

FROM THE EDITOR

NICOLE HENARES

Derrida, much like Thoreau, I find palatable and nutritious only in small doses. I keep a copy of Walden and an anthology of Derrida on my night-stand. Every so often I randomly will ponder passages from these texts. The tiniest of passages have proved useful, and for now, I am in no hurry. E.B. White endorses this methodology for digesting Thoreau. The same tactics can easily apply for Derrida, whose writings I have found- though some may disagree- equally as nutritious and containing as many “100 proof anchovies.”

When I first sent out the call for submissions for “Chora: Song of the Central Coast” I received numerous emails questioning my use of the word “chora”. What did I mean? Didn’t I mean “choral”? After all, following the colon was the word “song”. According to Derrida, “chora” signifies place and the dimensions or signification therein. Derrida, borrowed the term from Plato, who defined chora as the countryside surrounding the polis.

The Central Coast is a chora of stunning landscapes and sociological ironies. It is a luxury to live here, a luxury that most work hard for, a luxury that has given inspiration to many a poem. Indeed the aesthetics of the Central Coast, nature’s infallible grandeur, are pristine comforts for man’s puny spirit; however, I wonder about the ways the landscape, the region, shapes our lives, in perhaps, more “mundane” ways? While there is nothing wrong with the beautiful bauble of the landscape, and the fascination therein- after all we depend on the tourism industry for our survival, some would believe even more than agriculture- what is it that shapes and thereby distinguishes us as a region and how can our poetry reflect this individuality?

For instance, I was raised in Carmel in a house my grandfather built. My father was born in New Monterey, when it was a ghetto with streets named after prostitutes, not multimillion dollar real-estate with streets whose names sound quaint now that their meaning has been forgotten. My grandparents worked in the canneries. Through poetry about the Monterey Peninsula, I find a way to explain myself and my family.

Thus, I ask how can the poets and artists of the Central Coast reflect the ways our region has shaped our identities? How do our industries, and land itself, shape the subconscious and consciousness of the people of the Central Coast, as a unique place and people, as well as a microcosm to the macrocosm of the United States and the macrocosms of the human experience? A global-localizing of poetry, so to speak, as opposed to globalizing.

The theme I selected for my first issue as editor of the Monterey Poetry Review, “Chora: Song Of The Central Coast”, I admit is mercenary. Whitman, as part of his effort to sound the barbaric yawps of America, and inspire poets to come to “honor and destroy” his example, tells us he hears “America Singing.” How does our work on the Central Coast affect our quality of life and identity?

In November, when I announced “Chora: Song Of The Central Coast”, gas prices had hit \$3.00 a gallon. In the months since, our crops have suffered a distressing season. Gas prices have now reached \$4.00 a gallon, making food more expensive. The Euro is 1.5 to the dollar. Most people in retail or restaurants say they look forward to the flush of summer’s tourist season to slough off the debts of winter. The salmon season has been cancelled. Schools have been closed, teachers have lost their jobs. The housing market is festering from a slogging economy and blight of ballooned mortgages. And homes on the Central Coast hover around half a million dollars, for those who can afford them.

“Song Of the Central Coast” features poems and visual art about the work we do on the Central Coast, poems written by or about fishermen, agricultural workers, secretaries, cannery workers, retirees, therapists, teachers, baristas, and strippers. Yet how many songs are left unsung by those too busy working to write?

A SAN FRANCISCO HYPOCRITE IN MONTEREY

NICOLE HENARES

for two years a musician friend of mine
has slept in closets or the bushes for her art.

last saturday night she featured with a band from big sur
in downtown monterey.

i attended her concert in my finest weaponry
of polka dots and marilyn monroe
to protect myself against the neo-hipsters
who usually flock to such events.

i ended up sitting next to a blonde
who used her elbows as exclamation points
in a drunken conversation with a guy next to her.

typical, i thought.

sorry, she offered, before asking me where I was from.

here, i said, but i live in san francisco.
and i added, but i still call this place home.
i'd live here but i have a good job in sf.

a good job, she said, eyeing my polka dots,
so you can buy more things!

i teach high school,
i said, like it was an excuse.

you teach? she said,
and then told me she taught too
in seaside, in a ghetto elementary,
and lived month to month without savings,
what was i doing in san francisco
if this was really my home?
flinging back at me all my scorn
in one swoop.