



California State Poetry Society

Post Office Box 7126, Orange, California 92863

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CSPS Poetry Letter

Dear friends of poetry, the ***California Quarterly***, and the California State Poetry Society;

I've just returned from a poetry festival held in three Moroccan cities: Rabat, Salé and Marrakech. Poets from Italy, Spain, the United States, the Philippines, and Brazil attended, in addition to those from Arabic-speaking countries such as Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. Those of us writing in English—or in the case of the Italians, using English as a *lingua franca* between Italian and Arabic—were flawlessly translated, we presume, and we gratefully received generous applause. Jordanian poet and translator Nizar Sartawi presented a book of translations of my poems, *Searching for Bridges*, about bridges or connections between Western and Eastern poetry. The poems in Arabic—with Farsi, Urdu, and Italian highly poetic languages, and having great poetic traditions as well—were not always translated for us, though we would have liked to have heard the English versions.

Poets are mostly a peaceful lot. Some of us write political and anti-war poetry, but *all* of us would rather rely on the powers of persuasion to end and avoid present and future wars. Poets are honest, which politicians not always are. I believe that something like a world-wide reconciliation commission, in the style of the great Nelson Mandela's commissions in South Africa, should be set up by the United Nations to investigate past grievances of countries having to do with colonialism. These should be discussed, and present conditions justly adjudicated, grievances compensated, and *forgiven!* If you ask me, let's start with the Sykes-Picot treaty, which has wreaked so much havoc in the Middle East.

On the other hand, John Harrell thinks I'm crazy. ☺ He agrees the Sykes-Picot treaty, for instance, was a horrible imposition by arrogant European empires on the defenseless subjects of the defeated Ottoman Empire. But he also thinks executing adjudication and compensation programs would inflame the current situation egregiously, without generating much in the way of just solutions. It might at best only pour huge amounts of money into the pockets of Arab dictators and do nothing to improve—and maybe even worsen—the lives of Arab citizens.

What is your opinion? Do you have political poems? If so, please submit them through our website (www.CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.org) or directly to me at UMSaine@gmail.com, since it is my privilege to be the next ***California Quarterly*** editor (Vol. 43 No. 1). Our website can take all attachments except .docx.

We wish you a happy Christmas season and a happy New Year with good writing!

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Our first selection is from Keith Van Vliet, who faithfully directs the CSPS Monthly Contest.

A big thank you from the CQ Editorial Board to Keith Van Vliet for his diligent, inspired work!

SHADOWS

They say sorrows are the shadows
of the past
and fears are the shadows
of the future
But shadows are everywhere:
beneath cars on the freeway
down the dark sides of buildings
under shaggy eyebrows
at the base of trees
stretched starkly across
green grass in the park
in a long thin line
from the slender lamppost
jagged like lightning
when it reaches the curb.
Neutral and unpretentious
Lithe, alter egos of tangible things
Shadows touch, merge, then diverge
are soundless, all-knowing
Since they contain the essence
And the soul of the object.
Shadows are obedient
unbelievably supple
on cloudy days they come and go
as if to a magical conductor.
And sometimes on short bright
Winter afternoons
They become long as leopards
Reaching to infinity, and beyond.

Keith Van Vliet, Glendora, California
First appeared in *The Rotarian Magazine*,
March 1986



Our second poem speaks from a sandy stage, as it were. ☺

DESERT SOLILOQUY

The fine edge of the small dunes crest
where the sand shifts from light to shadow.
The winged sand erases his footprints.
Never is like the edge of sand.

He sees the incoming storm
that will flash flood the arroyo. He must
stay out of it. The threatening clouds
give him dreams of running in air.

The last mirages pantomime
in front of him. The storm breaks.
He huddles on the edge watching the
red mud flood this cut in the desert.

The short southern storm passes.
Its ephemeral waters pass into oblivion.
The desert drinks. It is no accident
that the Phoenix is a bird of the desert.

The fool falls asleep on the sand.
He dreams of extinguished candles
and drifts into a beautiful someday. Tonight
the stars will make love to the desert sky.

We are the stories we tell ourselves.
We become the stories we tell our children,
what we reveal, what we conceal.
Our yesterdays move into a different life.

Greg Gregory, Antelope Valley, California
First appeared in *Avocet*, Summer 2015





Here is a poem from a long-time New York member of the California State Poetry Society who participates in our monthly contests:

DR. MONKASH'S OFFICE (2232)

Twelve years past there was blood where none should have been,
 this began the saga of colonoscopies,
 first,
 second a year later,
 third five years later,
 and fourth five years later,
 trepidation tracked an ascending curve of anxiety,
 this morning,
 sitting before a wall of eclectic plaques,
 photographs, and memorabilia,
 in time one could read the life of this man from what he chose to present
 on his wall,
 tall, bearded, gray,
 this man could have been an ancient wise man in robe and sandals,
 at an age when the final curtain is one bad checkup away,
 awaiting the news,
 with timing and drama he read the results,
 spoke precisely into his microphone,
 and then explained the news to me,
 "If you're here in seven years and I'm here we'll do it again,"
 sounds good to me Doc,
 really good.

George E. Samerjan, North Chatham, New York
**3rd Place, CSPS Monthly Poetry Contest,
 August 2016**



And here is a poem from a 2009 issue of the *California Quarterly*:

WHITE LACE AT LOW TIDE

Wispy lines of blue-green waves
 Break gently side to side along the
 wide and level sandy strand,
 Urging fingers of flat water,
 insistent puddles, onto the beach.
 White embroidered foam left over
 from the slow roll of each wave
 Covers the flat expanse of sand
 Like delicate dreams stretching
 over the dingy drudgery of life.
 Beautiful tapestries spread out
 for the short times of the flow.
 When the water runs back to the sea,
 the foam sinks and settles,
 Leaving with the breaker's ebb.
 Here and there on the deserted beach,
 Traces of the froth remain
 To mark their forms upon the sand,
 like ambitions tatted so long
 That lives change, and mold themselves
 into realized dreams.

John Forrest Harrell, Yorba Linda, California
**First appeared in the *California Quarterly*,
 Vol. 35 No. 2**





Our last poem is a lovely tongue-in-cheek sonnet from the Land of the Bard.

FEVER

Tonight I shall write you a sonnet.
Tonight I shall make you my nurse.
I shall lie in the web of your sweetly spun net
and contrive to seduce you with verse.
I am feverish, sick with desire.
I can only be cured by your lips.
Will you treat me with flames from your fire?
From the heat at the heart of your hips?
If you quench me like this I can promise
 your patient will rise from his bed.
Standing tall, he will honour your kindness -
 those lips shall be tenderly fed.
*(From fever, in truth, I desire no release.
this knot, no untying; this passion, no peace.)*

David Houston, North York, United Kingdom
2nd Place, Literary Review, March 2001

And, once again, please send us your or your relatives' old *California Quarterlies*, especially from the period 1972-1992. Send them to me at 327 N. Fern, Orange, CA, 92867.

Your Poetry Letter editor

Margaret Saine
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