

CSPS  
Poetry Letter  
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Edited by Maja  
Trochimczyk

# Poetry Letter

California State Poetry Society



## A HARVEST OF BOOKS, POEMS, AND PHOTOS

In time for the fall harvest—a crop of great poems and three book reviews. This time, we are featuring some of our own: Alice Pero, Chair of Monthly Poetry Contests since 2020; Nicholas Skaldetvind, who guest-edited the Fall 2023 issue of the *California Quarterly* and everyone liked his work so much, that he was invited to join the CQ Editorial Board; and Frank Iosue, who served as the Judge for our 2022 Annual Poetry Contest. Three different voices, styles, locations. . . Alice lives in California, near the Los Angeles National Forest, close to nature, yet at the edge of a huge metropolis. We are neighbors and we love our land. Frank is in Arizona, and Nicholas travels a lot, from Sweden, to Greece, to California, to North Dakota, and home to upstate New York. As for the “poetic voices,” let the readers decide. The three book reviews present *Distance* by Deborah P Kolodji and Mariko Kitakubo (reviewed by William Scott Galasso), *Shimmer: An Ekphrastic Poetry Collection* by Paulette Demers Turco, reviewed by Michael Escoubas, who also reviewed *Gathering Sunlight* by Silvia Scheibli & Patty Dickson Pieczka. Our illustrators are photographers Beverly M. Collins (whom we know as a poet often published in the *California Quarterly* and elsewhere), and Iga Supernak, both based in the Los Angeles area.

Maja Trochimczyk, CSPS President



*Fall Leaves. Photo by Iga Supernak*

## FEATURED POET: FRANK IOSUE

Frank Iosue, who served as Judge for CSPS Annual Contest in 2022, was born in Los Angeles, California in 1951. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from California State University, Los Angeles and a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing / Poetry from The University of Iowa / Writer's Workshop. He has studied Poetry and Creative Writing with many nationally-renowned and prize-winning poets. His poems have appeared in numerous publications and online journals. He has conducted writing workshops, organized and hosted a number of monthly poetry reading series, and has been a featured reader at venues around Southern Arizona. He has served as a judge for numerous national poetry competitions, and creates poetry-related video content for his YouTube Channel, *ImUpToMystic*. He is the author of 11 chapbooks of poetry, which have been assembled and published in his volume *The Au Revoir of An Enormous Us: Collected Poems* (2017). He lives near Tucson, Arizona. Links to some of his visual poetry projects are below.

1. "Green Mountain Rhapsody" by Frank Iosue: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSHPNC0QGew>
2. "The Whitsun Weddings" by Philip Larkin: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLtUz5PGwrl>
3. "The Waste Land" by T. S. Eliot <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbZOpWjjvE>
4. "The Poetry Man 20 Question Poetry Challenge" by Frank Iosue  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJj3K7dTCEA>
5. "Dreaming Dog, Astride The World" by Warren Andrie <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIg1O3fbpiM>
6. "The Idea Of Order At Key West" by Wallace Stevens <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKEsHnr1yA>
7. "Autumn Begins In Martins Ferry, Ohio" by James Wright  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWQ6C9bz8PY>
8. "Little Girl, My String Bean, My Lovely Woman" by Anne Sexton  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Rso2G9SZRA>

### AN ALLEGIANCE OF INTELLECTS

*"Friend.....good!"  
~ Frankenstein's Monster*

There are these  
walls of air  
I wish through  
to all you  
unknown others.  
I've walked  
backward  
from death  
into the future,  
out of the flames,  
a cross-stitched,  
lock-kneed  
Lazarus:  
no further  
assembly  
required,  
and almost  
anatomically  
correct.  
I have reached  
the dead end



of all my  
inward arrivals.  
I've learned  
nothing more  
than that  
a child  
will not  
float like a flower.  
I am a mirror  
in the stillness.  
Strange  
as a cloud.  
As cold and alien  
as an Alp.  
I don't  
want to bear  
my load  
of breath  
alone.  
I must try  
to reach you,  
always.



Only  
a moment  
is not  
enough.  
Can I touch  
the hem  
of all  
your thinking?  
Feed me  
more  
language!  
Teach me  
how  
to inhabit  
a room!  
I want  
to live!  
I want  
to live  
near  
your mind!

*Frank Iosue*

## LITANY FOR AN ENLIGHTENED DEJECTION

Though you have digested all your deepest secrets,  
and the stars have feigned  
regalia for your anonymity.

Though each elation has emancipated yet another  
metaphor, and everything's the matter.

Though you have shed the fewest possible tears  
and have been always grateful, silently,  
that others suffered more  
than you might have or ought.

Though someone whispered, more than once,  
what must be done, and you did  
exactly as he pleases.

Though your mother may have loved you best  
but could not love you better.

Though you heard so many church bells ring,  
but discovered the path  
of prayer went only everywhere  
your blood was running.

Though the boats of summer kept on undulating  
effortlessly underneath you when  
they could just as easily have sunk.

Though the next step you took led in some  
intoxicating new direction eerily  
similar to the last.

Though every day you ate as if you wanted to,  
but found that you grew  
hungry out of habit.

Though the dream has yet to arrive  
that will not save you.

Though you have admirably, and without fanfare,  
conquered every piece of space  
you have ever occupied,  
and are to be  
congratulated on the triumph  
that has been your existence.

When you walk into the earth and finally drown,  
your loneliness will free you  
from your prosperity.

*Frank Iosue*

## THE ROOM THAT IS ERASURE

encloses:

the air of  
autumn  
that devours  
the green engine  
of the leaf

the ages  
of rain that  
eat  
the pebbles in  
the water

the sun that  
seals the small  
tomb of  
the trodden flower

the avalanche  
that is  
a breath  
as it  
overwhelms  
a skin

intractable terrain:

dried fields  
and desolate  
gardens

my heart:

the throne to  
which every  
absence has  
ascended

*Frank Iosue*



*Photo by Iga Supernak*



## THE BREVITY OF ENDLESSNESS

Night. I traverse sleep's phantom atmospheres;  
its unlit oceans and its vast frontiers.  
I linger 'til the darkness disappears

and wake to some small wonder, some refrain  
the world had long exhausted; some terrain  
un-earthed somewhere between a now and then

that can't be found on any calendar.  
How insubstantial and sublime we were,  
old loves, old friends! And how familiar  
each reassembled recollection seems.  
Time, loss and absence: those recurring themes  
that dwarf the fragile fiefdoms of our dreams

with their detestable supremacy!  
Whatever hold they claim to have on me,  
I revel in my heart's infinity—

beyond all skies; outlasting every sun  
that's shone, and rarefied by everyone  
I've loved. It's there we sing in unison

the anthems of our insignificance;  
there we endure, and end, and recommence,  
kaleidoscoped in memory's opulence,

forever. Everything we've always been,  
astir inside the graveyard of the skin:  
the soil we dream, and do our dying, in.

*Frank Iosue*

## COMPANIONS

Friends bring a silent language both  
learn to decode the fast and slow that  
blooms tight in shadows.

Something known from long ago recognized  
in a face that is new to us.

Some friends challenge who we are.  
They press our grey view, see  
through red anxiousness and  
detect our basement we believed  
to be hidden.

Each emerge from patterns that waited  
to greet, like found puzzle pieces that  
merge together. Companions in hunger who  
understand seeds and the sun.

Wings are stilled long enough for  
breath to cut the waters, hear life's  
glisten, and tasty-haunt of a horizon.  
A shell sees a flutter as the same heartbeat  
like a drumbeat at the center of a jungle

*Beverly M. Collins*

*Below: Dragonfly and Mr. Turtle, Photo by B. M. Collins*



**FEATURED POET: ALICE PERO**

**I WOULD LISTEN TO YOU**

I am sure that I would listen to you

if I weren't sworn to finding  
the fabric of me

not in  
blankets  
newspapers  
old bricks

I would be interested in hearing about the  
composition of

molecules  
rusty chairs  
even raindrops

Except that I just sweetened the call  
of that bird  
without a single thing

*Published in Ellipsis Literature & Art, Vol. 47*

**MORNING**

The wind opens the door and I go out  
looking for an old poem in the garden  
A new one would be too fresh, too bright  
I feel rusty in the morning before coffee and toast  
have to do a slow dance in the wet grass  
feel the sun touching yellow jonquils

I am rolling in old thoughts,  
like a dog who remembers the hunt in sleep  
I make little yips and jumps, a dance I have made before  
a white scarf over my face, like a spider's web

A friend will come and knock at the door  
and I will invite her in  
We will talk and laugh and forget all about poetry  
but new words will appear over coffee  
like warm mist rising  
and I will copy them down

*Alice Pero  
Published in Spillway, Number 14*

**EMPTY SPACES**

At the beach all my exclamation points  
turn upside down  
I am caught staring  
at the empty spaces sea pulls out of me  
I fill myself with discoveries:  
a monster mussel, ancient shellfish warrior  
clinging to a huge mass of seaweed,  
wiggling starfish  
and dozens of delicate sand dollars

I am a sea relic addict  
I can't stand the silence inside me  
I scurry for tiny things  
to clutter a mind washed too clean

The bucket fills with oddities:  
a haul of clam shells covered in barnacles,  
the barnacles wearing sea grass like mole hairs  
and broken mussel shells all worn down to nothing,  
blackened outer covering gone,  
leaving pure mother-of-pearl,  
a shining filling me up,  
All those old holes mended

*Published in Harpur Palate, Vol 10 Issue 1*

**WEATHER HOUSE**

I think I would like a weather house  
Each room hot, cold, rain or snow  
at a flick of a switch  
Clothes, neat, on a rack outside each room,  
a place to stow winter gear and slip into a bikini  
Rain boots, slush boots and thongs on racks  
for quick changes  
The rooms would be square, except for those  
with kidney shaped pools  
and fading ceilings that could cloud over or  
turn stark blue  
The ultimate Happening  
Children stuck indoors on rainy days could frolic  
in the Sun Room  
San Diego citizens could stand in bliss in cool  
Vermont spring rain  
Montana men, weary of crisp clean air could breathe  
deep in LA smog in the Smog Room  
And then there could be the New York Traffic Room,  
because all that noise is a weather unto itself

*Published in California Quarterly, Vol 29, No. 2*

## SERIOUS BUSINESS

Have you weighed the yellow of that bold-faced sunflower?  
Taken the measure of white as daisy opened to your touch?  
This is morning: serious business  
Sun is not yawning; night's pleasures are done  
Take out your yardstick now, your ledger  
Geranium's red must be counted  
Lobelia's blue cannot exceed regulation  
Pansy's multi-colored madness should be neatened up  
These colors must not leak or stain  
Our minds are clear, our mission pure  
Lest we run amuck  
begin to barter with poems, trade pigs for pearls,  
cell phones for peacocks, laptops for dahlias,  
Lest we wander off course, stray from the plan  
Let flowers rule us

*Alice Pero*  
*Published in North Dakota Quarterly, Spring 2007*

## BEFORE THE FALL

Squeezing the last drops of summer  
sweet and pungent, like a Chinese sauce,  
savored with watermelon and lime,  
we gallop down dusty hills, yell at the ocean,  
claim a stretch of land, three acres  
where eucalyptus stand like benevolent brothers,  
A huge hawk watches from a tall pine,  
marks us with the eye of the ancient god  
we cannot escape  
We lie in the arm of the hill, half crazed with sun,  
drunk with late summer's slow nectar,  
our mouths open to receive the offering,  
then slap the hard dry earth, bold as dancers  
daring the bull, we rush away,  
nimble as acrobats, thin as leaves,  
we float off, disappear into hot air,  
descend to drink cool evening moon,  
full and fat, waiting

*Alice Pero*  
*Published in G.W. Review*

## LEAVES FALLING

leaves fall  
over the telephone wires  
with soft grace  
with no apparent plan  
or sense of haste  
the yellow ones have the sun  
burning in them  
nothing urgent makes them  
spin downward  
in the passing breeze  
they have mastered the plan,  
the yearly dying  
and what telephone lines carry  
in scrambled complexity  
are nothing to them  
they fall in free time  
and have no knowledge of the volts  
and vexations of man  
traveling in milliseconds  
through telephone lines  
they flit through these  
vehicles of force,  
insouciant, careless and free  
mindless of electricity

*Alice Pero*  
*Published in Poet Lore*



## THE APPLES

I lean over on you  
and the wind shudders  
Trees stand at attention  
Branches, startled awake  
sway, dropping apples like  
small bombs  
the children rake away and eat  
delicious fruit  
They wonder at the fertility  
of trees

Alice Pero

*Published in Thawed Stars*



*Photo by Iga Supernak*



**ALICE PERO** joined the CSPA Board as a Director at Large in May 2019 and became the Chair of Monthly Poetry Contests in January 2020. She was elected the 10th Poet Laureate of Sunland-Tujunga in April 2020. She has published poetry in many magazines and anthologies, including *Nimrod*, *National Poetry Review*, *River Oak Review*, *Poet Lore*, *The Alembic*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Distillery*, *Fox Cry Review*, *The Griffin*, *G.W. Review*, and others. Her book of poetry, *Thawed Stars*, was praised by Kenneth Koch as having “clarity and surprises.” She also published a chapbook *Sunland Park Poems*, written as a dialogue with Elsa Frausto.

Pero teaches poetry and is a member of California Poets in the Schools, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering students to express their uniqueness through writing, performing and publishing their own poetry. She founded the long-running Moonday reading series and currently curates the Village Poets series at Bolton Hall Museum. Ms Pero has created dialogue poems with more than twenty poets. She also created the performing group, Windsong Players Chamber Ensemble and performs with them as a flutist.

Read a recent interview with Alice for more information:

<https://shoutoutla.com/meet-alice-pero-flutist-poet-poetry-teacher/>

ASKING YOU

Because of where we walk, there is very little light, but your face shines.  
 I turn to ask you if the Magna Graecia temples in ruin aren't beautiful  
 and you say *si, si*. I touch the gaping mouth of Neptune and he swallows  
 my hand, his face lighting up for a moment.  
 For some things I have no memory –  
 where I left my car keys,  
 what my ex-lover wrote in a text last week,  
 why exactly I came here.  
 But I like to know the names of Greeks and what they did –  
 Sisyphus, Heraclitus, Asopus –  
 and later, I want to know the name of these columns that limitrophe  
 your house like a sort of fence. Wide brick trunks opening into frames, branches  
 holding the field of corn and the stars I might be mistaking for planets  
 heavy next to us.

CRUSH

The car door was shut and stayed shut until it was opened.  
 I am uncomfortable but still  
 can enjoy how of all the guests, only our red  
 Ford isn't blocked in, so alive  
 I open the door and step out, so people  
 can go on deciding if they know me.  
*How you do one thing is how you do everything* Merryellen  
 reminds me where I was going without you  
 when I turn my face in the lone motion of a crush  
 amidst the vacuum of unmeasured leaving  
 the garden and the half-tailed cats via multiple rooms, whereas the whole party  
 was gladdened and still in motion. The funny thing  
 between adoration and silence.  
 Crawled up the nape of my neck: a shadow did.  
 Closed the pantry door: a ghost to placate did.  
 Lodged in life, you were inside and dancing, I think. The mystery remained  
 mildly erotic. I think other shapes were shifting in the trees without touching.  
 Everything, turning in this light, to stones.  
 We make ourselves warm. We make ourselves alone. I try  
 to guess your discalced itinerary through the room still in motion the wind  
 knocks the heads of lilies together and I end  
 up counting bougainvilleas instead.  
 Earlier we'd left footprints in the stones of ourselves.  
 The tide was out.  
*Not a problem at all*, the mirror said, *since you both look  
 the same from here.*



Nicholas Skaldetvind



## AVITHOS BEACH

The past alive  
warm sea water  
eye-level rounding

the buoy  
locking up the deep  
end behind a screen

of autumn friezes  
Zeus and Demeter left  
lying in

white sheets under  
blanket  
dull-colored intrepid

vines, roses  
standing nude  
with my back

to the cliff  
marble exquisite  
bedrooms

tracing the sand  
into twilight  
pink and well-worn

tracery stone-scapes  
grapes hang  
before transparent glass.

*Published in the California Quarterly, 49:1 (2023)*

**NICHOLAS SKALDETVIND** is an Italian-American poet and paper-maker who joined the Editorial Board of the *California Quarterly* in September 2023. He holds a M.A. (2019) from Stockholm University. Department of English and Transnational Creative Writing (thesis "The Spontaneous Poetics of Jack Kerouac's Letters from 1947-1956: Repetition, Language, and Narration.") In 2015 he received B.A degree from Saint Louis University Madrid, Department of Spanish Language and Literature, Department of International Studies, and Department of Ibero-American Studies. He is a recipient of numerous scholarships and grants, including Graduate ERASMUS Merit Scholarship (September 2018 – January 2019) at Bath Spa University. Department of English and Creative Writing in Bath, England; as well as scholarships at creative writing workshops at Berkeley, CA; Naropa University, Colorado and book arts and papermaking workshop at Wells College in Aurora, New York. He also was an undergraduate Exchange Student at the University of Copenhagen, Department of Political Sciences, English Literature, Spanish Literature, and Historical Linguistics (August 2012 – May 2016) and took a writing course in Danish in 2015.

Skaldetvind's research and teaching interests include: Twentieth-century American Literature, Transnational Studies, Epistolary Poetics, Life Writing, Literature of the American West, Papermaking and Book Arts, Fibers and Shrinkage, and Paper Drying Process. He is a multilingual poet and writer: native speaker in English, with advanced knowledge of Spanish, Danish, intermediate knowledge of Swedish, Portuguese, Italian and French.



*Red Cherries by Beverly M. Collins*

## WAITING

What can I do? Wish the day over like macular clouds  
making the palms waver under the pressure?  
I look through a thousand fronds diffused with sun  
flashing  
above visions of a beach set loose in the street  
and dull surfboards.

Either she wasn't at yoga

or the landlord snagged her to complain  
about the neighbors, motorcycles, or her little dog,  
but rarely about her  
and her current situation, which means me.  
For this we're grateful.

Twilight: filaments of pink  
and blue tie-dyed cups –  
the bra she's wearing.

*Nicholas Skaldetvind*

## METAXATA

She is always laughing when they meet.  
They eat toast for breakfast as usual.  
For 39 days he thought it was the Ionian at the bottom  
of his heart blooming, still, dreaming under the heavy  
grapes.  
While the unceasing grey of spectral faces pass in  
spate, he knows  
she is smiling beside him.  
Now as the bougainvillea and roses are in the garden,  
brilliant, and then not at all.  
Behind him her Mycenaean eye scatters broken urns, a  
future setting forth  
rock by rock, inch by inch collecting cicadas rallying  
against the gloam  
in Metaxata. Her face seethes still seraphim  
in slow time about the beach villa  
where she wrought summer's last warmth on linen.  
They spent a night on the floor gravely mute  
discovering  
themselves discovering the bright pulsation overcome  
by landfall's dark pleasure giving way to presence.  
Long afternoons turned leaves into autumn's fold.  
Each ambitious for what is visible between them now  
that winter has begun.

*Nicholas Skaldetvind*



*Seascape by Iga Supernak*

## WILLIAM SCOTT GALASSO REVIEWS *DISTANCE* by MARIKO KITAKUBO & DEBORAH P KOLODJI

*Distance Tan-ku Sequences and Sets* by Mariko Kitakubo and Deborah P. Kolodji, Shabda Press, Duarte, CA  
www.shabdapress.com. 2023, 93 pp.\$18.00 U.S (softcover), print 2023932505, ISBN:978-1-7377113-6-0



Deborah P. Kolodji is the longtime Moderator of the Southern California Haiku Study Group, a member of the board of directors for Haiku North America, and the inaugural recipient of The Science Fiction & Fantasy Poetry Association's Presidents' Lifetime Service Award. In addition, her *highway of sleeping towns* haiku poetry collection was awarded a Touchstone Distinguished Book Award from The Haiku Foundation. Mariko Kitakubo of Tokyo, is renowned for seven tanka collections, three of which are bilingual *Cicada Forest*, *On This Same Star*, and 2016's *Indigo*. Needless to say, given their combined literary pedigree, their collaborative work *Distance* sets a high bar concerning one's expectations.

Fortunately, *Distance*, subtitled *Tan-Ku Sequences and Sets* (for tanka and haiku), not only meets but exceeds these lofty expectations. These longtime friends, one might suggest (twin daughters of different mothers) have esteemed one another's work for years. Each sharing their work and experiencing travels back and forth from the U.S and Japan between 2007-2019.

Then the pandemic struck and most conversation frequently expressed in verse (haiku by Deborah and tanka by Mariko), became their modus operandi. The first of seven sections, we hold virtual hands illustrates how these gifted poets formulated their dialogue. One would text, the other would respond and bridging the time and distance between them literally and figuratively. They did more than cope with different time zones, they excelled in creating unexpected connections.

The still waters of their call and response formula regardless of the specific subject matter inform each other and grow with each reading. Each of the seven sections is distinct in focus, yet they achieve synchronicity when considered as a whole. Here are some samples of their sets and sequences. I've chosen shorter pieces (primarily the sets) as examples due to limitations of space. However, the reward of reading the sequences contained this work is equal in terms of consistent quality.

This piece is from the initial section, we hold virtual hands:

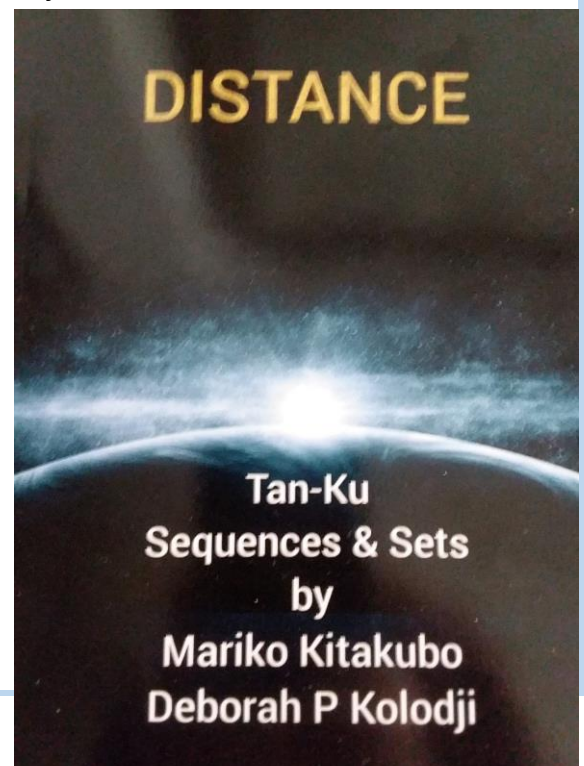
### Connecting Souls

there is  
an invisible thread  
between us...  
quietness of  
the pearl oyster  
  
closing my eyes  
I see your face  
Vermeer's earring

And this from the second section the eternal wind  
focused on Deborah's battling illness:

### Cancer

wind will bring





the summer storm  
my garden  
bordered by living  
cadmium yellow

wild mustard  
growing out of control  
clinical trail

And section three presents us with a classical  
Japanese reference:

### **Forest Bathing**

uphill path  
I slow down to breathe  
the pine scent

she perches  
at the edge of  
my straw hat  
a butterfly's siesta  
in emerald breeze



Each section gives us a deep sense nature's healing power and inherent beauty, a part of Gaia's treasured gift to us, her children. Hence, reminding us of our own responsibility as stewards of the earth. Here are two more samples that conjure two very different strands of the emotional spectrum the first derives from traces of us, the second from the section entitled *my words drift*.

### **End of the Tunnel**

no one knows...  
I escaped from  
his violence  
silent night  
holy night

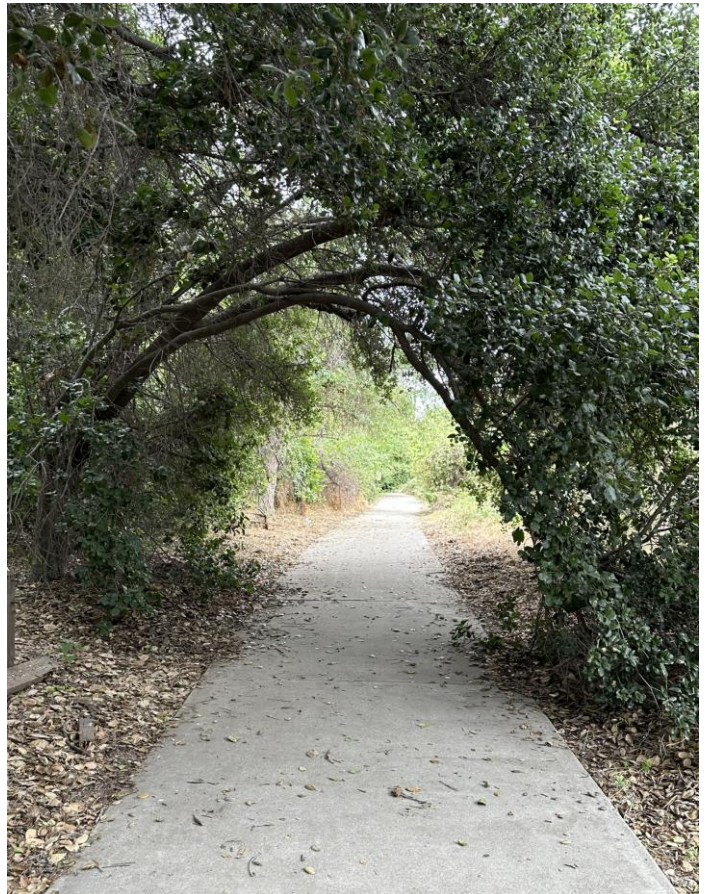
no more scarves  
to hide the bruises  
New Year's resolution

In contrast with the celebratory...

### **9th Inning**

losing streak  
the crack of his bat  
hits a foul ball

every motion  
stops and restarts  
slowly...  
we catch our breath  
Gyakuten Sayonara!



The final line means "coming from behind," a "goodbye," a homer with the bases loaded that give a team the lead. Finally, I would be remiss not to include a sequence, from as the road bends:



## First Blanket

behind  
pale cloud face  
the dignity  
before perfection  
chestnut moon

waiting, waiting  
the slow rise  
of the sun

previously...  
what do you  
remember?  
smiles for the sky  
newborn baby

first blanket  
your face peeking out  
from its folds



Photos in the review by Deborah P Kolodji

This collection *Distance* is full of quiet beauty and a wide range of subject matter comes Highly Recommended.

Book review by William Scott Galasso author of *Saffron Skies*

## MICHAEL ESCOUBAS REVIEWS *SHIMMER* BY PAULETTE DEMERS TURCO

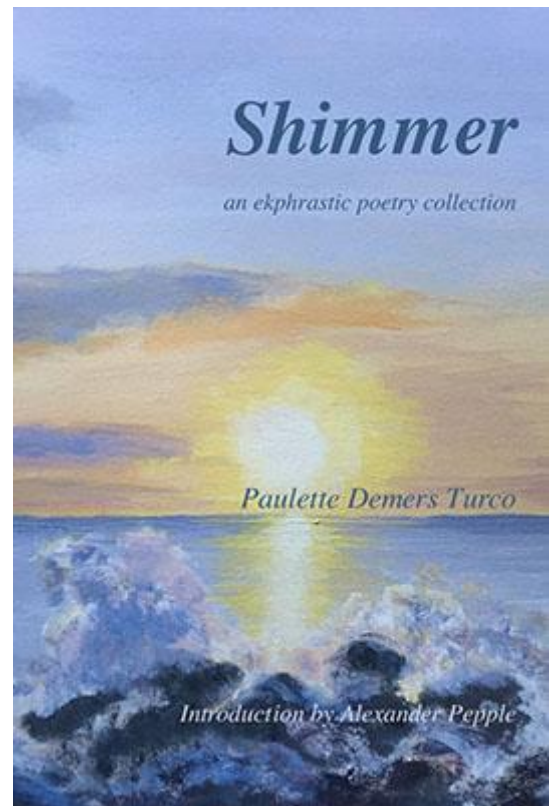
*Shimmer: An Ekphrastic Poetry Collection* by Paulette Demers Turco. 24 Poems ~ 25 art images ~ 81 pages. Kelsay Books. ISBN: 978-1-63980-317-0. ISBN: 978-1-63980-333-0

*Shimmer*, by Paulette Demers Turco, excels on two fronts: First, it is a superb work of art; second, and perhaps more importantly, it is a work of the poet's heart. Turco's professional resume includes a career in both clinical and academic optometry. Her life has been about vision, about helping people see the world with clarity. I have no idea whether Turco associates her career endeavors with her art. What stands out to me is Paulette Turco's visual sense with both brush and pen. My goal in this review is to juxtapose both the "art" and the "heart" accomplished in Paulette Turco's latest collection.

*Design* — The book is organized into six sections: I. Waves, II. Wishes, III. Flight IV. Flow, V. Beacons, and VI. Home. These economical section headings add to the charm and simplicity of design. Each heading contains between three and five poems. The book stays within its prescribed lanes. That is, both design and content are like a well-trained athlete: no fat or flab, just energy and precision.

*Nuances in Forms* — Most of Turco's poems rhyme. This is a maturated skill. I found the music of her rhymed sequences delightful to the ear. Even her non-rhyming poems resonate with internal rhymes together with excellent end-line decisions; all strong compositions. *Shimmers* features four triolets, numerous sonnets and even a double-sonnet. Her free verse poems remind me of Emily Dickinson's style, particularly in her use of the *em* dash.

*Heart and Art Juxtaposed* — I lead with *Shimmering Plum Island Dawn*, the collection's title poem. It is one of



several triolets which the poet judiciously places within the whole. Triolets feature prescribed line-repetitions and rhyme-schemes. These spare poems pack a creative punch while leaving room for expansive sounds and visual effects. I felt “time” melting as if I were present as the tide came in, castles disappearing. Is the poet’s heart conveying a subtle life-lesson?

*Shimmer, Acrylic on Canvas*

### Shimmering Plum Island Dawn

Sunrays shimmer in the air,  
Time melts as foam-topped waves crash down  
on sparkling sand as on a dare.  
Sunrays shimmer in the air.  
At high tide, castles disappear.  
My child’s towel becomes a gown.  
Sunrays shimmer in the air.  
Time melts as foam-topped waves crash down.



In section II, the poet turns her attention to family. I sense her heart in these poems which feature a young girl’s aspirations for ballet. Visually challenged, the youth must cope with whether to wear eyeglasses on stage. Two graphite drawings of a ballerina’s feet combine perfectly with sonnets that chronicle her inner conflict.

In the same section, the artist draws *February Lilies*, a combination which offers valuable insights about Turco’s artistic process:

*Sepia ink on Bristol paper*

### February Lilies

Lilies in a vase,  
lit with morning light  
through a mullioned window,  
beside drawing paper  
with pen and ink supplies  
  
to try—one stroke, then more,  
strong and gentle, curved.  
Accentuations, shadows  
extend across a sheet  
of thick white Bristol paper.

After a quiet hour,  
lines transform to stems,  
leaves, alabaster  
blossoms, vase, translucence—  
fragrant scent of spring.



Section III. Flight, features color photographs of sand dunes, ice-glazed holly berries glistening red, waiting for, “cedar waxwings / flitting in, / grasping orbs, / crisp and sweet, / sharing in pairs, / beak to beak.” You won’t want to miss the other lovely images and poems in this section.

Those who love lighthouses will delight in an entire section devoted to them. *Orange Sky on Charlevoix*, is among my favorites:



## Orange Sky on Charlevoix

She never could imagine this Great Lake,  
illuminated by the setting sun,  
bright as a centenarian's birthday cake—  
candles all aflame. This day's not done.  
This lighthouse, water surface, cloud-filled sky,  
capture this slant of light for moments here—  
before the lighthouse beam will blink its eye,  
as if afloat, for mariners to veer  
their ships around threats hidden by the night.  
For now, the miracle of waves of light  
meanders through the surfaces she'll view  
without him—pleased to be among the few  
to capture this collage of orange red.  
It will not last, nor change what lies ahead.



The term “Ekphrastic” derives its meaning from a Greek root meaning “Description.” However, there is more to it than mere description. At her best, the ekphrastic poet pours her heart into description. *After the Lightning Storm* speaks volumes:

## After the Lightning Storm

Thunder shakes the air, the ground, the oaks,  
as bulging, smoke-gray clouds spew giant glops  
that soak the withered garden-yellow sundrops,  
while jagged light from cloud to cloud now stokes

fear among some families. We help coax  
some to shelter with their beach bags. Shops,  
though closed, are havens till the lightning stops,  
the gusting northeast wind abates. Like strokes

of brush, the late day rays are swept through mist,  
lightning clouds that fill a brightened sky  
with purples, pinks, and apricot, and gold,  
while tall oaks appear as silhouettes  
in filigree—surreal to the eye—  
a bold celestial canvas to behold.



I close my review, as the author does, with her acrylic  
on canvas creation: *Dusk in Marblehead Harbor*.  
The curtain falls ever-so-gently with this excerpt  
from Turco's sonnet, “On the Edge of Light,”:

The harbor surface holds the rim of day,  
Reflected in each ripple, every ray  
Remaining in an iridescent sky,  
Dimming as a gull or tern coasts by.

Excelling in both brush and pen, in art and in  
heart, *Shimmer: An Ekphrastic Poetry Collection*  
shines with excellence.



*Michael Escoubas*

*Gathering Sunlight* by Silvia Scheibli & Patty Dickson Pieczka  
~ 104 Pages ~ The Bitter Oleander Press ~ ISBN: 978-1-7346535-7-1  
To Order: [www.bitteroleander.com](http://www.bitteroleander.com) or [www.spdbooks.org](http://www.spdbooks.org)

In *Gathering Sunlight*, two poets from divergent backgrounds and contrasting styles, combine their skills. The result is an engaging and wise collection which sheds fresh light on the human condition. The book is all about the hard work of “gathering.” Scheibli and Pieczka, have something to say. They are realists. Their poems face life with all its challenges, failures, and sufferings. Poetry is a sanctuary of sorts. Poetry can and should be enjoyed for its magic show of language. However, I hasten to point out that poetry, for Scheibli and Pieczka, is also useful. My goal in this review is to share the harvest *Gathering Sunlight* has had in my life.

**Backgrounds** — Among the standout features of *Gathering Sunlight* are interviews with each poet by the publisher The Bitter Oleander Press, (BOP). Digesting these educational interviews prior to reading the poems increased my enjoyment. From the interview I learned about Scheibli’s love for tropical areas of Mexico and Ecuador. I learned that she is an avid “birder” having compiled a listing of over 500 exotic birds during her intercontinental travels. I learned about a real-life mystical figure named “Chakira,” whose influence permeates much of Scheibli’s work.

Patty Dickson Pieczka’s interview with BOP is no less interesting and brings out both similarities and differences between the two artists. “Beyond These Poems There Be Dragons,” introduces Pieczka’s superb contributions to *Gathering Sunlight*. I was fascinated by her response to why she chose those particular words. Additionally, Pieczka like Scheibli, is a woman of the earth. She spends time in Shawnee National Forest near her native southern Illinois home. She avers, “Nature has always been important to my sanity and spirituality and is often woven throughout my poetry.”

My favorite part of the interviews is when each poet discusses her unique views on the writing process. I found their practical insights helpful.

### **Poems by Silvia Scheibli. Part I—Duende poems**

#### **Chakira, tell me once again**

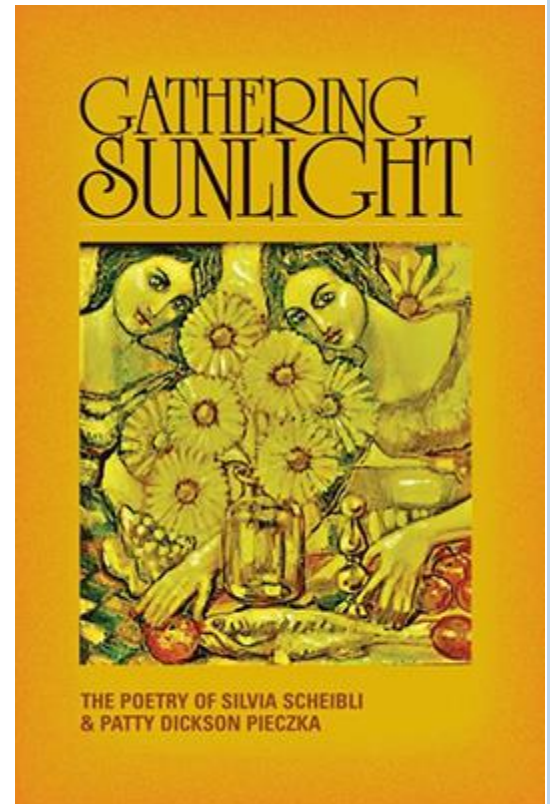
Oh, tell me how the moon  
opened your eyes and showed you  
a change in consciousness

How you wished that every coyote  
should have a black-tipped tail

How the oriole’s hood  
was dark until you changed it  
to reflect indigo sunlight

Nothing appears natural now—  
Now you dream the raven in silver.

How do you dream only in silver, Chakira?



Diamond Net, Photo by Iga Supernak





Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca has described the duende form “as a force not a labour, a struggle, not a thought.” Further via Lorca, duende is “an upsurging, inside, from the soles of the feet.” The duende, new to this reviewer, allows the muse to basically take over and drive the poem. One more example:

**My friend, Chakira, gave me her chisme**

Seascape in Blue, Photo by Iga Supernak

“Listen,” she said.

Pelicans glide on wings  
as straight as paddle-boards.

Aero-dynamic frigates ascend  
immense, azure skies.

Supplicant, boat-tailed grackles  
seek verdant, queen palms.

Caffeinated kiskadees  
exclaim an immanent sunrise.

You need to visit Nayarit—  
opaline goblet of barefaced dreams—  
more often.



Editor’s note: “Chisme” is Mexican slang for gossip.

Such is the mystical nature of much of Scheibli’s work, utilizing as it does, tropical surroundings, feathery creatures and an innate capacity for dream. In all, twenty-five poems comprise this section with titles that drew me in: “Ode to Iguanas in Nayrit,” “Jaguar Crossing,” “Under the Palapa,” and “Song of the Orange-fronted Parakeet.”

**Part II—Ecuador Poems**

Without a doubt Silvia Scheibli loves the people of Ecuador. This hospitable land with its “lush corn fields & many-colored roses, / ruby bromeliads & golden bananaquits, / scent of cocoa & coffee plantations” holds a large fragment of her heart. Six poems comprise this section. “Echos on the Road to Babahoyo,” reveals the poet’s heart for the land and its people:

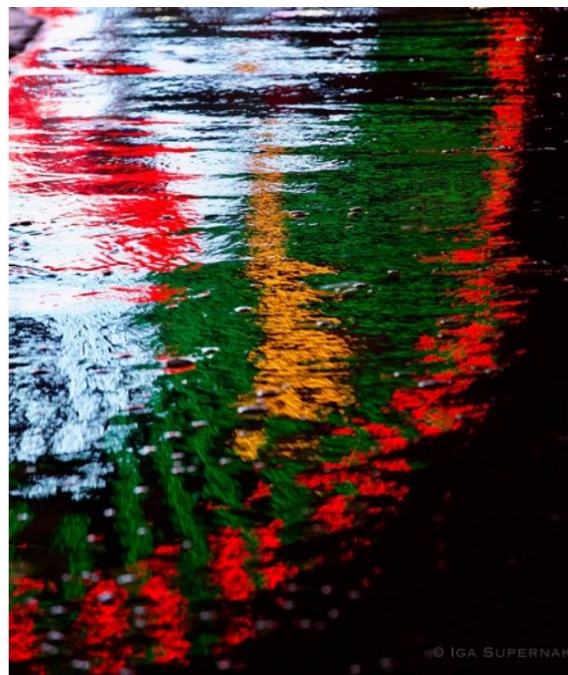
Geese & dozens of jungle chickens  
scratch endlessly on hillsides  
of banana trees.

Escaped sugar cane & emerald mist  
engulf abandoned houses.

Bromeliads perch on telephone wires  
like mourning doves.

With partially opened wings  
black vultures cast a shadow  
over yellow hibiscus.

Delicate roof ferns  
volcanic rock & golden bamboo  
fade into midnight  
with our café  
con alma socialista.





## Poems by Patty Dickson Pieczka: Beyond These Poems There Be Dragons

Like a child, I'm captivated by dragons. Pieczka "Had Me From Hello," with her title poem which I share in full:

Drifting on an ocean's  
silk and shells, sea-foam  
lacing pearls along the shore,

I follow a dream back  
to its home in the dark,  
unlace the night  
to find forgotten things:

half-vanished thoughts, time  
curled within my roots,  
words melted by a long-ago sun.

I drift to the ceiling  
to watch you sleep.  
Your dream breaks  
over shoal-bound rocks,

shaking loose a school  
of silver fears  
and familiar strangers

who sail angel-winged ships,  
read the 16 points  
of a wind rose to navigate  
through the moon's veil

and ghosts of fog  
to the farthest edge  
of the subconscious.

I found, within the dreamy cadences of alternating tercets and quatrains, challenges to my conventional ways of thinking. Did I note above that poetry should have an element of practicality? Gently, the poet prods me to probe life "to the farthest edges / of my subconscious."

Pieczka's poems are preceded by a quote from Dante Aleghieri: *Nature is the art of God*. With that as a baseline, the poet skillfully weaves nature and human spirituality into a seamless and coherent whole. Her practical mind gifts readers with down-to-earth titles: "Misplaced" is about her father's question which indicates that he does not know his own daughter. He asks, *Who I am?* With a family member suffering from Alzheimer's, this poem speaks to me where I live.

A distinctive feature of Pieczka's work is the "linked poem." These poems utilize the last line in the previous poem as a springboard to the following poem. This formulation, as far as I know, is unique to Pieczka. At least, this reviewer has not encountered it before. There are a total of four linked poems in the collection; each superbly conceived and written.

Pieczka's final poem, "At Horseshoe Lake," shows both the mind and heart of a poet at the height of her craft:

I pull sunlight from your hair  
to make our shadows pour  
into the cypress swamp,  
where rivulets spill back  
to the time we met.

Tupelo leaves brush the colors  
left by secrets barely whispered—  
words beyond flight  
and dream, strung to  
neither root nor bone,  
words tumbling in shapes  
never recognized before.

We unbutton the hours  
until day and night  
meet briefly at the horizon;  
they kiss, still making  
each other blush  
after so many years.



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Unity and other photos in this review by Iga Supernak

*Gathering Sunlight*, taken as a whole, is poetry that satisfies this reviewer's mind and his soul. Scheibli and Pieczka have created a triumph of the imagination.

*Reviewed by Michael Escoubas*



To Capture the Dawn, Photo by Iga Supernak

## CALIFORNIA STATE POETRY SOCIETY

Established in 1971, CSPA is the official state organization representing California to the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (NFSPS). CSPA was incorporated on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 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 CSPA 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 CSPA 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 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 fees, 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: CSPSMonthlyContests@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 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)



Abundance, Photo by Iga Supernak

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PHOTOS BY BEVERLY M. COLLINS, author of the books, *Quiet Observations* and *Mud in Magic*. Her works appear in publications in the U.S., England, Ireland, Australia, India, Germany, Mauritius, and Canada. 2019 Winner of Naji Naaman Literary prize in Creativity (Lebanon), twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize, prize winner for the California State Poetry Society; 2nd placed; June 2021 Wilda Morris Poetry Challenge (Chicago). Her photographs may be found on: The cover of *Peeking Cat 40* (England), *Fine Art America* products, iStock/Getty images, Shutterstock and more: beverlym-collins.pixels.com.

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