CSPS
Poetry Letter
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Edited by Maja Trochimczyk

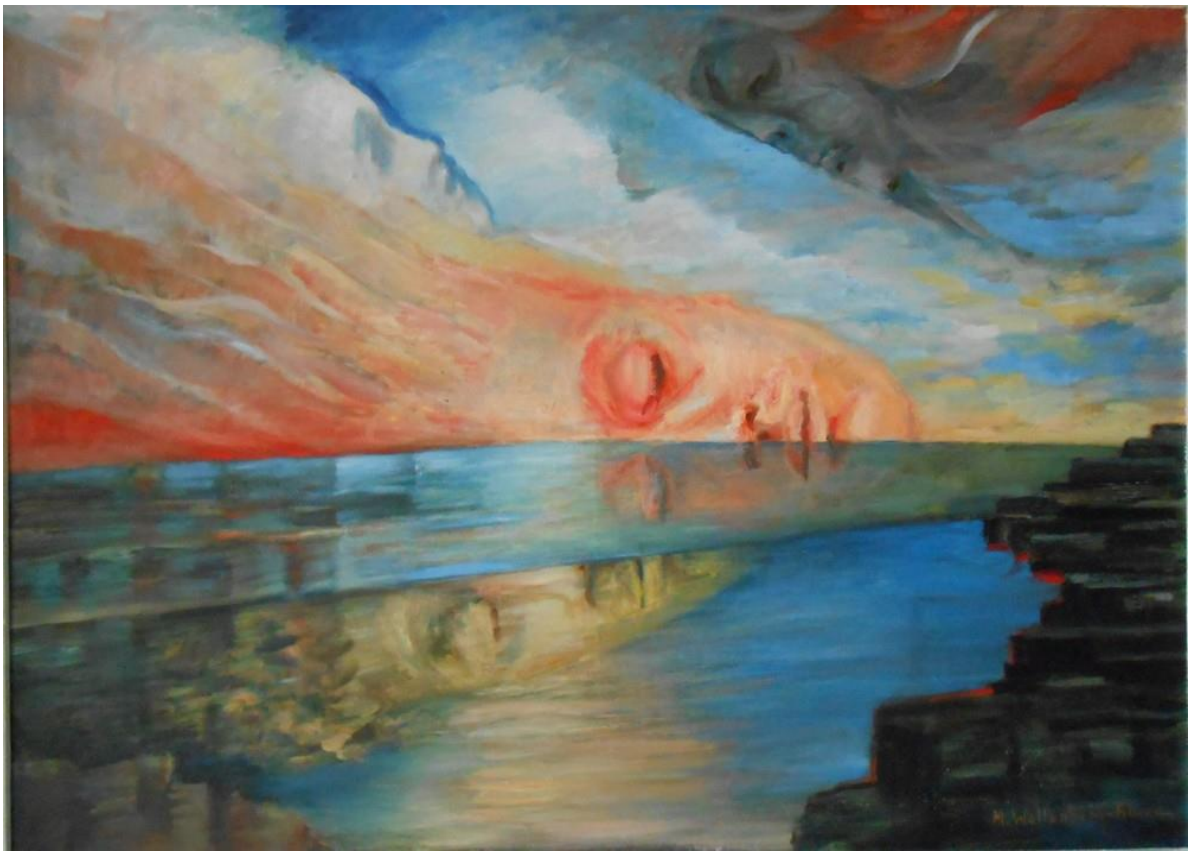
# Poetry Letter

California State Poetry Society

## 2024 MONTHLY CONTESTS – JANUARY TO JULY, AND BOOK REVIEWS

This issue of the *Poetry Letter* presents prize-winning poems from seven Monthly Contests of 2024, selected by the Monthly Contest Judge, Alice Pero. These poems fill the majority of its pages, complemented with two book reviews by Michael Escoubas including extensive poetry quotations which make the reviews even more enjoyable. I interspersed poetry with illustrations taken from artwork by Polish painter Maria Wollenberg-Kluza (b. 1945) whose paintings feature many literary inspirations and, in turn, have inspired many Polish poets and writers. I attended her exhibit at the Warsaw Library Gallery in September 2024 and found these paintings to be both inspired and inspiring, so I decided to share this souvenir from my travels with the CSPS poets and poetry lovers. One of the reasons for my trip was to participate in a conference "Generations Remember" organized by the Kresy Siberia Foundation and the Sybir Memorial Museum in Białystok. For this conference, I selected 12 poems from my book *The Rainy Bread: More Poems from Exile,* commemorating the suffering and resilience of my family members who lived in Poland's eastern territories and were imprisoned, exiled to Siberia or deported to the Polish People's Republic during and after the war. Their estates and farms are now parts of collective farms in Belarus, formerly Soviet Union. They did not receive reparations and were lucky to survive. Soviet Union annexed 48% of Poland's lands after WWII and about 3.5 million Poles were deported, about one million killed. *Deszczowy Chleb* is a new book with Polish translations of my poems; two are enclosed here.

*Maja Trochimczyk, CSPS President*



*Sen (Dream)* by Maria Wollenberg-Kluza, Oil on Canvas

## 2024 MONTHLY CONTEST WINNERS , JANUARY – JULY

**Monthly Contest Winners of 2024.** Alice Pero, the CSPS Monthly Contest Judge selected the following poems from submissions received each month. The first prize is a minimum of $10. Congratulations to all the winners!

January (Nature, Landscapes): ♦ 1st Prize: 1st Prize Colorado Smith, "SkyFire" ♦ ♦ 2nd Prize: Kathryn Schmeiser "Last One Standing" ♦ ♦ ♦ 3rd Prize: Paula Appling, "Cognitive Dissonance"

February (love): ♦ 1st Prize: Richard T. Ringley, "The Parts of You I Cannot Name" ♦ ♦ 2nd Prize: Jeff Graham, "Nocturne 31"

March (Open, Free Subject): ♦ 1st Prize: Sean McGrath, "hunger for eternity"

April (Dreams, Mythology, Other Universes): ♦ 1st Prize: Lillian Liu, "Sphinx Riddle" ♦ ♦ 2nd Prize: David Anderson, "The Next Eucatastrophe" ♦ ♦ ♦ 3rd Prize: Thomas Feeny, "Icarus"

May (Personification, Characters, Portraits): ♦ 1st Prize: Thomas Feeny, "The Bolder Brother" ♦ ♦ 2nd Prize: Paula Appling, "Still Life"

June (The Supernatural): ♦ 1st Prize: Jane Stuart, "Into the Light"

July (Childhood, Memoirs): ♦ 1st Prize: Carla Schick, "On the way to the library" ♦ ♦ 2nd Prize: Susan Florence, "Where Bach Takes Me"

## MONTHLY CONTEST WINNERS – JANUARY 2024

### SKYFIRE

Hard by the willows
over granite sand
slants a gray rain.

Black cumuli part;
sunburst ricochet off a lower cloud
onto the gray underbelly of the upper.
I drop to my knees in the sagebrush:

*that cloud*
*in the darkness*
*shimmers—*

*a thousand*
*tiny rainbows*
*pearlesce*

*twenty minutes*
*till thunderheads merge*

Hat in hand
I give my face
to the rain.

***Colorado Smith, First Prize in January***

### LAST ONE STANDING

Grass shoots slumber
among weed stalks,
their dried seed
heads bowed

But one miracle
Grows
Blooms
Stands tall

A daisy, her
white ray florets
embracing
a smiling sun-yellow
disk balanced
atop a slender stem,

refuses
to abandon
life

*Marguerite* ~
She loves me

Did no one tell
her
it is
winter?

***Kathryn Schmeiser, Second Prize in January***

## COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

*The Grand Canyon*

Described as a
"big hole,"
the overlook understated
the unimaginable emptiness that confronted me.
I stumbled backwards.

Found myself seated,
crying; its borders, its walls,
so illimitable,
my mind could only conjure wallpaper.

Irony twisted my gut.
Two dimensions
could never capture
this enormous void or contain
these otherworldly reds and oranges,
this harsh glare.

***Paula Appling, Third Prize in January***

*Camino* by Maria Wollenberg-Kluza (2023, oil on canvas)

## MONTLY CONTEST WINNERS – FEBRUARY 2024

### THE PARTS OF YOU I CANNOT NAME

I love the parts of you I cannot name.
I seek to find the means; and yet poor words,
I ask too much of you; for I have seen
the unseen light in you that brightens cold
and often haunted nights. I have no name
for this; it's you I know, the non de plume
of soft and certain moments that will quell
an uncertain heart; it only beats for you.

Be my sunlit heart; shine from grace within.
How dark is life when I am not with you.
How cold, how empty; the light drains from me
as if I were a ghost lost in a ghost's
unwanted dream; a demon dwells within
a place in Hell for those who love you not.

Give me your heart, I'll add my soul to yours
and thank the gods again for nameless joy.
We'll grace the world in children named from cats.
We'll grace the world – unnamed and yet so known.

***Richard T. Ringley, First Prize in February***

### NOCTURNE 31

Patch of red mums
(which have always been

your favorite)
that in this night's lack of light

are still white,
still feel white to the touch.

Of the moon's slow steps.
Of my body tossed along and across Earth's curve.

Of the chrysanthemum's faint murmur.
Of my voice's tinge of blushing and blushing.

***Jeff Graham, Second Prize in February***

## HUNGER FOR ETERNITY

you ever miss something
even when you are beholding it
right there in your dumbstruck eyes?

it had been close during
the goldfleeced autumns in Massachusetts,
the sunsets in Redondo,
the winters from a balcony in Palos Verdes
when snow had just started to top the distant Angeles

but never so distilled,
not until this little monster
crash landed on my pumping heart
and looked back at me with my own eyes—

then, as before, every moment felt worth holding onto forever
then, like never, each moment felt like it was rushing away

so this is how you fall out of love with the ordinary,
I thought,
this is how the hunger for eternity grows

*Ad Infinitum,* by Maria Wollenberg-Kluza, 2018, oil on canvas

**Sean McGrath**
**First Prize in March**
**Published in "Untitled Baby Project" (2023)**

## SPHINX RIDDLE

Beaming chariot for the sun,
his laugh prods the sphinx awake.
My four-legged
watchtower completes the acropolis,
carved out of living rock,
her sprawling limbs squeeze the marble, Thebes
implausible.

Flare and ichor fall!
highlighted golden. Tumbling
gravity reversing for the sky to yellow,
gelatinous blond sprays across his canvas
Midday.

Lemon sun shocks
corn fields bake their leaves,
stalks slowly to the gate.
Day or night?

Eye of newt, toe of frog?
Tragic hero, tongue of dog.
City had a spill
wronged sun slinks behind the calamitous clouds
evening, Oedipus,
The answer is man.

Civilizations for my three epiphanies.

***Lilian Liu, First Prize in April***

## ICARUS

I, a mere boy, yet
so much to keep in mind.
The danger of salt spray
upon my wings. The mist's
obscuring treachery. And above all
the soft kiss of the sun.

Now, when I recall your warnings,
Father, as we paced the long beach,
I think: Foot I should have spoken.
But who dare talk of fear
to one whose dreams already draw him
far beyond the stars

And in the end, can I deny
ecstasy was worth its price?
The rise, the thrill of flight,
my giant bird-shadow cast
over battered rocks below.
The shrinking coastline, earth's
silvery curve. Then, from
the corner of my eye
a glimpse of pink wax
weeping along my wings.
How I watched in wonder
as the tiny plumes fluttered
down, to fall like snow
upon the out-islands.

Truly, Father, the sun's breath
felt every bit as sweet as yours
when, lifting me up in
loving arms, you
dare thrust me skyward.

***Thomas P. Feeny***
***Third Prize in April***

*Cisza Krajobrazu (The Silence of a Landscape)* by Maria Wollenberg-Kluza, 2015, oil on canvas

## THE NEXT EUCATASTROPHE

*Causa latet vis est tomissima [While the cause* is *hidden, the force* is *very well known] – Ovid, Amores IV, 287*
*Vires acquivirit emodo [It gains strength as it goes] -- Virgil*

In a cross-step, slow-step dance each galaxy
calls out to choose a partner
and their *pas de deux* accelerates

through stellar winds and waves of space.
The dances turn in upon themselves.
Inside each universe, the stars increase in mass

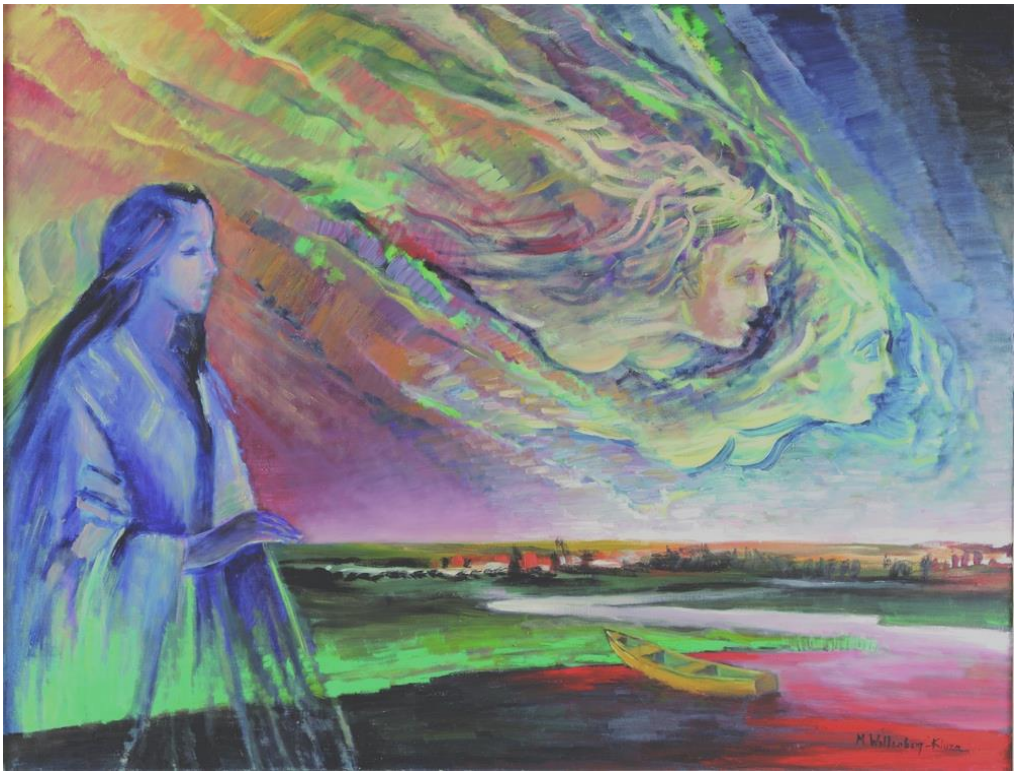
and inward fly, faster and faster: the dances widen
draw to themselves all outward
mass,
recidivate, and would obliterate—

but none can cease, each arises,
renewed from the swallowed energy,
then outward flies — new stars, new universes, new galaxies ——

the pace continues in and outside each dimension
and gyrates as our stars rotate: the ox becomes an ass,
the Pleiades, new polar stars,
and the southern cross, a moving mast.

*Eucatastrophe*. Coined by JRR Tolkien, it refers to the sudden turn of events at the end of a story which results in the protagonist's well-being. From the Greek prefix eu- (good) and catastrophe, traditionally used in classically-inspired literary criticism to refer to the "unraveling" or conclusion of a drama.

***David Anderson, Second Prize in April***



*Nokturn (Nocturne)* by Maria Wollenberg-Kluza, oil on canvas

## MONTHLY CONTEST WINNERS – MAY 2024

### THE BOLDER BROTHER

You stand in night, the hard
darkness.  Taking it all in.
With barely a shrug for
the vast drape of constellations.

Off on the sidelines,
I finger pocket change
and look on in silence.

Small eyes watch as
you turn on your heel,
crunch gravel,
kiss off the stars.

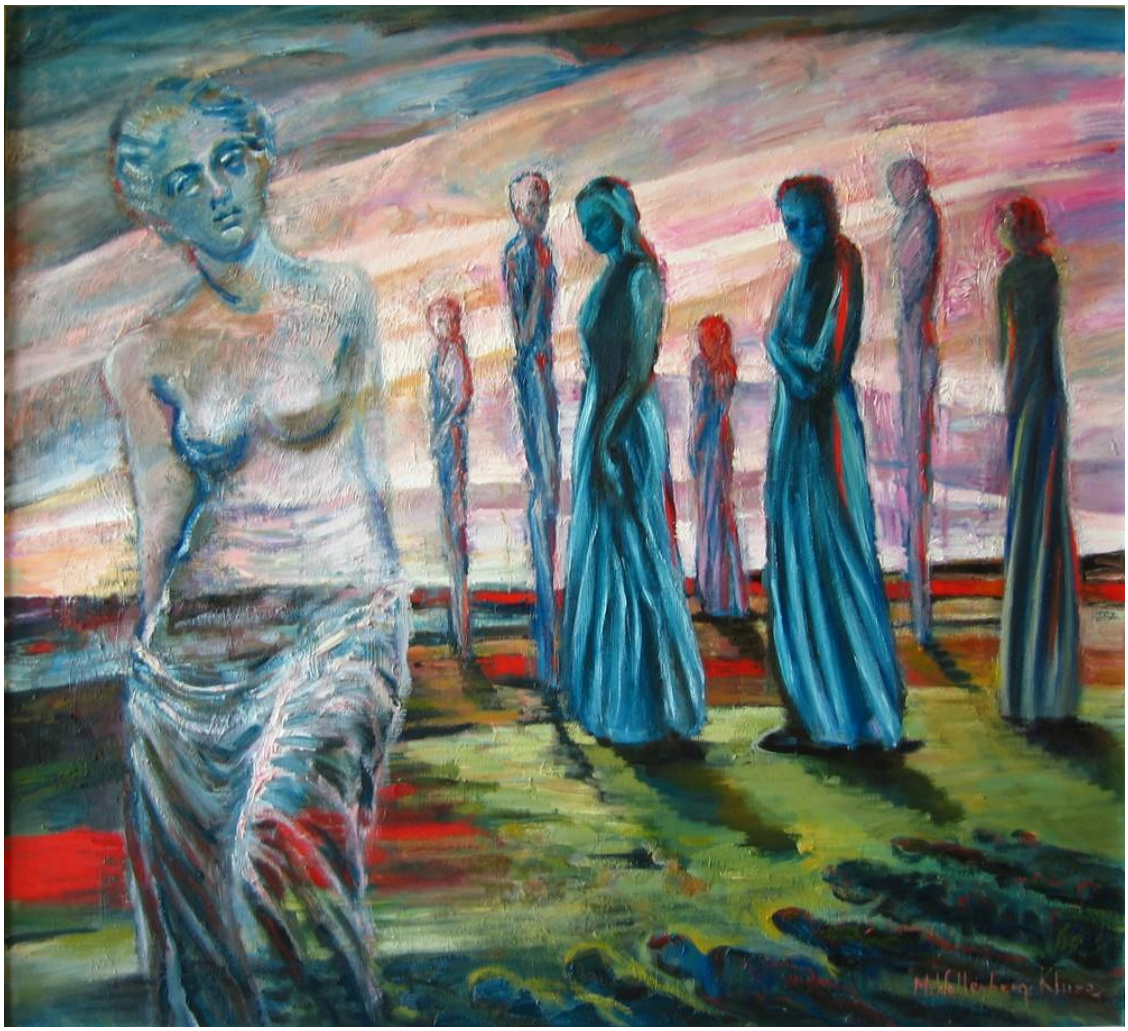
**Thomas P. Feeny, First Prize in May**
*published in "Night Into Day" (Canada, 1992)*

### STILL LIFE

Seven red pears
lined up just so,
atop grey-weathered oak board,
four inches wide.
One stands apart.
Pear-orating?

Pontificating.
Three attend,
three scoff.
The artist laughs.

**Paula Appling**
**Second Prize in May**



*Postacie z blekitu (Figures from the Azure)* by Maria Wollenberg-Kluza, oil on canvas, 2015.

## MONTHLY CONTEST WINNERS – JUNE 2024

### INTO THE LIGHT

As bold as winter but restless as spring
perched on a silver cloud that has no lining
he waves his wand—and the moon climbs higher
lighting a dark moaning night that cries
for its release! The vault of heaven
unlocks to let him pass, taking old stars
with him down the turning path that sizzles
at sunrise when sudden heat
wraps the universe,
cold fire that sends
Uriel on into the light
making his way from cloud to cloud—
the world above a distant world
floating on into the light,
into the light.

***Jane Stuart, First Prize, June 2024***

*Nihil Novi* by Maria Wollenberg-Kluza, 2015, oil on canvas.

## MONTHLY CONTEST WINNERS – JULY 2024

### ON THE WAY TO THE LIBRARY

I did not collect
dust laden pennies. I went towards reading
rooms Sealed fate Lips glued
to sound storms. Trans-
formations of body between starched
pages. A NY City block-long hard
pavement road to song. Scrappy
pencils. A brown paper bag
filled with poetry, tinged with blue
hues of bleeding
pens. I loved Nights
Hidden beneath blankets with a flashlight
Stalking sentences
Ignoring TV gloom
cast out from the living room. Specks
of ink.
The first card with my name
typed out like a warrior. I pierced
dust clouds with syllables,
robbed the coffers
of rhythms reframed syntax
from street fights. A cat clawed
at closed fences. Endless interruptions.
Blasts of sound.

*Continued on p. 9*

### WHERE BACH TAKES ME: CONCERTO #5

On the strings of the harpsichord
I return and settle in
to the off twang of f minor's
deliberate and steady sounds.

The notes play me back
to the plain convent room
where I practiced Skaters' Waltz
and found a place for my internal rhythm
and a certain joy.

It happened here in my girlhood
of plain wool uniform, white blouse and beeny
that I knew I needed more
than home and school and hopscotch
more than the Virgin Mary.

It was not without effort to go the distance
of the keyboard over the black and white
the mesh of major and minor,
it brought an escape
and a return

like the music this morning
traveling me back
forty-five years.

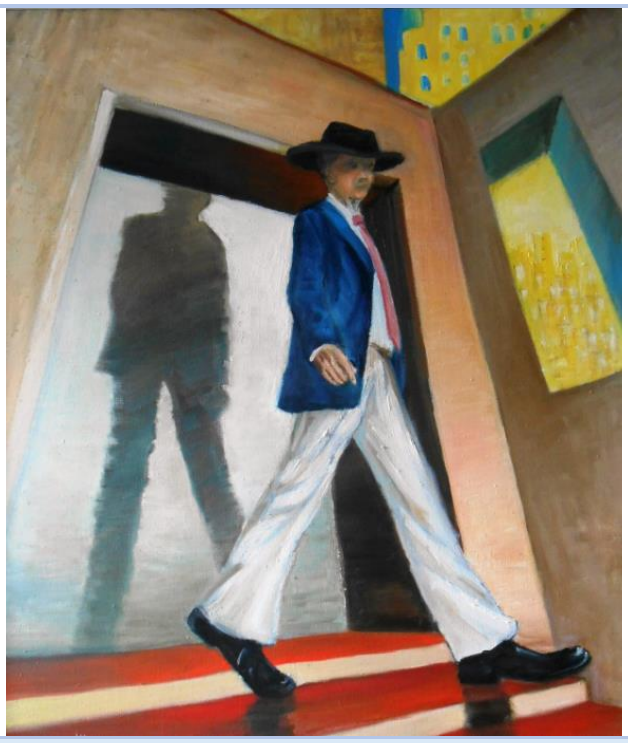
***Susan Florence, Second Prize in July***

Tongues tripping over
each new idea.

A pile of books
I learned

to etch
my mark in the margins.

***Carla Schick,***
***First Prize in July 2024***

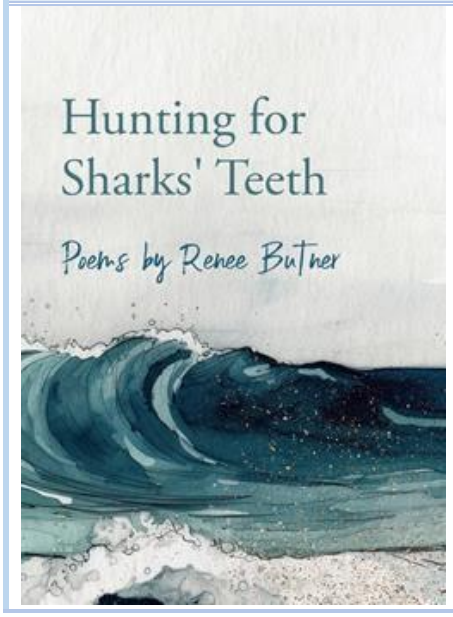


*Quo Vadis* by Maria Wollenberg-Kluza,
oil on canvas, 2013.

## FEATURED ARTIST – MARIA WOLLENBERG-KLUZA

Maria Wollenberg-Kluza was born in 1945 in Puławy. From 1967 to 1973 she studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. In 1973, she graduated with honors in painting and also received a diploma of textile art. In the years 1973-1975 she was an Assistant Professor at Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. The first individual exhibition of her works was organized in 1967. So far, she organized around 130 individual exhibitions in Poland and abroad: in Spain, Sweden, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, India, Ukraine, Turkey, Russia, Italy, Lithuania, and Georgia. She also participated in over domestic and international group exhibitions as well as in international presentations of Polish art (e.g., in France, Germany, Holland, Denmark, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Sweden, USA). She paints mostly monothematic cycles of 20 - 30 works such as: "People in the City", "Man and machine", "Cathedrals", "Art inspired by music", "Impressions of poetry - Images of Norwid", "Game of imagination" "Impressions from Spain", "Polish landscapes", "Confessions of mother", "SALIGIA - seven cardinal Sins", "He and She", "Ver sacrum", "Images of Turkey", "Notes from Norway", "Meditations and Prayers", "Chopin in Painting and Musical Motifs", "Old Polish Music "etc. . More information: www.wollenberg.pl

## MICHAEL ESCOUBASE REVIEWS *HUNTING FOR SHARK'S TEETH* BY RENEE BUTNER




*Hunting for Shark's Teeth*—Poems by Renee Butner
36 Poems ~ 45 pages. Lulu Press. ISBN #: 978-1-312-48589-1

Seamus Heaney, (1939-2013), a leading light in the world of poetry, had this to say about poets and their craft: "A poet is someone who feels, and who expresses her feelings through words. This may sound easy, but it isn't."

This quote came to mind during my journey through Hunting for Shark's Teeth—Poems, by Renee Butner. I asked myself, "Why hasn't this poet been on my radar screen before now?" Already an accomplished writer, Renee Butner's work has appeared in a variety of fine journals. Sharks Teeth displays these poems plus new poems that highlight her talent.

The book is organized into four untitled sections: I. 11 poems; II. 8 poems; III. 8 poems; and IV. 9 poems. Butner opens each section with a modern haiku, a haiku bookends the work.

Butner's title speaks to me on different levels: the first is "sea-level." The opening 11 poems take me specifically to the beach. My nostrils breathe salty air; aromas, sights, and sea-textures abound. On another level, I read Butner's poems at the level of "hunting." The title is catchy. But there is more. As poets we are constantly searching for life; we want to unearth life, we invest ourselves in life in and through our words. This is the work of poets.

**At Sea-level.** The poet "had me from hello," with "Ocean Pier":

She meanders down a
twilight street;
digests the sweet, thick air.

Cicadas and crickets sing their
summer evening lullabies.

The heady thrill of salt melds
with balmy trade wind currents.

As they play a final game of tag
children's voices hover

alongside he eternal background
reverberation of the sea.

She comes upon a
weathered pier projecting
over the bruising water . . .
a welcome provider of respite in the dusk.

*Nad Baltykiem (By the Baltic)* by Maria Wollenberg-Kluza, oil/canvas

The air around Butner's twilight pier is "thick and sweet." Crickets and cicadas sing, I hear the sea's "reverberations" rattling the pier. She puts me in the action. She does more than experience the air; she "digests" the air. The poet is fully ensconced in her surroundings, satisfied, whole and complete. Butner's work shows skill with poetic devices: alliteration, consonance, internal rhyme, simile and metaphor abound. Her poems are predominantly free verse; without end-rhyme.

"Five Senses" imbibes "grains of sand" that stings, / a thousand needle prickles." "Waves roar as they fold over / and crash against the shore / then fizzle back out to sea." Other titillating titles in this section include: "Dirty Sneakers," "Glorious Moon," "Lavender Skies," and "Sea Glass," none of which disappoint.

**Let's Go Hunting.** Butner is never far from the sea, which I sense is her first love. However, her interests go beyond the sea as primary metaphor. For example, "bits of blue eggshell" capture her attention and result in the poet contemplating morbidity. Is the baby bird tragically dead or might the shell fragments indicate some "natural progression / hatching, downy feathers" of a young bird learning to fly? Shark's tooth #1.

"Butter" is about` the poet's self-perception. What lies beyond the "Buttery golden path" . . . "Does the aura surround me / Or has it fled / Into the bare branches / of the trees." Shark's tooth #2.

In "Daybreak Thunderstorm" Butner awakens to "rain gushing down the drainpipe / near my head / pounding on the roof / in sheets." The eerie light flashings and thunderclaps frighten her puppy, but "her senses relish this abrupt awakening." Shark's tooth #3. Finally, "Jazz Notes" circles me back to Seamus Heaney's dictum: "A poet is someone who feels, and who expresses her feelings through words. This may sound easy, but it isn't."

After a hard day, art, in the form of jazz captures a "mood," brings the poet to herself within herself . . . where

A lone horn sings out
Edgy and soulful
Leading the session several
Golden shimmering moments
before backing off
To allow a bebop
walking bass line solo

Notes wrap around one another
Entwined in a dance
for the auditory sense

Jazz beat lines up with heartbeat
I relinquish myself to
the new pulse

*Etiuda (An Etude)* by Maria Wollenberg-Kluza, oil on canvas.

This poem, akin to unearthing that coveted shark's tooth in the sand, the quest for something deeper, sparkles as she revolves its sharp edges in her fingers.

***~ Michael Escoubas***

## MICHAEL ESCOUBAS REVIEWS *SILENT MARSHES* BY TOM MORAN

*Silent Marshes* by Tom Moran 24 Poems ~ 36 pages Cyberwit.net ISBN #: 978-81-19654-67

For a moment Tom's title, *Silent Marshes*, had me fooled. The title took me back to my Cajun roots in south Louisiana. There, "marsh" or "swamp" conjured tales of 15-foot alligators, a legendary swamp creature named "Monster Rougarou," snakes, frogs, pirogues being poled down the bayou, cypress trees, hanging moss, and golden sunrises. These notions were soon disabused by the author. Tom was born and raised in the south side of Chicago, in a tough neighborhood. Tom's "marsh" resembles gray, pock-marked concrete and families which cling to traditional values: hard work, church-going and loyalty. Marsh also means that invisible, often silent, space where one lives and navigates life's challenges.

My goal in this review is to highlight the heart of a mature poet whose latest collection gives voice to similar *silent marshes* many face in life.

"Dialogue with a Muse" is about Tom's feelings as he prepares to attend the prestigious Iowa Summer Writing Festival: "I'm inspired on the way. / Open up and feel again. / You pave over yourself / to hustle a buck. // What if the well goes dry? / Dig deeper. // How will I know if I'm any good? / A lump in your throat / before you speak." Who among us hasn't felt a twinge of self-doubt before we read our work?

"Departure" returned me to my own mother's bedside as her life slowly ebbed away . . . his airplane lifting off, is a poignant example of Tom's silent marsh theme:

The heart monitor alarm beeps.
Skycaps rush in to
check her luggage.
Her flight is boarding.
She passes, chalk white.
White as the sheet
they cover her with.

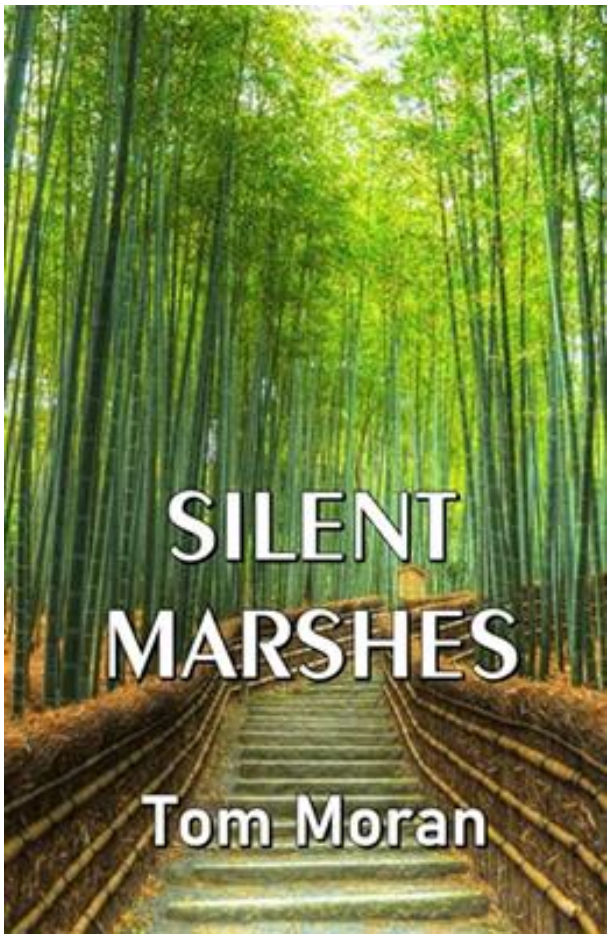
White as the page
I write on,
white as the vapor trail
of her jet
than angles upward.
White as the spaces
in my life
when she would leave home
for months at a time.

The poet's flight metaphor is perfect. By my count, five variations of "white" coalesce as Tom processes his loss. With a touch of irony he recalls times . . . "when she would leave home / for months at a time."

Stylistically, Moran writes a relatively short line. This suits him. I was taught to use short steps when walking through wetlands, lest I sink into uncertain terrain. Within his lines, the poet treads carefully, searching for the right words to guide his next steps.

Speaking of steps, "Hitchhiker," harmonizes both style and theme:

I pierce pinholes
in a piece
of black construction paper.
Hold the paper up
to the sunshine
because as a child,
I was told
that the stars
at night
is light
shining through from Heaven.
I pull away the paper,
smile at
the newness
of love
on my face.
I live
on the cusp
of two worlds,
one spiritual,
one Earth bound;
a hitchhiker
in the rain
who can't run,
can't hide,
and can't make
it stop raining.
A soul in
a concrete world,
waiting on the day
I cut loose,
fly free.




Just as "Hitchhiker" reveals the poet's journey down two roads "one spiritual / one earthbound," he invites me to

join him through the silent marshes of my life. "Vacancy" opens the heart of a youth who, "would play / in the bare spot / where her (his mother's) car / should have been parked . . . a room vacant / in my heart / just in case / she returns."

"Thanksgiving" captures the secret ruminations of a small boy. The poem opens a book of memories about how Tom's father took him to a turkey farm to "pick one out." Moments later, the turkey's neck was snapped off, the bird, now in in a white box slides down a chute ready for the ride home. The poet wonders:

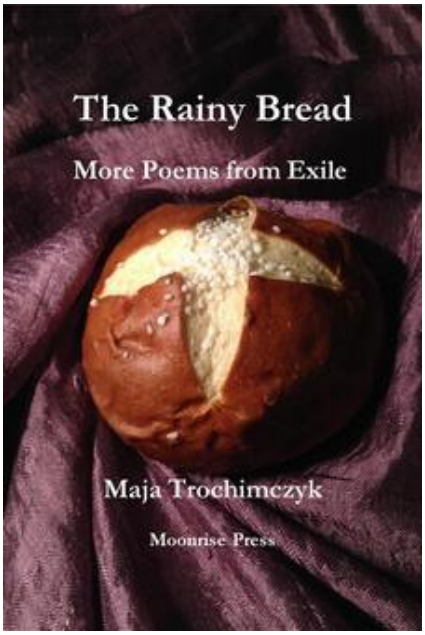
how will I
find my place
in this cement world,
where something
once alive is
butchered, boxed, and
laying in a back seat.

*Silent Marshes* is a thin volume consisting of twenty-four poems. Yet, it is pregnant with one man's studied wisdom about life. That study is a journey ever-fresh, ever-renewing itself in truth. Gift yourself, order your copy today.

***~ Michael Escoubas***

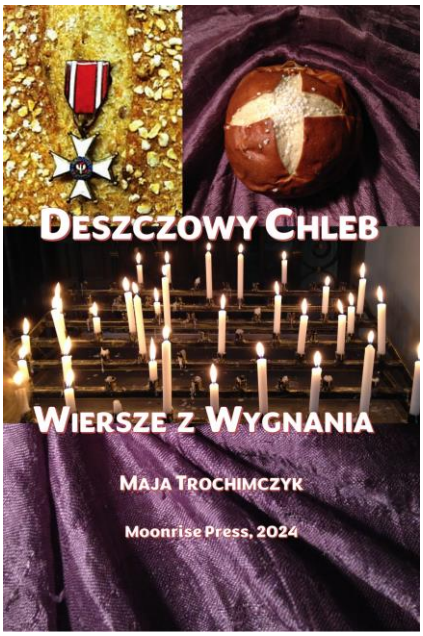
## POEMS FROM THE *RAINY BREAD: MORE POEMS FROM EXILE* BY MAJA TROCHIMCZYK

*The Rainy Bread: More Poems from Exile* is an expanded version of a poetry collection first published in 2016 and honoured with the Creative Arts Prize by the Polish American Historical Association. The book includes 63 poems about forgotten stories of Poles living under the Soviet and German occupations during WWII, especially in the Eastern Borderlands of Kresy. They were killed, deported, imprisoned, or oppressed after the invasion of Poland by Germany on September 1, 1939 and by the Soviet Union on September 17, 1939. Some of these brief portraits capture the trauma and resilience, ordeals and miraculous survival stories of the author's family, typical of Polish civilians.




These fictionalized memories are coupled with depictions of survival of other Poles deported to Siberia, the Arctic Circle, or Kazakhstan; those left the Soviet Union with the Second Corps of the Polish Army under the command of General Władysław Anders; those who were transported to refugee camps in India or Africa; and ended up in Argentina, Canada, Australia or the U.S. The Polish version of 2024 includes 40 poems.

https://moonrisepress.com/trochimczyk---rainy-bread.html
https://moonrisepress.blogspot.com/2024/08/deszczowy-chleb-polish-version-of-40.html



## ≡ ASTERS ≡

*~ for my Great Aunt, Jadwiga Hordziejewska, neé Wasiuk (1910-1997)*

Her mother's aunt, *Ciocia Jadzia* works in a kiosk in Oliwa
selling papers and razor blades in a ruined city
of charcoal buildings and five-year plans
She hides the best blades for her faithful clients
in the kiosk on the way to the Cathedral

where angels with puffy wooden cheeks
triumphantly blow their golden trumpets
walls and benches shake with the majesty of Bach
the gold-starred ceiling shimmers
in summer evening cold

The music of the seaside vacation heals the grey hours
of the girl, sitting in the kiosk, selling matches and tickets
after Ciocia Jadzia goes home to cook dinner
for her silent husband, drunk artist son

She works — Uncle Dominik, a proud nobleman
in a top hat and a black Sunday coat
walks through Oliwa's parks
with his last, prize-winning Holstein cow
He grieves the loss of his estates — the life he had had
before that fateful train ride from the East

He still sees the red-roofed manor with a white porch
bronze oak leaves scattered on the gravel path
silver gray of Lake Świteź
golden rye fields before the harvest

He walks home to rusty bricks pocked by bullet holes,
smoke-dark hallways, and a burst of color
in the courtyard where asters tremble
in last evening breeze —

a bouquet of fallen stars

## ≡ ASTRY ≡

*~ Dla Ciotecznej Babci Jadwigi Hordziejewskiej z.d. Wasiuk*

Ciocia Jadzia mojej Mamy ma kiosk w Oliwie.
Sprzedaje gazety i żyletki w zrujnowanym mieście
pełnym osmalonych budynków i planów
pięcioletnich.
Chowa najlepsze ostrza pod ladą dla wiernych
klientów w kiosku przy drodze do katedry.

Tam drewniane aniołki z wydętymi policzkami
triumfalnie grają na złocistych trąbkach.
Tam mury i ławy trzęsą się w majestacie
organów Bacha a złote gwiazdy na suficie
migoczą w chłodnym powietrzu wieczoru.

Muzyka to cud szarych godzin wakacji
nad morzem, straconych godzin
dziewczynki w kiosku, sprzedającej
zapałki i bilety, gdy Ciocia Jadzia
jest w domu i gotuje kolację dla milczka-męża,
pijanego syna-artysty z Bożej łaski.

Ona pracuje – a wuj Dominik, dumny szlachcic
w cylindrze i niedzielnym tużurku spaceruje
po parkach Oliwy z ostatnią, medalową krową
rasy Holstein. Wuj w milczeniu ubolewa
nad utratą włości – i życia jakie pędził
przed tragiczną jazdą pociągiem ze wschodu.

Stoi mu przed oczami czerwony dach dworu,
biały ganek, brązowe liście dębu rozsypane
na żwirze podjazdu, głęboka woda Świtezi,
srebrne pola nieskoszonego żyta w środku lata.

Wraca do mieszkania, do rdzawych cegieł
pokrytych ospą dziur od kul, przez korytarz
osmalony dymem. Czeka go wybuch koloru
w podwórku – astry tańczące na wietrze —

bukiet upadłych gwiazd

*Maria Wajszczuk (the author's grandmother) and Jadwiga Hordziejewska, sisters from Kresy, born near Baranowicze in Poland, since 1939 in the Soviet Union, since 1990 in Belarus.*

## ≡ THE RAINY BREAD ≡

*~ for Grandma Nina and Grandma Maria,*
*because they baked delicious bread*

Even if it softened, it fell into the mud
you need to rinse the slice. When it dries out —
it can be eaten.

And this round, fragrant loaf,
which Grandma baked with sourdough?
One bread loaf for a week — it was the best
with cream and sugar crystals.

And this moist, whole-rye bread baked with honey?
Delicious with butter and — more honey.
After each bite, take a sip of cold milk.
And the war bread, made from leftover, dirty flour?
Worms removed through a sieve. With bran,
sawdust — even a pebble can be found
among grains of sand. But, there it is.

Finally, the bread from the parcels sent
to Father Feliks, Mom's uncle in Dachau.
It's so ugly — no one would steal it.
Whole rye flour, thick slices saturated with lard —
Today we know: microelements and calories,
A guarantee of surviving five years of torture.

*Give us today our daily bread* —
the daily bread —
the rainy bread —
the bread of life —
bread

## ≡ DESZCZOWY CHLEB ≡

*~ dla Babci Niny i Babci Marii, bo piekły pyszny chleb*

Nawet jeśli rozmiękł, upadł w błoto
trzeba kromkę wypłukać. Jak wyschnie —
da się zjeść.

A ten okrągły, pachnący bochenek,
który Babcia upiekła na zakwasie?
Jeden chleb na tydzień — był najlepszy
ze śmietaną i kryształkami cukru.

A ten prawie wilgotny, razowy na miodzie?
Przepyszny z masłem i miodem — właśnie.
Po każdym kęsie, łyk zimnego mleka.

A ten wojenny, z resztek brudnej mąki?
Robaki odsiane przez sito. Z otrębami,
trocinami – nawet kamyk się trafi
wśród ziaren piasku. Jednak jest.

Wreszcie ten chleb z paczek wysłanych
do Ojca Feliksa, Wuja Mamy, do Dachau.
Szpetny — więc go nikt nie ukradł.
Z pełnej żytniej mąki, grube pajdy
nasycone smalcem — dziś wiemy:
mikroelementy i kalorie, gwarancja
przeżycia pięciu lat tortur.

*Chleba naszego powszedniego daj nam dzisiaj* —

Deszczowy chleb —
codzienny chleb —
chleb życia —
chleb

Letters of Father Feliks Wajszczuk (brother of Stanisław Wajszczuk, Maja Trochimczyk's grandfather) from NAZI German camp for the clergy in Dachau to his mother in German-occupied Poland. One of the letters included his request for food to be sent in packages: slices of dark rye bread saturated with lard and individually wrapped. Nutritious, high-calory, and too ugly to be stolen. Helping the resistance since the beginning of the war, Feliks Wajszczuk was arrested after being denounced by a Polish traitor. He survived five years of incarceration, while being a subject of cruel and illegal "medical" experiments on lung capacity. Too ill to return to his parish after the war, he retired to a monastery in France.

Private collection of Barbara Miszta, Poland.

## CALIFORNIA STATE POETRY SOCIETY

Established in 1971, CSPS is the official state organization representing California to the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (NFSPS). CSPS was incorporated on August 14th, 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 CSPS 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 CSPS 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 SUBMISSONS 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. 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; ⑦July: 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).**