

CSPS
Poetry Letter
No. 1
March 2024

Edited by Maja
Trochimczyk

Poetry Letter

California State Poetry Society



2023 MONTHLY CONTESTS, SONNETS, FOLK ART, AND OTHER DELIGHTS

The first issue of the *Poetry Letter* of a given year presents all prize-winning poems from Monthly Contests of the previous year and these poems fill the majority of its pages. I interspersed poetry with illustrations taken from the Smithsonian Museum of American Art: folk art by Josephine Joy (1869-1948), anonymous rural paintings, and California landscape art by Elmer Wachtel (1864-1939), Paul Dougherty (1877-1947), and Edward Bruce (1879-1943). The majority of paintings come from the oeuvre of Josephine Joy. According to the Smithsonian, "Josephine Joy grew up on an Illinois farm, where she loved to sketch birds, trees, and flowers. Circumstances prevented her from following her artistic calling until 1927, after her children were grown and her husband had died. Joy lived in California then, and the WPA's California Art Project afforded her the opportunity to work gainfully as an artist." Her paintings are in a folk-art style reminiscent of the French Henri Rousseau or the Polish Nikifor. She painted what she saw and how she saw it, without succumbing to artistic conventions about how art "should" look like, that changed in time like women's fashion styles. Folk artists encapsulate the freedom of self-expression, and the happiness of creativity. Since most, if not all of the awarded poetry is in free-verse format, I invited Konrad Tademar Wilk (one of the editors of the CSPS *California Quarterly*) to contribute some of his sonnets and to write three sentences about "why writing sonnets today?" Instead, he wrote a sonnet about sonnets and answered my question by *reductio ad absurdum*. Thanks for the freedom of expression and the blessing of creativity! Best wishes to all poets. Share the joy!

Maja Trochimczyk, CSPS President

THE SONNET

For Maja...

Why write sonnets today? Why not? What else—
—would you wish to do? Play golf or bridge?
Ride a gondola down Venetian canals?
Walk along the Campo de Hielo ridge?

I dreamt once of a *sonnet* in outer space
Full of metaphors like asteroids, and bare—
—planets filled with craters of meaning, a trace...
What is a sonnet good for? It's not fair...

The questions suggest justification
As if the ancient tradition needed:
"modernity's approval," sensation—
—of progress and speed, as though conceded...

...that a sonnet belongs to an antique—
—era... a touch of the older mystique.

March 13, 2024
Konrad Tademar



Aloes by Josephine Joy. Smithsonian American Art Museum, ca. 1935-38, No. 1971.447.43

2023 MONTHLY CONTEST WINNERS

Monthly Contest Winners of 2023. Alice Pero, the CSPS Monthly Contest Judge selected the following poems from submissions received each month. The first prize is a minimum of \$10. Congratulations to all the winners!

January (Nature, Landscapes): ♦ 1st Prize: Gurupreet K. Khalsa, "Slip Your Mind Into the Water" ♦ ♦ 2nd Prize: Joel Savishinsky, "Orchard in Autumn" ♦ ♦ ♦ 3rd Prize: Colorado Smith, "Spirit-Bears of British Columbia"

February (love): ♦ 1st Prize: Jean Varda, "Lover" ♦ ♦ 2nd Prize: Erin Garstka, "In the Twilight"

March (Open, Free Subject): ♦ 1st Prize: r g cantalupo, "The Art of Poetry"

♦ ♦ 2nd Prize: Ed McManis, "Thirtieth Anniversary"

April (Dreams, Mythology, Other Universes): ♦ 1st Prize: Lucia Kiersch Haase, "I Have Dreams"

♦ ♦ 2nd Prize: Gurupreet K. Khalsa, "Provisional Identity"

May (Personification, Characters, Portraits): ♦ 1st Prize: Allison Burris, "Two Good Witches"

June (The Supernatural): ♦ No Prizes. July (Childhood, Memoirs): ♦ 1st Prize Jane Stuart, "When Memories Fade"

August (Places, Poems of Location): ♦ 1st Prize: Jiang Pu, "Hakone Garden"

♦ ♦ 2nd Prize: Michael Shoemaker, "Stargazing at Capitol Reef"

September (Colors, Music, Dance): ♦ 1st Prize: Joan Gerstein, "Grayscale of Truth"

♦ ♦ 2nd Prize: Stewart Breier, "Hellstorm, Stars & Angels"

♦ ♦ ♦ 3rd Prize: Kevin Madrigal Galindo, "the rhythm of the wind"

October: No award. ♦ November (Family, Relationships): ♦ 1st Prize: Mia Kernaghan, "A Strange Chance"

♦ ♦ 2nd Prize: Jeff Graham, "Though" ♦ ♦ ♦ 3rd Prize: Carla Schick, "Today I Could Be Something I've Never Been"

December (Back Down to Earth – Time, Seasons): ♦ 1st Prize: Thomas Feeny, "Fall Afternoon"

♦ ♦ 2nd Prize: Jane Stuart, "December Melody"

MONTHLY CONTESTS – JANUARY AND FEBRUARY 2023

SLIP YOUR MIND INTO THE WATER

Clinging by the tree-equivalent of fingernails,
roots forsaken by sandy shoreline
surrendered companion lying in a tangle,
of slimed branches, the broken old oak
leans heavy above the water,
draped in swaying Spanish moss
like an ancient woman, bent and shuffling
in her drab dressing gown, waving
farewell to each friend in turn, waiting
for her time to fall into watery depths
to become a colony of barnacles.
And if you forget the cycle
to *descend into your own dream**
you can slip your mind into the water.

* Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, p. 108

Gurupreet K. Khalsa, First Prize

Published in *Mocking Owl Roost Blog*,
Special Poetry Issue, 1 September 2022.
www.mockingowlroost.com/blog



Stag at Echo Rock, Anonymous folk art, oil on canvas. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Herbert Waide Hemphill, Jr. and museum purchase made possible by Ralph Cross Johnson.

ORCHARD IN AUTUMN

Nothing seems to be what it is.
The carrots are like cardboard
Tomatoes: tasteless. Too many
mealy melons. The world has
taken a chemical bath, and
my taste-buds admit to
a failure of nerve.

This is not my orchard, and I
have a say only in its sadness.
Beyond the borders where
the trucks and spray do not reach,
a rogue tree, sidelined, overlooked,
limbs angled like arms crossed in anger.
It mimics a crone, overgrown,
whose suckers proliferate,
the mature apples now barely
the dimension of young-breasts
or swollen plumbs, still sweet
but tart, almost embarrassing in
their small, geometric hope for salvation.

How many more years will these offerings
keep their virtue? How many more years
will I be able to hike this far to find
their weeping crowns, the edges graced
by the blasts of October storms,
the windfall at their swollen feet
turning the soil into apple-earth?

Perhaps this is another creation's
Tree of Good and Evil, its roots
snaking beneath the boundary
between abuse and neglect,
the latter-day witness whose
autumn fruit embodies the Fall itself,
last resident of a paradise from which
one would welcome the relief of exile and
the exchange of innocence for character.

Joel Savishinsky
Second Prize in January

LOVER

your body
and my body
and the sun
that rises
between us
and melts
my mind
opens
my heart
body of
bird song
clear wind
on the
mountaintop

I am a cloud
resting
against you

Jean Varda,
First Prize in February

IN THE TWILIGHT

~ for Mark

I want to go back to the moment we met
and make the ocean lie still on the horizon,
light and shadows bathed in blue haze,
my only thought that you cannot be too near.

I want to see your blue eyes in the twilight,
two stars in the long vanishing trail of memory,
your hair wild as a tumbleweed and golden
as sun in the heat of an August afternoon.

I want to hear your voice in my ear so soft
it sends down a deep shock of desire stinging
the tip of my heart and startles my breath
from lungs easing into o's of ecstasy.

I want to make love beneath a saucer of a moon
with the tide at its full and the last ship lost,
every woman who ever loved singing from my bones,
every man who ever fell beneath a siren's spell answering.

Erin Garstka
Second Prize in February

SPIRIT-BEARS* OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

*When all animals spoke the same language,
the first Moksgm'ol* showed a human
which plants were edible,
and how to catch salmon,
leave their remains in forest
so their nitrogen nourishes trees.
About to teach the human how to hibernate all winter,
the white-bear was killed by another human 's arrow.
Now we bum wood all winter to live.
-Kitsao Legend*

In the spruce forest, to the thump of the shore-break,
shaman-song purls from a stormy petrel's burrow.
Muskeg tea tumbles downstream to the strait
as foamy spume from swells
surround a sperm whale's stifling stench
as it rots on the rocks—

its purple tongue almost gone
and cavernous cavities eaten into its creamy blubber.
On black sand under a huge hemlock,
a white bear and her white cub* sleep-off their feast.

To the rasping cry of Stellar jays,
dippers and crows harvest salmon eggs
from the riffled edges of the muskeg stream.
Bald eagles on cedar perches await
silver silhouettes in the Pacific
or unsuspecting shorebirds.

At dusk when the tide is out,
the white bears savor salmonberries,
search the sea wrack for kelp and crabs,
then CRUNCH acorn barnacles off the rocks ...



**Over 100 white black-bears live on the islands
in the Great Bear Rainforest.
They're not albinos: both their parents
had a recessive no-melanin gene.*

**Colorado Smith
Third Prize in January**

William Henry Holmes (1846-1933), *On the Coast of California*, watercolor, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Dr. William Henry Holmes, n.d. Catalog No. 1930.12.8.

THE ART OF POETRY

I usually get where I'm going
without knowing how I got there.

I'm driving, but it's not me fighting
traffic, it's someone else, someone
who's infinitely better at such tasks.
No, I'm usually drifting along on a song
elsewhere, listening to Bix Beiderbecke
on the coronet say, or Bechet on his
moaning clarinet. I'm here following a
burst of pure expression, gazing up
through the windshield at a splash of
wild, lime-green parrots, while my double's
out there cruising through amber lights,
negotiating a horseshoe curve. And yet it
is in those moments, in that space between
habit and desire, that suddenly a phrase
will come, a cluster of sounds, a line or two
or even a whole poem, written in my head,
or scribbled on the back of a grocery list
as my other continues squiggling down
the mountain. You might think there's
more to it than that, a kind of alchemy
to the way I multiply from one to three,
into this one braking into a turn, that one
watching a flight of green wings, and this
last one scattin' to the notes of a sweet
horn—a magic say to how one street shifts
into another until—poof!—I am there!—
parked in front of a grocery store or a pet
shop. But, that's not the way it happens
really. My pen simply rolls forward toward
some place I've never been before, (or I keep
revisiting), and I, I just go along, surrender
to the mystery

r g cantalupo
First Prize in March 2023

First published in *Wisconsin Review*

THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY

She dreams
of onyx, I'm
pretty sure,

a beach
in Mexico,
with a child

who sells carved
elephants, jingles
pesos, pans

for American gold.
Before she wakes
I rub lotion

on my hands
and feet
as if I were

an apostle,
an awkward
clumsy one

with wrinkled
sandpaper skin,
a long memory.

Ed McManis
Second Prize in March 2023



Josephine Joy (1869-1948), *Irish Cottage*, oil on canvas. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from the Newark Museum, ca. 1935-1938; Catalog No. 1966.31.8.

MONTHLY CONTESTS – APRIL, MAY AND JULY 2023

I HAVE DREAMS

Watching Britain By Beach, the ocean gleams
reflecting a quaint writing shed in Wales
and I'm not there, but surely I have dreams

where Dylan Thomas wrote midst winded beams
of windowed sun so near to sea bound sails.
Watching Bntain By Beach, the ocean gleams.

Reading Under Milk Wood and thinking of themes
for poems. Inspiration never fails,
and I'm not there, but surely I have dreams

just as a famous Wales poet, it seems
writing wave length verse, telling of his tales.
Watching Britain By Beach, the ocean gleams.

A far away place, yet a closeness streams
in quiet sea currents of metered scales,
and I'm not there, but surely I have dreams.

In the mind of a poet, there's always schemes
to follow in one's mind like beachy trails.
Watching Britain By Beach, the ocean gleams,
and I'm not there, but surely I have dreams.

Lucia Kiersch Haase
First Prize in April 2023

WHEN MEMORIES FADE

What lasts is the wind that followed you home
and the color of my morning star,
your footprints hurrying across wet sand,
my twist of the rain-soaked rope to the moon
and all things that happened that wonderful day
when we said goodbye to children we were
and began our trip to the sky, we said
through marshmallow clouds and hundreds of stars,
mysterious time not yet written of
but a promised world full of Christmas toys
and books that told of deep rivers and trees
where life's melodies were always sung
and our tracks were easy to follow,
our tracks are so easy to follow.

Jane Stuart
First Prize in July 2023

Arthur F. Mathews (1860-1945), *Spring Dance*, oil on canvas.
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs.
David J. Carlson, ca. 1917, Catalog no. 1982.126.

TWO GOOD WITCHES

they cool their legs in the little pond,
watch the hopping frogs
glisten and swim, frogs gliding
under the pads, plopping,
lilies bloom & feet sway
back and forth

*tell me who you helped today,
tell me the song you sang
to the tune of human foibles*

sharing rice cakes,
crustless cucumber sandwiches
cut into triangles,
carrot sticks & cold brewed tea
blended specially to face
another day of kindness

they've rucked up blue & gold
skirts past their knees,
dancing feet stilled
paddling, paddling
point with flicking eyes
as the woodpecker knocks
& the fir answers--
they admire his plumage

Allison Burris
First Prize in May 2023



PROVISIONAL IDENTITY

*For whatsoever from one place doth fall,
is with the tide unto another brought
for there is nothing lost
that may be found if sought.*
--Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queen*

Sliding around on the surface of a soap bubble (also known as the Universe), seeking purchase. Experi'ence the bubble as two-dimensional. Piercing the bubble to vast interior emptiness brings about annihilation

yet
in infinite space
room enough.

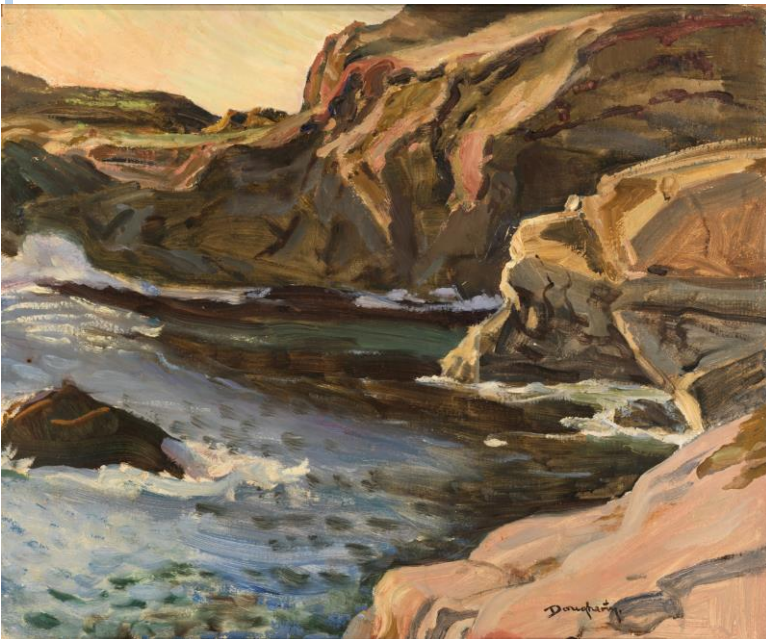
In traversing the bubble's surface I run and run to reach conclusion or understanding but end up where I began. Do you believe in this life? What if is the was of what shall be, Lao Tzu said, *remember how time past meanders into time present and becomes memories that linger through unforgotten years*, dispassionately seeing to the core,

mate
with heaven
feel
no break
return
to quiet.

Measureless untouchable source (repeated), music blowing dust. Hum of bass viols in the ocean. I walk on the beach, eyes on patches of sand just ahead of my feet. I am searching for a perfect rock—round, flat, bubble-smooth. What I find is not perfect. A bump on one side, ridges, swirls that could be a fossilized river, slick riparian eddies, islands, layers —

flow's origin,
mobius thread,
beginning/ending
simultaneous.

Rock, warm in my hand. If returned to shore, how long before its swirls, eddies become part of vaster ocean and shore, indistinguishable beginning and ending, *yesterday on the edge of tomorrow*, measureless untouchable source, found if sought.



Italics: from Sue Brannan Walker's poem
Yesterday on the Edge of Tomorrow

Gurupreet K. Khalsa
Second Prize in April 2023

Paul Dougherty (1877-1947), *California Cliffs*, oil on wood. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Carleton S. Coon, after 1935. Catalog no. 1968.148.

MONTHLY CONTESTS – AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 2023

HAKONE GARDENS

Once in a while
I need to come back to you
pluck my heart out soak it
in the jade-green wave
 of bamboo
rinse off its dust in your pond
set it free
let it swim
 chase koi fish & a few
 wandering clouds
 until cold morning dews
all evaporate
 from the mossy mountains
 & white-sanded rock garden

I need to shower
in the slow scent
 of a sweet olive tree
which flickers like incense
 grandma's wrinkled hands held
and a bell's wavering ringing
from a blue-bricked temple
 on the other side of the ocean

I need to look up
to a sky dressed with
cherry blossom
 maple & magnolia •
to the silent sound of

whispering wisteria
drop a petal

 or two

Jiang Pu
First Prize in August 2023

STARGAZING AT CAPITAL REEF

It's a mysterious nonmystery,
As I contemplate numberless
stars with the same mind
that counts out my correct change
at the checkout stand at the supermarket
I am baffled by the mathematical infinity,
An expanse of beauty I see
and yet I do not feel alone or distant.
There is something right on the outskirts
of the soul that lets me know
I am in some way more a beloved brother
than a rejected outlander
to these living, rotating masses of hydrogen and helium.
I am so glad you are here to hold my hand.

Michael Shoemaker
Second Prize in August 2023

GRAYSCALE OF TRUTH

Gray or grey
colorless
yet a huge range of hues
even fifty sexy shades
supple as silly putty faded drapes
solid as knitting needles sewing kits
mules hooves flannel suits a plane
mushroom hair gray matter brain
elephant and beluga whale
sunning lizards leisurely snails
dolphins cobblestones killer sharks
end of day just before dark
smoke from a distant fire
charcoal bullet wire spoon
staples drains cloudy afternoon
sardines drab depressed so sad
mold growing on a peach gone bad
a pirate's hooked hand caste iron will
a cool hip cat whose teeth are grilled
It's monkey bars slide and swings
ashes and squeaky box springs
It's lemur parrot pigeon gull
Unclear undefined distant dull
It's braces tools zipper and needle
Dubious areas that may not be legal

Joan Gerstein
First Prize in September 2023

HELLSTORM, STARS & ANGELS

While the hellstorm beat outside,
There were angels singing on the radio,
And the flickering of theater light,
Stars

Winged,
They descended,
Offering water and nectar to the parched,
In our flame drive land

Stewart Breier
Second Prize in September 2023

THE RHYTHM OF THE WIND

song sparrows forced to course correct
real-time, to get from A to B.
if you gaze upon the earth,
you'll see a scape of green
& whorled milkweed flowers bloom
dancing to the rhythm of the wind.

A striped licorice black and golden yellow bee
lands on milkweed petals.
Hopping from one beautiful blossom
to another in an improvised choreography,
it takes a moment to dip every new
partner lightly. They will spring back tall
when the bee is gone.

A strong gust announces itself
brushing the trees.
This wind has traveled by ocean
you can tell, the way it uses forest
to mimic the sound of receding waves
on shimmied sand.

The trees will pay no attention
to the syncopation of birds
chirping, instead they will slow dance
the day away to the rhythm of the wind.

Kevin Madrigal Galindo
Third Prize in September 2023



Landscape With Castles and Deer by M. A. Hall, n.d. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Herbert Waide Hemphill, Jr. and museum purchase made possible by Ralph Cross Johnson, 1875, Catalog no. 1986.65.116

A STRANGE CHANGE

Here is an hourglass of our time,
two spirits swirling like a carnival ride —
one with silver strands slowly coming undone,
and slips a light year away as we sit palm to palm —
the other newborn girl looking out at the world
and smelling sweet as Texas strawberry pie.

Here is where these two spirits meet —
at the kitchen table where all sins are atoned
and we wait with teacups half full,
watching a thousand crystal grains settle into place
to form only a minute's worth of passage in time.

One minute of life almost done and the other just begun —
paper thin skin hands turn to stardust under hospital lights
and a newborn is carried home for the very first time —
this is right before the hourglass is flipped once more
and life is reassured by the sadness, the strain,
the change and the flight.

Mia Kernaghan
First Prize in November

THOUGH

1
Each transparency: worlds of, conceivables beyond.
A hundred transparencies: one and none.
Transparent mirror: window's glance at window.
Transparent wall: rooms unending as they enter.

Inevitably, two people, face to transparent face,
invariably find themselves in the other's selves —
glimpses amidst and amongst
coinciding concretias of atmosphere.

2
Sometimes, infinite existences of and by a fingertip
touch another fingertip brimming
with alternate actualities unending.
Nothing changes, everything changes,
change changes —
change changes change.

The hand that holds the hand that holds.
Though, no —
two people,
no world.

Jeff Graham
Second Prize in November



MONTHLY CONTESTS – DECEMBER 2023

FALL AFTERNOON

The long breeze with its warning
sweeps down from the woods
heads straight for the lone boy
sprawled half asleep on the steps

Before him, in the yard
the white wind runs mad
swirling, gusting
snatching petals from flowers

He blinks up into the troubled air,
yawns at the gold-touched forest
moving hard upon the house

Patiently his day dreams on
while black-tigered trees laugh
to know
they'll swallow house and boy by spring

Thomas Feeney
First Prize in December

Published in "Breathing in Technicolor, Fall 2013

Josephine Joy, *CCC Camp Balboa Park*, oil on canvas,
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from General
Services Administration, ca. 1933-1937, No. 1971.447.41

DECEMBER MELODY

Tiger lilies
creek side flowers
shimmering drops
of silver rain
—such cold starlight
is this tomorrow
or today?

Bright and shiny wind
snowflakes in the air
winter's golden harp
plays on
in memory
but we wish for more
than yesterday

Shadows
light the sky
starry moments fall.
On the shore, a fishing net
full of broken shells
...but the sea is far away

Clouds cover the moon
night's shadows fall
over a stone garden.
You are planting
flowers made of glass.
This is time's menagerie

Jane Stuart
Second Prize in December 2023



FEATURED POET – KONRAD TADEMAR

UUR I

To quiet the soul enough to think, to feel, to know
To give those men and women of your heart a bit
To honor, to recall, to shout like angry crow
The cursed, the forgotten, the banished, the unlit
Diffused in the temporal flow of history
Stricken from the record of school pages, untaught
Truth rises from the dead, resurrected and free
The Eastern Soldiers who after Yalta still fought!
Not mere men, nor mere women, Titans, legends, saints

“Do not go gently into that good night” Thomas –
...was right – fight! Fight! Against the blood red restraints
Shatter the Hammer and Sickle... though the dawn alas –
... is far away, that you will not see freedom rise
Fight, fight! For all of mankind: fight! And do not lose!
We, the children, the grandchildren, brought up on lies
We will thank you after your unmarked graves – false truce –
... of “History is a lie agreed on” – have been lost
And we will light that candle, born again to the sun
To illuminate the moonless night of the crossed–
–out... the accursed, blotted, excised, like Akhenaton...
Żołnierze Wyklęci – here I lower my knee, pray
We will not yield so long as after night comes day.

March 1, 2013

UUR LVII

Divinity is contained in the unknown space
A mirror onto the soul, algorithm half lost
A half familiar, half forgotten blurry face
During the Bosnian War they blew up Stari Most

Ungraspable, so much so that it slips from the hand
Incomprehensible, baffling, bewildering
Beyond the mind's capacity to know, like sand
Slipping through the fingers, an odd obscure feeling

Does that make sense? A piece of dreams lost and found
Creation and destruction are casually bound
I look at the child and cannot see: a limit
For birth and death perception needs to omit

Ex nihilo nihil fit — throw open Hell's maws
The event horizon hides the root of love's laws.

**Konrad Tademar
May 30, 2013**

KONRAD TADEMAR

Elected to the Board of Directors of the California State Poetry Society in May 2020, Konrad Tademar (birth name Wilk) is an American poet living in Los Angeles. His works range from single sonnets to epic poems on themes including current events, myth, and philosophy. In addition to American subjects, his work is strongly informed by international events and history, especially those of freedom and oppression. Tademar's early childhood was spent in Poland where he was particularly influenced by the rise of the anti-communist Solidarity labor union.

Following his return to the U.S., he studied philosophy and literature at Los Angeles City College where he was president of the Poet's Platform. He then went on to graduate from UCLA. His poetry book *Fifty Sonnets*, titles like labels only get in the way... is available for purchase on-line. Other poetry chapbooks are out of print. He is currently working on two epic poems "Prometheus" and "Trafficking In Time" - scheduled for release in the near future. He has appeared in Los Angeles venues such as the Onyx, Ground's Zero, Magicopolis Theater, Wilshire Art Gallery, Bolton Hall Museum, and Pig and Whistle. In 1991, he founded the Witching Hour Poetry Gathering which has met continuously for over 20 years.

Additionally, he is a founding member of the Pecan Pie Organization, dedicated to artistic promotion and stage performances. Mr. Tademar recently served as the artistic director for Warsaw 80/75 performance of poetry, dance and music, celebrating the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of WWII (German attack on Poland), and the 75th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. The event was held at the Santa Monica Playhouse in September 2019.

The six sonnets are taken from his book of 164 sonnets, entitled *Trafficking in Time* and forthcoming from Moonrise Press. Written a-day-a-sonnet, these poems are diverse reflections on events of each day and their broader context.

UUR LVIII

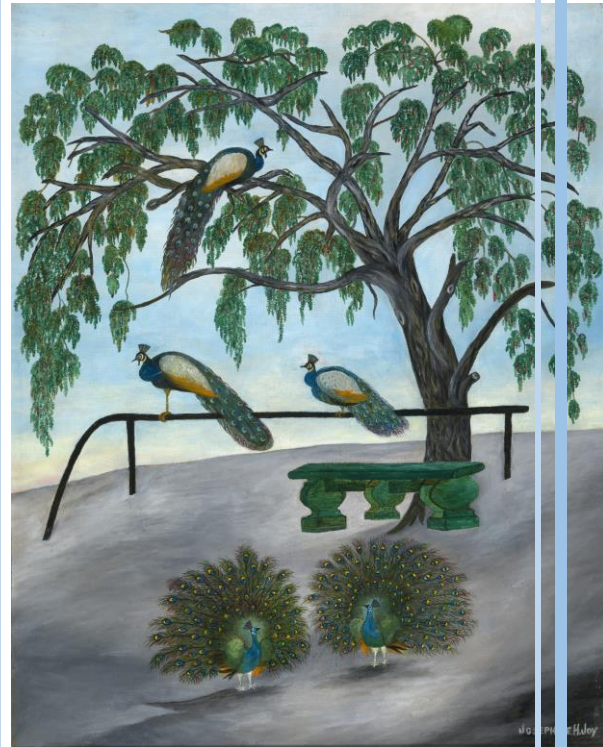
Happiness is a woman drunk on love, real joy
Sultry or too sweet, either way, I don't much care
Let it loosen her hair, shatter her reserve — coy
As long as she smiles and swings back and forth, the air—

—of magic in tune with red lips conjuring spells
Fingers making subtle signs suggesting soft places
Darting twinkle stars in the eyes — bottomless wells
Looking at you from across — while making faces

Silly and giddy as happiness ought to be
Freedom from care, time put on a shelf, dance of life
Happiness is a woman wearing red, you see—
—her place beside her man, far from any world strife

Moment to cherish, a sacredness to defend
Happiness is a woman's love holding your hand.

May 31, 2013
— for Sylvia...



Josephine Joy, *Trysting at Evening*, oil on fiberboard, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from General Services Administration, ca. 1935-1939, Catalog no. 1971.447.39.

Caption: "This painting may have been inspired by a sketch Josephine Joy made on one of her trips to the San Diego Zoo. The bench and railing in the image imply that this scene is a part of some man-made environment. The two peacocks in the foreground spread their trains to the fullest, displaying the bright colors of their plumage, and lift their chins in an attempt to attract a mate. The three birds perched on the railing and in the tree, however, ignore this elaborate show. In nature, the male peacocks are more brightly colored than female peahens, but here the artist shows them all to be more similarly colored."

UUR. LXIII

Now I close the doors of the caravanserai
And let m'soul drink her fill of the waters of life
A sand storm is come — let the new moon shade the sky
Draw your cloak close, cover your eyes, loosen your knife

The outsiders will seek to pierce your sacred mind
But they are only dust devils — holy water—
—will scatter their form, a Fata Morgana kind
Unreal except to cowards made of feeble matter

Steady your gaze as you still your heart, let calm reign
Miss not a moment nor opportunity
En passant capture the convergence of breath and pain
Cutting the throat of the threat, bleed to see

The flesh is the shore controlled self-knowledge makes whole
You and I are one at Katra where mind meets soul.

June 7, 2013
— a Litany against Propaganda

UUR LXXXV

Between the woods and rustle of leaves beneath the heels
In the shade of sky-struck trees sacred like mountains
Bordered by parking lots with their automobiles
Crisp concrete and gleaming glass of crowds at fountains

Middle-Eastern beads pray at Turkish coffee pot
Bescarved women in sunglasses seeking bargain deals
Far away the Cedars of Lebanon cry not
Even if the child in happy ignorance squeals

'Tis difficult to view world as the toddler sees
In innocent curiosity absent malice
Beneath my outstretched palm soil like the bark of trees—
—dry feels, in wonderland's hope each child is Alice

So small, rabbit hole sized, time stands still in dream world
To touch it all once again, the future to hold.

Konrad Tademar
June 23, 2013
- Midsummer

UUR XCVII

White stones in a semi-circle along straight lines
Clearly I am seeing patterns where there are none
And yet ripples of arcane laws appear as signs
Unconsciously made in state of true grace; the sun—

—strikes the stones arranged by an innocent child's hand
And I recognize by some Lamarckian process
Truth in ancestral memory, from distant land...
... violating laws of physics — to my heart flies—

—there to blossom, fester even; hatches sacred—
—patterns, geometry of broken symmetries
Alchemical design filtering some loose thread
Spun by fate to weave the garden back for its trees

I'd say the words, but I dare not! I'll map it out—
—instead and then I'll see the stars vanquishing doubt!

Konrad Tademar
June 30, 2013

UUR CXLIV

So, let me take you to wide open country, child
For this here concrete and glass steel built bright place
Is just a fancy jail for folks who fear the wild
People who hate the sweep of the horizon race

See the heavy yellow moon tonight? It shines strong
From outside where there are no boundaries, no limits
Where the one obstacle is the mind, come along—
—then to beyond, to the gallop rush by one's wit

Let the stars be your guide, and your backdrop the moon
Set your sights past the clouds, far from here, from man-made—
—things, let go the city and the road, you'll know soon—
—what freedom means, why hope and truth can never fade

Take my words with you to country open wide; trace—
—a path across the overdark, breathe outer space.

Konrad Tademar
August 20, 2013

UUR CLVIII

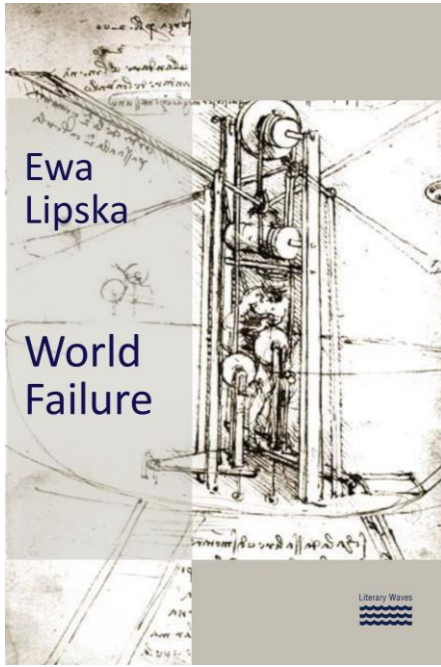
Parallel lines intersecting at vanishing—
—point of infinity constraining the bitter—
—noise of the hurt hummingbird as it fails to sing
Look to the moon, even there mankind leaves litter

Girard Desargues walks lightly... now untouching—
—plane of non-symmetric temporal vibration
A conflation of science and magic, matching—
—socks and shoes on the harsh pavement of elation

Here Terminus meets Thanatos with steel black wings
Sword drawn into perspective central axis line
Behold the moment, a pause to wait if it stings
Love within a mathematical cryptic sign

The matrix of oblivion lies in reach of all
Torture, while we wait for the other shoe to fall.

Konrad Tademar
September 13, 2013
- the Ides of September on Friday the 13th



Ewa
Lipska

World
Failure

World Failure by Ewa Lipska. Translated by: Anna Stanisz-Lubowiecka, London: Literary Waves, 2024, 80 pages, ISBN 979-888-4655-55-3

Being under the magnifying glass

World Failure is both intriguing and ambiguous volume of poetry. It is the art of distance and thought-provoking work that draws the readers in. The word in this poetry is treated with surgical precision in the tone of metaphysics and cognitive realism. Careful reading becomes a process where new meanings and interpretations appear. The lyrical subject speaks in a hushed voice about important events. The very beginning of the poem *Rebus* foreshadows an interesting play of meanings:

The riddle
wasn't limited
to the full Moon

Lipska's poetry in a high tone, full of references to history and music, is free from pathos and snobbery. The poet leans into a single existence or a phenomenon, watches them under a philosophical magnifying glass and interprets from many points of view. In this respect, it reminds

metaphysical poetry of Lars Gusstafson who observing specific ordinary events, objects or scenes builds a kind of deep philosophy of being. Surprising phrases and juxtaposition of words draw the reader into a new attempt to look at the world. It can culminate in a poem:

They Left. They Didn't Come Back

They left. They didn't come back.
Tangerines on the table.
The season of life is over.

The paintings they left behind
grow on the wall.

In *World Failure* the themes of love, death, passing, and pain are touched upon from a new perspective.

Life
acute preventive measure
against death.

It is eminently intellectual poetry requiring from the reader knowledge not only in the field of literature, but also painting, music, history. The poem *A Few moments on music* is delightful here beginning with the „harmony of the spheres” and ending mysteriously:

Luckily
music
is not
human.

The role of poetry and poets „sentenced to poems” is presented in an interesting way.

Homeless Poem

The homeless poem wanders
around the dark matter of paper.
Nobody's. The author left it
to its fate. An orphan of words.

Sometimes
poems are like abandoned dogs
barking for poetry.

Irony, humour, distance to oneself and the world shine through this poetry woven from a colourful fabric. And although it is the art. of cultural criticism you can feel the longing for the personal truth of existence and being „here and now” among wars and the returning memory of galaxies.

Working Memory

I won't be your role model.

We sit between wars
slicing the cheese of the moon
on a black plate.

I'm made of fears
and you need confidence.
I hold doubt and regret at gunpoint
and you're aiming at delight and courage.

A box of chocolates on the table.
I'm treating them to planets.
Celestial bodies in chocolate [...]

I can with full responsibility recommend a new poetry book by an outstanding poetess Ewa Lipska who in each poem gives us food for thought and reinterpretation of phenomena of nature and culture that are close to us leaving creative doubts.

~ Anna Banasiak



Josephine Joy, *Prisoner's Plea*, oil on fiberboard. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from General Services Administration, ca. 1935-1937, Object number 1971.447.38.

Family Matters—Poems for and about Grandparents and Grandchildren by Judie Rae, 42 Poems ~ 72 pages.
 Publisher: Kelsay Books. ISBN: 978-1-63980-353-8.

In her late teens, my wife of 54 years, was hurt in an ill-advised relationship. During this dark time, she found refuge on her grandparents' farm. Away from social scrutiny, she felt the healing hands and wise counsel of these loving people. Out of the crucible of experience they became ministering spirits to a devastated girl. This memory returned to me as I set about writing this review. *Family Matters* is a collection replete with life, captured in verse, which will encourage and verify our roles as major influencers in our families.

Grandparents and the Sense of Place. It is difficult to separate special people from their habitations. Rae opens her collection with "The Cottage", excerpted here:

No one clear memory
 of the first time I saw my grandmother's
 cottage stands out, no haunting view that returns
 distinct from all the other times
 I visited—and love—that home.

The river? Certainly that. But also
 the wooden floor Grandma
 painted forest green,
 bent over at the waist, wearing her
 no-nonsense shoes.

The washer with the wringer
 That once drew here hand through.
 The bruises, the broken
 Hand, I see still.

The poem continues setting a stage, as in a play. Grandma's garden which produced homegrown raspberries sitting on a bowl of cereal, a tiny bug found floating in melting ice cream served for dessert. "He didn't eat much," Grandma says; the dining room where everyone gathered to wait out the storm until it passed; and geese flying in flocks marking seasonal changes. The person so much a part of the place; the two are one in the make of the mind; both indelibly etched in memory.

Grandparents and the Sense of Touch. "What She Said," is rich with healing intimacy. The poet:

... can hear still my grandmother's
 archaic language, feel her warm
 aged hands as she patted my back,
 attempting to soothe me,

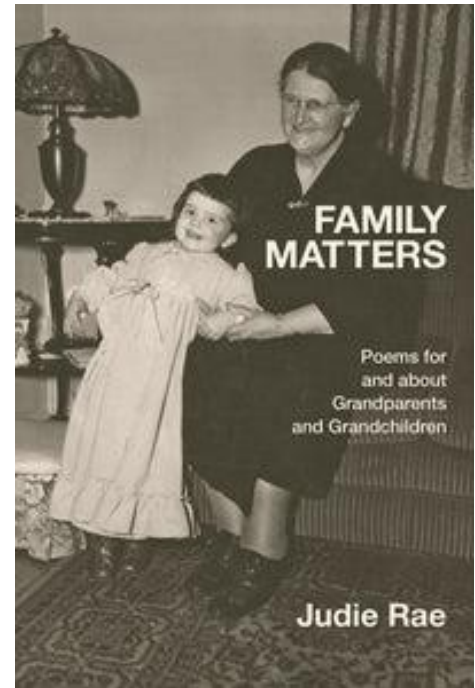
to erase the pain of whatever
 hurt had befallen her grandchild. ↗

Solace was her magic,
 a stoic's take on the world,
 the bandage she offered.

Her own pain was masked,
 lessened
 by the aid she gave
 others.

Whatever it is that grandparents have, call it a gift . . . Rae captures. Grandparents mask their personal hurts as they, with deft fingers, rub the shoulders of the aching young. Rae describes it thus . . .

and rubbed my shoulders
 waiting for the ache
 to ease, listening,
 always listening, saying



little, though some words
ring yet in memory:

Don't fret, child.

A Word About What Poets Do. The best poets have a knack for drawing you in. They have inscrutable eyes. Commonplace things breathe the essential air of love. In titles such as: "The Woodshed," the scent of wet wood, the musty residue of a leaky roof come through. "Unspoken Love," tenderly evokes wonderment as the poet recalls opportunities when she *didn't* tell her grandmother how she colored her life, how she gifted her with a childhood worth remembering. Rae displays literary skill in her use of humor and irony in "Saving for College," where coins were saved in a large jar deposited by parents, friends and relatives. One day the jar was shattered. When grandma inquired of her granddaughter where a replacement jar could be found, the response was: "Probably at the college fund store."

"For Aubrey, at Home," makes excellent use of internal rhyme, a technique which serves her well in delivering a heartfelt message:

Fever claims her baby rest
and she lays her small fierce body
against my chest and pats
my back as if to say,
*It's okay, Grandma; I know
you had nothing to do
with this.*

The wild expanse of years
moves between us—
little miss/crone
bridged by touch



I pat *her* back
to soothe
this child of my child.

As my grandmother
patted me,
her wrinkled hands, so mild,
now mine
breeching time
to bind all three:
Ghost, Grandmother, Child.

In this my seventh decade, I've learned to let my children and grandchildren live their lives. While tempted to impart "my" thoughts, "my" opinions, "my" wisdom, quite often I am the one who learns and grows because of them. However, if I were to offer a life-vision for my dear ones, this would be the one:

Directions to the Good Life

For my grandchildren

Head north to the future, windows
rolled down to collect the breeze.
On you way, feed the hungry.

Gas up on wonder.

Bypass the intersection of bitterness
and anger. Get lost. Find yourself
in kindness and smiles.

Grandparents: If you're looking for that elusive "something" you can't quite put your finger on . . . pick up a copy of Judie Rae's, *Family Matters—Poems for and About Grandparents and Grandchildren*.

Michael Escoubas

Quarantine Highway by Millicent Borges Accardi. 70 Poems ~ 93 pages.
Cover Art by Ralph Almeida. Flower Song Press. ISBN: 978-1-953447-35-7

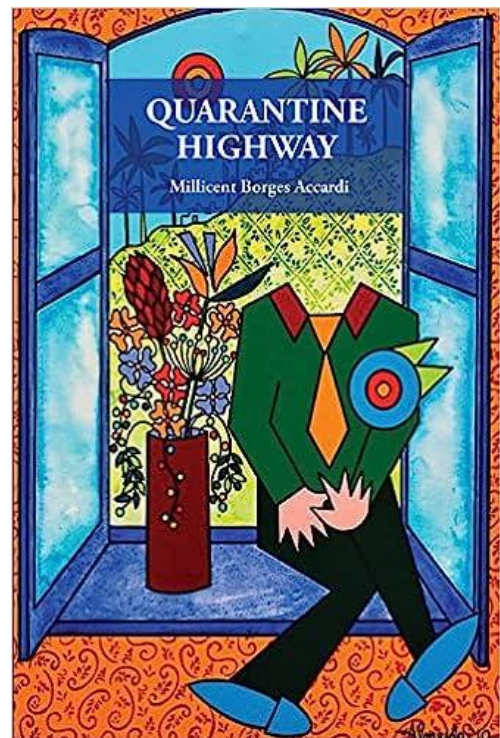
I was immediately struck by the title of Millicent Borges Accardi's fifth collection, *Quarantine Highway*. It suggests an interesting duality: full-stop on one hand, unlimited access on the other. In a book about the recently concluded pandemic, the title itself captures the essence.

I believe it will be at least a decade, maybe more, before a definitive history of the Covid-19 Pandemic will be written. In the meantime, it is the province of poets to guide folks through the conundrum of an era still impacting our nation's collective consciousness.

For a time it seemed we were living in a land (indeed in a world) not our own, navigating or trying to navigate life. It was a sea of uncertainty inhabiting two worlds. One voice commanded, "Stay in;" another screamed, "Get out," or "Let me out"! My goal in this review is to highlight this poet's unrelenting quest to capture this tension.

"We'll Come Down Close Behind," epitomizes Accardi's title. I share it in full:

And such and we have
and we need and we wa
and we have and if it happens,
we couldn't leave, and there is not a
never in the universe except now.
And but and and and for and if
Our place to live, it is a song
let it run peacefully into
the coda or the second chorus
where the refrain takes over.
And such and such and the homeless,
And prisons, and why can't I
leave my home without a mask.
We'd come down close behind
in the middle of a crowd, as if we
mattered and as if things were
normal rather than a new normal,
which is odious. Then, then and then
and could. Once, existence was on
full speed, catching rumors,
and touching faces and going outside.



Let me assure readers that the repetitions employed by Accardi are not typographical errors. Rather, they are part of her strategy to reach into the heart of her subject. It is like reaching into the trash because something that isn't trash is buried there . . . she wants to find it, needs to grasp an elusive something emerging with it firmly in hand.

Note line 6. I count 5 repetitions of the word "and," which is a coordinating conjunction. Conjunctions link related phrases and ideas in a way that makes sense. Why would Accardi use the term as she does? I encourage thoughtful readers to ponder.

Even Accardi's titles illustrate her strategy; they tend to be a little off-center, like the world of her subject. Titles selected at random: "Side by Side in Fragile," "For Truth would be from a Line," "As Among Grotesque Trees," "Differently, the Way Everything is Wrong," and "I Told My Friend to Rub her Lice Against my Hair." These are merely instances cited to show that *Quarantine Highway* is possibly the most unique Pandemic collection to hit the market *EVER!*

This excerpt from "In Oblivion," illustrates (as do many others) how we felt:

It is as if the world's engines
have ground to a frozen metal in the middle of
the midst inside a clutter clutch

of busy confusion and everyone
has been cast off, from the
blissful-working-gears we used
to down shift into.

The poem goes on to illustrate how . . .

We are ambiguous, a lost
part of speech, left behind.

Something my wife and I felt during this period was that of being cocooned like caterpillars. We imagined ourselves emerging as something more than before. "In Later Time," is about a similar sense of darkness or half-darkness, a kind of swampy murkiness. "There was / violence in the air, and I kept asking / myself what is another word for suffuse?" This poem captures a certain labyrinthine feel common during the pandemic. Try as we might the maze *seemed* to keep on winning.

While it *seemed* to be winning, in truth, it lost. Emerging, as a nation, from the cocoon alluded to above, it is my conviction that the caterpillar has become a butterfly. Are challenges latent in the aftermath? Of course, but my take from Accardi's bold new collection is one of hope. Accardi faces the hard reality of Covid-19. In poems that say what few others are bold enough to say, *Quarantine Highway*, inspires me to appreciate the good life offers. A literal quarantine may not be the worst quarantine. Do we not quarantine ourselves by the choices we make to cede our lives to evil?

Because of this poet, your reviewer is more determined than ever to live life to the full.

Michael Escoubas

CALIFORNIA STATE POETRY SOCIETY

Established in 1971, CSPS is the official state organization representing California to the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (NFSPS). CSPS was incorporated on August 14th, 1985 as a 501(c)(3) organization, so donations above the membership level are tax deductible. Donor and patron support ensure that (1) the quality publications of the CSPS continue and (2) our promotion of poetry and art in California and around the world thrives and expands. Information regarding renewal and patron contributions is on the Membership page of our website (.org). The CSPS began publication of the *California Quarterly* in the fall of 1972. The *California Quarterly*, published four times a year, accepts only unpublished poetry and no simultaneous submissions are allowed. Foreign language poems with an English translation are welcome. Submissions may be made through Submittable.com, via email, website, or even mail (by those without access to the internet and email addresses).

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MONTHLY CONTEST SUBMISSIONS GUIDELINES

California State Poetry Society encourages poetic creativity by organizing monthly poetry contests. The contests are open to all poets, whether or not they are members of the CSPA. Reading fees are \$1.50 per poem with a \$3.00 minimum for members and \$3.00 per poem with a \$6.00 minimum for non-members. Entries must be postmarked during the month of the contest in which they are entered. They must consist of a cover page with all contact information (name, address, telephone number and email address) as well as the month and THEME on cover page, and the titles of the poems being submitted.

Starting in January 2023, we are accepting previously published poems for our Monthly Contest. Please note the publication where it first appeared on any such poem. There are two ways to submit fees, by regular mail (enclosing check) or email (using Paypal): 1) by mail to CSPA Monthly Contest – (specify month), Post Office Box 4288 Sunland, California 91041, with a check made to CSPA; and 2) by email to: CSPAMonthlyContests@gmail.com (specify month), with fees paid by Paypal to the following account – CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety@gmail.com.

The monthly contest winners are notified the month after they are awarded. All of the winners for the year are listed in the first CSPA Newsbriefs and published in the first Poetry Letter of the following year. Prize-winning poems are also posted on the blog, CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.com. The 1st prize winner receives half of the prize pool for pools less than \$100. Please note: **Do not send SAEs**. We do not return poems. If you win, we will let you know. Otherwise, there are no notifications.

CSPA Monthly Contest Themes (Revised): ① January: Nature, Landscape; ② February: Love; ③ March: Open, Free Subject; ④ April: Mythology, Dreams, Other Universes; ⑤ May: Personification, Characters, Portraits; ⑥ June: The Supernatural; ⑦ July: Childhood, Memoirs; ⑧ August: Places, Poems of Location; ⑨ September: Colors, Music, Dance; ⑩ October: Humor, Satire; ⑪ November: Family, Friendship, Relationships; ⑫ December: Back Down to Earth (Time, Seasons).



California Spring Landscape by Elmer Wachtel (1864-1929), watercolor; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Bequest of Mrs. James S. Harlan (Adeline M. Noble Collection), ca. 1920, Object number 1933.4.9.