



Welcome to the Fall issue of the *Poetry Letter* for 2021. You will enjoy previously published poems by Greg Gregory of California, and Franklin Gillette of Colorado. Since both poets have been inspired by natural beauty, I selected California landscape painters of early 20<sup>th</sup> century to illustrate this issue of the Poetry Letter. Benjamin Chambers Brown, 1865-1942), Anna Althea Hills (1882-1930) and Selden Connor Gile (1877-1947) are hardly household names. As Californians enjoying the natural beauty of the same landscapes they painted, we should learn something about them. I am endlessly mesmerized by the waves of the Pacific and have taken countless photos of the waves breaking at Mandalay Beach, Hermosa Beach or Topanga Beach. The crystalline jade, aqua and sapphire shades of water are so full of life and the energy of water so incredibly powerful. Awe-inspiring! Two paintings I found capture the beauty of our ocean.

Other images show the grace and beauty of the trees, flowers – meadows of California poppies! – as well as mountains and streams we can see after leaving cement wastelands of cities and venturing into the unknown. Previously, I picked landscape paintings by Karen Winters; this time, we can see the tradition she continues to bring to life. We should also know more about California poets, of course. CSPS tirelessly works for this cause by publishing the *California Quarterly*, organizing contests, and more. Next year, we will be celebrating our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The organization was founded in 1971 but the first issues of the *Quarterly* came out in 1972, hence the anniversary will be celebrated that year.

In the current *Poetry Letter* we also present several poetry books. Doreen Stock and Caroline Johnson write about caring for parents in their old age and losing them to the relentless passage of time. David Chorlton sings praises of Arizona desert where he lives. Greg Gregory, featured below, writes about the landscapes and reflections arising from their presence near Mendocino, California. The *Village Poets Anthology* that I edited with Marlene Hitt celebrates 10 years of our monthly poetry readings at Bolton Hall Museum in Tujunga. It is thanks to such local efforts all over California that our poetic landscape is so alive today! Many thanks to the poets and the book reviewers: Jackie Kudler, Anara Guardan Diego, Michael Escoubas, and Alice Pero. Enjoy!

~ Maja Trochimczyk, Ph.D.  
CSPS President & Poetry Letter Editor

## Featured Poet – Greg Gregory

### Loons

A loon cries  
in our evening ears  
in the lull of summer  
nightfall - the sound  
like a void of ripples of stars  
on the lake's blackness.

The thing of the world is  
the softness of its secrets.  
Memories flow in like snow melt  
or the light of an extinct star,  
traveling so long its last existence  
rests on the surface of the water

### Late September

The airwebs of late Summer -  
life's fling of random chance  
in the face of Fall,  
spun works of small spiders  
ballooning into an infinite sky.

Gladiolas in endbloom,  
faded last flowers,  
woven fabric of light and shadows -  
the season's Archimedian  
displacement of  
being and emotion.

where light and dark  
romance each other.

The heavy bones of a loon  
let it dive easily into the night water,  
its histrionic red eyes colorless  
in the indifferent dark among  
shifting pools of moon  
and star.

Unlike the loon we  
cannot easily force ourselves into  
the void underneath. We  
remain at the edge,  
our fingers like those  
of the deaf  
who touch pianos so they  
may feel the music. Like them  
we reach,  
crazy as loons,  
into sparkling black ripples  
for the constant spill  
of moon and stars.

~ Originally published in *The Avocet*

## Brown Myotis

Crawling into the entrance  
I hear the soft flutters, the squeaks - small  
bats living deep in a hole in  
stone and clay. My lantern  
plays on the walls in shaman's images or  
shadows in Plato's cave  
frightening beings living  
in their own echoes, clinging to rock  
like Rodin sculptures - half in and  
half out of stone, wrapped  
in delicate wings, giving birth, suckling  
while clinging with slight bones,  
single thumb claws hooked tight  
to the crevices, fragile  
skeletons in brown fur  
transforming just before dusk, exiting in  
erratic flight into open dimness, drawn  
from stone and clay into night  
sky. Nocturnal undercurrents always  
pull us out  
of Utopia, acute ears tuned  
to hear only what is echoed back.

~ Originally published in *The Korf*

The aphasia of bare soil,  
the speech of tongues of  
old leaves,  
mute glossolalia  
of the empty earth.

The rubric of tubers and roots  
cloyed in tangles of clay, all  
Fall come  
astringent and acerb in  
dry skins of  
onions and bulbs,  
life asleep at the center.

Old rose petals,  
handfuls of potpourri  
ripe for release in tongues of  
fall fire, spun works of smoke,  
twisting webs of voices,  
stories ready to  
balloon into an unknown year.

~ Originally published in *Reflect*



Gathering Clouds by Benjamin Chambers Brown,  
Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain  
[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b2/Gathering\\_Clouds\\_by\\_Benjamin\\_Chambers\\_Brown.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b2/Gathering_Clouds_by_Benjamin_Chambers_Brown.jpg)

## Vista

By day, the kelp sways below the cliffs,  
hypnotizes like sirens in the moving blue water.  
The waves never stop moving to and fro, to and fro.

The kelp holds fast to its submerged anchors.  
Its fronds float like brown feathers  
The pound up onto the rocks. They rarely let go.

## Seine

Sea jellies  
who float luminous  
in moon-cast tides  
die invisible,  
without legacy  
except, perhaps,  
a trace of their salts in  
the wanting water.

They pulse  
invisible in darkness  
like our hearts.

Like them, we trail  
tenuous strands  
of ourselves  
as we move  
to sense where  
we have been,  
perhaps to bring up  
small bits of food  
to feed the pulsing hearts  
from a fading past  
fast receding into nothing.

These soft living crystals,  
these fabrics of soft glass  
are too much like us,  
pulled in and out  
by tides and who,  
in death, dissolve,  
their lucent domes gone into  
nothingness,  
empty water,  
only their memory,  
a phantom beauty  
enfolded in another  
breathing skin,  
its heart pulsing  
on the water's surface.

~ Originally published in *The Avocet*

Foam churns. Cormorants dive under the surface  
then pop up like small black dots and look around,  
surprised at where they find themselves after surfacing.

Voice is the lightest thing to carry along the cliff path,  
a tongue in the sea air, a privileged perspective  
for an instant, to seem like one who never dies.

A rock falls from the cliff into the waves below.  
I remember the old Beatles' lyric, "Here comes the sun".  
The water glistens to the horizon from the eroding cliffs.

The sky dances over sea, cliffs. the sky dances for itself. .  
A fool walks one more day and leads a lucky life.  
I must send postcards to others who are not here.

The cormorants dive. The kelp hangs on in the blue sea.  
The sea sings its song. It has ever since I first saw it as a child  
from my first walk on this cliff trail.

I looked down, watching the waves come into the rocks  
and wondered about mermaids, who, after their life  
of a thousand years, finally turned into sea foam.

~ Originally published in *Quill and Parchment*



*Breaking Wave* by Anna Althea Hills,  
<https://americanegallery.wordpress.com/2009/01/12/anna-althea-hills-1882-1930/>

## Featured Poet – Franklin Gillette

Franklin Gillette, a Colorado native, is finishing the first instalment of his book of poems: *Word Atlas (Part One)*. His work has been selected by *Poetry East*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Light Quarterly*, *CSPS*, and more. His operettas were set to music by various composers and performed in Kansas City and New York. He illustrates his own work.

## Salute

Your feet stand on the lower planets,  
Your legs are mountains-- alpine stairs,  
Your knees are flowing with bird flutters,  
Your thighs hold the atmosphere,

## The Penguins of Antarctica

Before the ever-bellying radiant sky  
they break sea hobbling past dunes of ice  
whose silent monuments of compact snow  
cut to mystery like unknowable gods,

Your yellow robes like the evening twilight  
cover up the ocean of your loins.

Your breasts contain galaxies that range,  
Your heart pounds religion in motion,  
Your mind shines the brilliance of the moon,  
Your chest is the golden throne of fortune,  
Your head echoes truth in endless caves,  
Your smile is the cause of all illusion.

Your arms are filled with splendid angels,  
Your hair is murky clouds of outer space,  
Your eyelids turn the night and day,  
Your touch is lust, Your feet are a lotus,  
Your hairs are drugs and herbs, Your veins rivers.  
Death is nothing other than Your shadow.

Your intelligence is all that is divine,  
Your head is the place of higher planets,  
Your back is where irreligion hides,  
Your tongue holds all the water spirits,  
Your neck: vibration, Your chest is the Truth,  
Your words forever are the holy chants.

Your nails shed leaving giant boulders,  
Your breath circles wind to the stars,  
Your brow heats with righteous anger,  
Your activities are rituals of fire,  
Your tongue licks lips creating craving,  
Your ears open out to all directions.

Your eyebrows (on suns of eyes) give warning  
to friends and enemies that are in You,  
--the galaxies are atoms of Your Being.

~ A shorter version published in *Poetry East*, Number  
Fifty-Seven, Fall 2006. 4th and 5th  
stanzas added here.

lonely, lacking ancient worshippers.  
Huddled on the bottom of the earth  
what they must endure-- the dimming skies,  
months without food, ice catapulting,  
skirmishes of wind which freeze the will  
of our boldest. --Here they must find warmth  
pressing to great circles beneath moon and stars,  
and millennia after rebirths.

~ Originally published in *The Auorean*, 2, 2010- 2011.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jN-ro2jlezE>

## Friend Relates a Childhood Memory

We were scuba divers telescoping  
in the Pacific's deep caverns where dark songs  
of whales vibrate through the undertow.

Seagulls plied like knives on piano wires  
as if to warn us when we leaped to sea,  
yet we clawed down, to fulfill our mission  
reaching for the hushed nocturnal floors.

Water weighed heavier; the sunlight dimmed;  
flaming out were eels, fish and squid.  
Our hands reached solid mass and yet it slid  
from our grip. A humpback paddled from us.

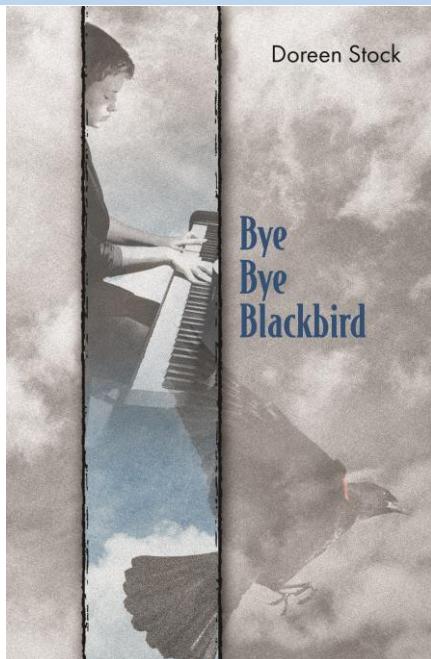
Yet once we found the basement of the sea  
we broke the ocean's crest and there we saw  
our little boat's mast on the horizon.

~ Originally published in *Poetry East*, Nos. 64 & 65, Spring 2009.  
The first sonnet from "Songs Beyond News."

**BELOW:** Selden Connor Gile, "Stinson Beach," 1919  
(Photo: [Oakland Museum of California via Wikimedia Commons](#) Public Domain)



## Book Review by Jackie Kudler: *Bye Bye Blackbird* by Doreen Stock



*Bye Bye Blackbird* by Doreen Stock. ISBN: 978-1-948461-81-8.  
ThePoetryBox, 2021.

The loss of a mother, regardless of her age or the quality of the relationship, is a profoundly significant life event. Poet Doreen Stock's compelling new collection, *Bye Bye Blackbird*, is a tribute to the indomitable spirit of a much-loved mother as Stock shepherds her through the indignities and triumphs of her waning days.

In the introductory dedication poem, "for Annetta Diamond Winnick" who died in her 94th year, after being "polished by these/ years/ of loving and being/ loved," the poet contemplates the prevailing strength of her mother's influence on her own life:

"How were  
You brave enough to do that?  
I am often asked....

Those who ask that question  
have never known you."

Poets have written about love and loss forever, but few have tried to stand witness to the actual end-of-life experience in their work, an experience so many of us have lived through and seldom forget. Yet here, with the precise pen of a true poet, Stock paints an intimate, vivid landscape of that experience: the rehab hospitals, the ambulances, the gravesides, as well as the portentous dreams that haunt her sleep.

Where, but in a rehab hospital, could a poem like "Your Unbecoming" have been conceived? Here Stock gazes head on at the sombre landscape of the body's regression back to its own beginnings:

"The urge  
to not soil oneself  
laid down during those precious  
toddler months with smiles and coaxing...."

now reversed by the cajoling night nurse:

" 'Don't you worry about it, just let yourself go'  
How do you cross that particular border?  
What do you find to say to yourself, no one  
there to help you with your unbecoming?"

"The Poem Geronimo," one of the true gems of the collection, celebrates the admirable prowess and humanity of Geronimo, an ambulance aide. Here, we see mother once again suffering her "unbecoming," but this time, ministered to by one of the book's true angels:



Anna Althea Hills, "Sunshine & Shadow-Orange Co. Park, California," 1915 (Photo via [Wikimedia Commons](#) Public Domain)

At seventy miles an hour without losing balance, without bumping his head on the overhanging glass full of life-saving equipment.

At seventy, without losing humane dignity, rolling the 93-year-old patient back and forth as the job demands and then, 10 minutes later as the infected bladder squirts, returning with a joke and a smile to do it again (think angel here, a term I do to use lightly) asking me meanwhile if I'm OK as we speed past the hawk poised on its fence post listening, listening in the crosswinds of the cars to

swoop down on the little rustling being under the grass and take her  
while the light of love shines out of the eyes of all of us ...

Geronimo.

It is indeed the light of love, even among the most challenging and disheartening of times, that shines through every line of this chapbook and is sure to remain with every reader long after. "Bye Bye Blackbird," the name of the song that mother in her "cherry blossom kimono" takes to singing through her end days is, of course, the title of the book as well as the name of the title poem:

"I couldn't see in, but could hear you, and all through the desert night  
on your last ride you continued, passing cactus, passing sage, your last  
instructions clear in my ear," You're the one to be sure I look right  
in the carriage, honey" all the way down Ramon Road, past  
oeeDate Palm Drive into Cathedral City where the cemetery lives,  
stop lights, go lights, with a wave of your white-gloved hand,  
a Liz Minelli smile, black cane tucked under your armpit:  
'I said Blackbird, oh, Blackbird, Bye Bye ...'"

Throughout this collection, Doreen Stock asks us to explore with her the many nuances of the pain of loss, but in the end, *Bye Bye Blackbird* is a stunning collection of love poems, written in terms we may not have encountered before.

~ Jackie Kudler

### Book Review by Michael Escoubas: *The Caregiver* by Caroline Johnson



*The Caregiver* by Caroline Johnson. 51 poems, 83 pages. \$16.00 ISBN 978-09986010-3-8. Holy Cow! Press

In 1983, at the young age of 58, my father fell victim to a brainstem stroke. This debilitating event placed Dad in hospice care, where he passed one month later. Caroline Johnson's new collection, *The Caregiver*, brought to mind my daily visits to the hospice unit, sitting beside him, hoping for a response but receiving virtually nothing that opened the door of opportunity to bid my father goodbye.

For approximately 12 years the poet managed the care of both of her parents through the rigors of slow-moving, long-term illnesses: Alzheimer's for her mother, variations of Parkinson's for her father. The 51 poems included in *The Caregiver*, invite the reader to share in the intimate details of the poet's twin labors of love as she, with the help of Donna, a professional caregiver, learned to care for others beyond all thoughts for herself.

*The Caregiver* is divided into three sections: Part I, Father; Part II, Mother; and Part III, Grief. In the Foreword Johnson reveals many of the inspirational sources that resulted in her poems. Trust me, don't skip the foreword. It is one of the best I've ever read.

Crossing opens Part I, and features her father's favorite creature:

Today I came across a painted turtle  
as I was bicycling near a canal.

He had stopped in the middle of the trail,  
head erect, all limbs exposed, waiting.

He seemed stuck in the moment,  
moving neither forward nor backward,  
trapped in time,

I thought of you, dear father,  
moving across unstable ground,  
gripping your cane and hovering  
for a brief moment

before the storms set in.

Years earlier her father had offered his daughter a piece of sage advice, "Be like a turtle. Let your problems roll off your back." I believe that Johnson tapped into that "nugget" more than once during her caregiving journey.



*Joyous Garden* by Benjamin Chambers Brown, Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joyous\\_Garden\\_by\\_Benjamin\\_Chambers\\_Brown.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joyous_Garden_by_Benjamin_Chambers_Brown.jpg)

The storms alluded to in Crossings, did set in. Poems such as Life's Melody, Shapeshifting, and Becoming Erudite, illustrate her father's once brilliant mind in slow decline. She remembers his voice, smooth, intoxicating/like the vodka tonic on the side table.

A Good Day, opens the door on Parkinson's in its advanced stages:

He was having a good day. A nurse evaluated him. He couldn't answer most questions, but he knew it was spring. He couldn't sign his name. He thought it was January. Still, he was having a good day.

Johnson is candid about her feelings in stanza 2 of A Good Day:

I wanted to leave. I had done my time—spent hours with the nurse and his caregiver. I had to grade papers, buy some groceries, get home to have dinner with my husband. But he was having a good day, and when I tried to say good-bye, he asked when he would see me again. I told him soon, and that I would bring cake.

As the poet moves the reader gently into the world of her mother's long goodbye, we are met with an epigram from Kahlil Gibran, The most beautiful word on the lips of mankind is the word "Mother."

Shut-ins is about Johnson accompanying her mother as she delivered pine wreaths to the less fortunate. Here she learned, my first lesson in kindness.

Coyote employs no fewer than four animals in a touching tribute, awesome and upright, harboring a/deep purpose and an elevated spirit.

Johnson has a way with metaphor; Skiing, showcases the poet's visual skills in this excerpt,

She stands up from her wheelchair clutching her cane—a monogrammed rod, a wooden crutch, a tree branch, an extended piece of willow, a bleached crow—

then plants it like a pole, attempting to descend  
the stairs one more time, each icy step a flag of victory,  
a fast blue slope, a thrilling dangerous carousel ride.

Barbara Crooker opens the door to the grief process, Grief is a river you wade in, until you get to the other side.

What Got Him Here, will touch the hearts of readers with its poignant lines that describe the grief process beginning long before Johnson's father dies.

As Johnson drives home from her mother's funeral, her poem *Changing Lanes*, begins to form. This prose poem takes the reader along in a potpourri of thoughts. Condensation appears on the windshield, it smears as she wipes it off. She recalls how her mom's grandsons played hide and seek around the coffin, how she fielded questions about what items should or should not accompany her mom to the grave. This poem in itself is worth the price of the book.

As the grief portion of *The Caregiver*, draws to a gentle close, look for "The Sneeze," written especially as a remembrance of her father, as well as, "The Gallery," which pays tribute to Johnson's mother, who loved and taught art. The closing lines stand out through the poet's tears of grief. Her mother's legacy captured,

You will find me in the dialogue of my students,  
in the cry of my neighbor's baby,  
in the wisp of a dandelion seed.

~ Michael Escoubas

First published in *Quill and Parchment*, December 2018

## Book Review by Anara Guardan Diego: *Blue Tin Sky* by Greg Gregory

### Blue Tin Sky



Poems by  
Greg Gregory

*Blue Tin Sky* By Greg Gregory. Avenafatua Press, \$16.00, 68 pages.

*Blue Tin Sky* is clearly a labor of love for poet Greg Gregory. Not only has he written the 54 poems in the collection but also created the cover art, a painting of a storm near Mendocino, which is fitting for poetry so rooted in northern California.

The book is divided into four unnamed sections, and nearly all of these free-verse poems are a single page in length and easy to read and contemplate before moving on to the next one. The title poem, *Blue Tin Sky*, invites us to "come bathe under waterfalls of words" and indeed, many of Gregory's poems use cascading words to evoke images, sensations, or emotions. For example, in "Along Drake's Beach" which describes shells:

the wonder shell, living in amazement, the rosy harp, lost in its music...  
the cat's-tongue oyster, mewing for pearls,  
the moon shell, living in mystery,  
the anomia, living without a name –  
all reaching down through spirals...

The poet pays careful attention to nature and his poems are inspired by loons, sea glass, wetlands, cattails, tree frogs, beaches, and trails. At the same time, he captures images from city life, as in "Night Moving":

Moon in the mirror,  
dresser in the back of  
an open pick-up  
jouncing down upper Market at 2 am

in which he observes that although the mirror shudders in its frame, the image of the moon always remains still. Numerous other poems also evoke the moon as it rises, gleams in a window, winks or stares like a cat's eye/ lost in the night sky.

Many of his lines are quite lovely: The thing of the world is/the softness of its secrets in "Loons" and When young, you have promise, when old, history in "Don Quixote, Summer" and the veil most fragile catches the most light. We learn to be quiet about beauty in "By Tomales Bay."

Other poems are dialogues—with a house:

My tires crush wild oat and star thistle that have finally grown through the concrete,  
now too broken to stop them.  
I have no business being here...  
The house whispers, 'Remember me, remember you.'

or with "an Ex from the 60's" which unmistakably references San Francisco:

City of visions. City of promises....  
City of painted ladies. City of mirrors...  
City of Alice's rabbit holes. City of illusions...

The third section is the most elegiac, as it addresses grandchildren, aging, and memory: ...years lose ceremony, importance. Our stories are the important things...The water and sea stay. The waves pass through.

These evocative and simple poems will stay with you long after you read them.

~ Anara Guardan Diego

## Book Review by Alice Pero: *Speech Scroll* by David Chorlton

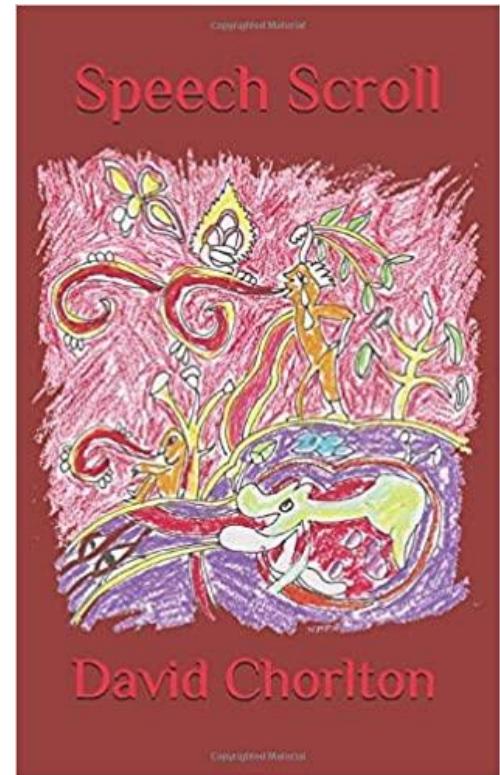
*Speech Scroll* by David Chorlton, ISBN , xxx pp. Published by Cholla Needs Arts & Literary Library, 2020,

When is poetry different from music? When do words transcend the commonplace on the page to the realm of the spirit? David Chorlton's "Speech Scroll" (Cholla Needles Arts & Literary Library 2020), a long poem in a sequence of 158 sections, is a rhapsody, evidence that this poet can get inside of life and feel its ecstatic force. In Chorlton's poems he is not just an observer, although one senses his keen perception of where he is and what he sees. He is more than that; he feels the causation of things, how they push and pull, how something in nature moves towards and with another and brings something new into being.

The style in this book is simple, sentences that in their easy rhythm and effortless images, become poems. We feel the weight of the form; each poem is 18 lines, yet there is nothing still or stilted; one thing happens and then another; this style is so wrapped in a surge of energy one cannot feel anything but that movement and the almost noble elements, even of the ordinary.

"It's a woodpecker's work to keep tapping  
at the edge where sky touches Earth.  
He's loosening the strip  
of metal holding  
clouds in place, persistent  
in the Heavens as he is upon the siding  
to a house with demons trapped inside."

In Chorlton's world "The wind tosses a hawk into the ragged sky" (155) "On the points of every star/insects are impaled" (142) and "The currency of a lost civilization/glitters all night/between horizons"

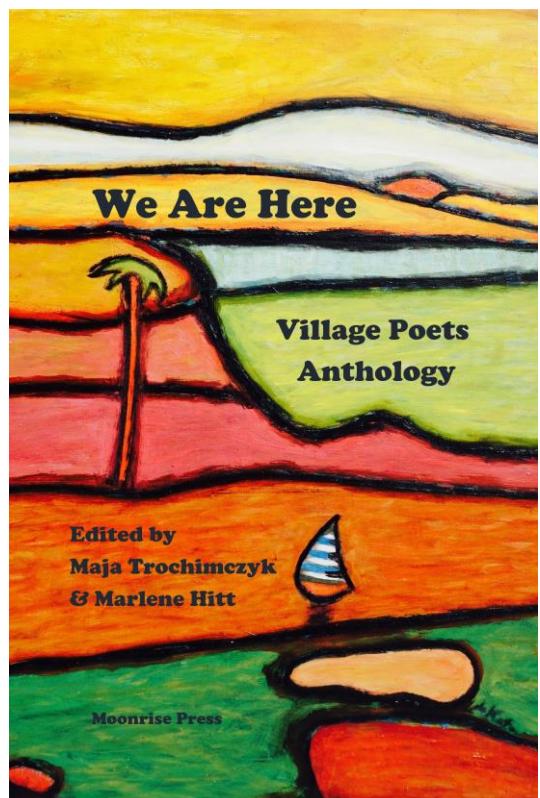


(112) There is always action, excitement. Don't read this work if you like pale lines of soft sadness. Yes, there is sadness, death, even extinction, but we always know life will keep surging through. And yes, there are gods and demons and the anxiety brought about by "... mice who live/in the drawer you never open/are nibbling away your rights" (93) All poets write about the moon but in Chorlton's vision "The gods dropped the moon/through a slot in Heaven/and let it roll across/the roof of the world all night." This moon poem brings us through the ordinary life of convenience stores and television and selling, life on earth, but at the end we are left with the moon as "a silver/coin shining from an open palm" (92)

Chorlton is intimately connected to the native life of the Arizona desert where he lives, yet we are also jarred into the reality of modern life with humans. "Why is that portable latrine/sanding in the street I can see it all/day is somebody hiding in there?" (120) And there is the persistent heat: "the forecast is a dry cough from the sky" (121) Past and present roll with one another in these poems as we are pushed and pulled with an inner energy that never stops and we never want to stop reading as we discover that "The mountain opens wide its arms/to receive the sun." (143) Just as the Native American found life even in the rocks and stones, from this poet's viewpoint all things are thoroughly alive and as he makes his testimony, we listen and learn with a thrill of joy.

~ Alice Pero

## Book Review by Michael Escoubas: *We Are Here – Village Poets Anthology* edited by Maja Trochimczyk and Marlene Hitt



*We Are Here: Village Poets Anthology*, eds: Maja Trochimczyk and Marlene Hitt. 290 pages (xxvi pp. + 264 pp.) 237 Poems + Biographies. 6" x 9" ~ Perfect Bound. \$22.00 Paperback ~ \$10.00 eBook. Moonrise Press. ISBN: 978-1-945938-39-9 (Paperback)  
<http://www.moonrisepress.com/village-poets-anthology.html>

In the 1950s my parents took my brothers and me to a science fiction thriller entitled, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Such movies were the "in-thing" at the time. For three impressionable grade-school boys, the whole thing was pretty scary. As our parents came into our bedroom to say evening prayers with us, they sensed our upset. Leaving the room, they touched our hands saying, "We are here, nothing bad is going to happen to you." Eventually, we got over our fright. I thought about their words as I worked my way through the poems collected by editors Trochimczyk and Hitt. *We Are Here*, resonates with me on two levels. For over a decade Village Poets of the Sunland-Tujunga community have borne witness to Californians about the magic of poetry. They organize poetry readings, write poetry, and publish books keeping the art and craft of poetry alive for generations yet unborn. On another level, I found myself taking notes on those poems which spoke to me as my parents did long ago. *We are Here*, became for me, a series of windows which nourish my life here and now.

**Organization.** The volume is attractively organized under two headings: Part 1. Featured and Guest Poets; Part 2. Poets Laureate of Sunland-Tujunga. Contributor's names appear in all-caps followed by their poems on successive pages. With some 80 participating poets, the designers have done a masterful job of pagination for optimal aesthetic appeal. At the end, each contributor is featured with an interesting biographical sketch.

**Craftsmanship.** If the pure love of poetry is your thing, *We Are Here*, will not disappoint. The Village Poets use virtually every poetic device in their well-stocked toolkits: end-rhyme, alliteration, assonance, consonance, prose poems, wild and exciting indentations such as Peggy Dobreer's "Exquisite Harmonics." There are metaphorical connections, which had me smiling with Ah! Ha! moments all the way through. In addition, I was impressed with both the complexity of some creations as well as many poems which featured simplicity on the page. Bill Cushing gets a lot done with his poem:

## Pelicans

Slowly circling,  
the pelican  
drops like a stone  
into water.

Then climbing the  
air, he stops, and  
with a single  
motion of wings,  
glides on the wind.

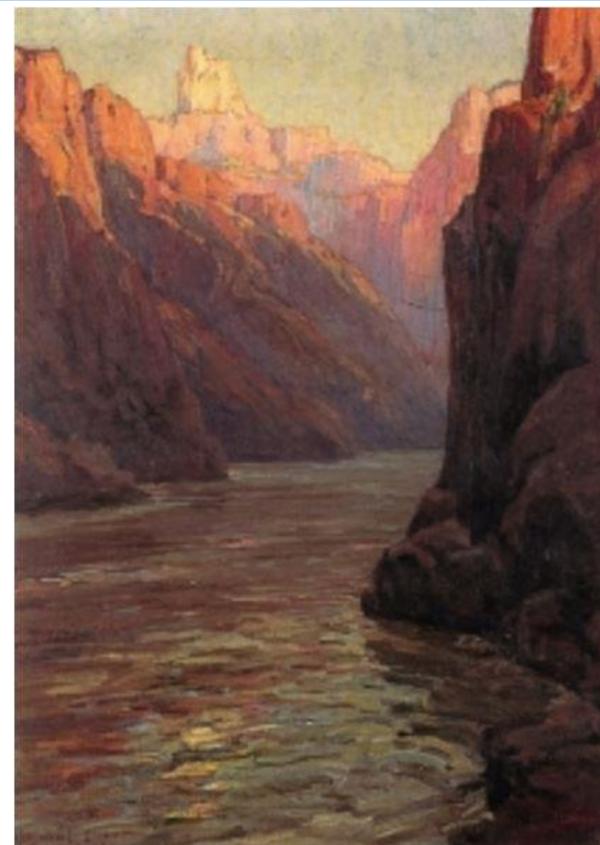
Thankful for the ride, I reluctantly dismounted!

**We Are Here—Opening Windows to Life.** Christopher Askew opened a window to outer and inner “place” in this excerpt from “There Is a Place”:

there is a place  
where sun and wind collide  
with towering fortresses of rock and cloud  
where time and rivers flowing  
carve in ruddy plans deep spaces  
vast and clear

in one such deep a hollow curves  
a dimple in the palm of God

Humor is a delightful window opened by Beth Baird in “Ode to a Temporary Relationship”:



*Grand Canyon by Benjamin Chambers Brown, Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain*  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grand\\_Canyon\\_painting\\_by\\_Benjamin\\_Chambers\\_Brown.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grand_Canyon_painting_by_Benjamin_Chambers_Brown.jpg)

You documented my existence  
We took photos capturing moments  
From our 753 days together  
  
For this and more, I THANK YOU!!  
  
But now you lie in state  
I felt your energy slipping away  
You could not hold your charge any longer  
  
The poem goes on to reveal the poem's true subject . . . don't miss out on this one!

*Santa Ana Canyon by Anna Althea Hills from*  
<https://americanegallery.wordpress.com/2009/01/12/anna-althea-hills-1882-1930/>

An impressive range of subject-matter and depth of thought are revealed by interesting titles: Madeleine Swift Butcher’s “What She Cries,” treats the very personal theme of parental disappointment, Butcher, “carries her mother on her back.” Educator, Don Kingfisher Campbell’s poem “Showing a DVD on the Galapagos to a Ninth Grade Class,” is irresistible in its showcasing of diffident students. Jerry Garcia invited me along, “While Walking the Dog Last Evening.” You won’t believe where this poem takes you. Another title, “The Magic of Mom,” held me at gunpoint:

Oh, MOM, your name's a palindrome;  
it's letters they form that.

It reads MOM going to the right.  
From left? It reads MOM back!

Dependable that MOM word is,  
in quality so true.

The YOU we always do count on,  
Today, you get your due!

Three hundred sixty-five the days,  
just one we celebrate.

We ought to celebrate you more;  
perhaps a weekly fete?

A magic MOM in ambigram,  
so please, do take a bow!

For even more—just flip that name,  
And MOM turns into WOW!

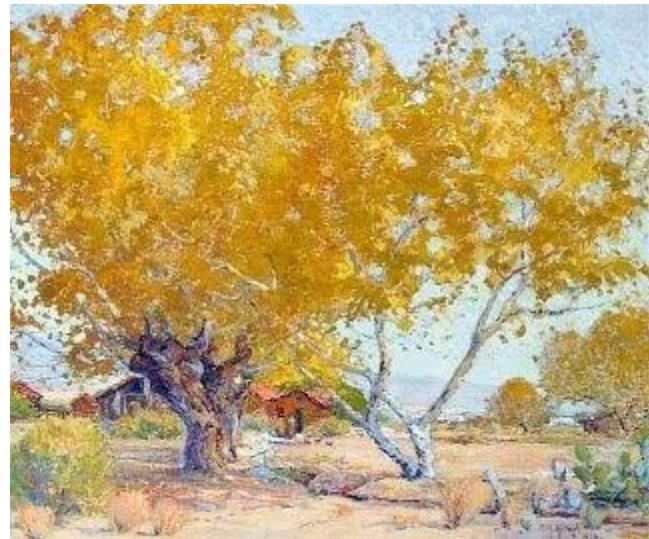


[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:California\\_Poppies\\_by\\_Benjamin\\_Chambers\\_Brown.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:California_Poppies_by_Benjamin_Chambers_Brown.jpg)

In each of these poems and many more, I came because of the title; I stayed because of the content.

**Windows opened by the Poets Laureate of Sunland-Tujunga.** First off, I was struck by the interesting history of former and current poets-laureate. This section features photos, brief biographies, and selected poems by each. Marlene Hitt's "Arrival," displays tender pathos as she anticipates the return home of her first-born son. "I will open my arms / to you, my firstborn child / so long traveling." Katerina Canyon's "Feet," is a riveting poem that took me to places, times, and memories that surprised me all the way through. Wherever I looked among these poems, the windows I opened never failed to nourish my life-sensibilities, adding to my life the fresh air of love and wisdom. Maja Trochimczyk's "What I Love in Sunland," provides ample proof:

1. The strong arms of the mountains  
embracing, protecting our town
2. The lights scattered in the night valley  
during my drive to the safety of home
3. How clouds sit on the hilltops  
squishing them with their fat bottoms
4. The river playing hide-and-go-seek under the bridge  
to nowhere: "now you see me—now you don't"
5. The towering white glory of yucca flowers in June—  
we are Lilliputians in the giants' country
6. The Mockingbird's melodies floating above  
red-roofed houses asleep on little sunny streets
7. Armenian fruit tarts sweeter than fresh grapefruit  
and pomegranate from my trees
8. Hot, shimmering air, scented with safe and star jasmine,  
carved by the hummingbird's wings
9. The rainbow of roses, always blooming  
in my secret garden



Desert Gold, Palm Springs by Anna Althea Hills (1882-1930)  
<https://americanagallery.wordpress.com/2009/01/12/anna-althea-hills-1882-1930/>

It is little wonder that the Village Poets have served their community and the larger world of letters with singular distinction.

~ Michael Escoubas

## Monthly Poetry 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 CSPS. Reading fees are \$1.50 per poem with a \$3.00 minimum for members of CSPS and/or NFSPS societies 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 first page with all contact information (name, address, telephone number and email address) and the titles of the poems being submitted. At this time there are three ways to submit:

1. by email. Poets may submit their work by email to: SPSMonthlyContests@gmail.com (Specify Month) and simultaneously pay their contest fees by PayPal to: [CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety@gmail.com](mailto:CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety@gmail.com).
2. by regular mail, enclosing printed copies of poems and your check, CSPS Monthly Contest – (Specify Month) Post Office Box 4288, Sunland, California 91041
3. online on our website CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.org, or

All Monthly Contests are judged by Alice Pero, CSPS Monthly Contest Judge. The 1st place winner receives half of the prize pool for pools less than \$100. For pools of \$100 or more, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd place winners receive \$50, \$10 and \$5, respectively. If there are insufficient fees submitted, the minimum prize is \$10. There are no exceptions to the prize disbursement rules. The monthly contest winners are announced as they are awarded and the winners are notified by mail. All of the winners for the year are listed in the first CSPS Newsbriefs of the following year. In addition, the first prize winner poems are published in the CSPS Poetry Letter (PDF, email, posted on website) and posted on our blog. Please note: Do not send SAE's. We do not return poems. If you win, we will let you know. Otherwise there are no notifications.

### CSPS Monthly Contest Themes (Revised)

- ① January: Nature, Seasons, 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: Best of Your Best (Winning or published poems only. Indicate name of contest or publication and the issue/dates of publication/award.)

*Benjamin Chambers Brown, "Poppies, Antelope Valley," before 1942 (Photo via Wikimedia Commons Public Domain)*



The *Poetry Letter* is a quarterly electronic publication, issued by the California State Poetry Society and edited by Maja Trochimczyk. Posted on the CSPS website in a PDF format; CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.org. Sections of the *Poetry Letter* are also posted separately on the CSPS Blog, CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.com.

**CONTACT & SUBMISSIONS:** [Maja@moonrisepress.com](mailto:Maja@moonrisepress.com); CSPS P.O.Box 4288 Sunland CA 91341-4288

**CALIFORNIA STATE POETRY SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS:** Maja Trochimczyk, Ph.D., President; John F. Harrell, Ph.D., Treasurer; Ambika Talwar, Secretary; Richard Modiano, Vice President, Communications; Richard M. Deets, Vice President, Membership; CQ Editors and CSPS Board Members at Large: Terry Ehret, Alice Pero, Monthly Contest Chair, and Joyce Snyder, Annual Contest Chair. **CALIFORNIA QUARTERLY EDITORS:** William Scott Galasso, Maura Harvey, Bory Thach, Maja Trochimczyk (Managing Editor) and Konrad Wilk.

## Join the California State Poetry Society

Established in 1971, CSPS is the official state organization representing California to the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (NFSPS). We were 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 (1) the quality publications of the CSPS continue and (2) our mission to promote poetry and art in California and around the world continues to grow.

### Benefits of CSPS Membership

- Quarterly receipt of the *California Quarterly*, which includes the quarterly *Newsbriefs* in the pages at the back of the issue
- The *CSPS Poetry Letter* is emailed in PDF format and, along with the *Strophes* newsletter of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (NFSPS) may be read online on CSPS site or NFSPS.com, respectively
- Reduced reading fees for the CSPS monthly contests (\$1.50/poem, vs. \$3.00/poem; min. two poems)
- Entry rights to all NFSPS national poetry contests
- A link from the CSPS Links page to his or her personal website (if any)

### Membership Categories

- Domestic Individual \$40 per year
- Domestic Family \$45 per year (four members max)
- Domestic Institution/Library \$39 per year (no contest entry rights)
- International Individual \$60 per year
- International Family \$65 per year (four members max)
- International Institution/Library \$55 per year (no contest entry rights)

Be sure to submit the names of those included in a family membership so they have contest entry rights with the CSPS and the NFSPS. Library memberships receive the publications listed above, but carry no contest entry rights with them.



### Donor and Patron Categories

- Donor ~ Membership + \$5, \$10, \$15, or \$20
- Patron ~ Membership + \$25, \$50 or \$75
- Silver Circle Patron ~ Membership + \$100
- Gold Circle Patron ~ Membership + \$200

### Renewals

Annual renewal of memberships in the CSPS takes place each year in December for the following year. Membership runs January 1st to December 31st. If you join mid-year and we have them, you will receive the prior issues of CQ and the Newsbriefs for the year. The mailing labels for each member include the last two digits of his or her (or their) paid-up subscription year.

Renew membership via the website ([CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.org](http://CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.org)) or by mail. If you have registered and signed in to the website (look for the registration information on the right side of the home page), you can see boxes at the right for paying for or renewing your membership.

If you can't see any boxes, you are not signed in and may wish to pay by mail. If you're paying by mail, click CSPS Membership Form to open a membership form in a new window and print it. Membership inquiries and payments by mail should be sent to:

CSPS Vice President - Membership  
2560 Calabria Court  
Dublin, California 94568

ABOVE: Selden Connor Gile. "Still Life with Trees and Mountain" 1919, oil on canvas. Campbell-Thiebaud Gallery (1999). The Society of Six, San Francisco: Campbell-Thiebaud Gallery