



**SIERRA MUSINGS**

**JANUARY 2017**

***SPECIAL YUBA LIT ISSUE***



Welcome!

Thanks for picking up a copy, brought to you in part by editor Jenny Godwin.

The Open Book Press will soon be developing a new monthly zine distinct from *Sierra Musings*, one specifically concerned with (and inspired by) the current social climate and examined through poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and other arts. We will continue to collaborate with Yuba Lit speakers and other writers and artists within the community and beyond. Look for our new name, design, and content soon!

To submit your work for consideration in our next issue, please e-mail [info@theopenbookpress.com](mailto:info@theopenbookpress.com)

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A word is dead  
When it is said,  
Some say.  
I say it just begins  
to live that day.  
– *Emily Dickinson*

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## - Contributors -



**Angela Sells, PhD**, is a mythology and poetry instructor at Sierra College and Meridian University. She is an emerging writer, with her first book, *Sabina Spielrein; The Woman and the Myth*, due out in 2017 with SUNY Press.



**Will Dane, MA**, will be teaching a short fiction workshop through OLLI in the spring that will emphasize how stories move us and the specific crafting process of short stories, from creation to feedback and revision.



**Sands Hall** is a writer, theatre artist, professor, and musician. Her work includes the novel, *Catching Heaven* (Ballantine); a book of writing essays and exercises, *Tools of the Writers Craft*; the plays *Fair Use* and *Little Women* (an adaptation of the Alcott novel); essays and short stories; and a CD of her original songs, *Rustler's Moon*. She works with the Community of Writers at Squaw Valley, for the Iowa Summer Writing Festival, and spends each fall in Lancaster, PA, teaching English and creative writing at Franklin & Marshall College. The rest of the year she lives in Nevada City, CA. At Yuba Lit, she will read from her feminist novel-in-progress.

## **SANDS HALL**

I hope that while Trump is president, and long after, we remember the beauty and the value of singing together. What helped bring me to writing was the music and lyrics rotating, so long ago, on my father's turntable: Leadbelly, The Weavers, Joan Baez, Peter, Paul and Mary, and, eventually, those early songwriting inspirations: Judy Collins, Joni Mitchell. So many others... There were also Christmas carols, for better or worse -- but where else, when you were seven, did you get to harmonize like that! Of course there were storybooks, and then novels, and plays, and, eventually movies—but early on, it was words connected to a song that lit my imagination. Whether the writing comprises a song or a story, a script or a poem or a memoir, its intention is to get things across. Important things. I remain so grateful.

Sands

This song sums up what I think so many of us feel this day; thank you, Woody Guthrie:

### **This Land is Your Land, This Land is My Land**

#### **Words & music by Woody Guthrie**

This land is your land, this land is my land  
From California to the New York Island  
From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf Stream waters  
This land was made for you and me

As I went walking that ribbon of highway  
I saw above me that endless skyway  
Saw below me the golden valley  
This land was made for you and me

I roamed and rambled and followed my footsteps  
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts  
All around me a voice was sounding  
This land was made for you and me

When the sun come shining, then I was strolling  
In wheat fields waving and dust clouds rolling  
The voice was chanting as the fog was lifting  
This land was made for you and me.

## **WILL DANE AND ANGELA SELLS IN DIALOGUE**

[When asked what's on the bedside table these days] I'll answer that in a prose poem. I've been reading about anger. Audre Lorde said, "Anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification."

But it's Paul Beatty's *White Boy Shuffle* that I can't put down, his anger, my anger, as a woman, as a woman of color, an Other, afraid to look others in the eye, those who lied about their vote, this empty rhetoric of a return to a time when we were "great," again,

When?

When were we united, whole, great, when have people like me been unafraid? Anger betrays hurt or maybe fear and

Beatty induces my tears after he calms me down; or how about *The Sellout*? Here Beatty upends the myth of America by reinstating segregation and slavery, a so-called comedy pointing to how little we've truly progressed

...Beatty turns anger into art, art into action: he speaks of madness, of systems and brute blunt force and sadness at the American dream held to us as attainable as if by some stroke of luck with affirmative action after an admissions counselor asks me my name and where does it come from,

I have no illustrious ancestral answer,

I have a reminder of the real America, I have an apartment in a red lined district; I have an affordable care act; if I under-achieve, it's expected; and

*White Boy Shuffle* satirizes mass suicide:

It's been a lovely five hundred years, but it's time to go. We're abandoning this sinking ship America, lightening its load by tossing our histories overboard, jettisoning the present, and drydocking our future. [We] have relinquished our needs in a world where expectations are illusion, has refused to develop ideals and mores in a society that applies principles without principle.

Is he right? What can this mean? Is this his anger turned into a place of solace for the rest of us? With one novel, is this how anger can be expressed and translated into action?

Is this how we, as artists, become patriots?

So this is what I'm reading, Will, to help me wrap my head around the election, and then I turn back to Baldwin who reminds me that as writer, in this myth, in this born into mess America that is my own, my role is to remain, *here*.

--

I like how you blend your personal experience with your personal reaction to the Beatty novels.

And then you mentioned Baldwin and myth. In his essay "the Discovery of What it Means to be an American," he says

That the tensions of American life, as well as the possibilities, are tremendous is certainly not even a question...The time has come, God knows, for us to examine ourselves, but we can only do this if we are willing to free ourselves of the myth of America and try to find out what is really happening here.

The idea today that America must return to a different era to become "great" again represents a regression backward, a rejection of the kinds of progress that should be second nature at this point, in terms of civil rights, the environment, and free speech, to name a few.

So what is really happening here, today, and what is going to happen next? Four years, the duration of a high school or college term, can be an important formative experience in

one's personal life. I wonder what this political term will do to the continued life of our communities.

You also touched on anger and fear in your poem. Along somewhat parallel lines, I've been reading a bit of Hunter S Thompson lately. Here's an example of fear and revulsion turned into something outlandish yet accesible and compassionate, even lucid at times. You know, Hunter the journalist was *there* at historically important locuses like San Francisco and La Honda in the mid sixties, the Watergate Hotel in 1973, Southeast Asia in 1975. He reported first hand on the energies of these moments, of people coming together with purpose.

In the essay "High-Water Mark," he says,

San Francisco in the middle sixties was a very special time and place to be a part of...no explanation, no mix of words or music or memories can touch that sense of knowing that you were there and alive in that corner of time and the world...There was a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was right, that we were winning...and that, I think, was the handle—that sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil. Not in any mean or military sense; we didn't need that. Our energy would simply prevail.

So I wonder, for the people here at Yuba Lit tonight, and in this wider community, where are our locus points going to

be over the next four years; how can we get to feeling like “our energy [is going] to prevail” over what is bound to be a new and unprecedented paradigm of “the forces of Old and Evil”? We might be less centralized than the city Hunter describes, more prone to virtual online meetups, but we also have our community hubs like this one, these tables for venting, brainstorming, planning, learning, and so on.

**THANK YOU FOR READING**

