

Leonore Wilson

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

June 1, 2012

Arts Council Napa Valley

1041 Jefferson Street

Napa, California 94558

707-257-2117

To Whom It May Concern:

“Poetry is one kind of language to hold its own against the grim disquiet. Poetry helps us seize our being-in-the-world, the better to enjoy, the better to endure. The poetic impulse—hope’s proof and finest messenger—arises to fulfill itself in praises and in blessings.” (Terrence Des Pres, *Praises and Dispraises*)

I am applying for the job of Poet Laureate of Napa Valley to instill in others the love and power of language, to write with the knowledge of place which means illuminating our valley with unwavering conscience. I was born and raised in Napa, which in Wappo means “home.” It has been incumbent upon me to learn about my home-- researching its history, its legends, its ethnic diversity, its fauna and flora -- and to sing about it in verse. I believe I did just that in my book *Western Solstice* as well as through my teaching jobs at NVC, the Veterans’ Home, the Montessori School in St. Helena, etc. I would like to spread this abiding commitment to local schools, hospitals, jails, libraries— just about anywhere where I can transmute indifference into artistic passion. My hope is to work with other artists collaboratively, not just poets but also with painters, musicians,

photographers, etc. I also want to bring a passel of extraordinary Bay Area poets to read in our valley.

Recently I donated books of fine poetry to the St. Helena Library. I have plans to donate more books as well as start a broadside series that will feature local poets as well as poets who write or wrote about the valley. Poetry homes is a further idea. Ronna Leon (former Poet Laureate of Benicia) had these imitation mailboxes installed in her town. Poems of all sorts reside in theses boxes and the public can contribute and take a poem at will.

I would also be willing to start poetry contests, especially in the schools. One of those contests would involve the River of Words. Former Poet Laureate of America Robert Hass began this competition so that children would get to know their local watersheds as well as the wildlife that thrive there. I have helped him with this contest in the past. I also taught children using the guidelines from the teacher's handbook he developed.

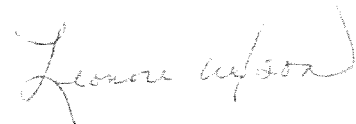
Other ideas I propose are to form a magazine featuring local poets and writers, write a column for the local newspapers, host readings and poet picnics, present movies based on poets throughout history, design postcards with poems about our valley, teach free workshops.

“You must write, and read, as if your life depended on it. That is not generally taught in school. To write as if your life depended on it: to write across the chalkboard, putting up there in words you have dredged, sieved up from dreams, from behind screen memories, out of silence—words you have dreaded and needed in order to know you exist.”

Adrienne Rich, *What is Found There*

Poetry is not about “I” but about “we.” We means finding our commonalities rather than our differences. We means building a vitally bold and provocative community, discovering a field of vision we can all comprehend. It would be my honor to serve this valley as a responsible, visionary Poet Laureate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ronna Leon".

Leonore M. Wilson

Education

St. Apollinaris School, Napa, graduated 1972
Justin-Siena High School, Napa, graduated 1976
University of California, Davis B.A. English writing/teaching, graduated 1980
University of California, Davis M.A. English writing/teaching, graduated 1985

Job Experience

Researcher, editorial asst. and proofreader for Peter Menzel, Hungry Planet and Material World book series (winter 2010)

Olivet University of San Francisco. Guest Lecturer and Associate Professor of English Literature and Academic Writing (Fall 2007)

Napa Valley College, English and Creative Writing Instructor 1985-2004.
I also established the ongoing writing groups in Napa, Yountville (including Vets Hospital of California), St. Helena and Calistoga.

Montessorri School of St. Helena/ Arts Council Grant, teaching Creative Writing to Children (2008)

Educational Center North Carolina (children's story writer) 1990s

Educational Testing Services (GRE/TOEFL exam grader) 1990s

William James Society, English teacher in California prisons, 1990s

Natural Science teaching docent in the Napa schools 1980s, 1990s

Ongoing substitute teacher in Napa schools and high schools

River of Words(international poetry contest) judge for former Poet Laureate of America, Robert Hass, 1990s

College for Kids/Napa Valley College, Creative Writing 1990

Professional Publications (partial list)

Books: *Western Solstice* (Hireath Press); *Writers of the Wine Country* (Heyday Press consultant and contributor); *Spanish Explorations of the Southwest* (textbook by Macon Press).

Magazines and anthologies:

Quarterly West, English Journal, Third Coast, DMQ Review, Poet and Critic, Laurel Review, Yellow Silk, Berkeley Poetry Review, Pedestal, MAGMA (England), Rattle, Madison Review, Five Fingers Review, California Quarterly, Poets Against the War (Sam Hamil national anthology presented to Laura Bush), Napa Arts Council Magazine, Hobble Creek Review, Pif, 2RiverReview, San Francisco Poets 11, Wild Duck Review, Trivia: Voices of Feminism, Ruminare, Faultlines, Poet's West, (partial list)

Awards

Nominated for four Pushcart awards in poetry

Jackson Phelan award (San Francisco Foundation) semi-finalist for poetry manuscript, "Without Choice"

Adastra Press (University of Idaho) Honorable Mention for poetry manuscript "Amado"

John Steinbeck Literary Award for fiction, semi-finalist

Poets and Writers grants: Napa Valley College teaching grant given for five consecutive years. Also specialized grant for teaching disabled older students in Novato, California.

Joanna Catherine Scott first prize award for novel, CHUTE

Villa Montalvo Center for the Arts, Saratoga, Calif. residency/fellowship

Squaw Valley Community of Writers scholarship for poetry (selected to attend five times). I donate to the scholarship fund on a yearly basis.

Mills College Bay Area Workshop scholarship for fiction

University of Utah creative non-fiction fellowship/ first prize award

Vermont Studio residency fellowship

Napa Valley Writers' Conference scholarship for fiction and poetry

BBC (United Kingdom) interview at Squaw Valley (of five writers selected)

KKUP/ San Jose radio station (interview of selected California poets)

Benicia Love Poetry Contest 2011 (first prize winner)

Professional References

Prof. Brenda Hillman, English Dept. St. Mary's College, Moraga, California

Prof. Sue Tracz, Statistics Dept, Fresno State, Fresno, California

Kent Leatham, associate editor of Black Lawrence Press, San Francisco, California

Betty Malmgren, Napa Valley College, Napa, California

Personal Information

Mother of three sons: CalTech Ph.D physicist residing in Denmark; SF based international photojournalist; SF hotel business associate.

I'm also an historical family ranch (est. 1915) operator in Napa Valley as well as a member of the Napa Valley Farm Bureau and Sierra Club. In addition to teaching, writing, editing and book consulting, I have helped clients publish books in fiction, non-fiction and poetry. (Titles upon request.)



May 30, 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to give my enthusiastic recommendation for Leonore Wilson to be chosen as the next Poet Laureate of Napa County. As Poet Laureate, I believe Leonore would bring lots of enthusiasm and energy to the job. But also, Leonore has plans for what the NVPL should be doing to promote the love of poetry--in our schools, in our libraries, and in other institutions and public places.

This recommendation is a selfish one: as the person who has been in charge of developing programs at the St. Helena Public Library for the past four and half years, I have supported our Poets Laureate in reaching out to the public. I established the first annual PoetryShare five years ago, at which Gary Silva and I met and formed monthly poetry readings at the library on Sunday afternoons. This program continued for almost two years. The library has, among other poetry events, hosted a bilingual poetry reading, an evening highlighting the three poets laureate to date, a program featuring a group of six local poets, and a program celebrating Leonore's new book, *Western Solstice*. The most recent program, in April, featured the poetry of Michael Waterson. At all of these major poetry events, there has been time for open mike, giving all poets the opportunity to read. I believe that these programs continue to create a public forum for poets and poetry lovers in Napa County.

If Leonore is voted in as our new Poet Laureate, I am confident that she will foster programs in numerous venues that will make poetry part of the everyday lives of all age groups. Her love of poetry is unequalled; as importantly, her poetry is, I believe, of genius quality. She tackles difficult subjects with depth, complexity, and heart; her work is a testimony to what poetry can be. As Poet Laureate, her poems and the work she has done throughout her long career as writer and teacher will be recognized.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robyn Orsini".

Robyn Orsini
Programs and Publicity
St. Helena Public Library

I would like to nominate Leonore Wilson for Napa County Poet Laureate.

From 1996 through 2004 I was a student in her Napa Valley College community- ed writing program.

She inspired me to read poetry and gave me confidence to write poetry, which helped me create an outlet for my post-traumatic stress symptoms.

My high school English teachers (1960s) stressed all poems must rhyme like Poe, Shakespeare, and Emily Bronte. I hated their poems. Poe was too dark, Shakespeare was too wordy, and Bronte was too old fashioned.

Leonore introduced me to Marge Piercy, Maya Angelou, Ha Jin and others.

I knew the girl in Piercy's poem *Barbie Doll*. A relative made fun of my body when I was a teenager. I pictured myself in that coffin and imagined what my bully would have said.

Angelou's poem *Africa* rhymed but was sensual and moved me. Every time I read this poem I enjoy it more. I always read this poem to my own class during Black Appreciation month. None of my students, all high school dropouts, have ever heard of this poem. Many ask if they can keep a copy. It pleases me that I can inspire them about poems like Leonore did.

Ha Jin's *The Past* gives me hope. After reading this poem I wrote a poem about my post-traumatic stress. It's only eight lines. It doesn't rhyme. But it's tone is like *Barbie Doll*, the words flow like *Africa*, and the message is powerful as *The Past*. It won an honorable mention in a Napa Valley Community College's writing contest.

Leonore Wilson can fulfill the goals and mission of the Napa County Poet Laureate program.

Yours truly,



Elizabeth Helmer

NAPA COUNTY POET LAUREATE PROGRAM

2012-2014 Nomination Form • DEADLINE (POSTMARK): June 1, 2012

Nominee Information

NAME *Leonore Wilson*

MAILING ADDRESS [REDACTED]

PHONE (DAY) [REDACTED]

(EVE) *same*

EMAIL [REDACTED]

WEBSITE

SIGNATURE *Leonore Wilson*

DATE

Please attach the following:

1) One page detailing how the nominee would contribute/ participate as Napa County Poet Laureate based

on the position description and the mission and goals of the program;

2) Nominee's writing resume listing any awards, publications, teaching positions and similar achievements.

Nominator Information

NAME *Elizabeth Helmer*

ORGANIZATION *NVC community ed teacher*

MAILING ADDRESS [REDACTED]

PHONE (DAY) [REDACTED]

(EVE) *same*

EMAIL [REDACTED]

WEBSITE *none*

SIGNATURE *Elizabeth Helmer*

DATE *5/26/12*

Please attach a one-page statement in support of the nominee based on the mission and goals of the program. Please refer to the Nomination Guidelines for Submission Instructions.

Submission Instructions

Please mail completed nomination packets by June 1, 2012 to:

Napa County Poet Laureate Nominations

Arts Council Napa Valley

1041 Jefferson Street, Suite 4

Napa, CA 94559

Arts Council Napa Valley • (707) 257-2117 • www.artscouncilnapavalley.org •

acnv@artscouncilnapavalley.org

Nominee Information

NAME Leanne Wilson
MAILING ADDRESS [REDACTED]
PHONE (DAY) [REDACTED] (EVE) [REDACTED]
EMAIL [REDACTED]
WEBSITE _____
SIGNATURE Leanne Wilson DATE _____

Please attach the following:

- 1) One page detailing how the nominee would contribute/ participate as Napa County Poet Laureate based on the position description and the mission and goals of the program;
- 2) Nominee's writing resume listing any awards, publications, teaching positions and similar achievements.

Nominator Information

NAME EDGAR CALVELO
ORGANIZATION _____
MAILING ADDRESS [REDACTED]
PHONE (DAY) [REDACTED] (EVE) [REDACTED]
EMAIL [REDACTED]
WEBSITE _____
SIGNATURE Edgar Calvelo DATE May 24, 2012

Please attach a one-page statement in support of the nominee based on the mission and goals of the program. Please refer to the Nomination Guidelines for Submission Instructions.

Submission Instructions

Please mail completed nomination packets by June 1, 2012 to:

Napa County Poet Laureate Nominations
Arts Council Napa Valley
1041 Jefferson Street, Suite 4
Napa, CA 94559

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
May 24, 2012

Napa County Poet Laureate Nominations

Arts Council Napa Valley
1041 Jefferson Street, Suite 4
Napa, CA 94559

To whom it may concern,

I would like to nominate Leonore Wilson for Napa County Poet Laureate.

I have known Ms. Wilson for many years. She is an established poet with poems published in poetry and literary magazines. She published a book of poems, *Western Solstice*, recently.

She is a devoted poet and cares about poetry. She taught creative writing and poetry in Napa Valley College. I attended some her classes before and I learned to appreciate and write poetry. Ms. Wilson has a deep feeling for words and beauty of poetic language. She is a strong promoter of poetry, understands the importance of poetry in children and the schools.

I am very happy to nominate Leonore Wilson for Napa County Poet Laureate.

Sincerely,



Edgar Calvelo

Poet Laureate

Whenever I read or see the words
"Poet Laureate" I think of only one person,
"Leonore Wilson" of Napa County and beyond.

From the first time we met over a
decade ago, she transported me from the
concrete jungles of old New York and made
me aware of a wonderful poetess who
takes on the beauty of the Pacific Coast
and its rivers and mountains.

Leonore Wilson in poetry and free verse
turns out word pictures of a land I
never knew and may her poems live on
forever.

Ev Parker
Napa Valley Register

NAPA COUNTY POET LAUREATE PROGRAM

2012-2014 Nomination Form • DEADLINE (POSTMARK): June 1, 2012

Nominee Information

NAME Leandro Wilson
MAILING ADDRESS [REDACTED]
PHONE (DAY) [REDACTED] (EVE) [REDACTED]
EMAIL [REDACTED]
WEBSITE _____
SIGNATURE Leandro Wilson DATE _____

Please attach the following:

- 1) One page detailing how the nominee would contribute/ participate as Napa County Poet Laureate based on the position description and the mission and goals of the program;
- 2) Nominee's writing resume listing any awards, publications, teaching positions and similar achievements.

Nominator Information

NAME Barbara Tuhoni
ORGANIZATION Napa Valley Writers Network
MAILING ADDRESS [REDACTED]
PHONE (DAY) [REDACTED] (EVE) [REDACTED]
EMAIL [REDACTED]
WEBSITE [REDACTED] (napa-valleywriters.com)
SIGNATURE Barbara Tuhoni DATE 5-23-12

Please attach a one-page statement in support of the nominee based on the mission and goals of the program. Please refer to the Nomination Guidelines for Submission Instructions.

Submission Instructions

Please mail completed nomination packets by June 1, 2012 to:

Napa County Poet Laureate Nominations
Arts Council Napa Valley
1041 Jefferson Street, Suite 4
Napa, CA 94559

Regarding Arts Council Call for Nominees: Poet Laureate

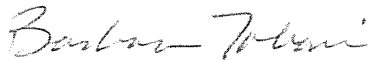
5-22-2012

Leonore Wilson

I would like to nominate Leonore Wilson for the 2012-2013 Napa Valley Poet Laureate. Not only is she an outstanding poet, author, and teacher, who loves her home here in Napa Valley she is fired up to represent poetry in our community and in our schools. I have heard her remark on occasion that we need to reach out to our grade school children and teach them literacy through poetry while also teaching them how to respect our valley and our native ancestors like the Wappo Indians.

I am a member of Napa Writers Network and we recently invited Leonore Wilson to be our guest speaker at Copperfield's here in town. She read from her book, *Western Solstice*, and not only gifted the crowd with her superb writing she inspired many, myself included, to up their game. I had the privilege of being Ms. Wilson's student in the 80's and not only did she motivate her students to write from their hearts, she made us feel at ease sharing our work with the class. I believe Leonore Wilson is prepared to lead. She would be a nurturing, generous, and sensitive leader. She deserves this nomination. She has greatly inspired my work.

Sincerely:



Barbara Toboni

Nominee Information

NAME Leanne Wilson
MAILING ADDRESS [REDACTED]
PHONE (DAY) [REDACTED] (EVE) [REDACTED]
EMAIL [REDACTED]
WEBSITE _____
SIGNATURE Leanne Wilson DATE _____

Please attach the following:
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2) Nominee's writing resume listing any awards, publications, teaching positions and similar achievements.

Nominator Information

NAME EDGAR CALVELO
ORGANIZATION _____
MAILING ADDRESS [REDACTED]
PHONE (DAY) [REDACTED] (EVE) [REDACTED]
EMAIL [REDACTED]
WEBSITE _____
SIGNATURE [Signature] DATE May 24, 2012

Please attach a one-page statement in support of the nominee based on the mission and goals of the program. Please refer to the Nomination Guidelines for Submission Instructions.

Submission Instructions

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Napa County Poet Laureate Nominations
Arts Council Napa Valley
1041 Jefferson Street, Suite 4
Napa, CA 94559

Zealand Poetry Review

Reviewed by Kent Heathman
go to page 3 for review

Figures in a Landscape / Western Solstice

University of Chicago Press

| \$18.00 | 86 pages | paper | ISBN 9780226514413

Hiraeth Press | \$13.95 | 92

pages | paper | ISBN 9780983585213

“Live in the layers, / not on the litter,” commanded Stanley Kunitz’s guardian muse in his 1978 poem “The Layers.” In Gail Mazur’s sixth book of poetry, *Figures in a Landscape*, she agrees with and elaborates on this dictum, revealing in each layer a landscape filled with figures.

No, that’s not quite right. Not *filled*. For although the thirty poems in *Figures* contain such odd bedfellows as ancient Greek eremites, dark matter, regurgitated shipwrecks, a child’s shoe from 1903, Mars’ recent perihelic opposition to the earth, the 1940s radio show *The Life of Riley*, and the gangster Johnny Stompanato (killed by Lana Turner’s daughter)—indeed, although Mazur herself describes a vision of tidal salt-flats “seething with unlikely creatures / and remnants of life where life’s been unfastened” (“Hermit”)—the book’s emphasis is more about perspective, distance and focus, and the focus is on the landscapes, not the figures. “We were tiny, he’d kept us small,” explains Mazur in the title poem, “so the painting would be landscape, not anecdote.” Mazur is interested in permanence and durability, in the way universals are weathered, eroded, and rebuilt over time, not in incidences or trivialities, what Kunitz called litter. “The landscape [will] survive without us,” she writes, with “us” meaning anyone and anything temporary, fleeting, mortal.

Before going any further, I should probably explain the emotional counterweight

of the book: “Us” also specifically refers to Mazur and her husband, the acclaimed visual artist Michael Mazur, who passed away in 2009. “Us” has been halved by death. The figures are fading; the landscape contains an intolerable emptiness. Life has been “unfastened.” And with that knowledge, every poem, every image, every vista in the book becomes (rightfully) formed and informed by loss and survival, by grief and endurance, by letting go and holding fast.

Except, as already mentioned, Mazur isn’t interested in anecdotes, even anecdotes as crucial and overwhelming as the death of a life-partner. Unless you read the ‘spoiler’ blurb on the back of the book, you will never find this underlying loss specifically spelled out anywhere within the poems (although few would exist in such potency without it). As she has done throughout her career, Mazur uses the facts of life, however raw, as tools to dig deep into the less tangible layers of truth and understanding. She brooks no superficial sentimental wallowing, whether in joy or sorrow. “I’m tough, that’s what I know,” she writes in “Inward Conversation,” and earlier counsels herself: “It is not your job to finish the task, / but neither are you free to abandon it” (“October”). She persists in the layers of living, not (to recognize the dual meaning) on the litter of loss.

Which is not to say that Mazur’s poems are in any way mere detached or disengaged coping mechanisms. She builds a wall not against the world and its losses but against surrender to those losses. Her poems, although quiet, are filled with tenacity and humanity. When she says of a hermit crab that “no shell he inhabits will be his home forever,” there is both sorrow and liberation in the understanding. Everything we love will be taken from us, but it will only have mattered *because* we first loved it, because we thus have the capacity to keep loving. *Figures in a Landscape* may open and close with the unbearable silences of: “In ancient Greece, a man could withdraw into the desert...” (“Hermit”) and “...then they’re out of earshot, gone” (“Poem at the End of August”), but in-between are the rich landscapes that have defined Mazur’s passions and promises over her entire career as she has stubbornly searched for what is real.

These landscapes include, obviously, her marriage and family, but also the

geography of coastal New England (specifically Cape Cod and Cambridge), as well as politics, dreamscapes, friends, students, and fellow artists (her personal pantheon in this book includes Baudelaire, Borges, Mailer, Matisse, Millay, Vittorio Sereni, and William Dunbar). But again, these landscapes exist for Mazur not simply to illustrate the stories of their transitory inhabiting characters, but rather to emphasize the substance of their durability. In “The Age,” she says of an almost hallucinatory political landscape: “I thought the hours of light would lengthen, / that nature still works that way. We would have a future.” This “we” is the same as the “us” of the title poem: Mazur and her loved ones, along with every other figure that has ever inhabited, been lost by, and rediscovered the world. Individuals *will* come and go; but the “we” that fuels Mazur’s quiet hope is universal, eternal, and grounding. The painting may be landscape; the figures keep it alive.

*

Three thousand miles away from Mazur’s shifting sands and cityscapes of New England, Leonore Wilson has set her first book of poems, *Western Solstice*, firmly in the fecund backcountry of central California. Wilson lives and writes on her family’s 96-year-old, 1,200-acre cattle ranch draped across the foothills overlooking Napa Valley’s famous wine country, and, like countless generations of California writers before her, the geography has gotten into her blood. “We are now in the [Sierra Nevada] mountains and they are in us,” wrote the naturalist John Muir in 1911, “beauty beyond thought everywhere, beneath, above, made and being made forever.” The segue is almost invisible between Muir describing a visit to Yosemite as “the first time I have been at church in California” and, exactly a century later, Wilson responding:

“...the world is church, is chapel, altar, blood, and body
in its soft skin and its fervor, in all the salt-vacancies of the ocean in

dawn and dusk, the affirmation of God collects in the russet-headed
grass of summer and in the tattered fungi and the fistfuls of snails
and sand verbena and the wings of the sycamore..."

("World as Church")

Don't be misled by this eco-spiritual affirmation, however. Wilson's book is not some Bambi-eyed redwood-hugging manifesto, and in the rest of her work she hews closer to William Everson than Brother Antoninus, closer even to the "unhumanity" of Robinson Jeffers, though she maintains a more positive energy than that which fueled Jeffers' verse. In "Carmel Point," Jeffers stated: "[Nature] knows the people are a tide / That swells and in a time will ebb," to which Wilson more constructively replies: "the universe routinely... / makes space for other things" ("Female Elegy").

Because Wilson has grown up in, and thus grown into, the geography of the West, she can write about its most primal forces when describing herself, and best reveal herself when writing about an intimate knowledge of the land. "Nothing is quite transparent in these California hills," she says in "Force and Beauty":

"If a woman hadn't been out walking her dog, they might never
have found the body among the miner's lettuce and jimson
weed, the young nurse

might have lain at the base of the creek invisible to the naked eye
for months, years— unfolded thing becoming a part of the
hypothetical West..."

Violence against innocents (and innocence) forms a major theme in Wilson's work. Whether describing the mutilated carcass of a buck, slaughtered solely for its antlers, or pesticide-sprayed grass the color of "stale horse urine / rimming a feed pail," or W. Eugene Smith's famous photograph of Tomoko Uemura, whose disfigurements (a result of Minamata Disease) Wilson poignantly compares to leafbuds on a California Buckeye tree, these poems never hesitate to stare full-faced into the harshness of reality. "This is not beautiful or meant to be," she

says, and later uses the voice of the goddess Athena to explain: "I'm telling you, if you saw the horrors in the day, / my owls, / you would shut your mouths at night" ("Athena Noctua"). Yet, like Mazur, she refuses to succumb or become numb to the world's horrors: in one poem, she literally clothes the naked when her husband finds a young woman, battered and senseless, hiding from an abusive spouse on their property.

Which brings up another major theme in Wilson's work: marriage, womanhood, and motherhood, the relationships of embodiment. "I am sewn to you" she says to her three sons in "Pig Spit," and while her husband is initially "a visitor from the outside" during their births ("Winter Russulas"), he soon becomes "the one who... / took the unbearable and made it bearable again" ("Swooning"). In tender lyrics that echo the intimacies of Robert Hass or Jane Kenyon, Wilson devotes multiple poems to the loves, lusts, and ministrations of her partnership, finally declaring:

"...I want nothing More than the imperfection Of
marriage, let that be My knowledge, my inheritance."
("Inheritance")

To give a final nod to the book's title, a solstice (in technical terms) occurs twice a year when the sun's position in the sky reaches its northernmost or southernmost extremes, thus appearing to stand still; solstices have traditionally been used to mark the advent of summer and winter. There is, in other words, no actual "western solstice," and I therefore interpret Wilson's coinage of the phrase to refer both to the sensation of timelessness felt in the West as well as the constant impending changes (seismic and cultural) that keep it simultaneously primal and raw. In Wilson's view (and thus in agreement with generations of California writers before her), these changes are mostly destructive when perpetrated by humans against the land, and the old reassurance that the land will survive no longer holds true:

"what once was

is becoming:

a skinny abstraction, a blurring,

husk.” (“Covenant”)

At least we are given the knowledge that *someone*, i.e. Wilson, remains to care for and celebrate the land, to hold it through its solstice, to keep it, as Muir said, “in us.”

return to reviews:

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SITE DESIGN BY

My Country

"There are roads to take when you think of your country."

—Muriel Rukeyser

And what if I witness but do not choose,
if I merely drive by, pull back
thinking of the one and only, if I am that
complacent to the woman with the purple bruises
around her neck, scourged neck, crown
of the black and blue. Christ
I see her weeping next to the oversized tattooed
drunk of a man. And what if I choose
not to aid her stalled U-haul, overheated
smoking machine of the underworld, near
where the wild irises bloom their white flags
from the red soil, where the unnamable
general in his nineteenth century bliss
shot one of the last Wappos from paradise.
And what if I choose not to aid her,
an entire life stuffed in that truck's
carapace, what if I drive by
keeping my thumb in my book
because I am terrified, made numb
and dumb as the virgin girl
when the word made flesh entered her here,
when the ordinary mud swallow sang,
dove hollowed out; she who was asleep,
daydreaming, preferring the milk of the cathedral,
girl who knew there are blue abrasions
in the meadows, that light could scald;
she who knew men with eyes in their chests,
slobs, dogs, big babies smoking pipes.
What if I drive by, choosing to look
the other way, mother, wife,
because it is spring in my country,
and in spring it is easier to be ignorant, unaccountable,
then what, then who will stop, then who.

Inheritance

Land is land—
Pearling earth stretching like the underworld,
Seeded fields that unfold,
Trails that drop off like single words . . .
Love, I tell you, land
Is land; its memory drowns me.
Those who want acreage
Can have the hard look of stars,
The barley and wheat, the devouring fall solstice
When the sinuous water
Sickens; I want nothing
More than the imperfection
Of marriage, let that be
My knowledge, my inheritance.
I can turn all evening and unmask a hill
Whispering my name,
I can hear the bereaved creatures,
See their crouching moonlit
Silhouettes but what is their design:
A safe wandering in place?
You whose face I hold under the bandaged
Lamp, you whose fragrance
I will kiss up to the edges
Of death, I knew you before the planting
Of legend and faith, when desire's
Language first brightened, when
Grinding hunger wrought grace.

Soft Gesture

He drew me to him gingerly
telling me to walk as if I were a doe
leaving only ink drops of hoof marks;
the air in late November crisp, smooth,
a tea-colored loveliness, and he was kneeling
as if in blessing to the small mound
of duff and matter, the leaves of madrone
and oak filtering the dawn shingles of mist;
there he brushed the deep sea
of dirt away like the oldest mystery,
as if not to awake pain, as if apologetic
or assuaging guilt; and since I knew
that he was out looking for wild mushrooms
I had anticipated a palpable find,
but there was a calm befitting
the most sublimated spirit—an ancient
dome prophetic as those of Eastern cathedrals—
and the creature was resting, its eyes
somewhere lost in its girdled skin,
its shell carved amazingly by wind and age,
as the hawk cry was heard
near the grove's threshold, so then he immediately
covered up the beast who had forged
its own grave, temporary tomb,
as he has done for me
so often in those early hours
before leaving for work—
scooting the blankets back
over my head, his wife assailed by
her familiar depression, hibernating
each morning from the effulgence of light.

Their Genesis

Fog swaddles the pastures, a white film, slub silk.
like the creamy net vernix
that once covered my sons
as I cover them now,
mature men who sleep with their loves
in front of the fire where the wet jaggy
boughs have bled to ash; how I want them to stay
soft-lunged, flecked
with insoluble brilliance
on this Christmas dawn; oh what I would
do to keep everyone lulled by quiet, as I light a candle
like a bright-masted thing
and perch on the compound steps, staring out
over the fertile patch of my living room
counting the crowning heads
as if I birthed all of them, but maybe
I did, as certainly as I formed
the home-made bread in the bowl, set
the cast-iron pot of milk on the stove
and stirred in the teaspoons
of salt and honey, the fine cocoa; maybe
in my inner silence when I walked
the wooded trails at night, a doleful girl
at the beginning of
womanhood, they were the bat-thumps
I heard; those voices, ascetic, dependable
caught inside the shaking bush.

Spring Gods

Remember the water flowing
from the distant mountains
into the red delta—
how we made love there
like lost nouns in the solicitous
late June among
the withering thorns and locusts
and wheat; there
we stepped from our cotton clothes
into the feminine earth;
there we began
to spoon little pieces of paradise
inside our mouths . . .
For months we had been
deceitful; we had stretched
our marriage vows,
but oh how we returned
libidinous, repenting
back to the flesh—
refuge of hunger
and the drooze of memory;
oh it seemed that spring
all the shells and plants
and stones were drawn
to our anxious and swinging
bones as if we were
the forefathers of flame,
and the gold sparks
inside the flame,
two crimson flowers,
two Judas
butterflies in braid.

"Shimmering up and down the original Tree, nature, *Western Solstice* is a gnosis that explores intense sensual vividness, being, and the flesh through the terrestrial details of a large and generous human empathy. . . ." —'Annah Sobelman, author of *The Tulip Sacrament*



WESTERN
Solstice

LEONORE WILSON

"Shimmering up and down the original Tree, nature, *Western Solstice* is a gnosis that explores intense sensual vividness, being, and the flesh through the terrestrial details of a large and generous human empathy. Political, fierce, and tender, Leonore Wilson's poems take 'cadence inside herself,' and 'anti-matter and matter flagellating, palpitating' into mysteries of life and death, female presence, the planet, gender, and music. Her process is transformative; the reader's experience is deliciousness, Gaia, sweet substance, 'Eden to the wasp, shelter and elixir': like eating 'Billy Holliday's limbering voice'; like 'consummating fallen darkness and diffused and fascinating'; or, like 'being fed clear to the core, and distance bent backwards'—chords of an embodying, gorgeous, and intimate art."

—Annah Sobelman, author of *In the Bee Latitudes* and *The Tulip Sacrament*

"Leonore Wilson's *Western Solstice* contains poems that spring whole and marvelous, shimmering from the earth. Born from a profound, wide-ranging, original and feminine mind, they bewitch the reader with a lush, passionate voice that is 'all impulse of towards' and a tensile form that is as breathtaking as its content. This book is a true treasure."

—Cathy Colman, author of *Borrowed Dress* and *Beauty's Tattoo*

"Milk of cathedrals, Edens of wasps—Leonore Wilson's poems, set in the 'lovely California golden-boast of stubbornness' that she knows so well and loves so much, chart the wanderings of forests, the thought-dreams of snakes, the bright and difficult births of souls and poems and gorgeous worldly heavens. These are wise, intricate and beautiful poems. Read them and become more human."

—Joe Ahearn, James Michener Fellow and editor of *Bat Terrier*

"Jane Kenyon talked about how the best poetry seems to 'body forth' from the poet, and *Western Solstice* demonstrates this premise. Leonore Wilson's poems are meditative and deeply felt, but they reach outward rather than inward. These poems sing themselves from body and soul into the world. I have long admired Wilson's poetry. I find her work to be transcendent, and I am glad for this book with its authentic thought and language that is radiant, redeemable and true."

—Gary Short, Stegner Fellow and author of *10 Poems and 13 Horses*, *Flying Over Sonny Liston*, and *Theory of Twilight*

LEONORE WILSON has taught at various universities and colleges in the San Francisco Bay Area. She continues to live on her family cattle ranch in Napa, California. She has won fellowships to the University of Utah and Villa Montalvo Center for the Arts. Her work has been in such magazines as *Quarterly West*, *Madison Review*, *Third Coast*, *Poets Against the War*, *Nimble Spirit*, and *Trivium: Voices of Feminism*. She is the mother of three sons.

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