch it

Clouds wrapped my head for sleep

 And sailed low on the canoes for twelve days

 And lifted lovers off their sleeping mats at night

 And cast about with fog making islets disappear

Reef came ashore on legs one night

 And cut lumber for a new house

 And asked the men to mend their nets

 And took some crabs home

Sunset came to me in a dress one evening

 And gave me red lips softer than birds

 And showed me orange smoke that soothed the eyes

 And thickened me with desire

Missionary pierced the horizon one day in a ship

 And came ashore in a chair

 And gave himself to the people

 And lifted lovers off their sleeping mats at night

Warrior came ashore one night and took you away

 Slamming my heart with thunder

 Drenching my fire with cloudburst

 Replacing the morning sun with darkness