

Whan that Aprille with his
shoures soote / What is all this
juice and all this joy? / April is
the cruelest month. / Thou
answerest them only with Spring.

CALIFORNIOS

SPRING POETRY ISSUE 2013



Brian Breed / Robert Kirkendall
J. Nicholas Maurer / Megan Mueller
Robert Tiffin / Yoné Noguchi

CALIFORNIOS
A Review from the Ends of the Earth

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Californios, which takes its name from the Spanish word for the historical residents of California, is a quarterly, online review that seeks to promote quality writing about California and by Californios. We hope to do this by providing a forum for new writing imbued with verve, care, and California mythos.

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Yoné Noguchi's "Poetical Strength" Editorial

The poetry world of late-1890s California was an exciting one. As we explored in our last issue, it was the time of Edwin Markham's controversial "The Man with the Hoe," which filled magazines for a number of years with debate about labor, communism, American values, and what poetry had to do with it all. But at the same time as Markham, Bierce, and others were facing off over these conflicts, east of San Francisco, in the hills over Oakland, something of more lasting significance to the future of American poetry was taking place: a poet who would help shape the face of Modernist poetry was finding his vocation.

Joaquin Miller, self-styled cowboy poet, had taken up residence in the hills above Oakland in the early 1890s, in a rustic home he called The Heights. But Miller does not concern us, at least directly. For in 1894, a young Japanese immigrant named Yoné Noguchi asked Miller if he could live with him in exchange for work. Miller obliged, and there at the Heights, Noguchi, not quite twenty and still unfamiliar with American culture and American language, taught himself to read and write English, and discovered, through his study, that he wanted to be a poet—an English language poet. He began to send poems across the bay to Gelett Burgess, editor of the *Lark*, and his poems began to appear alongside those of the native literary celebrities of the California 90s—Bierce, Markham, Miller, Twain.¹

¹ Yone Noguchi, "Introduction," *Seen and Unseen* (New York, NY: Orientalia, 1920), 1–3.

The year 1897 marked the publication in San Francisco of two books of verse from Noguchi: *Seen and Unseen*, a collection of 50 short poems which blend Buddhist koan and American pastoral lyric, and *Voices of the Valley*, a series of poems in the style of *Leaves of Grass* praising the beauty and exploring the spiritual meaning of Yosemite Valley. To read these early poems, which are poised between a Japanese understanding of nature and an approach to poetic form derived from Whitman, is to experience a moment of bizarre creative synthesis. A selection of three poems from Noguchi's California period is included at the end of this issue.

While Noguchi's early poems are indeed a joy to read and puzzle over, his lasting legacy would be in the influence he exerted over not the San Francisco poetry scene, but the New York and London scenes. After gaining some reputation in the West (and travelling on foot from Oakland to Los Angeles!), Noguchi toured the eastern states, and ended up in London by the turn of the century. Harriet Monroe's new *Poetry Magazine*, based in Chicago, published his haiku,² and Ezra Pound, taken by Noguchi's simple, more eastern approach to crafting poetic images, developed the Imagist approach to poetry, which would become, by the 1920s, a dominant force in American and British literature.³

Next to his inspiration of Imagism, Noguchi's literary and cultural criticism is worthy of special note. While Pound and other Western thinkers were urging the American/British literati to open up their mental canons to the literature of the Far East, Noguchi—the

² Noguchi was delighted and grateful to have had his verse appear in *Poetry*; he calls the magazine "an oracle with many prophets and prophetesses rising from the middle-west, [which] is dictating the American poetry." Yoné Noguchi, *Japan and America* (New York, NY: Oreorientalia, 1921), 46.

³ "Yoné Noguchi," <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/yone-noguchi>.

one member of the American/British literati who was actually *from* the Far East, was able to act as a spokesperson for those traditions—especially the Japanese—that were beginning to fascinate the Western world. His 1921 volume of criticism, *Japan and America*, helps contextualize for Western readers the actual state of Japanese politics, culture, and literature at the turn of the twentieth century, correcting Western misconceptions and filling in Western blind spots. What is so delightful about this volume is that Noguchi comes across as nearly giddy about the possibilities inherent in an American literature and an American consciousness newly open to its sister culture across the Pacific. Noguchi envisions the development of American literature over the nineteenth century as a migration:

... the mighty moving of American Literature toward the West, like the Western sweep of the sun, whose slow, rhythmic, stamping sound echoes in every corner of the continent. Indeed like the course of the splendid silent sun, the course of the civilization and literature is slowly but steadily moving Westward; and who will doubt that they are destined in time to reach the Pacific Coast? ... Then it is the time when the real literary co-operation between America and Japan will be acting.⁴

Noguchi envisions Mount Fuji and Mount Shasta as the twin “guardian tower[s]” of the Pacific,⁵ and urges his American readers to learn from the Japanese view of nature as not a mere “accessory to human life,” but a place wherein may be sought “the solidarity of the

⁴ Noguchi, *Japan and America*, 41, 46.

⁵ Ibid., 47.

universe... the true affinity between man and nature," where "we can forget our belittling self-aggrandizement or egoism, and then our true place in the universe will be revealed."⁶ Such an approach to nature, Noguchi seems sure, "would invigorate the minds of American poets so that they can escape from emotional sentimentalism, and their interpretation of nature will become more essential."⁷ "We dare say," Noguchi concludes, "that we Orientals can contribute some new poetical strength to the Pacific Coast to make her a literary centre of America, when the opportunity smiles."⁸

These words were written over 90 years ago, and the literature of the Pacific Coast has developed quite a bit since the twenty-something Noguchi Kerouac-ed his way down her highways. But the perceptions of visionary critics often extend far beyond their own epoch, and the poetry of many contemporary, young Western writers—including, I would argue, those included in this Spring Poetry issue of *Californios*—benefits still from that struggle to gain an understanding of nature and the writer's relation to it which Noguchi articulates so well. Though many have forgotten his name, the vision of Yoné Noguchi has left an indelible mark upon the literature of the last century, and it is this writer's hope that it continue, that the California writer may never forget the poetical strength and comradeship that can and should be drawn from our sister islands across the sea.

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⁶ Ibid., 48–49.

⁷ Ibid., 49.

⁸ Ibid., 50.

An Elegy to Adrienne Rich

Robert Kirkendall

My thin kayak, an orange torpedo
on the surface of the bay,
churns the water like curling fern fronds.
The red-brown otters wrapped in kelp
are just as rooted as the redwoods
up the river.

These mountains are too close to the sea.
They squeeze the branching roads
into unwelcome arrangements, like
tight clothes over wrinkled skin,
like a hand cupping a breast.
The mountains impede the sea.
I dream of leaping
from these mountains
into the submerged canyon, swelling
with upwelling and ice-cold vitality.

When I dove into that wreck
the material lifted me out.
Placed firm in perpetual flux
between land and sea, my
body hovered over Watsonville
and Castroville and Lover's Point
and Steamer's Lane. I bathed in the sea-air

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of strawberry-artichoke-pesticides.

And there I am again
beneath the jettied lighthouse.

The glossy seals salute
the time-crusted boats.

The waves in perpetual undulation
are a topograph of this difficult place:
each peal of water on rock or
water on water
or ripple on ripple is a dead exultation,
taking the acorn-shape spade of the bay.

Alcatraz

Megan Mueller

When Frank Morris and the Anglin brothers were gathering hair
from the barbershop floor, making papier-mâché faces,
raincoat lifejackets,
tunneling through toilets,
the warden's house had a roof, and children.

But now the cement risers of the exercise yard are covered
in the rheumy excrement of the thousands of birds
who nest on fragment former doorframes and
rise, screaming into the salt and wind, at the ferry's approach.

Now there are no bells or locks that are not rusted,
and only the gull-voices whisper over the Bay.

They call familiar phrases learned from their grandfathers:

I killed four women

San Quentin couldn't hold me

This place reeks of cold shit

I cannot swim, I cannot swim

Bioluminescence

Brian Breed

I trip on a rock in Corona Del Mar. I scramble for purchase but you stand just out of reach. I fall on the crags belly-first. I lose my breath with the jolt. It rolls pearlescent off the cliff. Disembodied I hit the water with a kerplunk. Cold wanders over this infinitesimal part of me. I struggle but the tide wins. The moon pulls: I sink beneath the currents, lose awareness. When it returns I see only the dark. It takes a while to grasp the blackness is a fact. But a school of jellyfish radiates light and synchronicity kicks in. The sea explodes. Plankton flash, krill glow, fish shimmer, even a phosphorescent squid swims overhead. I am but one dark particle in a luminescent ocean. Buoyant with the realization I take a thermal plume inland. You exhale and bring me around. You ask –Are you okay?–

–Tell me what you remember.–

A Baptism of Sonship

J. Nicholas Maurer

Champions of angst and justice,
the righteous bloodsucking blue
party Bush-hating war-killing hipsters,
magnanimous pirate-imitating backslappers,
the shy Moses-bearded men—freegans,
the grass-fed free-range animal maniacs
who live from Trader Joes's trash and
manna from Seven Eleven. The corals
of offspring, the fatherless, who speak
softly to girls insecure about their feet
and get drunk because they want to get close
and get close to understand
because they must be understood
and later, fall to pieces because they have
misunderstood, and let the chaplain
walk them to the door and
speak to the security guard explaining
the un-belonging nature of their form
and even later, in the swollen venue
sweating stick-like truths
out of burning human cords,
the holy liquid exertion, the
baptismal alcoholic pores,
for an unrivaled second, relief surged

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in the closeness of the moment and the
hope and the guts laid raw before
fathers who were not there.

Narcolepsy

Robert Tiffin

When my dad awoke from his colonoscopy
And the anesthesia still cradled him
He said *the only thing I wanted in the world*
Was to stay on that bed forever
But the nurse noticed him
It was time to wake up
To get dressed

I hear old men lust for sleep
Nearly narcotic
Lavish two-hour highs
Morphing deacons into
Recovering cokeheads
On a Sunday afternoon

Watching charcoaled meat
At our church picnic
I hear old hearts crackling
For sun-strewn living rooms
Before grace is ever offered

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So old slumber
Gives in to hazy oblivion
Encouraged by everything
Except the Seven Deadly Sins

The Avocado

Robert Kirkendall

Soft meat of green estate under firm
black skin, I picked you fresh
from farmer's market. Exalted on
the kitchen sill, alongside lumpy Hass-Brothers:
your silent expansion berates my youth.

You are grassy smooth. You are a living
turf flavor. Your vitamins nurture babes,
exploding sense of undiluted palettes.
Re-womb me, that I may experience
you again first-hand.

Your membrane yields to stainlessness.
Your precious innards are precocious, aging
in a cocoon without the world
of reds and blues--yellow, green, brown--not
halting in perfection, dependent on a percipient
blade. I stab your bulging nucleus
and lob it in the bushes.

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Firm soft flesh, I lift your pitless halves
to the California air
like perfect inverse paps. Aztec
Kings, Mexican farmers, and I
cherish your blossoms of mono-unsaturated fat
which continue to stimulate nutrient absorption rates.

The silver spoon tarnishes the green cream, lapping
in the oval gulf, a conquistador come to drink
the bay of tribes. It scrapes black armor,
your formless skin, like honored mail,
an empty butterfly-wrap,
afterbirth of kingdoms, now
folded shut and dropped in the dirt.

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Sunset

J. Nicholas Maurer

The orange slice
Rolls down

My citrus swallow
And juices into

The fire pit
Of my stomach

Where California
Poppies boil

Across the half-light
Of mixed blood

And mustard
Glory.

3 Poems

Yoné Noguchi

The Brave Upright Rains⁹

The brave upright rains come right down like errands from iron-bodied
yore-time, never looking back; out of the ever tranquil, ocean-
breasted, far high heaven—yet as high but as the gum tree at my
cabin window.

Without hesitation, they kill themselves in an instant on the earth, lifting
their single-noted chants—O tragedy! Chants? Nay, the clapping
sound of earth-lips.

O heavenly manna, chilly, delicate as Goddess' tears for the intoxicated
mouth of the soil, this gossamer-veiled day!

The Universe now grows sober, gaunt, hungry, frozen-hearted, spiteful-
souled; alone, friendless, it groans out in the flute of the stony-
throated frog.

Resignedly, the floating mountain of tired cloud creeps into the willow
leaves—washed hair of palace-maiden of old.

Lo, the willow leaves, mirrored in the dust-freed waters of the pond!

⁹ Originally published in *Seen and Unseen, or Monologues of a Homeless Snail* (San Francisco, CA: Gelett, Burgess and Porter Garnett, 1897), 3.

*I Hail Myself as I do Homer*¹⁰

The heart of God, the unpretending heaven, concealing the midnight stars
in glassing the day of earth.

Showers his brooding love upon the green-crowned goddess. May Earth,
in heart-lulling mirth.

O Poet, begin thy flight by singing of the hidden soul in vaporous
harmony;

Startle the lazy noon drowsing in the full-flowing tide of the sunbeams
nailing thy chants in Eternity!

The melody breathing peace in the name of Spring, calms tear to smile,
envy to rest.

Ah thou, world of this day, sigh not of the poets who have deserted thee—
aye, I hail myself as I do Homer!

Behold, a baby flower hymns the creation of the universe in the breeze,
charming my soul as the lover-moon!

O Yone,—a ripple of the vanity-water, a raindrop from the vanity-
cloud,—lay thy body under the sun-enameled shade of the trees

As a heathen idol in an untrodden path awakening in spirit sent by the
unseen genius of the sphere!

The earth, a single-roomed hermitage for mortals, shows not unto me a
door to Death on the joy-carpeted floor—

Aye, I call the once dead light of day from the dark-breasted slumber of
night!—

I repose in the harmonious difference of the divine Sister and Brother,—
Voice and Silence in Time.

O Yone, return to Nature in the woodland,—thy home, where Wisdom
and Laughter entwine their arms!

Ah Cities, scorning the order of the world, ye plunder rest from night,
paint day with snowy vice,—

Alas, the smoke-dragon obscures the light of God; the sky-measuring

¹⁰ Originally published in *The Voice of the Valley* (San Francisco, CA: Willam Doxey, 1897), 41–43.

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steeple speaks of discontent unto the Heaven!

O Yone, wander not city-ward—there thou art sentenced to veil thy tears
with smiles!

Behold, the cloud hides the sins of the cities—regiments of redwood-
giants guard the holy gates of the woodland against the shames!

Chant of Nature, O Yone,—sing thy destiny—hymn of darkness for the
ivory-browed dawn—

Behold, the deathless Deity blesses thee in silence from the thousand
temples of the stars above!

*Adieu*¹¹

Adieu, Sons and Daughters of the first pair of mortals!
Adieu, City—you know not of celestial joy rippling in tune with nature!
Adieu, Fame—a sunbeam following the darkness of night!
Adieu, Gold—glittering dust of the earth, valueless in the land of Heaven!
Adieu, Mansions—you wall the sky, hide the moon and the stars!
I love the unbroken peace of the country uniting the purple heaven with
 the green-carpeted earth below,—
I love the saintly chant of the winds touching their odorous fingers to the
 harp of the angel. Spring,—
I love the undiscording sound of thousands of birds, whose concord of
 song echoes on the rivulet afar,—
I muse on the solemn mountain which waits in sound content for the time
 when the Lord calls forth,—
I roam with the wings of high-raised fantasy in the pure universe,—
Oh, I chant of the garden of Adam and Eve!
Behold! The night's shadow girding round our half-sphere, the world goes
 into reverie,—
Yea, my spirit in a dream rises afar to steal the matchless pearls of eternal
 stars!
Hark! the far-off fowl sings of the divine morn of light! I hail the
 glorious sun's ascent!
I chant again of the complete order of the universe with the earth, with the
 heaven above!

¹¹ Originally published in *The Voice of the Valley* (San Francisco, CA: Willam Doxey, 1897), 49–51.

Contributors

Brian Breed is an English PhD candidate studying at the University of Miami. His fields of study include nineteenth-century British and American literature and Modernist literature. He draws inspiration from poets such as A.R. Ammons, T.S. Eliot, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Wallace Stevens.

Robert Kirkendall is a writer and high school English teacher in Hawthorne, CA. Recently married, he lives in San Pedro, CA, with his beautiful wife. Originally from Santa Cruz, he and his wife retain a strong connection to Northern California. He received his B.A. in English and Humanities from Biola University, and studied literature at Oxford University. His interests include the arts, the humanities, theology, percussion, backpacking, a good stout ale, and animals (mostly influenced by his dog-loving wife). Currently, he seeks to develop deeper insight into how narrative and verse influence human development, especially among youth from under-privileged backgrounds.

J. Nicholas Maurer grew up in the small town of Yucaipa, CA, which boasts global renown for its egg ranching, soda shops, and Mormon heritage. As a child, one of his now best friends questioned his sexuality because of his keen ability to bridge the gender gap at an early age. He tragically fell from grace in high school, but landed in the lap of some loving, holy rolling, cathartic charismatics. His number one strength is the calf muscle of his right leg, which still proves to be a pillar of strength as he pursues and often attains excellence in music, art, and poetry.

Megan Mueller is a Californian newly making her way in Houston, TX. Her work has appeared in *The Examined Life* and *The Inkslinger*; in 2011, her collection *Grotesques* was published as a zine of the same name. Her

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interests include the intersection of art and science in cooking, writing about animals, and traditional Greek dancing.

Robert Tiffin holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from Biola University and lives in Buena Park, the latter being in no way facilitated by the former. He periodically unshackles himself from the joys of daily supply chain management to enjoy P.G. Wodehouse, Rex Stout, Jasmine Dragon tea, and hockey. His blog may be found at pretentiouslypreternatural.wordpress.com.