

Theresa Whitehill

Poetry Biography

—Updated October 2020—



A California poet, letterpress printer, and graphic designer, Theresa Whitehill served her local community as Poet Laureate for the northern California city of Ukiah from 2009 through 2011 and has been involved her entire career in the production of poetry readings and literary events. Her poetry and letterpress broadsides, many of which are produced with her husband, artist Paulo Ferreira, are in the collections of the Getty Center for the Arts, the John Hay Library of Brown University, the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley, Mills College Special Collections, the New York Public Library, the Los Angeles Public Library, and Stanford University's Special Collections Library.

Born in Sacramento in 1957 and raised in Marin County, she attended UC Santa Cruz and Mills College in the late 1970s and early 80s, studying natural sciences, Spanish, English, and book arts. Since 1984, she has lived in Mendocino County in northern California, where she is well-known to local poetry audiences through her readings on public radio and local venues. In 1997, she served as Poet-in-Residence for Stags' Leap Winery in the Napa Valley, participating in salons that led to the catalog, *Napa Valley: Portrait of a Community*, which became the subject of a CBS Television Special. "Évora a Doce," her poem about Portuguese soul and food, was published as a limited-edition letterpress broadside by Alice Waters and Berkeley letterpress printer and designer, Richard Seibert. Her animated version of this poem was selected by the American Film Institute to feature in its annual report that covered her work for the California Digital Arts Workshop in 1998.

A collaboration with chef and author Shannon Hughes has resulted in a series of culinary poetry events between 2000 and 2003, blending Whitehill's writing and performance with Hughes' soulful food and menu concepts. She is a co-founder of Watershed Poetry Mendocino, for which she developed a poetry mapping project of the county. The event, a sibling to the Berkeley

Watershed Poetry Festival, brought together Mendocino and Sonoma County poets, writers, environmentalists, and activists, featuring numerous literary and environmentally-themed events in Ukiah between 2008 and 2012.

Whitehill's collections of poetry include *A Grammar of Longing* (2009) and *A Natural History of Mill Towns* (1993), published by Pygmy Forest Press; *Saudades*, published by Stags' Leap Winery in 2003; and the anthology, *Deep Valley: Poets Laureate of Ukiah 2001–2018*, published by Slow Mountain Press in 2017. Her body of letterpress broadside work covers nearly two dozen publications of her own poetry along with design and letterpress printing of a series of contemporary poets for the Berkeley publisher *hit and run press*, which includes poetry by Gary Snyder, Charles Wright, Brenda Hillman, Robert Hass, Charles Simic, Jane Hirshfield, Robert Pinsky, Louise Gluck, Sharon Olds, and A.E. Stallings.

World travel has deeply informed her literary work; she has spent significant time in Greece, Portugal, Spain, and the Hawaiian Islands, where she has studied and been influenced by the poetry and Rembetika music of Greece and Turkey, the life and poetics of Constantin Cavafy and Federico García Lorca, and the Fado music of Lisbon.

Whitehill is currently working on several new collections, including *Diván del Tamarit*, a poetic narrative of her journey to Morocco for the International Sacred Music Festival in 2012, and *Internal Combustion*, a collection of poems thematically centered on automobiles and other natural and unnatural disasters, partly inspired by the work of poet and ethnobotanist Dale Pendell and his Pharmako Trilogy on plant powers, poisons, psycho-active drugs, and herbcraft: *Pharmako/Poeia* (1994), *Pharmako/Dynamis* (2002), and *Pharmako/Gnosis* (2005). She spends her time between her studios in Ukiah and St. Helena, California, managing her commercial graphic design business, Colored Horse Studios.

Electronic Mail: poetry@theresawhitehill.com

Website: <https://theresawhitehill.com/>

Poets & Writers Profile: https://www.pw.org/directory/writers/theresa_whitehill