

Sacramento's Literary
Review and Calendar:

Poetry Now

November 2005
Vol. 11, No. 11

A Publication of the Sacramento Poetry Center



Catherine Fraga reads at HQ/SPC on Nov. 7th. See calendar for details.

"The poems in Catherine Fraga's new collection, *Running Away with Gary, the Mattress Salesman*, have but one goal: to "begin again/the story of my life" ("Dream Log"). They are polished gems that shine beyond a single life to illuminate all our lives. Their subject is, as always, love and human capacity, and the poet extracts these from her story and the stories of others. She speaks of "These voices/...always rattling in my throat/chanting in my ears. I am all of them, even those/I cannot yet hear" ("The Nature of Longing"). We are grateful for her listening."
—Quinton Duval

Catherine Fraga lives in Sacramento, California with her husband and two sons. She teaches writing at California State University, California and is working on a book collection of poems, *You Should Know*. Catherine has published her work in several literary journals and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in Poetry. She is the author of *Running Away with Gary, the Mattress Salesman* (Poet's Corner Press, 2005; www.poetscornerpress.com)

Holy Art

In 1949 my parents were in love living on East 14th in a cramped stucco walkup, above Manuel Lopez an artist who painted holy cards on stiff, pale blue paper, using dimestore watercolors.

I can guess why he did it.
My mother's hair was the color of chestnuts.
Soft, spongy, virgin curls that had not endured the roughness of a bristle brush.

I was not born yet. I was as remote as starlight.
It's hard for me to believe that my parents made love above an eccentric saint-painter in a roomful of angels, and I wasn't there.

But now I am. My mother is blushing.
This is the lovely thing about art.
It can bring back the dead.
It can wake the sleeping,
as it might have late that night when my father and mother made love above Manuel, who lay in the dark thinking holy, holy, holy.

—Catherine Fraga

This Issue:

Erin Doyle
Elsie Whitlow Feliz
Catherine Fraga
Gayiel Von Geldren
Ellen Johnson
Julia Levine
Shawn Pittard
Ruth L. Schwartz
Sandra K. Senne
Allegra Jostad
Silberstein
Ramona Soto
Bob Stanley
Reviewed:
The Bitter Suite
by Robert Roden
Black Dog
by James DenBoer

save the date Thursday, December 1, 2005 6-8pm
SPC's annual benefit
Poetry•Music•Silent Auction
at the home of Burnett and Mimi Miller
Watch the website for details and the mail for your invitation

Poetry Now, Sacramento's Literary Review & Calendar, is published each month by the Sacramento Poetry Center and is funded, in part, with grants from the California Arts Council and the Sacramento Cultural Arts Awards Program of the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission with support from the city and county of Sacramento.

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** and **Tule Review** delivered to your door or box.

Managing Editor: **Robert Grossklaus** (dphunkt@mac.com)
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Editorial Staff: **Jody Ansell, Ann Conradsen, Tom Goff, Barbara Link, Pat Osfeld, and Ramona Soto**

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 1719 25th Street, Sacramento. Our phone number is: (916) 451-5569.

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President's Message Keeping Company with The Word

Autumn: we know it in our blood and our bones. Cool enough in the early mornings so my warm-blooded next-door neighbor (my human barometer) now leaves his house wearing a sweater. But by 1 p.m., when I'm decompressing from two hours quizzing fourth graders on vocabulary, it's plenty warm enough for short sleeves.

Of course, spending time with 10 year-olds (dipping into the force field that is their collective energy) can, all by itself, warm you up. Helping them learn their way around our complex common language is a salutary experience. Like many adults, I tend to forget not only how much there is to learn but how much (by the time we've been on the planet a few decades) we actually know. We take our knowledge for granted, as much a part of us as our backbones.

Yet those of us who keep serious company with The Word have good reason to savor its power. When language is used well, we know it. It gives us a chill. It pierces our hearts. It raises the hairs on the backs of our necks. As those of us lucky enough to attend SPC's 2005 Writers Conference were reminded again and again. Thanks once more to Frank Andrick, Julia Connor, Molly Fisk, Carol Frith, Laverne Frith, Taylor Graham, Traci Gouridine, Susan Kelly-DeWitt, B.L. Kennedy, Christian Kiefer, Maya Khosla, Terry Moore and Born 2B Poets, Phillip T. Nails and Chip Spann for all they did to make The Poetic Experience such a remarkable event.

And, coming up, just to whet your appetite: 11/7: Catherine Fraga; 11/14: Julia Levine and Ruth Schwartz; 11/21: Bob Stanley; 11/28: Zen Marxist Launderettes (Ellen Johnson, Erin Doyle, Carolyn Schneider, Emily Wright, Margaret S. Burns, Laura Ann Walton, Sandra K. Senne, Mira Kores, Cecile Martin). See the Calendar for details. And while you're there, take a look at what's happening in the many other venues where, virtually every night of the week, fellow poets are spreading The Word.

Of Special Note: SPC's annual benefit at the gracious, art-filled home of Burnett and Mimi Miller will be Thursday, 12/1, 6-8. Poetry! Music! Silent auction! Food and fellowship! Watch the web for details and the

mail for your invitation. But, right now, turn your calendars to December 1 and Save the Date!

—Mary Zeppa

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Call for articles!

SPC would like to include your articles about the Sacramento poetry scene on its website. There is no limit to the length of these articles. Please send your work to:
Sacramento Poetry Center
1719 25th Street,
Sacramento, CA 95816.
You may also email your articles as Word attachments to:
dphunkt@mac.com or
poetrynow@sacramentopoetrycenter.org.
Please include your name, address, phone number and email address on each page.



Dad

Dad.
(A name I never called you.)

This is no gesture to magnify
an ordinary, mean-spirited man.
To the contrary.
It is time to put the tree back into the forest.

The next time the wind starts howling through my sleep,
Prompting a smothered effort to scream,
I will not see the trunk of a gargantuan, tortured form.

Instead I will find countless branches swaying together,
taming the storm with harmonic whispers
from all of the fathers to all of the daughters
whom they loved...but feared to feel such tender stuff.

In unison, gathering strength in numbers,
they will confess to their softer selves.
And the night will carry their sounds in its darkest hours,
to soothe the wounds of their young.

—Sandra K. Senne

“The dust and the rubbish of this house is all
ambergris and musk; the noise of the door of
this house is all verse and melody.” —Rumi

I'm free in my head
til Forest
 comes streaking naked his
 wind on my skin
 cross the wood floor sunlit
 room we share

we share my head my heart
 mostly his

beating to work to feed
him kale with raisins Charlie
Parker played be-bop dirt roots &
parks with ample sky

what strained faint beats
are left I follow
its sounds are the shadows.

“There's always the old woman in the forest.”

& I'm certain she'll eat me alive.

—Erin Doyle

Ode To A Poncho (1974)

brown and mustard plaid
a soft heavy wool
with twisted fringe,
my mother sewed the zipper
and the next day
I was a

HIPPIE!

Grace Slick! Patty Hearst!
High Plains Drifter!

standing in the sand dunes, arms stretched
it was my wingspan
with massive shadow

freedom from sleeves,
free to flap in the breeze
hanging from cable car
clattering through Chinatown
to seduce men with playful moustaches
and pennywhistles
to hide my young girl's body

Tom's mom sneered at my “blanket”
but I loved wrapping in it
to watch fireworks in the fog,
sleeping under it on some ratty couch
with no ride home
spreading it on damp grass for stoned picnic
with music by the hoodoo rhythm devils

each of us wore it as needed
and it always fit

I can't remember when I switched to a jeans jacket.
I didn't pack it when I moved to Berkeley.
where was it when I was 8 months pregnant?

my poncho waits for me
deep in my 17 year old closet
crooning like Joni Mitchell,
smelling of eucalyptus and musk

—Ellen Johnson

The Zen Marxist Launderettes will be reading, November 28th, at SPC/HQ. As the twenty-first century began, nine women began a writing collective, after working for a number of years with Julia Connor as their mentor. Singularly, each one can claim a notoriety of sorts in the arts, sciences and social services. But it is their eclectic dispositions that drew them to identify themselves as the Zen Marxist Launderettes. They see their collective spirit to be pharmaceutical in nature: a composition of volatile and essential substance. Members of the collective: Ellen Johnson, Erin Doyle, Carolyn Schneider, Emily Wright, Margaret S.Burns, Laura Ann Walton, Sandra K. Senne, Mira Kores, Cecile Martin.

Literary Calendar for November 2005

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

1 Tuesday

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

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

2 Wednesday

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

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

3 Thursday

Poetry Unplugged presents Angela-Dee Alforque. Open mic before/after. Mario Ellis Hill hosts. 8pm, Luna's Café, 1414 16th St. Info: 441-3931 or www.lunascafe.com. Free.

Poetic Light Open Mic: TBA. 8-10pm. Personal Style Salon, 2540 Cottage Way. Info: John Hughes, 470-2317. Free.

Evening of Poetry. Host: La-Rue. 7pm. Gwen's Caribbean Cuisine, 2355 Arden Way. Info: 284-7831.

4 Friday

Open Mic at the Barnes & Noble in Citrus Heights, 6111 Sunrise Blvd, 7pm. All are welcome to bring their work and meet other poets!

5 Saturday

Escritores del Nuevo Sol's writing workshop and potluck on 1st Saturdays. 11am, second floor at La Raza Galeria Posada, 15th & R. Info: Graciela Ramirez, 456-5323 or joannpen@comcast.net.

6 Sunday

Poem Spirits presents Kimberly White. Sacramento Unitarian Church, 2425 Sierra Blvd., 6pm, Rm 7/8. Info: Tom Goff, Nora Staklis, 481-3312; JoAnn Anglin at 451-1372.

7 Monday

Sacramento Poetry Center presents Catharine Fraga. Host: Susan Kelly-DeWitt. 7:30 pm, SPC/HQ for the Arts, 1719 25th (25th and R Sts.) Info: 451-5569 or www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org. Free.

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

8 Tuesday

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

9 Wednesday

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

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

Rattlesnake Press presents Allegra Jostad Silberstein celebrating the release of her new chapbook *In the Folds* from Rattlesnake Press; host: Kathy Kieth. The Book Collector, 1008 24th St., 7:30pm, free.

10 Thursday

Poetry Unplugged presents Suzanne Roberts; hosted by Barbara Noble. Open mic before/after. 8pm at Luna's Café, 1414 16th St. Info: 441-3931 or www.lunascafe.com. Free.

Poetic Light Open Mic: TBA. 8-10pm. Personal Style Salon, 2540 Cottage Way. Info: John Hughes, 470-2317. Free.

Evening of Poetry. Host: La-Rue. 7pm. Gwen's Caribbean Cuisine, 2355 Arden Way. Info: 284-7831.

11 Friday

The Other Voice presents Mary Dawson and Beulah Amsterdam, 7:30pm, Davis Unitarian church library, 27074 Patwin Road .Info: Allegra, (530) 753-2634 or Betty, (530) 753-1432.

A rare appearance of famed poet and activist, Amiri Baraka, performing at the 4th Annual Beat Generation & Beyond Conference, at Varsity Theatre and John Natsoulas Gallery & Center For The Arts, in Davis. Check out full information and register by website: www.natsoulas.com. (Free if you register before Nov. 1st.) By phone: (530) 756-3938; fax: (530) 756-3961; email: nancy@natsoulas.com. John Natsoulas Gallery & Center For The Arts, 521 First St., Davis, CA 95616.

12 Saturday

Poems-For-All presents "From Tundra and Bone": Anne Coray & Rebecca Morrisson, hosted by Richard Hansen, 7:30pm. The Book Collector, 1008 24th Street. Refreshments & free mini-books. Sponsored by Escritores del Nuevo Sol/Writers of the New Sun. Info: JoAnn Anglin 451-1372.

King of the Mic Night, Part 3: Poetry Slam Competition (qualifiers from Mahogany September and October slams). 3 rounds of elimination. Host: Terry Moore. Sac State. \$10. 455-8410 or www.malikspeaks.com.

Patricity in Spirit in Truth, open mic at Queen Sheba's restaurant, 1537 Howe Ave., 3-5pm. Info: Patricia Turner-Green, 920-1020 or patricity_07@yahoo.com.

A rare appearance of famed poet and activist, Amiri Baraka, performing at the 4th Annual Beat Generation & Beyond Conference, at Varsity Theatre and John Natsoulas Gallery & Center For The Arts, in Davis. Check out full information and register by website: www.natsoulas.com. (Free if you register before Nov. 1st.) By phone: (530) 756-3938; fax: (530) 756-3961; email: nancy@natsoulas.com. John Natsoulas Gallery & Center For The Arts, 521 First St., Davis, CA 95616.

13 Sunday

Stockton Poet's Corner presents Catherine Fraga. 7pm, Barnes & Noble, Weberstown Mall, Stockton. Info, www.poetscornerpress.com or (209) 951-7014.

Bill Pieper reads from his latest book, *Gomez*. Richard Hansen hosts. 4pm at The Book Collector, 1008 24th Street, Sacramento; info: 442-9295.

Calendar continued...

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

The Pomo Literati KUSF 90.3 FM in San Francisco (www.kusf.edu) 2-4 pm. Special guests Bill Gainer and Chris Olander. A never before studio B session with Sacramento writer/musician David Houston with The Cristina's. Plus pre-recorded works by Joe Donahoe, Bucky Sinister, Beth Lisick, frank andrick, Lee Ranaldo, Patti Smith, Philip Lamantia and many more! Produced and anchor/hosted by frank andrick.

14 Monday

Sacramento Poetry Center presents Julia Levine and Ruth L. Schwartz; host: Bob Stanley. 7:30pm, SPC/HQ for the Arts, 1719 25th (25th and R Sts.) Info: 451-5569 or www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org. Free.

Sacramento Poetry Center Board Meeting, 6 pm, Hamburger Mary's (17th and K.) Info: spc@sacramentopoetrycenter.org or 451-5569.

15 Tuesday

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

Third Tuesday Poetry Series presents Michael Pulley and Nwando Mbanugo. Hosts: Art & Christina Montecon. Q&A follows reading. 7pm at La Raza Bookstore, 1421 R Street. Info: 743-5329. Free.

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

16 Wednesday

Urban Voices presents Quinton DuVall and Will Staple. Hosted by BL Kennedy, 6:30-8pm, South Natomas Library, 2901 Truxel Rd. Free.

California Lectures presents TC Boyle, author of 7 collections of short stories and 10 novels. Winner of many awards, including from the Gugenhiem Foundation, National Academy of Arts and Letters and the O'Henry Award. 737-1300, www.californialectures.org. 7:30pm Crest Theatre, 1013 K St., \$24.

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

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

Joshua McKinney reads with a few CSUS alumni poets in the Library Gallery on the CSUS campus at 7pm.

17 Thursday

Poetry Unplugged presents Bill Gainer, Tod Cirillo, and Song Cow Bell; frank andrick hosts. Open mic before/after. 8pm at Luna's Café, 1414 16th St. Info: 441-3931 or www.lunascafe.com. Free.

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

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Evening of Poetry: Host: La-Rue. 7:00 pm. Gwen's Caribbean Cuisine, 2355 Arden Way. Info: 284-7831

18 Friday

The Jook Joynt 3: NY poet Ainsley Burrows. Host: Khiry Malik Moore. Hard Rock Café. 545 7th Street. \$15. www.Malikspeaks.com or mailikspeaks@aol.com

The Nevada County Poetry Series will be celebrating its annual Giant open-mic and the release of its 2005 anthology in the Off-Center Stage at the Center for the Arts, 314 W. Main Street, Grass Valley. For information call (530) 432-8196.

19 Saturday

Underground Poetry Series presents Flo Real and Terry Moore with open mic for Candlelight Love Poem Night. Underground Books, 35th and Broadway (next to Starbucks). Info: Terry Moore, 455-POET. \$3.

20 Sunday

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

21 Monday

The Sacramento Poetry Center presents Bob Stanley. Stan Zumbiel hosts. 7:30pm, SPC/HQ for the Arts, 1719 25th (25th and R Sts.). Info: 451-5569 or www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org.

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

22 Tuesday

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List Your Event:

To have an event listed on the SPC Literary Calendar, please email us at: calendar@sacramentopoetrycenter.org, dphunkt@mac.com or call Robert Grossklaus at: (916) 337-8962 by the 5th of the month preceding your event.

Thank you.

Calendar con't...

25 Friday

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

26 Saturday

The Show presents Rodzilla, The Forgotten One, and Born 2B Poets with open mic contest (\$20 prize) 7-9pm. Wo'se Community Center. 2863 35th Street. Tickets, \$5 Underground Books or fromtheheart1@hotmail.com. Info: Terry Moore, 455-POET.

28 Monday

The Sacramento Poetry Center presents the Zen Marxist Launderettes (Ellen Johnson, Erin Doyle, Carolyn Schneider, Emily Wright, Margaret S. Burns, Laura Ann Walton, Sandra K. Senne, Mira Kores, Cecile Martin). Rhony Bhopla hosts. 7:30pm, SPC/HQ for the Arts, 1719 25th (25th and R Sts). Info: 451-5569 or www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org. Free.

December 1

The Sacramento Poetry Center's Annual Bennefit at the home of Burnett and Mimi Miller. 6-8pm. Poetry, music and silent auction. Details forthcoming at www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org.

December 3

Poetry in Rancho Cordova: Club Itaewon, 2942 Bradshaw Road (near King Skate), T-Mo, 519-5213, www.fingerprintpress.com/terry. \$3.

A Calonyction Coming

(I had watched for them all summer)

Early one morning they come, five moon-flowers
full bloom like dancing girls with wide, white slips
reach out through the green vines finding grip
on the walls and along the eaves of my shed.

Full bloom like young brides with wide, white slips
they dance on a garden house stained barn-red.
By the walls beneath the eaves of the shed
opened to fullness by the light of moon,

they dance on a garden house stained barn-red,
lingering now in the slant of Autumn-
light, as if the brightness of the moon
still were shining in the shadowed east.

They linger now, in the slant of Autumn,
the earth's angle turning away from sun,
two stay all day beside the shadowed east
that blurs the edges of the browning leaves.

The earth's angle turning away from sun
deepens the green of hearts the vine weaves,
softens the blurred edges of brown leaves
in the early morning of moon flowers.

—Allegra Jostad Silberstein

Allegra Jostad Silberstein lives in Davis, California. She is a retired teacher who now has more time for writing poetry and performance as a dancer. Also, she leads a liturgical dance group, sings and plays the recorder. Her poems have been published in *Poetry Depth Quarterly*, *Poetry Now*, *Poetry of the New West*, *California Quarterly*, *Rattlesnake Review*, and other journals and anthologies. Her chapbook, *Acceptance*, was published in 1999.

On the way

At seven o'clock in the evening
on the way to a poetry reading
I saw by the edge of the road
in a clear space open to mountains
just past the crowding of houses,
a shimmering:
sun polished wild oats,
golden seed pearls
strung on their stalks
swaying in perfect freedom,
easy in a gentle breeze.

For these brief moments
miracles seemed logical:
how certain gifted believers
can be given Mary visions,
how the heart stops momentarily
and then does a little flip-flop
when the beloved appears,
how the cripple can walk
and the blind be given sight,
how rainbows are a promise...

At half-past the next hour
when it came my turn to read
the words had gone astray.
I spoke pale shadows
beside an inner ache
for the wayside
shining I had seen earlier.

Would that I could sprinkle words
with holy water, set them like a seal
upon my palm, press them to my lips
and let them fall upon the page
like evening sunlight on wild oats.

—Allegra Jostad Silberstein

Allegra Jostad Silberstein reads at The Book Collector on Nov. 9th. See calendar for details.



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throughout the Sacramento area and
beyond?

For details, contact us at:

poetrynow@sacramentopoetrycenter.org.

Gristled Angels

I.
They were lovely once, untouched,
But at midnight in the Tenderloin, they are laying out
the rags and wrappers and half-finished sodas—
they are displaying lamps, pamphlets,
even a prosthetic leg
that the youngest crack-head touches,
flicking her hair back in a gesture
left from middle school, and who knows,
stoned as she is, whether the plastic foot
looks like a twisted wand,
or a nostalgic galaxy of sinew
connecting some kind of tenderness
to absence,

or why the dooper lunges at her
with a knife, until running,
blood everywhere, she thinks,
It tastes like salt, it tastes like home.

II.
This week, in my office, the boy
the social worker brings,
arrives in a rising tide of terror,
until it seems his mother crouches there,
behind my couch, clutching a razor,
while his small arms, his fierce bite,
strike and grab her
hair instead of mine, instead of me--
though I kneel over him,
glazed with sweat and spit,
holding on.
And when the boy
finally slips back into his body,
I touch his cheek.
He looks up.
Asks, Is it true?
Can you really break your heart?

III.
Swept down, and slowly
in the dark, in silence,
there is a deep soreness, an accidental opening,
where I've let hope too far in,

while around the bay, a vast summer
explodes in gulls and terns,

rivers fingering the elliptical shores,
estuaries rimmed in scotch broom,

three untouched girls on the beach,
swinging ropes, singing.

Here one could wake.

Or go on drifting
in a small craft

as the weather suddenly turns wrong
—wind blowing hard out of South—

the sea's enormous swells
fighting my scull,

the world's complicated armada of suffering
floating out of that boy's beginning-- his mother
waking, at fourteen, from a weeklong high.

Even if the gristled angels rise like buoys;

Even if we have to motor through the dark water
of the otherworld,

Do you see how easily a child grasps
that he is unfinished?

That the vile story has to be lanced,

before he can become a pocket again
for light, for nothing

but the present--
astounding in its plain speech, it's possibility.

-for V.

—Julia Levine

Julia Levine
reads with Ruth
L. Schwartz at
SPC/HQ on
Nov. 14th. See
calendar for
details.

Julia Levine has won numerous prizes and awards for her poetry, including the 2003 Tampa Review Poetry Prize for her latest full-length collection, *Ask*, the 1998 Anhinga Poetry Prize for her first poetry collection, *Practicing for Heaven*, a Discovery/the Nation award, the Pablo Neruda Poetry prize from Nimrod, the Lullwater Review Prize in Poetry and the 2004 Sacramento Poetry Center Prize. Published in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Ploughshares*, *The Southern Review*, *The Southeast Review* and *Prairie Schooner*, she lives and works in Davis, California.

On Whatever Form the Past Assumes Waiting for Us to Enter

Each evening, the pond drawing in its breath of koi
and letting it out as stars and streetlights,
the children begging every story to take them closer,
while beyond us, tractors stand in fields
like sentries, waiting for deep night
to come alive.

The corn splits and shreds into silk.
Your father calls from across the county
to catalogue the towns, the friends,
he is losing to the past.
Memory pools in the yard's dark fjords.
A hunger not unlike hurt
gathers the fabled bodies, stony and patient
as statuary, as the delicate hands
that braid an hour into a life
there, in the blackest halls of shrubbery,
in October, all those mythic ears pricked to water,
the youngest child stepping outside
before bed, certain she has seen something
beneath the five cypresses, everything
suddenly poured into stillness,
everything listening.

—Julia Levine

Come take a walk with James DenBoer and his black dog; a walk through two seasons, from winter to spring. A walking meditation on nature, the nature of sensory experience, and what is beyond the senses. As DenBoer writes: “Walking the dog/is the time to see along the road/ahead.”

Black Dog: An Unfinished Segue Between Two Seasons is a long poem deftly arranged in three sections: Winter, Spring, and a short Coda. The Sacramento reader will encounter familiar geography, from Paragary’s brick oven, with “it’s wood smoke...full of chickens and calzone,” to Arden Ditch, where the speaker asks its “trinity ducks” to “pray for us...among the orange peels, waxed wrappers, and shredded black tires.”

DenBoer’s black dog is both literal and figurative. Black dog is a walking companion who “must investigate every grated sewer opening.” Black dog is also a means to measure how far apart humans exist from their animal nature. “Black dog is all himself; unlike me,/who is filled with everyone else and those/nothings we continue to believe in, like dead parents and lost friends/and beliefs themselves./Black dog has no friends;/he would bite anyone that looks like God./He has no belief, he is all action.” Black dog is Churchill’s black dog, too; that black dog of depression that “sits on my brain.” A black dog that “will tear me like God believes he can.”

As the poem progresses through winter’s dark season, DenBoer makes an exciting metaphysical leap when he writes, “the sky is still as gray as a gull in gravel/on the river bar and storm clouds thump up//higher than God, and blacker than his eyes./Or the eyes of his black dog, staring away from spring.” Don’t despair, the speaker and his black dog lead us out of the darkness. We walk through winter’s discontent and into the “astonishing theodicy of spring.” A well-selected word, theodicy: an argument in defense of god’s goodness despite the existence of evil.

It is in nature and in the quotidian—and in studying his black dog—that the speaker finds hope and moments of understanding. “Black dog doesn’t have our skepticism,/but he has the right response: this night/is fantastic enough, and the answer/to the game of unbelief is the clear moist air/ of the ordinary.”

I take lessons from the black dog
who also learns from me. We
segue from unbelief to belief and back again.
If god lives within
the body of a dog and of a man,
is it the same god? If god has built

these small beings, what was its lesson?
There’s no way to say
that I am a black dog and have you believe
me. But if I say
a black dog lives in me, rages,
weeps, bites and clicks its thick claws

down the asphalt, then you have a choice
to walk with us each early morning
or late at night whatever the weather.
And any god who wants may come along.

Nature and the black dog also teach the speaker about poetry. “Poetry achieves, uh, itself, only by stripping out emotion/and approaching a condition of pure abstraction./Easy for dogs to do, pure dreamers.” DenBoer may, in fact, be on the verge of an *ars poetica*. “The orange window-sill, the blue bottles,/the red and green geranium,/all have parts to play in the picture of meaning. The eye/is the first circle, said Emerson,/and its voice waves overhead,/ring chasing ring, to light/on the yellow black white magpie!”

A reader will have no doubt that DenBoer has mastered the art of seeing, and the art of writing poetry. It is important to note that this Rattlechap’s cover drawing is by the author. The gestures of three trees are elegantly captured, resulting in a drawing rich with meaning.

Reading *Black Dog* brought to mind other long poems I’ve enjoyed, in particular, Charles Wright’s “Homage to Paul Cezanne” and Carolyn Forché’s “The Angel of History.” DenBoer’s long poem lends itself exceptionally well to the chapbook format, and he and Kathy Kieth, Rattlesnake Press’s publisher and editor, have produced a truly remarkable book. Kieth continues to bring exciting writing from the community to the community, and her newest Rattlechap showcases one of Sacramento’s most distinguished writers.

Black Dog will inspire the reader to seek out other works by the author. His *Learning the Way* was the winner of the International Poetry Forum U.S. Award, and *Trying to Come Apart* was a National Council on the Arts award-winner. I highly recommend *Dreaming of the Chinese Army* (Blue Thunder Books, Michigan, 1999), which is available at The Book Collector. You can also purchase *Black Dog: A Segue Between Two Seasons* at The Book Collector, 1008 24th Street, Sacramento, CA, or order it directly from Rattlesnake Press, 4708 Shade Tree Place, Fair Oaks, CA 95628. Price: \$5.

The Bitter Suite by Robert Roden

reviewed by Ramona Soto

In the aptly-named *The Bitter Suite*, Robert Roden explores a range of complex personal relationships. There are intimate glimpses into a young family, an extended family of aunts and uncles, and relationships between men and women in the larger world.

Many of the poems explore Roden’s interior monologue while caring for mundane tasks. While a few of the pieces seem uncomfortably intimate, as when one overhears embarrassingly trivial personal dialogue between family members, there are brilliant flashes of closely-observed interactions that should not be missed.

The title of the poem “Eye-Bury,” for example, at first may seem cutesy, as it’s simply toddler talk for the word “library.” However, Roden then invests this toddler language with meaning, using each stanza to comment on a different writer to be found at the library and continuing the image of “eye” and “bury”: “And the vanishing point between life and art, uncovering/Sylvia Plath’s poetry while pondering the image/Of her craned neck, how she buried her eyes in the oven’s depth.” And again: “The eyes of Albert Camus, bashed against/The dashboard, buried in his cerebrum--/While the last manuscript flies out the window.”

In “Royalty,” Roden uses medieval images whimsically to recount another small event of daily life: a meal with a toddler. The highchair becomes “his throne,” as the boy “guillotines a peeled banana/.../Then tosses his unwanted scraps/To the floor: a tiny moat/Of crumbs for some imagined peasants.” The result? “...the manservant must kneel and bend,/Like a creaking bridge, to pick them up.” ⇒

If a few of Roden's pieces about home life with small children seem to have been written while either blinded by infatuation for his young family or numbed by the attending lack of sleep, perhaps that's partly the point. In "Rising" and, especially, in "The 25th Hour," he addresses the challenge of continuing to write while exhausted from the demands of caring for a young child ("Yes, your son will rise at 6:00/Or soon thereafter, and your wife/Has been asleep for nearly an hour now./Do not let that stop you...")

It didn't stop him. In fact, Roden's gift for metaphor glows in "Night Calls". It is again the middle of the night (as it always seems to be when there is a new baby in the house), but this time there are "...Northern Mockingbirds/Outside my window" calling constantly. The wife's sleep is disturbed, and her lashes "flit against my chin./***...Her hands leap/Into the dark like frantic birds/At the sight of suddenly shifting light;/One finger pecks the air/..." The last stanza of the poem brilliantly suggests a hypnotic, rhythmic birdcall ("What did he do?/What did he do?/He kissed her/He kissed her/"), as the wife is lulled back to sleep even as the night birds continue their chatter.

Another extended metaphor—a game of Othello—is used in "The Play" to describe the tense swordplay often interwoven into a relationship. Othello—a game of strategy in which a game can be lost suddenly if the opponent makes an unpredictable move, flipping the black and white pieces over to his/her color—is a fitting metaphor for the risks involved in intimate human connection: "You are turning over something in the living/Room, but I will take the bathroom/Opposite the closet. On my way, I will beat you/In the bedroom, flipping the black comforter/Over the white sheets on the bed/That I have just made. A few moves later/You will turn pale as a handkerchief./As I leave through the front door of this/Smothering condominium..."

Several pieces in *The Bitter Suite* touch on troubled relationships. Perhaps the most extreme is examined in "Foreign Sick Medicine," which charts the course of a man's murderous jealousy: "I'm pretty sure that night he lay/Beside her sleeping body, then rose/And dusted her for fingerprints/Or any other hints of her unfaithfulness." Later: "The following morning he shook/Her awake for a fresh/Session of interrogation." Finally: "He pulled his service revolver/From its cold holster,/Having judged the case unfit/For further trial..."

But it is Roden's family and their milestones of births and deaths that figure most prominently throughout this book. A series of poems about the death and cremation of his grandmother, as well as the dividing up and sprinkling of her ashes, illuminates frictions within the extended family. However, some darkly funny images surface in "Mother's Mother Died Today, Or Maybe Yesterday..." In it, as the family gathers on a pier to toss the ashes into the ocean, they meet the task with a wry sense of humor. They see signs on the railing prohibiting overhead casting, "So my family members will have to fling/The ashes underhand. Another/Sign warns that mussels and clams/Found here are not fit for human/Consumption, but there are no admonitions/Against tossing your mother over/The edge of the retainer."

This illustrates Roden at his best: exposing the complexities of relationships—the ability of humans to love imperfectly, to glimpse light through the numbing shock of grief—and letting the reader peer over his shoulder into the small observations that form a rich life.

Sex

It's the church of pleasure and sorrow.
All its intricate windows have been smashed.
It holds the places where the stars
opened inside us, blood on shattered glass.
It holds the light between us,
brighter than anything –
except for the equal measure of darkness,
sealed inside our bodies,

which eclipses it.

O stubborn animal, celestial, transforming.
O spasm which loves nothing but itself,
aware of nothing but itself, grateful to nothing.
O firefly which asks, What do you most want?
as it sputters out.

—Ruth L. Schwartz

Ruth L. Schwartz is the author of four books of poems and a memoir, including *Dear Good Naked Morning* (Autumn House 2005), selected by Alicia Ostriker for the 2004 Autumn House Prize, and *Edgewater* (HarperCollins 2002), chosen by Jane Hirshfield for the National Poetry Series. She is the recipient of numerous national awards, including grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Ohio Arts Council, and the Astraea Foundation. After teaching at Cleveland State University, California State University Fresno, Mills College and elsewhere, she has left academia behind and is currently a certified Depth Hypnosis practitioner and shamanic counselor in Oakland, CA. For more information, please visit her at www.DepthHypnotherapy.com, or at www.RuthSchwartz.com.

Trees in Wind

How sure they are, the trees in wind,
gangly, manic, drugged, exuberant; rustling,
reckless, lost; wringing a thousand hands
over a thousand graves; placing long fingers
to long lips, saying Hush, all is not lost
that you think is lost; saying There are costs
you have not yet paid. They know more than you
want to know, you who want to know

everything. They know more than that and aim
to tell it all night long, in song you can't repeat
or translate; Don't forget, they say, and pray, equally
to the gods of wind and ground; chance and purpose;
air and failure; gods of all things fallen, their limbs
block the way, arrow toward the way.

—Ruth L. Schwartz

Ruth L. Schwartz reads with Julia Levine at SPC/HQ
on Nov. 14th. See calendar for details.

Rainbow Blue

1

you may not
understand
at first

but you keep
at it, looking
beyond
as if

window
narrowing your eyes
learned to focus
invisible

2

now that you've spent time
writing first thoughts

let's divide up into small groups
of around fifty million

3

The card:
she wanted it to say
witness to the world
speaker of sand and sea.

4

Each October
in the blue village
blue leaves fall
from the blue tree

January brings
blue snow
drifting from
blue-grey billows

and Spring rains
again paint
hillsides a soft
emerald blue
In the turning of seasons
how long I've watched
this rainbow
depart and return.

—Bob Stanley



twenty ought something

Letters still the same, numbers
run their usual course, turning over

ten times ten, we watch the ball
come down, they set it up again.

I turned around and there you were.
We share the banked path of zero,

while children come and go,
future racing on the way to past

is now, it is the same
as always. In the picture

empire turns to itself,
so we build a bonfire, a frozen

lake, smoke turning into stars
is all we need, the dome of sky

to attach our selves –
the wild terrific sky.

—Bob Stanley

Bob Stanley has led poetry workshops for nearly twenty years, and is an active member of the Sacramento Poetry Center. His poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Hidden Oak*, *California Quarterly*, *Calaveras Station and PDQ*, as well as in *100 Poems: The Sacramento Anthology*. Bob recently received his MA in Creative Writing from Sacramento State, and is teaching composition at Sacramento City College, American River College, and Solano Community College.

The Coloring War, 1943

At The Frederickson's, Potrero Hill Housing Projects

Lila and I on the floor – coloring in a book
about war. While the grownups drink their

beer, it's our job to hate the enemy. Our
weapon is wax, and we color American heroes.

We wear the points off red crayons on the lips
of nurses, the crosses on an Army ambulance,

or hospital tent. We wear down our gray crayon
on Navy battleships, destroyers, cruisers and carriers.

Blue for the wild blue yonder which we've come
to call the sky. Green for the jungle where yellow

Japanese hide in machine-gun nests. We also use
yellow for the gold-star flag given to mothers whose

sons are missing in action. War is hell, say the adults
as we listen and learn its glory and color.

—Elsie Whitlow Feliz

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

We accept poetry, book reviews, event commentary, poetry-related articles and interviews. Accompanying these with short biographies and pictures (B&W or high-contrast color JPEGs are preferred) is welcomed. Please submit 3-6 poems at a time. Include your name, address, phone number and email address on *each page*. Email submissions of poetry are not encouraged. Please send your work along with a self-addressed stamped envelope to:

Poetry Now c/o
Sacramento Poetry Center
1719 25th Street
Sacramento, CA 95816

Reviews, articles and pictures can be sent via
email to:

poetrynow@sacramentopoetrycenter.org
or dphunkt@mac.com.

Please keep book reviews between 500-1500
words, event commentaries between 100-250
words and interviews and articles between
500-2000 words.

Please note that accepted work will also be
available on our website:
www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org

The Map of Memory

This is how I remember:

with words on white paper
black and white photos
taken on a windy hill

This is what I remember:

singing in the Molokan church
the wrinkles on Bunya's face
here eyes shining bright with love

This is what I remember:

the soldiers visiting her house
her daughters, my aunts dancing
to Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey

This is what I remember:

everybody eating, jitterbugging
Bunya knitting socks for the soldiers
as I sat under the table, listening

This is why I remember:

I am named for Bunya
she lives inside my head, inside my heart
and she will tell me when the party is over.

—Elsie Whitlow Feliz

Local blogs/websites to check out:

Rhony Bhopla: <http://rhonybhopla.blogspot.com/>
Brad Buchanan: www.miracleshirker.blogspot.com
Molly Fisk: <http://www.mollyfisk.com>
Robert Grossklaus: www.xanga.com/dphunkt6/
Richard Hansen: <http://www.sacfreepress.com/poems/>
Ben L. Hiatt: <http://digitaldawg.blogspot.com/>
David Humphreys: www.poetscornerpress.com
<http://poetscornerpress.blogspot.com>
James Lee Jobe: <http://putahcreek.blogspot.com/>
Colette Jonopulos: <http://colettej.blogspot.com/>
<http://tigerseyepoet.blogspot.com/>
Kathy Kieth: <http://medusaskitchen.blogspot.com/>
Crawdad Nelson: <http://www.crawdadnelson.com/>
Larry Stenzel: www.larrystenzel.com
Patricia Wellingham-Jones:
<http://www.wellinghamjones.com>
Max West: <http://flasheslightning.blogspot.com>
Various: <http://greatamericanpinup.blogspot.com/>

Do you have a poetry blog or website you'd like people to know about? Email the web address to: dphunkt@mac.com.

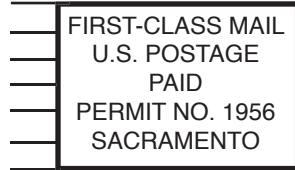
Recently Released/Available Again:

1. *Why I Collect Moose* by Svea Barrett
winner the first Poet's Corner Press chapbook contest 2005
2. *The Miracle Shirker* by Brad Buchanan (Poet's Corner Press)
3. *Black Dog* by James DenBoer (Rattlesnake Press)
4. *Joe's Rain* by Quinton Duval (Cedar House Books, POBox 73, Manchester, WA 98353; www.cedarhousebooks.org)
5. *Free Wheeling* ed. Elsie Whitlow Feliz
(Towe Auto Museum, www.toweautomuseum.org)
6. *Using Your Turn Signal Promotes World Peace* (CD) by Molly Fisk
7. *Running Away With Gary the Mattress Salesman* by Catherine Fraga (Poet's Corner Press)
8. *Skunk Talk* by Albert Garcia (Bear Star Press)
9. *Under the Shuttle, Awake* by Taylor Graham
(Dancing Girl Press)
10. *Fangs #1* ed. Robert Grossklaus (Rattlesnake Press)
11. *The Empress of Certain* by Norbert Hirschhorn
(Poet's Corner Press)
12. *Driving Without a Map* by Margaret Hoehn
13. *The Land* by Susan Kelly-DeWitt (Rattlesnake Press)
14. *Rattlesnake Review #7* ed. Kathy Kieth (Rattlesnake Press)
15. *The Commuters: A Novel of Intersections* by Cheryl Klein
(City Works Press)
16. *Erik and Laura-Marie Magazine #29* by Laura-Marie
17. *Territorio Nuevo (littlesnake broadside #16)* by Irene Lipshin
(Rattlesnake Press)
18. *All From Elsewhere* by William Ludington
19. *The Novice Mourner* by Josh McKinney
(2005 Dorothy Brunsman Poetry Prize at Bear State Press)
20. *El Sobrante: Selected Poems, 1975-2005* by Charlie Macdonald
21. *Letters With Taloned Claws* by Eileen Malone
(Poet's Corner Press)
22. *We Have Tress* by Alexa Mergen
23. *Bigfoot Lives* by Crawdad Nelson
24. *Brevities #32* ed. Joyce Odam
25. *A Whooping Crane Diary* by Jeff Ross
26. *Ithaca* by Gilbert Schedler (Poet's Corner Press)
27. *The Common Fire* by Shelley Sevren
28. *In the Folds* by Allegra Jostad Silberstein (Rattlesnake Press)
29. *Mudsong* by Michael Spring
30. *Greatest Hits 1981-2004* by Hannah Stein
31. *An Ocean-Front Hotel Room* by Ron Tranquilla
(Rattlesnake Press)
32. *This Land Is Not My Land* by A.D. Winans (Presa Press)
33. *State of Siege* broadside by A.D. Winans
(Black Shark Press: www.mysteryisland.net/shotglass07)
34. *King* broadside painting/print by F. N. Wright
(Black Shark Press: www.mysteryisland.net/shotglass11)

Do you have a recently released book or know of one that you feel should be listed here? Contact us at poetrynow@sacramentopoetrycenter.org with the title, author, publisher and any quips, quotes or even lengthy reviews of the work.

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Thinking About Trees

In a valley town
 in a wooden house
 my mother
 hung a poem on the kitchen wall.

I was outside
 climbing the great black walnut
 tree.

My mother
 planted an orange tree.
 Like a tart ball of sun
 the fruit puckered my mouth.

In a valley town
 in a wooden house
 my sons and daughters
 outside

picked autumn red pomegranates,
 climbed the beckoning apricot tree.

Now,
 gone from the valley town
 Kilmer's poem hangs on my kitchen wall
 in this condominium
 looking at Japanese maple,
 liquid amber, fruitless pear.

—Gaylel Von Geldren

Intrusion

Your golden body
 may have tarnished your
 sensuous voice might
 even crack.
 Twenty five years are gone.

Uninvited
 you invade my mind
 while I wait
 for the traffic light to change.

Maybe the couple in the Pontiac Firebird
 or an Acker Bilk solo on the radio
 breezes you through me
 sparkling
 like sunshine
 weaving waves
 of yesterdays I cannot forget.

Your silence burdens me yet

—Gaylel Von Geldren