

Sacramento's Literary
Review and Calendar:

Poetry Now

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Special
Double-Sized
Poetry Month
Edition

A Publication of the Sacramento Poetry Center

Julia Connor: Sacramento's New Poet Laureate



The Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission proudly announces the new Poet Laureate for the 2005-07 term. Respected poet, artist and teacher, Julia Connor was selected from a number of talented and learned artists who vied for the opportunity to represent Sacramento's literary community. One of Sacramento's most respected poets and visual artists, Ms. Connor extends her creative talents into fields as diverse as ceramic sculpture, painting,

humanities scholarship, and public arts administration.

Ms. Connor has been an active contributor to the Sacramento poetry community as well as a Board Member of the Sacramento Poetry Center for 23 years. Connor has received recognition for artistic excellence in the field of poetry with a Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commissioner's Award, a California Arts Council Poetry Fellowship, and a California Arts Council Writer's Residency.

Described by Gary Snyder of the California Arts Council as "...a well-known, subtle, poetic master," Connor has written several books, including *Corresponding Flowers*, a personal poetic narrative that includes a partial history of the Sacramento area. She has had a long involvement and fascination with the Sacramento Valley that she is yearning to share as Poet Laureate.

Anne Waldman of The Jack Kerouac School at Naropa University writes, "I have admired the singular lyricism and highly engaged 'ear' of her craft, as well as her other accomplishments as a teacher of poetry." Connor has taught writing to MFA graduate students at Naropa Institute, as well as special populations that include youth at risk, persons with developmental disabilities, marginalized women, and incarcerated adults within the California State prison system. She has taught writing intensives on both the east and west coasts, and in England. Connor has fostered new generations of Sacramento writers through thirteen years of master class workshops.

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Submissions of poems, artwork, and other works of interest to the Sacramento poetry community are welcome. See submission guidelines on page 10.

Poetry Now is distributed free in area bookshops, coffeehouses, community centers, colleges, etc. Back issues are available for \$3 each. Your membership gets **Poetry Now**, **Tule Review**, and **Rivers** delivered to your door or box.

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The Sacramento Poetry Center is a non-profit corporation dedicated to providing forums for local poets—including publications and reading series—and bringing to Sacramento the finest poetry we can get our hands on. Our offices are at 1631 K St. in the Sacramento Ballet Co. Bldg. Our phone number is: (916) 441-7395.

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Staff: **Amy Picard**



President's Message

Hello again.

Welcome to National Poetry Month. There are going to be many events happening this month. Take a look at our calendar on page 5 and see.

Our New Home

I wanted to remind everyone that SPC is moving from the current 17th and K Street location to 25th and R Streets. We will be sharing our space with other arts organizations in a shared collaborative setting. We will officially be moved to that space on May 1, 2005. Our regular readings will take place at the Ballet building at 17th and K through April and then switch to the new space in May. So, please remember to go to the new location at 25th and R Street during the month of May. Thanks.

Fairytales Town

On Saturday, April 9th, the Sacramento Poetry Center will be out at Fairytales Town for their *Festival of the Young Child*. The purpose of this event is to let parents know what resources for educational and extracurricular programs are available in Sacramento and its surrounding areas. SPC will have a booth with magnetic poetry and poetry necklaces for the children so they can participate in the art of writing poetry while having fun too. We will be there from 11am to 3pm. Fairytales Town is located at 3901 Land Park Drive, Sacramento, CA 95822.

"The mission of Fairytales Town is to promote the imagination, creativity and education of children in a safe and colorful environment."

Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission Marketing Mini-Grant

Recently, SPC applied for the SMAC Marketing Mini grant. This grant allows arts organizations to work on a focused project for marketing. SPC's proposal included the production of an informational brochure and postcards to help promote the Center. I am happy to say that the application scored a perfect 10 of 10. So this means we will get some funding for this project to a possible maximum of \$5000. This is great news for SPC and the poetry community.

Sacramento Poet Laureate

I would like to congratulate Julia Connor for being selected as the new Poet Laureate of Sacramento. Apparently, the selection process was difficult with three excellent poets making the short list for the selection. The celebration for the new laureate will be on Sunday, April 10, from 4-6 p.m. at the Sterling Hotel. For more information visit the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission website at www.sacculture.com.

Sacramento State Writer's Conference

The Sacramento State University College of Continuing Education announces its first Writers' Conference to take place August 5-7 at Napa Hall.

One highlight of the event will be a

keynote speech by nationally acclaimed author, Dorothy Allison.

Designed for aspiring poets, novelists, playwrights, children's authors, memoirists, reviewers, or anyone with a passion for the written word, this three-day conference features workshops, public reading events and one-on-one consultation with nationally acclaimed writers. Participants will also experience professional-level writing instruction, individualized feedback on their own work, networking opportunities with published authors and peers and the chance to learn how to publish their work.

Workshop leaders will include: Al Young, David Bianculli, Kristen Iversen, and Joshua McKinney. For further information, contact Manuela McClary at Manuela@csus.edu or 916/278-5485.

Special Event in May

Poetry Reading Helps the Fight Against Cancer! Sacramento resident Sharon Wright, diagnosed with ovarian and colon cancer, can't afford her \$600 per month insurance costs. Local poets and people impacted by cancer are coming together to raise money to fight cancer and help Ms. Wright with increasingly unaffordable medical costs. We encourage all to come and hear the poetry and voices of the community. Poetry is an important vehicle for healing and fighting a disease that affects our community.

When: Monday, May 16, 2005, 7:30 p.m.

Where: The Sacramento Poetry Center's new home (May 2005) at 25th and R.

How Much: Donations to Sharon Griffin and Livestrong requested, \$5 minimum.

Who: Poets Nicole Griffin, Traci Gouridine, Heather Hutcheson, Kathy Kieth, Sandi Waserman, and others.

For more info: Heather Hutcheson, Center for Collaborative Planning, 916-498-8306 or heather@connectccp.org or Martin Mcllroy, Sacramento Poetry Center, 916-441-7395 or spc@sacramentopoetrycenter.org.

Editor's Note:

My apologies to our subscribers who may have received this issue late. Our printer was closed for Spring Break and, consequently, this issue was printed a week later than planned. Thank you for your understanding.
—RMG

(con't from page 1)

A recommendation by Ray Tatar, Literature Administrator at the California Arts Council states, “[Julia Connor] has received residencies from The California Arts Council’s Artists in Community Program, taught poetry in the California Prison System, and served on the writing faculty for the California State Summer School for the Arts for the past eight years, mentoring a new generation of California writers. Because of the diversity and depth of her talents and her record of mentoring poetry so effectively with such diverse populations, she has my unqualified support to be chosen as Sacramento’s Poet Laureate.”

Connor’s poetry, deemed exquisite and enchanting, is sampled below:

CANTO (excerpt)

...relax I tell them
you’re inside poetry now
admonish they
read themselves thru
concrete walls
entrust my few
magic skills
& confide I’ve come
because I wish to grow old with the grace
to risk being
ridiculous
& am practicing
now...

Connor was nominated by Ellen Johnson (Defense Investigator), Laura Ann Walton, (Founder of the Women’s Wisdom Project), Carolyn Schneider (Artist, Librarian, and Teacher at the Isleton School), Erin Doyle (Landscape Designer), Margaret S. Burns, Ph.D. (retired Professor, U.C. Davis School of Medicine, Dept. of Ophthalmology), Cecile Martin (Assistant Director, California Energy Commission), and Patrick Grizzell (Poet).

The community is invited to see Ms. Connor accept the title at City Council and Board of Supervisors’ meeting on Tuesday, April 5. Call the Arts Commission at 566-3986 for location and time.

A private reception will be held on Sunday, April 10, to inaugurate in-coming Poet Laureate Connor. The press is invited and will have an opportunity to interview Ms. Connor.

Julia Connor was officially selected as Poet Laureate on March 16, 2005. For more information on the Poet Laureate Program, please contact the Arts Commission at (916) 566-3986.

shelter

(from *x-ing the acheron*)

under the arbor
the ardor
of september
clusters

my thumbs polish
the cloud-glass
of childhood
grapes

little mirrors
little terrors
I devour
one by one

—Julia Connor

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Literary Calendar for April 2005

Note: Unless otherwise stated, events take place in Sacramento, CA.

2 Saturday

Escritores del Nuevo Sol's writing workshop and potluck on 1st Saturdays. 11am, at Helen Goldvarg's Info: Graciela Ramirez, 456-5323 or joannpen@comcast.net.

Straight Out Scribes Rant-a-thon and Art Exhibit, All welcome to Get It Off Their Chests. 10 am-6 pm, (child friendly 10 am-2pm; uncensored, adults only from 2-6 pm) Kinks International, 629 15th St., Info: Staaibu, 452-1290, staaibu@yahoo.com. Free to audience, speakers/readers pay \$1 per minute.

3 Sunday

Poem Spirits presents **Joyce Odam**; **Tom Goff** speaks on Czeslaw Milosz. Sacramento Unitarian Church, 2425 Sierra Blvd., 6:00 pm, Rms 7/8. Info: Tom Goff, Nora Staklis, 481-3312; JoAnn Anglin at 451-1372.

4 Monday

Sacramento Poetry Center presents **Catherine Webster** and **Muriel Zeller**. Host: Susan Kelly-DeWitt. Free. 7:30 pm, Sacramento Ballet, 1631 K St. (17th & K). Info: 441-7395 or www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org.

5 Tuesday

SPC Poetry Workshop, 7:30 pm, Hart Senior Center, 916 27th St. (27th & J). Info: Danyen, 530-756-6228. Workshop news, www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org, SPC Workshop News. Free.

Terry Moore's Access Television Show, 1st & 3rd Tuesdays, 9 pm, Channel 17 (depending on cable provider). Co-hosted by Regina High. (Sacramento viewing only.)

4 | poetryNOW

Sutter LAMP (Literature, Arts and Medicine Program) Writing To Heal workshop, 6:30 -8:30 PM. Sutter Resource Library, 28th & L Streets, 6th floor. Info, Chip Spann,454-6802 or spannc@sutterhealth.org. Free.

6 Wednesday

Sutter LAMP Writing To Heal workshop, 6:30 -8:30 pm. Sutter Memorial Hospital, 5151 F Street. Info, Chip Spann,454-6802 or spannc@sutterhealth.org. Free.

Dr. Andy's Poetry and Technology Hour, host Andy Jones, 5 pm, KDVS-90.3 FM. Info, culturelover.com.

Mahogany Urban Poetry Series, 9:00 pm, Sweet Finger Jamaican Restaurant, 1704 Broadway. Info: www.malikspeaks.com or 492-9336. \$5 cover.

7 Thursday

Sutter LAMP Writing To Heal workshop, 4-5 pm. Sutter Resource Library, 28th & L Streets, 6th floor. Info, Chip Spann, 454-6802 or spannc@sutterhealth.org. Free.

Poetry Unplugged, Vincent Kobelt, host: Gilberto Rodriguez. Open mic before/after. 8 pm, Luna's Café, 1414 16th St. Info: 441-3931 or www.lunascfe.com. Free.

8 Friday

Sutter LAMP: Grand Rounds. David Lehman, MD and **Chip Spann, PA** present to the community on the effects of writing on healing. Sutter Cancer Center, 28th and L Streets, Classrooms 1-4CC. 7:30-8:30 AM. Free. Info: Chip Spann, 454-6802, spannc@sutterhealth.org.

Escritores del Nuevo Sol: Grupo Semila, UCD students. 7:30 pm, La Raza Galeria Posada, 15th & R. Info: Graciela Ramirez, 456-5323 or Joannpen@comcast.net.

Luna's Cafe: "Second April" featuring: **Jose Montoya, Frank Andrick, Carol Frith, Gilberto Rodriguez, Linda Thorell, Gene Avery, Becca Costello.** With **Chris Hall** and **Mike Farrell** (music); hosted by BL Kennedy. 7:30pm to 11:00pm at 1414 16th Street \$5.00 at the door.

9 Saturday

Poems-For-All: Dead French Poets with **Greg Boyd & special guests**, hosted by Richard Hansen, 7:30 pm, The Book Collector, 1008 24th Street. Refreshments. Free mini-books. Info: Richard, 442-9295.

SPC at Fairytale Town: Festival of the Young Child. 11am-3pm. At Fairytale Town, across from the zoo in Land Park (3901 Land Park Drive). SPC will have a booth at the festival which lets parents know what resources for educational and extracurricular programs are available. Info: Heather Hutcheson, 441-7395

10 Sunday

Stockton Poet's Corner. Paula Sheil and **Richard Rios** read. 7 pm, Barnes & Noble, Weberstown Mall, Stockton. Info, www.poetscornerpress.com or 209-951-7014.

11 Monday

Sacramento Poetry Center presents **Tim Kahl**, host: Bob Stanley. 7:30 pm, Sacramento Ballet, 1631 K St. Info: 441-7395 or www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org. Free

Calendar continued...

Note: Unless otherwise stated, events take place in Sacramento, CA.

Borders in Elk Grove: Heather Hutcheson, Samuel Iniguez, James Landrum and Diana Fontaine read at 7 pm. 7415 Laguna Blvd., Elk Grove. Info: Constance Carter, 691-7659

Sacramento Poetry Center Board Meeting, 6 pm, Hamburger Mary's (17th and J). Info: spc@sacramentopoetrycenter.org or 441-7395.

BookTown, a bi-weekly radio show spotlighting the literary scene, co-hosted by Molly Fisk and Eric Tomb, 1-2 pm, KVMR 89.5 FM.

12 Tuesday

SPC Poetry Workshop, 7:30 pm, Hart Senior Center, 916 27th St. Info: Danyen, 530-756-6228. Free.

13 Wednesday

Dr. Andy's Poetry and Technology Hour, host Andy Jones, 5 pm, KDVS-90.3 FM. Info: culturelover.com.

Rattlesnake Press features **BL Kennedy** reading from his new chapbook, *Been Born Bronx*, with **Gene Avery** and **Arthur Balderama** as back-up musicians. Host, Kathy Kieth, the Book Collector, 1008 24th St., 7:30 pm. Free

Mahogany Urban Poetry Series, 9:00 pm, Sweet Finger Jamaican Restaurant, 1704 Broadway. Info: www.malikspeaks.com or 492-9336. \$5 cover.

14 Thursday

Poetry Unplugged, Master Of Puppets Sean Powers. Sean is a poet/storyteller and a shadow puppet theatre master. Host: Barbara Noble. Open

mic before/after. 8 pm at Luna's Café, 1414 16th St. Info: 441-3931 or www.lunascafe.com. Free.

15 Friday

The Other Voice: Betsy Gale, Tracy Gourdine, and Paula Sullivan read, 7:30 pm, Davis Unitarian church library, 27074 Patwin Road. Info: Allegra, 530-753-2634 or Betty, 530-753-1432.

16 Saturday

Third Saturday Series, Gloria "Glo" Purter, 7-9 pm, Underground Books, 2814 35th Street, info: 455-POET. \$3 fee.

17 Sunday

Third Sunday Writing Group 1-3 pm, various locations. Info: eskimopi@jps.net or nancy_wallace@calpers.ca.gov.

18 Monday

The Sacramento Poetry Center presents **Dennis Hock**; Stan Zumbiel hosts. 7:30 pm, Sacramento Ballet, 1631 K St. Info: 441-7395 or www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org.

19 Tuesday

SPC Poetry Workshop, 7:30 pm, Hart Senior Center, 916 27th St. Info: Danyen, 530-756-6228. Free.

Third Tuesday Poetry Series: Kimi Julian and Vincent Kobelt. Host: Art Mantecon. Q&A follows reading.

7 pm at Arden-Dimick Library, 891 Watt (Watt & Northrup). Info: 264-2770. Free.

Terry Moore's Access Television Show, 1st & 3rd Tuesdays, 9 pm, Channel 17 (depending on cable provider). Co-hosted by Regina High. (Sacramento viewing only.)

20 Wednesday

Urban Voices: Anne Menebroker, Jane Blue, Joyce Odam, hosted by BL Kennedy, 7-8 pm, South Natomas Library, 2901 Truxel Rd, free.

Dr. Andy's Poetry and Technology Hour, host Andy Jones, 5 pm, KDVS-90.3 FM. Info, culturelover.com.

Mahogany Urban Poetry Series, 9:00 pm, Sweet Finger Jamaican Restaurant, 1704 Broadway. Info: www.malikspeaks.com or 492-9336. \$5 cover.

21 Thursday

Poetry Unplugged, Alvin Orloff and Tara Jepsen. Host Frank Andrick. Open mic before/after. 8 pm at Luna's Café, 1414 16th St. Info: 441-3931 or www.lunascafe.com. Free.

California Lecture Series presents **Ira Glass**, host of "This American Life," 7:30 pm at the Crest Theatre, 1013 K St. Tickets: \$20 & \$23. 766-2277, www.californialectures.org.

List Your Event:

To have an event listed on the SPC Literary Calendar, please call Jody Ansell at: (916) 739-0768 or email us at: calendar@sacramentopoetrycenter.org by the 5th of the month preceding your event. Thank you.

Calendar continued...

22 Friday

Poetry at the Art Foundry: TBA, host, Luke Breit, 7:30 pm, Art Foundry Gallery, 1021 R. Street. Info: Luke, 446-POET. \$5 donation.

24 Sunday

Pomo Literati poetry radio program w/ special guest **B.L. Kennedy**. Hosted by Frank Andrick. 2pm to 4pm, KUSF 90.3 fm in San Francisco or online at www.live365.com/stations/kusf. Contact Frank Andrick for more info: fandrickpabpub@hotmail.com.

25 Monday

The Sacramento Poetry Center: Hannah Stein and Carole Stone. Rhony Bhopla hosts. 7:30 pm, Sacramento Ballet, 1631 K St. Info: 441-7395 or www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org. Free.

BookTown, a bi-weekly radio show spotlighting the literary scene, co-hosted by Molly Fisk and Eric Tomb, 1-2 pm, KVMR 89.5 FM.

26 Tuesday

SPC Poetry Workshop, 7:30 pm, Hart Senior Center, 916 27th St. Info: Danyen, 530-756-6228. Free.

27 Wednesday

Dr. Andy's Poetry and Technology Hour, host Andy Jones, 5 pm, KDVS-90.3 FM. Info: culturelover.com.

Mahogany Urban Poetry Series, 9 pm, Sweet Finger Jamaican Restaurant, 1704 Broadway. Info: www.malikspeaks.com or 492-9336. \$5 cover.

28 Thursday

Poetry Unplugged, **BL Kennedy** and **The Downtrodden Saints: Chris Hall, Mike Farrell, Arthur Balderama, Gene Avery, Steve Vanoni, Paul Basye.** Frank Andrick

hosts. Open mic before/after. 8 pm at Luna's Café, 1414 16th St. Info: 441-3931 or www.lunascafe.com. Free.

30 Saturday

The Show, Brit Williams 7-9 pm. Wo'se Community Center until further notice. 2863 35th Street. Tickets, \$5 Underground Books or fromtheheart1@hotmail.com. Info: Terry Moore, 455-POET.

On **April 13th**, Rattlesnake Press will celebrate, in addition to National Poetry Month, the one-year anniversary of the Rattlesnake Reading Series at The Book Collector. Come to this special party, which will include not only the release of **BL Kennedy's** *Been Born Bronx* (SnakeRing Spiral-Chap #4) but all kinds of extra surprises as well. 7:30-9 pm. at The Book Collector (Home of the Snake). Be there!

What you might have missed...

POETRY/FRIENDS/WINE/FOOD/CONGRATULATIONS marked the tenth anniversary celebration at The Book Collector on March 6. Rachel opened the store ten years ago; Richard soon joined her, and their partnership has built a family store that gives poetry in this town a tremendous boost—both in terms of the readings they host and the poetry books they make available, and through their involvement in the Sacramento Poetry Center and other community projects. March 6 was a fitting tribute to them and to the store, and the fine readings (and lively libations) were a part of that. Hats off to the Hansens, and congratulations!—Kathy Kieth

Looking Ahead: SPC Monday Series

May 2nd:

Gary Thompson and George Keithley

(see pages 12 and 17)

May 16th:

Sandi Wasserman, Sharon Griffin, Heather Hutcheson, Kathy Kieth and others. \$5, fundraiser for Sharon Wright, who is suffering from cancer and unable to afford insurance costs. Collaboration with Dept. of Health Services in honor of Women's Health Month.

Been Born Bronx by B.L. Kennedy

ISBN: 0-9766399-0-4, 74 pages; Rattlesnake Press
Reviewed by: Bill Gainer

From its alliterative title, to the honesty of its observation, through the rolling lyric of its narrative, to its touching of the avant-garde experiment, *Been Born Bronx* is more than the latest sampling of one of our more flamboyant artists – *Been Born Bronx* is a textbook of modern poetic form – one worth the study of any serious student of the craft – one in which B.L. Kennedy invites, challenges is a better word, the reader to experience poetic possibility.

Starting with the title poem, “Been Born Bronx,” Kennedy warns the reader that something exciting is about to happen:

GOD DOES NOT SEE ME; GOD JUST GETS IN
MY WAY!

I Been Born Bronx
With no prohibitions, no rules or regulations
I ask no permission.

Been Born Bronx is sprinkled with what Kennedy calls “picture-poems.” On the surface these seem an interesting collection of paintings and simple line drawings with the outline of a minimal-poem scratched into the image. On further study, the reader realizes that these pieces of art are not just images, but rather the representation of the idea of image – the text is the striker on which the reader’s imagination is lit. Through his picture-poems, Kennedy allows the reader to use his or her own image of the world to understand – his. Kennedy’s picture poems are so honest in idea that the concept of going beyond the paint demands exploration!

Continuing the experiment, Kennedy uses the placement of lines, highlighted by a few words to create a masterful piece of sensuality. In the poem “Open Lips,” Kennedy uses solid and dashed lines to illustrate the lips closed, then parted in a kiss, then another, then closed, then parted again – as if to capture all that is RAIN/MOON/SUN/EARTH, then again the kiss and another, and then the lips again closed, as if lost in the romance of the DANCE.

In the rolling lyric of the poem, “I Write Your Name,” Kennedy shows how easy it is to say I love you. Then in a set of observational poems, “Setich Manor,” Kennedy uses words to paint a narrative that is so clear the reader feels as if he or she is peeking over the writer’s shoulder, watching the events unfold. The poem, “My Encounter With God,” begs to be read; it offers everything that is today’s poetry.

Been Born Bronx is one of the more interesting, important poetry collections to come out of Sacramento in a long time. Kennedy has done something exciting here. He has reached out to the corners of poetry and brought them together, not in a polite fold, but in the crumpled rush of heart-pounding literary expression. Kennedy has found the pulse of poetry. I suggest you take the time to feel it. I suggest you take Kennedy’s advice – “ask no permission” – and buy this book. It is well worth the read!

Photograph

(from *Been Born Bronx*)

a child sits alone
on a littered stoop, Bronx
apartment building, summer
soaked afternoon, holding
a comic book like a priest
holds his rosary in prayer,
it is a Marvel.

his hands are wet and he
is nervous, all dressed-up
like Roy Rogers. wearing his
new Converse whites,
lowcut.

his face is frozen in the moment,
because he does not yet feel
what the world is doing to him.
something is in his eyes.

it makes him feel different as he
watches the camera. as if
he is saying no...
this is my image and
is not to be shared with anybody.

it is 1963
I am ten and feel the world enter.

—B.L. Kennedy

B.L. KENNEDY BEEN BORN BRONX

AN INTERVIEW BY ROBERT GROSSKLAUS

03.08.2005



RMG: You tend to pay careful attention to the arrangement of your books. *Been Born Bronx* seems quite linear; the beginning is dark and depressing, the second and third part are a little more upbeat, and it finishes on a melancholy note. How did you go about arranging this book?

BLK: Ultimately, the book arranged itself. It

was really kind of a mystical experience. I've never had the experience where the book dictated itself. At the last minute, poems that were in the book came out and poems that weren't in the book went in. "Love Pome" wasn't in the original manuscript. It replaced "Solstice," which didn't fit into the book. The first part is about the Bronx; the second part, Carnal Combat Zone, pretty much deals with erotica; the third part [The Scar] talks about my heart and the fourth part [Sacramento] is about Sacramento. The Bronx and Sacramento are the two cities that contributed towards my education – the Bronx was my street education and California my formal education. In the Bronx, I dropped out of school in the seventh grade and am basically self-educated. I did a lot of reading. In California, I found out I could go to college without a high school diploma – hell, I didn't even have a junior high school diploma. I knocked off a B.A. and two M.A.s and then I went to Colorado [Naropa] and knocked off an M.F.A. I got the first Master's degree from an accredited university in performance poetry – which wound up on MTV of all things... It's been a very interesting journey.

RMG: The beginning of the book, your childhood in the Bronx, was rather depressing...

BLK: The Bronx was joyful and depressing. It's all about loss and magic. Had I stayed in the Bronx, had I stayed in New York City, I'd probably be dead. Most of my friends in the Bronx are

either dead, in jail, or married – which, when you think about it, is all the same thing.

RMG: Was there a cap on the number of pages you could put into the book? It's the longest of the SpiralChaps...

BLK: The book capped itself. Kathy [Keith] originally planned for thirty new poems and the picture poems. Then she went over some of my older poems and decided to make the book more of a "collected poems" because she saw this connection between Bari Lewis Kennedy and B.L. Kennedy. Everybody knows B.L. Kennedy, but very few people see Bari Lewis Kennedy; there really is this duality between the two, this kind of uncanny balance. B.L. Kennedy is sort of the "bad boy" and a lot of Sacramento will never let Bari Lewis Kennedy come out because they'll always judge the bad boy.

RMG: That kind of bad boy stigma can both draw and repel people in such a way that they can't seem to look away from that image. One of the things that *Been Born Bronx* seems to do is paint a cohesive picture of both facets.

BLK: Ann Menebroker says that there's a Bari coming out in my language now – but that Bari's always been there. There's this balance between the two coming out now; there's this blossoming happening in my life. It's changing my poetry, my language, and you can see it in what I'm writing now. Look at the "Seitich Manor" poems. There's this development that's occurred; I don't know where it's coming from.

RMG: Where do you think it's taking you?

BLK: I don't know and I'm not questioning it. I'm just enjoying the ride. You talked about melancholia at the end of the book... when I wrote that last poem, "Sipping My Coffee..." I took it for a test ride at Luna's; the poem does not work at a reading. It's a beautiful homage to all of my teachers and the Sacrament community and all of the people

who contributed to my growth as a poet. Joyce Odam, Ann Menebroker, D.R. Wagner, Doug Blazek – all of them. It is lost at a reading because all of these younger poets are unaware of the “old god.” It does, however, work on the page.

RMG: The poem feels very conversational...

BLK: It was a conversation – with myself.

RMG: But it invites the reader in.

BLK: It was actually inspired by Gene Bloom. When Phil Goldvarg passed away, they had a memorial service for him. I’d known Phil for many years – since 1982. I didn’t attend it because I knew it was going to turn into a poetry circus. I wanted something a little more private, so I had a little memorial service in my home; I lit some candles and I said good-bye to Phil. Because I didn’t attend it, I was criticized at Luna’s saying that I have no respect for my elders. A poet who did attend it criticized me. So I wrote this poem to show that I do respect my elders and those who have freely given to me.

RMG: The different sections of the book are stylistically different from one another. Were they written during different time periods?

BLK: “Carnal Combat Zone” is probably the oldest poem in the book – probably the first poem I wrote in Sacramento. The first two poems I wrote in Sacramento were “Carnal Combat Zone” and “Outlaw;” the original handwritten manuscripts, as well as the typed manuscripts, are in the Sacramento Room. I donated them to Ruth Ellis; I guess they’re in a vault or something. Both of them appeared in my first book, *Jim Morrison Visits Disneyland* which was illustrated by Pat Grizzell – except for the cover. The cover was done by Danny Schroll. The cover came to me in a dream. Grizzell wanted nothing to do with the cover because I had Walt Disney’s head on a naked female body being impaled by a sign saying, in blood-red letters, “culture.” And Grizzell is ever so conservative.

RMG: Why is “Carnal Combat Zone” dedicated to Patti Smith?

BLK: Patti Smith is one of the great shamen of contemporary American poetry – she is a magician, a healer, one of the great performance poets of our day. Patti has always

inspired me and I dedicated it to her because of that – she inspired me to take my poetry off the page and she showed me that language can be alive, that the poet need not be confined to just the printed page. The other person who did that was Anne Waldman. Those two women, in my opinion, are two of the strongest, most independent, coolest writers in America.

RMG: How did “Love Pome” come about?

BLK: “Love Pome” was written in Arcata for Melanie Anne MacRae who is a very wonderful artist, dancer, singer and illustrator. I met her in Boulder, Colorado. She did the layout for *Anatomy of Seasons*, which is dedicated to her. Bill Carr loves that poem; he does a very unique rendition of it. He stretches out the language in a very sensuous way. When he read that, I was honored. I have never heard someone take my poetry and read it better than I could conceive myself reading it. Seriously. He just does a beautiful version of that poem.

RMG: You incorporate the I Ching into your painted poems and your poetry quite often. How does that happen for you?

BLK: I don’t know how to explain my relationship with the I Ching. They come to me in my mind. They literally appear as they appear. Those poems are all written spontaneously, no references or anything; they just appear as the poems are being written. It’s like the poem “Outlaw;” I was walking up the street with Dedrick Webber and I froze in my steps. Literally, in flaming letters before me, was: “I want to be Arthur Rimbaud/ I want to be a gun runner of words/ ambiguous and vague/ a virus of language.” I wasn’t stoned, I wasn’t drunk; it was there. I’ve always looked at the poet as being a sort of a priest; as being sort of a mystic, like Rumi, as having some sort of connection with an outer world...

RMG: “With the Chi of Heaven I Sculpt Your Beauty” is along these lines...

BLK: That was written for Linda Thorell and the last lines are a tribute to Kenneth Patchen, who I consider to be one of the greatest poets in the twentieth century. It’s very, very sad that a lot of his books are not in print. I consider *The Journal of Albion Moon-*

light to be one of the greatest books to be written in the twentieth century and I put it on my list for everyone who calls themselves poets, professes to write poetry, professes to study poetry— to read that book. I hear New Directions has put it back in print. He was one of the first performance poets— before Rexroth, before Ferlinghetti— was Patchen. He was quite an innovator.

RMG: You're doing a lot of picture poems; is that your primary direction at this point?

BLK: There are things I can do with picture poems that I can't do with language and there are things I can do with the printed page that I can't do with picture poems. I can't create, for example, on the printed page what I can create with the colors and the swirls in a picture poem. And then there are things I can do, like the narratives in the Seitich Manor poems, that I can't do with the picture poems.

RMG: How do you approach the picture poems? How did you get started with them?

BLK: After I had my heart surgery, they wouldn't let me write. They said that writing was too stressful for my heart. So I took art classes. I took art history from Fred Dalkey where I basically learned about artists and I had a lot of questions. Fred Dalkey said: "It seems to me that you don't so much want to know the answers to your questions, but for someone to give you permission to paint." So, at the end of the semester, we had a choice: to either write a critique of an artist or to do a self-portrait. Up until then, I was convinced I was color-blind because, when I was sixteen years old, I went for a job interview at AT&T and they gave me a test where I had to identify the colors of wires. And I failed the test. They told me I was color blind and I

believed them; after all, they're AT&T. So all my life I've believed I was color blind. So I went out and got some oil paint and canvas. Not knowing anything about paints, oil paints, or how long they take to dry, I made two self-portraits. Thick. Very thick. Two months later, they still weren't dry. Fred gave me a B+ for even attempting it. And that's how it started. My first picture poem, which I did in chalk pastel on paper, was called "Being A Visionary Is A Pain in the Ass". And that was inspired by Patchen. One thing led to another and, not counting the picture poems I've sold or given away, in this apartment, I have around 1100 picture poems. I'll set out to do one and I'll end up doing 50 without realizing it. I sort of go into a trance. I'm going to have a piece at Luna's in April. Then there are the books I've done where I've hand-painted them. They're all over the place. Jack Jamieson has one where only two copies exist called *The Barroom Kabbalah*— a concrete poem inspired by d.a. levy.

RMG: This book is like a living thing, an organism, a life in pages...

BLK: Poetry is this amazing, living thing. *Been Born Bronx* is a living book. "Been Born Bronx" actually started out as a ten-page poem and it's just fifteen lines in this book. But it's a tight poem. Just as "Outlaw" was a war cry for the eighties, "Been Born Bronx" speaks for the millennium— we will not ask for permission any longer. I don't think the poet needs to ask for permission any longer. I've been laughed at and I've been applauded. It doesn't matter. I'll just continue doing what I'm doing. I'm just a poet and I'll continue being just a poet.

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George Keithley's award-winning epic poem, "The Donner Party," a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, has been adapted as a play and an opera. His poems, stories, and essays have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Harper's*, *American Poetry Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *The Sewanee Review* and *The Kenyon Review*. He has earned the DiCastagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America, a Pushcart prize, the Allen Tate prize, and other awards. Born in Chicago and educated at Duke, Stanford, and the University of Iowa, George has been a visiting writer in Russia. He and his wife live in Chico, California.

Galileo Speaks with God on a Midsummer Night of Shimmering Stars

(From *The Starry Messenger*)

1
The moon is late and still the hour shines.
Cedars shudder in their blackness.
From far off a faint jingling.
"Do you hear our tower bells?
The wind plays them like a timbrel."

2
Planets appear to glow with their own life.
The fabric of the heavens at any moment
might become a glimmering tapestry.
Truth—to an unquiet mind—is never quite enough.

3
"The stars blaze above us.
How did you know we would love them so?"

4
He wishes to ask a wicked question
but his courage fails him:
Why offer us such beauty—distant

bells tremulous in the high wind;
the diffident dance of the great trees;
this wonder that steals our breath away—
and certain death?

5
How long has he lived alone?
He believes he cannot know
how to cherish a woman
beyond his passion
for her. Always
fearing she'll leave him.
The dread of an unwanted child.

6
"I understand my duty.
But you have formed a darkness so vast and lovely
it hurts my heart."

With the restless shuttling sound
of a spirited loom at work
the night wind turns the sky to silk.

—George Keithley



George Keithley reads with Gary Thompson on May 2nd. See calendar for details.

A Sacramento Moment

Passing by the church steps, I see a man, bent—
washing his feet from a water bottle, and a cloth

—intent, intent—his shoes placed neatly side
by side. It is twilight and still warm for October.

He does not seem to see or care that I watch him
do this. It is his need, and this is his only means

and place. He will have his bare feet clean, then
lean back, maybe, and watch the people pass.

—Joyce Odam

At the Berkeley Public Library

(for Neruda's centennial, July 12, 2004)

Oh, Chile!

Turn my body into a drum
and pound me with callused palms,

that the percussive pain
of your people might shatter
my breastbone into pieces
of birds that fly far beyond

the clutches of the small
men who salute you with
the precision of knives,

to leave them clawing at the
air they think they own.

For they cannot stop the music
as it turns from drumbeat
into an exhalation that will deflate
their ballooned citadel of tyranny,

dropping them to the ground
like a collapsed lung,
crumpled and misshapened,
disfigured by your triumph.

—Dennis Hock

Someone Crying By

Someone crying by this morning
sends his voice into the house
in a disturbing half-laugh, half-
cry—song-like and loud—and
out of place for this neigh-
borhood. A dangerous sound.

The room goes still—pulls in,
where I have lost my thought,
fringe of other sounds in-
truding while I try to measure
the direction of this one soul
crying so peaceful-early.

Thus the day begins. With
apprehension. And I think of
this. He is gone now, taking his
misery with him and I can let
the noisy day continue: that air-
plane those birds this clock.

—Joyce Odam

Dennis Hock, a Sacramento poet, is currently doing volunteer work and living in community at San Damiano, a Franciscan retreat center in the hills above Danville, CA, where he spends his days engaged in maintenance work, dishwashing, and groundskeeping—all the while listening for the plaintive cry of the red-tail hawk.

Dennis Hock reads
on Monday, April
18th . See calendar for
details.

First Stage Fascination

we went then
to the
skyview
roof
of the hotel
just to
top off
the excitement
of the evening
so trusting of
each other
and giddy with
intensity of
rapport and then
in unison
fell off while
still con-
tinuing
our animated
conversation
politely
not looking
in windows
on the way down

—Joyce Odam

Hannah Stein and Carole Stone will be reading together on Monday, April 25th. See calendar for details.

Hannah Stein, who lives in Davis, is delighted to read at the Sacramento Poetry Center with Carole Stone. Carole is one of the first poets Hannah ever met, at the beginning of her adventure with poetry at the Aspen Writers Conference in the mist-shrouded past. The whole story—if anyone would like the whole story—can be found in the introduction to her newly released chapbook in Pudding Houses’s “Greatest Hits” series.

The partial story is that Hannah has a full-length collection, *Earth-light*, with La Questa Press, and an earlier chapbook, *Schools of Flying Fish*, with State Street Press. Her poems appear widely in literary journals and anthologies, and she’s been nominated for several Pushcarts. Hannah’s most exciting literary event of the moment (apart from reading at SPC!) is participating in a panel discussion at the AWP (Associated Writing Programs) spring meeting in Vancouver. The subject is “Bigger Mountains, More Space: Does Moving West Change Eastern Writers?” Since she was born in Brooklyn, New York, and moved to California in her twenties, this is a tantalizing theme for her.

Porcine

Half a dozen pigs in a pen
noisily root and shove, cram
their hairy bulk against each other.
A double row of teats buttons up
the front of each pink hide.
Jogging by, I seem to excite them
as though they expect there’s a slop
pail hidden behind my back.
Their amplified grunts commit
riot against this peaceable farm
pocket, its nearby hills greening
in light rain, upturned furrows
black and fecund. Though I am
curious, the pigs balk at connection,
their inaccessible little eyes
walled around with tough pink skin
as though a surgeon once tried
to light the bottom of those wells—
snipped, snipped, then gave up
or was scared off, like me. As I
approach the fence the pigs gang
together, heave at it, push—
shattering the sky, shrieking that
once out, they’ll hang me upside
down, carve me into chops.

—Hannah Stein

Siren Song

Between rocks that grind like jaws
and maelstroms gushing down
to the sea’s boneyard,
a wave worn galley

furrows a V through black
water. Chained to the mast, Odysseus
tries himself out in the crucible
of a hopeless knowledge.
Who would choose

to be in his place—bent
on another sphere of reckoning,
possessing and possessed. He strains toward
the power he’s handed over: of pouring
straight into the ravished sky.

He has gotten away with
the impossible, almost.
Heavy with the weight

of that music, that longing,
he will begin a new life
among ghosts.

—Hannah Stein

Mrs. Frances Isaacs

I thought of her, a Romanian refugee, as French, because she was petite, her glossy black hair wound on the neck in what my family called a bun. She said

chignon. Her topazed fingers and amethyst earlobes, silk blouses in tones of chardonnay and nectarine made her the only sophisticate in the world I grew up in. Each week after my piano lesson my mother would tender her a dollar. I longed to play

she gave me Bartok instead. But the only other teacher put pennies on her pupils' knuckles. *Hopeless!* snorted Mrs. Isaacs. Once after a recital

she gave me a deep blue bottle silvered with a princess—Evening in Paris my mother, murmuring “poor taste,” wouldn't let me wear. I was twelve. Mrs. Isaacs and her mother had escaped

by crossing four borders in a horse trailer, and I knew the two had more panache than the rest of us together.

One afternoon in the midst of a lesson her mother slipped in from the kitchen, wiping her eyes on her apron. *Ach*, she said, *I thought you was Frances playing!* and hugged and kissed me. Her chin bristled and she smelled of cooking; the large wart couched between nose and cheek turned me sideways. Then as Mrs. Isaacs played for us

a compass needle of sunlight edged between the window's faded draperies, striped a meander up her back: an arrow that pointed me toward another life I yearned one day to invent.

—Hannah Stein

Note to Hansel Found with Gretel's Will

When we left our father's cottage for the second time, we were already lost, although the dark woods seemed familiar, and scattering the breadcrumbs a ritual.

The witch did not frighten me. Her gingerbread house felt homier than Father's filled with our stepmother's anger. Did we ever have a real mother? I can't remember, can you? But we had each other.

The witch fattened you on pancakes and milk, wanting me to believe she was mothering you. But I had learned the ploys of a survivor and murder, my brother, was easy.

—Carole Stone

Falling

Neighbors carried us to their house across the street where twin beds were pushed together. I was afraid of falling into the crack.

In the morning a grownup stacked blueberry pancakes on our plates like silver dollars. Aunt Jemima grinned at us from the kitchen counter.

I dug out the sticky berries to eat, my brother asked for seconds. Then it was time for school: my kindergarten, his second grade.

Somewhere else mourners extolled our parents' virtues before gravediggers lowered them into the earth.

—Carole Stone

The Burden of Wings, poems by **Colette Jonopulos**

published by Rattlesnake Press, 2005

Reviewed by Carol Frith

The Burden of Wings by Colette Jonopulos is visually sumptuous, with beautifully reproduced artwork by Nancy J. Hickey on both front and back covers. Rattlechaps are distinctive for their tasteful papers and high quality production techniques, and *The Burden of Wings* is certainly no exception.

Jonopulos' poems are as sumptuous as their presentation. Much of her collection is ostensibly nature poetry, more to the point, perhaps, poetry with an almost ecofeminist slant, natural images harnessed in the production of metaphor and/or symbology. In "A Few Markings on Wood", for example, the poet writes, "This is what I leave:.../...—a few/markings on wood—what I take:/memory of breathing underwater,/voice..." the poet characteristically reaching back into the natural history of the organism for metaphors that become meta-logical correlatives in the forging of a personal mythos.

Birds are frequent images in Jonopulos' iconography. In "Three Nights with Crow", she writes of "...the/place truths unrobe,/where children/wear avian heads/(feathers bristled along/their spines)..." images of human gestational history subsumed quite unexpectedly in the symbolism of birds, Jonopulos' metaphor becoming a compellingly reductive semiosis for the unnamable. In the poem, "In Time", she writes that "...we comprehend only what/is turned between our fingers; and possibly, the/irregular singing of the waves/," the mythic singing of the sea usurped again almost immediately by her ubiquitous birds in "Learning to Fly," where she writes, "...—sound/more like bird wings/working in unison than/this torpid silence/," Jonopulos' birds in this case preempting communication. In "Downdrafts," she writes, "...a/bird flies toward the river, leaves images of brackish wings/in words..." the symbolic bird finally breaking out, intermediary-free, to translate itself directly into words.

In "Disruption with Primary Colors," Jonopulos' treatment of avian symbol becomes boldly overt: "crows confused by autumn's sudden descent;/one, then another sullenly lift themselves off/pavement,

attitude of artists interrupted—/" which image she immediately juxtaposes with a Kandinski "...chinless wide-eyed Christ/," symbol and symbol "disrupting" the page. Similarly, in "To the Place of Swallow Flight," she watches "swallows make a circle of themselves,/slanted arrow wings synchronized/," the birds, it would seem, converting themselves into (conscious?) organic metaphor. Expanding the conceit in "I Have Been to the Creek in February," she observes that "...Each of us/enters without expectation, leaves on wings no longer hesitant/." And finally, Jonopulos' avian imagery becomes frankly self-subsuming in "When Night Comes Early." "...I turn in all directions,/" she writes, "imagine the feathered body, the inky underwings, the lone bird/rising with slow intent..." a fitting closure for Jonopulos' inter-relational mythos of nature and one sensitive woman's place in it, the magical inconsistency of metaphorical knowing that constitutes "a burden of wings."

I very much recommend this chapbook. You can purchase *The Burden of Wings* at The Book Collector, 1008 24th St., Sacramento, CA.

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Three Men in a Boat

Three men in a boat—
one poet, one dying poet, one poet
who has lost his art.

Nothing happens.
No sinking boat,
no drifting for days
without food,
no choices to be made
about who lives, who dies.

Three men in a boat
simply fish, well
into a summer night—
some muffled words,
sandwiches packed from home,
starlight.

Whoo. Whoo. Whoo
of a deep-throated horned owl
unsettles the river.
The dilemma:
who should answer,
and to whom should he speak?

—Gary Thompson

Gary Thompson taught in the Creative Writing Program at CSU, Chico for twenty-five years and managed to play second base for the PESTS for just about that long. He was one of ten featured writers for *Highway 99: A Literary Journey through California's Great Central Valley*, a year-long project sponsored by the California Council for the Humanities. His poems have been published in many magazines and anthologies; his most recent collection is *On John Muir's Trail* from Bear Star Press. He currently lives in Port Orchard, Washington, where he and his wife, Linda, spend an inordinate amount of time aboard an old trawler named Keats.

Gary Thompson
reads
with George
Keithley on
Monday, May
2nd at SPC's
new location:
HQ @ 25th
& R

Yurok Time

I like time before Darwin
and von Humboldt. I like Yurok
time, for example, when Umai
(a lonely girl) could sing herself
across the ocean into the world-
beyond-the-world

to visit the sunset and find
Laksis (Shining one), her nightly friend.
I like names without Latin:
seagull rather than Larinae,
stories without explanations,
a song for no reason,

a journey through the horizon
to unknowns without fear or shadow.
I like the sun going down
just now, a moment of gold
spraying out, a stunned instant when words
go back before books.

—Gary Thompson
from *On John Muir's Trail*, Bear Star Press, 1999

SPC@HQ
25TH@R
MAY 1ST
2005

Hominid Love Letter

The shape of your femur suggests that you woke up each day with a destination on your mind while I was aimless and scavenged for deer, never knowing if I would bring it back to the cave for you, my dear. I never knew the child was mine either, so I stuck to scraping hides in my hovel with the other men . . . And now they tell me, this is why we Neanderthals are buried with our memories and hopes. And you, homo sapiens who paired and mated are credited with birthing the imagination. But let me tell you there are times now in my dark home when I can picture your slender body, your sweet chin, your compressed pelvis that seemed as dense as a flat rock to pound on. And I wonder why you chose a man with such great brow ridges like me who needed a shave and a good set of clothes. I want to know why you took me in your arms so sweetly, without displaying, and let my thick, coarse body be forgiven again and again and again. I want to know why you loved me, my dear. This question may seem stupid to you after so many years, after our child has grown and gone to swirl its genes among all these modern humans, but I am looking for an answer. I need to know why I am not such a pitiable thing. I need to know why I am not beyond redemption. I need to know that I am human even though I regret our home life was not like the other humans whom you know. Please tell this dumb creature. I need to know why you loved me, dear. So, I have learned these words to ask you this here where I am now, in the dark, aimless, wandering within this ultimate privacy of mine where I am nothing and you are the future I have dreamed.

—Tim Kahl

Meditation on Eggshells

The jumbo grade A egg you cracked into the breakfast skillet was stamped in red “Enjoy before Sept. 10.” It’s Sept. 9, we’ve survived this far toward the expiration of an egg cut short. Just yesterday a big black SUV cut from the fast lane into ours. Two moving bodies cannot occupy at 80 mph the same space at the same time, no matter how our molecules jostle themselves into visible form. Our tin white Ford already eight years past its prime, we slipped to the shoulder.

This morning’s egg lies sunny-side up, its bright yellow yolk done just right.

—Taylor Graham

Tim Kahl reads on
Monday, April 11th.
See calendar for details.

Tim Kahl teaches at Sacramento City College. He has published or has works forthcoming in *Nimrod*, *American Letters & Commentary*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Indiana Review*, *Confluence*, *Eclipse*, *night rally*, *Conduit*, *Poetry Motel*, *Collages & Bricolages*, *Synaesthetic*, *Oyez Review*, *Lightning & Ash*, *The George Washington Review*, *OnTheBus*, *Nightsun*, *RE: AL*, *Bouillabaise*, *Illuminations*, *The MacGuffin*, *SunDog: The Southeast Review*, *Square Lake*, *Madison Review*, *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Prairie Winds*, *Sulphur River Literary Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Louisville Review*, *The Palo Alto Review*, *Solo*, *Carquinez Poetry Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Poet Lore*, *Limestone*, *Porcupine*, *Willow Review*, *International Poetry Review*, *Texas Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, and *Caliban*. Additionally, he is currently working on translations of German poets Rolf Haufs and Christoph Meckel, and Austrian avant-gardist Friederike Mayröcker’s book of poems/novel, *Das besessene Alter (The Possessed Senior Citizen)* as well as a collection of contemporary Brazilian poetry and the poetry of Portuguese Nobel Prize Winner José Saramago. He also received his second Pushcart Prize nomination this year.

Digressions on Camouflage

Another news-clip from the war
on the other side of the world, our young
soldiers dressed in camo, weapons raised,
& then the instant brilliant
blast, all you see is burning dust & sand &
spitting splits of concrete. If soldiers
are inside that cloud, they're camouflaged
as tatters & bits & shrapnel of
themselves in uniform.

Camouflage — remember Jon & Rusty,
summer-campers on our mountain.
We dressed our two-week scouts in Army-
surplus camo, taught them woods-lore, compass.

35 degrees 107 paces to a cedar snag,
then due-north 95 paces & wow! what a view!

Rusty threw sticks for the dog.
We counseled how to hunker down & listen
to the nuthatch *hank-hank*, coyote
hollowing out the night.

Now Rusty's almost grown; & volunteered
for the Army that dresses kids in camo
& sends them compass-forth
to the other side of the world.
We watch them blown up on TV.

—Taylor Graham

A Stump

In this open field that used to be
manzanita thicket, I'm cutting back
manzanita sprouts and seedlings,
but not as fast as they grow.
Five years ago we logged this place.
We slashed and burned and seeded
grass and clover, lupine
and California poppies.

But this hillside wishes
to grow wild again to thicket;
it resists being pasture, as I
resist your notion
of what I ought to be doing
this morning. Cleaning house
or scouring my soul.

Sun spreads over the field
drawing grass up from its roots,
exhorting clover to be greener,
poppies to open their golden palms.
Here's an old-crone manzanita stump
as big as both my fists, still
rooted, with its tiny crown
of tender pink-tinged leaves.

—Taylor Graham

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The Trajectory of Sunflowers by Margaret Hoehn

winner of the 2002 Readers' Choice Award from and published by The Backwaters Press; ISBN: 0-9726187-4-0
Reviewed by Ann Conradsen

If you haven't yet discovered *The Trajectory of Sunflowers* by Sacramento poet Margaret Hoehn, which was published last summer, you couldn't do better than to seek it out now, in spring. It speaks throughout of light, rebirth, redemption, the classic themes of spring.

A brief glance through the Table of Contents may not reveal this over-riding vision; titles like "The Slow Vanishing of Being Reshaped," "Sister of Absence," and "Falling" seem to indicate a darker view. And it is true that absence lives in this book, is almost a character.

What is absent? What vanishes? "[T]he dark river of a man's eyes blending into nightfall/... photographs that fade in the midday sun, how they yellow at the corners,/ turn brittle, pieces chip away like pottery;/ the hair disappears, the eyes, the mouth/... the North Star can be lost for weeks at a time;/ a person can lose direction in the snow..." ("The Forgetting of Absence"). In "The Process of Revision," reality itself seems to disappear: "My diary is a book of absence./The willful pages forget what I have/ written before I put down my pen./ The ink flows skyward/... several mountains were pushed back into the earth by/ the weight of their own grief./ This happens with people, too...the birds are afraid of the way/people leave: in pieces, adding to/ and abandoning a little at a time/ the things and faces that we love..."

But more prevalent in this collection is the presence of a generosity of spirit and language. Throughout, Hoehn uses fairly long lines and formal and complex syntax (more Beethoven than Cage) to be clear, truthful and complete. While these brief excerpts can't fully demonstrate this feature, they can hint at the level of detail incorporated in these poems: "...the old grocery store on the corner,/ with its peeling paint and dusty porch,/ wants to sink in the grass and dream/ itself back to prairies and sky..." ("The Changing of Unsteady Shapes"); "[t]he flame on the blackbird's wing has/ flickered out against the deepening dusk/ of its body..." ("Sleeping Through Winter"); "...the oak behind the house slipped/ in the sodden earth and crashed down, splintering onto its side;/ the huge root ball rotted through; the bright wood of the trunk/ shattered to expose an inner decay. It was a silent

betrayal/ of the heartwood that had been a long time coming./ I remember another storm... when/ I was eight and my father drove his family through/ the night in a two-door Ford, old, khaki-colored with/ a hood shaped like an airplane's nose. That night my father/ drove through the wind and rain with both hands gripping/ the wheel, his body leaning forward into the storm, his face set with the grim expression of a gunner on/ a plane from the Second World War..." ("Looking Back Through Clouds"); and "My mother's hands were maps of the sweltering valley... tomatoes shimmered in our hands like small suns fallen to/ earth..." ("Leaving the Fields). Perhaps most exemplary of this use of detail is the poem "Forecast," an exploration of water in all its states and forms. The last stanza illustrates: "*Precipitation*: the way the/ body recants, then rushes/ back to itself, becomes the/ sound of falling water, of/ water falling, of reunion./ It is the sound of your life/ entering your body again."

But Hoehn suggests richness in the levels of possibility that she posits, too. In "Traveling Through Night" the speaker says, "A flight of wild geese has/ sheared the sky in half so I/ must drift between two nights./ In one, I fall deep into the dusk of my beloved's dark eyes;/ I glow bright with sleep and/ love. In the other, I lie small and restless in my bed and/ wonder if the entry to/ my heart can hold against/ the randomness of sorrow..." This kind of alternate reality is echoed in many other poems, notably "The Process of Revision."

Always the trajectory of this book is towards humanity and redemption. In some of the poems, redemption is found in art. In "Letters from Rodin," Rodin reveals what he and Rilke create and redeem: "...Once, while descending/ for years through granite, my fingers brushed against/ the curve and hollow of a/ woman's form,/ trapped but shining/ in her sleep. With love,/ I pulled her free... If you were here,/ your pen would raise/ hydrangeas from the lapis/ soil and set the swans in/ luminous flight." And "Vincent, Drifting Toward Crows," which won the 2002 Robinson Jeffers Tor House Prize for Poetry, imagines Vincent Van Gogh: "He will paint the sunflowers, blazing like/ haloes behind the head of Lazarus as he/ rose again into the merciless light./ He will paint cypress bursting into the/ flames of green sentient prayers;/ and the dazzling whirlpools of the heavens."

Often, life is redeemed by life itself. Sometimes, a small, seemingly insignificant movement or shift can create a new life. "Something in the Distance Changes" shows the speaker in an epiphany; a change in vision causes the potential of deeper hearing in another person, which in turn might allow "an addict six states away [to] crawl out from beneath the junipers... and stand dazed... face/rimmed with gold, glowing like a saint." In "Letters from Rodin," Rodin writes, "A harsh art is life:/ the chipping away,/ the sanding down--/ that hard ache of loss that/ gives us back our hearts,/ in their softest form."

Every poem presents a hope—through vision, through thought, through art, through nature—that life is deep with meaning and wholeness. I cannot do better than to end by giving you Hoehn's whole poem, "Found Things," and urge you to find this book and revel in the light of its language and heart.

Found Things

A moment, so bright that it cannot be stopped, might slip between a small gap in the sagging drapes, and lift you out of your life and back, in a single

breath. And in that instant, you might surface from beneath your own heart: a blue-skinned sleeper waking, as if through water, to take an iridescence

of your own; in the same way the North Star once ascended from the center of a night lake to float within an hour not yet lived. And gasping hard for

air, you could pull yourself to safety on the raft of your own strong light and, from there, watch the holiness of your shadow, soft echo of the

body, slowly spiraling back to earth: to the place where all found things eventually gather, and like the sea, fall back within themselves forever.

The Trajectory of Sunflowers is available from Amazon.com and from the publisher: The Backwaters Press c/o Greg Kosmicki, Editor/Publisher, 3502 North 52nd Street, Omaha Nebraska 68104-3506

Suicide Poems

A knife
in the basket,
a basket of flowers.

A trail beyond the sea
a path over water
a stone.

Crows emerge in city trees
nobody watching
sad hard wind blow.

No wasted breath
awash in the delta
swimming carelessly.

Come to a good strong ending
it's enough. One tires of the war.

That bunch of words paved
over and walked on.

A pretty woman will finger your arm
if you trespass, and pull up your stem
if you don't.

Any of a thousand needles
and restful cigarettes and cold drinks.

The entire river will flow through
a very small hole.

Even a spring bird
is going to corrode.

You can die
in any water.

A wound in the leg is a slow
and ponderous undertaking.

One o'clock is when a football game starts
and the girls dance while the crows
eat live squab at the stadium.

A slow burning fire on a damp night
in the timber.

con't ➤

(con't)

You have a few
oranges on your tree and one hopes
you'll find a good one
then eat it and smile.

There are no words for other words.

When the sun comes
through fall trees
and squirrels rattle
over sidewalks
and pretty girls laugh
by split bark
and an old truck loaded
with hard work passes
I say nothing.

I don't even open my mouth in most cases.

I come slowly up a road in the rain.
Glowing worms underfoot.
That crooked fir tree tore the sun
in half and ever since then rain
fell part of it on the water and part on me.

—Crawdad Nelson

History

They nailed a thermometer to the barn wall
and the temperature exceeded one hundred
in the shade and an artist was on hand
so all was remembered just as it was.

—Crawdad Nelson

Hedgehog

What about when the snake went around the corner
and found a colonel eating dates?

He was happy
just to be alive.

Men die every day
when the shooting starts.

—Crawdad Nelson

The Hedgehog's Occupation

*Walking by the graveyard
I recall your tang.*

Amanita Pike, *Deliberations*

Out of all those holes only this one looks good.
I'll just sit here and bristle.
The first thing a small bomb cracks is the egg
I was set to eat.
Staring at an image in the sand.
Thinking of a girl back home

If I crush a pomegranate
I get a boot full of blood. There's a suicidal
atmosphere and fogs.

It's a good time to lay low
under armor.

When shrapnel flies
I think beautiful thoughts and love killing.

Love comes in fifty calibers and sprinkles
its harsh ammunition up and down the street.

—Crawdad Nelson

Insurgent Memoirs

Half the camellia
blossoms are nothing but rot:
A mild insurgency.

12,000 more soldiers
now stand in weather
smelling blood.

The Defense Department acknowledges the use of napalm
in the city of Fallujah.

The newspaper predicts blue poles
and boating in the far north. I'll vouch for the impression
left by the rodents who emerge
on the right day in the wrong weather.

It rains across my eyes, deep as the Atlantic
and fouled by shipping. The rich are still able
to tarry a while on the bluff and watch
the sport of great unwinding mammals
growling in the surf. Cocktail hour
is a time of peace, reinforced with linen on the table,
soft music, mild torture in the anterooms, but rainclouds
cover me in my simple camp.

An insurgent bluejay tangles with my scrambled eggs.

In Guantanamo disturbing noises are produced
by the introduction of a wire into a niche.
Dogs die momentarily along the nation's highways,
cats are utterly without compunction,
men like me are squatting on every scrap of unposted land in the west,
which amounts to certain distant bluffs.

And the underside of rotten logs.

Yellowjackets inject their measure of poison into my uncomprehending blood
causing me to swear and turn blue.

Half the daffodils
are going to bloom in a hard freeze.

—Crawdad Nelson

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