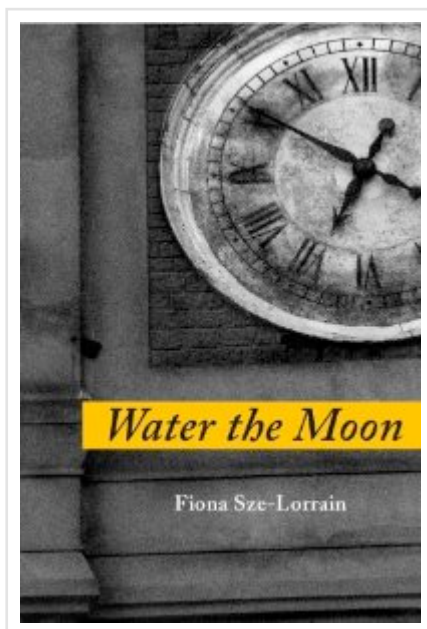


Water the Moon

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a review by Joey Madia

In the past 12 months I have had the opportunity to review several collections written by poets who are producing works stemming from their condition of being a Westerner in the East or vice versa. The time for such catalogued experiences is certainly ripe—with the United States and Asia having no choice but to come to terms with one another economically and otherwise, and the growing realization (from a small but potent population) that the future of our world must exist in a place that honors Uniqueness without fortifying Boundaries, such dichotomy-breaking insights are keys to the doors of New Possibility.

Who better to keep those keys than the modern poet?

From Sze-Lorrain's bio we learn the following: She was born in Singapore and "grew up in a hybrid of cultures." She attended school in Britain, the United States, and France. She has performed worldwide as a zheng concertist and released a CD in 2009. She is an editor at Cerise Press and a translator, and writes non-fiction as well as fiction.

With such a varied education, artistic background, and cultural palette, Sze-Lorrain is ideally suited to represent the vanguard in what so many of us hope will be a braver new world. *Water the Moon*, her first poetry collection, sheds light on what such a world might be.

The book opens with a couplet from Li Po, and proceeds in its opening section, "Biography of Hunger," to explore the sensual experiences of the author as she watches her grandmother "water the moon," creating a culinary delight with historical ties to the Emperor Chu Yuan-chang 600 years before.

History, and one's country-based sense of place within it (and ultimately outside of and beyond it), provides the roads on which she navigates in poems with titles such as "Shoebox Filled with Mao Buttons," "Tibet," "A Talk with Mao Tse-tung," and "Odyssey." Highlights of this section are the prose-like poems "The Sun Temple" ["I pause at a

hermit's rococo cave, now revamped/as a Bed and Breakfast"] and "The Unrecorded Days" ["In this world, every rendez-vous existed before the very beginning"].

The second section moves westward, and is entitled "Dear Paris." Here the poet is at first the stranger in a strange land, laying out her prayer:

I come to you for salvation,
old and delicate,
aging yet timeless

The poems progress to a sense of her finding the familiar in the new, again in the culinary arts, as expressed in "Breakfast, Rue Sainte-Anne," where the worlds of East and West are clearly connected by the ending lines.

With this newfound footing, the poems gain a surety of self-in-place, as Sze-Lorrain experiences architecture, art, and love (all symbolized through the recurring themes of moon and water), until she can once again look at Geography through the lens of History in "A Brief History of Time."

The once-stranger is now at home, and her many interests and aspects flow ever more seamlessly together, where the preparation of food is likened to Flaubert's use of commas and verses are flavored with myriad cultural references from around the world.

It seeming fitting to call the last section of *Water the Moon* its "third act," as it is very much a poetic exploration of art, artists, and broader-ranged thinkers. From Albert Einstein to Man Ray, Edith Piaf to Picasso [and his Muse, Dora Maar], Van Gogh, and Chopin, Sze-Lorrain employs her knowledge of history and geography to situate her own artistic sensibilities and sensualities with theirs. The final section, entitled, "The Key Always Opens," goes on to explore the relationship of Samuel Beckett with his own Muse, Suzanne, after he was stabbed by a pimp in 1938 ["Be My Bride"].

In a bit of fun, the collection offers "A Lot had Happened: A Five Act Play," an homage to Gertrude Stein's satire of the rigid form of 5-act plays before visiting the photographs of Steichen and the "ruach" of Romanian poet Paul Celan.

The collection ends with a poem titled "Instructions: No Meeting No World," which ties all of the themes and artistic forms of the book together, summed up in the sentiment:

"Prefer rivers to regrets. Two of them happen
to meet outside the window."

The confluence of two rivers is known to be a magical place, full of supernatural occurrences and triumphs and tragedies of equal measure and memory.

Add a shining night-disc above, and you begin to understand the power and meaning of

Water the Moon.

Joseph Madia's reviews have been appeared in many syndicated publications. He is a playwright for the New Mystics Theatre Company, and the author of *Jester-Knight*. Learn more about Joey Madia at www.newmystics.com.

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By (author): Fiona Sze-Lorrain

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