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The Geography Of Home: California's Poetry of Place

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Gary Young, editor
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Is California just a state of mind? The seventy-six poets collected here prove that it is far more. California's diverse geography encompasses the spirit and physical, as well.

A thoughtful introductory essay precedes each poet's work and gives a glimpse into their thoughts, experiences and personal histories by addressing how California shaped the writer's creativity and life.

The enormous pool of talented poets include Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Robert Haas, Philip Levine, Larry Levis, Adrienne Rich, Gary Snyder, Diane Wakoski and Charles Wright. It is a lush, welcome gathering of voices depicting the wholeness of place by describing everything from homey, small town details to the grander scheme of the Sierras and the coast. The poets roll nicely by alphabet one into the next. The essay breaks are bright spots of easy reading, a moment to gulp down an essence of someone's life. And then onto the rhythm of poetry.

Descriptions from Garrett Kaoru Hongo's poem, "Yellow Light," give lush images and faint scents of neighborhood living in Los Angeles:

If it were May, hydrangeas and jacaranda
flowers in the streetside trees would be
blooming through the smog of late spring.
Wisteria in Masuda's front yard would be
shaking out the long tresses of its purple hair.
Maybe mosquitoes, moths, a few orange
butterflies
settling on the lattice of monkey flowers
tangled in chain-link fences by the trash.

California's landscape has made an unmistakable and permanent mark on these writers. Carolyn Kizer writers, "…to me [these poems] breathe the atmosphere of California and would not have existed had I not lived here." Each poet expresses an intimacy about this landscape that is truly beguiling. The editors have done an excellent job creating a concise, rich volume of poetry a reader can go to and explore in a world seemingly without limits.
AIMé MERIZON (August 16, 1999)

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