

# CARTOGRAPHY OF POETS

## Maps, Archives, and Locating the Poetic

Thursday, September 17, 2020, 5:30 p.m. PT  
Live via Zoom  
University of Southern California

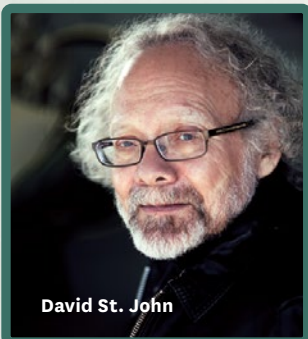
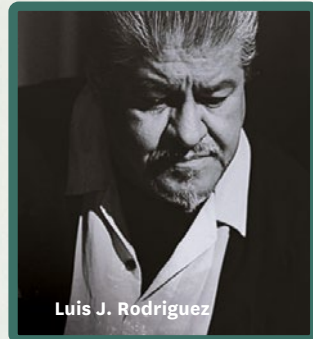


Photo: Stephanie Biani

Photo: Ty Cole

### ABOUT THE POETS

- **Dana Gioia** was the poet laureate of California from 2015 to 2018. He is the author of five collections of poetry as well as the nonfiction book *Can Poetry Matter?* Gioia is formerly the Judge Widney Professor of Poetry and Public Culture at USC.
- **Garrett Hongo** was born in Volcano, Hawai'i, and grew up on the North Shore of O'ahu and in Los Angeles. He is the author of *Coral Road: Poems*, *Volcano: A Memoir of Hawai'i*, and *The Mirror Diary: Selected Essays*, among other books.
- **Robin Coste Lewis** is the poet laureate of Los Angeles. Her 2015 debut poetry collection, *Voyage of the Sable Venus*, won the National Book Award. She is a writer-in-residence at USC Dornsife.
- **Luis J. Rodriguez** is the author of numerous books, including the memoir *Always Running: La Vida Loca, Gang Days in L.A.* He is the founder of Tia Chucha Press and a former L.A. poet laureate.
- **David St. John** is the author of twelve collections of poetry, including the recent *The Last Troubadour*. He has been honored with the Rome Fellowship and the Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, among other awards. St. John is University Professor and chair of English at USC.
- **Gail Wronsky** is the author, coauthor, and translator of twelve books, including the forthcoming *Under the Capsized Boat We Fly*. She is the Daum Professor at Loyola Marymount University.

“[P]erhaps I’m interested in redefining what ‘LA Poet’ means. And what that means has nothing to do with the representation of Los Angeles in the media. ‘LA Poet’ for me means people like Wanda Coleman . . . or the Watts Writers Workshop, or Garrett Hongo, Juan Felipe Herrera. It means Samoan poetry and Korean poetry, and the politics of *la linea*. Of course, almost primarily, it means Mexican and Chicano poetry, Salvadoran poetry, Filipino poetry.”—Robin Coste Lewis in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*

## FROM “CRUISING 99” BY GARRETT HONGO

Starting in a long swale between the Sierras  
and the Coast Range,  
Starting from ancient tidepools of a Pleistocene sea,  
Starting from exposed granite bedrock,  
From sandstone and shale, glaciated, river-worn,  
and scuffed by wind,  
Tired of the extremes of temperature,  
the weather’s wantonness,  
Starting from the survey of a condor’s eye  
Cutting circles in the sky over Tehachapi and Tejon,  
Starting from lava flow and snow on Shasta,  
a head of white hair,  
a garland of tongue-shaped obsidian,  
Starting from the death of the last grizzly,  
The final conversion of Tulare County  
to the internal-combustion engine,  
Starting from California oak and acorn,  
scrubgrass, rivermist,  
and lupine in the foothills,  
From days driving through the outfield clover  
of Modesto in a borrowed Buick,  
From nights drinking pitchers of dark  
in the Neon Moon Bar & Grill,  
From mornings grabbing a lunchpail, work gloves,  
and a pisspot hat,  
From Digger pine and Douglas fir and aspen around Placerville,  
From snowmelt streams slithering into the San Joaquin,  
From the deltas and levees and floods of the Sacramento,  
From fall runs of shad, steelhead, and salmon,  
From a gathering of sand, rock, gypsum, clay,  
limestone, water, and tar,  
From a need or desire to throw your money away  
in The Big City,  
From a melting of history and space in the crucible  
of an oil-stained hand—  
Starting from all these, this porphyry of elements,  
this aggregate of experiences  
Fused like feldspar and quartz to the azure stone  
of memory and vision,  
Starting from all of these and an affectionate eye  
for straight, unending lines,  
We hit this old road of Highway Ninety-Nine!

## FROM “WATTS BLEEDS” BY LUIS J. RODRIGUEZ

Watts bleeds  
as I bled  
getting laid-off from work,  
standing by my baby’s crib,  
touching his soft cheek  
and fingering his small hand  
as dreams shatter again,  
dreams of fathers  
for little men.

Watts bleeds  
and the city hemorrhages,  
unable to stop the flow  
from this swollen and festering sore.

Oh bloom, you trampled flower!  
Come alive as once  
you tried to do from the ashes.

Watts, bleeding and angry,  
you will be free.

## FROM “CALIFORNIA HILLS IN AUGUST” BY DANA GIOIA

I can imagine someone who found  
these fields unbearable, who climbed  
the hillside in the heat, cursing the dust,  
cracking the brittle weeds underfoot,  
wishing a few more trees for shade.

An Easterner especially, who would scorn  
the meagerness of summer, the dry  
twisted shapes of black elm,  
scrub oak, and chaparral, a landscape  
August has already drained of green.

...

And yet how gentle it seems to someone  
raised in a landscape short of rain—  
the skyline of a hill broken by no more  
trees than one can count, the grass,  
the empty sky, the wish for water.



## FROM “FRAME” BY ROBIN COSTE LEWIS

Farther out, surrounding us, there were other farms too,  
which had been worked, but were not working. There was the pool,  
a liquor store, an old house, the golf course, a koi  
farm, our new neighborhood, the bakery from Hawaii,

then the landing field for the Goodyear  
blimp. You could live here for years and never  
understand: Were you rural, industrial, or suburban?  
We thought we were *home*, but our cardboard

was just slender venture on Negro sprawl.  
Before that, it was law: we could not own property  
except in certain codes: South Central, Compton, Watts,  
where the construction companies were under contract

with the LAPD to tile or tar our addresses onto our roofs,  
so when their helicopters needed to shoot,  
they’d know—and we’d know too—  
who was what and what was who.

## FROM “THE LAST TROUBADOUR” BY DAVID ST. JOHN

Standing at the glass-paneled wall of Liza’s kitchen  
at the old house half-hidden

Over a mile up Canyon Road in Joshua’s gated compound

I’m just smoking a joint & looking down at the dusk  
dusting the Malibu lights as they flare

Along the coastline below & I can hear the ripped-up

Buick fenders & Caddy bumpers slammed around out  
in the barn studio as they’re slowly

Torched into art as Joshua moves the spitting arc-welder . . .

## FROM “LIGHT CHAFF AND FALLING LEAVES OR A PAIR OF FEATHERS” BY GAIL WRONSKY

. . . the threat of annihilation in every windblown  
dust mote of malignant life. All these years I’ve been watching

out warily in obvious places (in bars, in wars, in night cities and  
nightmares, on furious seas). Yet what’s been trying to destroy

me has lain hidden inside friendly-seeming breezes, behind  
soft music, beneath the carpet of small things one can barely see . . .

## MORE CALIFORNIA POETS

- ◉ **Wanda Coleman** (1946–2013) — known as “the unofficial poet laureate of Los Angeles”
- ◉ **Ina Coolbrith** (1841–1928) — an Oakland librarian and California’s first poet laureate
- ◉ **Eloise Klein Healy** (b. 1943) — L.A.’s first poet laureate, whose works explore themes like community, sexuality, and home
- ◉ **Juan Felipe Herrera** (b. 1948) — a former U.S. poet laureate who grew up as the son of migrant farmers in the San Joaquin Valley
- ◉ **June Jordan** (1936–2002) — born in New York, this visionary poet/writer/activist spent the last 13 years of her life teaching at UC Berkeley, where she was known as the “Poet of the People”
- ◉ **Phillip Levine** (1928–2015) — best known for his poems about working-class life in his hometown of Detroit, Levine spent the last three decades of his life living and teaching in Fresno
- ◉ **Yone Noguchi** (1875–1947) — the first Japanese-born writer to publish poetry in English, Noguchi brought the form of the haiku into English
- ◉ **Marisela Norte** — wrote much of the book *Peeping Tom Tom Girl* on the bus between East L.A. and downtown
- ◉ **Kenneth Rexroth** (1905–1982) — a key figure in the San Francisco Renaissance
- ◉ **Yesika Salgado** (b. 1984) — L.A.-based Salvadoran poet who writes about “her family, her culture, her city, and her fat brown body”

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- ⦿ Did you have an idea of a “California poet” or an “L.A. poet” in your mind before attending this event? Has that idea been changed or challenged in any way?
- ⦿ What “California-ness” do you perceive in these poets’ work?
- ⦿ Do you feel connected to the work of any poets who are from the same place you’re from?
- ⦿ Why might place be important to a poet?
- ⦿ What can poetry offer to our sense or understanding of a place?

## IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- ⦿ Tia Chucha’s Centro Cultural and Bookstore | [tiachucha.org](http://tiachucha.org)
- ⦿ Beyond Baroque | [beyondbaroque.org](http://beyondbaroque.org)
- ⦿ Tuesday Night Project | [tuesdaynightproject.org](http://tuesdaynightproject.org)
- ⦿ Influx Collective | [influxcollectiv.org](http://influxcollectiv.org)
- ⦿ Da Poetry Lounge | [dapoetrylounge.com](http://dapoetrylounge.com)
- ⦿ The Anansi Writers’ Workshop at the World Stage [theworldstage.org](http://theworldstage.org)
- ⦿ Poetry Classes and Workshops offered at USC in Spring 2021
  - Undergraduate Poetry Classes**
  - English 105x: Introduction to Creative Writing
  - English 172g: The Art of Poetry
  - English 299g: Introduction to Genre Poetry
  - English 362g: Contemporary Poetry
  - Poetry Workshops For Creative Writing Majors:**
  - English 304: Introduction to Poetry Writing
  - English 406: Intermediate Poetry Writing

## DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

**RUTH WALLACH** of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this evening’s event. Those with a call number (e.g., books) are physical items which you can find in our campus libraries. Those without a call number (e.g. e-books, journals, and databases) are electronic resources, which are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](http://libraries.usc.edu) but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

### BOOKS

- ⦿ Dana Gioia, *Daily Horoscope: Poems*. Saint Paul, Minn.: Graywolf, 2002.  
**DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PS3557.I5215 D35 2002**
- ⦿ Garrett Hongo, *Coral Road: Poems*. New York: Knopf, 2011.  
**DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PS3558.O48C67 2011**
- ⦿ Robin Coste Lewis, *Voyage of the Sable Venus and Other Poems*. New York: Knopf, 2015.  
**DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY FACULTY HALL: PS3612.E98A6 2015**
- ⦿ Luis J. Rodriguez, *Trochemoche: Poems*. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone, 1998.  
**DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PS3568.O34879T76 1998**
- ⦿ David St. John, *The Window: Poems 1998-2012*. Sausalito: Arctos, 2014.  
**DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PS3569.A4536 W56 2014**
- ⦿ Gail Wronsky, *Bling & Fringe: (the L.A. poems)*. Los Angeles: What Books, 2009.  
**DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PS3552.E5384B55 2009**

### ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS

- ⦿ [David St. John Papers, 1960–2018](#)

### RECOMMENDED DATABASES

[Columbia Granger’s World of Poetry](#): A source of thousands of poems, poet biographies, and commentaries. This database covers poetry from all ages and time periods.

