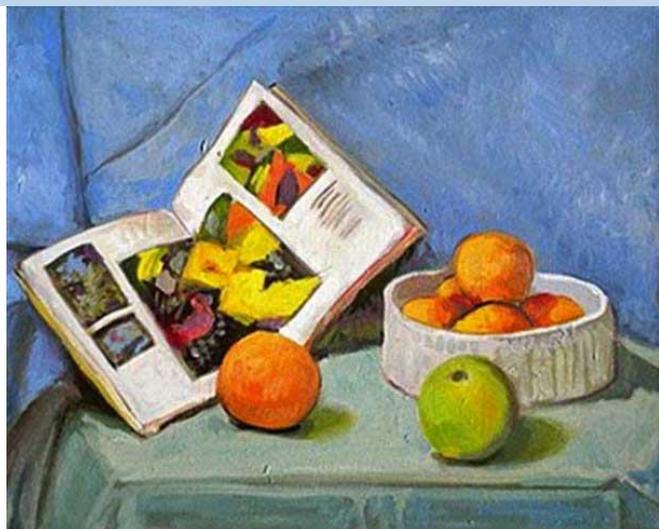


Poetry Letter

California State Poetry Society



Winners of CSPS Monthly & Annual Poetry Contests in 2021



Pam Coulter, "Still Life with Oranges"

<https://www.californiastatepoetrysociety.com/2021/04/monthly-contest-winners-january-march.html>
<https://www.californiastatepoetrysociety.com/2021/07/csp-s-monthly-contests-winners-january.html>
<https://www.californiastatepoetrysociety.com/2022/01/winners-of-12-csp-s-monthly-poetry.html>

California State Poetry Society is pleased to publish the prize-winning poems for the year 2021 in its blog and the *Poetry Letter* No. 1 of 2022. Below is the list of winners with links to the blog posts where the poems are published. January through March winners appeared on the blog twice, April through June once and July through December also once in the blog posts linked below. The award winning poems are included in this issue of the *Poetry Letter*. Since there are so many, we will publish book reviews in the next issue in May 2022. Congratulations to the poets and many thanks to Alice Pero, our Monthly Contests Judge.

As illustrations on this blog, we are presenting the artwork of Pam Coulter Blehert, still life paintings and landscapes. The artist who died in 2021 was born in Evanston, Illinois and lived in Northern Virginia, the subject of many of her landscapes. She completed various postgraduate courses in art: American University, Corcoran School, Odeon Art School (LA), Paris and holds a B.A. degree from Antioch College in Humanities/Studio Arts (1965). She participated in 17 solo exhibitions and in 34 group exhibitions. You can find more information on her website at pamcoulterart.com.

~Maja Trochimczyk, Editor

LIST OF MONTHLY CONTEST WINNERS

- **January 2021** - Theme: Nature, Seasons, Landscape. First Prize: □ Dr. Emory D. Jones, "Sanctuary" □ Second Prize: Marlene Hitt, "Summer of Fire" □ Third Prize: David Anderson, "The Coming Snow"
- **February 2021** - Theme: Love. □ First Prize: Claire J. Baker, "Speculation"
- **March 2021** - Theme: Open, Free Subject. □ First Prize: Julia Park Tracey - "Just One Thing"
- **April 2021** - Mythology, Dreams, Other Universes. □ First Prize: Jerry Smith "Aboriginal Americans" □ Second Prize: Teresa Bullock "Plain Air, Oxford" □ Third Prize: Ruth Berman "Praxilla's Folly"
- **May 2021** - Personification, Characters, Portraits. □ First Prize; Louise Kantro "Is That a Bird?" □ 2nd Prize: Elaine Westheimer "Mending Its Own Business" □ Third Prize: Elizabeth Kuelbs "The House Knows"
- **June 2021** - Theme: The Supernatural. □ First Prize: Gail White, "The Ghost in the Restaurant"
- **July 2021** - Theme: Childhood, Memoirs. □ First Prize: Corey Weinstein "Mezzrow's Mistake" □ Second Prize: Keala Rusher "On Butterflies" □ Third Prize: Chryss Yost "Canid"
- **August 2021** - Theme: Places, Poems of Location. □ First Prize: Ahmad Aamir Malik "Montreal from a Departing Plane's Window" □ Second Prize: Eileen Carole "Caribbean Dreams 1 & 2" □ Third Prize: Lynn M. Hansen "Anacapa, Island of Mirage"

- **September 2021** - Theme: Colors, Music, Dance. □ 1st prize: Catherine McCraw, "Blue Plate Special" □ 2nd prize: Carla Schick, "Other Miracles I Failed to Notice.(Remembering Coltrane's Dear Lord)" □ 3rd prize: Jonathan Ansley Ward, "Are Islands Alive"
- **October 2021** - Theme: Humor, Satire. □ First Prize: Joan Gerstein, "A Day of Races"
- **November 2021** - Theme: Family, Friendship, Relationships □ First prize: Marilyn Robertson, "Cannery Row Mural, 1946" □ Second prize: Cathy Porter, "Insatiable" □ Third prize: Jeff Graham, "Ode: the 2020's"
- **December 2021** - Theme: Best of Your Best (award-winning or published poems). □ First prize: Lynn M. Hansen, "Storm Spiders" □ Second prize Elizabeth Kuelbs, "Flower Moon" □ Third prize: Louise Kantro, "By the Campfire, Borrego Desert"

JANUARY 2021 – FIRST PRIZE

Sanctuary

by Emory D. Jones

Bent grasses hint
at the passing of unseen winds
and spirits.

Spires of black spruce,
rise out of moss
and point skyward,
their broken branches draped
with a haunting thin gauze
of lichens.

Poisonous red capped mushrooms stand
like miniature tables and chairs—
fungus furniture
that some secret night
might have hosted
the "little people"
so important in the folklore
of the native Ojibwa.

Something spiritual lives here,
something dark
something old.



JANUARY 2021 – SECOND PRIZE

The Summer of Fire

by Marlene Hitt

... only a few clear days to see mountains
that summer of smoke.

It blew north to south, west to east,
then due westward with a thick canopy
veiling the sky.

That one morning, dawn sun
rose red as a bloody yolk
fiery as those flames

that devour ridges and ranges
licking them clear of chaparral.

That sun spread orange on the sheets
where we lay while orange flames
covered thickets and nests.

Fire!

You have such a terrible craving
reducing cedar and pine to
blackened stumps, sumac to ash.

We pray for rain to bear you downhill
to melt the rage of you.

This morning in the orange light
air is pungent;

the smell of black brush,
the fear of live creatures.

After the night of fire
I do not fret over the smell of
last night's onions
nor do I light a bathroom candle
but gaze out to yellow-grey,
watch the mountains disappear.

LEFT: Pam Coulter, "Shack in the Foothills"

JANUARY 2021 – THIRD PRIZE

The Coming Snow

by David Anderson

The lone buffalo grazes
ninetly feet away
from a single giant pine.

This landscape hangs
unbalanced
by the haze of a coming storm.

Coated with ice
the buffalo
continues to bite

the short grass
we cannot see
under the shifting layer of slush.

Spare winter feed belies
the flourishing tree
which, like the buffalo,

stands alone
and catches the diamonds
of the oncoming snow.

FEBRUARY 2021 – FIRST PRIZE

Speculation

by Claire J. Baker

I learn by going where I have to go.
~ Theodore Roethke

My love & I are a blink
in time's polished mirror
a tinkling of bells
a sprinkling of savvy
filled with drama, trauma
& triumph.

In the center of our story
we gather anise
& rosemary for soup.
After reading *The Waking*
we realize we read
each other easily.

Speculating
we will love forever,
clinking glasses
surely makes it so,
& so for now
we gloriously come and go.



Pam Coulter, "Great Falls in Early Spring"

MARCH 2021 - FIRST PRIZE

Just One Thing—

by Julia Park Tracey

Between two trees, a pretty
atch of light like sun on water, firelight on walls—
like rain against the window, where every gleam's a
jewel—

Mica in concrete. Ice crystals. My
wedding band with a diamond for each child.
William Carlos Williams' broken glass
and Lucy in the sky, all shining with that
unbearable beauty, the only thing
that keeps my two feet moving when I should otherwise
collapse. A sparkle so bright it
waters my eyes. A light so delicate and sharp
like the first breath on a January morning.
Strange that's all it takes some days to endure.
So little. So much.'



Pam Coulter, "Lemons in a White Bowl"

APRIL 2021 - FIRST PRIZE

Aboriginal Americans

by Colorado Smith

A windblown iris-blue sky,
flint chips and black-on-white shards
are peppered among red-rock spires
where, centuries of centuries ago,

yucca-fiber sandals pressed braided tracks
into this barren barranca
leading down to a sulfur spring.
Summer monsoon mud
and smoldering sun seared their trace
into castellated Cañyon del Muerto
in the Dragoon Mountains.

A fevered history and sacred legends
from the People's Chantways
speak of spiritual geography:
ancestral burial cists,
shamanic blessings;

of salt-pilgrimages to the Sea of Cortez,
of crossing windswept sands
and silver playas;

of parched, desert dreams:
mesquite-bean mortars,
palo verde,
and Sages.

APRIL 2021 - SECOND PRIZE

Plein Air, Oxford

by Teresa Bullock

There. Near the pinking apples
stands a giant chestnut shading the yard.
On the ancient wall crusty with lichen,
a resting cat sits sentry. Plush gray,
a boat cat by trade, he stops by
for a lap of milk and tummy rub
before padding home
to his long boat on the Isis.

Downy cygnets paddle around his boat,
bobbing and weaving for slick grasses.
Sculls swoosh by like needlefish.

Look again. Up river
a cow herd cools under
long lashes of willow. Port Meadow
glows golden in the late sun. The palette:
Mud Brown, Tree-Canopy Green, Sky Water Blue,
Shadow Black. For the cows -
quick strokes in white and rust.

APRIL 2021 – THIRD PRIZE

Praxilla's Folly

by Ruth Berman

Sicya — a fruit like the cucumber
Or the gourd
Eaten ripe.

In Cucumber Town
In Sicyon near Corinth
Praxilla mourned Adonis in the spring.

Her Adonis, sprouting in the garden,
Spoke of what he missed,
Being dead:

Sunlight
Starlight
Moonlight

Ripe cucumbers
Apples
Pears.

Silly as Praxilla's Adonis!"
Men in other
Cities hooted

Shocked that an idiot woman dared
Put cucumbers on a par
With the celestial glories
In Cucumber Town
Praxilla
Ate fresh salad

Her bite of immortality
Succulent
With earth-born flavors.

In the land of death, Adonis
Waiting for the spring
Remembers sunlight on the garden.

MAY 2021 – SECOND PRIZE

Mending its Own Business

Elaine Westheimer

Slick, midnight black, big as Poe's
imagination, bird claws wood
where leafy tears flutter like
green crystals under a jay-blue sky.

Seems nothing like a writing desk*
as I spy its folded span amid tree
sway and sprawl, a warrior hunter
alert for prey and insurrection.

MAY 2021 – FIRST PRIZE

Is that a Bird?

by Luise Kantro

Well, Joan Miro.
I don't get it.
A moon. A star.
Five, maybe six, wacky, tilted heads.
I see no birds.
Crazy gymnasts, birds are.
The air. The cloudless sky.
That weightless sensation.
Really, I see no birds.
Why call your painting
Women and Bird in the Moonlight?

As for the heads –
mere faces with eyes
nose and mouth.
Are they the women?
Where are the boobs
the painted nails
the wombs?
The shapes part I get.
Round, pointed, curved.
Shapes are cool.

Oh my, is that thing a bird?
And those colors, orange and gray.
I can almost feel sun's warmth touch my skin,
loamy earth crumble in my fingers.

Best of all, through memory's eye,
I see the marvelous drawing my son,
at five, made of a child sitting at a table
watching his orange juice fly across the room.

Mending... Continued

Beak snaps off a sizeable twig,
I guess for a nest, and then takes
flight; my wild-thing thoughts
turn to domesticated musings.

*"Why is a raven like a writing desk?" is a riddle proposed by the Mad Hatter during a tea party in Lewis Carroll's classic 1865 novel, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

MAY 2021 – THIRD PRIZE

The House Knows

by Elizabeth Kuelbs

The house knows this baby's zipping her bags
bound for some wild place riddled with termites
or leaks or views of cracked bricks.
All the babies are the house's favorite
so she sings remember like a circus at the end of the world
tumbling lavender Easter eggs from under the sofa,
sunshining the floor with golden nap patches,
percussing the stairs with ghosts of first steps and high heels,
breathing fresh sourdough and butter from the kitchen,
cajoling flocks of orioles to trill in the backyard poplars,
and plinking scraped knees and triumph on the worn piano.
But this baby, bound for some wild place,
just kisses the front door, then rolls her bags down the walk
where the weeping cherries froth blossoms at her nonstop
and the grass greens so hard, stretching pluckily skyward—
you hear me, baby? the house calls,
you stretch skyward always
lawnmowers or no damn lawnmowers



Pam Coulter, "Poppy Field"

JUNE 2021 – FIRST PRIZE

The Ghost in the Restaurant

by Gail White

If I'm not fit for heaven, let me haunt
Venice, I prayed. And now I have a front
Row seat at Florian's, facing St. Mark's square,
To start again my oldest love affair.
It's true the waiter never comes to take
My order - understandable mistake
Since I'm not visible - so what's the use
Of showering the servants with abuse?
People sit down around me. I don't care-
Catching the pageant from my vacant chair,
I see the paving stones grow bright with rain,
The pigeons cluck and stutter, twilights wane
To starry nights. I watch, while thanking God,
God, the changing lights that turn St. Mark's facade
from gray-green stone into a sheet of gold.
Don't sit down suddenly. You'll feel the cold.

JULY 2021 – FIRST PRIZE

Mezzrow's Mistake

By Corey Weinstein

What was I thinking,
what was thinking anyway?
In high school I thought a lot
about who was doing what to whom,
And how did I fit in or out.

A jock, yes that barn door right tackle,
The pride of Little Warsaw, Polsky Tech,
Lumbered dumbly right up to us stoners,
Da ya know where I ken get sum, y a know, sum.
A doobie lookin' for a doob, yes,
Dope, dank, bud, boo, giggle stick, weed,
Joy by many names,
Herb, cabbage, reefer, shake, In so many ways,
Ganja, da kine, Cheech and Chong, skunk.
His Jay Tokenstein to my Mezz Mezzrow,
My 420 every day to his can't name the day.

Dare I on a dare, I did dare, I swear.
In the hall, swivel eyes, arms at sides,
palms fast and smooth, cash and goods,
A dime bag, he'd never know it was Oregano.

Let's just say, He Knew.
What was I thinking!



JULY 2021 – SECOND PRIZE

On Butterflies

By Keala Rusher

One day, I woke up
Just like every other
But this day, I was no longer
Sixteen or seventeen or eighteen.

Instead, the lettuce in the planterbox
had bittered and bolted
Shooting up flowering stalks,

While the air smelled of soil
And warm tomatoes
Fresh off their vines in mid July.

If I spoke to my past self
And she asked me if true love exists
I would tell her yes,
Because I know it myself.

Though, it doesn't feel like
heartracing and insects,
however beautiful,
The way people say it does.

More so a letter with good news
You were not expecting,
Sweet tea, and a fleeting breeze
That carries scents you can't begin to place,
But recall all the same.

ABOVE: "Sunflowers and Pears"
RIGHT: "Great Falls Autumn" by Pam Coulter

JULY 2021 – THIRD PRIZE

Canid

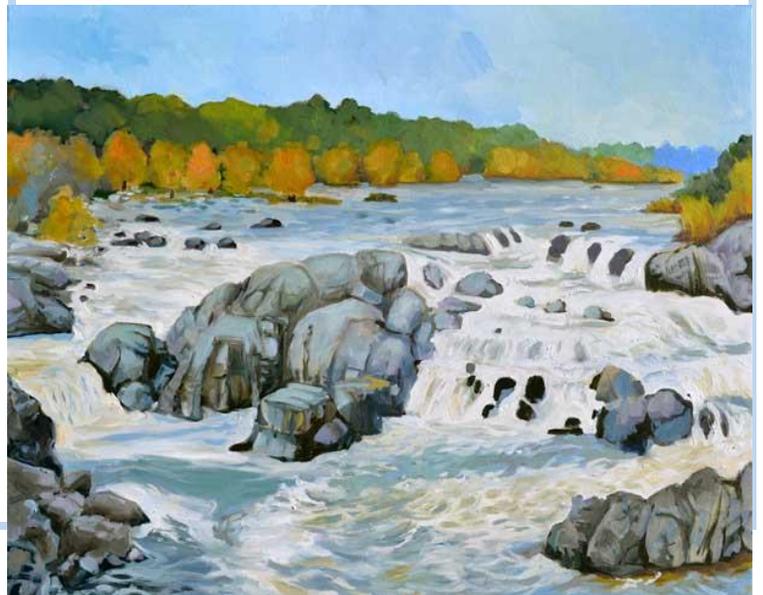
By Chrissy Yost

This story begins with low sun and low tide.
The shadows pulled across on the sand,
rolled out like butchers' paper.

The blue-grey brush strokes evening.

This is the story my dog tells himself,
of shadow wolf in the wilderness,
running with his fierce jaws and arch
of feathered tail projected onto sand.

And the shadow of me, long-limbed
giant wobbling south, with the tide
and the darkness snarling over
who will get us first.



AUGUST 2021 - FIRST PRIZE

Montreal from a Departing Plane's Window

By Ahmand Amir Malik

The buildings and bridges that were so bright and so towering yesterday
with a thousand lambent flickers receding like an irreversible lament.
City lights that often spoke of home, of her, of tears hidden no longer
breathing in fragile shimmers the way teardrops do.
Somehow, I know the wistful agonies that vacillate in the city air
after an hour of rain; somehow, I know the petrichor of moist yellow leaves
rising from the street sides around St. Denis tomorrow morning.
In a few hours,
I'll be a line of burning frost in the sky,
a contrail of wonder for a child lying in the dying November grass.
And now I can see all the streets I never saw,
all the people I never knew,
all the lives I never lived.

AUGUST 2021 - SECOND PRIZE

Caribbean Dreams 1 & 2

By Eileen Carole

1

I have felt no tropical breezes
Blowing through my sister locks
Have sipped no Caribbean concoction
With coconut and tiny umbrella
Have eaten no plantain, much less rice and curried goat
I have walked no sandy white beaches
Whether by day or moonlight eve
I have shopped no marketplace for baskets and shells and such
No tall, dark and handsome island man
Has whispered sweet nothings in my ear
I've not the money to have the travel agent book the fare
I sit landlocked and stateside I fear
So, my Caribbean fantasy is just that, a dream
St. Lucia, Antigua, Jamaica... all too far away it seems

2

This is my equinox, my season of content
A Spring, eternal on my horizon
The onset of sunshine, warm days and Caribbean nights
My season of glory and community with earth and sea
Barefoot in the sand and skipping along the shore
Basking in Spring and longing for Summer
Spring is my opportunity to reinvent myself
To evolve into my higher destiny
In this place is my time to come alive again
Leaving Winter's discontent
And the cold, synonymous with closure
I have come to the island to retire, yet live again
I've come into my equinox, my Spring, if only in my dream!

SEPTEMBER 2021 - FIRST PRIZE

Blue Plate Special

By Catherine McCraw

Flying home to Hot Springs
for Christmas

I closed my eyes and recalled
the old Bluebell Cafe, long closed,

which was a few blocks
from my parent's home.

and served "blue plate specials".
I tried to remember the distinct color

of the sturdy china dinnerware ...
at first I thought cornflower

but my memory twisted
to a darker tint, more a deep royal blue,

like a winter evening in Paris,
the time of day the French call l 'heure bleue.

Then my mind segued to the Club Cafe downtown
that served homemade custard or fruit pies

and the waitress who was always there
with the blueblack beehive hair,

wearing the mustard gold uniform
with the cream ruffled apron.

What was her name -
Edith, Evelyn, Esther, Estelle?

I refuse to believe she retired or died,
She was too essential.

I prefer to imagine she slipped through
a lattice-work square in time

and now resides in a black-and-white
Twilight Zone-esque diner

where she doles out slices of blueberry pie
and thick mugs of hot coffee

while she daydreams of sneaking out
back for a Marlboro break.

Then I revert to trying to conjure
the shade of those plates -

cheerful afternoon blue,
or a deep twilight hue?

It's not really true you can't go home again,
but it is true you can't get home again.

AUGUST 2021 - THIRD PRIZE

Anacapa, Island of Mirage

By Lynn E. Hansen

Emerging from coastal fog
Anacapa, known by the Chumash
as Anypakh, Island of Mirage,
appears as one island
but is actually three
separated by water.

Wind-swept and volcanic,
Anacapa grows golden
with a unique floral display
each Spring - giant coreopsis.
At the East end of the island chain,
Arch Rock bends over the sea,
forms a frame for reflection
of our solar flame as it slides into the next day -
its last beams glittering
on the writhing water that slaps
steep cliffs along island sides.

Without fresh water or trees,
western gulls form pairs,
join the largest breeding colony
of their species in the world.
Safe from predators, surrounded
by abundance of food, they build nests
in sheltered depressions of vegetation,
forage in the rich waters off shore,
feed and defend their spotted chicks,
circle overhead keening,
dive bomb human visitors,
appear out of the fog
like ghosts.



Pam Coulter, "Watering Can"

SEPTEMBER 2021 - SECOND PRIZE

**Other Miracles I Failed to Notice.
(Remembering Coltrane's Dear Lord)**

by Carla Schick

Coltrane's sax breaks sound
Each note yearns for the next
prayer

Walk these hot humid days
Walk although your body just drifts
nowhere-

Who watches?

Strange to view everyone turn in
tears centered in their eyes
clouds drift in and out
no direct path of light

Each note ascends to the next
unpredictable sequence of chords
a key no one heard before shudders

I move looking out a window
catch my reflection
yet cannot see

Each note turns
Each note trails above

Unbroken clouds desert lupine
blossoms as though resting
in opened palms-

Alone and not I listen again
did I hear him crying or just
myself shedding skin
I thought I knew'



Pam Coulter, "Autumn Apples"

SEPTEMBER 2021 - THIRD PRIZE

Are Islands Alive?

By Jonathan Ward

Sunrise over Kauai
Blue/Green + Golden sand
The night loses its magic
The day begins to dance

Are islands alive?
Do they breathe in
The warm tropical breezes
Do they exhale turquoise surf?

Is Love like an island—
A warm embrace of wonder
A surrender of the heart
Into a peaceful sea of Light?

Sunset over Kauai
Golden Fire into Green/Blue
The day enfolds into twilight
The stars begin to dance

BELOW: Pam Coulter, "James River Railway Bridge"



OCTOBER 2021 – FIRST PRIZE

Day of Races

By Joan Gerstein

With briefcase in hand and sharpened pencils,
I traverse streets of this coastal town.
In evenings, mornings and afternoons,
I wear sturdy shoes, walk up and down.

I enumerate for the US Census,
going to non-response follow-up homes.
I record the answers they give me,
though I'd rather be penning a poem.

The questions of name, sex, age are easy.
"Are you of Hispanic origin?" is OK,
but I know when I voice the next question,
perplexed people will stare with dismay.

We're almost done, it's the fifth question,
I smile sweetly as I gaze at their faces.
Please look at list D, I say, with dread,
Choose one or more of the following races.

There's Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean,
African American, Negro, Black,
American or Asian Indian,
maybe White if a name starts with Mac.

There's Filipino or Other Asian,
Native Hawaiian or perhaps Samoan.
You could be Other Pacific Islander.
Tell me which ones you have chosen.

I don't really understand, they reply,
I think of myself as Canadian.
With a weary smile and patience of Job,
I say Look and show them List D again.

Where is Estonia,? they inquire.
I'm sorry but I fail to understand.
Using examples I learned in training,
I cite some groups, give a helping hand.

Pacific Island groups include Tongans.
Other Asian groups are Laotian or Thai.
I say, Aha, there's another category:
Some Other Race, in desperation I cry.

Tell me what you want to call yourself.
I'll write whatever you want me to.
You can be French, Nubian or Russian.
I just want this interview to be through.

Finally they decide what race to pick.
At this address, the Census I complete.
But I bet you dollars to donuts,
at the next home, this farce, I repeat.

NOVEMBER 2021 – FIRST PRIZE

Cannery Row Mural, 1946

By Marilyn Robertson

Before the factory whistle blows at noon, a blue
lunch wagon pulls into a parking spot beside the
tracks.

A passing engine trails its banner of black smoke,
but cannot put a damper on the scene-

all greens and yellows drifting
toward a peach-colored horizon.

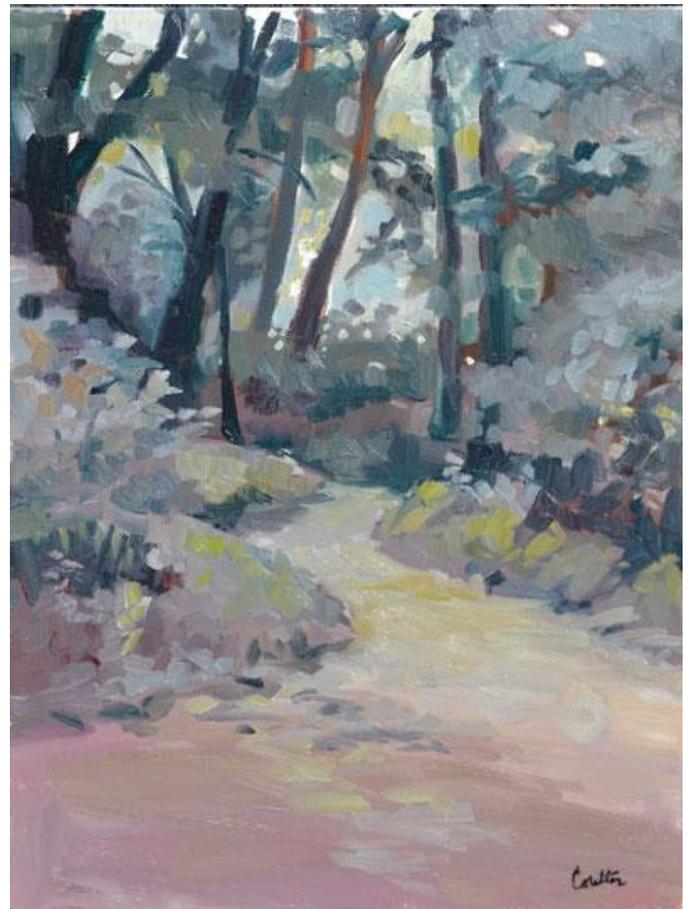
Nobody looks anxious here,
wondering what might come next.

The woman in the back of the wagon
slices bologna as usual.

The man on the bicycle steers his loaves
of sourdough to their destinations.

The blonde on the porch railing lean
s forward as a soldier lights her cigarette-

his strong arm holding up a weathered post,
his sturdy boots just waiting for instructions.



Pam Coulter, "Path (Riverbend)"

NOVEMBER 2021 – SECOND PRIZE

Insatiable

By Kathy Porter

ten too many, and the night
just started
as if there are better options

and if you cross me,
don't let the door...

tried to quit -
but daylight kicks that idea back
with a shot

I won't hold your coat
if you want to dance

the couple in the corner
look ready to fight

they remind me of us
when faces were young
every party a jet
ready for take-off

those good days
line my face

and I swallow what's left
of the years

NOVEMBER 2021 – THIRD PRIZE

Ode: The 2020's

By Jeff Graham

Sometimes, people enter your life -
what I thought
of what I thought there was,
of what I thought there was to say.
Strand of hay in a needle stack,
broken by the camel.
Hat pulled out from the rabbit.
White mask hoisted atop the mizzenmast -
sometimes, people.

LEFT: Pam Coulter, "Hanover Avenue, Richmond,
Virginia"

DECEMBER 2021 – FIRST PRIZE

Storm Spiders

By Lynn E. Hansen

Prickly like puncture vine seeds
speckled brown, spiny-backed,
storm spiders undulate
as they ride harmonics
of tropical breezes.

Throwing, running, cutting,
throwing running cutting,
they craft geometry of delicate threads,
communities of silk made visible
in back lighting, or soft mist

Tethered to grass, leaf, balcony,
crouching centrally in their silvery plane,
imitating dead leaves, directing
yellow mammary-like bumps toward
the light, Gasteracantha await prey.

Suddenly, dashed like Hawaii
during hurricane winds of Hele ulu ulu,
a mower slashes gossamer webs,
casts spiders adrift clinging to silken balloons
riding pulses of wild warm air.

Fortunate filaments snag on a shrub,
anchor arachnids who begin again,
throwing, running, cutting,
throwing, running, cutting,
a delicate geometry of thread.

~ 1st Prize in Nature, Ina Coolbrith Annual
Poetry Contest, Oct 15, 2004



DECEMBER 2021 - SECOND PRIZE

Flower Moon

By Elizabeth Kuelbs

Before dawn breaks, catch the palms:
those dutiful guards, who shade

their little daytime queendoms,
feeding bees and woodpeckers,

in the windy dark, when the jacarandas
lavish blossoms at their feet, and

the roses exhale honey and clove,
and the jasmine trembles like a bride.

Their lush plumes, sequined with stars,
ravish the flower moon.

~published in Black Bough Poetry:
Freedom-Rapture Edition, June 2021

DECEMBER 2021 - THIRD PRIZE

By the Campfire, Borrego Desert ‘

By Louise Kanro

Tonight she writes in lantern light
apart from the circle of others, in small, tight,
cursive, of how this desert day began
sunrise-cold and windy, with the smell
of bacon scrambled into a swirl of
eggs, potatoes, and onions.

Clean-up of skillets took a while
with only sand to scrub and
a pot of rinse water boiled
on the Coleman stove.

She has learned that there is poetry
in such tasks. In the zero hour
of the night, well before midnight
since little brightens the blackness
she remembers how, when she was young,
sun, clouds, and black-tailed jack rabbits
made her giggle and her heart
puffed up with the dough
of childhood's promise
soft with joy.

~ Third Prize for Northern California
Women's Music Festival Contest

CSPS 34th ANNUAL POETRY CONTEST WINNERS, 2021



The 34th Annual Poetry Contest of the California State Poetry Society was managed by Joyce Snyder and adjudicated by Georgia Jones Davis. The contest results are as follows and the prize-winning poems are posted below. Congratulations to all winners! And thank you for the gift of your words.

PRIZE-WINNING POEMS

1st Prize: "Three Men in a Boat"
by Robert S. Spich, Los Angeles

2nd Prize: "Snow" by Bruce Gallie, Rancho Cucamonga, California

3rd Prize: "Rub-a-Dub-Dub, Three Men in a Tub" by David Anderson, Lincoln, California

HONORABLE MENTIONS

- o "Winged Sandals" by Claire Scott, Oakland, CA
- o "A Snake in Pajamas" by Louise Moises, Richmond, CA
- o "I Don't Know Why" by Livingston Rossmoor, Modesto, CA
- o "Wish" by Susanne Wiley, Hot Springs, AR

ANNUAL CONTEST 2021 - FIRST PRIZE

Three Men In a Boat

By Robert S. Spich

Three men in a boat on a hot Saturday
In an open field in Kansas, near Freeway 117.
Their presence suggests a strange hope floats in their grassy harbor,
Hope that perhaps some new anxious sea will rise to save them,
Help them to escape from the immensity of this endless dry land!
Maybe a return of the Great Flood to this cloudless, blue sky place,
And they, rescued in that strange old boat, chosen to reseed lost humanity!

But probably not...see all those shiny beer cans scattered about?
Hear the whistles and yells at the passing cars,
Listen to the shouting laughter and hugely bad singing!
And those flaunted flags waving of no nations anyone knows!
This is not an Armageddon Moment to fear!
Not that Final Judgment to fear!
Not that Final Judgment that seeks to separate, condemn and punish!

No, just three men in a boat in a field on a hot Saturday afternoon,
In the middle of endless Kansas, drinking beer and raising no particular hell!
Why should we expect anything else? After all this is Dorothy's country!

ANNUAL CONTEST 2021 - SECOND PRIZE

Snow (a tanka)

By Bruce Gallie

Recall my cold feet
in a foot of snow, walking
by her that time, not
saying "Hi", heart skipped a beat
then my sadness, my cold feet.

ANNUAL CONTEST 2021 - HONORARY MENTION

A Snake in Pyjamas

A Cento for D.H. Lawrence, The Snake

By Louise Moises

A snake in pyjamas came down the steps
down from the earth-wall
trailed soft-bellied over stone
his straight mouth
mused a moment, gold venomous voice,
I like him
drunken god, length curving round
the broken bank
snake easing, withdrawing
into a clumsy log
like lightning, gone into a fissure
At noon, I stared,
regretted human education
wished he would come back
king of the underworld in diamond-back pyjamas.

ANNUAL CONTEST 2021 - THIRD PRIZE

Rub-a-Dub-Dub, Three Men In a Tub

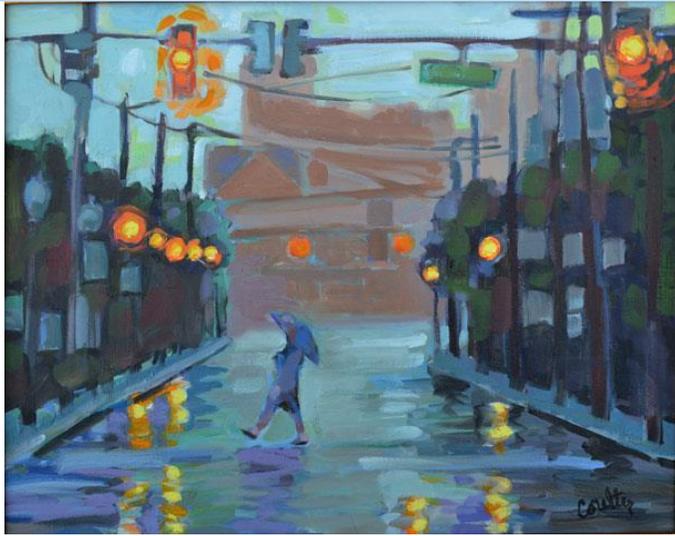
A cyrch a chwta (pronounced kirch a chootah)

By David Anderson

Every tenth wave swells and lifts
them high, drops them deeper, sifts
their guts, dizzies their brains, shifts
speed, empties the guts of the biffed,
rocks sightlines, horizons, gifts
those emptied stomachs with sniffs
of food for the crew, and drifts
the skiff toward shore, to tumble
the seasick off, humbled, stiffed.



Pam Coulter, "Yellow Reflections"



ANNUAL CONTEST – HONORARY MENTION

I Don't Know Why

By Livingston Rossmoor

I don't know why it came in search of me.
 I don't know when or how it came.
 It came in the light or dark, I couldn't see.

Dust in the wind, breezes rustle in the tree.
 A speck in the universe, it has no name.
 I don't know why it came in search of me.

It sails in a canoe on the wild sea,
 in and out of waves, don't know where to aim.
 It came in the light or dark, I couldn't see.

I know it is there, still coming, it seems.
 Nothing to latch on, nothing to claim.
 I don't know why it came in search of me.

A small bird, a nest, it's real, not a dream.
 It's neither words nor voices, it is calm.
 It came in the light or dark, I couldn't see.

It is not a summons, it carries no theme.
 It was cold, I can feel it now, it is warm.
 I don't know why it came in search of me.
 It came in the light or dark, I couldn't see.

TOP LEFT: Pam Coulter, "Rainy Day Blues"

RIGHT: Pam Coulter, "Suburban Spring"

ANNUAL CONTEST- HONORARY MENTION

Winged Sandals

By Claire Scott

He played tennis, soccer, softball
 sailing on the back of an easy wind
 a Hermes in winged sandals

until that Sunday when he was seventeen
 and the sharp edge of luck tossed him
 twenty feet, and he hard hit on
 the asphalt of Fuller Street

his dreams defaced by a distracted driver
 running late or texting her boss
 or putting on pale pink lipstick
 future plans wobbling on spindly legs

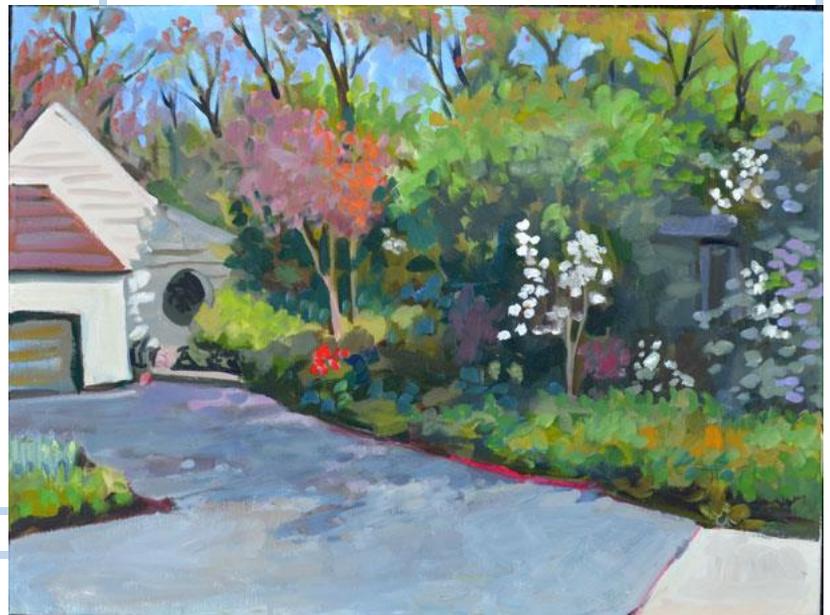
hobbling, listing, stumbling, lurching
 dystonia said the doctor no cure
 and she looked away

now only in hope's distorting light
 do I see him running down the field
 scoring goal after goal, a great grin on his face

I want to fly back on winged sandals
 touch him on the shoulder and say
leave home a little later today

I know there is a wider world
 where some slow shuffle, some curl over
 walkers or canes, some settle in wheel chairs
 pushed by attendants from the Philippines
Diwa, Althea, Mahalia

sometimes I get a glimpse of this world where
 not everyone needs winged sandals to soar
 then my son scuffs into the room, wincing,
 his left foot dragging



ANNUAL CONTEST – HONORARY MENTION

The Wish

By Susan Wiley

I zip up my favorite jacket - the one with the frayed cuffs
grab a scarf and Hannah's leash, and we slip into the dark night -
like voyeurs in someone's deepest dream
Her white tail dances before me as we navigate
thru night sprinklers and fallen branches to our favorite hill
Constellations scribbled on a backboard sky sparkle like
tiny flashlights held by travelers on their way
to the other side of midnight

I worship Orion and his god-like stance
as if his stars were my own private cluster of magic
He grows weary of my constant adoration
We sit in our own velvet silence and watch for falling stars
Hannah and I - shoulder to shoulder - keeping each other warm
She lays her nose against my cheek, and I weave my fingers thru her fur
like fat worms burrowing themselves in the warm dirt

I lean in and whisper in her ear
"Lets pick the brightest star and make a wish"
My wish is always that she will be with me
for as long as I live

The nights grow shorter and the path harder to navigate
and when the sun has scorched our grassy hill
we take our last walk

I look to Orion to reach out his sword
and stay this moment with his magic
But he slips away beyond the horizon
to a greener hill - and Hannah follows

I think back to that night of falling stars
and I believe Hannah's last wish was
that I would be with her for as long as she lived.

Lucky girl
She got her wish

Annual Contest Submissions Guidelines

This contest is open to all poets, whether-or-not they are members of the CSPS. Poems must be uploaded to our website or postmarked from March 1st through June 30th. Reading fees for all entries, domestic or international, are \$3.00 per poem for members and \$6.00 per poem for non-members. There is an 80-line (two page) limit for each poem. Winning entries are announced on our website, blog, and in the Newsbriefs in the four issue of the CQ in the contest year. Poets winning 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes receive \$100, \$50 and \$25, respectively. As many as five Honorable Mentions may also be Award-winning poets are published in the fourth issue of the CQ in the contest year. The Honorable Mention poems and other submissions are forwarded to the CQ Editors for possible inclusion in the subsequent issue. Contest results are posted on our website. If submitting by mail, send a cover letter with all poet information and a list of submitted poems, one copy of each poem with no poet identification, plus an email or SASE for results, to: CSPS Interim Contest Chair, P.O. Box 4288, Sunland, California 91041-4288.

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 of CSPS and/or NFSPS societies 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 first page with all contact information (name, address, telephone number and email address) and the titles of the poems being submitted. At this time there are three ways to submit:

1. by email. Poets may submit their work by email to: SPSMonthlyContests@gmail.com (Specify Month) and simultaneously pay their contest fees by PayPal to: CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety@gmail.com.
2. by regular mail, enclosing printed copies of poems and your check, CSPS Monthly Contest – (Specify Month) Post Office Box 4288, Sunland, California 91041
3. online on our website CaliforniaStatePoetrySociety.org, or

All Monthly Contests are judged by Alice Pero, CSPS Monthly Contest Judge. The 1st place 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. If there are insufficient fees submitted, the minimum prize is \$10. There are no exceptions to the prize disbursement rules. The monthly contest winners are announced as they are awarded and the winners are notified by mail. All of the winners for the year are listed in the first CSPS Newsbriefs of the following year. In addition, the first prize winner poems are published in the CSPS Poetry Letter (PDF, email, posted on website) and posted on our blog. Please note: Do not send SAE's. 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, Seasons, 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: Best of Your Best (Winning or published poems only. Indicate name of contest or publication and the issue/dates of publication/award.)



Pam Coulter, "Gypsy"

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