

Spoken Flares, Sung Beacons

selected poems & song lyrics

Eileen Aronson Ireland



Eileen Aronson Ireland, born with the Great Depression, friend of Venice West beat poets, marched for and wrote of the urgent social issues of the 60's–80's, civil rights, woman's rights, the Vietnam War and later called out 21st century evils. Yet, beyond this, her poems range to insightful personal revelation with frank courage, and sprinkles of ironic humor. Her style, too, has a notable spread from traditional sonnet and haiku to unique formats with cadenced imagery. Poignant human concerns, coiled within resonant technique, flag her powerful work.

Advance Praise for Eileen Aronson Ireland

“The poetry of Eileen Aronson Ireland sings from the rhythms of postwar Brooklyn to the beats of Venice, California, onward to the dreamlandscapes of contemporary New Mexico, and forward, toward the rushing future. Calling on histories and prophecies and childhoods and friendships, Eileen Aronson Ireland's poems touch the reader with music, with imagery, with a singular human life voiced fully by an original sensibility. While every debut is retroactive, Eileen Aronson Ireland's collection offers us an unexpected poet, freshfaced and spirited, her newness belied only by the years.”

—**Susan Hansell**, playwright and founding editor of *Spot Lit*

“It's rare these days to recover an artist associated with the Beat Generation, but poet Eileen Aronson Ireland carries that legacy forward through a voice of quiet staunchness, one drawing an intimate geography of the West Coast with humor, tenderness, and a persistent reminder that our domestic and public histories are always intricate and inseparable.”

—**Nancy Grace**, Virginia Myers Professor of English (emerita), The College of Wooster; author of *Jack Kerouac and the Literary Imagination*



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A SPECIAL NOTE OF GRATITUDE TO

William (Bill) Mohr who found me at age 80, reignited my
poetry flame, then mentored in friendship;

&

Susan Hansell who *Spot Lit* me in print and also
became a true mentoring friend.

AND IN MEMORY OF VENICE WEST BEAT POETS

Stuart Z. Perkoff and John Thomas

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On the Road of One's Life: Eileen Aronson Ireland's Poems and the Lingering Tumult of Venice West

Spoken Flares, Sung Beacons is both a debut and a retrospective, and both categories will likely interweave on several levels as readers become familiar with this book's intriguing evocations and contrasts. If a debut means an initial encounter, for instance, it is not just Eileen Aronson Ireland's writing that is formally collecting itself for the first time, but also an introduction to this book's readers of the community of poets with which she was aligned over sixty years ago. As we near the end of the second decade of the 21st century, Venice West frequently oscillates between becoming better known to those curious about the Beat movement while almost simultaneously retaining an almost Xanadu allure of distant, uninhabited enchantment. The names of that community's leading figures remain submerged by the canonical preference for urban areas with a longer pedigree of literary superficialities.

The vibrant scene Ireland found herself participating in sixty years ago, however, was anything but an obscure contingent of so-called underground writers at that time. As I point out in *Holdouts: The Los Angeles Poetry Renaissance 1948-1992*, Venice West is the titular subject of a poem in Donald Allen's canonical anthology, *The New American Poetry (1945-1960)*; furthermore, the community is specifically referred by Allen in his introduction. The neglect of this scene within almost

all accounts of Beat writing at the end of the last century remains somewhat puzzling, especially in a postmodern period of literary critique in which the privileging of masterpieces is suspect. If the recent transmogrification of Venice into an oceanside annex of Beverly Hills has had any beneficial side-effects, perhaps one could be the renewed interest in Venice West, since it provides such a contrast with the current exclusiveness.

In Ireland's case, her voice is literally still present in the Venice West scene, in the form of recordings made by Lawrence Lipton, a poet best known for his raucous homage to Venice West, *The Holy Barbarians*. Lipton, it could be argued, was engaged in a makeshift anthology, in which he was coaxing work from poets who would either not have books at all or would wait years for their work to be collected.

Although Eileen Ireland did not begin publishing any of her poems in a literary magazine until the past decade, her writing was accorded respectful attention by several of the most astute members of the Venice West scene, with whom she shared a recessive literary gene of hermeticism. Her lifelong reluctance to seek public attention for literary writing is not at all surprising when one considers her initial affiliation with Venice West, a community in which artistic career-mongering was regarded as an indication that one still was firmly lodged in middle-class America. Bruce Boyd, for

instance, whose poetry was also included in another volume edited by Donald Allen, still has not had a single stand-alone collection of any of his poetry – not even a chapbook. He remains a singularity within the purlieu of *New American Poetry*.

As noted in this collection, the poet most important to Ireland was Stuart Z. Perkoff, whose late 1950s' poem about the Holocaust, "Feasts of Death, Feasts of Love," was the first avant-garde delineation of the aftermath of the Jewish genocide. Indeed, Perkoff was considered the leading poet of the Venice West ensemble that included the late Frank T. Rios, Tony Scibella, Bruce Boyd, and John Thomas. This community, which Perkoff often viewed as closer to being an anarchistic ensemble rather than Beat, first coalesced in 1955, before the Six Reading in San Francisco took place. One should not make the mistaken assumption that Venice West was derived from examples set in North Beach or Greenwich Village; and once launched, Venice West continued to amass those with a serious interest in poetry. As was the case with Ireland, John Thomas took up residence fairly late, and he became the first to acknowledge her in a book as a voice in this community. In point of fact, it was only because Thomas (aka John Idlet) used a fragment of one of her letters as an epigraph for his first poem in his own first eponymous book (Red Hill Press, 1972) that I initially knew of Ireland as someone pertinent to this scene. Years later, perusing Perkoff's journals at U.C.L.A., I

found her name again, listed as a member of the poetry workshop that Perkoff and Thomas had organized.

When I first managed, early in the last decade, to track down Ireland in her mountain redoubt, she told me that she had not been writing for a number of years, and yet the recent poems make the interlude of withdrawal seem like one of artistic necessity, a test self-administered to determine the solidity of the early work. Most certainly, this poet discovered her particular intonation back at the start, and has nurtured it even in her apparent absence from an active community of poets.

One of the most important poems in Ireland's book, "Jerusalem Duet," follows the example of Perkoff in making Jewish identity part of her communal artistic continuity. With dialogic empathy, Ireland catches the tormented ironies of historical displacements and exiles. Nor is that Ireland's only political focus. Given the age of the poems, it is remarkable how the urgency of Ireland's voice still reverberates on the page. In part, this sense of being thematically pertinent derives from an unusual engagement by Ireland with one of the most arduous upheavals of our lifetime, the liberation of South Africa from apartheid. Exuding the bohemian patina of an euphoric period in resistance literature, Eileen Ireland's poems simultaneously remind us of the many ways "resistance" can modulate our understanding of any individual imagination.

Her poems also remind us of that admonition that anyone engaged in a liberation project must also find in it the resources of personal emancipation. For Ireland, this is an exuberant, charismatic affirmation of the life-force in its intertwined eroticism. As models for that upstart life, Ireland turns to one of the classic models of self-determined liberation, Isadora Duncan.

The infamous accident that ended Isadora Duncan's life has an almost tarot-card-like aura; the manner in which her scarf abruptly knotted itself into a hangman's noose of sorts has attracted the attention of many poets over the years, including Hart Crane. For Ireland, this heroine deserves the homage of emulation in the form of gestural ritual; it is also an occasion in which Ireland's self-portrait reveals her skill in giving the pirouettes of line breaks the delicate pause needed to make the image palpitate:

Silk scarfed
To quell
September chill
Taking wheel to
Drive my day

("Channeling Century 20")

If the personal lyric almost always flickers with grace notes of something sundered, Ireland's poems accept the poignant aftertaste of loss that adheres to

the wound one licks in self-rebuke; her poems also simultaneously extend to the reader the resonance of solace shared. Modest aspirations aside, her poems hint at an assuagement that can reinforce the virtue of forbearance, more needed in the plight of present days than even the Beats anticipated. At the same time, Ireland is fully aware of the transformations in contemporary social networks. Her poem, “The Surfer Knows,” which plays with the trope of the internet’s denizens as “surfers” of the web, swivels in agile free verse lines.

The Beat movement most certainly generated more than its fair share of cautionary tales in which the personal lives of those who challenged the normative standards stumbled on mortality earlier than they ought to. The diversity of people in the scattered communities of Beat writers and artists, however, proved to be a crucial aspect of the gratifying survival of many of the women, some of whom have written with precise insight about their youthful experiences. In particular, Joyce Johnson’s *Minor Characters: A Young Woman’s Coming-of-Age in the Beat Orbit of Jack Kerouac* is a splendid memoir of that era in which Johnson notes that “Most of (the Beat women) never got the chance literally to go on the road. Our road instead became the strange lives we were leading. We had actually chosen those lives.”

The gift of these poems by Eileen Ireland is that the life she chose no longer seems so strange, but the

only one that could have been affirmed as worthy of being lived, not just then but up until the present moment. Recognition of her as part of one of the most audacious and inspired undergrounds in American literary history is long overdue, but her quietly heroic persistence will now join the conversation of how to go about empowering our imaginations.

Bill Mohr

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1960's through the 1980's
poems & song lyrics
VENICE BEACH, CALIFORNIA



You Resound

You resound

beneath the surface of my day
infusing memories

Even kissing a child's cheek
murmurs waters we share

as vortex

as music

you touch me

I touch you

You resound

in fathoms of my night
to the source of poetry

touching

everywhere

Grandma

Waiting at the station no
knots in your shroud
zaftig Grandma Becky
worn to bones

I never asked you questions
You never told me anything

Do you dream in Yiddish Polish Russian English
the marked village *shtetl*
you grew breasts in
before the crossing
age sixteen with one brother
Who was left swaying
in the doomed synagogue
father mother sister
Did the walls *wail*
that last night or
chant your escape
from *blood-land*

or did you hear only *Matchine Ahmerika*
you would stitch you life on

husband a *landsman*
3 children
4 grandchildren
7 great-grandchildren
husband only son 1 daughter
already under stone

What do you read between *their numbers*

What do you hear the morning after

a child dies or

10 *yahrzeit candles* later

How many lips kiss you

with my son's lips

What must *I* bear

when *I* no longer can

Waiting at the station no

knots in your shroud

zafzig Grandma Becky

worn to bones

I never asked you questions

You never told me anything

Tattoo Man

1

Bottles of *claws* and *flags*
of *breasts* of *chains*
red *black* and *blue*
and *green* for *nipples*

Bottles of *icons* and *myth*
of *memories* of *fears*
for *bodyscapes*
coded in *pride*

Handy on a steel table
antiseptic and cotton
serving needles
screaming for flesh

2

Window on the ocean
where the drowned devolve
to the void *ineffable*

Poster on the window
Map Your Essence
In Color Immutable

Man the Rover
bares his back for an
immutable revelation

Wizard of Symbols
stabs *Zodiac Signs*
in color *impeccable*

3

*(Legend tells that when a tidal wave was
announced some people rushed to see it,
others to ride it and some were washed away.)*

A spasm of the rocks
the water wired them.

Swing low sweet chariot

and the *solemnly* voices
like every radio Jesus
squawked the day the time
the lookout beach
but the height?
the appetite?

They came with binoculars
eating potato chips
They came obsessed
teasing destiny
with anticipation

...coming for to carry you...
warbled the Tattoo Man.

The potato chips will be soggy
the sand thronged again
flipped rocks in the
crust of Japan jaded
undulations regular.

...*home* he crooned
looking over *Jordan*
at the hysterical gulls
Great hypodermics
they *suck and jet*
he peeled *fortissimo*

4

Dragging her ghosts
until his room is filled
she cries *Heal me Poppa Please.*

Maybe *hearts in flames*
or *twined forget-me- nots..*
he smiles

No...not that she whines
folding naked arms
I just mean..*moving on*

Hands grasping stars
perhaps *or surfers*
dancing the waves

She dreams back and raw
I begged him not to try
not **that wave...NO**

Maybe red forceps
or a seaweed wreath
He stalks her ghosts

Quick cut the cord
a child to hold .
Let me count the toes

He juices two
footprints worth
to finesse her dream

Gone done with it
at last now cooing
The lie soothing her open

for the rapture
of the remedy
lusting home

The Vietnam Wall

(written to music as Eileen Ireland)

I searched for your name on The Wall
Now here's your name after all

Your beloved name
among thousands of others

sons daughters and fathers
husbands lovers and brothers

Here's a red rose for the wall of the fallen
the black granite Vietnam Wall

My tears find your name on The Wall
Other tears shower them all

We can't forget
there are thousands of others

sons daughters and fathers
husbands lovers and brothers

Roses for all on the wall of the fallen
the black granite Vietnam Wall

Some wanted to go
but others said no

The many just went
where the government sent

A handful won fame
A number caught blame

Too many earned rank
on a black wall of names

Together we sing by The Wall
One nation joined after all

to honor your name
and those thousands of others

sons daughters and fathers
husbands lovers and brothers

Roses and songs for the wall of the fallen
The black granite Vietnam Wall

Some cracked under strain
Many still sweat the pain

Too many gained peace
on a black wall of names

Roses and songs for the wall of the fallen
our black granite Vietnam Wall

2010 on, *poems*
LAS VEGAS, NEW MEXICO



Charles Brittin 1967, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2005 M.11) © J. Paul Getty Trust

I Got a Man Jazz

- (1) I got a man
a good time player
can carry me
weightlessly in air
and fly me there
with his rocket racer
I got an outer space embracer
- (2) I got a man
sweet and wise
sees the tears
behind my eyes
cools my fears
with arms and ears
no lies
- (3) I got a man
can heat my nights
and blaze my days
with firework delights
his elegant timing
mimes my rhyming
I got a genius man who stays

(4) I got a man

can fly my balloon
to both sides
of honeymoon

(5) I got a man

loves a full course dinner
knows how to feast
ain't no beginner
just get daddy in the mood
forget about fast food

(6) I got a man

looks me up and down
strips my smart talk
with his *gimme* smile
til I'm ready
for unzipping hands
in my own sweet while

Tsunami, Beyond Hokusai

half past the planet
rock fracks
ocean whelms

we window Hokusai's
frothing wave
tagging frail boats
on wind bossed sea
respecting its power
poised

but *this* water
geared by *earth* not wind
slurs *beyond Hokusai*
sluices low fast widening
energy toward *land*
then shoaling back and back
clears bay to beach
to arch a crest of terror
to the highest power
a *Hiroshima* of water

not war-venge
radiated malice
but an amoral force
cascading *holocaust*

eyes mouths open shut
towns tea pots Buddhas crack
flotsam kimonos shoji straw
relics of centuries muting to mold
flesh bones sink crush crawl
 images are easier to lure
 than sounds
 but impossible to hear
 or forget their
 stifled terror
 in quake shocked sea
now incense chant smoke
soaring debris shores
evolve dirged essence and
drowned voices toward the *ineffable*

This Mocking Sea

Don't taint us *flighty mumbblers* laughed upon
With hauntings from the sea our music shares
enchanted cadences exotic snares
insinuating words We *paragon*
our poem- sprays for Gods *and* Babylon
Our conch of myth its blast revealed can tear
the nest-tied sea-hawk poet clear *aware*
to *reach* Atlantis Eden Avalon
where fable poetry were spawned to dare
to salvage paradox that swarms *this sea*
where shark the ironies from green traps stare
hurl clear prey buoying prey soar mocking *free*

Which poet pirate cheating snares will wrest
the mocker from the mockery our test

Within

always
a step within
the lights the set
the words our
embodied words to
surge the house as
bolts of intuition as
informed passion
charging
scripts acts
of this life

At Almost 86

for Briana and Brandon and other young poets

Not to preach she winks
Just sounding her own way
She plumbed the cache

of arts and books and
her own seminal depths
for images and nuances
as architect of **words**

So plumb the *cache*
and *your seminal source*

to build **your words**

but store her wink
to *cheer* you
deep and far



About the Poet

Born in Brooklyn, New York in 1930, Eileen Aronson Ireland wrote poems in high school but not until migrating to Venice Beach, in Los Angeles, California in 1959, did she write again, inspired by Stuart Z. Perkoff's poetry workshop. She also became active in the social & civil rights movements of the era, as seen in her work.

By 1989 she was no longer writing, and in 1995 she retired from California Civil Service, to Las Vegas, New Mexico. In 2010 a phone call came from poet/professor William Mohr, who had tracked her down after hearing a 1964 tape of her poetry reading. Then, she again began to write; and after he introduced her to Susan Hansell, playwright/editor of *Spot Lit Magazine*, her work was published in multiple issues. Professor Mohr guided this book.

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