

Poetry Letter

California State Poetry Society



PUSHCART PRIZE NOMINATIONS FROM CQ VOL. 48, 2022

California State Poetry Society is pleased to announce the following nominations to Pushcart Prize for 2022 from the *California Quarterly*, vol. 48, issues no. 1 (edited by Maja Trochimczyk), 2 (guest-edited by Margaret Saine), 3 (edited by Bory Thach) and 4 (guest-edited by Deborah P Kolodji), published by the California State Poetry Society in 2022. Congratulations to all poets! Copies of honored poems are posted below.

1. Vol. 48 No. 1. "Waterfall Symphony" by Dana Stamps II
2. Vol. 48 No. 1. "Light" by Frederick Livingston
3. Vol. 48 No. 2. "The Land I Long For" by Michael Fraley
4. Vol. 48 No. 3. "The Calling" by Ella Czajkowska
5. Vol. 48 No. 3. "Tule Elk Preserve in March" by Vivian Underhill
6. Vol. 48. No. 4. "Morning at Moore's Lake, Again" by Kimberly Nunes

LIGHT

Mendocino, California

sunbeam alone
is a poem
but on this fallen log
with you

everything is
tongue tip
fingertip
heartbeat

who was I?
sweating brick
by brick
in gilded cities

as if
to impress
the heavens
with my cleverness

as if
to invent
anything
as alive

WATERFALL SYMPHONY

Droplets drum against
rocks, a blue dragonfly's
enchantment dances,

lilies perfume the amphitheater sky,
coconut sun —
screen slathered on,

and nude sunbathers splash
as they surface,
then dive

underneath. Echoes
from a chorus of jumpers,
the jagged cliff's ledge a stage

as summer mist—an ovation
as happening wetness hits—
croons its steamy scores.

*Dana Stamps II
Riverside, California*

LIGHT, continued

as this urgent
syrup
melting into
our veins

warming
pine-steeped air
Earth was made
for breathing

suddenly
I become
blue
and cloudless

*Frederick Livingston
Mendocino, California*

THE LAND I LONG FOR

The world I want lies under the waves,
Under many chilling leagues of water,
Beyond the reach of common daylight.

Pale stars illuminate its deep blue sky
And trees of giant girth cover the ground
They've occupied for countless years.

The land I long for is wakened at dawn
By the clear notes of flowing birdsong
From the leafy crowns of the trees.

The story was never told to me in school,
I only know it to be true because...
My blood and bones have taught me so.

*Somehow I will find a way
To reach the forest floor
Through a door I cannot say
Is made of gravestone or of wood,
But which is no less real to me
Than any ordinary day.*

*Michael Fraley
San Francisco, California*

TULE ELK PRESERVE IN MARCH

Here it is midmorning and the valley is singing to itself.
Listen to the bees
thrumming to the trees in bloom like a hum in the chest
for comfort. The hawk unfolds from the cottonwood
a mosaic of pottery shards and the ravens
croak like stones dropped in water, down the back
of the throat. Feel the earth pulling you close.

It is not nostalgia, to cling to the marshy ghosts
of a parched lake, the water snakes who swarmed
through the rattling reeds.

The breeze picks up and the hawk returns.
The heat rises and the plains begin to wave.
One shell-white egret sits in the shush
of leaves still translating wind into sound.

Someday all this will have silted away, the halo of song
arcng above this small pond, the calf chasing the birds.
The birds translucent below the sun.
Once this was underwater
*And is
And will be again.*

Viivian Underhill, Allston, Massachusetts



Raindrops and Reflections by Susan Rogers

THE CALLING

Take my hand, we shall drink golden starlight
from the brass chalice of curiosity,
adorn our hair with stars' glittering light.
We shall clothe ourselves in silver moonlight
and blush our faces with sunlight's kiss,
and dance through the dust of time unmeasured,
whirl till we are dizzy with awe
and drunk on the songs of the universe.

I have not truly known freedom until
I have shaken off the chains of attachments
to this world, this low-land
—of biological, mechanical, electric—
of static, of moving,
till I felt the seductive
beckoning of the ephemeral,
the limitless melody of cosmos.

I measure myself in dawns and twilights,
in inhales and exhales, breathless moments,
in dreams and daydreams and nightmares
as I unravel into blooming.

I am a flower eternal, floating,
drifting soundless in space on the waves
of the darkly enchanting oceans
of nebulae in purples and pinks.

And I dare you to not heed my calling,
and I dare you to resist the pulling,
the fire, the resonance in the bones
which leaves the traitorous flesh a-trembling.
And I hail to you: Come! We shall walk down,
down to the center, down to the core,
down to the end of all, down till it's up,
until it becomes the beginning.

*Ella Czakowska
Beverly Hills, California*

MORNING AT MOORE'S LAKE, AGAIN

By eight a.m., the mist, like ghosts exiting, bustles and fades
in every direction, spheres barely there,
until they aren't.

Quickly, slowly, the sun casts in.

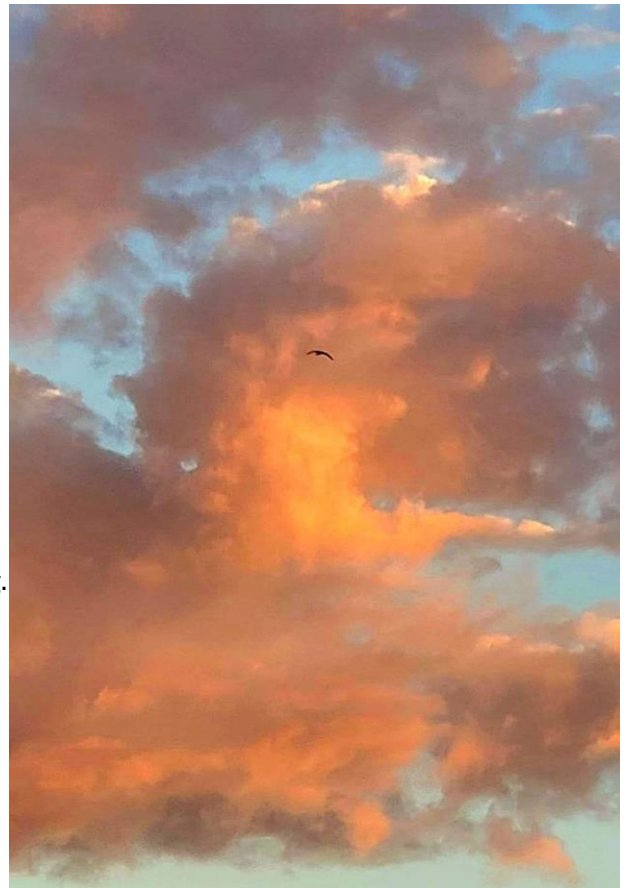
The lake turns dark mirror, speckled with night dust
and featherings—the occasional dragonfly
stringing along morning's heat. Reflections of trees—
and clumps of trees, borders
onto other realms, all the same as this one.

Sudden sounds—a cormorant propels
the surface like an engine. At the floating dock, hops
to join another, then settles, observes the air, the sky,
all the nothingness of the world before them.

Black from beak to tail, to webbed toe, yellowish dob
on the other one's head, he has not moved, but to nibble a wing.
The wet one holds her wings aloft, waggles tight,
steady beats in eastern sun, diaphanous, melting to brown,
she continues, thus—I know so little—

have gendered them to my own pleasure.
With pen and notebook, sun hat, and poncho
over my pajamas, shoes
I slide on and off in cool sand.

The birds contemplate—an avian thought matrix, untouched.
One steps a quarter turn, intent, drying her body.
So much patience here. And time.



Paradise Sky by Susan Rogers

And yet—I can see the watermark on the shore reeds, the lake
is lower than last year, that much dangerously
lower. There's a flash of red

on one cormorant's bill, somewhere, the same bullfrog sounds
at a depth that matters, somewhere out of sight.

*Kimberly Nunes
Ross, California*

FEATURED POET – KATHI STAFFORD

EARTH

March 1st Rabbit rabbit
Rabbit doesn't help this time In a hospital
Room I'm on the floor Day of my disaster
Cancer in gut Foundations of earth and my
Life laid bare Bible on the nightstand
Cords of death pull tight at 2 am I am so
Alone the disease my powerful enemy
I am on a fine line in the dirt I'm only mud
In this moment on an edge between being
and
Nonbeing
Nothing left and yet
Supreme love reaches down rescues me
Cords loosened I still breathe air mixes
with
Dust He brings me into a spacious place of
Beauty Ferns orchids lantana spring up
under
These feet the day of rescue and
Clean hands lifted in praise for eternity

THE SPACE BETWEEN

On the edge of sleep, here sits the yes
In the magic space between now and maybe
Between the star and its implosion I find
Joy too much Music the bridge between
Galaxy's edge and this mild heart of mind
Opposite sides of the glass
I wish for a tiny denouement
I kiss the raccoon and he turns into a
Fish Or a ruddy prince
He sniffs the air On his hind legs
He wants in He thinks he wants to be
tamed
If he only knew

BLANK CHECK

One year ago today: My first go
At radiation. The tech with his arms
Flu of blue tattoos and scars eases me
Into place. The quiet clicking

Machine drones on as I hold still
In its shadow. A thin red light razors
Below my skin, down to an ocean of
Cells and fear. In a few weeks, my skin will

Scale off—each strip delicate
And lacy. So individual, each layer
With its sheer story of my past. Some women
Much stronger than I am

Thirty-three times I go home after and burrow
Into sleep, so hard and final.

I win the lottery. One year come
And gone
With no new lumps. This is a gift
And a wonder yo me. Will there always be
A blank check
Made out
To future scars?

May I never ask the right questions.
There's a tale for every traveler.

The tech guy talks about his newborn,
Jimmy, three months old, while shines
With joy. Jimmy almost in the room with us
Talcum powdered and fresh
The man is trying to distract me.

I laugh and
Take it all in.

My pain held up on all four corners
By the prayers lifted by my saints, my friends, toward
Gentle sky, oh Metta, oh peace of my Lord.

BANYAN

I drive toward the airport 3 am in a hot
Bengaluru night I drive past a park
Full of banyan trees where one man
Sits beneath the Strangler fig
Shared with a swarm of wasps

No fruit without the sting He is wrapped in
White robes His sweat precious as he achieves
Nirvana The columns of the trunk ricketed and
Etched with Many rivers of joy in this
National tree of India
Elliptical leaves with seeds spread
By birds frugivores soaring through
Branches and with mutual bliss
Move the fruit Far from the parent
The man leaves behind his robes
For his next ascension

PSALM 30 DIVIDED AND CUT

Thou has lifted me
Thou has lifted me
And my foes have not rejoiced over me
Thou has lifted

I cried unto you
Cried unto you
Thou hast healed me
Pulled out the cancer cells
By surgeon hands
Thou hast healed me

You brought my soul out
You brought this soul
Out from the grave kept me from the pit
At 2 am on the March morning when my soul
Almost slid away I felt it going

Sing Give thanks at the remembrance
Of His holiness
His gift of life
Weeping lasts a night
But with morning comes joy

I cried to Thee Lord
And in the morning you gave
Joy. Peace. My soul.

You turned my mourning into dancing and
gladness
Thank you forever for this extra day to see
The precious granddaughter faces you gave me.

BORDERLAND

I am on the edge of old and older
My land pushes up to his land
In the field three horses sisters
And one pony. In the land next door they
Wait next to the gathered trees In sacred shade
One kneels to me Do they remember apples
I brought them last spring? I forget their names
Except for Bear The little one black and
Impetuous. One suffers from the pain that
Will not end while Three witches stir their
Cauldron in the borderland Six geese float at pond's edge
Under Oaks and slash pines and two crows
Fly to them for no known purpose.
Jasmine on the gate Still blooms
Its scent and whiteness Bring me home
Help me find level ground
I'm dizzy these days
Ground beside the blue red roses a cliché of beauty

GLAD HIVE

A tablespoon of honey and Aunt Ruth makes me
Swallow the comb my throat
Tickles. Tiny wings scratch me close
Spit out the wax when she's not looking
My little bee might miss his sisters Or not
Let's call him Fred for now From Glad Hive
Next day Auntie steers the station wagon
Halfway across Oklahoma encased in teak
Over to Glass Mountains. Though they are barely a
Mesa but we don't argue Free buzzes around
And my toe hurts
But I keep still
Auntie glows on the crest transformed
We scoot down the hill on our butts all the way
My cousins and I build an altar One stone for each
Tribe Near Rattlesnake Lake
Plains Spread out every which way in a
Season of tall grass
And barley rustling in the vicious
Wind where I am simply myself.
A very small girl in a big prairie.

Kathi Stafford is the author of *Blank Check*, a poetry collection, and co-editor and contributing author of *Grateful Conversations*, an anthology of Los Angeles poets. She previously served as Poetry Editor and Senior Editor for *Southern California Review* for many years. Her poetry, reviews and interviews have been published in many journals, such as *Rattle*, *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Nerve Cowboy*, and *Southern California Review*. Her poetry has been anthologized in *Chopin and Cherries* and *Sea of Alone: Poems for Hitchcock*. Stafford is a corporate attorney who is also a violinist with Brookwood Strings and a banjo player and alto for the Staffords, a bluegrass band.

FEATURED POET AND PHOTOGRAPHER – SUSAN ROGERS

GRATEFUL CONVERSATIONS

Everything we have we're given
in love to use in love, in grace.
There is nothing we alone have written.

We are but a conversation
of light, through this exchange we trace
everything we have. We're given

sour and sweet, lemon, raisin
and grain to bind them into place—
there is nothing we alone have written.

We eat cakes but have forgotten
their origin. We have erased
everything. We have, we're given

we look, we laugh, we love, we listen.
We welcome gifts we embrace.
Yet there is nothing we alone have written.

Watch sunset turn to a ribbon.
Remember honey and its taste.
Everything we have we're given.
There is nothing we alone have written.

A FIELD OF WINTER GRASS

~ after a photograph by Peter Sheffler
"Winter Field Grasses, Far Away Point, Maryland"

To be still in the middle of chaos
to be singular in the midst of multiplicity
to be a line in a series of lines
a note in a chorus, a voice in the marsh
a reed in a tangle of stalks
to be woven in a field of complexity
yet still a thread, an arrow, a direction
an intention, a clear heart, a hidden blade
a crisscross of here and there, a slender
reaching strand of light, an intersection
of possibility a dance of detail, a piece of
the weave, a pattern of everything,
a field of winter grass.

THE ORIGIN IS ONE

for Kotama Okada

The dove knows the way
follow her.

Your heart knows the way
listen well.

Within your deepest self
are wings of light.

They cover the earth
with waves of love.

Do you remember?
You once knew.

Stand in the warmth
of sunlight and recall.

The origin of the world
is one.

The origin of religions
is one.

The origin of all
humankind is one.

Circle back.
Imagine the great will

of all things
stirring in your fingers.

Reach out your arms
and open your palms

to the sky.
It is time.

NUMBERS

When she thinks of her husband,
she thinks of a half-moon carrying a shadow half behind.
The moon never loses fullness,
even if it is draped by night.
Once she could see the moon's unsevered disc,
no matter what portion lit the sky, and in its one, cool light
complete herself. Now she finds only broken shapes,
sees semi-circles separated. She does not know how
to live in two places at a time. For three or four months
she thought she could be the sky
suspended in space above their cities.
But it has been five or six years; he has not appeared.
She feels hollowed like air inside a weightless cloud.
Seven days a week, she composes letters in her head,
but cannot find eight lines to explain emptiness.
Her nine koi fish swim in bright scaled circles in the pond
They cannot distract her. She thinks again about walking
ten miles to the pavilion, but has walked this road
a hundred times before, envisioned him returning
a thousand times and more. Today, it seems
ten thousand miles separate them.

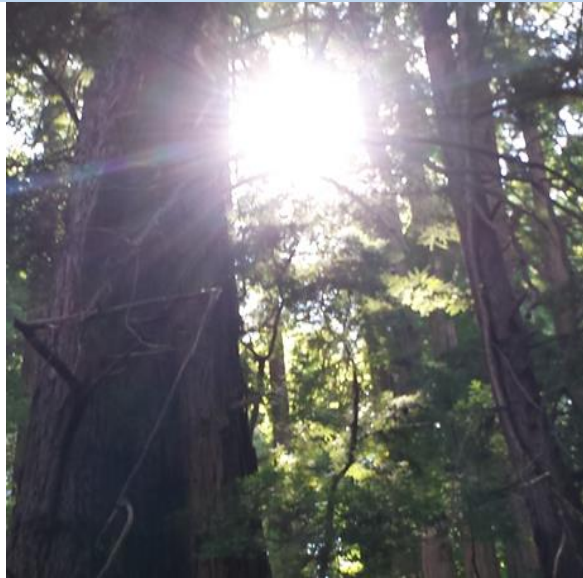
If she knew the words, the numbers, she would write a poem.
She thinks of ancient China, of Zou Wenjun
who waited for her husband at a pavilion
when he was sent to the capitol for months which spun
into years. Zou Wenjun waited spinning words and tears
into a numbered verse and when her husband sought divorce
showed him the poem. Greatly moved, he changed his mind.

Where in this ordered universe can she find
the words to fill a heart? She will have to start again,
relearn the edges of a circle, reclaim the white light
of her first moon.

GRASS

Yesterday, someone I know
Looked through me
like I wasn't there,
as if I were a field of air,
insubstantial and invisible.
Today, I think of my great teacher
who said,
"Become a practitioner of genuine humility,"
and a modern saint who said,
"A cyclone can destroy the mightiest of trees,
but even a cyclone cannot touch the grass.
This is the greatness of humility."
So today I have decided to become like grass,
which needs no encouragement
but water, sun and sky,
which is invisible, often, as we walk by,
a genuine practitioner of humility.
It is true the grass is sometimes mowed;
but that just keeps it safe from storms,
close to the ground, close to you.
Oh God of all things great and small,
cyclone, trees, dirt,
let me strive to always be like grass,
cool comfort for the earth.
So that children may run through me,
barefoot on a summer day
and I may greet them, or catch them if they fall,
soft and green and sweet, with no resistance
to their play,
almost invisible, pure reason for their joy





RETURN TO MUIR WOODS

In the cathedral of trees
sunlight christens moss-grown branches—
a sacrament.

I breathe in
air of clear intention
purified, re-written.

In the cathedral of trees
I smile at each person I pass
sharing the wisdom of woods.

So many voices mingle:
English, French, Italian, Farsi.
Each harmonized in hope.

I caress a broken trunk on its side
a moment of camaraderie
thanking it for pointing me to sky.

In the cathedral of trees
I walk with you
each tree

a testament I read now
and save for later.
I do not know

if the path through
is straight or a loop
that circles back to myself.

Either way I return.

SUNFLOWERS IN YOUR HAND

I wonder if I will recognize you
when you return
in a different form.
I like to think your breath
so intimately part of mine
that when you are reborn
even if you wear
white organza as a bride,
or the black habit of a nun,
if you appear much younger
than you were
in a sweater striped in cyan blue
with wild sunflowers in your hand
I will remember you,
just as I remember the shine
of a sun dazzled stream
after it's gone dry, the rhythm
of staccato rain when I swing
my hammock under cloudless skies,
or the sound of laughter
in a dream of exquisite joy.
Even if you choose to be my cat,
a hummingbird, a bright scaled koi.
And if you are born in another country,
don't speak words I understand
if you are not female this time
but instead a boy, I hope there will be
some note of you that sings,
your music indisputably
through the differences of then and now,
so I will know you are the one
that it's you come back
in whatever form you come.

Susan Rogers considers poetry vehicles for light. She's a practitioner of Sukyo Mahikari—a spiritual practice promoting positivity. In 2013, 2017 she received nominations for Pushcart Prizes. She's co editor of *A Sonic Boom of Stars* and was one of four international judges for the 8th Rabindranath Tagore Award.

<https://www.loispjones.com/susan-rogers>. **Publication Credits:** "Numbers," *Kyoto Journal*, Issue 92; "Longing for October," *Kyoto Journal*, Issue 81; "A Field of Winter Grass," *Interlitq: California Poets Part 2*; "The Origin is One," *Saint Julian Press*, 2012; "Grass" and "Grateful Conversations," *Grateful Conversations*, 2018; "Return to Muir Woods," *Altadena Poetry Review*, 2019; "Sunflowers in Your Hand," *Quill & Parchment*, May 2019.

MONTHLY CONTEST SUBMISSIONS GUIDELINES

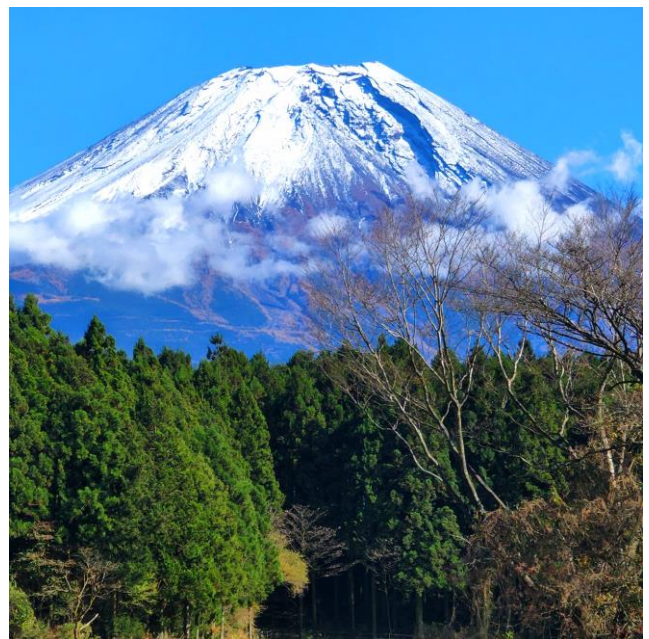
California State Poetry Society encourages poetic creativity by organizing monthly poetry contests. The contests are open to all poets, whether or not they are members of the CSPS. Reading fees are \$1.50 per poem with a \$3.00 minimum for members and \$3.00 per poem with a \$6.00 minimum for non-members. 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, by regular mail (enclosing check) or email (using Paypal): 1) by mail to CSPS Monthly Contest – (specify month), Post Office Box 4288 Sunland, California 91041, with a check made to CSPS; and 2) by email to: SPSMonthlyContests@gmail.com (specify month), with fees paid by Paypal to the following account – CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety@gmail.com.

The monthly contest winners are announced as they are awarded. All of the winners for the year are listed in the first *CSPS 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. For pools of \$100 or more, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd place winners receive \$50, \$10 and \$5, respectively. There are no exceptions to the prize disbursement rules. Please note: Do not send SAEs. 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, 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)



Poetry Letter is a quarterly electronic publication, issued by the California State Poetry Society. Edited by Maja Trochimczyk since 2020. Emailed and posted on the CSPS website; CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.org. Sections of the Poetry Letter are also posted separately on the CSPS Blog, CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.com.

Photos by Susan Rogers: *Ladybug Luminous*, p. 7, *Muir Woods*, p. 8, *Fuji Suddenly*, p. 9.

MICHAEL ESCOUBAS REVIEWS *LEAVE IT RAW* BY SHAKIRA CROCE

24 poems, 30 pages, published by Finishing Line Press. ISBN 978-1-64662-265-8

<https://www.finishinglinepress.com/product/leave-it-raw-poems-by-shakira-croce/>

As a reviewer the first thing I consider about a collection is the title. *Leave it Raw*. Who would use those words for a poetry collection and why? I don't want my food served "raw." I want it cooked according to the recipe. I don't want my body rubbed "raw" by the clothes I wear. I want garments whose textures and styles are kind to my body. In conversation, I dislike "raw" language that irritates my sensibilities. Give me well-heeled vocabulary and good verbal manners. *Leave it Raw*. What is this?

Poet Shakira Croce invites her readers to join her on a journey. It is a pilgrimage of sorts. Croce visits familiar places and experiences. These include making sense out of life after losing everything in a fire ("The Remains"). "Homecoming" returns readers to those long ago days when:

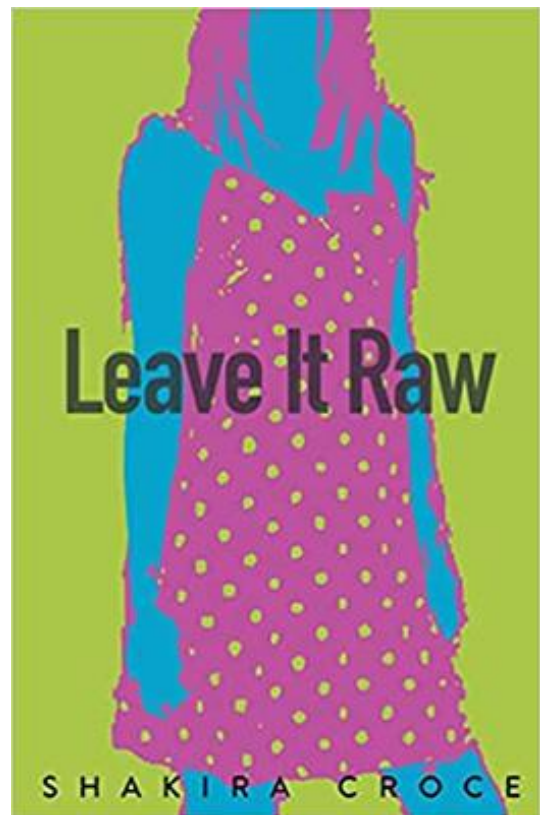
King and Queen
walk down the 50-yard line,
but she feels the arena of eyes
still on her.

"Commuter's Pastoral" studies a once robust man in the dim light of old age. I give these examples merely to point out that Shakira Croce is a gifted poet. Her poetry paints compelling pictures of *reality*. Hence, her title, *Leave it Raw*. When poets tell the truth, the results get our attention. I interpret "raw" in the sense that Croce takes a "fresh" perspective on her subjects.

Croce's writing style is *verse libre*. She uses it well. Line break decisions result in pleasant reading cadences. Her poems look good on the page. She varies presentation between couplets, tercets, quatrains and poems without stanza breaks. Croce does not employ end-rhyme. I'm impressed by her craftsmanship. Interlinear rhyme, assonance and alliteration are hallmarks of her work.

Earlier I used the term *Pilgrimage*. Croce includes a poem by that title. I reproduce it here as Exhibit A in my thesis that *raw* means "*freshening of life*":

We can make up time in the air,
the captain explained,
or at least that's what I understood
between the fuzzy intercom and
broken English,
not mentioning we'd lose
six hours crossing the Atlantic.
They say animals have a different
internal clock, without feeling
passing weeks and years.
Yet the butterfly with a tear
across her right wing
returns at noon each day
to that same turn in the road,
darting between rosemary and dandelions drying
in the honeyed weeds.
The sense of smell is the strongest
for us all to find food, a partner.
Flowers waiting to procreate on a cliff above the sea
bring me back to where I was born.
After spending a lifetime thousands of miles away
that simple power lets me know my home
is not where I live
but a long climb up from Roman rocks and ruins



to the stuff springing from
the uncut earth.

In “Pilgrimage” the poet considers the meaning of place. During a tedious flight across the Atlantic she muses that even a wounded butterfly has a strong sense of belonging. The butterfly returns again and again to those environs which propagate life. The “raw” truth is that occasionally, if we’re looking, we gain a fresh perspective—and life can never be the same again.

This is precisely why *Leave it Raw* should be in everyone hands. The best poets take the commonplace and infuse it with freshness not thought of before.

Best of all, Shakira Croce’s poetry reflects a good mind. Hers is a mind which takes a deep dive into her subjects. “A Second Honeymoon” demonstrates that Croce knows where her readers live. Two quatrains follow:

Last night I don’t know why
we were fighting.
I think you felt like
everything was on your shoulders.

.....

It’s time to plan
a break from working our way
up, shift scenery, and
rest our limbs from the climb.

We have come full circle. *Leave it Raw*, is a pilgrimage down the road of life. Reserve your seat on the plane and buckle up.

Michael Escoubas
first published in
Quill & Parchment



Beach Sunset 1 & Beach Sunset 2 by Maja Trochimczyk

Judith R. Robinson Reviews *BORN UNDER THE INFLUENCE* by Andrena Zawinski

ISBN 978-1625494160, 130 pages, \$20.00 <https://www.wordpoetrybooks.com/zawinski.html>

Andrena Zawinski, author of *Born Under the Influence*, is a poet of time and place but that is clearly not all: This is a voice of great experience. Equally notable for this reader is Zawinski’s extraordinary skill with the many forms of poetry; this collection contains villanelles, pantoums, rondel. and sonnets, all brightly rendered. One of her specialties is the haibun: A haibun is a Japanese genre of writing that mixes chiefly autobiographical prose with haiku. Here is a beautiful example:

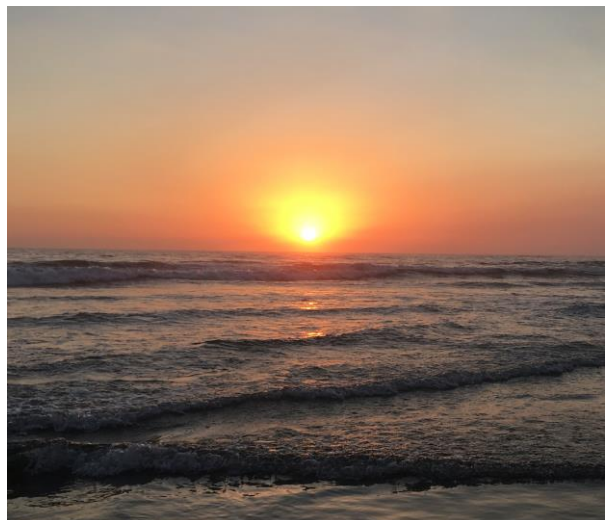
SUMMER HAIBUN

Summer’s long light swells with bright lemons, melons, corn,
the silken thoughts, facets of sunlight cascading along waves,
run of shorebirds sweeping the horizon.

It is for young mothers jostling babies in low tide or for dozing
on the soft lull of water lapping the shore beneath an untamed
sky feathered in oncoming sunset.

This time of day curtains billow at windows in soft light, sun
squints in above a rippling bay as summer knocks at the door
and we answer

a wail of seagulls
winging wild above a catch
eyes fixed past us



In addition to her range with form, Zawinski's work can be quite lyrical, even when referring to gritty beginnings—

From "Anchorless in the Light"

I cannot resist lingering here
in this veil of white light blinding with beauty,
reminding to hold onto this, hold it close and dear
as I was once stuck inside glass and brick, sight set
on neighboring city decks, their hubbub, drunken songs
brouhaha, all of it weedy with ivy, bats circling chimneys,
unlike these distant hills yet to be peopled.

—and as we travel with her from a girlhood in western
Pennsylvania, with its rivers, mills & furnaces where
she reveals—

The milkman's daughter
is what I longed to be.
I loved when the sun rose and buttermilk came,
pulled off the seal and foiled cap, ringed my finger
around chunks of yellow fat at the bottle's lip, shook
and spilled it into a glass, salted and gulped it down.

(Interestingly, she reminds us in an endnote that a milkman's
daughter referred to a child of adultery, at a time when women
were housebound.) --through an American, mid-20th-century
childhood::

From those ----
drawn-out summers
sticky with sweat, bare feet stung
by pavement, racing inside to box fans
for a wash of syncopated cool, waiting
for something bigger to arrive...

—to young adulthood when:

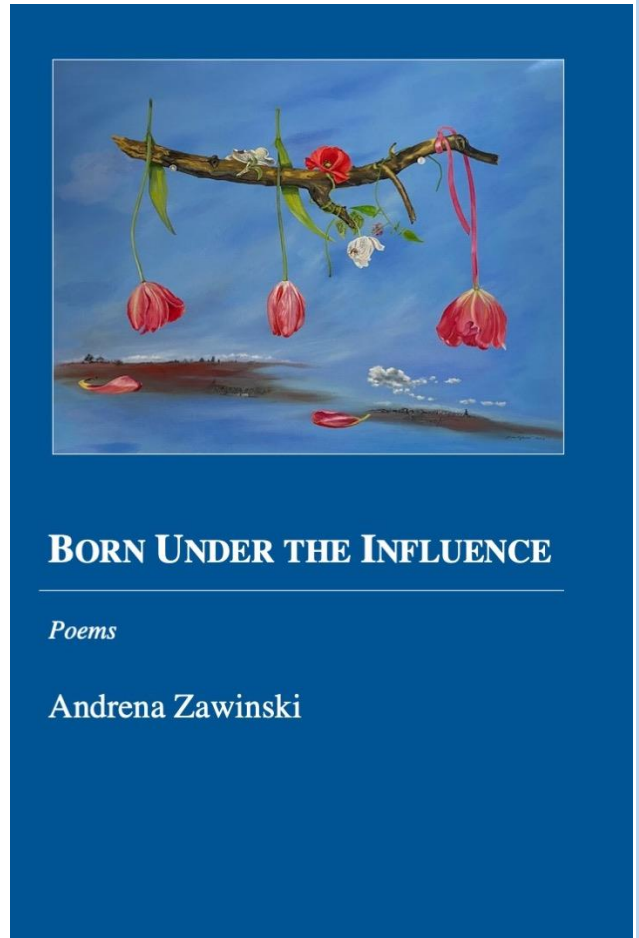
Getting stiffed on tips waiting corporate parties, sweating out
mid-summer short orders of cheesy omelettes and fluffy pancakes
washed down with pitchers of Bloody Marys and Mimosas.
Grabbed by the throat by a drunken pill-popping veteran
for shutting him off from another Long Island Iced Tea."

It is also worth noting that Zawinski has enormous knowledge of other people's work, which she acknowledges as influencers throughout this collection. She generously tips her poet's hat to Adrienne Rich, Maggie Anderson, Wislawa Zymborska, Gerald Stern, and many others.

Also impressive is the volume of solid work in this collection, much of it finding a place here after publication and awards from many fine literary journals. Finally, perhaps the greatest pleasure in reading *Born Under The Influence*, is the opportunity to participate in the fully realized life of an intelligent, engaging woman. In over 100 vivid poems, we live it right with her. There are even forms called cherita and landay, both new to this reader.

~ Judith R. Robinson

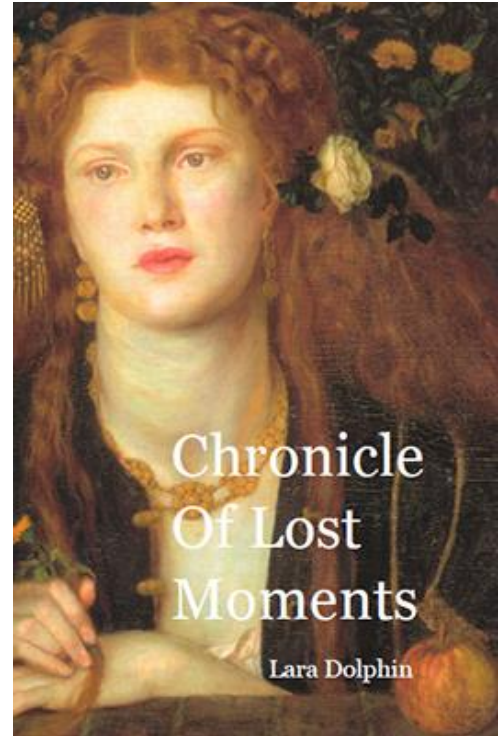
Judith R. Robinson is a visual artist, editor, teacher, fiction writer and poet.



Among the many aphorisms uttered by Wallace Stevens is this gem: *Poetry is a response to the daily necessity of getting the world right.* I have always treasured that quote because it gets to the heart of poetry and why people write poetry. As I immersed myself in Lara Dolphin's latest chapbook, *Chronicle of Lost Moments*, I was impressed by Dolphin's eye for detail and heart for the ironies of life. Her poetry demonstrates an affinity akin to Stevens. More on this later.

I lead with the poem which opens the collection: "As The Earth Regards the Anthropocene":

All our stuff (the concrete the asphalt
the gravel the plastic) outweighs every
living thing on the planet from the Pando
aspens to the pygmy possum—
creation waits for us and while it's easy
for gestures long-delayed like a greeting card
lost in the mail or a flight stuck on the tarmac—
it's almost lunch and I'm at the donation center
chatting with Dave as he helps unload a trunk
full of gently-used clothes books and toys—
he's told me that he's five months sober
he won't get the kids for the holiday
I tell him about my job the long hours
the low pay my car that won't stay fixed
so there we stand among the stuffed animals
and kitchen appliances feeling
the weight of the world on our shoulders.



The title segues into Dolphin's themes: "Anthropocene" refers to human activity as it relates to climate and environment. I researched Pando aspens and the pygmy possum. A large Pando aspen grove in Utah is in grave danger from several outside influences. I did not know that this tree grove, with its lovely yellow foliage, is the single largest organism in the world and has been around for thousands of years.

There are fewer than 2,000 pygmy possums left in the world. This cute creature is prey to several predators and suffers from a reduction in food supply. These potential losses may seem trivial to some but not to Dolphin. Moving into the heart of the poem, the poet chronicles a series of "ordinary" things common to daily life. These "lost moments" pile on and weigh us down . . . while "creation waits" for meaningful human responses to challenges that could have irreversible impact on life as we know it.

Stylistically, Dolphin writes in free verse. When she uses rhyme, she uses it well. "Lost In L.A." illustrates:

There is no worry of wind or snow
or time or place in Godot's Hyperloop below

sidewalks where children run and play
near streets where out-of-towners lose their way.

No trains, parades or fire trucks
no snapping turtles, so safe of ducks

will slow the traffic as it flows
to listen, for what, no one knows.

Where cars sail by on electric skates
and no one sees and nothing waits.

While a variety of environmental themes permeate Dolphin's *Chronicle*, poetry as fun and entertaining is

important to her. "Pace of Play" pokes fun at baseball. It's slow pace is about as boring as *waiting for the oven to heat*. Don't miss this one!

Dolphin's heart for her husband showcases one of many tender moments included in *Chronicle*. Her innate pathos shines in "The Best Time To Plant A Tree":

we were classmates in seventh grade
hanging out at band practice
riding the same bus home
we made out in high school
then went our separate ways
four years of collect passed
before we met again
and another five years would pass
before you got serious and I got smart
and you asked me to marry you
the fifth anniversary is wood
so let's plant a tree to celebrate
we make a hole two times larger
than the nursery container is deep
for our hearty Appalachian Redbud
as we dig I try to remember
the last time I told you I love you
that you are my lifesource, my breath
I should have told you twenty years ago
the second best time is now.

I thought the author should have used the title, *Chronicle of Lost Moments Recovered*. The tenderness and maturity enshrined in the above poem is precisely why. In it Lara Dolphin understands that *poetry is a response to the daily necessity of getting the world right*.

~ Michael Escoubas, first published
in *Quill & Parchment*



Waiting for Us and Hill Clouds by Maja Trochimczyk

