



Trinity House Review

Michaelmas 2020

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Editorial

The future of contemporary poetry in the English language is uncertain. More people write poetry today than read it and few poets if any are willing to challenge, as Seamus Heaney once wrote, its perilous status “as a diagram of political attitudes.” What reasons can we give for this? Two in particular occasion this journal:

(1) There no longer remains an identifiable tradition of merit in the evaluation of poetry’s quality. The democratization of poetry as a tool for endorsing the expression of experimental identities rather than a form of surrogacy through which we look onto the world and wonder has slighted the public perception of its purpose. These postmodern poems, fraught with unskilled ambiguity and excessive meta-language, have dismissed the mystery once provided by traditional forms and techniques and chosen instead to be *vague*. The intended audience of such poems is clear.

(2) Poetry fails to speak to ordinary people. Deconstructionist tendencies have seized transcendence from English-language poetry and have left poets with nothing vital to say to ordinary people. Instead, the uninitiated are asked to affirm the obtuse and ostentatious personal experimentation expressed by these poems, where clarity,

form, and conservative religion are dismissed for pornography, vulgarity, and chaos. With such verse on offer, might it be that ordinary people have not dismissed poetry, but instead wait for it to speak to them?

Such verse is an insignia of Charles Taylor’s “haunted age”. Modern life is marked by a prolific sense of the loss of meaning and transcendence once expressed by religious devotion but replaced now by political activism and social experimentation. We have become blind to what is worth worship in our world and the failure of our poets shows it. There are poets however who remain “on the side of undeceiving the world” and have resisted the brutalist urges of modernity. Their reward will not be anonymity.

Therefore, we gladly present the Michaelmas issue of the Trinity House Review. Here we offer a selection of poets who skillfully adapt traditions of form and technique to speak to the transcendent nature of life that we share as human beings. Many are Christians, some are not. All seek to show what is good, and true, and beautiful about human life. We invite you to read along with us as we embrace this sight in the hallows of a haunted age.

Travis Wright and Dan Rattelle
Michaelmas 2020

Christian Wiman

I TIED MY SPIRIT UP

I tied my spirit up
with little disciplines
of mince and simmer,
dust and plunge.

I separated, calibrated,
rated grinders
for their megawatts
of whir.

I hummed and rhymed,
recited and opined,
made of my days
a sonic lock

behind which there lay,
I said, no truth,
and to which there was,
I said, no key.

Said to whom?

Down the halls
and through the rooms,
into the very pith

and span of cells
the question boomed,
if silence can be said
to boom.

Sally Thomas

THE HERMIT'S CHRISTMAS

What child is this? This morning there's no child.
The sunrise is a Tropicana rose,
His mother's favorite, blooming in the cold
Above a ridge all rough with leafless trees.
No child, only a wren that shrills alarms
From the brush pile as his shadow falls across it.
Humbly he cradles branches in his arms –
His fire's gone out again. He'll have to nurse it,
Breaking finger-lengths of twig, before he can
Brew tea and toast a slice of thick brown bread.
There's no child here. He'll break his fast alone,
An aging man, hunchbacked beside his red
Embers. The one miracle he anticipates:
The day itself. For this, in hope, he waits.

THE HERMIT'S SECOND DAY

Saint Stephen's Day: the snow's all pocked with thaw.
His footsteps flood themselves. The creek runs high
In noontide sun whose whiteness makes him sigh,
Contented, on the doorstep. Berries glow
Like blood-beads on the hollies. Cedar waxwings,
Nunlike in smooth beige habits, calling see!,
Receive their sacrament. Yes, he does see.
Seeing's all he does, almost, though listenings
Enter in as well. If he's to pray,
He must both see and listen. Everywhere
The word of God declares its constant coming.
All the world is vibrant with its humming.
He alone, in prayer, is left to hear
The word made flesh made quietness at midday.

THE HERMIT HEARS THE NOISE OF MANY WATERS

The springtime creek in flood has climbed its banks
And spread itself all through the ferny woods,
Re-wintering the earth, though greening trees
Hold sunshine hopefully enough. Today's
Surprise: a blacksnake glaring from the woodshed's
Rafters, its dry refuge. The hermit thinks
Of the pair of nesting wrens, rose-brown eggs laid
In their ring of grass and down, in a rusted-out saucepan –
Ancient enamelware – hung on a nail – and empty.
Well, someone's loss is someone else's plenty.
Waking to the creek beneath his cabin,
A murmur as of wings, a black liquid
Colloquy of songs in the surging night,
He rides his ark of darkness, waits for light.

A.M. Juster

VERTIGO

The world turns liquid, reels and rolls
as gravity

veers at angles; what was still
is blurred and whirled.

Revolutions echo; you lie
still for hours,

too weak for vomiting and still
too dazed for prayer.

No whiz-bang device can repair
your inner ear;

doctors try shifting crystal shards,
like sad wizards.

Sometimes it's magic, sometimes not—
they never know.

They never know what to advise
if that trick fails.

Focus your eyes on horizons,
one whispered once,

It helps to refocus the brain;
the brain resets.

The brain can reset in the ways
my father's did.

When his tumor nicked a vein,
cells drowned in blood.

His bloodied brain regathered words,
word word by word.

Grace is not crystalline, but grit
that squints at pain.

Grace is the will to retake things,
thing thing by thing.

Joseph Massey

THE SHAPE OF SOMETHING SAID

No time beyond daylight
waving on the floor

like spilled water, and so it goes.
This window won't hold

the omens that pass. My mind
haunts my body as my body

haunts the room
and there's a glitch

in the quiet, an inked-in echo.
Sleep is a relief.

Sleep and poetry.
Not words, but the space

around words
anchors me to an hour.

Across the street
forsythia bursts from black rubble.

Even inside, I'm surrounded
by what wakes in April.

No time beyond shadows
spilled around windows.

A nameless tree's makeshift sundial
sliding deeper into the mulch.

TO A NEW FRIEND

Daylight disassembles into sound—
the hum I hold in my head
is the hum you hold in your head, too.
The poem, written or unwritten, is
enough to see us through the thaw.

Soon the fields will fill with names. Mud
will rupture with indescribable color.

YEAR'S END (WINTER SOLSTICE)

What began with bewilderment
ends with fatigue. Pixelated
days dispersed into static
we mistook for speech.
We stopped listening
how many shocks ago.
The horror and how it hollows.
One way out
is to locate grace in a walk
and receive a tree's bare
but bright frequency.
Notice the waxing gibbous
afternoon moon
smudged above a shuttered
Bank of America—lucent,
resigned to its transparency.
See starlings
expand and collapse
like lungs exhaling dusk.
Now the long night,
a long silence
if we'll let it find us.

ODILON REDON'S FLOWERS

For Caitlin Flanagan

as if the vase were
 a body
 and breath
a field
 in bloom

*

a field
in a frenzy
in a vase

 illuminates
 the room

*

 the syntax
 of each stem
articulating time

*

the air
alone

all aura now

Jane Zwart

THE SOUL IS A CRYPTID

“The soul is like a wild animal.” *Parker J. Palmer*

It is not Kafka’s roach
beached on a man’s bed
and it isn’t the creature

from whom the regent
nicked his nickname,
the kenning Lionheart.

It is not the gamete
sloshing inside its plaster
bassinet, not the egg

muscled from isthmus
to nest; nor is it
the monster roughed in,

ruffed in waves, whom
mapmakers once drew to
keep the weak from the sea.

It is not the ape, fingers
vitiligo-pink; not the rat
wise to the maze.

It is not the mouse,
syringe-transfixed,
nor a vole, nor a vulture.

It is not the lapdog, not
the wolf pup, not a hyena
shrived of mirth. No:

It is the sum of these
and something more.
The soul is a cryptid.

J.M. Jordan

VISITATION (or THE MOUSE)

My head is heavy with bourbon, having traded
the evening's long-drawn clamor into darkness,
and the night's bright out-flashings of niter and panic—
for this moment: this desk, this lamp, this bottle.
Because this, and this alone, will shut it down,
will smother the spitting thoughts dragged in behind me
before the blank day comes back. And so I sit
bricking myself into this airless chamber.

Then — the quick peripheral flash of you
(my small grey ghost, my speck of shadow),
as small paws flit without so much as whisper
in transit over the moon-squares on the floor.
You pause and peer, in a quiet reconnoiter or
a peripatetic quest for holy things
hidden (as such things are) among the shadows.
You raise up, turning your eremitic face
toward me, and, for a hushful moment there,
fix me in a strange steadfast gaze,
a patient recognition of our shared estate,
an old sea-deep assurance. Then you turn
and scamper off beneath the old black bookcase.

I pause. The perfect stillness settles back,
unemptied now and laden. The orb of lamplight
is warm and aurous. All the ancient stories
are lined up in their places on the shelves.
The shadows rest, and even the ugly shapes
that turn in the amber liquid have gone still.

I cork the bottle, climb the unlit stairs
to find my sleeping children sculpted frieze-like
in their whirl of quilts and shadow, gangly limbs
all tangled up in darkness, girded by
small tutelary wings and spiky tails
and small felt teeth in harmless yawning rows.
I make the cross and share your blessing with them
(my small grey ghost, my speck of shadow),
whispering to them in the stillness how
this thing, this *life*, will always surround them,
sometimes flashing out in saints and scriptures,
sometimes howling in the neon flare of the streets
or in the cloud-sweep of a storm-racked sky,
but more so often simply there,
abundant in the dusty cracks and corners,
in the leaves growing silently against the window,
in the skitter of tiny feet behind the wall,
or in drunken blessings, prayed out in the dark.

Marly Youmans

YOUTH AT THE BORDERLANDS

At summer solstice, half asleep he hears
Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis
Drift the morning through the flung-high windows,
And all the drowsy blood in him awakes,
Begins to stir like lined Lazarus.
The dormant cells of him brighten like stars
Emerging in the vaulted tomb of night.

And how and what to be as man in spite
Of shatterings, in spite of bane and blade,
In spite of graces lost, in spite of us:
A fog of questions gnats his mind and steals
His peace away. He rises. Dew ascends,
Daybreak sun a host above a chalice
Of earth. All's cloud, and Tallis in his ears.

Jen Fueston

EASTER, 2020

Whatever holy day has woken,
somebody first put water to boil,
or laid the birch logs across
a fire, someone

tended to your life. When you reached
for a cup, it was clean and waiting.

Even those cold mornings
it was your own body rising by habit
toward a stale, familiar bread,
late snow bending the lip of the lilies.

CHOCHECHERRY

The whole of a life,
a berry in my throat.
a sugar cube dissolving
in the tongue's hollow.

Some days I live with
no past, and no name
but mother—she is
immortal, without

biography. I was before
her—as the full flower
is before the seed that
it bears to remake itself.

Ben Myers

SMITH & SONS

The ice chunks stick, a choking in the throat
of aged, withered water pipes and draw plumbers
out on dead cold days. There's a white truck backed
into the gravel drive next door. Across
the side it says in scrawling, confident
red, *Smith & Sons: Most Trusted Name in Plumbing*,
and I remember when the plumber was
just *Smith*, back when *& sons* were just two dumb
guys I knew at school, one apt to spend all day
locked in a bathroom stall with a stolen
Playboy. The other's favorite party trick
was slicking up his denim crotch with hairspray
and lighting it on fire to run through
the party crowd singing *Hunka, Hunka, Burning
Love*. Two dogs in a wild pack of strays
that all of us ran in. Still, I don't doubt
the claim the slogan makes. My dumbass friends
have mostly found a way to make themselves
useful. They hammer neatly in the nail
of every blessed year and drink the bourbon
backed with beer of divorces, births, and deaths.
You'll see them pouring salt from paper bags
onto their sidewalks and front steps before
a freeze or sitting in their winter coats
in bleachers at high school basketball games, knees
raised, hands in coat pockets, faces calm and stern.
And though I know it isn't true, I want now
to say they're chieftains, kings, every single one.

SONNET IN WHICH I ASK FOR FORGIVENESS BY WAY OF COMPARING
OUR MARRIAGE TO A TRUCK

That time I slammed the back French doors then kicked
that concrete planter off the deck and broke
my toe, the neighbors saw the whole conflict,
one-sided no doubt, and I was the joke
around the block for weeks, until the Kent
kid took a dump in their front yard. What I
in all my rage and slobber meant
is that I love you. Something's wrong with my
temp gauge and radiator, which always
blows up just when the truck gets going. So
I put us up on blocks to sit for days
until you get the parts to make us go
again. The hood is gone. I've stripped the gears.
But we can make this engine run for years.

Katie Hartsock

FLASHES IN ALL DIRECTIONS

Who is responsible
for the terrible times I've laughed —
when someone else's child

fell from a chair at my table, when I learned
about the faultless boy Life-Flighted off the football field
or what nuclear fission

can do? When I parked
by a wood I'd never walked before
and I saw the fence binding

its twenty acres, and its unlocked turnstiles — one entry,
one exit — radiating bars eight feet high,
and its rows of barb wire

above the fencing, tilted in — not to keep any climbers
out of, but to keep them inside,
this FENCED NATURE AREA,

as the signage read — I laughed and pushed my way
in. The pearlescent light of a low winter sun getting
lower made the chain-link glint

and trees stood spray-painted with the usual
suspects of hearts, PEACE, a penis, initials,
pluses. One trunk said, I SEE YOU,

a forest spirit turned panopticon, like the fiery sword
that flashes in all directions
outside the garden needing guarded since the day

God went for a walk in his woods
and found a man and a woman trying to hide
everything, and asked them

my favorite question God ever asked:
“Who told you that you were naked?”
It always makes me laugh.

ELSA IN THE MAW

after Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade

An otherworldly goldleaf light
that sparks uncanny thirst
still saturates the Grail when she
takes hold of it and starts

to run. Which opens up the earth
that will give her one more chance,
knowing, it seems, by the slant of its chasms,
she'll fail and fall within.

When Indiana says *Give me
your other hand, honey,*
I can't hold you he's trying to say
he believes she can be saved.

He thinks. He's actually not sure.
The last time I went to Mass
I went alone and pregnant and the priest
stopped by my side on his way

down the aisle, during the recessional hymn
hardly anyone sings.
I don't usually see you by yourself. He patted
my shoulder. *No tears, no tears*

today. And I grew more enraged:
Yes, today. Yes, tears today.
I didn't say it, couldn't speak.
It was just after the reports

and everything beloved in
my church looked criminal,
complicit in the sins, even
being there. And what

could be sufficient, what can save
it from itself, as is?
Somewhere Elsa's body is buried
in Lucasfilm dry ice,

and that chalice down there with her, if
we imagine past the end,
inside the hellishness that hangs
around the holy places.

THE MOTHER'S STOMACH, A KIND OF TREE

that grew with such an unchecked reach it looks
like a wolf about to leap, on prey or pups
ventured from the den too soon. Each branch a crux
becoming other crosses, knots, nooks, bulges
of elbow ache or pilonidal clefts.

Its bark still wants to stretch towards every claw
or wing or mandible that left its nests,
and its limbs paunchy all year with autumn.

And when it lies on its side in bed, what a face
it makes! When she breathes, it breathes too. Of those
who loved this body when it was uncut paper,
she thinks of you. Of some scenario:
your torso back with hers, nervous to move.
You fill your hands and call it beautiful.

Jane Scharl

AFTER AN IRISH PROVERB, AND A ROUND OF DEPRESSION

The well-fed does not understand the lean.
The happy days will not recall the sad.
You can't go back and forth in time to glean

the scraps of joy that slipped down in between
those heaping plates of pleasure. It's too bad,
but the well-fed cannot understand the lean.

Today you can't imagine that you've been
in such despair. All right. Today be glad
you can't go back and forth in time to glean

the leavings from the dry days for the green.
Just know when next you're adding up your tab:
the well-fed does not understand the lean.

So you've traveled, eaten, drunk. You've seen
Paris. Everything there is, you've had.
But you can't go back and forth in time to glean

from that. The extra's wasted. Let it be.
You'll know, when things go down again to bad,
the well-fed does not understand: the lean
cannot go back and forth in time to glean.

THE LILY

Mary's Flower

A single calla lily rises, slight and pale,
from a cut-glass vase upon my table.

Why do people call these flowers white?
As white, perhaps, as waxy-cold storm-light

driven just before the hail; as some
dim star whose atmospheric color runs

like slowly spreading paint; it is the shade
of oil-tattered foam upon waves,

but I cannot call it all white at all.
I cannot call white anything; the whole

premise, the promise of it, is to be
nothing – no shade, no hue – discernibly

more than any other thing, or rather
to be everything at once, together.

See the calla lily: see the pale green
sheath that curves along the spine, the sheen

upon the petal like the sheen of flesh
beating blue with blood; see the crushed

yellow spadix at the core and how
the color radiates, reflecting out

and up the flute. Such a simple flower,
comprehensible and neat, without

excess mystery... oh, but look, just there,
at the petal's very brim, a span where

the greeny edge and yellowed center meet,
crossed below with shaded veins: now *that*

is beginning to be white, that single
band where all colors meet and mingle

and dissolve into that thing that is all things,
which in itself I cannot see, but rings
these colors round with themselves, each
one in full intensity, bleached

by their own light, which ceases not to be
in the supernova heart of purity.

J.D. Smith

AUBADE

This Sunday morning finds me still in bed
Though not hung over, seized with doubt, or ill—
In fact, the opposite, but lacking will
To rise from lolling and my limbs' slack spread.
At least this lack of fervor will not wed
Me to a mission or a vest tailored to spill
The blood of strangers as if to fulfill
Commandments born less of love than dread.

This peace of ready understanding breaks
Against one martyr's term for it—"cheap grace"—
The wound uncleaned, yet ample balm applied.

Reopened, may I find a heart that wakes
To more than sloth, discerning my true case,
A need for mercy deep as it is wide.

Amit Majmudar

AMERICAN UPANISHAD

1.

One cycle brings down the rain.
Another cycle brings down the news

in flaming ball-peen hammers
we learn to juggle with glass hands.

One cycle synthesizes ATP.
Another cycle synthesizes apocalypses.

When the umbilical cord to our hunger is cut,
Give us this day, we pray, our daily dread.

Like gerbils sipping from the trauma bottle.
Remind yourself: I run inside a wheel.

Recycle my flesh into nitrogen.
Recycle my flash into night.

2.

Embodiment is solitary confinement.

Your breath tunnels up and out
but, seeing Yama's soldiers on patrol,
backtracks down and in.

Your heart taps the plumbing
with its systolic SOS.

A hand shoves cold pizza through the slot.

Dancer condemned to the chattel life,

Edmund Dantes in the Chateau d'If,

your every nerve is barbed wire.

Even if you found someone

to touch you, how could you bear
to be touched?

3.

Aum: a sound where silence makes a home. Aum
is an omen of silence yet to come. Aum

sets a throat aflutter, matching gadfly wings
and epileptic eyelids. Spindrift sea-foam Aum

births love and other warmongers. Aum
reads birth and death as a palindrome. Aum,

blown through a grass whistle,
assembles the breath into Rome. Aum

shivers my tuning-fork of bones. Its seminal
syllable swells my skull's dome. Aum

is the password storing my memory,
the chromosome that carries my syndrome. Aum

in my rhizome, in my pith and phloem. I say it,
I am it, and I need no other poem: Aum.

4.

The prodigy Ramanujan
instructed Cambridge
using nothing but a compass.

“One leg,” he whispered, “spins but does not circle.
One leg circles, but it does not spin.”

That marvel of a Tamil in his suit coat
wished to pirouette—quod erat demonstrandum,
dancing—but he made do with a clockwise sweep.

“In both, the stillness stays imperfect—yet
in both, the stillness stays.”

He laid aside the compass. On the paper he raised,
they saw the perfect circle. The circle’s perfection
was the distraction. Ramanujan blinked

through the hole gouged in the circle’s heart
by the steel point,

a fisheye peephole in the door of perception,
a morphine pupil, witness to what
if not the same gunshot fired point-blank

through the mouth of every galaxy?
“This,” said Ramanujan, “is what we teach.

This is why we could invent the Zero.
This is what we think holiness is:
A black hole. A singularity,

singing. A Self.”

5.

When I write *book*, some people see a library,
while others see a cop car. When I say
hole, some people hear completeness
while others hear the bullet. My mother
tongue keeps so many homonyms and homophones
around because my mother
country makes one word work
two jobs: One job in an upscale suburb,
one job on the South side. *Job* is work that pays—
or a good man carpet-bombed with buboes
over a bet in heaven; and never sure, after that,
where to build his altar, whether

the weather would alter. No,
I still don't know what *art* is—the root
of artificial, or the root
of heart? All I know
is that the real gets its hook in my tongue
sometimes. The more I talk,
the faster it reels me in.

6.

Our books were spoken before they were written.
Even after they were written,

the palm leaf or the birch bark page decayed,
its half life, in that wet heat, maybe a decade.

The first books were bound with string, meaning
book, in Sanskrit, had a double meaning.

Granth signifies both a book and knot.
Every book aspires to be both a book and not,

but in our theology—where the senses bind us
to our bodies—they are homonymous

to signal the making of books
is the tying of knots. The books

I've written bind me to the world
though they speak of transcending the world.

Cut the knots that bind these palm leaves. Speak the poem.
Set your books free. Let the loose leaves slip from your palm.

7.

Both eyes lowered to the microscope:

White coat in the crime lab.

One eye closed, one eye looking through the crosshairs:

Sniper in the sniper's nest.

Both eyes shut:

Yogi in the lotus.

Heavy, heavier, heaviest:
Depends on how much death is sitting in your lap.

Meditation is immediate—nothing comes between
the seer who closes his eyes
and what he isn't seeing.

Heavy, heavier, heaviest.

Of these three masters of concentration,
the yogi comes the closest to nonbeing.

The Sanskrit word for *heavy* is *guru*.

You tie your guru to you.
Your guru sinks you into your own depth,
the weight at the end of a plumb line
plunked in the sea of rebirth and death.

8.

When you feel lightheaded, like your skull
is a helium balloon on a string
slipping your spinal cord
clear out of its canal,

beg this blessing:

Make me heavy, guru.
I am losing my resolve.
It's the melting snow that packs down hardest.
Pack me down into a ball.

When a daughter dies unmarried,
they dress her like a bride.
I want a black hole where my navel is
so the light gets sucked inside.

9.

If Samsara is a sea, a sea of death and rebirth,
dive to the bottom of this metaphor.
When your toes feel the sand give,
crack the egg. The contents float out: nucleus
and cytoplasm of a single-celled amoeba.
The egg white tucks into a dome. The egg yolk
stretches into tendrils, tentacles, and now
a jellyfish rises with you, powered on sighs.
The tentacles pair up parallel and turn
in double helixes, strands of Dharma Nirvana Atman,
first sign that your genetic raw material
crosslinked spontaneously in the Samsara Sea.
The strands tighten and braid into a sea snake
that wraps your torso and your outstretched arms—
caduceus of the doctor, Laocoon of loss.
If Samsara is a sea, you owe it to your Self
to kick and writhe and break through to the sun.
You have to become the first of a species of one.
The first to will your own evolution.
The sea snake stiffens with the beginnings
of a vertebral column. By the time
the message in a bottle you are
washes up on Samsara's shore, what used
to be a sea snake is a prophet's staff.
Grab hold of it and stand up on the sand.
Take a good look at the sea where you got your start
because there are deserts and deserts ahead.
When you get to the foot of the seashell-speckled Himalaya
where your bottle will be broken and your message read,
don't worry, you won't have to scale it.
The sun will have burned your back raw by then.
Drop the staff and flex to snap the last strands of fascia.
Free your shoulder blades. Unfurl them into wings.

Eric Norris

ELEGY FOR A HOUSEFLY

I find you on my windowsill,
Desiccated, mummified, wrapped
In mournful dust. Your richly complicated
Ruby eyes have shriveled into

Horrible dried strawberries. Still,
I want to say a little something (not unkind)
In memory. I find myself
Picking at you with my pencil point.

A wing breaks off immediately. I fetch
A pair of tweezers from my vanity.
I hold the wing up to the sunlight and I see—
To my astonishment—stained glass:

Truly illuminated manuscripts
Telling half-remembered tales. One where
You are the brainchild of Beelzebub.
And one where God is Love.

Dan Sheehan

NOONDAY ANGEL

This morning, twin catbirds thrash in the yew
As the hawk returns, and a tree-saw's whining
Swells and recedes like a pert fiddle tune.

The breeze tells of farmers out manuring.
The rose-hung trellises stand white and true.
St. Anne's rings out the Angelus at noon.

All is well, in other words, all is good,
A moment's joy flaming through the valley
Like light that bursts the stone door of a tomb.

As the spirit scatters leaves along the alley,
A cat in tattered silk slips from the wood.
Hunching, an orb spider pedals its loom.

You give us as much as the heart can take,
Lord – a stormy desire we can hardly bear
To know, in the end, more than you allow,

To feel the soul swooning in the noontime air,
Dazzled as the skin of a sun-struck lake.
But here is your day. It's enough for now.

Jane Greer

WE'D LIKE THEM TO BE DIFFERENT THAN THEY ARE

We'd like them to be different than they are,
those whom we love: more social, quieter;
smarter, less know-it-all, less self-effacing.
More passion would be nice—the kind we like—
with half the current drama. They should be
less nosy, more concerned about our needs.
Sometimes our loved ones make us want to scream
with a small habit that they just can't shake;
it would be wonderful if that were fixed.
They think they're trying hard, but just imagine
what they could become with a bit more effort.

Laura Hogan

HEART AS HONEYCOMB

The Bridegroom says to the Bride, "your heart has become a honeycomb full of every kind of instruction."—Gregory of Nyssa

Australian stingless bees aim
their egg nurseries upward

in a spiral,
the same configuration

as crystals grow
their glow and luminous mother

of pearl multiplies in the mouth
of mollusk. Sweet sugarbag

bee helix of beeswax—
trace of divine finger

in the genes in the wax,
refraction of gem glimmer

of pearl pulsing architectural
evidence

of love of algorithm
secreted in buzzing cells

which build and bend twenty
terraces high. You who number

the stars, yellow the corners
and planes, bundle the efficient

hexagon—: you know
the precise sum of tiny wings

you've folded inside
this humming honeycomb,

reaching up to you.

Andrew Frisardi

THE SWEEPER

He came to us one day in all his grimness
To purge the hardened tar that crimped our chimney.
He came to us as if a silhouette.
Grumbling greetings, he unlatched his kit
Of grips and metal bits with wire meshes,
And screwed in place the mother of all brushes.
He dragged out from a plastic sack his hide
For inside, harsh with char, and pulled its hood
Up on his head to shinny into darkness.
We hung a sheet to claim the fire's carcass,
Around the flame-devouring mouth of hearth
That spat the felled dismemberings of his art.
He plied his scrubber like a metal mole
Sounding out the measure of his hole.
We were relieved to listen to the bristles
Grate old winter nights' combusted dust,
All that was left of bonds to soothe our sores.
We loved to hear the slough of spent desires.
His mouth still blind to words, the man pulled free
His head from all that past. An unclogged flue
Is a freed soul, he seemed begrudgingly
To grant, and scrunched his brush to pure potential.

Jacob Riveff

A JOURNEY GALDOR

—*from eleventh-century Manuscript 41, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge*
—*edited text from Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie's The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems (Cambridge University Press, 1942)*

I gird myself 'round, give myself to God—
against the painful stitch, the painful blow,
against the grim grasp,
against the enormous fear loathsome to all,
against all that is loathsome as I travel the land.
'Triumph-chant I chant 'round, triumph-staff I carry,
word-triumph and work-triumph. May it avail me,
no mere obstruct, no man afflict,
no loathsome fear my life threaten—
but save me, Strong One, Son, and comforting Spirit,
excellent Lord and every glory,
the Shaper of heaven, as I have heard.
Abram and Isaac
and holy men like Moses and Jacob
David and Joseph,
Eve and Anna, Elizabeth,
Zacharias and Mary, Mother of Christ,
and too, the brothers Peter and Paul
and thousands also of your holy angels
I call to my aid against every foe.
Let them carry me, keep me safe on the way,
all of them hold me, be a helm to me,
steer all my going, let glory's hope
be a hand overhead, a roof of saints,
a school of the victorious, stalwart angels!
With perfectly peaceful mind I pray
that Matthew be my helm, Mark my mail-coat,
strong light of life, and Luke my sword
all sharp and bright, and John my shield,
a marvelously arrayed Seraph my spear.

Forth I'll fare, friends I'll meet,
angels' glory, lore of the godly.
I pray victory's God for God's own mercy,
a wholesome journey, gentle and calm
winds on the shore. I've heard of wind,
surging waters. Always saved
from every fiend, may I meet with friends
to dwell in the peace of the powerful Lord,
safe from the loathsome who threatens life,
gladly established in angels' glory,
the holy hand of heaven's kingdom,
while I will live this earthly life. Amen.

* * * * *

Ic me on þisse gyrde beluce and on godes helde bebeode
wið þane sara stice, wið þane sara slege,
wið þane grymma gryre,
wið ðane micela egsa þe bið eghwam lað,
and wið eal þæt lað þe in to land fare.
Sygegealdor ic begale, sigegyrd ic me wege,
wordsige and worcsige. Se me dege;
ne me mere ne gemyrre, ne me maga ne geswence,
ne me næfre minum feore forht ne gewurpe,
ac gehæle me ælmihtig and sunu and frofre gast,
ealles wuldres wyrðig dryhten,
swa swa ic gehyrde heofna scyppende.
Abrame and Isace
and swilce men, Moyses and Iacob,
and Daut and Iosep
and Evan and Annan and Elizabet,
Saharie and ec Marie, modur Cristes,
and eac þæ gebroþru, Petrus and Paulus,
and eac þusend þinra engla
clipige ic me to are wið eallum feondum.
Hi me ferion and friþion and mine fore nerion,
eal me gehealdon, me gewealdon,
worces stirende; si me wuldres hyht,
hand ofer heafod, haligra rof,

sigerofra sceolu, soðfæstra engla.
Biddu ealle bliðu mode
þæt me beo Matheus helm, Marcus byrne,
leoht, lifes rof, Lucos min swurd,
scearp and scirecg, scyld Iohannes,
wuldre gewlitegod wælgar Serafhin.
Forð ic gefare, frind ic gemete,
eall engla blæd, eadiges lare.
Bidde ic nu sigeres god godes miltse,
siðfæt godne, smylte and lihte
windas on waroþum. Windas gefran,
circinde wæter simble gehælede
wið eallum feondum. Freond ic gemete wið,
þæt ic on þæs ælmihtgian frið wunian mote,
belocun wið þam laþan, se me lyfes eht,
on engla blæd gestapelod,
and inna halre hand heofna rices,
þa hwile þe ic on þis life wunian mote. Amen.

James *Matthew Wilson*

AFTER A LINE BY MAURICE SCEVE

So far the one I love surpasses me
That, even writing this, I stop and wince,
 And, having finished once, I start again,
And yet again, and have done nothing since,
 But scratch out faulty phrases with my pen,
So far the one I love surpasses me.

So far the one I love surpasses me
That every metaphor dissolves to dust
 And disappears upon the vacant air,
Rather than stretch out as a bridge I trust
 To bring across the one who draws my stare,
So far the one I love surpasses me.

So far the one I love surpasses me
That all the rattling refuse in my sack,
 The stray flames flickering about my brain,
Which I had saved for this, come hurtling back
 Reflecting not her mind but my heart's pain,
So far the one I love surpasses me.

So far the one I love surpasses me,
My listeners think it all sad fantasy
 Conceived by one who lives too much alone,
And forms of shadows what can no more be
 Than could a crown of stars or wisdom's throne,
So far the one I love surpasses me.

JOSEPH SMITH RUN OUT OF TOWN

Arms bathed and streaked in Philistine blood,
Eyes bright with honey, Jonathan
Awaited judgment, where Saul stood.

His father shook the sacred lot
To learn if the Lord's will was that
He spare the boy or that he blot

Him out with one swing of his sword.
"I'll execute what he commands,"
Said Saul, "And prove I keep my word."

But the dice fell as if gone mute,
Rolling out neither the Lord's will
Nor sign the Lord had heard his suit.

A few years on, Saul finds himself
Desperate, crouched in a witch's tent,
Begging a ghost to show himself

And tell him he still has a fate.
We all are Saul, violent and anxious,
Run ragged till we know our state.

And though you chase our caravan
From town, and set our tents on fire,
And have our books put under ban,

And though you lock me in this shed
As if to mock the Son afresh
And leave us both just short of dead,

I know you'd slaughter your own sons
For dice like those; and would obey
Their roll to be God's certain ones.

And some night you'll come starved with fear
To where we're camped out on the lake,
And what I have to say you'll hear

Not as my voice, and you will see
That what you hate now you most need,
The sure stroke of my prophecy.

THE DARKNESS COMING

The world grows dim beneath
A dark and lowering cloud,
Whose threat is that this vision,
But no more, is allowed.

By whom, I ask? And wait.
Who says the black must come?
Who buries me beneath
An arbitrary thumb?

All men are brought up short
Before a door of stone;
The simple and the wise
Agree we die alone.

But wisdom is a bird
That rides on empty air,
As blind to what shall come
As what dark wounds we bear.

It will not comfort you.
So, do not comfort me,
As I stare through the dark
Yet do not cease to be.

Jason Myers

THE DISTANCES

Tomorrow I will move a fig tree
from its pot to the sandy ground.
The day after I will set elements
upon my tongue: salt, water, yeast,
clove. For months I've watched
transformations wordless & disturbed.
I don't follow the zodiac but I know
my sign. Right, left, up, down.

We haven't sufficient words for the distances we encounter, so we settle on these: prairie, mountain, missing, moon. I relieved your shoulder of the burden, a psalmist said. Yesterday I lifted a woman into her car: smell of frailty on my hands. How many seasons have the seeds I've spoken to the rude dirt said nothing, nothing. How many states have I visited museums memorializing massacres. In childhood I could not have known my obsession with dusk was a flirtation with finitude. Finishing is overrated if sometimes necessary. My drawer accumulates unsent letters the way someone who hasn't had a proper meal in days will settle for scraps. Each word written is

wed to one that stays inside the pen,
the mind a furrow of silence. How
do you do, I ask the spruce in our
sporadic correspondence. She
responds in jay, in owl. Howls
are like bowls the soul pours
its soup in. The first time I saw
someone die I thought their breath
was a wizard, but nothing was
behind the curtain. Spring's
relentless with comforts, salve
on each wound winter opened,
salted. We do not have much
further, my grandfather used to
say, regardless of map's testimony.
Each time he lost someone his
smile became a country with stricter
border security. Let go, let go
the ocean told him. My burden
is easy, Jesus said. Oh really?
What, then, is this weight
upon my shoulders, my god?

Will Justice Drake

THE INTERCESSION

The only hay baler was me and Euel
in the barn catching what our father threw
from the truck bed, hearing him shout, "You'll
have to hold your breath if it bothers you."

My lungs burned in the dust either way,
a hundred pounds of hay through the loft,
cheeks puffed tight with a breath I'd saved
to keep from collapsing in asthmatic cough.

I'd squint before tossing the hay in a heap,
and the golden dust would billow in the slats of light.
Each mote moved its way. I breathed.
They moved together. I breathed the light.

If I called out now, I would crow
like a rooster, like the bronze bird in the floor
of the car in town. The man always showed
up with the fowl in the front, his greens and gourds

in the back. The bird would cluck and squat on the news.
Its litter splotted out words, and its bright,
amber eye cocked upward and true
like a scope looking past the sun at the night.

Four years later, I lay in France,
cold, disarming mines, pressed to the ground
like a creature scratching food from the sand.
A mortar fell. *Ventre à terre*. No one around

except the girl turning round and round
on her doorstep. Her dress flared out
like a parasol twirled around
in the rain. The child beneath it wondered how

to keep us dry in the squall, became a mother
calling to come home, to look in the cupboard
for the pressure plates stacked like saucers,
and something—I've forgotten—about being discovered.

Back home, up on the water tower
near that abbey of German monks,
someone kept shooting rivets at an hour
when we were all sleeping. So I jumped

out of bed to find him in the dark,
but instead I heard flapping wings,
the woodpecker pecking at the metal bark
of the antenna, the tap-tap perhaps her flinging

a coded message into space, like a prayer.
Or maybe she was receiving one for me.
After a while, it suited me to hear
the rhythm, a kind of peace
 like a volley of mortars,
 like a cough.

Contributors

Will Justice Drake lives in northern Alabama, where he teaches English literature and coaches soccer. His poems, essays, and articles have appeared in *Raleigh Review*, *New York Daily News*, *Negative Capability*, and other publications. He received his MFA from North Carolina State University.

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