



California State Poetry Society

Post Office Box 7126, Orange, California 92863

2016 No. 2 *Poetry Letter*, a publication of the California State Poetry Society

CSPS Poetry Letter

Dear Poets, CSPS Members, contributors, and Friends of the *Poetry Letter*!

VIVA! I briefly note here that this *Poetry Letter* accompanies **CQ** Volume 42 Number 2, which is the first issue of the CQ published with an ISSN. This is explained a bit in the current CSPS *Newsbriefs*.

We thank all those on the CSPS Board who have suggested this step, especially Nancy Dougherty, and most of all John Harrell, who has carried it out and made it work. It is fitting that the CQ ISSN would commence with the issue he has edited.

Here I'm in Munich, on the 19th day, minus one, of rain in Europe: Italy, Switzerland, four km of Austria twice (on the train both ways from Munich to Zurich), and Germany. I am most thankful that computers and the Internet permit me to edit the *Poetry Letter*—again—from my digital archives. Times have changed since the mimeo machine and the typewriter key cleaner, which was almost like chewing gum!

Please send us your deceased relatives' old *California Quarterly* issues, especially from the period 1972-1992! Send them to me at:

327 N Fern St, Orange, CA 92867. ☺

Greetings to all, and wishing you a happy and creative summer,

Margaret Saine
UMSaine@gmail.com



This first poem was nominated for a Pushcart Prize when it was first published:

MR. AVOCADO MAN

An older man in khakis and a Giants cap sits on a bench
in late afternoon sun
outside Whole Foods on Telegraph Avenue
meticulously stacking
slices of whole wheat bread
then placing one on a napkin

he cuts and positions slivers with his plastic knife
from a luscious avocado
perfectly split, pit left in
setting the pieces like a precious mosaic
then scooping the sandwich with the napkin
pressing the two halves together

over and over he does this
absorbed and content with his handiwork
on his whole wheat canvas
then swallows each in a few voracious bites
taking up the next slice
to begin his avocado dance again

I am mesmerized, envious
picking at my tuna on a hard French roll
having just come from the hospital up the street
refusing to eat in their cafeteria
though there's nothing really wrong with the food
except for me wanting out of the building

my newly-discovered lump gnaws
an unwelcome foreign invader
how did it worm its way
into my soft and sexy right breast

I throw away my half eaten sandwich
closing my eyes as tears pool
sweet memories tingle of fevered nighttime groping
and morning caresses under tangled sheets
I cling to my husband of forty three years

Tell me Mr. Avocado Man
do you come here every day
with your stack of bread and perfect avocado



show me how you make your sandwiches
help me to forget today
and what I must face tomorrow

Joanne Jagoda, Oakland, California
First appeared in *Gemini*, Winter 2015

Here is one in our series of *GREAT* old American poets:

YOUNG SYCAMORE

I must tell you
this young tree
whose round and firm trunk
between the wet

pavement and the gutter
(where water
is trickling) rises
bodily

into the air with
one undulant
thrust half its height—
and then

dividing and waning
sending out
young branches on
all sides—

hung with cocoons
it thins
till nothing is left of it
but two

eccentric knotted
twigs
bending forward
hornlike at the top

William Carlos Williams, 1883-1963



I adore this poem by Greg Gregory, beautifully balanced between memory and actuality:

DIALOGUE WITH A HOUSE

I pull into the old driveway.
The tune, Keep Bleeding Love, plays on the radio.
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.

Most life occurs invisibly
and stays invisible
hidden by weeds that grow feral
and shadows thrown by an abandoned house.
When your house forgets
so do you.

But doors and windows are all openings -
ways in and ways out of fairy tales,
or nightmares that escape like shapes
from Pandora's Box when your memory finally
turns into a pool evaporated after too many summers.
The house whispers, "Remember me, remember you."

The house listens and sees like a child.
Old voices behind doors, images in mirrors
come out like small nameless birds bolting from the eaves,
an illusion, like heat shimmering from asphalt,
an unraveling of precious, ordinary things
as easy as breath.

The stories we tell ourselves are light things
that can be changed by will or desire.
Houses are more difficult. I back out and turn around.
The house continues to mime its tales.
Mine recede in a shimmer of ripple glass,
driving down a newly strange road.

Greg Gregory, Antelope, California

First published in *Song of the San Joaquin*, Summer 2012

