

A Publication of the Sacramento Poetry Center

Poetry Now

October 2004
Vol. 10, No. 10

Love and Finance
(an investment venture)

Options open into trust
A wink, a thrust
In someone's direction
Capital

No guaranty
No disclosure
No dividend
No Fidelity

She wanted security
In principle
But ventured too far
In interest

The Account matures
But in the balance
Withdrawal is complete.
Account closed.

What were the options:
Futures Exchanged for Profit
A margin of error maybe

—Monika Rose

What would redeem her value
What would ensure her safe deposit,
and accrued investment

(Monika Rose will be reading Monday,
Oct. 18th— see calendar for details.)

Her Assets spill like liquid at a rate
Growing in interest but lacking in trust
Mutual ambition will fund his eyes

Stocks split into late profit
Yields rebound briefly
Performance is flexible
Equity bonds too much

He looks elsewhere
A trade for gains
Her loss at issue
Evaporates into

Contributors to this Issue:

G.O. Clark, Melody S. Gee, Tom Goff, David
Rogers, Monika Rose, Nicole Pouchet Skuba,
Ann Wehrman

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Submissions of poems, artwork, and other works of interest to the Sacramento poetry community are welcome. Work **MUST** be accompanied by a SASE for return. B&W or high contrast color photos & brief bios of submitters are encouraged. Please note that poems, reviews, etc. submitted to any of the Sacramento Poetry Center's publications may appear on the Sacramento Poetry Center's website:

www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org. Please send submissions to: **1631 K St., Sacramento, CA 95814**. Email submissions are not encouraged. Poetry Now is widely distributed free in area bookshops, coffeehouses, community colleges, etc. 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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President's Message

Hello again.

Some news from the California legislature and Governor Schwarzenegger...

On September 9th, the governor signed legislation increasing the license and renewal fees for the Arts license plates. The fees will increase to \$50 for new Arts license plates and \$40 for renewals. This is great news for Arts organizations that receive funding through the California Arts Council. Nearly half of all the fees go to arts education programs and grant funding. The Sacramento Poetry Center was fortunate to benefit from this program this fiscal year when the California Arts Council received little funding.

Book Launch

Something to look forward to on October 9th. Chip Spann's book *Poet Healer: Contemporary Poems for Health and Healing* will be celebrated. I have seen the hard work Chip has spent collecting poems and creating the book. The binders filled with correspondence from publishers, authors, and poets are amazing (and very difficult to lift). This project has been the culmination of Chip's teaching efforts, his passion for poetry, his passion for medicine and his passion for humanity. Please check out this event. I'm sure Chip would love to tell you some of the great stories from this undertaking.

Please join us for revelry as we celebrate the publication of **Poet Healer!**
Sacramento's Second Saturday
October 9, 2004 6:00 – 8:00 PM
Sutter's LAMP Literature Arts and Medicine Program; Sutter Medical Center, Sacramento
Buhler Building/Cancer Center
2800 L Street, Room 220 (second floor)

Sacramento Poetry Day: October 26

October 26th is Sacramento Poetry Day as proclaimed by former and current Mayors of Sacramento: Anne Rudin, the late Joe Serna and Heather Fargo. This October 26th, the Sacramento Poetry Center will host an event on the Capitol Steps (at the corner of 11th and L Streets, north steps, facing L Street) to commemorate Sacramento Poetry Day with a poetry reading. Readers will be given 3-5 minutes to read their favorite poems. The event will go from 11:00 A.M. until 1:30 P.M.

Save the Date: November 5, 2004

Check this out... what a lineup! **Albert Garcia** and **Jeff Knorr** will read from their most recent work at Cosumnes River College, in Room BS129, from 12-12:50 p.m. Don't miss this outstanding reading! For more information, please contact Lisa Abraham at 916-691-7379.

Tryst with Destiny

This was a very successful event with many people attending the festivities. There was

wonderful poetry, native dancing, and great Indian food to enjoy. The Sacramento Poetry Center thanks the contributors to the August 16, 2004 Tryst with Destiny event hosted by Rhony Bhopla. The following were participants at the event: Usha Bhatani, Usha Ahuja, Azmina Bhanji, Neelam Canto-Lugo, Ursula Khajani, Maya Khosla, Abhjit Khullar, Pallavi Pandya, Prabhjot Rai, Sunaina Rao. Also, thank you to our event sponsors, volunteers and attendees.

For those of you who missed getting a copy of Maya Khosla's book *Keel Bone*, you can find it on-line at Bear Star Press:
<http://www.bearstarpress.com>.

Newest Board Member

At our last board meeting, Rhony Bhopla joined the board of directors. She has shown lots of energy and enthusiasm, with the Tryst with Destiny event as an example. To catch her in poetry action, come to SPC on November 1, 2004, where she'll be presenting: "A Brief Exploration of Mental Illness in the Arts."

Thanks to Straight Out Scribes

Congratulations on the successful "Locks" event that was a benefit for the Jamaican Student Exchange Program. Stajaabu and V.S. Chochezi coordinated this event which was hosted by the Sacramento Poetry Center over two days. We are proud to be involved with such dedicated individuals that promote community and poetry in Sacramento.

Fairy Tale Town

Once again, the Sacramento Poetry Center was out at their booth for the Children's Book Celebration at Fairy Tale Town. This event lasted over almost two days. It was originally scheduled for Saturday and Sunday (Sept. 18th and 19th). But, unfortunately, on Sunday, the day was cut a little short due to the thunderstorms and lightning and, oh yeah, the two inches of rain in an hour. It was still successful, though, with children creating poems with magnetic poetry and also making poetry necklaces and bracelets with poetry beads. It was a big hit and we had kids around all day at the SPC poetry booth. So, thank you to Fairy Tale Town, Heather Hutcheson for organizing the SPC booth, and the volunteers: Sandra Senne and Traci Gourdine.



Patricia Wellingham-Jones. Voices on the Land.

Reviewed by Tom Goff

Chapbook, 28 numbered pages. 2004. Rattlesnake Press, 4708 Tree Shadow Place, Fair Oaks, CA 95628. Inquiries: Kathy Kieth: kathykieth@hotmail.com. ISBN # 0-9753350-2-2.

Muriel Rukeyser, in *The Life of Poetry*, describes American poetry as suspended between opposing tensions: outrage and possibility. I hasten to add that possibility, in Patricia Wellingham-Jones's verses, is as potent as outrage; yet I can think of no more effective antiwar poem than Wellingham-Jones's "The Cleanest War in History." Included in *Voices on the Land*, this poem bodies forth exactly how war is forever—in Garry Wills' phrase—"ratcheting up" its own blood-soaked intensity, far beyond the battle-makers' power to halt, slow, or even foresee the full horror. For depicting as it does war's eerily blame-transcendent evil, the poem deserves quoting in full:

The Cleanest War in History

They are calling this the cleanest war in all of military history.
—Tom Brokaw, April 2, 2003

Tell that to the ravens
plucking out eyes
on the blood-packed sand

To fathers cradling
the last of their hopes
in the torn bodies of sons

To young girls swelling
with the unwanted gifts
of swift strong soldiers

To mothers and wives
pulling veils of grief
over their faces as they wash the dead

Tell the children
who wander dazed with thirst, alone
among rat-swarmed ruins

how lucky they are

To quote "The Cleanest War" is almost to obscure the deftness and delicacy of the whole collection, and yet this poem has subtlety, too. Removing the end punctuations leaves each stanza horrifically intact yet mutes each image-burst in a reticent haze, as if the reporter's voice trailed off, mercifully inarticulate. But the choked sarcasm of the last line (befitting the clipped "Tell it to the Marines" cadences) is unmistakable. The poem works as a bearing of witness and a shudder of revulsion; such emotional directness is typical of this poet.

Wellingham-Jones's other poems offer direct message and artful delivery. A trained psychologist, Wellingham-Jones never hesitates to point fingers, less at a mistaken friend or neighbor than at the source of the trouble in that person's behavior. An example of this kind of poem is "Unadorned," where a male acquaintance with a

"cluttered mind" mischaracterizes Shaker furniture as "simple."

What is rather moving, as well as amusing, is to see the poet attest to her own foibles. For her, tact counts for much, and its absence is a real sin, especially in bullish males (I infer this from other poems of hers I've read). Oddly, Wellingham-Jones seems not to suffer the long-winded gladly: thus the speaker in "Coming At Me" silently decries how the woman in conversation with her

talks nonstop in a semi-knowledgeable
way that grates down my spine
like a file rasping on a rusty nail.

Such weariness, perhaps, is a hazard for all whose professions require sustained listening. Here, though, the speaker's distaste contends with compassion and insight for control of the poem. For this reason, the final lines—

I wonder, as I will for days,
what cosmic gift, small kernel of truth,
comes packaged in this tidy small woman.

—ring with truthful appreciation and condescension, neither emotion unnoticed by the alert author. Don't misunderstand: this self-honest awareness of multiple motives and undercurrents is fascinating. And even as I'm mildly irritated by the easy clichés of "Victimhood Empowered," in "Summer Camp for Women Writers"—

No need here
for placating grimace
teeth bared in submission

—I admit envying the one male invited to the restaurant among the ladies-only discussion group, in "Honorary Woman." It's easy to enjoy (and to wish I'd said) such lines as:

Himself announced to the table at large,
Good conversation has no gender.
I've been lonesome
in a group of men talking sports.

There is a rich variety in this collection, too. The nature poems, justifying the title, are good; several effectively juxtapose human with animal psychology. But what lingers after the pages are shut is the sense, not just that this is real poetry, with its "criticism of life," but that the argument is conducted with vigor inside the chambers of the self. Even the polemical poems benefit from rigorous self-argument; the structures have the right kind of stiffness and the right kind of give.

And all this is true for Wellingham-Jones in the way it was true for Rukeyser: the poems of *Voices on the Land*, like those of her great predecessor, seem to take action; but they are really preparing us for thought, since they set us clear and poetic examples of thought. Can it be that these verses, with their intricate crotchets and self-questionings, exemplify the poetical life, lived "all the way up?"

Literary Calendar for October 2004

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

2 Saturday

First Saturday Series. TBA. Noah Hayes hosts, 8pm, Theatre on the Boulevard, 1901 Del Paso Blvd. Open mic after. Info: Supanova09@hotmail.com or Sac_Town_Poetry@hotmail.com . \$5 donation

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.

3 Sunday

Sacramento Unitarian Church, 6:00 pm, TBA , 2425 Sierra Blvd., Rms 7/8. Info: Tom Goff, Nora Staklis, 481-3312; JoAnn Anglin at 451-1372.

4 Monday

Sacramento Poetry Center presents Shawn Pittard/Moira Magneson/Bob Eakins. Host: Bob Stanley. 7:30 pm, Sacramento Ballet, 1631 K St. (17th & K). 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.

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.)

6 Wednesday

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

Mahogany Urban Poetry Series, 9:00

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

7 Thursday

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

8 Friday

Voices of the New Sun unveils new anthology: Voces del Nuevo Sol, Cantos y Cuentos / Voices of the New Sun, Poems & Stories. 7:30 pm, La Raza Galeria Posada, 2nd Floor, 1421 R Street, Info: 456-5323

9 Saturday

Poems-For-All: Ruebi Freyja, hosted by Richard Hansen, 7:30 pm, The Book Collector, 1008 24th Street. Refreshments. free mini-books. Info: Richard, 442-9295.

Book Launch: *Chip Spann's Poet Healer: Contemporary Poems for Health and Healing*. Please join us for revelry as we celebrate the publication of Poet Healer! Sacramento's Second Saturday, 6:00 – 8:00 PM, Sutter's LAMP (Literature Arts and Medicine Program) Sutter Medical Center, Sacramento Buhler Building/Cancer Center, 2800 L Street, Room 220 (2nd floor).

10 Sunday

Stockton Poet's Corner presents the students of Lodi High, Bear Creek High & Delta College. 7 pm, Barnes & Noble, Weberstown Mall, Stockton. Info, www.poetscornerpress.com or 209-951-7014.

11 Monday

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

Sacramento Poetry Center Board Meeting, 6 pm, Hamburger Mary's (17th and K.) Info: spc@sacramentopo

etrycenter.org or 441-7395.

12 Tuesday

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

13 Wednesday

Rattlesnake Press features Joyce Odam, host, Kathy Kieth, the Book Collector, 1008 24th St., 7:30pm, to celebrate the release of her new chapbook from Rattlesnake Press, *A Sense of Melancholy*. 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.

14 Thursday

Poetry Unplugged, Be Herrera. 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: Kathy Kieth and Patricia Wellingham-Jones, 7:30 pm, Davis Unitarian Church Library, 27074 Patwin Road. Info: Allegra, 530-753-2634 or Betty, 530-753-1432.

16 Saturday

Capital City Artists Collective's 3rd Saturday Workshop, poetry, live music, open mic, 7-10 pm, 4320 Stockton Blvd. Info, Terry Guilford, 457-0831 or Sha-Lo, 348-4005. Refreshments. \$5 cover, kids free.

Candlelight Love Poem Nights, TBA, host, Terry Moore, Underground Books, 2814 35th St, \$3.00 7-9 pm, Info: 455-POET.

17 Sunday

Third Sunday Writing Group 1:00-3:00 pm, various locations. Info: eskimopi@jps.net or nancy_

Calendar continued...

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

wallace@calpers.ca.gov.

18 Monday

The Sacramento Poetry Center presents Monika Rose of *Manzanita*. Stan Zumbiel hosts. 7:30 pm, Sacramento Ballet, 1631 K St. Info: 441-7395 or www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org.

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.

19 Tuesday

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

Third Tuesday Poetry Series Jane Blue and Chris Olander. Host: Kimberly White. 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

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.malikspeak.com or 492-9336. \$5 cover.

Poets for Democracy & Core Freedoms: 5:30 p.m at Koret Auditorium, San Francisco Public Library, 100 Larkin St., SF (across from City Hall); Diane di Prima, David Meltzer, San Francisco Poet Laureate devorah major, Michael Rothenberg, Jack and Adelle Foley, Michael C. Ford with Larry Thrasher on percussion, Gerald Nicosia, A.D. Winans, Jayne Lyn Stahl, Neeli Cherkovski, Philomene Long, RD Armstrong & surprise guests.

Admission: Free. Hosted & produced by Jayne Lyn Stahl. This is a show of solidarity—a community of poets, friends of poetry, and artists committed to raising consciousness, participating in the political process, and affirming our inalienable, and constitutional, right to freedom of expression. Sponsors: Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University, PEN American Center Freedom to Write and International Programs, New College of California, PEN Oakland, The First Amendment Project, San Francisco Public Library, Friends of the San Francisco Public Library, PEN American Center West, and Literature Without Borders.

21 Thursday

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

22 Friday

Poetry at the Art Foundry: Patrick Grizzell, host, Luke Breit, 8:00 pm, Art Foundry Gallery, 1021 R. Street. Info: Luke, 446-POET. \$5 donation.

25 Monday

The Sacramento Poetry Center: Jeff Knorr of Sacramento City College reads from his new collection of poems. Susan Bonta hosts. 7:30 pm, Sacramento Ballet, 1631 K St. Info: 441-7395 or www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org. Free

26 Tuesday

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

Sacramento Poetry Day, 11 am-1:30 pm on the north steps of the Capitol (facing L St. @ 11th & L St.). Each reader will have 3-5 min. on the mic. Sign up in advance via email @ www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org or sign up at the event. 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, 9:00 pm, Sweet Finger Jamaican Restaurant, 1704 Broadway. Info: www.malikspeak.com or 492-9336. \$5 cover.

28 Thursday

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

29 Friday

Day of the Dead/Dia de los Muertos: annual reading and music event to celebrate this holiday 7:30 pm, La Raza Galeria Posada, 2nd Floor, 1421 R Stree., Info: 916-456-5323 (Voices of the New Sun)

California Lecture Series: Maxine Hong Kingston. Recognized for her highly melodic and poetic epic novels that detail the experience of first-generation Chinese Americans, Maxine Hong Kingston was instrumental in bringing Asian-American literature to the forefront of the literary world and to public attention. 730 pm, Crest Theatre, 1013 K St., Info: 737-1300 or www.californialectures.org. Tickets: \$20 & \$23.

Poetry Unplugged Special Event, Carole and Mitzi (Tara Jepsen and Beth Lisick). Carole and Mitzi have toured the US, but this is their first show in Sacramento. Host: Frank Andrick. Work of Becca Costello, Gilberto Rodriguez and Rob Lozano also featured. 8 pm at Luna's Café, 1414 16th St. Info: 441-3931 or www.lunascafe.com. \$5.00.

October In The Railroad Earth: A Tribute To Kerouac and The Beats 25th Year—The End Of The Road Reading, 7:00pm to 11:00pm at the Art Foundry Gallery: 1021 R Street, Sacramento, CA. 95814 \$6.00 at the door. Tel. (916) 444-2787 or (916) 447-2781 or

Calendar Con't...

contact B.L.Kennedy (916) 452-5493. Featuring: B.L.Kennedy, Pat Grizzell, Anne Menebroker, Linda Thorell, D.R.Wagner, Cameron McHenry and Todd Cirillo Info: The End Of The Road reading will be the last of October In The Railroad Earth Series. This is the longest running tribute to Jack Kerouac and The Beats. Started 25 years ago by B.L.Kennedy and Pat Grizzell as a one night stand, this reading series has become a Sacramento tradition for the past quarter of a century. Over the past 25 years the reading has taken place in other locations as well as Sacramento— Denver, CO, Boulder, CO, Eureka, CA, Arcada, CA, Willits, CA, to name but a few of the cities that have hosted the reading. Now, after 25 years we come the the end of the road. Series founder B.L.Kennedy is closing the doors on the Sacramento tradition on Friday, October 29, 2004. This has been a long run and the most successful reading series in Sacramento history.

30 Saturday

The Show: Sacramento Spoken Word All-stars plus Cavisha Williams and Ise Lyfe. 7-9 pm The Guild Theater, 2828 35th St. Tickets: \$7, Underground Books or fromtheheart1@hotmail.com. Info: Terry Moore, 455-POET.

31 Sunday

A new venue: Spirit in the Arts Center is devoted to exploring, honoring, celebrating and engaging the intersection of Spirit and the arts. SAC is a partnership between the Bread of Life Center and the North Sacramento United Methodist Church. Individuals and groups are welcomed to develop their artistic and spiritual selves through as many forms of creative expression as SAC can support: music, drama, painting, drawing, writing, sculpting, storytelling and more. All events at the North Sacramento United Methodist Church, 650 El Camino Ave, near Del Paso Boulevard, 648-1803. Amy Kaplan facilitates writing workshops for SAC. Contact her at kbarh@comcast.com. Small fees charged for most workshops.

Shilus Publications Presents

BLISS

A Journal of Erotica
Volume 1

Editor: Rhony Bhopla

\$12.95 ISBN 0972062602

Available at The Book Collector

1008 24th St., Sacramento

or email editor@shilus.com for details.

Bliss is a provocative journal of erotic writing that invites the reader into the sensual realm.

This collection of poetry, fiction and art features works of 33 individuals that promises to titillate and inspire you to write, revel and relate. A must have.

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.

Bean by Bean

Her hands break bean by bean and
throw each piece into the pot. Her
fingers are fat and stumpy, her knuckles
large and wrinkled. They are decorated
with the many rings my grandfather
has given her through the years. Each
diamond and ruby is a reminder of the slap
or punch given just a week or a day before
the jewel. They glitter and shine in the juice
of the beans. Forty-two, maybe forty-three
years she's been breaking those beans. Carefully,
carefully. Neither drop of dirt nor bit of bruise
falls into the pot. Her jeweled fingers snap
bean by bean. And down the kitchen sink
go all the leftovers.

—Nicole Pouchet Skuba

Regret

(after Debussy's *Estampes*)

I was never in Paris
in the rain—
worn, stone streets shining through
onyx and silver sheets of water
that whip and flick hat-shielded faces
of husbands and wives trudging home
to hot coffee or soup,
a nap before the fire—
but Paris must be so in the rain.

And surely they will have missed the
trees, dipping clean, cool
ribbons of light, and
the river, churning heavy and black,
raising its defiance
towards the bridge bowing over—
rivers always rise, when it rains.

—Ann Wehrman

Eating Bitter

Meant swallowing
hardship. Tasting pain.
Chewing the tendons
of heartache without ever
buttoning your eyes.

To eat bitter, my mother
dipped her finger
in her father's absence.
Cut her lip on the hungry
dry season of Canton.
Swallowed winter's bittermelon.

She squeezed bitter from her
palms onto the bamboo
knife handle.
Into the savory and the sweet.
I held her bitter
words and silences
behind my teeth.

I learned the taste of things
was not always in
the taste. Was not
reason enough to dislike
or like what I ate.

My stomach filled
with my mother's intentions
and her secrets.
And I took in bitter
from the food
and the hands that moved
inside my mouth.

Her seasoned wok
cradles the salty black
bean sauce, and
the bittermelon, the fuh-gua,
named for the way
it makes your eyes harden
and water.

—Melody S. Gee

Exposure

Tangerines in the still urgent night
begin to shrug off their caving skins

She had set them out to bring in the New Year
each heavy with promises

their curves inviting good fortune and luck
Now she has only to let it all begin

The woman looks through her kitchen
toward midnight sees noon plunging
onto the bottom of the world
there already the year she wants to stay
has given way to another
Warm rinds heave under their folds

she takes one tears away
skin from flesh

She finds where its surrender
has already begun

fingers breaks in the stem the navel
the bulging pips

White thready veins raised and running
like scars on body turned inside out

She wishes hers was like the body of this tangerine
holding together even after
being stripped and sectioned
The idea of acid builds on the back of her tongue

Memories between her palms pressing
and fingers kneading between skin and skin

She remembers him kneading her like a fruit
under his palms she presses until
the fruit gives way
bodies becoming continuous

knitting through desire each other the visible dark
She holds the day at a distance

the spidering dawn takes back
a layer of darkness

And it is a morning like any other
Fruit naked in one hand skin in the other

She opens the flesh exposes the seed
the curves the dips the honeyed ravines

the pursed edges now touching the air
She lets the promises run inside her

lets the body on her tongue become
the idea that can build no more

—Melody S. Gee

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Low Tide Lightning

you are dreaming again in the tall reeds
and long grass in the tidal crux of Kowloon

do you remember the story Ruby?

the house grew so thin
under the fire

we waited as the days turned yellow
for the fishing to start again

early grey September mounted fast
and fell

you counted three between the lightning
and the thunder

the turtle shaped clouds were upon us
still you counted three

we were drunk on our first taste of avocados
our white dresses tearing

on the rocks our buckets of clams
too small to eat

three became two one
then there was nothing between

the flashes and roars between the house
and the fire snapped from the sky

we waited all night for rain
for the ocean above us

to unzip from the clouds
and throw down its tide

the fog horn at dawn
blew dry over the cliffs

in the morning we shook loose
the house skeleton and bolted

before the wind from its collapse

could catch us under

our knees so you remember
with eyes closed

which of us was more
afraid to sleep in the woods

who was grateful
there was the sweet moss

—Melody S. Gee

The secret knowledge of water

Water knows something
we don't:
taught by limestone,
it has learned

the patient way
to knock down
concrete, how
to make canyons

by exposing layers
and layers of naked geology
so slowly
not even the rock protests

and only shadows
notice.

—David Rogers

Solstice

Winter was on us.
We hid in the cover of slouching leaves,
stalks dripping sweet into the loam.
All around us their voices
thick with the coming of snow.

Our last morning in the sugar cane.
We crouched low, staying just ahead
of the cutters.

We cut too, with stolen
butter knives sharpened on flatstones.
We risked being caught in the orbit

of arms that tapered down
to machetes.

We wore out our mouths
on the syrup gorged fibers,
even the bitter green ones
left to freeze in the field.

We knew then that the distances
between bodies were always moving, even
if the bodies were still.
We could touch the distance closing
in on us, turning our bodies
with every turn of the cutters' aim.

We believed, too, that somehow
the earth could choose to break free,
cut the band that belted it to the sun.
Behind us, canes lay stripped
and bundled like twigs.

But spring would come again,
rubbing out the low haze of winter,
and we would know the earth had chosen
to take us out of this small, dark season.

We crept on, our chests over our knees.
Always close enough to hear
the stopping and slashing,
never fast enough to break away
from the cutting pace.

—Melody S. Gee

Sightseeing

the electric bus tugs us across the sky
Irving Street down to La Playa scratches
of lamplight melt across our faces

all day we watched like tourists as fishermen
flicked their lines over the pier
hands tangled in the frenzy of a bite
after hooking the clearest cod eye
from buckets of lucky chum

we squinted against the glare of the water
pointed as if we were the ones discovering
Alcatraz and Angel Island

you love to take in the city that has been ours
these two years still pretending we are
strangers forgetting the old taste
of Victoria Cafe buns so we can linger again
and again over our first decision
of honey or sugar

heading home we let ourselves grow
familiar again the bus skirts the water
along the Embarcadero as if it were the very
edge of living outside
the germ of a storm lies over the bay

outside there is everything to see
the nights here never dark enough to hide
completely the shapes of things but here
is your face in the yellow hum of the bus light
in the sharp ding of the stop request rope
I pull at Van Ness

our groceries slide into the heel
of a woman who sits ready
with her camera and orange fanny pack

I watch you now the same way she watches
each street heavy with people
each lit window carving a block of light
into the side of its building
which she imagines must be home
to someone

—Melody S. Gee



Calling all Poets &
Lovers of Poetry!

Join us to
Celebrate

Sacramento

Poetry Day

tuesday
october 26th

North steps of the Capitol

(Facing L Street at 11th & L)

11:00 AM – 1:30 PM

Come to read, • Come to listen

Join this celebration of the spoken word.

Bring yourself, bring the poetry you love

Come to the microphone and share.

Each reader will have 3-5 minutes.

Sign up in advance by e-mailing The Sacramento
Poetry Center at www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org
or come to the Capitol and sign up at the event.

We will make every effort to hear every voice,
during our designated hours between 11 and 1:30

**KEEP POETRY ALIVE HERE IN SACRAMENTO
AND AROUND THE WORLD!**

Sacramento poetry day was established by a proclamation issued by Mayor
Heather Fargo in 2001. A prior proclamation was made by Mayor Anne Rudin.

**JOIN THE SACRAMENTO POETRY CENTER
& GET POETRY NOW DELIVERED TO YOUR DOOR EACH MONTH!**

Your membership is tax deductible and entitles you to receive SFC publications and admission discounts. Please enclose a check or money order for the amount circled:

\$25 (standard) \$45 (family) \$75 (contributing)

\$100 (supporting) \$200 (sustaining) \$250 (universities)

\$500 (corporate) \$15 (persons on fixed incomes, students)

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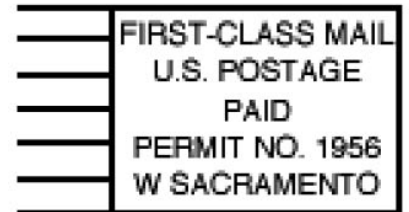
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Please make checks payable to: The Sacramento Poetry Center
1631 K St., Sacramento, CA 95814

The Poet Tree, Inc.
 dba Sacramento Poetry Center
 Sacramento Ballet Company Building
 1631 K Street
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Poetry Now



Meditation

China rain
 pan flute afternoon
 ghost music
 of the glaciers past
 of the eyes
 behind the stars
 waiting on
 the flip side of time.

—G.O. Clark