

Volume 9, No. 9 **POETRY NOW** September 2003

*A Publication of the Sacramento Poetry Center*

Please join us for an evening with  
**SHARON DOUBIAGO**  
on September 22, 2003, at 7:30 p.m.  
at the Sacramento Poetry Center,  
1631 K St., corner of 17th & K, in the Ballet

**THE LAST TIME WE SAW STAN BARR**

In my van on the headlands writing.  
The last time I saw Stan. The divers  
descend for abalone. The gulls rise up.  
My father said when you see a seagull  
know it is me. I saw the notice  
this morning on the post office door.  
Kelly said a bee sting. My heart hurts  
but still I write. Beeline. Climb back.  
Recline. Someone says  
yellow jacket. That he said  
that bee won't leave me alone.  
A strange man's hands come through the window, deposit  
a jar of blackberry honey on the seat. *I'm Tommy  
the Bee keeper, I thought  
you might need this.*

Before the sun comes down in the cypress grove  
we make the big ring holding hands. We're getting  
old but still it's in us. Forming  
each body, the history we risked everything for  
to be here, Stan. Looking  
at the creator looking at us. Water  
in our eyes too. His face. Bizarre. His  
strange eyes. The many places on Earth  
we met him. The dance floor. How fantastically  
he danced. We all fall down. So his sister  
who none of us knew existed  
steps into the center, tells of first seeing him  
home from the hospital in swaddling clothes.  
In the night parked on Calpella  
the tide rising into our bodies. Then out.  
The exchange is so clear the air  
is the old neighborhood.

SHARON DOUBIAGO



**Contributors:**

**Bob Bradshaw  
Sharon Doubiago  
Tom Goff  
Taylor Graham  
Thomas Hill  
Crawdad Nelson  
Shari O'Brien  
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## 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, literary criticism, and other work 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](http://www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org). Please submit to 1631 K St., Sacramento, CA 95814 or e-mail [snookie42@aol.com](mailto:snookie42@aol.com).

*Poetry Now* is widely distributed free in area bookshops, coffeehouses, laundromats, and select bars. 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—bringing to Sacramento the finest poetry we can get our hands on. Our offices are at 1631 K Street in the Sacramento Ballet Co. Bldg. Our phone number is 916-441-7395.

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello again!

### September Readings

We have some really great readings coming up this month. September 1st will be the *We Beg to Differ* anthology reading. This anthology was put together by Richard Hanson, Luke Breit and Traci Gourdine. The anthology celebrates poems with the theme of peace. Local poets and poets from afar are included in this collection with some big names, including Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Diane DiPrima. Copies of the anthology will be on sale at the reading (\$10) and proceeds will go to Sacramento Poets Against the War.

On September 22, Sharon Doubiago will be coming to the Sacramento Poetry Center. She has taught and/or has been in residence in many writing programs throughout the country. She has won two Pushcart Awards in poetry and fiction and in 1991 won the Oregon Book Award for Poetry for *Psyche Drives the Coast*. And these are only a fraction of her accomplishments. So, come out to the Poetry Center at 7:30 on September 22nd and enjoy a wonderful night of poetry.

### Good News and Bad

The good news is that the California Arts Council (CAC) survived the budget chopping block. The bad news is that CAC was left with a budget so small that it will be barely able to sustain itself. Just this last week our treasurer received a letter from Ray Tater, grants program manager of CAC, stating that all grant programs have been suspended until further notice. So, what this means for the Sacramento Poetry Center is a loss of income of approximately \$4000 or close to 1/3 of our operating budget. These next few years may be really tight unless we can find alternate sources of funding.

### 25th Anniversary Celebration

Next year will be the Poetry Center's 25th year of serving the poetry community in Sacramento. Back in 1979, the Sacramento Poetry Center was incorporated as a non-profit organization. It started with a newspaper ad... Theresa Vinciguera wanted to share and workshop her work with other writers in the Sacramento area, so she took out an ad looking for others with the same passion. Soon the group formed The Poet Tree, Inc. (our official business name) to serve the needs of the community. The Sacramento Poetry Center became an independent literary organization that relies mainly on volunteer support.

Next year, we would like to celebrate our poetry community, the Poetry Center and all of its current and past volunteers, board and advisory board members. Lots of people have put

in hard work over the years and a celebration of this work is definitely in order. I encourage anyone who would like to help coordinate, organize, advertise, call participants, solicit sponsors, or otherwise volunteer to help with this celebration, to please call 441-7395 or e-mail [spc@sacramentopoetrycenter.org](mailto:spc@sacramentopoetrycenter.org). We are in the beginning stages of planning the event so you may not immediately be put to work, but we will take names and information so we can contact you when the time comes.

### Theme and Variations (from Mary Zeppa)

Theme and Variations is a weekly showcase for classical literature and classical music. Each month we open the program up to new voices—the music of today's finest composers and the poetry of amateur and professional writers from around the world. The result is a unique one-hour music and poetry magazine which we think is one of the finest hours of radio entertainment going.

The boundaries are pretty wide.. The main (number one!) quality a poem must have is its ability to be heard and understood and enjoyed in one take. Selection process is twofold. Poems are first evaluated on their own merits. When a poem is chosen, the author is asked to read it over the telephone. This reading is then put up before our review board."

There is a \$5 submission fee that goes toward production expenses for Open Forum. "If that's not within your means, send an e-mail and we'll discuss it."

There is no pay but poets whose work is featured on Theme and Variations will receive a complimentary CD of that program.

For full guidelines, see the website <http://www.treehouseproductions.org>.

### Thank You

Thanks for supporting the Sacramento Poetry Center through your membership, volunteerism and donations.

--MARTIN MCLROY

## PAPERWORK

*Scarce and unusual books  
in literature & the arts*

Search my inventory on the Web: [www.paperwrk.com](http://www.paperwrk.com)  
or email me for books you need: [jamesd@paperwrk.com](mailto:jamesd@paperwrk.com)

# Y

Always buying books, from single copies to large quantities. I always need West Coast small press poetry, signed and limited edition poetry, books by Sacramento writers, sets of literary magazines, jazz books, avant garde art & music. Let me know what you have!

**James DenBoer**  
916-492-2515

## TWO POEMS BY TAYLOR GRAHAM

### SMILING

It's strange how everybody  
smiles here. The girl  
behind the counter taking credit cards  
for gas. Even though she looks  
across each morning at the same  
cheap travel items on the shelves,  
the chips in reflective wrap  
and sun-screen on a day  
that isn't sunny. She smiles

like the man leaning against his car  
while the gas pump gushes.  
Even at 1.89 a gallon,  
more than he can afford,

he smiles to no one in particular,  
unless it's the old lady bundled up  
for more than weather, wearing  
her whole wardrobe  
(the part that doesn't fit  
in the two hang-bags she carries),  
traveler to not much  
of anywhere. And even so,  
she smiles

as everybody does here.  
I've come from someplace else  
where I didn't smile  
either. Maybe this way-  
stop is the place to start.

### FORTUNE IN A MASK

"Society prepares the crime; the criminal  
commits it." She shuts the text-  
book and gazes out the window at a rising  
half-moon. As it silhouettes the skyline,  
does it cast romantic spells? No,  
it just casts shadows into unlit places.  
See how it glints off the scaffold  
(or is that a shopping cart?)  
that guards a sleeping figure  
just off Main. What steps  
an alleyway absorbs in the dark –  
by daylight, nothing but lined asphalt.

The half-moon glances against blinded  
courthouse windows, the day's evidence  
eaten by a dumpster.

A night's so hazard. What will the next  
full moon bring? More heaped-up hunger  
than one enchanted evening  
could ever satisfy.

### NEAR THE LIBRARY NAMED V.I. LENIN

The scene was set  
not simply  
by architecture (yours or  
the city's)

I knew  
that / that had begun to crumble

nearly a decade before  
we found the park cold and crisp  
gated in iron  
and  
framed in glass

you  
your eyes reflected  
framework  
not quite unlike

a system of belief or love  
unfolding itself  
in the center of a symphony

where we sat comparing possibilities  
one Friday evening  
in the middle of Moscow

right as the sun began to set

unlike most days, not a tragic situation  
this time  
in fact  
far from it --

being framed on the grass  
and feeling like portraiture

finally witnessing your system  
of internal architecture  
a perfect composite (as I thought it might be)  
of  
sunlight  
and  
sound.

THOMAS HILL

SEND US  
YOUR  
POETRY  
NOW

## TWO POEMS BY BOB BRADSHAW

### CALIFORNIA BOUND

He stopped writing.  
My husband's ink well dried up.  
I was determined to bring him one.  
So I packed a covered wagon  
with jars of grease,  
a hen, salt pork, a rifle, bacon, pans,  
cloth, ammunition, buckets and six children.  
Two oxen  
hailed us toward California.  
We wore our teeth down eating meals  
peppered with dust and grit.  
We sweated like mules  
and walked all day.  
Pretenses were like wet bedding,  
something everyone was  
uncomfortable  
with.  
My neighbors and I talked  
about mosquitoes  
more than we did fashion  
or politics.  
Some wagons were bigger.  
Some oxen were less sickly.  
But we all ate the same meal of dust.  
We all were saddened  
by grave markers  
that studded the trail.  
I added one more:  
"Here lies my dear daughter,  
who lay down  
in this dusty bedding  
on May 7, 1853."  
My darling Jenny had died  
of cholera. The laudanum  
helped ease the pain  
a little.  
There was nothing for me and the kids  
to do but move  
on.

### ELIZABETH AND ROBERT BROWNING

She was 40. TB and lousy lungs kept her  
in a room where a curtain, against her father's wishes,  
whisked insolent sunlight in. But always  
she was adrift, alone. Robert understood. Robert!  
He drifted in when she thought loneliness  
would always be her chaperone.  
Her father became moody. Aggressive.  
Guests were driven off. The doors locked.  
But Robert had seen her for what she was,  
a soul-mate, a woman as articulate as her eyes.  
So he gathered her up, and fled to Italy.  
Her father sulked, refusing to see her again.  
He couldn't understand the loneliness  
of an invalid, set adrift in an empty boat.

We fretted a lot.  
But I figured no worry was as bad  
as a rainstorm and a leaky wagon.  
Or a husband who didn't write.  
What if I got there  
and found he had moved on?  
Exhaustion  
frightened me more  
than rattlesnakes and wolves.  
Could I track him any further  
than California's gold fields?  
You can't haul children  
from one territory to the next  
like they were water barrels  
waiting to have their lives  
filled.  
They need schooling.  
They need rest.  
Or maybe it's me who needs rest.  
I need rest as much as our oxen do.  
I'm as exhausted as they are.  
But I know California's better.  
If the miners don't have nuggets the size of toads  
then at least they've got  
their fields of grass  
to lie down  
in.

### THE SNIPER UPSTAIRS

Pardon me my blasphemy  
But I suspect God is a sniper,  
Armed and highly dangerous,  
Toting on his bloody sprees  
A colossal Uzi  
To blast human flesh,  
Splatter brains with glee,  
Shred tissue like ground meat,  
Randomly, without provocation.  
Although some preach we are guilty, all,  
Here far east of Eden after the Fall,  
The one who took the most recent slug  
Wasn't Adam, and I'm not Eve.

It seems the trail of evidence  
Leads to Him as accomplice  
Of the trigger-happy thugs.  
The Master-mind is depraved, deranged  
If cold-blooded murder is part of his game,  
Or plan, more sinister than grand,  
Still settling His score with little man,  
On a ghastly power trip  
As He rips our hearts apart...  
Again.

SHARI O'BRIEN

# LITERARY CALENDAR FOR SEPTEMBER 2003

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

[www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org](http://www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org)

1 Monday

Sacramento Poetry Center presents Sacramento Poets Against the War reading from *We Beg to Differ*, a new peace anthology edited by Luke Breit & Traci Gourdine. The 26 contributors to the anthology range from local lights to Beat poets Diane Di Prima and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Publication party/reading hosted by Bob Stanley -- includes refreshments. Sales of the anthology (\$10) benefit Sacramento Poets Against the War and other peace organizations. 7:30pm in the Sacramento Ballet Building, 1631 K St. (17th & K). For more information call 441-7395 or visit [www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org](http://www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org).

2 Tuesday

SPC Poetry Workshop, 7:30pm at the Hart Senior Center, 916 27th St. (at 27th & J). For more information call Danyen Powell at 530-756-6228.

3 Wednesday

Dr. Andy's Poetry and Technology Hour, an inventive, cross-disciplinary radio show hosted by Andy Jones, airs Wednesdays at 5pm on KDVS-90.3 FM in Davis/Sacramento, or anytime at KDVS.org. Details at [www.culturelover.com](http://www.culturelover.com).

The Mahogany Urban Poetry Series presents weekly readings of poetry from across the globe, 9:00pm at Jamaica House Restaurant, 1704 Broadway. \$5 cover. For more information visit [www.malikspeaks.com](http://www.malikspeaks.com) or call 916-492-9336.

4 Thursday

Poetry Unplugged presents TBA, hosted by Anna Wilson. Open mic before and after. 8pm at Luna's Café, 1414 16th St. For more information call 916-441-3931 or visit [www.lunascfe.com](http://www.lunascfe.com). "No cover," says coordinator frank andrick. "At poetry unplugged the words...are free."

5 Friday

Lyrical Verses at Sandra Dee's is a weekly open mic featuring poetry and spoken word. Hosted by Pierre, 7:30pm, 601 15th Street (corner of 15th & F). No cover. For more information call 448-6375 or e-mail [Enshimbe@hotmail.com](mailto:Enshimbe@hotmail.com).

6 Saturday

MatrixArts Space presents 1st Saturday Poetry Series, featuring poet/playwright Bill Carr, the spoken word/musical group Reparations, and poet Kimi Julian, hosted by Noah Hayes -- followed by open mic. 8pm at 1518 Del Paso Blvd., near Arden. \$5 donation. For more information call 916-923-9188.

Los Escritores del Nuevo Sol hosts a monthly writing workshop and potluck, 11am on first Saturdays. Escritores fosters the cultures/traditions of Chicano, Spanish and Native American communities. For details contact

[joannpen@attbi.com](mailto:joannpen@attbi.com) or call 916-682-9011.

8 Monday

Sacramento Poetry Center presents Thomas Hill, self-described author of twelve unpublished books of poetry, whose pieces have appeared in *Bigger Boat*, *Red Wheelbarrow* and *580 Split*. Reading hosted by Tim McKee -- followed by an open mic. 7:30pm, Sacramento Ballet Building, 1631 K St. (17th & K). For more information call 441-7395 or visit [www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org](http://www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org).

Book Town, co-hosted by Molly Fisk and Eric Tomb, features mystery writer Cara Black and Sixteen Rivers Poetry Press collective member Jackie Kudler on her new book SACRED PRECINCTS. 1-2 pm PST on KVMR 89.5, Nevada City.

*KVMR's Book Town has been co-hosted by Nevada City poet Molly Fisk and Grass Valley bookseller/collector Eric Tomb since the year 2000. The bi-weekly show covers all things book-related: from writing to the remainder table. Recent guests include novelists Mary Mackey and John Updike, and poet Alison Pelegrin. Molly and Eric have wildly different taste in poetry, but feel sure that it is necessary to an American life.*

9 Tuesday

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10 Wednesday

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The Mahogany Urban Poetry Series presents weekly readings of poetry from across the globe, 9:00pm at Jamaica House Restaurant, 1704 Broadway. \$5 cover. For more information visit [www.malikspeaks.com](http://www.malikspeaks.com) or call 916-492-9336.

11 Thursday

Poetry Unplugged presents Gilbert Rodriguez, Sacramento's most vocal surrealist storyteller, hosted by Barbara Noble. Open mic before and after. 8pm at Luna's Café, 1414 16th St. For more information call 916-441-3931 or visit [www.lunascfe.com](http://www.lunascfe.com). "No cover," says coordinator frank andrick. "At poetry unplugged the words...are free."

12 Friday

Lyrical Verses at Sandra Dee's is a weekly open mic featuring poetry and spoken word. Hosted

by Pierre, 7:30pm, 601 15th Street (corner of 15th & F). No cover. For more information call 448-6375 or e-mail [Enshimbe@hotmail.com](mailto:Enshimbe@hotmail.com).

13 Saturday

Poems-For-All Second Saturday Series presents Max Schwartz, hosted by Richard Hansen at The Book Collector, 1008 24th Street. Reading, refreshments and mini-chapbooks, all in a delightful space! For more information contact Richard at 916-442-9296.

15 Monday

Sacramento Poetry Center presents Gilbert Schedler, UOP professor of Religious Studies, reading from his new book, HONEST TALK, a "slender volume where the everyday points beyond itself," writes Robert Benedetti. Event hosted by Stan Zumbiel -- followed by an open mic. 7:30pm in the Sacramento Ballet Building, 1631 K St. (17th & K). For more information call 441-7395 or visit [www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org](http://www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org).

16 Tuesday

SPC Poetry Workshop, 7:30pm at the Hart Senior Center, 916 27th St. (at 27th & J). For more information call Danyen Powell at 530-756-6228.

17 Wednesday

Third Wednesday Poetry Series is hosting an evening with Albert Garcia and Jeff Knorr, 7pm at Barnes & Noble, Arden Fair Shopping Center, 1725 Arden Way. Free event. For more information call 916-565-0644.

The Mahogany Urban Poetry Series presents weekly readings of poetry from across the globe, 9:00pm at Jamaica House Restaurant, 1704 Broadway. \$5 cover. For more information visit [www.malikspeaks.com](http://www.malikspeaks.com) or call 916-492-9336.

Dr. Andy's Poetry and Technology Hour, an inventive, cross-disciplinary radio show hosted by Andy Jones, airs Wednesdays at 5pm on KDVS-90.3 FM in Davis/Sacramento, or anytime at KDVS.org. Details at [www.culturelover.com](http://www.culturelover.com).

18 Thursday

Poetry Unplugged presents San Francisco storyteller, poet, and tarot artist Mark Ewert, fresh from headlining at Beth Lisick's Porch Light series, with tales of Ginsberg, Burroughs, et al. Hosted by frank andrick. Open mic before and after. 8pm at Luna's Café, 1414 16th St. For more information call 916-441-3931 or visit [www.lunascfe.com](http://www.lunascfe.com). "No cover," says andrick. "At poetry unplugged the words...are free."

19 Friday

Escritores del Nuevo Sol present their Annual All-Spanish Evening, hosted by Fausto Avedano & Graciela Ramirez. 7:30pm at La Raza Galeria

Pasada, 704 O St. (corner of 7th & O). \$5 donation. For more information call 916-682-9011.

Nevada County Poetry Series presents Neeli Cheroovski, Ann Menebroker and Chris Olander. 7:30pm at The Center for the Arts, 314 W. Main St., Grass Valley. Admission \$7; \$5 students & seniors, refreshments included. For more information call 530-432-8196 or 530-274-8384.

Lyrical Verses at Sandra Dee's is a weekly open mic featuring poetry and spoken word. Hosted by Pierre, 7:30pm, 601 15th Street (corner of 15th & F). No cover. For more information call 448-6375 or e-mail [Enshimbe@hotmail.com](mailto:Enshimbe@hotmail.com).

21 Sunday

Stockton Poet's Corner presents Norine Radakin, reading and signing her new Poet's Corner Press collection GENERATION, 7pm at Barnes & Noble, Weberstown Mall, Stockton. For information visit [www.poetscornerpress.com](http://www.poetscornerpress.com) or call 209-951-7014.

22 Monday

Sacramento Poetry Center presents Sharon Doubiago, hosted by Heather Hutcheson -- followed by an open mic. 7:30pm, Sacramento Ballet Building, 1631 K St. (17th & K). For more information call 441-7395 or visit [www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org](http://www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org).

Book Town, a bi-weekly radio show spotlighting the literary scene, co-hosted by Nevada City poet Molly Fisk and Grass Valley bookseller/collector Eric Tomb, airs 1-2pm PST on KVMR 89.5 FM, Nevada City.

23 Tuesday

SPC Poetry Workshop, 7:30pm at the Hart Senior Center, 916 27th St. (at 27th & J). For more information call Danyen Powell at 530-756-6228.

24 Wednesday

MatrixArts presents MatrixArts Caffé and Conversations: a night of storytelling, comedy, poetry and controversy, hosted by JoAnn Anglin. This month's theme: Starting Over. 7-9pm at 1518 Del Paso Blvd., near Arden. Suggested donation \$5; refreshments provided. For more information contact MatrixArts at 916-454-4988.

Continued on back cover...

**Please Note: TO HAVE AN EVENT POSTED ON THE SPC LITERARY CALENDAR, PLEASE CALL SPC AT 916-441-7395 or e-mail us at [calendar@sacramentopoetrycenter.org](mailto:calendar@sacramentopoetrycenter.org) by the 5th of the month preceding your event. Thank you.**

## ESTATE SALE

If you go into a dead stranger's  
house to buy useful items  
flagged with price tags--  
remember, these things  
are negotiable: flowered vase,  
paste jewelry, jello mold

\*\*\*

The living room: crocheted doilies  
pinned where head and hands touched  
preserving upholstery past its natural life  
so many ceramic figurines  
as if life could be still, in one place,  
posed just so  
a settee, a fainting chair, a wooden desk  
with a bound composition book of essays

\*\*\*

The study:  
books with an old person smell  
hold an invisible mold, a watery dampness--  
picture frames with accumulated interior scenes  
a bowl of fruit gleaming on a table  
a lamp throwing a shadow of light

child-like flat oil paintings of pink desert  
narrow forest path with impressionistic pastel  
a blood sunset in primary colors  
frothy ocean shore and its distant blues

the frames will be perfect  
for your own creative scenes

\*\*\*

The bedroom:  
so many wigs of fake grays  
hat boxes stuck with hat pins  
so much transfiguration in one room

quilts, crocheted afghans, dolls  
jewelry boxes with gaudy gold earrings  
the woven comforter  
gauze pillows, more doilies  
so much latent comfort

\*\*\*

The kitchen:  
sterling knives, tea cozies  
a toaster from the 40s  
hand-painted plates of strawberries  
endless coasters, dish towels  
embroidered with dancing vegetables

Envision the woman's invisible claw still poised  
over the china teapot  
and a sterling gathering of a lifetime

\*\*\*

For this sale--  
you can't take it with you,  
might as well  
leave it for someone else  
to turn over  
haggling over the best price  
when you go.

MONIKA ROSE

### What are you reading?

We want to hear from you. Please send us 75 words or so about five books that have had an impact on your poetry and let us know how we can get hold of the book so we can share the information with other readers. Write a short poem, share a journal entry, review each book, just let us know what you are reading. PLEASE send words about your favorite five books to POETRY NOW, 1631 K Street, Sacramento, CA 95814 or e-mail [snookie42@aol.com](mailto:snookie42@aol.com). Thanks!

It's difficult to pick just five books and say they are the most important, but I can name five that influenced me and still do, and a little about why.

#1 The Colossus, Sylvia Plath. Nobody could cut words up into little pieces the way Sylvia Plath could.

#2 Hard Country, Sharon Doubiago. The twentieth century in America from an interested and dedicated observer.

#3 Collected Poems, Kenneth Patchen. There would have been no Beat Generation without Patchen.

#4 Leaves of Grass, Walt Whitman. Freedom unmitigated, freedom unlisted, freedom from tradition.

#5 Ring of Bone, Lew Welch. Chicago Poem, When I Drive Cab. Lew got down to the nitty-gritty but did it with style.

CRAWDAD NELSON

# BOOKMARKS

## REVIEWS BY TOM GOFF

**Alfred Habegger. *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson*. Random House, 2001. 764 p. \$35.00 (hb). ISBN 0-679-44986-8. Also available from Modern Library, 2002. 800 p. \$16.95 (pb). ISBN 0-812-96601-5.**

One criterion for choosing a poet's biography is the answer to a question: does the biographer's own life parallel that of his subject—in range of interests, in societal connection, in response to human contact—thus allowing the biographer to understand the poet's creativity from "inside"?

In this regard, Emily Dickinson has found a fresh new chronicler: Alfred Habegger. Like Dickinson—though she seldom took advantage of her social eminence in Amherst—Habegger can move at will through a sphere of connections; his are academic (he has taught English at the University of Kansas). Like Dickinson, too, he is a close observer of nature—seeking butterflies, much as she collected botanical specimens. And again like her, he understands how a writer's success is founded on retreat and self-containment: Habegger now lives with his wife Nellie in an Oregon log house, and his web page proclaims him an independent scholar. While refining myth or erasing error about Emily, he insists that the biographer use "gimlet-eyed scrutiny," not sweeping supposition.

This gimlet-eyed quality gets results. While appreciating Thomas H. Johnson's edition of Dickinson's poetry, Habegger quotes from R.W. Franklin's new edition, more chronologically accurate. He sees Dickinson's development clearly, drawing on recent feminist views. Habegger scotches, thank heaven, the old notion that Dickinson ignored such small matters as the Civil War: rather, the blood struggle worked on her internally, as did frustration in love. Both traumas, issuing in symbol, inspired her greatest run of poems, coeval with the war's climax (1862-1865). After reading Habegger, I found Dickinson poems I'd literally not seen before, like this one:

The name - of it - is "Autumn" -  
The hue - of it - is Blood -  
An Artery - upon the Hill -  
A Vein - along the Road -

Great Globules - in the Alleys -  
And Oh, the Shower of Stain -  
When Winds - upset the Basin -  
And spill the Scarlet Rain [...]

[Franklin 645, from 1862]

Amid such grim metaphoric play, which pertains to autumn leaves' mundane blood-red, is it too fanciful to infer the "Stain" of real battle? September 17, 1862, saw the one-day holocaust of Antietam, fought on Northern ground by Lee's and McClellan's armies. And there is the conventional but touching poem about a mother who has predeceased her battle-slain boy, reuniting with him in afterlife ("When I was small, a Woman died," Fr 518, from 1863). This surely harks back to Antietam (in its last line, "For Braveries, remote as this / In Yonder Maryland -"), while implying that, for Dickinson, news of the tortured combat emanates from as distant a place as heaven.

Perhaps a half dozen poems in Dickinson's work allude directly to the war, but others vibrate with its agitation, including the famous "This is my letter to the World" (Fr 519), where nation-shaking issues are at stake ("For love of Her [Nature] - Sweet - countrymen - / Judge tenderly - of Me"). To elaborate, however, is to exaggerate, and Habegger dislikes exaggeration. He accepts the premises of biographies past: Dickinson's unrequited love for a mysterious "Master" (the married preacher Charles Wadsworth); her seclusion, which made the pent-up poet a chatterbox of genius when she did see visitors; her difficulties with "Father," stemming from both Mr. Dickinson's fixed beliefs about women and his anxieties for family health.

But Habegger doesn't overstate in these matters. Dickinson's religious hesitations ("Demur - you're straightway dangerous - / And handled with a Chain -," says Fr 620) are correctly seen, not as agnosticism, but as quasi-allergic reaction to the waves of "revival" in her day: where others prattled about God, she delved, questioned. She was a religious poet; or why did she write so consistently in "common" (hymnal) meter, or make so much of wearing her virginal

white (in private)? In Habegger's hands, we witness her spiritual journey with suspense; we follow her poetical quest, rooting for her to succeed.

Finally, Habegger's economical quotations from the poetry include works rightly famous along with lesser but revealing ones, reminding us that Emily Dickinson benefits more than many great poets from close biographical reading. The result is sympathy and awe for this woman of privilege, reduced by gender to servitude of a kind. We see why she preferred, with shyness and the reticence of rank, to circulate handfuls of her verse, like Shakespeare's "sugared sonnets," among "private friends"—and we want more than ever to taste her famous gingerbread.

**John Balaban (tr.) *Spring Essence: The Poetry of Hồ Xuân Hu'ong*. Copper Canyon Press, 2000. 135 p. \$15.00 (pb). ISBN 1-55659-148-9. Available from [www.coppercanyonpress.org](http://www.coppercanyonpress.org).**

I apologize at the outset for my attempt to write Hồ Xuân Hu'ong's Vietnamese name (in qu'c-ngũ script) with my inadequate computer typescripts. But that brings me to one reason this volume of poems is needed. Poet John Balaban has slowly and carefully translated a "first sizeable collection" of Hồ Xuân Hu'ong's poetry; and it is about time for this great Vietnamese poet.

According to Balaban, Hồ Xuân Hu'ong (1775?—1821?) was a highly-placed concubine (actually second wife) of a prominent village official, born in north Central Vietnam, taught classical literature by her scholar-father, well-positioned to observe the slow fall of the Confucian social order that had controlled Vietnam for 900 years.

But much of her life, like Shakespeare's, is mysterious. Her parentage, her marriage, and many of her whereabouts in life are only good surmises by contending scholars, with scraps of record. What is known is that Hồ Xuân Hu'ong was admired in her day, even as her poetry of sexual, psychological, and political daring (and double meaning) may have put her at risk. Her poetry, on one level sincerely Buddhist, shimmers below the surface with its sexuality, celebrated yet seen clearly, in real transactions between man and woman:

Confession (III)

Her lonely boat fated to float aimlessly  
midstream, weary with sadness, drifting.

Her hold overflowing with duty and feeling,  
bow rocked by storms, adrift and wandering.

She rows on, not caring who tries to dock,  
sails on, not caring who tries the rapids.

Whoever comes on board is pleased  
as she plucks her guitar, sad and drifting.

While in translation this doesn't seem the subtlest of her poems, it does have a magic, partly from hidden meanings: the boat metaphors, according to Balaban's helpful notes, are covertly sexual. If we read them rightly, without overreading, the woman here is promiscuous, quite capable of self-pleasuring—yet the last line hints how unequally she benefits from a typical congress.

Balaban, in rendering such poems as these, has served us in several ways: he is the first to give us Hồ Xuân Hu'ong's verse, not only in the more recent qu'c-ngũ script, but in the elegant, clearly reproduced Nôm script, quasi-Chinese in character, of the original rhymed poems. A gifted poet himself—as in his brief tribute to Hồ Xuân Hu'ong, which bookends the volume in Vietnamese and English—Balaban lends neat, suave, concentrated style to his renditions. One reservation: some elegancies may be a touch elaborate, too nicely Englished. For example, when Hồ Xuân Hu'ong writes (in literal translation),

peaceful evening spring go pavilion  
light light not dirty little world dust

we feel a tad disconcerted by Balaban's version, starting with his lifted-from-first-line title:

SPRING-WATCHING PAVILION

A gentle spring evening arrives  
airily, unclouded by worldly dust...

That "airily," while indeed airy, has a certain adverbial flab; and that "worldly" seems too worldly, even for this sophisticated lady of

poems. (A native Vietnamese speaker, one imagines, could work that awkward-but-idiomatic "light light" into an English version, trusting that Hồ Xuân Hu'ong's innate elegance will out.) Yet Balaban deserves credit for drawing attention to difficulties, and for resolving them with success. I mentioned his tribute to Hồ Xuân Hu'ong, which aches for the poet's absence while it evokes her manner:

Under the American sky, still dreaming.  
The riverhead runs on, cloudy feelings float away.

Over the years, a clever voice echoes.  
On the river, an old moon recalls Xuân Hu'ong.

These lines echo the voice of that great Vietnamese poet, first of her nation to command such classicism while writing in the vernacular. If we hear, in her voice, the universal cadence that enlivens Tennyson's best work, or Pushkin's less cynical verse, we have her and John Balaban to thank. (Thanks, too, to Be Davison Herrera for bringing it to my attention.) This book will repay multiple readings—with interest.

**Mary Zeppa. *Little Ship of Blessing*. Poet's Corner Press, 2002. 23 p. \$10.00 (hb). ISBN 0-9705931-7-1. Available from [www.poetscornerpress.com](http://www.poetscornerpress.com), or write to: Poet's Corner Press, 8049 Thornton Rd., Stockton, CA 95209; ph. 209-951-7014.**

A disclosure before I review this volume by one of Sacramento's premier poets and a member of SPC's board: this reviewer has a chapbook forthcoming in the same series (from Stockton's David Humphreys). That info notwithstanding, Zeppa's miniature sailing vessel, packed with spice, holds her trim from stem to stern. Also, those who have heard Mary sing with her a cappella jazz vocal group, Cherry Fizz, know why the verse's best sparkle is in the poems about music. A musician's experience informs the opening entry, "Aleatory," a better poem than any I'd seen about Mozart. The ending is emphatic yet delicate of touch, like a Mozart piano sonata:

...His quill pen  
tossing notes  
profuse as pennings spilling from  
the silk purse of a nobleman,  
the wide sleeves of a god.

Here both the title and the typography, too, imply a prodigy's coverage of the keyboard, perhaps in virtuoso improvisation. Anyhow, the composer's written notes finally dot the paper, obeying a pair of dice Wolfgang has thrown. What image better suggests the careless generosity of the composer's gift?

That said, I wonder if this booklet, and others in the series (when second printings come around), could do the reader a favor: a page of end notes, for those not expert in a particular poet's specialty. Even with dictionary, a reader might need help sorting terms like "embouchure," "passacaglia," and the odd musician's name: Arcangelo Corelli, for instance. As for me, I took it on faith, with John Balaban's guidance, that Hồ Xuân Hu'ong [reviewed above] was solidly Buddhist; so, when faced here with Zeppa's playful Zen poem, "The Fifth Way, or The Weak Yogi and The Stupid Saint," I wanted to know what the previous four ways were. (It is a good poem.)

This much aside, Zeppa's musical references are impeccable, and always pertinent to the verbal melody. One poem, "June Allyson's Other Movie," could come to its poignant point (about music's power to surmount family griefs) a bit sooner, while another, "The Lit Globe of Her Inner Life," seems, I don't quite know why, to repeat its catch-phrase ("Made of...") too often, though there are breaths of word-music in it ("Made of mezzo-soprano and / meadowlark and the tick of a lazy-day clock"). Another poem, "The Scent of the Rose," uses a similar refrain beautifully ("Not the root, not the stem as it twists in the wind"): this is the one to read with the opera Der Rosenkavalier wafting from the background. And how better to note life's transience—summing up English-language poetry from Herrick to Cummings—than in this little word-garland:

Not the petals that cling as their life bears them down:  
bud: blossom: lush: withered: gone.

Altogether, *Little Ship of Blessing* is a great and delicate chapbook; watch it sail.

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# POETRY NOW

## SEPTEMBER CALENDAR

Continued from Page 5...

The Mahogany Urban Poetry Series presents weekly readings of poetry from across the globe, 9:00pm at Jamaica House Restaurant, 1704 Broadway. \$5 cover. For more information visit [www.malikspeaks.com](http://www.malikspeaks.com) or call 916-492-9336.

Dr. Andy's Poetry and Technology Hour, an inventive, cross-disciplinary radio show hosted by Andy Jones, airs Wednesdays at 5pm on KDVS-90.3 FM in Davis/Sacramento, or anytime at [KDVS.org](http://KDVS.org). Details at [www.culturelover.com](http://www.culturelover.com).

**25 Thursday**  
Poetry Unplugged presents TBA, hosted by Ted Finn. Open mic before and after. 8pm at Luna's

Café, 1414 16th St. For more information call 916-441-3931 or visit [www.lunascfe.com](http://www.lunascfe.com). "No cover," says frank andrick. "At poetry unplugged the words... are free."

**26 Friday**  
Lyrical Verses at Sandra Dee's is a weekly open mic featuring poetry and spoken word. Hosted by Pierre, 7:30pm, 601 15th Street (corner of 15th & F). No cover. For more information call 448-6375 or e-mail [Enshimbe@hotmail.com](mailto:Enshimbe@hotmail.com).

**27 Saturday**  
The Guild Theater Poetry Series presents "The Show," a monthly poetic, spoken work, and musical event. This month features The Oakland Slam Team (ranked fourth in the nation), Chaz, Uptown Poets, Born 2B Poets, and Felicia McGee. 7-9pm at 2828 35th St. in Oak Park. For tickets contact [fromtheheart1@hotmail.com](mailto:fromtheheart1@hotmail.com) or Underground Books next to the Guild Theater. For more information call Terry Moore at 916-455-POET.

**29 Monday**  
Sacramento Poetry Center presents Taylor Graham, reading and signing her new collection from Poet's Corner Press, HARMONICS. "These poems sing with the music of the inevitable," writes Susan Kelly-DeWitt. Event hosted by Susan Bonta -- followed by an open mic. 7:30pm in the Sacramento Ballet Building, 1631 K St. (17th & K). For more information call 441-7395 or visit [www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org](http://www.sacramentopoetrycenter.org).

**30 Tuesday**  
Poetry Workshop, 7:30pm at the Hart Senior Center, 916 27th St. (at 27th & J). For more information call Danyen Powell at 530-756-6228.

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