In her novel *Bruised Hibiscus*, Elizabeth Nunez confronts the differences between passion and power, black and white, and male and female. The novel begins with a fisherman’s discovery of a mutilated woman, who appears to be white, in the Trinidadian town of Otahiti. Although the race of the woman is later disputed, the very thought of her being white sends Otahiti and surrounding towns into a tizzy. The crime, which townspeople believed was a result of “man-woman business,” (8) rekindle a forgotten friendship between the characters of Rosa DesVignes ne Ape Appleton and Zuela Simona Chin. Upon seeing each other, the women remember the unthinkable act they had witnessed from behind a hibiscus bush twenty years ago -- the same act that has torn them apart.

Although Nunez’ poetic style helps set the tone of the novel, the first few chapters feel as if she tries too hard to be poetic, as her lengthy sentences can be hard to follow. Once she introduces both of the main characters, however, she seems to become more comfortable with her narrative voice and abandons unnecessary lengthiness without losing the poetic flow of the novel. Despite the fact that the beginning of the novel can be hard to follow, its complex narration does not last long enough to cause a major problem to keep readers from getting into the novel.

One of the strongest aspects of the novel is the strength of the character development. Although the two main characters, Rosa DesVignes ne Appleton and Zuela Simona Chin, shared a strong sisterhood as children, their adult re-bonding takes the entire novel to form something solid. On the surface, their situations seem so different that they don’t feel as if they can connect. At the end of the novel, however, they eventually realize that they were both slaves to their own misguided ideals. What makes their relationship so convincing is the time they put into it. After twenty years of separation, their lives had taken them in such different directions that they needed time to regain their feeling of sisterhood. Their sisterhood could not be regained, however, without first realizing the dangers of their marital situations. While Rosa and Zuela try to help each other along on the way to freedom, it is not until they achieve this freedom that their feelings of sisterhood return.

Reviewed by Jessica Opad
Overall, I felt that Nunez succeeded with what she set out to do with her novel Bruised Hibiscus. Nunez used Trinidad and its people to show the damage of European colonialism in the way that the people of Otahiti react to Rosa and Zuela. Although her two main characters share a bond of sisterhood, they come from two very different worlds, as Rosa came from a wealthy white family, while Zuela came from a poor family of color. Nunez clearly shows the regularity of wealthy white families and poor black families, and the way that it rips at the threads of Trinidadian society. Despite their racial differences, however, Nunez clearly illustrates the common hardships that they faced because of their gender. Both women, regardless of being black and white, were powerless against their husbands because of the male society that dominated Trinidad in the 50’s, and, according to Nunez, still dominates today.