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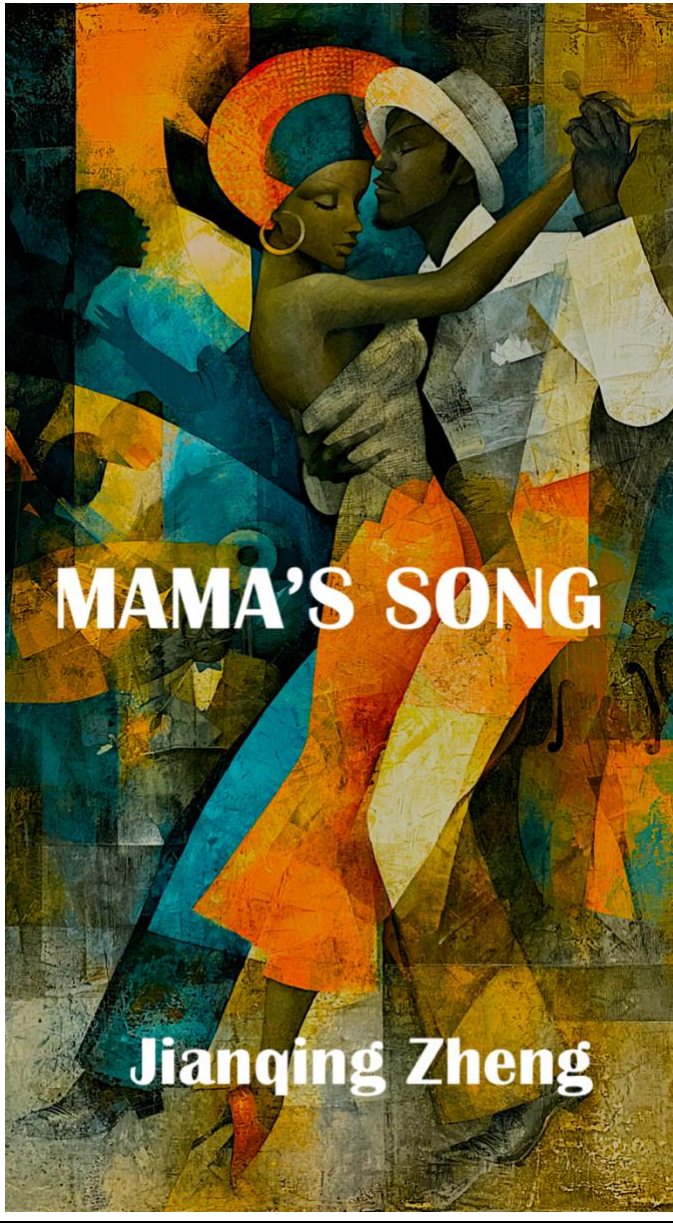

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Made available online and/or printed in the USA and elsewhere as a novelty and commemorative document celebrating the poetic works of Jianqing Zheng.

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Richard Stimac and his new book ***BLOOD, WATER, AND STONE***
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Image: *Midnight Session at the Lenox*. (AI-assisted digital image) by O:JA&L staff creative. 2026. Public domain via MidJourney AI.

MAMA'S SONG

Poems

JIANQING ZHENG

for Mama Nell George

(1921 – 2010)

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LOUIS ARMSTRONG

In an ear-grabbing
loud burst

his trumpet
is jazzing up

the dance floor
into hugs and hops

~

Dancing shadows
shuffle and swing

in the song
of *La Vie en Rose*

blooming dreamily
in his distinctive rasp

~

The Voyager
Carries his song—

"Melancholy"
and jazzy—

on its journey
into outer space

SIDNEY BECHET

A clarinet's soft soliloquy
wanders at a crossroads, searching
for a feeling to *Treat It Gentle*:

wind weaving the dark night
in a blare of New Orleans jazz.

A soprano's cheerful cry
keeps a heavy heart afloat
down the dream, down the river,

down through the shadows
of streets to jump up jazz.

The soft soliloquy of a clarinet
turns back at the crossroads, searching
for a feeling to *Treat It Gentle*:

life needs jazz to jazz up,
jazz needs life to liven up.

JOHN HURT

His blues whispers
in a gentle melody,
calm and smooth
with a fingerstyle flow
of the Yalobusha River,
like a simple chat
to his country folks.

They don't sway
or sing along,
they don't nod,
clap or tap,
they just listen,
immersed in his
soothing voice,

as slow as his steps
weary on the dip and rise
of the unpaved roads
he must travel
for his Avalon blues.

DRIVING SOUTH ALONE IN BESSIE SMITH'S BLUES

This autumn night, the sound of rainfall
is as mindless as a restless chatterbox

I push on the car radio, and Bessie Smith's
"Standin' in the Rain Blues" flows out:

Rain, rain, rain, don't rain on me all day
Rain, rain, rain, don't rain on me all day

Immersed in her powerful contralto
I croon with her expressive intensity:

Rain, dear rain, don't rain on me all night
Rain, dear rain, don't rain on me all night

Even if you rain all night I ain't got blues
Even if you rain all night I ain't got blues

Rain, dear rain, your tears will dry at sunrise
Rain, dear rain, your tears will dry at sunrise

I chant along to Bessie's thunderous moan
and our voices drown out the annoying rain

Rain no longer threads her soulful blues
Rain no longer threads my driving blues

I am singing with sunshine on me all night
I am singing with sunshine on me all night

I will get to my dream place at bright dawn
I will get to my dream place for a brighter dawn

MOVE ON UP
IN MAHALIA JACKSON'S SONG

Her gospel booms
in a divine voice,

touching the hearts
of the weary bodies

to jump excitedly
in the battle cry

of a shouting chorus,
clap their hands

loud and long,
and soul-dance

to shake off shackles
of hardships

endured day and night
on their trek

to climb the mountains
for a beautiful dream

to live as an equal human
in this world.

BILLIE HOLIDAY'S PAIN-ESQUE

In one breath of her
bruised voice, sadness
bears more sadness:

hanging from southern trees
rooted in the blood
of lynched bodies,

strange fruit releases
the smell of burning flesh
and the rotten stench

of a dark history
when freedom was
a star never sparkling,

a word too luxurious
for the oppressed
to even breathe.

JAMES COTTON'S CHEERFUL BLUES

His harmonica blasts out the joy
of hopscotching, hip-bumping,
foot-stomping,

and whistles into a freight train
chugging-chugging
across wide cotton fields—

making the iron rails
throb-throb-throb
into fast heartbeats.

Notes surge like high cries
and deep-throated wails,
drawing short breaths,

thrilled in the heavy rhythm
of chanking-chanking
Delta blues.

DIZZY

A sudden wind
scoots
stoops
scuds

surfs
skids
swoops

a Corvette
revving
up-down
on a narrow
mountain road

jerking
burping
rattling
to halt
in awe

at the edge
of a cliff—

thunderclaps
of cheers
and applause
laughing
into
a trumpet

blaring
hopping
bopping
into
brassy
bebop

JOHN COLTRANE'S MEDITATIONS

Christmas Eve…
nodding
by the fireplace
as the shrieks
of "Serenity"
blow hard
from a gramophone,

I close my eyes,
hunting
for an inner peace
dodging
the chaotic noise
of the world.

~

Yearend walk…
desiring
to decompress
my body,
I press play
on "Consequences"
via smartphone,

and my mind
surrenders
to tumble
in the violent
waves shattering
my desire into foam.

~

Alone time…
an "Offering"
of meditation
skids like a skater,
spinning
into a culmination

of peace
belching gladly
in wind—

a catharsis
of night
released
to sunrise.

LITTLE MILTON

The expansive Mississippi Delta,
where gorgeous sunsets

promise splendid dawns,
where old railroads and stagnant rivers

divide communities,
where white cotton shimmers

under blue skies,
where the harvest of dreams

sounds like the popping
of dry soybean pods,

is the fertile flatland
where the roots of blues

go far and wide,
where "The Blues Is Alright"

day and night,
where a juke house shakes

in loud claps and heavy stomps
along with Little Milton,

whose booming voice
thunders through the roof

to startle stars to blink
with a delightful surprise.

SWINGING
IN LKJ'S "HURRICANE BLUES"

It's a bold beat
for palm trees
to line dance,

shake the shore
and release
the riddim of joy

into a smooth flow
of a soft voice—
blues-poesy

in the low lap
of the wavelets
to lure you

to nod and shog
in the murmuring
of his song

chasseing
on the dream sea
of calm night.

KILLING TIME
IN PO' MONKEY'S

Autumn
rain
taps

the
juke's
tin roof

as rustic as delta blues

which
braids
a refrain

into
a flight
of dreadlocks

to shake off the world

no longer
nice
to innocence

no longer
nice
to itself

drowning in the flood of chaos

JUKE NOTES

afterglow…

a beer bottle
left by the door

of a backroad juke
keeps winking
until stars leak in

~

chewing

a bluesburger
at Ground Zero…

a bluesman
drifts over to sell
his first album

~

tipsy night…

a bluesy voice
staggers out

of Po' Monkey's
to swing
in autumn wind

~

delta storm…

the long-closed
juke joint

sways
as if walking
on cypress knees

IMPRESSIONS: GUT BUCKET BLUES

The bucket beats burst
at the corner of Beale Street
cranking up the speed,

a flock of starlings
in undulating patterns
at autumn sunset.

~

Outside the smoke pit
the busker drums the bucket
into chitlin blues,

the barbecue smoke
starts to twist its slender waist
into shifting shapes.

~

A carriage horse struts
with a proud gait, its clip-clop
an echo of blues

beaten out gladly
by the busker, whose shoe box
is tipped by sunset.

MAMA'S SONG

Weeding a small patch of tomatoes
and setting trellises in the backyard,

Mama hums a spiritual in a low voice:
a bumblebee buzzing over azaleas.

When she was a young woman,
Mama left her small Louisiana town

to work as a butcher in New Orleans
and a singer in Louis Armstrong's band.

Her magnetic voice always draws
a broad smile from Dad, who wobbles

to Mama as her garden helper.
Day after day, her songs sprout

into vines climbing with clusters
gleaming red in my memory.

FREED AT LAST

New Orleans
jazz funeral—

a gospel hymn
slowly swings

bidding farewell
down the street

~

autumn wind—
a dirge

following
the procession

to the grave
above ground

~

parasols rejoice
and dance

in stomps
to shake up

the dead
for the second line

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

JIANQING ZHENG's poetry collections include *Dreaminations*, *Visual Chords*, *The Dog Years of Reeducation*, *A Way of Looking*, *Enforced Rustication in the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, *The Landscape of Mind*, *Delta Sun*, *Just Looking*, and *Delta Notes*. His poetry awards include three Mississippi Arts Commission's poetry fellowships, the Gerald Cable Book Prize, and the winner of the Slapering Hol Chapbook Competition and of *Georgetown Review* Poetry Competition.

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A closet drama in two acts by Anthony Hamilton

How to Love a Headstone
Poetry by Sloane Asakura

The Last of the Gallants
Poetry by Atar Hadari

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Poetry by Amanda Leal

Deer in Fog at Twilight Near Squalicum Lake Road
Poetry by Richard Widerkehr

Democracy has Lifted Up Its Voice
Poetry by Mike Puican

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Poetry and prose by members of the Two-Year College Caucus at AWP

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Poetry by Ellis Elliott

Home

Poetry by Amanda Leal

Study of Burkas

A poem by Dana Sonnenschein

The Open Window

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Poem scrawled on a maize-sheaf for her (last offering)

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A poem by Bruce Bond

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Haibun by Keith Polette

Family Photo of America

Poetry by Lynn Potts

Chester River Reverie

Poetry by Priscilla Long

Salton Sea

A short story by Mike Murray

The Fiddler

Poetry by Tim Hunt

A Balloon Called *Young America*

Poetry by Jennifer Clark

High Fashion

Featured Collaboration

Poetry by Adjei Agyei-Baah & Fine Art Photography by Jerome Berglund

2023

Rain Comes to the Central Valley
Poetry by Adrienne Pilon

DECIDUOUS
Poetry by Jean Kane

Potter's Valley Road
Poetry (Americana) by Richard Widerkehr

Old Barn *or* How Things Go On
Poetry by Penelope Schotte**Nothing To Be Sorry For**
Poetry by Lynn Cohen

Small Lantern
Featured Haiga Collaborations
Haiku: Hassane Zemmouri and Photography: Megali Bretou & Bea Bauer

A Sport and a Pastime
Haiku (Americana) by Ron Scully

Night Train
Haiku by Jerome Gagnon

The Aquarian Foundation
Poetry (Americana) by Jeffrey Gray

Once There Was a Way
Poetry by Steve Myers

Local Habitations
Poetry by Edison Jennings

Occasions for Listening (Excerpts from a WIP)
Spencer Silverthorne

2024

Needful Things
Micropoems by Ronald J. Scully (Americana)

Designation
Poetry by Wendy Taylor Carlisle

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Poetry by Michael Lee Johnson

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Formalist poems by Peter Austin (Americana)

Garden
Poems by Jianquing Zheng (Americana)

Let Me Say This Up Front
Poetry by David James (Americana)

GEMS
Poems by Larry D. Thomas
BESTIARY
Poems by Larry D. Thomas

2025

WEST Toward Squalicum Mountain
Poems by Richard Weiderkehr

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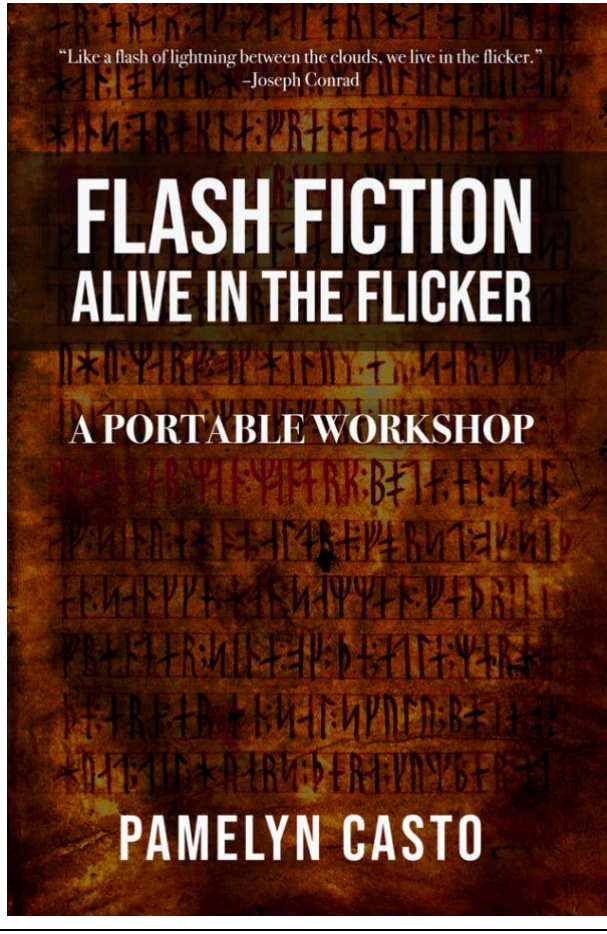

AMAZON REVIEWS

for Pamelyn Castos's *FLASH FICTION: Alive in the Flicker*

Daniel J. Nicholas
Reviewed in the United States on August 26, 2024
Verified Purchase

If I were to teach a class, this book would be required reading or a course outline for discussion. Bravo, Pamelyn! In addition, I look forward to your monthly blog to start up again.

David Lignell
Reviewed in the United States on November 23, 2022
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Pamela Casto's new text, Flash Fiction: Alive in the Flicker, is a must have "portable workshop" workbook for anyone who desires to learn and practice the many forms of flash fiction.

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Norman Jensen
Reviewed in the United States on April 2, 2024

Reading is great but hands-on prompts are even better.

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