Ammon Hāwea Apiata

Puna

after Alice Te Punga Somerville's 'Rākau'

There are days when I silently
beg my language to stay with me.
I plead for it to keep flowing in the
grooves I carved in my own tongue.

Hesitant, I stand and open my mouth,
not knowing if water or blood will pour out.

I look for words and stories to whet my mind
and draw all the language in my body to my lips.

I listen for soft voices to press into my ear,
hoping they'll eventually slide down
my throat and fill the pit in my stomach.

Then I let my language spill out of the pen in my hand and soak the paper with every
feeling and thought I can articulate.

My language was once their language.
To use it is to drink from the source.

Author's note: This poem was originally written in te reo Māori. The English verse is not so much a translation as a reimagining of the original ideas.

Puna

Noho tonu mai, e taku reo.

E rere tonu i ngā awaawa

i whakairotia i taku arero.

Whakaohongia te hirikapo
kia kore ai e hinamoe.

Kaua e huna i ngā kokonga
o te hinengaro.

Kuhu mārire mai ki roto i aku
taringa, hei whakahinuhinu mō
taku wairua.

Maringi noa atu i te pene kei
taku ringa, hei tuku i ngā kare ā-roto.

E taku reo e, tūhono mai nei i ahau
ki te ao o ōku tūpuna, kia tū tonu ai
au i te puna o tō rātou mātauranga.