

Book Review

"California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present"

Edited by Dana Gioia, Chrissy Vost & Jack Hicks

(Santa Clara University; HeyDay Books, 2004)

The first distinctly Californian anthology presents a diverse collection of poets from various backgrounds.

My favorite feature is short biographical and critical notes for all 101 authors, all having one thing in common, their own contribution to the state's cultural development, and a West Coast literary tradition.

This anthology includes in "Part I: Early Poets" exiled Cherokee author John Rollin Ridge (Yellow Bird) (1827-1867) who "outlined a vision of history that suggested social classes, races and nations were in the midst of evolving to higher planes of consciousness."

In "Part II: California Modernists", the philosophical anarchist and pacifist, Kenneth Rexroth (1905-1982) plays a central role in the state's literary history as "the Daddy of the Beat Generation" who built "a West Coast identity for American

Book Review: California Poetry - Page 2

poetry."

In "Part III: Mid-Century Rebels and Traditionalists", gay author Robert Duncan (1919-1988), a comrade of Rexroth, is described as "a fascinating California cultural figure who lived as an unfettered poet and brought homosexuality and the homosexual artist into dominant discourse". Here his beautifully sad "The Temple of the Animals" and "This Place Rumored to Have Been Sodom" is telling.

Finally, in "Part IV: Contemporary Poets," Jenny Factor (b. 1969) (same year as yours truly! 😊), gives us a bit of Lesbian eroticism in her ironically hetero poem "Ruby Fruit."

"California Poetry" is a must read for any lover of poetry or literary history, and a mandatory part of any public library.

— Jennifer Gann, E23852
Salinas Valley State Prison
P.O. Box 1050
Soledad, CA 93960
babygirlgann.noblogs.org

—
Anarchist, prisoner, poet,
artist, blogger, transfeminist