

**EVENT TITLE:**  
**Poetry and Place:**  
**Connecting Who We Are to Where We Are**

**EVENT DESCRIPTION:**

Poems of place not only describe and document locations: they reveal how we internalize place and how it impacts our lives. It can be said that where we are is who we are. Whether we are Indigenous, lifelong residents, recent transplants, or just passing through, places change us, and we in turn change them. US poets representing Alaska, Hawai‘i, the Mojave Desert, Northern California, and the East Coast will read and discuss poems showing relationship to place, including cities and wilderness.

**EVENT CATEGORY: Poetry Reading**

**Moderator:** Lucille Lang Day

**Poets reading:** Anne Coray, Eric Paul Shaffer, Ron Welburn, Ruth Nolan, Lucille Lang Day

**OPENING REMARKS:**

Welcome to **Poetry and Place: Connecting Who We Are to Where We Are**. Thank you very much for being here.

My name is **Lucille Lang Day**, and I am the moderator of this event. The other four participants are Anne Coray, Eric Paul Shaffer, Ruth Nolan, and Ron Welburn. We will all be reading poems in which place plays a central role.

I am a poet and the publisher of a small press, Scarlet Tanager Books. I’m the author of 11 poetry collections and chapbooks and also an editor of three anthologies, including *Fire and Rain: Ecopoetry of California*, which I coedited with Ruth Nolan, who will also be reading with us today.

**READINGS:**

**Anne Coray**

The first poet reading will be **Anne Coray**. Her novel *Lost Mountain* is a love story inspired by the Pebble Mine project. She is also the author of three poetry

collections, and her work has appeared in *North American Review*, *Kestrel*, *Poetry*, and *Alaska Quarterly Review*. She has received fellowships from the Alaska State Council on the Arts and the Rasmuson Foundation. She divides her time between the coastal town of Homer and her birthplace on remote Lake Clark in Southwest Alaska.

### Anne's Introduction

- Thank attendees. Mention Covid craziness, travel.
- Thanks to Lucy, publisher of my first book, *Bone Strings*. I'll be reading from each of my books as well as from a forthcoming chapbook.
- Lake Clark homestead location/description.

### Anne's Poems

- "*Heracleum lanatum* (Cow Parsnip)": Cow parsnip—all over Alaska. Very tall, some get to be 8 feet. Feeling at the time that I wanted to withdraw from political discussions.

#### *Heracleum lanatum* (Cow Parsnip)

The flowers seem whiter this summer,  
more delicate than I remember:  
drops of ethereal blood,  
the umbels an onionskin tracing  
set down with a fine-tipped pen.

What else might I miss in this life—  
how many days have I not seen the sky,  
soft rags of clouds shining up the blue,  
their shadows tumbling casually  
over the mountains, while disillusion

like a dark flame burned  
my mind's petty length.  
I'm tired of human clamor,  
smudge and clutter of the world.

Who wants to go on  
governed by the same rude horns,  
the demagogues, the rabble?

Let the culture fall to its own cravings;  
I'm taking up with things divine:  
leaf-filter, sheath and fiber,  
stalks so tall they often lean  
but determine to grow taller,  
that ask for only the rain's thin coins,  
the soil's nutrient and a decent light.

- “Elegy for Four Wolves Killed by a Neighbor Last December”: Poem contains the title of my book, *Bone Strings*. Musical theme, “sleeper’s ear,” word play on word “score.” Wolves epitomize wildness. Mention Board of Game and Alaska politicians, wolf control.
- “A Hand Half in Darkness”: Poem’s title taken from a line in a poem by John Haines.
- “Night Light”: Alaska winter darkness hard for some people, but the flip side is incredible daylight during the late spring and summer. No need for a reading light in June, but in March, yes.
- “First Infraction”: Next piece from my forthcoming chapbook, *Late Fall Bucolics*. 24-poem linked sonnets. Rhymed. Themes are climate change, fire, art, and myth. Super Cub reference, and also the pass—Lake Clark pass, the route through the mountains from Cook Inlet to my homestead.
- “Rapt”: Last poem also points to my own culpability regarding climate change.

## **Eric Paul Shaffer**

The next poet to read will be **Eric Paul Shaffer**. He’s a professor at Honolulu Community College on the [mo-koo-poo-knee] (island) of [oh-ah-who] (O‘ahu), in the [mo-koo] (district) of [KO-na] (Kona), in the [ah-who-poo-ah-ah] (mountain-to-sea land division) of [ka-PA-la-ma] (Kapālama), in the [eel-lee] (local district) of [knee-ew-hey-lay-vie] (Niuhelewai). He is author of seven

books of poetry, including *Even Further West*, *Lāhaina Noon*, both containing poems of the islands, and *Portable Planet*, containing place-based poems of years living in California and Okinawa. In 2022, *Green Leaves: Selected & New Poems* will be published by Coyote Arts.

## Eric's Introduction

I will begin with an introductory chant announcing the speaker's place of origin and taught to me by my kumu (teacher) followed by my own translation into English. Then, I will read poems of the islands and end with a poem that reminds us of our place on the planet.

**Mai ka ipu o ka makani 'Ōlauniu mai au  
Mai ka 'āina o ka wai kahe o Niuhelewai  
He wai hua'i o ka uka  
No uka ke 'ala 'iliahi  
Kō i ke kai o Kawa  
He waiwai nui ka na'auao  
A puka i ke ao mālamalama  
Ua 'ike a...**

This lovely song of place was written by our well-loved kumu Gerald Alama Keaulana, our "Uncle Kimo." The chant is called "**He Oli Puka Kula**" and was composed as a chant to introduce us when we travel to other places from **Ke Kula Kaiāulu 'O Honolulu**, or Honolulu Community College. Here is my translation from 'Ōlelo Hawai'i.

I am from the gourd of the wind that rustles coconut leaves,  
From the land where the flowing stream carries the floating coconut,  
on water that springs forth from inland forests.  
From the upland comes the fragrance of sandalwood  
drifting to the sea of Kawa.  
Knowledge is a great treasure  
that illuminates the world with light.  
This is known.

## Ron Welburn

The next poet, **Ron Welburn**, has sent us a video of his reading. He's retired from the English Department at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where he was a director of American Studies. He also co-established the Anthropology Department's Native American and Indigenous Studies Program. Ron is finishing a project on Native Americans in jazz. He and his wife have been long active as vendors and dancers on the northeastern powwow circuit. He is of Accomac-Cherokee, Assateague, Lenape, and African American descent. Ron's poems try to convey insights and ironies of East Coast Indigenous experiences and histories, combined with observation of the natural world, and his love of jazz and other music.

### Ron's Introduction

Thank you, Lucille, and thank you for inviting my participation in this event. Yes, this is special occasion for me because I am of southeastern Pennsylvania. My poems today will reflect a lifetime of Indigenous awareness as much as a transplanted urban Indian has tried to live. By my teens I was reckoning Philadelphia as Lenape homeland, and other parts of the country according to Indigenous homelands. And I'm still learning.

### Ron's Poems

- "The Blue Hour": California Native poet Deborah Miranda, editor of a 2004 issue of the journal *Shenandoah*, explained her fondness for the poem as telling a "distinctly Indian story." The poem reflects one aspect of the modern urban Indian experience. Jazz followers may recognize the musicians mentioned.

#### **The Blue Hour**

Now at 21 he is legal as well as hip,  
this young Southland Indian,  
in the shadow of the Showboat  
on South Broad Street.  
Hip in his continental jacket and cordovans,  
and playing the stingy-brimmed fedora

so he too can look good, like Sinatra.

He whispers to the girl on his arm  
“Come fly with me,”  
as they enter the nightclub through the hotel,  
the girl he’d heard about last winter  
in another office at the job,  
the girl from West Catholic Girls  
whose family goes back to Maryland every spring  
for turning soil on the old land,  
and goes back to Maryland every summer  
to soak up the ancient breezes off the Bay,  
and goes back to Maryland every fall  
for harvest and to dance in deerskins and calico.

Tonight she wears dark brown pumps, his date;  
knockout shoes with scalloped sides, and  
a sleek suit ensemble.  
They had finally met a few weeks ago, and  
they now enter this musical cavern at the blue hour  
to enjoy The Three Sounds, with Mr. Turrentine.  
A choice made together  
to weave traditions with the urban scene.

- “Carnelian Star”: A-historically, the Lenape used carnelian, an agate, for trade and ceremonial purposes from deposits in Lancaster County and in northeastern Maryland.
- “North This Far”: U.S. Route 202 follows an indigenous path beginning near Wilmington, DE, and winding way up in New England. Ron and family members have lived near 202 in Pennsylvania, and he has lived close to it in Connecticut and now in Massachusetts.
- “Shackamaxon”: The area known as Fishtown.
- “Eyes, The Same Mouths”: This poem muses on facial likenesses my nieces have with young Native women depicted on a calendar.

## Ruth Nolan

The next poet, **Ruth Nolan**, has also sent us a video. Ruth is coeditor of *Fire and Rain: Ecopoetry of California*, editor of *No Place for a Puritan: The Literature of California's Deserts*, and author of *Ruby Mountain*, a poetry collection. Her poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction have appeared widely in magazines and anthologies. She is a professor of English and creative writing at College of the Desert in Palm Desert, California, and a former wildland firefighter based in the southern California desert and mountains.

### Ruth's Introduction

I have lived in California's Mojave and Western Colorado-Sonoran Deserts for most of my life. I am a second-generation Californian and worked in my young adult years as a seasonal wildland firefighter for the Bureau of Land Management's California Desert District and the U.S. Forest Service throughout the western U.S. I write poetry, fiction and creative nonfiction focused on California desert life, cultures, and landscapes, and am deeply involved in advocating for this desert, through my writing, activism, and work as an educator, particularly in opposition to large-scale renewable energy projects sited here.

- Introduce Mojave Desert-based ecopoetry and Mojave Desert poems, which establish a deep connection and relationships between poetic expressions and place, as considered in terms of being a living and vibrant cultural-eco-environmental interface.
- Importance of ecopoetry in the formation of a contemporary and historic relationship between poetic expression and place, specifically, the Mojave Desert.
- Origins, development, structure of early and contemporary Mojave Desert poetry and some of the differences and similarities in the poetic conceit of these poems.
- Power of ecopoetry to celebrate and define the Mojave Desert, one of the world's most beautiful and harsh landscapes.

Poems Ruth will read:

- “A Black-chinned Hummingbird”:

**Black-chinned Hummingbird**

*A small hummingbird of the West*

I cut fresh sage at the mouth of Wildrose Canyon  
brought it home to dry on the old wood stove  
I want to burn the fat string-wrapped bundles  
so I can remember you, so I can forget about you

The kitchen table is full of stems and memories  
of hikes, the Panamint Mountains, your knife is dull.  
I've been exploring old and new desert trails alone  
the hills, the dunes, the wind, pending solar farms

I had to go so far to find this year's crop of sage,  
drought, hot sky, blinded by technology's stare  
you once tried to mend the broken furniture  
but wouldn't hug our daughter or braid her hair

Outside, the black-chinned hummingbird builds  
its little nest in blades of a lone, far-north palm tree  
weaving together dried grass and other lost things  
threads of your flannel shirt that I still love to wear

I wonder how long it will survive in the next hot  
windstorm in this season without rain, a summer full  
of huge mirrors and blades, if the fat turkey vultures  
will savage the young from their eggs then fly away

- “Joshua Tree Weeping”: A poem by Cynthia Anderson.

## Lucille Lang Day

### Lucy's Introduction

I am the final poet reading. My poetry has been deeply informed by the landscapes of Northern California, where I grew up and still live. Visits to other places have also impacted not only my poetry but also who I am as a person.

### Lucy's Poems

- “Wild Flowers and Whales”: I’ll start with a poem of the California coast from my collection *Infinities*. Growing up with the ocean so near made me aware early on of the vast otherness of the sea and yet also of the oneness of being and the consciousness of other creatures.

#### **Wildflowers and Whales**

Buttercups, cream cups, sun cups—  
luscious as their names—  
hug a meadow  
high above the sea.

White and yellow clusters gleam  
amid purple pussy ears,  
wild hyacinths  
and seaside daisies.

Far below, a gray whale cow  
swims north, calf tucked  
close to her shore side,  
where killer-whale

sonar can't detect it.  
Powerful muscles  
squirt milk into snout;  
the baby gains nine pounds

in one hour of nursing.  
Together, cow and calf  
dip beneath the surface,  
their bodies forming

graceful arcs. They rise  
again, fountains  
fanning from blowholes  
into salt-laced air.

And who can say  
what impossible poppies  
with satiny petals  
unfold in a whale's brain,

what iris petals, etched  
with nectar guides,  
blow there? And what puny  
human on the cliff

can prove this cow doesn't hear  
a haunting song  
in her inner ear and hum  
it to her little one with love?

- “Eye of the Beholder”: In this poem, from *Fire and Rain: Ecopoetry of California*, I realize that I am part of a California ecosystem.
- “Welcome Home”: My mother was born in Massachusetts and was a descendant both of the Wampanoags and the *Mayflower* Pilgrims. This poem, from my book *Becoming an Ancestor*, is about reconnecting with my Wampanoag heritage.
- “Resplendent Quetzels”: My visits to other places have made me realize that I am not just a citizen of California, or even of the United States, but also of the planet Earth. I wrote this poem, from my latest book, *Birds of San Pancho and Other Poems of Place*, in Costa Rica.

- “Climbing the Leaning Tower”: I’ve also been changed by my visits to cities. Two visits to the Leaning Tower of Pisa, about three decades apart, made me confront some of my fears. This poem is also from *Birds of San Pancho*.

Thank you again for joining us. We’ll now take questions and comments from the audience.

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