

# The Land Of Bliss (Pitt Poetry Series)

By Cathy Song



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Cathy Song's fourth collection of poetry unveils glimpses of the elusive but everpresent power of wisdom and compassion. Recognizing that we have the ability to create our own misery as well as our own bliss, she finds the unexpected in broken lives, despair, and even seemingly joyous occasions. Song's poems are often, like a handful of water, "cold and impossibly / clear, unlike anything / you've ever held before."



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#### The Land Of Bliss (Pitt Poetry Series) By Cathy Song Bibliography

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#### **Editorial Review**

#### From Publishers Weekly

Song's fourth collection is neither as rigorous nor as striking as her first, Picture Bride, published in the Yale Series of Younger Poets series: its fairy-tale narratives are full of well-worn archetypes and symbols; its confessional pieces describe domestic scenes, juvenile illness and the deaths of relatives in familiar (though still painful) terms. Some pieces use a forced Hawaiian pidgin English that at times speaks with an eerie weight, as in "Pokanini Girl." In many pieces, though, short lines speed the eye down the page, but can't rescue the language's sing-songy sleepiness: "Rain that falls and has been falling/ is the same rain that fell/ a million years ago." And the more lyrical pieces can't quite break their tropes: "The roses, stems cut at a slant under rainwater, / breathe cool nights into the air thick with biscuits." Archetypes abound, but their exploration is often too cursory: "Out of the broken/ mirror, sand/ shatters the hourglass/ and a waterfall of time/ pours all the years/ you spent in the desert." The handful of narrative poems with long lines work better, as they don't pile on the drama of the short (frequently one-word) enjambed line, as in "The Bodhisattva Muses": "Slow to awaken to danger, we still did not intervene./ Even when the boy treated her badly,/ we allowed, for the sake of art, the boy to break her heart." In such poems, the collection finds its intended voice.

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## From Library Journal

A Hawaiian native and daughter of a Chinese orphan, Song writes culturally fascinating work that at its best displays a superb mastery of craft. In her fourth collection (her first, Picture Bride, won the Yale Younger Poets Award in 1983), she magnificently intertwines the harsh reality of her aging parents (including a mother frequently hospitalized for depression) with memories of her grandparents. Past and present converge along with the belief in an afterlife that is Song's ancestral heritage: "Dying is what we do, and do/ so well we weep and drink and let/ things fall into cracks." But despite containing some of the finest long poems this reviewer has read in recent memory, this volume is uneven. When Song strays too far from autobiography, as in "White Ashes" or "The Sister," the speaker is lost to us, and the poems become shrouded in mystery. Set within this weighty context, some of the shorter pieces seem trivial. But despite these flaws, the entire second section of this work is strong enough to highly recommend it for all libraries. Rochelle Ratner, formerly with "Soho Weekly News," NY

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#### Review

"Song writes culturally fascinating work that at its best displays a superb mastery of craft...she magnificently intertwines the harsh reality of her aging parents (including a mother frequently hospitalized for depression) with memories of her grandparents."

--Library Journal

"Cathy Song ... is rapidly becoming a major poet. Her new poems have a genuine hard edge as she explores the multicultural voices of Hawaii."

--Isthmus

#### **Users Review**

#### From reader reviews:

#### **Pedro Engle:**

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#### Wilfred Walker:

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