



## ***CSPS Poetry Letter***

Dear Friends of Poetry and of the CSPS!

It is hard to gauge the importance of poetry. In his marvelous long poem, “Asphodel,” William Carlos Williams has formulated it cogently:

It is difficult  
to get the news from poems  
yet men die miserably every day  
for lack  
of what is found there.

Poetry is important. It unites us. And with almost every issue’s submissions, there are also poems from correctional institutions by persons who have found poetry to be a life-affirming solace, as well.

Several years ago, our editorial board decided no longer to publish reviews, as we felt that organs such as the *American Poetry Journal* were better equipped to do so. But sometimes, like today, I think making an exception is OK.

Wishing you a happy and productive Indian summer, and urging you please to submit at [www.californiastatepoetrysociety.org](http://www.californiastatepoetrysociety.org), I remain

Yours in poesy,

Margaret  
[umsaine@gmail.com](mailto:umsaine@gmail.com)



***Miriam’s Iris, or Angels in the Garden: Poems by Maja Trochimczyk***, Moonrise Press, Sunland, Los Angeles, CA, 2008, [info@moonrisepress.com](mailto:info@moonrisepress.com).

Maja Trochimczyk is a widely published poet and musicologist born in Poland; from 2010 to 2012 she was Poet Laureate of Sunland-Tujunga. The title of her book promises a joyous stroll among various gardens, each marked by sparse, abstract photographic images of trees, shrubs and clouds by the author. Miriam is a reference to Solomon’s beloved in the magnificent garden of the *Song of Songs*, only that the Northern iris substitutes for the Mediterranean rose. In a double reference, Miriam’s iris also refers to the iris of the eye, the “gaze” (on page 1).

The verbal gardens are shrouded in floral and arboreal beauty. Each is represented by an angel, in the sextuple sequence of Romance, Desire, Grief, Death, Peace, and Wisdom. Each cycle thereof again consists of six poems, like pearls on a necklace. The six allegorical gardens—or in modern terms, emotions and stages of life—represent a progression in which, significantly, death is not the end, but is overcome by transcendent personal visions of Peace and Wisdom.

The poet concludes each of the six sections with an *Interlude*, a transition path into the next garden, as it were; each ending becomes a new beginning. These interludes remind me of the musical “Promenades”

that Mussorgsky interposes between the sound paintings of his “Pictures at an Exhibition.” In turn, each interlude at the end of the garden is followed by a free-flowing tanka- or haiku-like text in italics, titled “In Passing,” and flanked on each side by blank pages—that is, open on each side to past and future, as if to epitomize the open-endedness and volatility of poetry and human experience.

Waking up in Los Angeles is an unsettling experience for so many, it being a city of immigrants and exiles, including angels, to be sure, like the ones in the book: “I should remember—this is California/ I should remember—I am not at home [37]. In the poem ELLENAI 1 of the *Peace Garden*, she writes:

life’s winds took me  
from place to place  
  
like a rose petal  
carried by waves. [70]

In daily life, and especially in dreams, Polish homeland and Californian exile blend in surprising fashion. Sometimes it is an uneasy back-and-forth. An old photo asks: “Who was this quiet, smiling child? Where was she now?” [50] Because I had my own European river experiences, I was especially fascinated by this poem, referring to the Vistula:

I knew my river,  
but my memory still mixes its golden sand  
with the squeaky quartz crystals of the Baltic. [36]

Sometimes we hope to recognize the landscape, the vegetation, but the picture blurs before our eyes:

No hope for *maki*, *chabry*, and *rumianki*.  
My childhood flowers  
won’t be found on the meadow  
painted yellow by spring  
across the barren slope  
I see from my kitchen window. [8]

As a footnote tells us—and I adore footnotes in poetry—the three flowers evoked in italics are red poppies, blue chicory, and white chamomile. In Maja’s native Polish, which is a beautiful touch in itself to include, we are reminded that multicultural lives also bring linguistic variety and innovation to the region of Southern California. We are grateful for these evocative landscapes, because Los Angeles is not exactly filled with landscape poetry of this caliber.

In “Amor the Angel of Romance,” Maja Trochimczyk’s love poems are especially beautiful:

you looked at me  
and I saw myself  
for the first time  
  
...  
In your hands  
love filled every  
square inch of my skin... [15]

This book is not only for the avid gardener and landscape enthusiast, it is a treasure trove for the lover of poetry, the lover of other countries and the world. I recommend it very highly.

Margaret Saine



Our first poem is by Michael O’Sullivan from Cobh in County Cork, Ireland:

### GENESIS

Earth-fire extinguished, heaven shot with flame,  
A bronze girl in the water’s hail,  
Command, in sensuous excess,  
A planet’s path, or comet’s icy tail.  
All nature’s children self-consume:  
Lear, element-in-flesh turns element again,  
Heraclitus coaxes ash upon the sand,  
While Charlemagne is crowned with his own rotting skull.  
None more than Lighting  
Its white flesh devours:  
For in that landless protein bowl,  
Before the word, Eternity astride,  
Observe, Illumination spent,  
How darkness soon consumes the fecund tide.

This first appeared in *Lir’s Other Children* (Lapwing Publishers, 1992), Michael’s first book published in Ireland. It was later included in *The Physics of Parting*, his first book in America, which won the Cloverdale Prize for poetry in 1993. The award was chosen by a panel of judges from ten countries.



Well, it seems that your name has to be Sullivan for you to appear in this issue of the CSPPS *Poetry Letter*! Our second poem is by John Sullivan from Galveston, Texas. It was first published in 1998 in the journal *The Lucid Stone* (Scottsdale, AZ).

### DEATH STEALS THE SNOWMAN

*Purify. Crystallize. It’s late now for the world.*  
Albert Ayler

1

*Why?*

So much like speech, this rain, useless  
gray urge of bone-October on my face, this  
rain, so much my own mirror: inside – when  
I want to play outside – like play in  
this rain ’til Death steals the Snowman, all  
night, all day, books of blow embodied  
beat against my brain, this actual lobe of  
jump, quiver, some a-gonna’ fly, of peel



me, I love you, peal me beats  
against the bell of our own common skull  
deals, doles, and dooms of the Joy Channel  
operator, like this rain, so much like  
speech, stares down, like this rain eats  
its own obsessions for a dream deco  
modulator, inside a red city so much like  
a mouth it spits: *Drink, Eat, Piss, Dream*  
so much like I'll be in your dream, I'll  
break any law, so much like I'll be in your  
dream, I'll claw my own way inside like a  
screw, like there's a word for this  
one slow I or another – plain useless – 'til  
Death steals the Snowman, so useless,  
and so much like this rain

2

*How?*

this cage we made like this rain—they's the  
worst—so careless, useless, sweet as a scar,  
like this rain, like a hard city skin can't use this rain, *saecula saeculorum*, all October  
Death steals the Snowman—tell you, they's the worst—and baby screams, thumps upon a  
wall and sweats like unto: *speech, like bullets pimp you, rule you, teach*, I don't want to  
hear no more, no more—they and they's the worst—locks us smart and hard inside a raw  
world when need knows only wing, tongue, skin, the orgone pulse of speech through  
each hole in each face so much and so useless, like this rain

3

*Where the Snowman Goes ...*

this rain mutters and sighs, full  
of red eyes all night, red eyes all  
day, and this rain says you and me's got  
to go invisible just like this rain, and jitter,  
together, like amputated angels in our own  
skin, alone, say our story like this rain,  
backwards, yes, our own story must begin with speech, a nose for Death, another nose to  
get away before October, like how this rain falls useless, on you, on me, all its matter,  
heft and suchness seeps down through our skulls, yes, this rain says our own story 'til  
Death steals  
the Snowman, unmoors us from memory, drifts backwards into simple presence, plain  
flow into panic, into jagged threat of love that falls down, red-eyed, into you, into me, so  
useless, and so much like this rain

