



CSPS Poetry Letter

Dear CSPS Members, Friends of Poetry, *CQ* Readers and *CQ* Contributors,

Some time ago, we gave up printing reviews, because we felt we were not so well equipped as some other journals specializing in them. As it happens, our newest *CQ* Editor, Nancy Cavers Dougherty, asked if we could print a review. I was very happy to oblige and present it for you directly below. And please *do* submit your poems through our website:

www.CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.org

Your *Poetry Letter* editor,

Margaret

UMSaine@gmail.com

Book Review by CQ Editor Nancy Cavers Dougherty

My Rice Tastes Like the Lake, Tsering Wangmo Dhompa, *Apogee Press*, Berkeley CA, 2011

At a WordTemple poetry reading held in Sebastopol, CA last February, Tsering Wangmo Dhompa read from this third collection of her poems. It was my first introduction to her work; I was captivated by her gentle presence and the power and profundity of her words. With the recent earthquake in Nepal and its devastating impact on the entire region, her background as a Tibetan-American gives her work an added poignancy.

Written in a prose style, her poems are driven by a logic and inquiry into life, with themes of happiness, the self, the experience of exile, geography, and relationship. There is a sense of longing throughout, longing for a country – and for her mother – that is beyond grasp and yet such a part of her identity. She embraces all the incongruities that life has presented her in brilliant combination, with one image moving to the next and revealing layers of meaning. I found myself rereading many of her poems and understanding more after each reading. Unlike some difficult poets, though, I never felt frustrated or thwarted, but more interested and surprised, too, at the many turns.

Her language and use of words can be playful at times and enlivening. I enjoyed the discovery of new words, such as furbelow, fillip, grift, tintinnabulation, perigee, and catabolism. She is in ways an intellectual poet, but without losing an overall feeling or tone. Her poems follow a progression of thoughts to arrive at subtle endings. There is a sense of orbiting in this universe.

Tsering Dhompa has also written a memoir, *A Home in Tibet* (*Penguin Books*, India, 2013), that traces her family's history; it is beautifully written. She lives in San Francisco.

Nancy Cavers Dougherty
Sebastopol, California



The following are two lovely landscape poems about the Sierras:

Ponderosa in Sequoia National Park

Puzzle bark protects
the ponderosa overseeing our campsite,
even after small fingers peel thin patches
from its thick trunk
to build a pile of varicolored riddles
for pondering.
And while it can't compete
with the great sequoia—
in this space it takes center stage.

As I sit on a log,
as a bird chirps
and the voices of children echo,
the tree offers the last breath
of daylight—the length of it lit
by sun that will soon slip away.

Rocks looking like California trolls beckon.
I head up to the granite lookout and study the softening valley.
Meteor streaks will soon replace this billowy light.
Ponderosa pokes me from the side,
and I turn back to limbs spread wide and arthritic,
curling into disjointed shapes,
like the small dragon
with a lightening bolt for a tail.

I tread down the hill with care
through the facing incense cedars,
sugar pines, lodgepoles, and white fir,
even as the ponderosa continues to hug the last rays.
Tonight I will toss a puzzle piece
into the fire and ask, “What next?”
And “When?”

Kari Wergeland, Santee, California

First appeared in *Mission at Tenth*, Vol. 5, 2014



Bear Boxes

In the High Sierra country
the lecture went into reruns.
Place all scented items into bear boxes:
food and food wrappers,
toothpaste, soap, shampoo—
and ChapStick (a policy tough
on lips drying coarse in the night).
A bear was recently seen
munching on sunscreen.

Why would they bother waiting
for the one person
who forgets to lock the box,
to raid our toiletry items
(okay, peanut butter sandwiches)
when they could just dine
on human flesh?

They're scared of us,
the ranger says,
and we want to keep it that way.
This, he tells us after noting
how smart they are—
how their learned behaviors stick.

So mothers in search
of 22,000 calories a day,
fat that will feed their young
as they rest in winter slumbers,
remember to go through garbage bins—
part of their natural routine these days.

Kari Wergeland, Santee, California

First appeared in *Meat for Tea: The Valley Review*, Spring, 2014

Let me send out another plea for old issues of the *California Quarterly*, especially from the first two decades – 1972-1992. We still only have an incomplete run, too spotty to send to the California State Library in Sacramento, which has declared that it wants not one set, but two if possible – the second one for circulating. I think it is important for people to have access to this, as we are talking about the history of California poetry and the history of poetry *tout court*. Please ask any long-time members among your acquaintances to look in their attics. We would be *most* grateful to receive any discoveries as donations to the coming *CQ* archive in the California State Library!



And here, finally, is an intriguing “people poem”:

Distillery of the Sun

I.

She’s a complicated person; one of those rare people
who laughs only because she’s had a tough life
and can’t see it at all.

What she can see, with eyes audacious and ever-reaching,
is your inner-landscape releasing oxygen
that settles upon nightfall and nearby skies
celebrating at the top of your mind and eyebrow.

It’s complex, what she does; beyond the deepest blue,
evoking, in her down-to-earth way, an invitation:

Come; there is so much more laughter to be revealed
and into your subtle hands will settle the essential droplets
of form and identity.

II.

She asks where everyone has gone to
while plucking at greenery,
picking berries in purple and red,
but thinking not of an alcohol made from fruit or honey
but a drink made from grain
and that we are all just spirits absently floating
out of and into the distillery of the sun
near-perfect impurities
taken by an isolation of breeze
that touches our forehead,
soon to be memory; consumed, forgotten,
perhaps never noticed at all.

Richard King Perkins II, Crystal Lake, Illinois
2014 Bacopa Literary Review Poetry Contest – 2nd Place Winner

