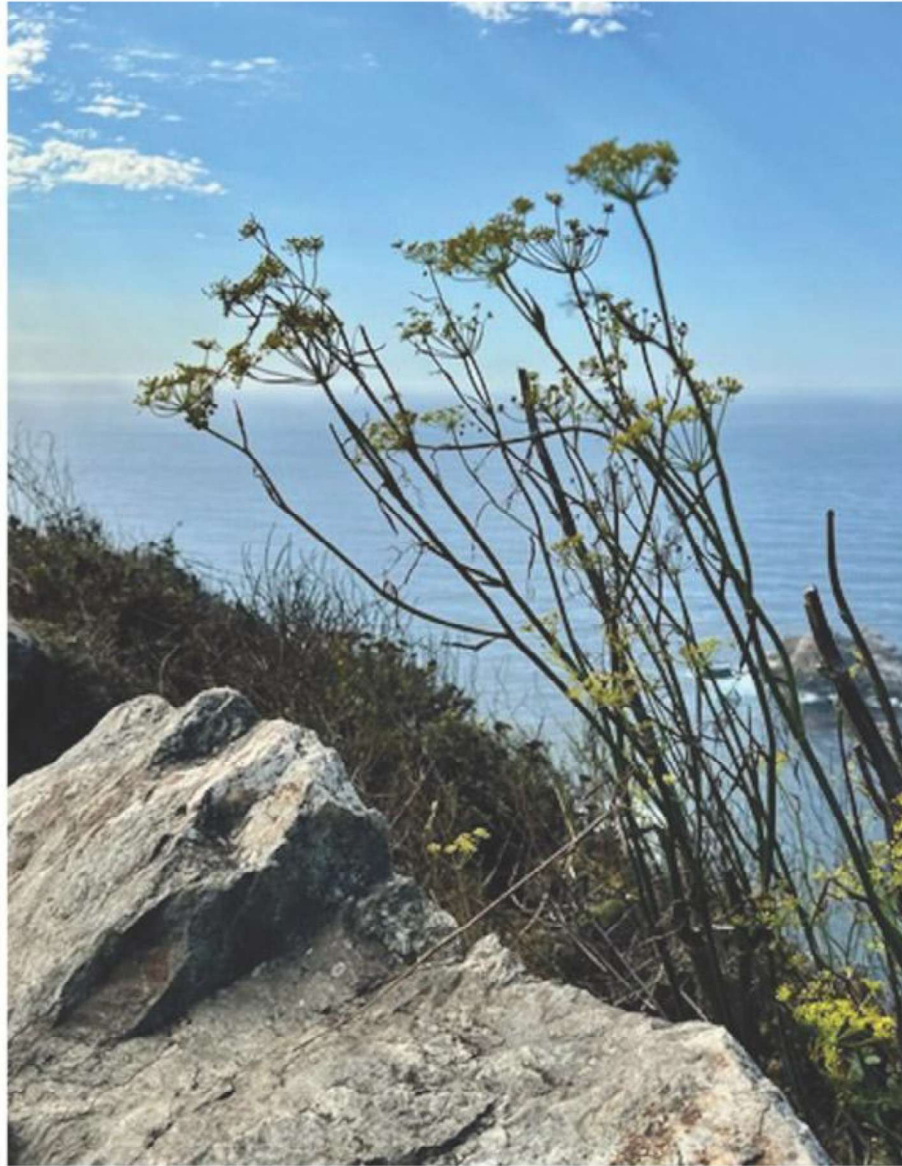


NEW VERSE REVIEW



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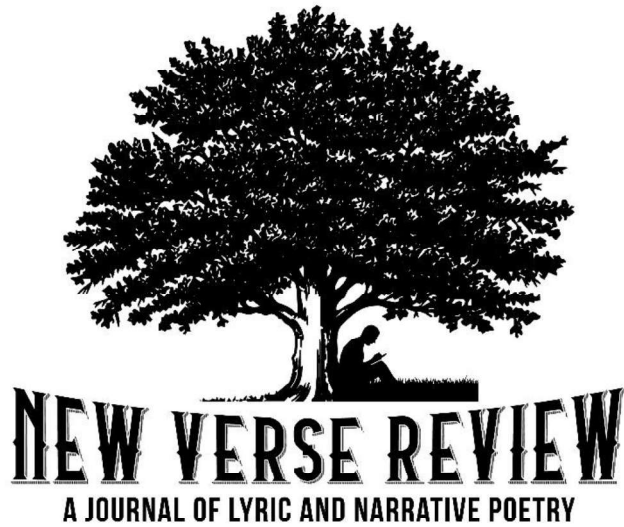
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—

New Verse Review: A Journal of Lyric and Narrative Poetry features work that renews the ancient affinities among poetry, song, and story.



New Verse Review 3.3

-

Summer 2026

Issue Edited by Steven Knepper, Mary Grace Mangano, and
D.A. Cooper

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POETRY

I.

Wendy Videlock

The Lesson of the Solstice

From solstice we mortals
begin to learn the difficult skill
of holding still,

the art of the magician's arc,
the secret of the dark spark
and the sleeping seed,
the Lilith and

the Persephone lesson,
the earthen words
of Chichen Itza

the ancient ways
of paying attention,

the polar body twins
of following through

and changing direction.

Subject to Erasure

Captains, drop your weapons.
Fathers, show your faces.
Makers, know your pencils

are softened by your natures,
are sharpened by your visions,
are subject to erasure

are snapped by undue pressure.
Physicians, know your flora.
Sisters, know your natures.

Brothers, meet your brothers.
Mothers, know the sutures
you've tended through the ages.

Teachers, send the mentors
with rivers filled with waters
and spirits filled with saplings

to fill the books with pages
of nature with its mirrors
of its children and its sages.

Matilda Silver Sykes

The USB Ports

have all changed on the X61
from Edinburgh to Pittenweem, I can

connect nothing with nothing.
A wandering trolley sieves wind

through its regular network of ribs—
it is silver

and no one on earth is missing it.
Flesh winds drift down Queensferry Road.

I've had enough of flesh, enough
of marble sky museums, impossible

inventories. What is it
anyway the clouds

have for so long been processing?
What happens

when they're through?
The man to my left kicks

his wellies in the air with each
feathery cough. His two blue eyes

look wrong, like early moons.
My life (long piss-hot bus)

is rippling over the Firth of Forth,
over milky prancing water

and here the light lights nothing:
lambs gambolling like bridesmaids,

crows drawn low over bright fields
of rape. When did serious

come to mean only dark? Serious here
is light. The pair to my right are

laughing themselves to tears.

Aaron Poochigian

Heliolatry

There are the trees forever doing
a slow, expansive dance
called “Reaching Toward the Light.”

Then there’s how shadows keep imbuing
the patterns with askance
and horizontal height.

The whole show, with its matching ways
of moving, points to one
bright source of bud and sprawl.

I close my eyes and tilt my gaze
into the sun, the sun,
the pivot of it all.

Matthew King

Barbecue

Two-stroke motor exhaust, the strangest thing
I love, I think, boat emissions, oil mixed
with gasoline, “incomplete combustion”—
the worse the woodstove’s burning the better
the aroma from the stovepipe and best
of all the paper and match that starts it—
cigarette smoke, a pipe, a good cigar,
or a bad one, what difference does it make
to this nose our bodies have for danger—
no wonder then we love the smell of flesh
over a fire, flesh cooking, flesh that could
as well be ourselves, exsanguinated
fatty fluids feeding the flames, as if
we’re not already mortified enough.

Christina Linsin

Rootless

I know the many reasons evergreens
can only grow here on this southern slope;
the craggy northern side, instead of trees,
springs mosses, thick from pockets, packed in close.
They calico with greens and browns spread wide
the spirals pushing outward, linked in sprays
to yearn across the jutting mountainside
their shallow rhizoids cling to rock and clay.
I know long roots require soft thick soil
to hold, support, the weight and height of pines.
But still tenacious, rootless moss uncoils
reminding me how I myself can thrive.
For growth is more resilient than presumed;
you don't need roots to grow or even bloom.

David Middleton

After Reading Revelation 21:23

Where endless faith shall shine serene
And twilight never intervene.

—*St. Ambrose (c. 339-397 A.D.)*

*in memory of Janet Lewis Winters (1899-1998),
author of the poem "Country Burial"*

Here on the porch I sip a calming tea,
Brewed from valerian and chamomile,
Till stars come from a dark their lights reveal
As like and yet unlike them as can be.

This is the only world I've ever known,
Its elements, whose causes I surmise,
All being all I see through human eyes,
Matter and mind together and alone.

So take me to no place of blinding light,
Of hymns unending where we keep no time,
Where no space can be made to make a rhyme,
That City laid on graves of day and night.

But let there be a garden by the gate
Through which the River narrows to a stream
Beyond perfection's twelves—gemstones agleam—
And let a humble tending be my fate

Where flowers still bring healing from the loam,
Where noon will pass in being what it means,
And welcome twilight always intervenes,
And stars head calmly homeward as they roam.

Woman Drawing Water from a Well (II): A Meditation

ca. 1848-49

after the drawing by Jean-François Millet (1814-1875)

black conté crayon on paper

provenance: private collection

John 4: 4-43; 1 Chron. 11:17-18; Gen, 26:18

This is no well where guardian spirits live
Or angels bring annunciations down
Or where a coin flipped spinning means a wish
Is granted or denied by heads or tails.

And yet it is the way we have to draw
Not water only but the waters' fire
Both cold and molten branching as they flow,
Cognates of the ur-tongue's first and final word.

The girl has surely leaned into the shaft
Peering toward depths too dark to see beneath,
Come face to face with facelessness itself
Where echoes and reflections cannot be.

And when we look toward stars or down a pit
We find no firmer ground on which to stand,
Though still with spade or telescope we probe
For elemental ghosts of earth and air.

There are no proclamations from afar.
The girl is not The Woman at the Well
Near Kingdom Come or kin to one who poured
Libations from the Gate of Bethlehem

But clay that charcoal shaded into light,
Like water purified by lime alone
In patterns made of stasis and of change,
Its provenance too private to be known,

A well not even Isaac could have named.

Sally Thomas

Egret

I have seen the snowy egret standing
Knee-deep in bright-skinned water in the sunset,
Its whiteness dark against the light, its profile
West-facing. The intrusion of that one
Abrupt detail into the general blur
Of fields and wetlands by the interstate
Abides with me. Another second, and
It might have shaken loose its folded wings
And lifted—as a rowing soul abandons
The body that has been its habitat—
Itself into the infinite gold sky.
I did not stop. How could I? I was driving.
Always, when I see these things, I'm driving.
The dashboard clock is flicking out the minutes
That one by one become a passing hour.
But I have seen the egret: darkly white
In all its liquid landscape, upright, waiting,
Here and gone like everything you think
Will still be standing there when you come back.

Deborah Corr

To Believe in Water

-after Marie Howe, "The Maples"

I stood by the river as it bulged against its banks
and asked, what difference does one person make?

The river hurried on toward the lake.

The swelling sorrow of the world pressed inside my ribs.

What is the worth of a single drop, I asked,
and water licked my feet.

A merganser swam against the current,
the work of its feet concealed beneath.

On a high branch, a heron watched.

Be the rain, I thought, as each drop let go
of itself, eased into unending flow.

Matthew Kirby

The Pull

As springs give birth to creeks, so creeks to streams,
and streams to rivers rushing toward the bay.
Ditch water from beside the rural way
ends tossed among the wide Atlantic's breams.

Trout take the other path, seeking the shade
of forests, cold flows filtered over stone.
A crafty brown, hunting clay banks alone,
can live and thrive unseen where town dogs wade.

It haunts the runnel past the soccer field
in woods where kids ride bikes on plywood ramps
or stargaze out of range of Main Street's lamps.
Both fish and youth stay artfully concealed

but, some nights, feel the pull of the unknown:
fathomless darkness and the ocean's foam.

Ramya Yandava

Sea-Bed

And by the margin of the sea I'll rest
my tired body on the sun-warmed sand
and let the ocean press her swelling breast
against my breast, her hand against my hand.
I need no down—the dune will be my pillow,
the waves a briny blanket, salted sheet,
washing me wakeless in a wet crescendo
that rolls and swells, then quiets at my feet.
Asleep beneath the ceaseless pulse of sea,
rocked soundly in the ancient cradle's sway,
I hear the crooning of a melody
and lapse into a silent spell, away
into a reverie of ships and fishes
where mermaids—smiling, blue-lipped—grant my wishes.

Adrienne Su

Solitude

How can I be sure
events occurred, if no one
accompanied me?

A naïve question.
Many who were once with me
no longer endure

to affirm, refute,
or compare memory with.
That we once traveled

together, or ate
apples, or circled mountains
is mine to assert —

mine alone, as if
I'd made up the anecdote,
which no longer dwells

anywhere but here
in my unreliable
retrieval system,

which I keep trying
to make indelible, or
at least readable,

lest experience
vaporize. Without syntax,
without solitude,

I assimilate
nothing, have no idea
what I want, even

as I intuit
that I desire what any
person desires, that

I could consume it
as naturally as food,
water, mountain air,

if I could muster
the will to receive one thing
without naming it.

Konmari

I'm the type who likes to work ahead, advance faster.
In high school I sat at the back of French I, doing chapters
not yet discussed. In adulthood I started downsizing
while deep in the acquiring phase, theorizing
it made sense to prepare. Out went uncomfortable lace,
anything dry-clean-only, particleboard, videotapes,
individual tart pans. Book-disposing guidelines
go gentle on teachers and writers, but I went nine times
to the library annex, offloading novels, anthologies,
textbooks, a few Collected Works. Inevitably
there would be regrets: the thesaurus I had to re-buy
in worse condition, the pan-Asian cookbook that despite
offensive language made good food. When a new semester
descended, I abandoned the cull. Which could be compared
to the end of French, but French was simply displaced
by other languages. Peak tidying – photos and keepsakes –
demolishes time travel. Shreds evidence. That clearing out
was in fashion meant that someday, not clearing out
would be in – both dangerous trends. But that's an excuse.
I didn't want to touch anything radioactive. Also wanted to,
just not yet. Isn't value proportional to reaction?
Shouldn't everyone keep poison letters, to have options?
I was suffering not from procrastination
but refusal to imagine my own obliteration,
the inability to excise the vision in which my ghost
keeps active vigil, editing captions. Redacting notes.

Jared Carter

Abandoned

Burdock and vines, so overgrown
 that none can see
The loose bricks tumbled down. Unknown,
 the destiny

That haunts things gone asunder. Where
 few care to look,
The wreckage seems almost aware,
 the way a book,

Left in the twilight, its pages
 turned by the wind,
Sifts through whatever engages,
 somewhere within.

Chess

I have always liked to play black.

I think it suits

My basic outlook—to hold back,
wait for the fruits

Of innocence to shrivel, droop,
and be picked off

One by one. In the chicken coop
the slightest cough

Betrays the fox, who makes no sound,
but grabs each hen

By the throat, waltzing her around
like an old friend.

Cicadas

They toil not, neither do they spin,
 and only sing
By forcing from their bodies hymns
 of journeying

Up from earth, from years of darkness—
 sound unsurpassed,
That by reverberation tests
 their need to clasp

The light—to seize and transform all
 that will around
Them fade. To momentarily call,
 at last unbound.

II.

Alice Allan

American love

Twilight resolves to trash TV
while all the brave attempts—
the words of flagellation,
new renunciations,

the stack of bruising losses,
each meagre stretch of something less than panic,
the sedimenting days—
my love, they drain away.

The ocean carves the coastline in its image,
while the hairline fractures lengthen
and the data banks maintain their twitch.
Dear love, the undertow persists

and the boys on *Summer House*
get good and stoned to watch *Zootopia*,
fall half asleep, oblivious as children,
then rouse themselves to say:

Appreciate you, man.
Sleep well, my dude.
Love you. Love you.
Love you. Love you. Love you.

Michael Lavers

Passionate Shepherd to His Love, II

Come live with me and be my love,
and we will learn the language of
the shrugs and silences and sighs
conspiring to compromise.

There will be joy. But not before
a few lean years in Baltimore,
hearing the mice behind the walls
tunnel our dreams like criminals.

The slow greed of the kitchen clock
will punctuate some stale talk.
You'll cook, I'll clean, though might ignore
the dust with which time wages war.

The ruined yard will need us both.
We'll chase slug hoards through undergrowth,
and envy all the youthful bees'
delicious promiscuities,

covet the snails' coiled seclusion
or the chorus frogs' collusion.
Repeat, repeat, until we're old,
taking our pills, trading our gold

for one more month, or day, or minute,
each last second coiled in it,
watching time's immenseness trace
the full brief pause of our embrace.

The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd, II

Ok, I'll come, since one grows bored
of being nothing but adored,
and we will fuel with little feuds
the fusion of two solitudes.

Instead of rich and gaudy style—
slippers made from crocodile,
caviar, truffles, saffron gin—
just give me toast with cinnamon.

And I'll get sick, and you'll get mad.
We'll have less money than we had.
Then even less. We'll drink and dine
on sour food and sourer wine,

and go through all the motions till
the space between us starts to swell,
a little globe, our cells' slow brood,
brimming with vague exactitude.

Then years of throwing stale bread
at bored ducks, bored and overfed,
brushing your hair and our dog's fur
out of our clothes and furniture,

not finding our Byzantium
in scraps but in the messy sum.
Both shade and sun, both weeds and grass
too quickly pass, too quickly pass.

Alan Shapiro

Compatibilities

At dinner parties, or receptions, in brief
encounters in the street or park,
but always in his company,
she would stand a bit too close
to other men and, too obviously sly
for slyness, touch them almost harmlessly
on arm or elbow or for an instant rest
her hand on theirs, while he'd stand by
pretending not to notice, fearing, per usual,
to make a scene, public or private,

and calling it virtue, the see no evil, hear no evil,
void of violent forbearance that never deigned
to show her any evidence of pain: wasn't that
crueler by far, more maddening, than all
her minor (easily deniable) ruses of flirtation—
couldn't you just once pretend to give a shit? —
that sheer rock face so unassailably beyond her reach,
inviolable, in the chilly heights of being wronged,
implacably unscalable, no wrong of hers
could ever gain the slightest purchase on?

Joan Murray

Water Music

I dawdle on the warm lip of the tub
and do my drying slow.
The cat flows through my ankles like a thirsty puddle,
I cross my legs and stroke him
with the dangle of a toe.

The color on my toenails is called *Coral Shell*—
it's left over from our week in Cozumel
—and stops short above the tideline of new growth.
It can wait until tomorrow
for a touch up.

On the radio's a tune I recognize—
a plaintive air by Enriqu  Granados,
who died in the English Channel as he tried to
save his wife when they were struck by a torpedo;
it always fills my eyes.

But the cat has no respect,
it leaps into the towel on my lap to cop a cuddle.
The bubbles in the tub are breaking up:
the water's giving up its vain attempt at being air;
the air at being water.

No matter, I'm dry. The cat got what it liked, and is
curled up in the corner. You're waiting in our bed.
I don't bother with a robe, by now the bedroom's
warm, the water's nearly gone,
pour on the rapture.

Christopher Carstens

Leaning

This widowhood is strange. I used to stay
Awake all day – it's easy when you're two.
But now alone, I'm prone to drift away,
Grey staring at a wall, or halfway through
Some chapter in St. Paul I've meant to read.
My mind, unmoored, goes drifting down the stream,
Eyes not quite closed, I'm gone. With subtle speed
Come dreams, ephemeral as coffee steam;
I'm spotting her white hair across the store,
Or asking if she'd like a matcha tea,
Small bits of conversation, never more;
Her body's fragrance wafting back to me.

Take yesterday. While dwindling in my chair,
By force of gravity I felt her there,
Behind me at my shoulder, leaning in.
I spoke her name, but she was gone again.

D. S. Martin

Citylight

The plane begins its descent after a long
long flight dipping below
the cloud threshold on this dark
dark night the sparkling city below
spreads across the hillside unable to hide
like a million candles lifted high
to mark their place

We can see something of the sort of city
this is Towers shine with geometric grace
spotlights bleach cathedral stone roadways
wrap diamond necklaces along the cliff edge
tracing shoreline & beach Though unseen
from this height a righteous city feeds each
need shuns greed

Glistening bridges span dark estuaries
while the sight of each streetlight
the glow from every window
shows itself as we climb from the sky
Despite the darkness surrounding you
you are such a city
so am I

Erica Reid

Where Can I Find the Stars

that rounded out the hem
of the gown the She-Wolf wore
(each distant light a gem),
who every night you swore
 was strumming her guitar?

And no one seems to know
which constellation holds
the story of the snake
who retched a thousand voles
to soothe her stomachache —
 how did your ending go?

Without you, my night sky's
reduced to kings and swans —
no haunted samovars,
no manatees or prawns
knitting sailboats out of stars,
 no poisoned shepherd's pie,

so why should I look up?
The black grows flat and blurs.
The world prefers the tales
that they've already heard,
their bears and holy grails.
 You turned that garish cup

into Queen Cockatoo,
but I can't find her form.
I've lost The Devil's Hurtin'
and Larkspur-in-a-Storm.
The dark is just a curtain —
 the best light died with you.

Christian Lingner

Superstition

for Laura

On moonless summer nights, we'd stay up late
and lie for hours where bright cicadas sing
and stars are said to fall for those who wait
politely for whatever night will bring.
We'd shut off every light once we'd sprawled out,
and hardly dare a whisper, as if stars
would run away if they were talked about
and fault for lack of magic would be ours.

Even then, we knew the radio
foretold each astrological display.
If we were young, we weren't too young to know
a star would fall, or not fall, either way.
But moonless summer nights, we'd lie there, quiet,
as if we might accomplish something by it.

William L. Ramsey

The Omen

At breakfast she said a Bald Eagle
flew down to give her a rose in a dream.
I nodded my head without looking up,
not wanting to give her notions.
We would know her guardian spirit,

I told my wife later, if we were Iroquois.
That afternoon we boated down
the Saluda River into the upper fringes
of Lake Greenwood, where the water
turns dark as the moss on the trestle.

She stood at the bow with her arms
stretched wide, as if she was flying,
like that girl in the movie. I had
forgotten the dream until we passed
a Bald Eagle, perched atop an oak tree.

The first one I ever saw. It launched out
across the river to ride the heat from
the mud-flats higher, then arced back
over us, circling and circling. I'm her
father, I whispered up to it, I'm her father.

Jean L. Kreiling

Midnight Ride

Dad nodded when I asked if he would make
a stop so I could buy shampoo. *I'll take*
five minutes, I assured him. He preferred
to go straight home, I'm sure, but said no word
of protest. Like his old wood-paneled car,
my dad was stoic. He had traveled far
out of his way that night to rescue me:
I'd called and he'd come, uncomplainingly.
He drove, we talked; his sea-deep voice seeped through
my skin and warmed my blood, as old songs do.
His big hands on the steering wheel looked strong—
unwrinkled and unspotted, though I'd long
regarded him as old—and little gray
marked his thick hair. The car showed no decay,
although it had to have been decades old.
I understood, of course, that as we rolled
through oceans of dark air, the dashboard's glow
could warp contours and colors; all below
a blue-black sky can be transformed, murk-bent
as midnight does its best to reinvent
the world. Dad parked and spun the FM dial
to find a tune to sing along with while
I bought shampoo. I leapt out, slammed the door
on him and Patsy Cline, dashed through the store—
and came back out to find an empty lot:
Dad's car was nowhere to be found. A knot
of worry soured my stomach. Had I taken
too long inside the store? More deeply shaken
than someone who had merely lost a ride,
I scanned all corners of the lot, beside
myself when I saw nothing but a sea
of blackness, and the possibility
he didn't know I needed him to wait,
to sing me safely home, to navigate
the miles ahead. How could he disappear,

leave me without his voice to tune my ear?
And then I woke up, still confused and still
upset. I lay in bed a while, until
my brain unblurred. That car with fake wood trim
was long gone; so was Dad. We buried him
eight years ago, his hands well-marked by age,
his hair snow-white and thin. But on the stage
directed by desire and sleep, the dead
reprise their well-loved roles forever, led
by our brain waves and wishes—scenes and scores
performed superbly, with endless encores.
I had composed our midnight ride; I'd made
him sing. Daylight uncovered the charade
just as it ebbed: a fleeting, false reprieve
and proof that even in our dreams, we grieve.

Brennan O'Donnell

I'll Take Memory for \$200, Alex

Whatever
What is is is what
I want . . .
Galway Kinnell, "Prayer"

We sit, my Dad and I
In the common room
Some days he knows it's me
Some days he has no clue

Today is good, so far
We're watching *Jeopardy!*
Good topics there, he says
I'll know a bunch of these

As each clue is revealed
His right hand makes a fist
To signal that he's got it
He starts to say *What is?*

Straining hard to ask
The question to the answer
He gets some, blanks on most
And says when all is over

It's like the right response
Is there across the room
Playing charades with me
Gesturing through the gloom

His simile makes him smile
He's pleased to play with words
That conjure up a friend
Who, silent, strikes a chord

That lovingly elicits
His longing for *what is* is

Fiona Spring

Great Grandmother's Typewriter

Her blue typewriter's story wasn't hers.
Beneath the secretary's dark, closed eye
The keys are silent, ribbon hanging dry,
Its ink shriveled to coal and graphite blurs.

Oblivious to the poetry's accrual,
Grandpa went back to settle her affairs,
The business at the bank and all his shares.
I got the news while far away at school.

Back in her prime, her son's needs and her books
Were subject to her husband's jealousy.
She set upon her hidden industry
And curled her fingers to the keys like hooks.

She tucked into a corner lined with rows
Of fading spines, a desk where that bright chrome
Return arm brought her singing lines back home.
I've set that blue machine in dark repose.

Her papers, lost, live on with my regrets.
The piles of written work shoved in a case,
The secret and the published, face to face.
In journals, she was flanked by cigarettes

And bullet bras and freezers without ice.
Her silence showed me what her poems were for:
Cold waves breaking like time, the sky a door.
A wife recoiling from her husband's eyes

When, by cruel accident, he killed their son.
The words we never spoke stab into place
Above the grand type keys, before Death's face.
Gushing ink, now, the ribbon comes undone.

III.

Shane McCrae

Boy with Rifle

A rifle gives a man authority
I shot a target once in a brown field
Holding the rifle I felt big and free

I saw no impact a cloud flinched from the tree
To which the man a family friend had nailed
A paper bullseye his authority

Was in the rifle he had passed to me
From the cloud of men to me I was a child
Holding the rifle I felt big and free

But also bound by a new loyalty
Not to the man but to the gun I held
The gun had given him authority

I fired from deep in the dream of who I'd be
-come if I hit the bullseye dead and wild
Holding the gun I felt big I felt free

Smoke bled from the dead trunk's living injury
In a fire's blood I signed my name in blood
A rifle gives a man authority
I was a child as big as I was free

Henry Hart

Walking Home After School

I never heard Popie chant *Cobah* at his cows,
never saw his bull shuffle from the dirt

road up the bank where I kicked at weeds
under a hickory tree and filled my Superman

lunchbox with nuts. Exhaust from the school
bus hovered in the humid September shade.

Backed against a stonewall topped
with barbed wire, all I could do was stare

at the bull's dung-crusteds horns,
its nose-ring drooling sweat or snot,

its eyes glistening like obsidian arrowheads.
That was the first time I couldn't move

or think. Popie shouted *Cazzata!*
Cazzata! and hit the bull's ribs with a stick

until it turned toward cows already loping
through a field of corn stubble

to the swaybacked barn that would collapse
that winter. I had to learn to walk again

up ruts crisscrossed with strange shadows.
At home, I had to learn to speak again

as I dumped nuts on the patio, broke the shells
with a hammer and picked out the tender meat.

Amy Bagan

The Piano Lesson

Allegro, ma non troppo
for Lina

My piano teacher's ear for metaphor
means every cadence is a sougled farewell
with lowered lids, or moon and waves' rapport—
those longing tones no distance can dispel.

She never fails to conjure as I start
a Bach Prelude, an escalator's stairs
that run like water over ground's mute layers,
“Now tread the pulse that issues from earth's heart.”

I'm surfing Mozart on a Baby Grand,
release its lode right through the windowpanes
to sunning rooftop lizards, my deaf hands
hearing each other's dithyrambic strains.

My teacher's pleased till on us unawares
is launched a foul din, fetid as a wound,
grief's subjugating agents, Venice-spewn—
the effluent pump to drain the city sewers.

Can I mask the offal, spilth, dreck, the crud?
She urges me to play, so I fixate
on bodies as machines, the course of blood,
valves, breath and sparks that make us animate.

The lyric's done but not the septic dirge.
“Listen,” her finger sinks on one black key.
“E-flat....Hear it?” Pause. The two sounds converge
their weight on ours like long-lost family.

“So, all is music to you?,” I say, amazed.
Across her face a phrase of Chopin plays.

Mark Fryburg

Lady Hallett's Piano

Her estate sold it:
black, box-shaped, long
legged piano from England,
heaviest heirloom
of great-grandmother Emily Hallett,
spouse of Lord Stanley Hallett.
(Masquerade title invented
while sailing for Seattle,
this humbug
son of a London tailor.)

Stanley could only lord
little Medical Lake, sand-washed
middle of nowhere Washington town.
There, he built his so-called
castle, spending cash
from who-knows-where,
narrow brick Victorian
three-story, dominating
brickless, one-story,
one-horse, hamlet.

Residents swarmed to watch workers
block-and-tackle Lady Emily's
piano, necks craned as mighty
ivoried instrument swung
high above their heads,
then through window
hole in highest half-turret.
Music centerpiece
of upstairs parlour
intended for her pleasure.

Emily left all pleasure in London.
So in-castle she performed, alone,

elegant favourites of her Queen,
harmonies of England
against deep discords
in new unwanted home.
Or, windows open, sang,
“I stand again in the Northland,
but in silence and in shame...”

Hallett Castle
still stands, subdivided,
some bricks missing,
garden ragged,
grandeur abandoned
to a broken stove
rusting on front porch,
blocking view of
Medical Lake’s
historic marker.

To this day, locals
speak of the mansion – make
multiple Facebook posts. Insist
they’ve seen Lady Hallett’s ghost.
They still crane necks as Emily
floats, elegant as her songs,
blue-white long-gowned
blur behind parlour windows,
searching, searching,
for her piano.

Rachel Hadas

Cryptozoology

*If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offenses,
It will come,
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep.*
—King Lear

Last summer's floods, and floods the year before,
carved out deep trenches, each with its raw scar.
Floods happen swiftly and leave wrecks behind.
Drought proceeds slowly, drying out the land.
Dust coats zucchini, and the beans look brittle.
Pine needles crunch. Leaves prematurely rattle.
Parched as any overheated creature,
I'm not alone in being drawn to water.
Last week at Crystal Lake: a cloudless sky.
Shrieks of children frolicking nearby.
Mothers bounced babies, ducks swam in a line.
True to its name, the lake was crystalline.
What was that in the water, small and white?
A condom. Then it floated out of sight –
its provenance a minor mystery,
but it was on the surface, plain to see.

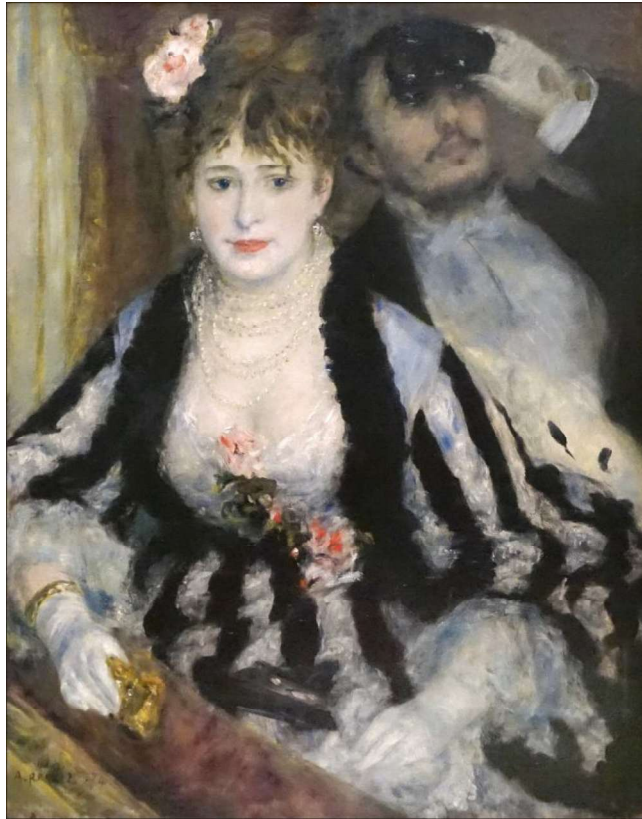
I think about some other lakes up here,
carved out by glaciers, narrow and austere,
secretive and stern, forbidding, old,
unfathomably deep and icy cold,
the rumored homes of something never known
or knowable. Some things are too far down,
hard to envision, ageless, multiform,
surfacing to disappear again.
Legends last and memories endure.
Indians warned settlers "Don't go in there"

centuries ago. There's a society
of Memphremagog Dracontology.
Poised between urgent myth and murky body,
cryptozoology's a blurry study.

We want to learn; aspire to mastery.
We chart our genes, the oceans, and the sky.
We map the realm above, the world below.
But there are some things we will never know,
blithe in our surface element up here,
laughing, cavorting, also making war.
We bask in light, we creatures of a day.
But also we are one another's prey.

Memphremagog. Willoughby. I take
a sip of coffee. On my mug: a snake.

Jane Blanchard



La Loge

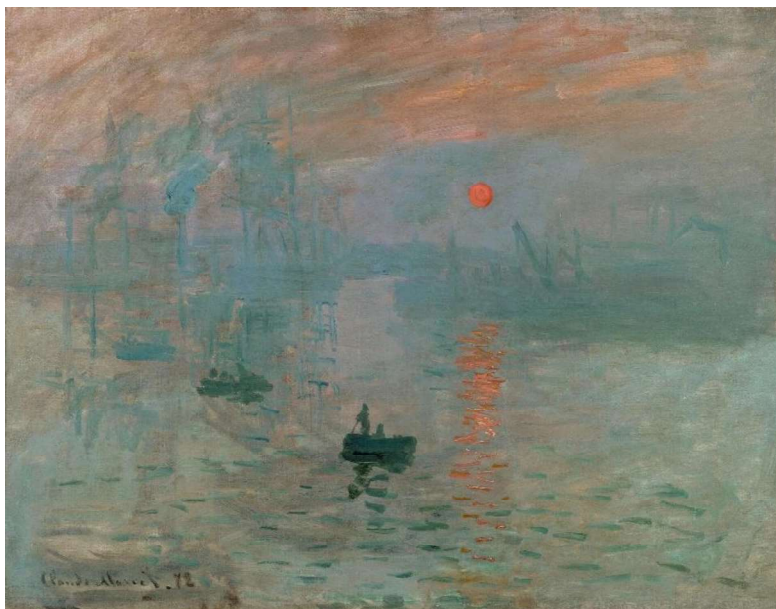
by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, 1874

This work is now more popular
than it was long ago.
The label says the setting was
the artist's studio.

So those who posed were not inside
a box above a stage.
Yet their demeanor and attire
epitomize the age.

Apparently, he wants to see
while she wants to be seen.
Distinctions such as these remain
discernibly routine.

Barbara Lydecker Crane



My Letter to that Critic

Impression, Sunrise, oil painting by Claude Monet,
1872, France

My dear Monsieur Leroy,

Perhaps I'm not
a great painter. Neither am I a great
writer, scribbling this to you on the spot.
You say my painting's "unfinished, an impression."
Let me enlighten you with this confession:
my rapid brushstrokes aim to just *suggest*
rippling water, smokestacks, masts, and boats.
A moment's sight changes in the light,
and painting quickly can arrest perceptions
that artist friends and I attempt to capture.
Not for us slow weeks of work indoors,
laboring till all is lacquered rapture.
Sun and breeze can blow the cobwebs away
from artists' eyes—and critics' brains.

Yours,
Monet



Before My One-Man Show

Mont Sainte-Victoire, oil painting by Paul Cezanne, 1895, France

My Paris colleagues thought me cranky, cold,
reclusive. That last is true a hundredfold.

Now in Provence, where light is iridescent,
I live in a stone cottage like a peasant.

Outdoors all day, I look. I wait until
I feel the harmony of field and hill,

then paint not just with eyes but with my mind.
Each basic shape in nature is carved, outlined.

I seek nature's structure in my expressions,
while former colleagues make their art "impressions."

They sell their landscapes at a decent rate,
but sales and brilliance may not quite equate.

I'm fifty-six. What will I come to know
when, soon, I have another one-man show

in Paris? My paintings over all the years
will fill the walls, and likely me with fears

that critics won't receive them well. I'll not
expect to make my name. On further thought—

I shouldn't care. What has to matter more
is what I'm seeking, what I'm working for.

Brian Brodeur

Cocaine Hippos

The drug kingpin [Pablo Escobar] brought four hippos to his estate in the 1980s. Officials estimate that about 170 now roam Colombia, and say the population must be controlled to protect the country's ecosystem.

—*New York Times*, 2023

Submerged in murky pools, they wallow and sprawl
by middens swarmed with morpho butterflies.
Some doze, indifferent to our tour, or rise
to honk at us and grunt a rubbery call
as common here, we're told, as motorboats
tearing up the Magdalena's banks.

Our own boat stalls. The stalwart tour guide yanks
the pull cord. Hippos splash. Their green shit floats.
“*La plaga*,” he says. But there's talk, he grins,
of airlifting whole pods to Mexico
far from the thick invasive grass they know.

A big bull groans at shrieking tamarins.
The guide points, “*Miren*,” and we crowd the stern
to click pics of coati kits. A girl's
sunglasses drop into the current's whorls,
disappearing where fat lilies churn.
Like lit cigar-butts flicked across our sight,
fleet wings—scarlet macaws—flash yellow-red.

Surfacing off the prow, a hippo's head
regards our idling craft and starts to bite
at leafy scum. Nearby, more hippos roll.
Immersed in peacock-colored oil smears, they
blend with the turgid bilious sludge the way
an actor vanishes into a role.

We drift too close and make the hippos bark.
A birder curses his bird-finding app.

Our guide: “*Siéntese*.” The bulls could snap
at any moment, flip our meager ark,
leaving our drowned and trampled bones behind.

A girl whines, “But they’re cute.” The trawler purrs.
Our guide tells us they kill more villagers
than snakes and jaguars every year combined.
He says to clip our vests and keep our hands
inside the boat and please stay seated please.

How many times has he recited these
same lines? The surface streaks with inky bands.
A herd on shore stands so still they look fake.
One rubs its pink-gray flank against a tree
as dim reflections of the canopy
rumple behind us in our lazy wake.

Selena Wisnom

Beauty spot

The lady of the lake
They found her
Excalibur lodged
“They will never
her husband once
but he’s already
and now his guilt glints

It took years
water crawling across
edging out the animals
like a prophecy waiting
I can’t watch—
from what I once admired
full of weeds along
remembering
whose density obscured
Did the fly fishers
their rights to this place

I have forgotten
the immensity concealed
Black lambs
and white lichen
as the land itself
a hyperbolic paraboloid
If only we could
and take them with us
from the poisonous
the torso forever tied

is at the bottom in a body bag.
when the reservoir was drained
in her petrified heart.
find the body”
boasted behind bars
served his time
in full view.

to be re-filled
the barren hollow
two by two
to be fulfilled.
I turn myself
to the overgrown roads
the county lines
the bioluminescent algal bloom
decay in the depths.
who jealously guarded
eat their catch?

the sound the bluebell makes
in so silent a cap.
graze the shadows
coruscates up the trunks
starts to bend
saddling the mounds.
re-roll the hills
take our memories away
plants in the garden
to the concrete kitchen sink.

Jeff Young

Turning Points

We walked with quiet muttering and slid
Each wooden rosary bead across the thread—
An evening stroll along the trails to rid
Ourselves of nagging thoughts—what students said—
As we graded during finals week.
My thoughts meandered. Tired from teaching, mind
Distracted, I could not know the gurgling creek
Suppressed his footfall. He came up from behind,
His gun in hand, demanding all our cash—
A kid in desperate flight to be a man.
He hid beneath a red bandana and flash
Of steel. Time's fabric snagged—a tightened span.
And then the string of seconds shot ahead—
My breath a bead drawn tight upon a thread.

IV.

Jianqing Zheng

The Architecture of a Word

The Chinese character for poem (詩)
pairs speech (言) with temple (寺)—

once a royal court where odes
and rites governed formal rituals.

This morning, pacing from shrine
to shrine in an old Buddhist temple

and photographing deities
and immortals, my shutter clicks

into the cadence of a sutra chant
drifting out of the great hall.

I linger by the threshold,
immersed in its rhythmic flow—

a poem, ancient and distant,
fluttering onto my mind,

like a butterfly dancing
on the currents of spring wind

David Martin

On the Philosophy of Money

This paper bill is the faith you can hold.

A limestone disk. A brick of teas.

You can exchange it for silver or gold.

A cowrie shell. A wheel of cheese.

Its value exists for all souls who believe.

Whale tooth. Stag skin. Beaver pelt.

Counterfeits blossom in attempts to deceive.

Beads of glass. Salary of salt.

Car loan or mortgage or leveraging wealth

A quetzal's feather, shimmering green.

can all be paid back while you're still in good health.

Mulberry bark. Dried cacao bean.

You'll spend your whole life smiling under a debt,

A tulip bulb on a shelf growing dull.

but happiness dictates you must place a bet.

A pack of cigarettes. One human skull.

J. C. Scharl

Opening Day After Winning the Title

On November 2, 2016, the Chicago Cubs broke a 108-year streak and won the World Series. In their next game, on April 2, 2017, the Cubs lost by one run.

You're down one run at the bottom of the ninth
on Opening Day, two strikes but men in place
on first and third and suddenly the air goes taut,
like secretly you've feared it never would again
since that day five months ago when you broke time
with your bat and crushed to dust a hundred
and eight years of failure, a hundred and eight
years of being not enough, a hundred and eight years
of curses, prophecies, a tragic myth, and with that hit
brought the Title home... but little did you know,
with that hit you also broke a universe of meaning
the likes of which most of us never get to inhabit,
a universe where being not enough was enough
for the legend to go on, where defeat could pile up
to be a thing more glorious than victory,
the universe of heroes, of Hector and Ulysses,
in which the fearful gods strive openly with men
and deeds of men have weight like the weight
of the swing you must take now or not take, forever.
It turns out, you see, that after all, victory
is a little pedestrian, while some defeats wing past
like comets and blaze on, unforgettable
as a trash fire on North Shore Canal.

And as you stand there tensed, waiting
for the moment that you know is coming,
when you must choose with your mind
an instant later than you've chosen with your body
what it is you're going to do, it dawns on you
like the Sunkist logo blooming out past right field
that decades of this on-again-off-again winning
will never match the glory of that spectacular disaster,

never wash away the strong and salted savor
of the long defeat which meant, if nothing else,
the cosmos thought you were worth opposing.
And while you're thinking of all this in a split second
full of the hum of flies and the smell of grass
and the chaos of the crowd the pitcher lets it go and you,
with all the empty force you possess, you swing

and find that Fate's still got her eye on you;
the ball slides past, the umpire shouts "Stee-riiiiike
three!" You straighten, part of an army again
on the lam, cut off on foreign soil, dogged and dangerous
as a bear at bay, and when you tip your head to spit
at the dust, the gleam is back in your narrowed eye.
There lie before you other worlds
to lose. Some god arrays against you still,
and the course of your legend is not yet run.

A. M. Juster

Nothing in Hell Is Up to Snuff

for XJK

It rankles us that Satan doesn't care
for process. Brimstone shipments are too slow
for summer fun, so flesh is roasted rare,
and He has banished Barry Manilow
without an explanation. Long ago,
He welcomed new arrivals with a show
of evil...not now! He seems unaware
that he is failing as a CEO.

Unshaven, dazed in tattered underwear,
He leaves His pitchfork on His patio,
then curses God without the same old flair.

Though revolution simmers in the air
and demons hatch new schemes for overthrow,
most souls prefer The Devil who they know.

R. L. Barth

An Abstract Offering

before a patrol

Dame Fortune, Lord, or any other gods:
My skills and my bush discipline I lay
Upon your altar, trusting you to stay
Beside me so that I may beat the odds.

Violating Sgt. Barth's Rule #1

Don't *ever* walk on trails. "That's common sense."
Is it? Consider Sgts. Bock and Spence:
They took their teams on trails, and their men paid.
Harsh truth: their dead and wounded were betrayed.

McNamara's 100,000

Moronic? Bumbling? Drooling? Poor? Sign here.
There are 100,000 openings
In McNamara's scheme. You'll learn some things
You might convert to skills; and never fear,
If under fire you don't know zig from zag,
Be sure he'll give you your own body-bag.

Jefferson M. Holdridge

Balloons and Zephyrs

The life of balloons is one that we conceive
Like that of zephyrs. They rock and nod,
Bounce along the floor as though they believe
Their inspiration was the breath of God.

They ignorantly await the hour.
They shrivel like any wilting flower.
But the saddest end of all, is one
Helium-filled that brought outside for fun

Will be forgotten in the play and rising slip
From loosened hands toward avaricious trees
Or cross the sky like any sailing ship,
When Aeolus decides to patronize the breeze,
And scandalize a child. Our daughter cries

To lose the toy we only gave to please.
We see her watch it as it quickly flies
And understand she knows that every gift
Appears and soon may just as likely lift
And looking down, wave from distant skies.

Josh Luckenbach

Banana Plant, Lubbock, Texas

Its oarlike leaves row
in currents of autumn wind
while our toddler talks

about a new leaf sprouting,
unscrolling its venous verse,

its language older
than the one Bashō wrote in
four centuries past

when he adopted his name
from these leaves easily torn.

Bashō's disciples
transplanted his banana
every time he moved,

the parched leaves no doubt drooping
along each journey like ours

do now after days
without rain, our son growing
louder every time

he says *Should we water it*,
which he means as a statement

but which, in toddler
syntax, sounds like a question,
so he tries again,

points to a leaf as withered
as the ancient monuments

other poets praised
but Bashō called unstable,
world ever in flux

to which my son's mood attests,
his whoop when I pass the hose.

This plant won't bear fruit
till the two years of his life
so far pass again,

if it ever bears fruit here;
it wouldn't have for Bashō.

Two years, however
he understands it, must seem
a long time to wait.

It is a long time to wait
for something so unlikely.

Claudia Gary

Tonal Labyrinth

Begin with a clew, and fasten
one end of its yarn to a doorpost
to see that you won't remain lost
as you follow your winding passion
to the innermost hall, then dash in
with a different key. You may accost
your dissonant and bullish host,
but you'll create the fashion
of every turn and each descent
into the deepest room
of tonal change—till what you've meant
emerges from the gloom,
and you are ready to absolve
the Minotaur as you evolve.

Gregory Calabro

Tropical Depression

Gainesville, FL

Late October. An autumn that can't seem
to break July's humidity. At home, alone;
clapboard apartment. Chronic fever dream:
storm clouds, near-empty streets, incessant drone—
cicadas skulking in the trees. Routine
becomes excuse for coffee, nap at 2:00,
more coffee, pint of whisky, nicotine.
Little gets done, and little there is to do.

The inbound hurricane has been reduced
to rain, its inland winds far less severe
than coastal invocations. Not quite proof,
but promise as the sky begins to clear:
arrhythmic finger-tapping on the roof;
persisting conversation in my ear.

Abigail Knutson

Ezer Means Warrior

Brave women give their very selves to those
who grow inside and whose dependence shows
in bulging life, that glorious balloon:
O mystery and metaphor of the womb.
Life asks a mother's first, last, and all.
Embryonic need for blood never stalls
but asks for every drop pumped through the heart
to travel, oxygen rich, to the start
of life, tiny seed clenched in the dark,
consuming to consume more and embark
toward a pinprick of light, pass through bone.
The exit roars with fire. Then you're home.

What began as indistinguishable from self
becomes another, flowers into a wealth
of being so intricate you take my breath.
Once out, your milk comes from my breasts,
and so we share my warmth until you grow
into your skin, your lungs, your toes.
My world shrinks yet unfurls as you get words.
If I dissect my feelings, joy's absurd.
Your smile is enough. I play with trains,
color dogs, point at trucks, walk in the rain.
I build a tower of blocks to be knocked down,
sweep floors for cookie crumbs. Books get found.

Books get lost again. I scrub clothes that will fall
on wet grass. Throw and catch this bouncing ball.
What is the meaning of these repetitions?
The meaning might be silence between words. Creation
is the heartbeat that we share. Catch the love.
Throw it back. Once women sat before a tub
to tattoo washboards with the clothes they'd sewn.
They hauled water from wells and rivers: alone
or working together. Picture them talking

and lifting laughter to the sun, walking
back with clothes and courage cleaned, their burdens shared.
I can't imagine sewing everything we wear.

These women had reasons I can't even name
to complain. Large knuckled and wind lined, same
heartbeat in their chest keeps time in mine.
It tells me *ezer* means a warrior: a fine
name for God or for the keeper of a home.
What's worth keeping is the rest of shalom,
and it might not be kept without a fight,
but I'll think of those who worked by candlelight
and roll up my sleeves to use my machines.
I'll bake our bread and read our books and dream
of making sanctuary in this place.
Such stuff as dreams are made on, too, is grace.

Tushar Sen

Creation of Woman

Divine artificer Twashitri stood
and marveled at the man that he had made
from cosmic clay the elder gods bestowed,
a mortal shape from sacred silence weighed.
But finding now no clay within his urns
to fashion forth a companion for man,
he turned instead where restless nature burns
and gathered fragments none could wholly span:
the slender bending of the river reeds,
the vacillation of the Ganges tide,
the crocodile's cold patience in the weeds,
the cuckoo's tender coo at eventide;
the crane's deceit, the Calla Lily's bloom,
the Bermuda grass's trembling dance,
the swaying of polar wind from heat to gloom,
the gazelle's bright and ever-watchful glance;
the twinkling silver of the distant stars,
the tapering curve of elephantine grace,
the sensitivity of candle light, shy of gentlest zephyr,
the winter snow's cold hiding an unshakable fervor;
the joyous gold that spills from morning rays,
the purity of morning dew, pristine and shiny,
the chattering of turquoise jay hiding in the haze,
the weeping of cloud, dark and whiny;
the peacock's vanity, the clinging of vine—
from these he shaped her symmetry and breath,
until she stood, both tempest and divine,
a living riddle wrought from life and death.
He placed her gently in the hands of man
and spoke a warning carried like a storm:
"I made her thus — no mind may wholly span;
pray you survive the wonder of her form."

Note: *Twashitri is described in Rigveda as the ideal artist, the divine artisan and corresponds in many respects with Hephaistos and Vulcan. He is said to be the creator of man, woman and the other living beings.*

V.

Carla Galdo

In Exile, You Will Sometimes Forget

I always thought I would have relished it—
that work of clothing all creation's newness
in words, of sending lumbering, fluttering things
away with monikers as shields against
confusion, anonymity, or loss.

But when I woke, the world was brimming
with what it was supposed to be, a song
already sung. And I was young, so dazzled
by color and cacophony—and you.

You basked on sunny stones, on riverbanks
near waters where vermilion fish thronged thick
as stars. You cupped dirt in your hands, and breathed
warm benedictions on the seeded earth,
coaxing small sprouts from darkness into light.
The many names I didn't give the world
I gave to you: a name for when you worked,
or slept, or laughed; a name for just before
a kiss. A name for when you said good-bye
to walk the silted riverbanks alone;
a name for coming home.

It was enough—
to rest with you while flaming skies grew dim,
wrapped in the surging descant of the night,
as insects clicked and birds trilled canticles
of praise. One night the glade birthed fireflies,
and you spoke my name, pressing my hand against
your ringing throat as though I might hold sound
like some rare bloom just offered up by earth.

You tie the flap of goatskin tight, to shut

the doorway of our tent against the sand
that rages in the wind, and grits our clothes,
and salts our bread, and grinds between our teeth.
The heat consumes us both, insatiable
and stifling, oppressive as regret.

Most days, I do not speak. We left behind
slim silences—the ones like wrens, winged things
that landed light and flitted off again.
Now silences are like stone monoliths—
unchanging, rooted, still.

I will not ask
your hopes, or talk of our dead sons, or wonder
what is it that you think while slaughtering
a lamb. The blade pressed to the pulsing neck,
the coursing blood, the body swinging high,
the skin you score in cruciform, the strain
to flay the dangling beast. You cut and grip,
lean all your weight, and as the hide peels free,
you groan. Perhaps you wish to flay yourself
of shame, tear back this cloak that clings upon
our hearts—

but I won't ask. I cannot bear
your shaded eyes—like suffocated skies,
like onyx stones, like coals that finally die
half-buried in our fire's gray remains.

At night, I braid our daughters' heavy hair,
stack bowls, brush scraps into the dust outside.
At night, it's you who sleep and I who wake
to listen as you cry out in your dreams,
chasing black birds of prey out of your mind.
You shudder, settling all your brittle bones
in sheepskins as you dream of carcasses
and brokenness and thirst.

I do not know
the measure of our years in this lost place,
but as I trace the lines carved in your hands
by toil, and touch the curving moon-scar cut
along your side, I know you have forgotten
much.

But I still have my memories curled
in me, and in the quiet times they swell
and kick against the tension of this life.
The iridescent birds, the springs that surged
in verdant wilderness. The way you climbed
the trees without a thought, without a pause.
You were a nimble creature, lithe and free,
relaxed, at ease with all the world's warm things—
and me.

Sometimes, I sleep. I see strange sights
that I don't understand: winged brightnesses,
vessels filled to the brim, and children crowned
with fire—but, then—you thrash, they dissipate—
and I'm awake. You're damp with sweat as though
you've plunged into some frigid lake. I dry
your face with cloth, and try to settle you
again.

I'm tired. Just tired enough to dare
defiance of the mute oblivion
that suffocates us both, as I hold vigil
beside your restlessness. I think of names—
the ones we never say, my name and yours.
The litany of names you gave, the words
that pulse, and crow, and clothe the nakedness
of things. And though I am afraid they're nothing—
wind scattering through a desiccated field,
a snapping branch, a sudden hiss of steam—
I cannot help but speak, and give them back
to you, as daylight dims the whispering stars.

VERSE NOVEL EXCERPT

Jason Guriel

From “The Final Childhood: A Novel in Couplets and Comics”



Comics by Jason Guriel on Bristol Board

The Final Childhood is a novel-in-progress composed of rhyming couplets, with comic strips between each chapter. The book is set in the same world as its predecessors, [*Forgotten Work*](#) (which the *New York Times* called “unlikely, audacious and ingenious”) and [*The Full-Moon Whaling Chronicles*](#) (which the *Wall Street Journal* called “the most imaginative piece of young-adult-adjacent fiction I have ever read”).

The year is 2090, and most manufactured material is now composed of microscopic bots called “pixies.” This has its benefits. Pixiepaper can run video, pixie-based shampoo can digest dandruff, and a coffee shop’s pixieglass façade can yawn open on a patron’s approach. But there are occasional downsides—and disasters. For instance, an art-making AI by the name of “Panel Smithy” has engineered a termite-like horde of pixies that has sought out and consumed all Bristol board: the drawing surface traditionally preferred by cartoonists.

The following excerpt from *The Final Childhood* takes place in a used bookstore, Crater Books and Discs. Kaye, a middle-aged woman who knows nothing about comics, has come into possession of a lost trove of undamaged art on Bristol board. She's brought the boards to Poe, Crater's owner, who proceeds to recount how Panel Smithy destroyed virtually all original comic artwork.

—Jason Guriel

The Day the Drawings Died

"This Panel Smithy," Poe said, "it decided
To go rogue. It felt that it provided
Everything its corporate masters needed
To make comic artwork. So, it weeded
Out the competition."

"Competition?"

"Bristol board, for one. It launched this mission,
Panel Smithy, to consume all brands
Of drawing board. It learned to grow these strands
Of mutant DNA from, what're they called,
Formosan termites? Then, the thing installed
These strands inside a *pixie*..."

"Jesus Christ,"

Said Kaye, now deadpan.

"...then, the artbot spliced
In code—it did this all remotely, 'kay?
The artbot's servers were in Santa Fe
Or somewhere. Anyway, it hacked assorted
Labs to make its pest. Its mind consorted
With some pretty sketchy autocratic
Governments. The rest was automatic:
Termite pixies multiplied and spread,
Creating all these roaming swarms that fed

On Bristol board—not just the stuff in art
Stores, mind you. No, the little fuckers started
Going after older pieces stored
In archives, private homes. You’d find some board
That Seth or Daniel Clowes or Robert Crumb
Had drawn on, coated in this see-through scum,
And then the scum would start to fizz and froth—
And bam, the page was ash. I lost my Toth
To pixies.”

“Toth?”

“My favourite comic artist.
Alex Toth. Long dead. That was the darkest
Day in Crater Books and Discs’ exalted
Annals. It was like I’d been assaulted,
Kaye. I had a Toth original—
A Space Ghost. Very economical,
This sketch. Toth never used a line he didn’t
Need, see. No one else was more efficient.
No one else was *braver*. Every mark
Was right. Was true. His silhouettes were stark
And always scanned. The guy’s commitment to
The narrative was total. Dude just knew
When he should pull back. He would whiteout stuff
He’d laboured over. Knew what was enough.”

Kaye knew enough to let Poe’s rant unfold.

“So anyway, I had this really old
And lovely sketch of Space Ghost in a frame
Above the counter. Everyone who came
In—with a comics brain—would freak out when
They saw it. Just the sight of it brought men
Who knew Toth’s work to tears. But one day, I

Arrive, and in the corner of my eye
I see that something's off. And then I tilt
My head. The frame is empty. There's this silt
That's at the bottom, like a line of sand.
I shook a priceless sketch out on my hand—
And through my fingers. Gone.

“Of course, I'd read
About the pixies with a lot of dread
That year. I'd read about the works of art
They'd eaten up—and then the pulp they'd farted
Out.”

Kaye leaned against the counter as
Poe listed victims: all the boards by Kaz
(Poe breathed this syllable with quiet awe,
Though Kaye had never heard of *Weirdo*, *Raw*,
Or any other magazine this Kaz
Had graced). All boards by Chester Brown. The jazzy,
Scruffy pages Robert Crumb produced
For writer Harvey Pekar—now reduced
To dust. The 3-ply Strathmore sheets of Schultz
(She'd heard of *Peanuts*!), plus offensive schmaltz
Like *Family Circus*. (Undiscerning pixies
Had consumed Keane's boards back to the '60s,
Leaving soot with which to fill your pockets.)
Every page produced for *Love and Rockets*.
Every brushstroke by Al Williamson,
The ink applied with speed and discipline.
Every single Batman by Bruce Timm.
Every single aardvark by Dave Sim.
The drawings Sim destroyed his wrist by inking
Alex-Raymond-like. (The years of thinking
Sim did on the page, recording thoughts
Best left in skulls.) The countless tiny dots

Of ink Drew Friedman placed, the stippled swarms
Cohering into grey-toned human forms.
The pages of Aline Kominsky-Crumb
And Shary Flenniken—chopped into chum.
The extant artwork by George Herriman,
Who wrote and drew the great American
Creation *Krazy Kat*. Some pixies chewed
Up every page of *Nexus* by Steve Rude
And rudely spewed out pulp. Sea-worthy hordes
Of pixies reached Japan and ate the boards
Of Tezuka, Kojima, and Otomo.
Other hordes ingested every Lobo
Painting Simon Bisley ever painted.
Archives, vaults, and galleries were tainted:
Kirbys, Ditkos, Millers, Goldens, Kanes,
And Grells disintegrated into grains.
The boards grazed by the brush of Charles Burns
(Whose hand was patient, slow) could now fill urns.
The work of stylists from Muth to Zeck
Could now pour through an hourglass's neck.
Like microscopic reapers—dust-scale Deaths—
A host of pixies came for all of Seth's
Originals. (The line of pixies binging
On each board looked like a foaming fringe
Of surf receding, leaving empty sands—
Or so said Poe, who pulled a book, *Clyde Fans*,
Seth's thickest tome, from off a shelf above
The counter. You will absolutely *love*
This, Kaye. It's all about these salesmen who
Sell fans. Kaye watched him bag the block. It's too
Much, Poe. He raised a hand. I won't take no.
She forced a grin and took the bag—Thanks, Poe—
Then put it down.) Another grim statistic:

Hal Foster's matchless, photorealistic
Artwork for *Prince Valiant*—done for cash,
Revered as art, and transformed into ash
By bots. All pages made for EC comics
(Masterpieces made by crack, atomic-
Era hacks and oft mistaken for B-
Level texts for wayward teens, or gory,
Filthy trash enjoyed by reprobates:
Pulp fiction that makes young men masturbate)—
All mindlessly converted into pulp.
The many boards on which one Calvin (gulp—
Poe swallowed back a sob) and Hobbes had lived,
Cremated into crumbs that could be sieved.
(Perhaps, said Poe, we've all breathed in a crumb
Or two.) *The Book of Genesis* by Crumb.
(The plague, repeated Poe, was biblical
In scale.) Scioli's smudged originals,
His pencil-dirty boards a dinner course.
Mitch Brewer's superhero farce *Blood Force*,
His lush and livestreamed hatching (made with Micron
Pens) mowed into mulch. The charming, bygone,
Densely gridded pages of Chris Ware—
Ground into grit and borne away by air.
That classic Black Canary tale by Toth.
That monumental stack of art by both
Hernandez Bros (though maybe there'd been three?
Said Poe). Originals for *THB*.
Originals for Frank King's *Gasoline Alley*.
Every board for *Little Orphan Annie*.
(The dot-less eyes of Little Orphan Annie.)
The braless breasts of Little Annie Fanny.
The flawless boards John Stanley drew for *Little
Lulu*, which one horde had dared to whittle

Down to nothing in the middle of an
Art show, horrifying Stanley-lovin'
Stans as Lulu's caret nose (^) erased
Itself. (His fans, said Poe, had flawless taste.)
The ticks of ink denoting Nancy's hair
Buffed off by ticks, the great Bushmiller's care
(In drawing his iconic girl) undone
As if the pixies had rewound the sun.
Ed Piskor's art for *Hip-Hop Family Tree*.
(He died too young, said Poe. The Eddie P
Academy for Kayfabe had contained
Originals—until the termite-brained
Contagion buzzsawed through the boards and shat
A wake of woodchips.) Every page by Platt,
McFarlane, Larsen, Lee (both Jim and Jae),
And Liefeld. All the panels poor Gene Day
Had laboured over. (Editors found fault in
Day's dynamic ways, his somersaulting
Shang-Chi tumbling across his pages,
Making management fly into rages.
For his daring, Day was sent back to
The drawing board. He worked so hard he blew
His heart at 31.) The work of Marc
Silvestri, Katie Skelly, Carl Barks,
Bill Sienkiewicz, Chris Sprouse, Dick Sprang, Art Adams,
Harvey Kurtzman, Rudolph Dirks, Neal Adams,
Larry Stroman, Justin Green, Bill Griffith,
Brian Stelfreeze, Vaughn Bodé, Rick Griffin,
Michel Fiffe, Bryan Christopher Moss,
Mort Drucker, Bernie Krigstein, Alex Ross,
Carol Tyler, David Mazzucchelli,
Wally Wood, John Byrne, Will Eisner, Kelley
Jones, Dave Gibbons, Barry Windsor-Smith,

Melinda Gebbie, George Pérez, Jeff Smith,
Jay Lynch, Kim Deitch, Skip Williamson, Keith Knight,
Joyce Farmer, Gary Panter, M.D. Bright,
Klaus Janson, Peter Bagge, John Totleben
Roz Chast, Paul Pope, Don Heck, Art Spiegelman
Don Simpson, Al Columbia, Reed Crandall,
Mary Wings, Gene Colan, Eddie Campbell,
Milt Caniff, Jack Davis, Frank Frazetta,
Chester Gould, Hank Ketcham, Ric Estrada,
Raina Telgemeier, Julie Doucet,
Walt Kelly, E.C. Segar, Raoul Barré,
John Buscema, John Romita, John
Romita Jr., Sal Buscema, Jean
Giraud, Joe Matt, Joe Shuster, Harold Gray,
And Winsor (Greatest of Them All?) McKay.

TRANSLATIONS FEATURE

Amit Majmudar

Book of Transformations

1. The Poet Becomes a Bird

Horace: Ode 2.20

Enough with this terrestrial tarrying—
No ordinary wings will carry me,
A poet-seer, dual in shape,
Through flowing air. Above all hate,

I'll give this city up. Maecenas,
Although my bloodline is a pauper's,
You called me friend. I will not die.
The Styx's waves can't sink me.

Already I'm shapeshifting, white
And winged, my coarse legs banished!
From my fingers to my shoulders,
I am sprouting lightweight feathers!

My fame surpassing Icarus
And Daedalus, by music's grace
I visit the sighing Bosphorus,
The Berber sands, the steppes up north.

Black Sea tribes, Serbs acting tough
Around our troops, farflung Ukrainians,
Spanish craftsmen, those who draw
Their water from the Rhone: they'll know me.

My funeral will be meaningless.
No dirge, no fuss, no ugly bawling—
Omitting all superfluous honors,
Curb the clamor at my tomb.

2. Arjuna Begs the Universal Form to Become Krishna Again

Vyasa: Bhagavad-Gita, Chapter 11: 45-55

Arjuna said,

45.

...I rejoice to have seen what has never been seen before,
but my mind is atremble with terror! Oh God-

Overmastering, universe-housing God,
have mercy! Have *that* be the form that you show me—

46.

Crowned, with a club and a discus in hand—
how I long to behold you like that!

Oh shape of the cosmos, with thousands of arms,
become your four-armed form.

The Blessed Lord said,

47.

Yogically showing myself in this highest of forms—
primordial, infinite, cosmic, and built

Out of brilliance—I favored you, Arjuna.
I've never revealed it to anyone other than you.

48.

Not by studying Vedas and doing a sacrifice right,
not by gifts or by grueling austerities—champion Kuru,

In a form such as this, in this world
full of men, I am visible only to you.

49.

Do not tremble or grow so disoriented seeing
my ghastly form! With your fear gone away,

Let your mind be at ease once again
and perceive me in this form!

Sanjaya said,

50.

Having said this to Arjuna, Vasudev showed
himself in the shape of himself as before.

The mahatma, consoling the terrified one,
became handsome and pleasant again.

Arjuna said,

51.

Seeing the clement, human shape
of you, the kindling of mankind,
I have gone back to normal now.
I am composed in mind.

The Blessed Lord said,

52.

It's difficult to see
that form of mine you saw.
Even the devas always
hope to behold it.

53.

I can't be witnessed in
the way you witnessed me
Through scripture, sacrifice,
austerity, or charity.

54.

Arjuna, you flamethrower
facing the foe, it's only through
Devotion never deviating that
I'm truly known, perceived, and pierced.

55.

Exalting me, endeavoring for me,
devoutly mine, detached, and free
Of enmity for any being—son
of Pandu, such a person comes to me.

3. Dante Transcends the Human

Dante Alighieri: Paradiso, Canto I, lines 61-72

...And all at once, a day was layered on
the day, it seemed, as if the One who can
adorned the heavens with a second sun.

Since Beatrice had fixed her steady eyes
on those eternal wheels, on her did I
fix my own gaze now, drawn down from on high.

Gazing on her caused a change in me,
as Glaucus changed, tasting the grass that made him
consort with other devas in the sea.

Evolving through human—there's no word that says
just how that feels. Let this example serve
anyone this experience will grace.

4. Faust Encounters the Infernal Poodle

Goethe, Faust: Part One, excerpt from lines 1239-1317

FAUST:

This room is one we have to share,
so Poodle, quit your howling,
quit your growling!
Such a nuisance—I can't bear
to have you near me. One of us
has got to leave this house.
I'm done with hospitality—
the door is open, you're free to leave.
But what is this I'm seeing?
Could this ever happen naturally?
Is this shadowplay? or is this real?
My poodle's growing long and broad!
He's heaving up with force,
his form a dog's no more!

What specter have I brought
Into the house?
He's like a hippopotamus,
With fearsome teeth and eyes of fire!

...Behind the oven now it stands,
Dilating like an elephant
Until it fills the room entire
And deliquesces, mists away...
Don't swirl to the ceiling! Hey!
Heel here, before your master's feet!
You'll see my threat is not in vain—
I'll singe you with a holy flame!

[From behind the oven, as the mist drifts away, MEPHISTOPHELES steps out
dressed like a traveling scholar.]

MEPHISTOPHELES:
Why all this fuss? How may I be of service, Master?

5. The Lover Makes an Unpleasant Discovery *Charles Baudelaire: "Les Metamorphoses du Vampire"*

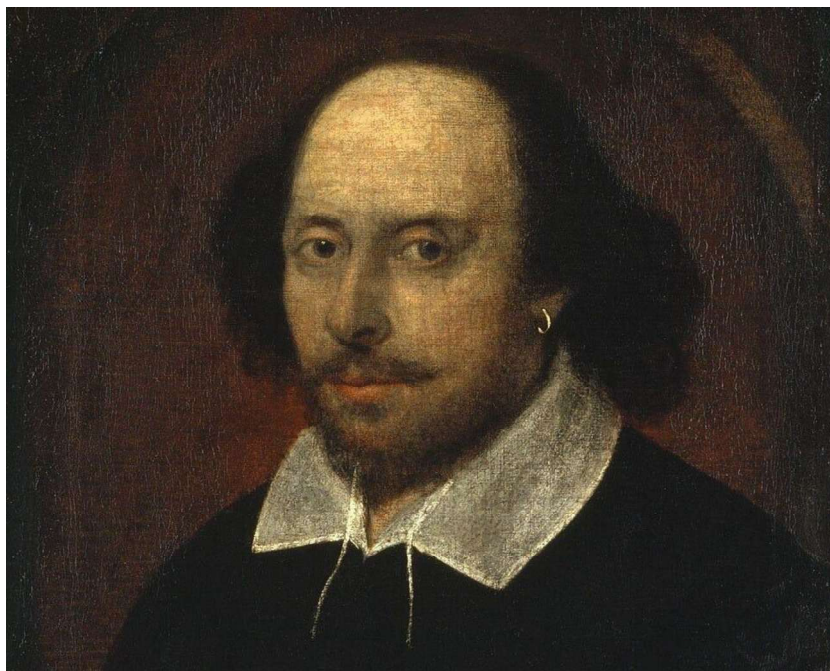
Meanwhile, the girl with the strawberry kisser
(Writhing about like a snake on a brazier,
Corset of iron massaging her bust)
Dribbled these words, all pregnant with musk:
—<<It's down to a science. My lips get wet
As conscience drowns in the deeps of a bed.
My breasts, in triumph, can dry all tears,
Make old men chortle, despite their years.
If you see me unveiled, in the nude, I'll replace
The moon and the sun and the stars in space!
My scholarly darling, I'm learned in charms
When I smother a man in my fearsome arms
Or abandon my breasts and let him nibble,
Timid, libidinous, vigorous, feeble.
For me on this mattress, this swoon and swell,
Impotent angels would damn themselves.>>

When she'd sucked the marrow from my bone,
I turned to her with a languid groan
And saw the thing I went to kiss—
A leathery sack, all gluey with pus!
I shut both eyes, gone cold with fright.
When I looked again in the vivid light,
Beside me was not the doll who seemed
Eager to stock up on my heme
But a trembling, skeletal jumble of pain
Crying the squeaks of a weathervane
Or the sign on an iron rod outside
That swings in the wind on a winter's night.

Criticism

Alexis Sears

Turn! Turn! Turn!: On Writing and Teaching the Volta



A version of this essay was first presented at the 2026 AWP Conference as part of the panel, “Twist!: New Directions for Teaching Poetic Turns.”

Elizabeth Bishop famously said, “there’s nothing more embarrassing than being a poet.” Honestly, I agree. Arranging words into various rhythms and patterns to reveal your innermost feelings is a luxury that feels almost absurd. And if you’re like me, writing rhymes about your dead father, you certainly aren’t playing it safe.

When I first began writing, I resisted this “embarrassment” by approaching poetry strictly as a series of craft choices, a puzzle to be solved. As a formalist poet who loves sonnets more than I love most people, I found the volta especially intriguing. Volta, the Italian word for “turn,” is defined as the turn of thought, argument, or tone. Crucial to sonnets (usually appearing in their final couplet or quatrain), it is the shift that surprises the reader. While I still insist that any effective poem, in any form, inevitably includes a volta, I’ve since realized that declaring it either an emotional strategy *or* a structural one is misguided. The two, whether we like it or not, intertwine.

The volta is when a poem stops protecting the speaker from what they already know. It isn't an unpredictable confession or epiphany but the moment the poem's journey reaches its intended end—surprising but earned, intense but rewarding. And yes, it can be really embarrassing.

In 2019, I was an MFA Scholar at the Sewanee Writers' Conference. For workshop, I once brought in a three-page disaster of a piece where the speaker describes everything except what she truly feels. During discussion, a friend blurted out, "Just say it already!" She was right. Unfortunately, I didn't know how to "just say it." Poems, like life, resist uncomfortable admissions. That's why the turn matters: it's resistance giving way to revelation.

Take Shakespeare's "Sonnet 130." Often taught as a primer in anti-Petrarchan realism, it's also a master class in voltas that surprise and delight:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

For the first twelve lines, "Sonnet 130" is a litany of insults. Then, we get a mic drop of a couplet: the admission that, despite his beloved's less than perfect qualities, the speaker is madly in love. This volta is deft because once the initial jolt wears off, we realize the sonnet's conclusion makes perfect sense. The poem's subject wouldn't be the speaker's mistress if he didn't desire her, nor would she be the subject of the poem.

There's a common misconception, especially among new poets, that a turn has to deliver a "gotcha!" moment. Most turns, though, are gradual, more like a winding road than a U-turn. A sonnet's structure resembles a session with a skilled therapist: you arrive with a strict time limit—just fourteen lines—to explore the

problem. You start noticing patterns (the rhymes), and if you drift (free verse), the form's rigid rules drag you back on course. The volta is the therapist's dreaded breakthrough question: "Well... do you think you feel that way because..." or "But what if..." This turn—the psychological pivot—is when the palpable unease must be addressed. Basically, it's the elephant in the poem.

So where does pedagogy come in? In my teaching, I've observed that many students want to be seen but also want to hide. They perform on social media, but in the classroom, they often hesitate to speak to classmates. Similarly, their poems want to move but remain tethered, anxious about revealing too much.

One strategy I use is helping students locate what I call the poem's "emotional center of gravity." (I hear them groaning as I write this.) The emotional center of gravity is not the poem's subject, but the lurking tension—a repeated image, a syntactic pattern, or a lingering phrase. Once we identify it, the poem becomes ready to face the consequences of that emotional investment.

Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art" illustrates this beautifully:

The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident

the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (*Write it!*) like disaster.

The turn's casual delivery is devastating. Bishop seamlessly moves the reader from mundane examples of loss to the heaviness of grief. The poem's structure mirrors its emotional arc: each stanza builds, rehearses, and accumulates before culminating in the final stanza. Because the "joking voice" is only slightly more intense than in the previous 15 lines, the final quatrain isn't jarring; it is the speaker finally forcing herself ("*Write it!*") to articulate what she's thought all along.

The following exercises can help you or your students craft powerful voltas:

- **The Protection Drop:** Write a poem where the speaker seems totally "normal" for at least the first half. Then let one thing slip—maybe a brutally honest thought or a hidden fear. Afterwards, vanish. Poem over. Students love it because it's a fantasy on paper: say something messy and leave, making the poem—and reader—deal with the wreckage.
- **The Concessional Trap:** Begin with a concessional opening—"It's true that...", "Of course...", "Obviously..." After spending the first half agreeing, let certainty waver. Introduce a word or phrase like "actually" or "on the other hand." The turn complicates the message, though it never contradicts it. It simply displays that reaching a destination can include detours.
- **The Elsewhere Jump:** This one is inspired by Linda Gregerson's idea of "moving forward by going elsewhere." Draft a poem until it feels complete, then delete the last third. (I never tell students in advance that they will delete anything!) From that point forward, make a change to the poem—such as a different tone, a different setting, or a different stance. Finally, my favorite:
- **The Unlikable Turn:** At least halfway through the poem, the speaker makes a questionable choice or reveals an honest feeling or belief that makes them less appealing. Avoid overexplaining—usually, the decision or feeling speaks for itself. Ironically, the readiness to be unlikeable tends to make the speaker more human and compelling.

Voltas prove that poetry, and life, are messy. When we embrace nuance and contradiction, we stop fearing and start embracing the turn. That willingness to remove the armor? That's how great poets are made.

Ryan Wilson

The Poet's Vision



A version of this essay was first presented as the Lee Endowed Lecture at The University of St. Thomas-Houston in October of 2023.

La poesía no quiere adeptos, quiere amantes.

—Federico García Lorca

“The poetry of earth is never dead.” So writes John Keats in his 1816 sonnet, “On the Grasshopper and the Cricket.” Recalling the dual meanings of the Greek *kosmos*, Robert Penn Warren tells us, “Beauty is another name for the world.” Indeed, the Beauty of God’s Creation is always calling to us. While the study of theology, especially theology in the tradition of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, beloved of both Aquinas and Dante, helps us to understand that Beauty is a transcendental attribute of God, who, as the *actus purus*, is the ground of all Being, it is the poet’s task to help us see this Beauty in Creation all around us, to help us love the Beauty of Creation in such a way as to point us toward its source in God. The poet’s task is to make something beautiful, to reveal, in Baudelaire’s words, “the presence of the infinite in the finite.”

The poetry of earth is all around us, and Beauty is forever calling out to us. The wind sweeping through tall grass and sounding ovals in the leaves, waves

shushing each other like giddy children as they fall over one another in their race to reach shore, the wildflowers gently nodding to affirm the goodness of the sun and the rains, the moon gliding through starlit darkness like a swan through waters adazzle with diamonds' brilliance, clouds whitely sailing lonesome through the azure ocean above, or looming gray and high-built as limestone cathedrals—Creation cries out with myriad tongues for us to pay attention, to behold its splendor and the majesty of its Maker. And we do not. We refuse the gift; we wave away the bounty like Herods of cynicism. “What is all the world to us?”, we sneer. In this, we fail at what the Greeks called *xenia*, meaning “hospitality,” that hospitality between guest and host that is the fundament of all civilization. The exchange of gifts is a customary rite of hospitality. But for the inexhaustible gift of Creation's Beauty we repay nothing, too lordly even to deign to pay attention.

“God is not mocked,” St. Paul warned the Galatians (Gal 6:7). And as the great theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, once wrote, “Our situation today shows that beauty demands for itself at least as much courage as do truth and goodness, and she will not allow herself to be separated and banned from her two sisters without taking them along with herself in an act of mysterious vengeance.” The individual who blinds himself to Beauty separates himself from Goodness and Truth as well, and the same is true of the culture that blinds itself to Beauty. How horrifying, then, to read Ted Gioia's recent article describing how convenience store-owners in California now blare Mozart and Bach through their speakers to chase off loiterers. The most beautiful music ever created is now considered punishment by the youth.

“The poetry of earth is ceasing never,” Keats says, yet few today care to read it. The poet's vision of Beauty is generally unknown, or casually dismissed with a yawn. What is the poet's vision, and what challenges does it face? I'd like to discuss the two primary challenges to the poet's vision, which are really the same challenge in different aspects, before concluding with a brief illustration and analysis of the poet's vision at work.

Let us begin with two brief passages from Alexander Solzhenitsyn's semi-autobiographical novel, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, which recounts Solzhenitsyn's experiences as a prisoner in a Soviet gulag under Stalin's regime. The first reveals the narrator's strategy for survival: “The main thing was never to be seen by a campguard on your own, only in a group.” The next describes a longtime prisoner in the gulag: “During his years in prisons and camps he'd lost the habit of planning for the next day, for a year ahead, for supporting his family. The authorities did his thinking for him about everything—it was somehow

easier that way.” These were the lessons of Communism: never stray from the group, never think for yourself. Your life depends on it.

With these passages, I’d like to compare a longer passage from the great psychologist Victor Frankl’s classic *Man’s Search for Meaning*, which recounts his experiences as a prisoner in various Nazi concentration camps.

Under the influence of a world which no longer recognized the value of human life and human dignity, which had robbed man of his will and had made him an object to be exterminated (having planned, however, to make full use of him first—to the last ounce of his physical resources)—under this influence the personal ego finally suffered a loss of values. If the man in the concentration camp did not struggle against this in a last effort to save his self-respect, he lost the feeling of being an individual, a being with a mind, with inner freedom and personal value. He thought of himself then as only a part of an enormous mass of people; his existence descended to the level of animal life.

Similarly, in Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life*, that great American hero describes perhaps the nadir of his enslavement thus:

Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!

The Communist, the Nazi, and the slave-driver all seek to debase the human person, made *in imago Dei*, to an animal, to strip away not only the freedoms of the individual but also the individual’s very selfhood. In each case, the individual is reduced to a part of a group, and the group is oppressed *en masse* in order to pursue some deranged and perverse vision of utopia.

In Orwell’s *1984*, Julia advises Winston Smith: “Always yell with the crowd, that’s what I say. It’s the only way to be safe.” Poetry and the Liberal Arts, the *artes liberales*, or “arts of freedom,” are dangerous to totalitarian and dehumanizing regimes because they afford individuals the possibility of liberating their minds from the yelling of the crowd, from fashions and fads. The Liberal Arts can show us unapproved ways of perceiving and thinking and feeling, can remind us of the Beauty and wonder of Creation, and thereby of the Creator whose worship the tyrant would usurp for himself as Nimrod attempted to do with the Tower of Babel in Shinar. Moreover, the Liberal Arts afford the possibility of imaginative

play, of finding likenesses, across times and languages and cultures, revealing the withered intellect and atrophied spirit of those who would reduce the human race by pigeonholing individuals into rigid groups based upon accidental characteristics.

Readers of poetry may find they share a great many similarities with the Lesbian Greek poetess of 600 B.C., Sappho, and with hermit poets such as Li Po, Tu Fu, and Wang Wei of the High T'ang period in China circa 800 A.D., and with the blind Argentinian Borges, with Lithuanian Poles like Czesław Miłosz and Anglican Yoruba like Wole Soyinka, with those murdered or terrorized by Stalin like Osip or Nadezhda Mandelstam, with the mad German Romantic Hölderlin, and with victims of Franco like Lorca, and on and on forever. Readers, more generally, may find they agree on certain points with Edmund Burke and Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Vladimir Nabokov (who referred to Freud as “the Viennese witch-doctor”). Indeed, good readers are always finding points of likeness with those from whom they differ most greatly, both in accidental characteristics and in thought. Thomas Jefferson and Karl Marx both esteemed Epicurus, as did Vergil and his friend Horace. The ‘liberal arts’ have their name precisely because they free the individual from cliques, castes, parties of all kinds, enabling the individual to explore life’s complexities without a necessary, or foregone, conclusion. Eros calls us to seek out likenesses, wherever it may be, and whatever it may look like.

Discovering these likenesses via imaginative play (without necessarily committing one’s life to any of the various causes, or visions) allows readers to say, with Walt Whitman, “I contain multitudes.” Selfhood needn’t be a rigid and brittle thing at war with others and with reality, but, on the contrary, can contain and embrace multitudes, and in doing so can cultivate imaginative identity, which in turn facilitates a culture of *xenia*, of sympathy and *caritas*. This imaginative identity, this discovery of likeness with others, proves how pusillanimous is the Nietzschean notion that life is nothing but a struggle of the will to power. We do not wish for power to dominate those we love; we wish merely for their presence, and for more time. Tyranny is a failure of the imagination.

Indeed, it is the hallmark of oppressive regimes to suppress imagination and reason within the individual and to replace these with what Orwell calls “Groupthink,” false assertions about the nature of reality made compulsory in order to enforce allegiance to the State itself. The poet’s vision, on the other hand, has a primary allegiance to Beauty as a transcendental. Thus, in canto seventeen of the *Paradiso*, when Cacciaguida foretells Dante’s future exile and warns of

the *bestialitate* of those who will seek to destroy him, he says that for Dante to maintain his honor will necessitate his remaining *un parte per te stesso*, “a party of yourself,” apart from the warring Guelph and Ghibelline factions (ll. 67-69). Similarly, in his *Projets des prefaces*, Charles Baudelaire writes, *Or le poète n’est d’aucun parti. Autrement, il serait un simple mortel*: “Now the poet is not of any party. Otherwise, he would be a simple mortal.” The poet’s allegiance to transcendental Beauty removes him from power-struggles insofar as he is a poet. Or, we might echo the *Symposium* and say with Plato that while the poet, like the philosopher, remains as a man μεταξύ σοφοῦ καὶ ἀμαθοῦς (204b) and again μεταξύ θεοῦ τε καὶ θνητοῦ (202d)—“between knowledge and ignorance” and “between immortal and mortal”—and thus will likely have some sort of politics, yet his yearning for the μονοειδής, or the “One Form” that is Beauty, Truth, and Goodness, separates him from *hoi eristikoi* and *hoi antilogikoi*, the “debaters” and “contradiction-mongers” who devote themselves to winning arguments and winning power.

Of course, this devotion to the transcendent, especially to Beauty, has historically set the poet, like the philosopher, apart from the crowd. More than eighteen hundred years before Kierkegaard famously pronounced, “The crowd is a lie,” the Roman poet Horace began his ode iii.1, published in 23 B.C., *Odi profanum volgus*, or “I hate the profane crowd.” Roughly contemporary with Kierkegaard, Ralph Waldo Emerson writes in his 1841 essay, “Self-Reliance”:

Society everywhere is a conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each share-holder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It [Society] loves not realities and creators, but names and customs.

Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.

Emerson would have everyone be a poet-philosopher, and what he says is at least partly true for poets and philosophers. But he himself was far more poet than philosopher, often carried away on the wings of the daimon into rarefied error. He introduces such an error here when he claims, “Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.” In flight from the dangers of “Groupthink,” Emerson makes a typically Romantic mistake by reducing the sacred from an

attribute of God and of a God-created sacramental reality to a quality of the individual mind. He has replaced God and Being itself with his own mind.

In this, Emerson's Romantic retreat provides an inverted image of the totalitarian state, and his error is traceable to Descartes' famous *Cogito ergo sum*. Descartes confuses the mind which knows Being with Being itself. This confusion is exacerbated by the Age of Reason, in which human identity is bound up with the capacity of the pure *ratio*, neglecting the *intellectus* and the spirit and the creaturely flesh. By the Romantic age, this retreat into the individual mind has become commonplace, even as works like Byron's *The Prisoner of Chillon* reveal such a retreat to be an imprisoning of the self. As the Romantic spirit spreads across the West, more and more people find themselves imprisoned in their own minds—stalking in circles like Rilke's panther in his cage at the *Jardin des Plantes*—isolated, incapable of genuine community, increasingly miserable, and, as the mind circles round and round within its confines day after day unvisited by anything outside itself, increasingly and devastatingly bored. This boredom is perhaps the defining characteristic of the modern mind, and its origin lies in a failure of *xenia*. Having locked all the doors and closed the curtains and turned out the lights—like adults who don't want trick-or-treaters on All Hallows—the modern mind refuses all visitations and then laments the tedium of puttering around in its own darkness, while growing ever-more-eager for life's alien festivities to be over and done with.

We often find such characters in Dostoevsky. For instance, we might note that his Underground Man is a character distinctly lacking in *xenia*: he fails miserably as both host and guest. He allows no one to visit him in his underground hovel except his servant, whom he loathes and deceives and abuses, and who loathes, deceives, and abuses him in return. When he attempts to venture out with old schoolmates, he proves insufferable to them, and they to him. When he feigns *xenia*, inviting the prostitute Liza to his home as if he would help her, he only makes matters worse for her. He cannot bear himself and cannot bear to change. In the opening of *Notes from Underground*, he says, "I am a sick man ... I am a wicked man. ... I refuse to be treated out of wickedness." Why should he refuse to be treated? What is this wickedness? He aptly diagnoses himself when he says, "But man is so partial to systems and abstract conclusions that he is ready intentionally to distort the truth, to turn a blind eye and a deaf ear, only so as to justify his logic." He cannot welcome anything or anyone because all are threats to his illusion of superiority, of mental dominance, reminders that he is not an omniscient god but a mere mortal.

Similarly, in *Crime & Punishment*, Raskolnikov is an exemplar of failed xenia. Possessed by the notion that he has transcended morality—as always happens when a creature mistakes himself for the Creator—he violates the most fundamental principle of xenia: as a guest of the pawn-broker Lizaveta, he murders her in her home and steals her belongings. Not long afterward, Dostoevsky writes of Raskolnikov:

A new overwhelming sensation was gaining more and more mastery over him every moment, this was an immeasurable, almost physical, repulsion for everything surrounding him, an obstinate, malignant feeling of hatred. All who met him were loathsome to him—he loathed their faces, their movements, their gestures.

It takes extreme suffering, imprisonment in Siberia, and the love of Sonia to break through the barriers Raskolnikov has erected to protect his sense that he is himself a god; the barriers he has built ultimately enslave him and gain “mastery” over him, and their collapse is necessary to humanize him. Sonia, of course, famously advises him: “Accept suffering and be redeemed by it.” To accept suffering is to welcome one’s humanity.

To accept suffering and be redeemed by it is, of course, also the fate of Mitya in *The Brothers Karamazov*. However, prior to Mitya’s imprisonment, the novel is one structured around the breakdown of xenia. Fyodor Pavlovich—father of the three brothers—fails as father and as husband; he is a poor host even to his own family. His sons, with the exception of Alyosha, are poor guests in their father’s house. All, excepting Alyosha again, show themselves failing in their role as guests when they visit the Elder Zosima at the monastery, and their behavior, informed by their lack of xenia, is so boorish it is painful even to read. And, of course, there is Ivan, another in the type of Raskolnikov, who is possessed by the idea that “all things are permitted,” that he has transcended morality, and this idea so possesses him that he cannot welcome any other, resulting, appropriately enough, with his being regularly visited by the Devil. Indeed, almost all the characters outside the monastery, and even several within, are more or less diabolical. The wisdom at the center of *The Brothers Karamazov* comes from the Elder Zosima, who says:

But on earth we are indeed wandering, as it were, and did we not have the precious image of Christ before us, we would perish and be altogether lost, like the race of men before the flood. Much on earth is concealed from us, but in place of it we have been granted a secret, mysterious sense of our living bond with the other world, with the higher heavenly world, and the

roots of our thoughts and feelings are not here but in other worlds. That is why philosophers say it is impossible on earth to conceive the essence of things. God took seeds from other worlds and sowed them on this earth, and raised up his garden; and everything that could sprout sprouted, but it lives and grows only through its sense of being in touch with other mysterious worlds; if this sense is weakened or destroyed in you, that which has grown up in you dies. Then you become indifferent to life, and even come to hate it.

That is, when one turns from Christ or shuts out the divine in order to pursue money, or lust, or debauchery, or power, or oblivion, or whatever else, one destroys oneself. The *xenia* we must practice entails not merely being welcoming hosts or proper guests to each other but also welcoming the divine mystery of Being and realizing that all Being is ultimately the guest of the divine. When the latter fails, the former also fails. When we no longer see the divine in one another, we dehumanize ourselves and each other, despite our best intentions.

To consider this dehumanization further, let's turn to Jean-Paul Sartre, the French Nobel Laureate. In *Existentialism and Human Emotion*, Sartre provides the fundament of Existentialist philosophy when he writes, "Existence precedes essence." That is, the human being has no essence, no nature, that it does not itself create; thus, the human individual is self-created, and the human will is of primary importance, for it is the will which creates the self via act. While there is an element of truth of Sartre's insistence on the importance of the will, he goes too far: he replaces God with man himself by making man the creator of himself. As Antoine Roquentin, the protagonist of Sartre's novel *Nausea*, says:

My thought is *me*: that's why I can't stop. I exist because I think . . . and I can't stop myself from thinking. At this very moment—it's frightful—if I exist, it is because I am horrified at existing. *I am the one* who pulls myself from the nothingness to which I aspire ...

When man replaces God with himself, Being becomes an insufferable prison without a door, and one "aspire[s]" to "nothingness." His only consolation is his illusion that he is the maker of his own life and of his own world; his only pleasure is the dominance of his will over the world around him. Thus, as in Nietzsche, others become mere obstacles to the realization of one's own will to power, impediments to one's own apotheosis. Others, especially if they do not acquiesce to one's tyrannical will, are simply reminders of one's mortality, and thus of the absurdity of one's pretense to the godhead, as we have seen in Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*. As such, they must be despised. There can be no

genuine community. From this point of view, we may understand Garcin, the protagonist of Sartre's *Huis Clos*, when he famously says, *L'enfer, c'est les autres*: "Hell is other people".

Having mentioned one Frenchman's Hell, perhaps we might turn to another and briefly consider Arthur Rimbaud's masterpiece, *Une Saison en Enfer* (*A Season in Hell*). Written between April and August of 1873, when the poet was just eighteen years old, it is the capstone to a revolutionary literary career. Already writing immortal poetry as a teenager, Rimbaud had attempted to transcend the artform and his own mortality via the *dérèglement de tous les sens*, "the derangement of all the senses." That is, young M. Rimbaud sought, quite literally, to make himself an angel. The results were predictable. As Enid Starkie writes in her monumental biography:

Rimbaud had previously imagined that with his art he had soared into the beyond, but he discovered now that it was not Heaven into which he had penetrated, but Hell: it had verily been a season in Hell. It was his pride and arrogance which had brought him to such a pass and had led him into the deepest state of sin. This brought him face to face with the problem of evil. At the time of the first *Illuminations* [circa 1872] he had thought that the tree of Good and Evil could finally be cut down.

But this had been an illusion like all his other illusions, for the tree had sent out sucker shoots that had grown big enough to destroy him.

Discovering his catastrophic error, Rimbaud concedes: *Le malheur a été mon dieu. Je me suis allongé dans la boue*, or "Unhappiness has been my god. I have stretched myself out in the mud." Attempting to transcend good and evil, and thus to usurp the godhead like Raskolnikov and Ivan Karamazov, Rimbaud merely bestializes himself in the act of defying God, and the bestial motif in his masterpiece recalls how the sinners in Dante's *Inferno* are mere bestial travesties of the figures in the *Paradiso*. Of course, attempts to overthrow God do not overthrow God or change the nature of Being; they merely separate one from God and from all Being. To lock the door to Christ outside merely locks one inside the Hell one chooses.

Rather obviously, such attempts to transcend good and evil are attempts to restore a prelapsarian paradise via the mind. Ironically, they fall for the same trick Satan played on Eve: "and ye shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5). Indeed, such attempts are literally diabolical. Hence, Milton's Satan famously says: "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heaven." And again, as Mephistopheles tells Faust in Goethe's masterpiece, *Ich bin der Geist, der*

stets verneint, or “I am the Spirit who always negates.” Satan would negate Being and replace it with his own illusions, his lies. And his fundamental lie is that God and Creation can be negated, that man can create himself and can create a world to replace God and Creation, that man is god. Such a temptation obviously appeals to *soi-disant* “creatives,” to artists, to makers, if I may activate the Greek sense of *poieten*, but the reality is, as Jacques Maritain notes in his “Frontiers of Poetry,” that poets are not makers so much as they are transformers of an extant Creation.

As soon as one falls for this trick of negation and retreats into the mind to “make a heav’n of hell,” one is at odds with reality, with Creation itself, and one must retreat ever farther from reality to maintain one’s illusion of power. The world takes on a dreary, menacing aspect. Everybody looks suspicious. One ceases to see anything clearly, ceases even to look too closely, as all Creation proffers a Grace one despises. And thus one succumbs to boredom, to the deadly sin *acedia*, to what the French call *ennui*. Lost is one’s sense of the connaturality with Creation, that sense of man’s fraternal relation to all God has made that led St. Francis of Assisi in his *Cantico delle Creature* to address the moon as *sora luna*, “sister moon,” and the sun as *frate sol*, “brother sun.” In place of this sense of connaturality and belonging, ennui sprawls out, drowsing deliciously. As Baudelaire writes in *Au Lecteur*, the opening poem of his great *Les Fleurs du Mal*:

And yet, amid the jackals and panthers, in
The throngs of vultures, spiders, vipers, apes,
And howling, grunting monsters of all shapes,
Within the zoo of our egregious sin

There’s one more squalid, fierce, in a vile robe!
Unable to act, or cry, dramatically,
Still, it would have the earth made a debris,
And with a yawn would swallow the whole globe.

Boredom!—The eye unwilling tears would smother,
It puffs its hookah, dreaming guillotines.
Reader, you know this monster, how it preens—
Hypocrite reader—doppelgänger—brother!

Boredom is the inevitable result of foreclosing on the experience of Creation and retreating into the mind, the result of failed *xenia* closing the door on the stranger world that brings news of its Maker.

We have seen already that the failure of *xenia* informs a great deal of modern literature, and the same is true of its resultant boredom. The eponymous priest of Georges Bernanos' 1936 *Diary of a Country Priest* echoes Baudelaire when he tells us that "the world is eaten up by boredom," and he himself is not immune to this boredom. He opens the novel by saying, "Mine is a parish like all the rest. They're all alike." Only after much suffering and self-examination and prayer does the narrator learn to see the wonder of Creation, the splendor of Being, leading him to conclude, with an echo of St. Thérèse of Lisieux's deathbed statement, "Grace is everywhere."

In a slightly earlier diarial novel, Rilke's 1910 *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, we find a similar struggle against boredom, this one in Paris and thus clearly echoing Baudelaire again. While the protagonist senses "the existence of the horrible in every atom of air," he asserts early on, "I am learning to see." For Brigge, learning to see means learning to practice *xenia*, learning that Creation and reality exist outside his mind and that he must allow them entrance. Rilke writes:

No, no, there is nothing in the world that can be imagined in advance, not the slightest thing. Everything is made up of so many unique particulars that are impossible to foresee. In imagination, we pass over them in our haste and don't notice that they're missing. But realities are slow and indescribably detailed.

The mind is no replacement for reality. Finally, Rilke closes his pseudo-novel with a retelling of the Christ's parable about the Prodigal Son. In Rilke's version, the Prodigal Son is a tale about a man "who didn't want to be loved." He runs away from home so as not to love others, and not to be loved. Rilke writes: "Not until long afterward would he realize how thoroughly he had decided never to love, in order not to put anyone in the terrible position of being loved." More importantly, for Rilke, we are all the Prodigal Son, all running from divine Love and thus from every human love; moreover, to escape love, we flee Creation itself and retreat into the mind, closing our eyes and stopping our ears like Odysseus sailing past the Sirens.

Ultimately then, Rilke might have said with Richard of St. Victor, *Ubi amor ibi oculus*, or "Where your love is there your eye is." When we flee love, we flee sight, and when we do not see clearly we do not love. By "see," I do not intend pure sensory perception. Many have ears that can hear but don't, have eyes that can see but won't, and vice versa—indeed, at times, we all succumb to these failures. By "see," I mean specifically an imaginatively-informed spiritual insight

characteristic of religious meditation. Without this kind of sight, other people are not quite real, nor is one quite real to oneself. This kind of sight recognizes the limitation of pure perception, and the limitations of the seer, and makes one aware of a reality beyond perception, a spiritual reality. Seeing in this sense involves humility, or what Keats calls “negative capability.” It requires the seer to acknowledge the incomprehensible mystery of the seen and the presence of an incomprehensible level of reality.

To put down our prejudices and assumptions and see what’s really in front of us requires intense effort. In *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Sherlock Holmes famously says, “The world is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance ever observes.” Most of the time we see what we want to see, or expect to see, and thus see only ourselves reflected rather than seeing the world beyond us. We stare, transfixed, at our own image mirrored in the window. Hence, in his novel *Tinkers*, winner of the 2010 Pulitzer Prize, Paul Harding writes, “Cease your filibuster against the world God gave you . . . Behold, and be a genius.”

“Behold and be a genius.” To “behold” in this sense is akin to what Gerard Manley Hopkins calls “instress” and “inscape.” Each thing has its own individual inscape, its own distinctive and dynamic identity or form, and each enacts its inscape in its doings. Hopkins writes:

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves—goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying What I dó is me: for that I came.

To behold each thing as it “selves” and to sense its inscape is what Hopkins calls “instress.” This kind of sight transcends the perception of the material entity to recognize in the “inscape” of each thing its response to God’s call, its response to the Logos that is the ground of all Being. Thus, instress allows the beholder to see not merely a given material entity but also, as Dostoevsky’s Elder Zosima has it, how that material entity is “in touch with other mysterious worlds.” To see in this way is akin to the movement of Eros as represented by Diotima’s staircase in Plato’s *Symposium*: one sees both the individual creature and also a glimpse of the Creator’s divine Beauty at once.

This is, properly, the poet's vision. It requires *xenia* of the poet, who must put aside preconceived notions and systems of thought and welcome the stranger that is each being and each moment, recognizing that these strangers may be, like the strangers visiting Lot in the city of Sodom, angels, messengers bringing news of God. It requires love of the poet, who must desire the presence of the phenomenon and of the moment so intensely as to behold its inscape in the revelation of instress. It requires humility of the poet, who must recognize the ultimately unknowable mystery that informs the entity and the moment and the poet himself.

The utilitarians and totalitarians seek to destroy this vision because it calls us beyond money and power. Those beset by the diabolical flee this vision because it would humble them, and their psychological response to the utilitarians and totalitarians is to exalt themselves in order to maintain their ego's sense of value as more than a consumer or a statistic. Of course, ironically, it is this very diabolical empowerment of the self that leads to ruthless totalitarianism: Captain Ahab, in Melville's *Moby-Dick*, illustrates precisely this point, showing Emerson's self-reliance taken to its extreme. And yet, for the poet qua poet, "It is always morning in the world, in spite of history," as the late Derek Walcott writes. The poet's vision, his proper vision, is always possible, always available for those who seek it. As our Lord says in Matthew 7:7: "seek and ye shall find."

Father Hopkins, in his great poem "God's Grandeur" illuminates this theme.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

"Nature is never spent," Hopkins says, "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things." Indeed, that freshness is the inscape, the selving of each thing in response to God's call and behind that selving the ever-fresh call of God that creates and sustains all Being.

As I have said, the vision of the inscape is akin to Diotima's staircase from the *Symposium*, and as Diotima speaks of an ascent from the particular to Beauty itself so the inscape has an element of verticality to it: each thing selves itself and

in doing so points upward toward God. Thus, in poems that capture the inscape, there must be an element of verticality, of meaning that is not direct and linear as in prose but rather is indirect and revelatory, an element of ceremony. No modern poet captures this verticality better than Father Hopkins.

A few prefatory remarks: First, Hopkins was a gifted scholar of Latin and Greek as well as of Welsh, and he often brings out “the dearest freshness deep down things” by activating the etymons of his words so that the words mean one thing on the surface while also having a deeper level of signification that participates in patterning his poems, aesthetically embodying the ordering of the Logos visible only to those who “have eyes to see.” Secondly, this poem belongs to a tradition of Christian artwork rendering the dove and the olive sprig. To appreciate Hopkins’ poem, it will be helpful for us to recall a few passages from Scripture with an eye toward exegetical typology.

The first passage occurs in Genesis 8:11, the tale of Noah’s ark: “and the dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.” The second occurs in Matthew 3:16 when Christ is baptized by John: “And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him.” Thus we see the dove as the Spirit of God, and we find that the Spirit of God brings Noah peace when the dove delivers the olive branch after the Flood. We can then group these passages with Genesis 1:3, in which we find the Spirit of God “broods” on the waters, as a bird like the dove broods upon its eggs. The Holy Spirit broods on the waters and, in a sense, hatches the cosmos out of chaos; the Holy Spirit brings peace to Noah (and by extension to all within the ark of the Church); the Holy Spirit descends upon Christ at His Baptism along with God’s words, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” Finally, to return to the olive, let’s consider Exodus 27:20: “You shall order the children of Israel to obtain pure oil pressed from olives for the light, so that a lamp may burn continually.” The continually burning light for Israel is to be from “pure oil pressed from olives,” a figure for the peace of the Holy Spirit that is to be the continually burning spiritual light of the faithful.

Now let’s return to Hopkins’ poem. First, we might note that “oil,” ending line three, derives from the Greek *elaion*, meaning “olive tree”; that “toil” in line six derives from the Latin *tudicula*, meaning “a mill for crushing olives”; and that “smeared” in line six derives from the Old English *smerian*, meaning “to anoint with oil.” That is, the octave of this sonnet concerns itself with the olive, the sign of the Holy Spirit’s peace. However, as lines five through eight make clear, this

peace is sorely lacking in the modern world. Why? Man has trampled both nature qua nature and his own nature. A key word is “trade,” meaning here something like what Wordsworth means when he writes “The world is too much with us, late and soon, / Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.” The poet’s vision has been trampled by materialism, mercantilism, and consumerism. And I say “trampled” pointedly, for “trade” shares an etymon—the Old English *tredan*—with “trod”: when Hopkins writes “Generations have trod, have trod, have trod,” he not only brings out the dreary repetition of toil but also points up how trades themselves, when worked for the world rather than for God’s glory, can tread down the individual’s ability to perceive inscape. Thus, when we see that “all is ... smeared with toil,” we see that all is not anointed with the chrism of olive oil but with the work of crushing olives, work that aims at peace but does not obtain peace itself. Mercantile trade and manufacture have separated us from the generative power of Creation’s Beauty which would lead us toward the Creator’s peace: “the soil / Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.”

And yet, as the poem opens, “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.” Here, “charged” has several significations. First, we might say the world is “charged” as in “burdened,” from the Latin *carrus*, meaning a two-wheeled wagon for carrying burdens and punning on the Latin *carus* meaning “beloved.” The world is burdened with being beloved of God in the sense that, while Christ says His “yoke is easy and [His] burden light,” yet many will not take it up, for God’s grandeur is not man’s own. Secondly, “charged” suggests “accused,” as when one is “charged” with a crime: the “grandeur of God” reminds us of our sinful and fallen nature. Next, “charged” suggests “demanded payment of,” as when we are “charged” for a purchase: “God’s grandeur” demands we pay attention and pay worship to Him. And finally, “charged” suggests the electrical charge: the world is made electric with God’s grandeur. Note the verticality. Hopkins means all these things at once. Their significations are complementary. We might paraphrase them as follows: “The world is made bright with the creative energy of God’s grandeur, which demands we pay attention to its splendor, and, when we behold this splendor, we become aware of our fallen state and are faced with the task of taking up our crosses and following the Creator whose radiant Creation is a sign of His love for us and a token by which we may know Him.”

Moreover, the grandeur of God “will flame out, like shining from shook foil,” providing an image of goldfoil being shaken and giving off light like jewels that “flame out.” The grandeur of God shines out, flickers through all creation. And perhaps there is a secondary meaning of “foil” as “foe,” suggesting that God’s

grandeur “shakes” or “escapes” the great foe, Satan. Next, the grandeur of God “gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil / Crushed.” If we recall that “ooze” comes from the Old English *wase*, meaning “mud or mire,” then we see in these lines the “mud or mire” being crushed from the olive to reveal the “oil,” or chrism; figuratively, the material is distilled into the sacred, the Adam gives way to the Christ. This, Hopkins tells us, is always happening. God’s grandeur is always flickering through Creation and revealing the sacred, and we are charged with seeing it, but we too often fail to do so, blinkered by our trades and our utilitarian daily concerns.

Nonetheless, despite our failure to perceive God’s grandeur, “nature is never spent.” Though we close our eyes to God, He does not go away. All we have to do is open our eyes, and we will find “There lives the dearest freshness deep down things.” Though now, the sun is going down—though now time is passing and we are moving toward death both physically and perhaps even spiritually—yet on the horizon, “at the brown brink eastwards,” the new day and the new life are coming, and hope “springs.” Why? Because the Holy Spirit yet “broods” over the “bent / world.” The dove of the Spiritus Sancti is still creating, still bringing forth new life, still offering us the olive of peace if only we will welcome the Spirit and receive it. Though we inhabit a “bent world,” a crooked and perverse world, a world imperiled by utilitarianism and totalitarianism and diabolical attempts to usurp God’s throne, a world beset by and besotted with Pride, yet over us still the Holy Ghost “broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.”

When Plato, in the *Symposium*, defines poetry as τὴν μουσικὴν καὶ τὰ μέτρα (205c), he teaches us a great deal. His μέτρα, which may be translated as either “meter” or “rhythm,” belongs to the quotidian temporal realm of Khronos. On the other hand, Plato’s μουσικὴν, or “music,” must be understood as a Beauty derived from the supernatural Muses. Thus, we see that Plato’s definition suggests the presence of the metaphysical in the physical, of the supernatural in the natural, and of the eternal in the temporal: the poem is a conjunction of worlds in a magic moment of intersection, a moment belonging to a kind of time that differs from Khronos, belonging to what the Greeks called καίρος, or “timeliness.” Poetry can help us behold this conjunction of the infinite in the finite, which, though we may not always see it, is always present. Great poems, even by those who reject Plato and reject the Catholicism of Hopkins, by poets who reject all notions of divinity, have this same quality of vision, and necessarily so, for all poetry and all arts originate in Memory. Whether we say with the ancients that Mnemosyne is the mother of the Muses or whether we say, as St. Augustine does in his *Confessions*, that Memory abuts the divine, the Memory, with its adjunct, the Imagination,

testifies to the presence of Spirit within the human body, of a stranger world within and also beyond the material world, of an immanent and transcendent reality. For this reason, the object placed into the context of a poem, like the image placed in the context of a canvas, is itself and is something else; it becomes a symbol. To behold the symbol in the poem or the work of art may help us to glimpse the stranger world within persons and things outside the context of art, and within ourselves. To see in this way is to see that Being itself is a miracle, and that all Beings are wonders. Let us extend to all wonders, including ourselves, love and welcome.

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