

Poet writes about the soul and change

Laney Fouse
Assistant Opinion Editor

There are only two subjects that lend themselves to a poet's pen. These, according to the poet Li-Young Lee, are joy and death.

To the joy of many who filled Gregory Forum last Wednesday night, the young poet transcended us to another time and place. His poems, like short stories of his life, offered us a glimpse beneath the surface of his character.

Once there, we felt the tug of his ancestral ties to his Chinese parents. We endured the love and heartache he feels for his wife and sons.

Perhaps, by his own admission, his greatest struggle in writing poetry is to "get it right." Lee admits, "there's a very painful distance between the person and the experience. At least that's the way it feels to me. No matter what you do you can't get closer. You can't get inside another person's essence."

Yet, when his strong, clear voice echoes through the crowd, you somehow feel his essence. Speaking to the audience about his poem about eating a peach, *From Blossoms*, Lee says he probably didn't get to the essence of the peach. He claims that every poem he ever wrote was a failure—a great failure. His poem, *From Blossoms*, he says, "was one of my finest failures."

People have asked him how he does research for a poem. His answer, "I eat things. I ate about 20 dozen peaches . . . but that's my idea of research. I ate peach after peach after peach. "It dawned on me one day I was eating a particularly good peach that I had no idea what this peach was. So I was trying to get this taste of the peach. So I'm looking at the color and the whole thing was just escaping me. The more I looked, the more I thought, the more it was gone. So that's a problem and the bigger problem is when you're trying to write a poem about it. If you're a poet you don't want to write a poem about the peach, you want to be the peach."

To help further explain his idea of research, Lee offered this, "On the airplane here they were handing out apples. They don't give you meals any more on the airplane. They throw peanuts at you from the back of the airplane.

"Sometimes they hand out apples and you're supposed to say thank you, thank you. You pay \$600 for a ticket and you only get an apple. It occurred to me as I was eating this apple that I don't



Photo by Laney Fouse

Visting Poet Li-Young Lee shares with CCC how he looks at life differently.

know what an apple is. So I take a bite out of it. I'm chewing it, I'm trying to hold that taste so that I can understand. The more I try to do that the more it escapes me.

"From taking a look at the apple I see that it's not red at all. There's blue in there, yellow in there, there's a little purple, a little black, it's brown. It's not a red apple at all. "And I'm sitting there having these thoughts—I was sober, I wasn't on LSD or anything. I kept looking at this apple and it dawned on me that it's not red at all it's multicolored.

"I hadn't a clue about its flavor. So I take another bite. The more I thought about it the more it escaped me. By the time I'm done I've eaten the whole thing—the seeds; I'm sucking on the stem. I'm trying to get everything I can out of it. The more I do it the more it escapes me.

"So I thought gee, and I looked up and everyone is eating their apple very happily and I'm having this existential crisis. That happens to me a lot. This is my idea of research."

Lee, a prolific writer, admits that Ralph Waldo Emerson is one of his favorite writers.

"[Emerson] is absolutely a visionary, absolutely mad and absolutely an ecstatic writer. If you read him right, he doesn't make any sense at all. He's speaking from another place. His sentences are very incoherent, leaping, making jumps because he's all over the place."

The love for Emerson's work

prompted Lee to start reading the writer's journals. Ironically, it was here that he ran across a passage where Emerson was talking about the Chinese immigrants. According to Lee, Emerson wrote, "I really don't understand them. They have no poetry, they have no music, they have no culture." Lee laughingly states, "I guess the Sian, the T'ang and Shang dynasties escaped him entirely."

Besides his poetry, Lee offered up a lesson in life. He believes thinking of people in terms of their usage is a fatal error. He insisted, "That kind of mentality is rampant right now in our culture and on our planet. So, we think of everything in terms of equipment. Someone looks at the Grand Canyon and thinks, ah, oil fields. Someone looks at a forest and thinks lumber, not forest."

He further adds that we tend to look at people the same way. "You might look at a women and think good housekeeper. I'll marry her. You might look at a man and think good breadwinner. I'll marry him."

In listening to Lee, one comes away from this event feeling somehow changed. Maybe it's because your ancestral roots run deep. Or maybe it's because you value the traditions of your family. Just maybe it's because the poems of Li-Young Lee are about the body, the soul and about change. His poems are about life. But most of all, his poems are about the challenges joy and death brings to each of us.

'Mutual Consent' bristling with tension and humor

Andrew Beck
Staff Writer

If Hollywood wants to make an American version of the French film, *Mutual Consent*, its actors should take a course in "Divorce 101" and "Spousal Revenge."

The Portland Film Festival has some great French films submitted to this year's screenings, like the gender-bending comedy *French Twist*, France's submission for Best Foreign Film Oscar. *Mutual Consent* is also a impressive piece of work, but instead of using comedy timing it uses malicious intent and quarrelsome behavior.

a few month after the divorce; Jeanne is starting a new life in Paris and Romain is staying in the family home. Like so many divorces Romain and Jeanne think that they maintain a healthy relationship after their hasty divorce.

The movie continues after the couple has been a few months apart and we see a healthy, growing, Jeanne with a new life and an unemotional Romain.

...This heated argument sets the tone for the entire picture...

Although he doesn't show it, Romain has been completely emotionally tortured since his family's defection; this side of him you don't see be-

cause of perfectionist and anal-like qualities. The writing and casting of Romain is one of the high points of *Mutual Consent*; Richard Berry's character can get much better as the consummate disgruntled divorcee. Romain deals with his emotional frustration by taking it out on Jeanne, trying to discredit her among her friends, family and at work. *Mutual Consent's* script is full of growing tension and is bristling with witt, humor and hidden sadism. Romain's constant war with Jeanne and her growing insecurity as a result of it makes *Mutual Consent* a good choice for a weekend movie.

The morning after the fight a painfully sober Romain and desensitized Jeanne "mutually consent" to get divorced and give Jeanne custody of their ten year old daughter Mado (Adrienne Winling). All seems well during the divorce hearing and yet Jeanne faints outside the courthouse, a perfect symbol of things to come.

The divorce seems amiable enough at first for Romain and Jeanne as the movie continues

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Mutual Consent played at the Portland International Film Festival and is now playing at Koin Cinemas in Portland.

CCC to be graced by Hirshfield



Contributed photo

Lora Wahrgren
Assistant Photo Editor

Clackamas Community College will be graced with the presence of Jane Hirshfield, famous author of three books in a special poetry reading today in Gregory Forum at 2 p.m.

Her most recent book, *The October Palace* received two awards from the Poetry Center, the Commonwealth Club of California and the Bay Area Book

Reviewers.

She resides in Molino, California and has taught at school such as University of California at Berkeley and University of San Francisco.

"I've known her work for several years...I think she's one of the best cotemporary poets in the US," said English Instructor Diane Averill.

This is one reading you shouldn't miss.

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