



The Windhover

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Lindsey Conklin Keller

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ROBERT MANASTER

Questions to Recover (#4)

This early morning I hear wind tugging
attached leaves, backyard maples whirling,
the last threads of summer heat unwinding
like each ending of a sentence caught
in my dumbfounded tongue. A porch light
just before dawn flickers. There are hints
of me everywhere, which no one knows.

I've become slave to threats of steel and flesh—
whether seen or unseen, whether aimed
at us here entering a Walmart or leaving an IMAX
or whether we're the ones aiming
and triggering to fire at will overseas.
I've always been crouching behind a gray well,
lowering by rope the pail of my conscience.
In this damp echoing dark
I've let others speak for me.

I've climbed Jacob's ladder down into the cave
of my dreams. In this dark, God, I'm away
from that jealous competitive urge put on You—
that You had to show a grand commitment or else
others might have thought, *The Lord was powerless*.
In this dark, I know I've still not owned my silence,
I've still not escaped the Egypt in my soul.
In this dark, I am making my heart my face.
God, when will I climb up Your rope
ladder of compassion and speak up?

SHANNA POWLUS WHEELER

Baptism

I bathe my daughter, each soap bubble
set like an opal on her skin—not a fragment
like the one I brought home
from a gem shop, which flames briefly
at certain angles—but whole and gleaming.

As I scrub her elbows and knees,
she tells me she is like a gemstone
not yet polished in her tumbler:

*I have sharp edges; I don't fit well
in a box with other rocks.*

I tell her she is not the rough quartz
she believed was a diamond
until it shattered at her feet.

Rinsing suds from her hair,
I consider the slow story of geodes:
trickle of water, swash of minerals
through the caverns of her mind,
where shimmering cathedrals rise.

Surely this is a parent's priestly duty:
to hear the professions of pre-adolescence,
to pour a counsel of words like water,
my hands feeling for jagged places
no cloth can polish.

BEN EGERTON

Last Supper VI

Don't worry, *my little sparrow*, about what to eat tomorrow or the day after that or the day after that, or what to drink. There are puddles, pools on the roof, reservoirs in gutters and gardens for you to sip and splash in. You'll find scraps under the tables and benches (watch out for dogs!).

My little sparrow, you can't follow the Lord. Your wings won't carry you. But the Lord'll be back. Not like this, not here, not sure when. You'll find him one spring morning in the ornamental gardens, by the bandstand and pond, doling out breadcrumbs like seed. He'll wear a coat and hat (iridescent feather in the band so you'll *know* him). The Lord'll be feeding the koi, leaning out beyond the fence so the smaller ones get their share.

HOLLY WELLS

An Epileptic Nun Reads the Tyndale New Testament, 1535

I accepted the book from the cloth-merchant's wife because her voice was full of fire and the song of the nightingale. (Over-reciting the liturgy has worn our own voices dull and Latinate.) *Trust me, Sister Margaret*, she said, slipping the small book inside the folds of the bolt of silk for the new altar cloth. I, in turn, slipped it inside the folds of my habit. The weight of its presence there has kept me awake.

Now that Matins has ended, I ask Mother Abbess if I might remain in the chapel to pray. *Only for a little while*, she says. *Do not waste the candles*. I go where the candlelight is brightest, next to the old stone Saxon cross, and I kneel. I stare at the cross, at the carved birds resting in the labyrinth of vines, at the runes etched along the rood's edges, mystery-ridden. When my sisters' footsteps have receded, I reach into my habit. The leather of the cover is soft and warm.

Mother Abbess always says that books like this would burst into flames upon opening, leaving behind only pain and smoldering ashes.

I take a deep breath and open to the first page, running my fingers over words that look like any other words in any other book—until I start reading them.

The candlelit sentences sing with all the life in thunder and soft breezes, sing of how we are more than the sparrows sold for a penny. If even sparrows can fly, what do we not see about ourselves? Only a veil keeps us from a world where wings will remove all difficulties, and that veil is torn, torn by the live embers of words winding into a light-web and encircling the stone cross above me. The runes and the twisting vines glow with all the radiance of hidden things revealed as the graybrown sparrows in the stone come alive, rising rising above the chapel roof above the night mist beyond the tree branches rising rising until they are more than sparrows they are stars.

The night spins away from me, and the wasted candles, still burning, stand and wait. I leave them lighted because the bell for lauds is already ringing, the first rays of dawn reaching through the windows.

The book is hidden in my habit again. *Deus, Deus meus, ad te de luce vigilo. Sitivit in te anima mea*. I say the words along with them but not in Latin: *O God, my God, I watch for you at break of day. My soul thirsts for you*.

My sisters gasp and glare, but I barely notice. My fallen voice now rises on the beating wings of sparrows, with its own hints of fire and the song of the nightingale.

ROBIN STOREY DUNN

The Kingdom of Heaven

A week earlier, I'd overheard two men talking on the bus.

"Those people will help you out if you don't have a place."

The sign said Caritas. It was next to a church. That's where I went now. The door was locked so I knocked. A woman peeked out.

"I'm sorry, we're closed," she said.

She shut the door, and I turned to leave. I noticed the landscaping. I might be able to sleep behind some of these bushes, I thought, if someone's not already there.

I stopped before I got down the steps. I knocked again. The same woman peeked out.

"I'm sorry, we're closed."

"Please."

I could see by the discomfort on her face that she was the type who cared. She let me in and sat me at a desk. I gave her an abbreviated version of my story. I needed a place.

"There's only one place, if they have room. They may already be full for the night."

I took the address and left.

The Salvation Army shelter stood in the shadow of larger buildings. Homeless people waited in the yard out front for the doors to open. As I walked up, a man called out.

"Hey."

I looked and saw him leaning against a wall.

"I've got a hotel paid up for the week. You can stay with me."

I didn't believe him about the hotel. In any case, it wasn't worth the price.

"Come back if you change your mind."

Men could stay three nights. Women with children were allowed to stay a week. Women without children got three nights, like the men. A man wrote my name in a ledger. I waited outside until we were led to a cramped room for dinner served cafeteria-style: a slice of bread, a glass of tea, and a bowl of something pink. It took several minutes to make out the broken beans. I wasn't

that hungry.

After dinner, the men, women, and children were led to our quarters, a long room filled with beds. A large white woman took a bed against the wall and spread five children out around her. Somehow, with her foot in a cast and on crutches, she'd gotten them here.

A skinny white girl said she was sixteen and pregnant but she wasn't showing. A black girl who looked twelve said she was sixteen, and that her white husband was forty. She'd left behind a baby too sick to leave the hospital. A black girl was visibly pregnant. She said her name was Jackie. She was seventeen.

The woman with a broken leg held forth as an authority. She'd spent more time homeless than the rest of us combined. She knew how the system worked and what didn't. I sat on my top bunk cross-legged and listening, with Jackie on the bed below.

The skinny white girl left to go to the bathroom. When she came back she said she'd just miscarried on the toilet. The women were alarmed.

"What did you do?"

She said, "I flushed it," and laughed. The middle-aged woman laughed too.

I wanted to leave. I felt out of place. More than out of place, I felt threatened in a way I didn't when I was alone.

I packed my bag. When I looked up I saw two women in the doorway.

"Does anybody need a place to stay?"

I looked at them.

Black nuns; I hadn't expected that. I watched the other women hurry, gathering in front of them excitedly. One nun was barely five feet tall and seemed aged. The other nun was tall and broad, and younger; I couldn't have guessed her age. Both were wearing robes, which fell to their ankles, and matching habits that spilled over their shoulders and draped down their backs. The older one was dressed all in white, the younger one dark blue.

It was the younger one who'd spoken. The women all answered at once.

"I do!"

"Me!"

"Me too!"

I sat on the edge of my bunk, watching, and was the last to say, "Me, too." I hoped I wasn't too late.

"We have room for everybody," the younger nun said. "Everyone can come."

We followed them out and gathered on the sidewalk. Their station wagon

was parked out front. It looked like a remnant of war, paint and chrome gone, a sea of rust and dents. The white girl had her own car and offered to carry as many as she had room for. Squeezed between two cars, we barely fit.

I rode in the station wagon, in the front seat between the two nuns; I was already sticking close. The younger one drove and did the talking, while the older one read a large Bible resting on her lap.

“We’re from King Over Kings and Yahvah Over Lords Temple,” the younger one said. “We believe in the Bible, and that salvation comes through Yahshua, the one you know as Jesus.”

They weren’t Catholic.

Inside, I was sure I’d seen crucifixes around their necks, but I saw now they were unadorned.

“I’m Sister Lydia,” the younger one said, “and this is Mother Ruth.”

Mother Ruth, on my right, half-turned and said, “All praise is due to Yahvah most high, Yahshua the son, and the precious Holy Comforter.”

When the older one spoke it sounded almost like singing. When Sister Lydia began again, her voice sounded flat by comparison but also more pointed.

“Yahvah is the Hebrew name of our heavenly father. It’s found in the Hebrew Scriptures nearly six thousand times. Yahshua is the name of his son, the one you call Jesus, who died for us on the cross.”

“It’s true,” I said. A Christian band Jenny listened to used the name Yeshua. She’d played me some of their songs.

Their place was just east of I-35, not far from downtown. As we pulled up Sister Lydia said, “Welcome to the Lighthouse.”

We gathered in the small dirt yard surrounded by chain link fencing. Chinaberry trees provided shade. Weeds grew against the side of the house and along the boundary.

Before she let us in, Sister Lydia told us the rules.

No smoking.

No drinking or drugs.

No sex unless you were married.

Curfew was at seven. You had to attend church services unless you were working or in school. Church was every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday night, all day Saturday, and every Sunday afternoon.

“We keep the seventh-day Sabbath,” Sister Lydia said. “It lasts from sunset Friday til sunset Saturday. We spend that day in in worship.”

The white girl whispered to the woman on crutches. "Like hell."

It was a shotgun house that stretched the length of the lot, with a single hallway down the center and rooms on either side. Halfway through, a door divided the house front from back. Souls lived in front, and the church lived in back.

The biggest room went to the woman with the broken leg and her children. Sister Lydia put me in a room with the sixteen-year-old girl who'd left a husband and a baby somewhere. Her name was Lisa. She said she'd come from the country, and I believed it.

There was no furniture in the room, only a pile of donated clothes we formed into pillows for our heads. We slept side-by-side on the floor. I slept peacefully for the first time in weeks.

The next morning, Lisa and I went through the clothes, taking what we liked. I pulled a Levi's jacket from the pile.

"But you've already got one," Lisa said. I saw the need and want in her eyes. It was true, I was wearing one already, and she had nothing.

"Yeah," I said, but kept it.

Lisa didn't trust the church.

"There's something off," she said. "Something's not right."

I nodded in agreement. If she left, I'd have the room to myself.

She was the first to leave, that first morning. She slipped off without a word. Afterward, guilt ate at me; she had nowhere to go. Still, I was glad to have the room to myself, at least for the moment.

After Lisa, the next to leave was the skinny white girl, who had no taste for the preaching and rules. The rest followed, all except me and Jackie. I didn't understand why people would leave rather than shelter in place. I'd come to see almost all of them did.

The first morning, before Lisa left, Sister Lydia gathered us in the hallway and told us rent was seventy dollars a week. The women complained.

"You said it was free."

"You said we didn't have to pay anything."

"I knew this wasn't right."

Sister Lydia said, "If you don't have anything, you don't have to pay. When

you get a job and you have something, you can pay then.”

Sister Lydia said we needed to go to Caritas to ask them for groceries and rent money. She drove us downtown, then waited in the car while we went in.

As we began to introduce ourselves a man cut us off in the foyer. He knew who we were.

“You tell Sister Lydia she can do what she wants, but we’re not helping.”

The woman who’d helped me the day before was there, looking down at her desk and avoiding eye contact. Someone gave each of us a bag of groceries.

“If you end up somewhere else, come back and maybe we can help,” the man said.

We each carried a sack to the car. Sister Lydia asked what happened. The women were quick to explain.

“They didn’t want to give us anything because we’re with you.”

“They didn’t want to help.”

“They don’t like you.”

Sister Lydia knew the man we were talking about. “They’re supposed to help those in need,” she said, not for the last time. “They help who they want.”

Back at the house, she collected the groceries and took them to the back. The women were quick to complain.

“It’s for the house,” she said. “We’ll fix all your meals.”

The women grumbled, but I didn’t mind. Twice a day, they served us bowls of beans and rice. The beans looked like beans. I’d never eaten so well.

That night, we went to church. Again, we squeezed into the station wagon and the white girl’s car, and drove to a small house not far from the Lighthouse. As she parked at the curb, Sister Lydia said, “This is the temple.”

She let us into a small utility room then stopped to give instructions.

“When Yahvah appeared to Moses, he told Moses to take off his shoes because where he stood was holy ground. It was holy because Yahvah appeared there. This is where Yahvah makes himself known to us, so we take off our shoes as a form of respect.”

Some complained but everyone complied, lining their shoes in pairs along the wall. Barefoot or in socks, we were led through a doorway hung with burgundy velveteen drapes. The room inside was dimly lit. Mother Ruth sat at an organ, her back to us, singing and playing. It was the song I came to think of as her theme; she used it to open and close every service. It played in my head

every day until recently, until I wrote it down. As I wrote and re-wrote this, the song disappeared like a satisfied ghost.

Praise him

Praise him

Praise him in the morning, praise him at noontime

Praise him

Praise him

Praise him when the sun goes down

The music swelled, filling the room. Mother Ruth's hands and feet moved each with a life of its own, confidently. The organ was the only instrument in the room, but she made it sound like a band, and her voice filled the room like a choir. One or two people were kneeling. Others stood, their arms aloft. We crowded into two rows of folding chairs.

A rostrum stood across from us. The light came from two small lamps, one on the rostrum, the other on the organ to our left. The walls were covered in block lettering. I kept going back to them as I watched a man dancing near the rostrum. As he hopped, sang, and shouted, I read.

NOW THE WORKS OF THE FLESH ARE MANIFEST, WHICH
ARE THESE: ADULTERY, FORNICATION, UNCLEANNESS,
LASCIVIOUSNESS, IDOLATRY, WITCHCRAFT, HATRED, VARIANCE,
EMULATIONS, WRATH, STRIFE, SEDITIONS, HERESIES.

I didn't know what VARIANCE and EMULATIONS meant, but thought I understood the rest. I'd done most of them. The passage ended with another list. This time I recognized the words but couldn't say what they meant.

BUT THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE,
LONGSUFFERING, GENTLENESS, GOODNESS, FAITH, MEEKNESS,
TEMPERANCE: AGAINST SUCH THERE IS NO LAW.

The man dancing near the rostrum was tall and thin. He wore a black choir robe. His hair was natural, a little long, his beard patchy under high cheekbones. If I said he looked like Marvin Gaye you might think I'm the kind of white woman who can't tell Marvin Gaye from Isaac Hayes, and I may

be, but even now everyone agrees: he looked just like Marvin Gaye. He was hopping from foot to foot, singing a tune that bore no relation to the song Mother Ruth was playing. He hopped, then leapt, knees pumping sometimes as high as his chest. Sometimes he'd jump straight up as if trying to touch his head to the ceiling, which he almost did. He sounded like a ghost.

A second man knelt. His hair was cut close, his beard neatly trimmed. Thick glasses gave him a studious look. Later, Jackie would say she thought he was the handsome one, but I disagreed. I saw his lips moving but couldn't hear his murmurings.

A woman near me looked just like Sister Lydia, but Sister Lydia was across the room, her arms held high, her fingers splayed. The lookalike held an infant in one arm and waved the other in the air. Children stood on either side of her, some singing, others looking bored, looking, probably, like children in places of worship everywhere.

An older woman sat in a folding chair. She gently waved an arm, handkerchief in hand, a Bible resting in her lap. From time to time, her body jerked with a spasm that worked its way out through her limbs, and left through her fingertips. Her face was rapturous.

Another woman, much younger, danced across the room, then in the middle, then in a corner, then across again, her eyes shut, then wide open, her movements graceful, then spasmodic. She wept. She was silent, then sang, then screamed, louder, then laughed forcefully, bending over and clutching her belly as if it hurt. She quieted and closed her eyes. When she opened them, she was staring at me. Since I was staring at her our eyes locked. She was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen.

"Come here, sailor," she said, smiling now. She said it like Mae West. She crooked her finger to beckon me.

I smiled back, uncertain. Her robe was soaked with sweat.

"Yes, you," she said. She reached out and took my hand. She began moving easily, pulling me to her, wrapping her arms around me, then spinning me; She was smooth. I tried to keep up, but was clumsy. Too quickly, she let go.

She began to sing again. The melody was a roller coaster ride. The words stuck in my head.

"I've got the Holy Ghost and fire, why don't you get high?"

When a pretty woman looks at you and says, "I've got the Holy Ghost and fire, why don't you get high?" you sit. You stay.

Later, the man who sang like a ghost preached, mostly by shouting. He preached with his whole body, pausing to draw a chest full of air before shouting some more. It was a newcomers' sermon, a warning to repent now, before it was too late.

There was more music, more prayer. My senses were distorted, and I was, somehow, strangely, high. It was a sensory high. I lost all sense of time. When the room settled and I looked around, only Jackie and I remained of the group we'd come with. I was on the floor. Mother Ruth knelt beside me and took my hand. She asked me if I was ready.

I said, "Yes."

I had almost no idea what I was doing.

Jackie knelt nearby. The woman who'd danced with me was holding Jackie's hand, coaching her while Mother Ruth coached me. I stole glances, wishing I'd gotten the pretty one.

Mother Ruth was earnest, focused. "You need to ask Yahshua for forgiveness," she said. I nodded. She asked me to repeat the prayer she made.

I stole another glance at the woman with Jackie. Jackie was weeping and praying out loud. I got the sense she'd done this before, or at least seen it happen.

I re-focused on Mother Ruth, trying to maintain a proper solemnity.

"I was shapen in iniquity."

"In sin did my mother conceive me."

"Thou desirest truth in the inward parts."

I sensed more than knew what the words meant. Mother Ruth clutched me to her chest, squeezing me tight. She was crying. It seemed like everyone was crying except me.

She put her hands on my shoulders. I stared back.

"You belong to Yahshua now," she said. "You belong to the kingdom of heaven."

ANDREAS FLEPS

Heaven

*If there is no God,
Not everything is permitted to man.
He is still his brother's keeper
And he is not permitted to sadden his brother,
By saying that there is no God.*

—Czeslaw Milosz

I have thought it a waste of time
straining our eyes searching for heaven,
when hell is easier to see,

and eternity is merely where the eyes go
when they are tired and desperate
to escape a human skull.

But I want to believe for my mother,
whose love laid streets of gold
beneath my feet within the nuclear fallout
of my thoughts;

for my brother,
who texts me every day before I wake
as if I am his morning prayer;

for my father's inner discontent
to be cleansed into contentment—

for his lion persona to lie
next to his lamb of a heart;

for my Opa's body failing over the years
with congestive heart failure, bowel cancer,
and multiple strokes—

his tongue tied to confusion,
and white eyebrows raised in surrender
to a broken brain;

for my Oma suffering through war
as she heard the sounds of rape,
but didn't know what rape is—
still able to see her reflection in the blade
her mother held tight in hand
under the light of an indifferent moon,
as it watched women walk back to the group
wailing and collapsing to their knees—

innocence and dignity caved in
under the weight of trauma
human skin shouldn't contain;

for how she ran with her good friend
hand in hand as bullets buzzed past them like ballistic bees—

those hives of hurt, and one pierced the friend
straight through the back, but my Oma kept sprinting—
she had no other choice—carrying the blood of the friend
on her face to safety;

for how my Oma lost her sister who was 36 to cancer,
then was visited by her in a dream and heard
it's not what we thought,
but it's even better than we imagined—

how she waits in anticipation for the day
when all these tears will be wiped away,
and in her mansion in the sky,
ghosts will take off their white sheets
so she can hug what is no longer absent.

I want to believe paradise
is like an inverted explosion—

an atomic bomb in reverse,
gathering every living thing
back to its proper glory.

In the name of Maybe,
And its wild, wide story,
and in the name of Love—

I do not believe in heaven,
but I will
 if you need me to.

CONTRIBUTORS

ERIN ANDERSON has taught English in the U.S., Czech Republic, Russia, and Saudi Arabia. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, she has taught in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia. She has an MFA from Northern Michigan University (2003), and her work has appeared in *The Cream City Review*, *The Mississippi Review*, *Wordriot*, *Slow Trains*, and *The Summerset Review*.

DEVON BALWIT's most recent collection is titled *A Brief Way to Identify a Body* (Ursus Americanus Press). Her individual poems can be found or are upcoming in *Relief: A Journal of Art and Faith*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Apt* (long-form issue), *Psalterry & Lyre*, and *Saint Katherine's Review*, among others.

MARK BENNION's poems have appeared or will appear in *Anglican Theological Review*, *The Aurorean*, *Poems for Ephesians*, *San Pedro River Review*, *WestWard Quarterly*, and other journals.

MARK S. BURROWS's poems have appeared in many journals, including *Poetry*, *The Cortland Review*, *Southern Quarterly*, *Metamorphoses*, *91st Meridian*, *Spiritus*, *The Christian Century*, and *Anglican Theological Review*, among others. His recent poetry collections include *The Chance of Home*, *Meister Eckhart's Book of the Heart* (2017), and *Meister Eckhart's Book of Secrets*, both of the latter co-written with Jon M. Sweeney. He is a past recipient of the Wytter Binner Poetry Prize, with a residency at the Santa Fe Art Institute. He teaches religion and literature at the University of Applied Sciences in Bochum (Germany) and edits poetry for several journals and for Paraclete Press.

STEPHANIE CHAMBERS is an Assistant Professor of Art at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor. She received her Master of Fine Arts (2014) from Northern Illinois University, her Master of Arts (2011) and Bachelor of Fine Arts (2008) from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Stephanie makes paintings and drawings that question our relationship to nature by investigating the dynamics of landscape. They focus on the mental, physical, and spiritual connections with nature to challenge our ideas of what nature is, how we know and interact with it. You can learn more about her and her work at www.sechambers.com

TODD COPELAND's poems have appeared in *The Journal*, *High Plains Literary Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Sewanee Theological Review*, *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, *The Antigonish Review*, and *Columbia Poetry Review*, among other publications. He won *Descant's* Baskerville Publishers Poetry Award in 2018. He lives in Waco, Texas.

WILL CORDEIRO has new work appearing or forthcoming in *Cimarron Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Salamander*, *Sycamore Review*, *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *The Threepenny Review*, *Typehouse*, and elsewhere. Will co-edits the small press Eggtooth Editions. Will received an MFA and Ph.D. from Cornell University and is a faculty member in the Honors College at Northern Arizona University. Currently, Will lives in Guadalajara, Mexico.

PAMELA CRANSTON is a poet whose work has appeared in *Adirondack Review*, *Anglican Theological Review*, *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, *Syracuse Press*, *Penwood Review*, and many others. She is the author of *The Madonna Murders* and two books of poetry: *Coming To Treeline: Adirondack Poems* and *Searching for Nova Albion*. She was ordained an Episcopal priest in 1990 and has served churches and hospices in the San Francisco Bay area for the past thirty years.

ROBIN STOREY DUNN was raised in a family of German immigrants and grew up hearing "Hitler was right on the race issue" at the dinner table. At sixteen, she ran away and was homeless before being rescued by an all-Black spiritualist church. For the next ten years she lived an ascetic, communal life. When it became impossible to stay, she had to find her way in a world where she hadn't yet learned to live.

BEN EGERTON is a poet and education lecturer from Wellington, New Zealand. He is close to completing his PhD in poetry and theology at Victoria University of Wellington, where he held the 2018 Claude McCarthy Fellowship. Ben's poetry has been published in print and in online journals in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand.

ANDREAS FLEPS is a 28-year-old poet, based near Chicago. He studied Theology and Philosophy at Dominican University, and has had poems published in *The Poet's Haven*, *High Shelf Press*, as well as forthcoming in *Listen*. He translates teardrops.

MARYANNE HANNAN's first book, *Rocking Like It's All Intermezzo: 21st-Century Psalm Responsorials*, was recently published by Resource Publications. She lives in upstate New York. Her website is mhannan.com.

MAX HARRIS was born in England and now lives in Wisconsin. His stories have been published in *The Missouri Review*, *The Madison Review*, *The Windhover*, *Litro Magazine*, and other journals on both sides of the Atlantic. He is also the author of six scholarly books, including *Theater and Incarnation*, *Sacred Folly: A New History of the Feast of Fools*, and, most recently, *Christ on a Donkey: Palm Sunday, Triumphal Entries, and Blasphemous Pageants*.

CARRIE HEIMER is the author of *The Other Stars Hover & Wait: Poems and Prayers for Advent*. Her work has appeared in *The Comstock Review*, *The Atlanta Review*, *Rock & Sling*, *Relief: A Journal of Art and Faith*, and *Dappled Things*. She teaches for the same reason she writes: to explore grace.

ROBERT MANASTER's poetry has appeared in numerous journals including *First Things*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Image*, *Sojourners*, *Maine Review*, and *Spillway*. He's also published poetry book reviews in such publications as *Rattle*, *Colorado Review*, and *Rain Taxi*.

D.S. MARTIN is the author of four poetry collections, including *Ampersand*, and *Conspiracy of Light: Poems Inspired by the Legacy of C.S. Lewis*—both from Cascade Books. He is Poet-in-Residence at McMaster Divinity College, the Series Editor for the Poiema Poetry Series, and has edited three anthologies: *The Turning Aside*; *Adam, Eve, & the Riders of the Apocalypse*; and *In A Strange Land*.

SUSAN MCLEAN, a retired professor of English from Southwest Minnesota State University, has published two books of poetry, *The Best Disguise* and *The Whetstone Misses the Knife*, as well as one book of translations of the Latin poet Martial, *Selected Epigrams*. Her translations of Latin, French, and German poetry have appeared in *First Things*, *Presence*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Transference*, and elsewhere.

JOY MOORE lives in Tennessee, where she manages two coffee shops and a music venue and teaches writing and interdisciplinary courses. Her writing has appeared in *Hunger Mountain*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Lake Effect*, *Serving*

House, and *Prairie Schooner*, where she won a Glenna Luschei award.

ANGELA ALAIMO O'DONNELL is an English professor and Associate Director of the Curran Center for American Catholic Studies at Fordham University. Her publications include two chapbooks, five collections of poems, a memoir, a book of hours based on the prayer life of Flannery O'Connor and an award-winning biography of O'Connor. O'Donnell's work has won the NY Encounter Poetry Prize and been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Web Award. Her most recent collection is *Still Pilgrim*, and a new book, *Andalusian Hours: Poems from the Porch of Flannery O'Connor*, is forthcoming from Paraclete Press. <http://angelaalaimoodonnell.com/>

DAYE PHILLIPPO has lived her life backwards, first raising her large family, then earning Creative Writing degrees from Purdue University and Warren Wilson MFA for Writers. She is the recipient of a Mortarboard Fellowship, an Elizabeth George Grant, and a Tennessee Williams Scholarship for poetry. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Literary Mama*, *Shenandoah*, *Cider Press Review*, *Great Lakes Review*, *Natural Bridge*, and *Presence*, among others.

FORREST RAPIER is a recent MFA graduate from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He is the winner of an Academy of American Poets Prize, and his work is forthcoming or has appeared in *Best New Poets*, *Borderlands*, *Verse Daily*, *The Boiler*, and *The Greensboro Review*. He is currently a lecturer in the English Department at UNCG.

LUCI SHAW is the author of over 35 books of poetry and non-fiction prose. She is Writer in Residence at Regent College and a recipient of the Denise Levertov Award for Creative Writing. Her most recent collection is *Eye of the Beholder*, and a new poetry volume, *The Generosity*, is forthcoming from Paraclete Press.

BROOKE STANISH is a creative writer who has been published in the *Living Waters Review* and will soon be published in Sigma Tau Delta's magazine *The Rectangle*. Additionally, Brooke's writing has been published in various other places such as the University of Edinburgh's *The Student* and Washington, D.C.-based *Capitol Standard*. She is also an avid reader, long-distance runner, and

perpetual learner interested in the inherent unity underlying practices of art, science, and spirituality.

STEPHEN TUTTLE is an associate professor of English at Brigham Young University, and his writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Threepenny Review*, *The Southern Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Normal School*, and elsewhere.

DONNA WALKER-NIXON was a full professor at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, where she received the distinction of receiving the Mary Stevens Piper award for excellence in teaching. She lists her five primary professional achievements as 1) founding *Windhover: A Journal of Christian Literature* in 1997, 2) co-editing the *Her Texas* series with her friend and mentor James Ward Lee, 3) co-founding *The Langdon Review of the Arts in Texas* 4) publishing her novel *Canaan's Oothoon*, and 5) serving as lead editor of *Her Texas*, an anthology of creative works by Texas women.

HALLIE WAUGH is an emerging writer and native Nashvillian currently living in Oklahoma City. She recently received her MFA from Seattle Pacific University's low-residency program, and her nonfiction has been published at *Nations Media*. She is interested in work that explores the longing for home and the minute complexities of human relationships.

HOLLY WELLS lives in Mississippi and has taught both high school and community college English. As a writer, she is interested in exploring the points of view of both major and marginal historical figures. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Copperfield Review*, *Torrid Literature Journal*, *TWJ Magazine*, *Sehnsucht*, *Wordgathering*, *The Magazine of History & Fiction*, *Literally Stories*, and *The Sunlight Press*.

SHANNA POWLUS WHEELER is the author of two poetry collections: *Evensong for Shadows* (Resource Publications/Wipf and Stock) and *Lo & Behold* (Finishing Line Press). Her individual poems and book reviews have appeared in a wide range of publications. She teaches in the English Department and directs the Writing Center at Lycoming College in Williamsport, PA. www.shannapowluswheeler.com.

ERIN WILSON's poems have appeared in or are forthcoming in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Envoi*, *Kestrel: A Journal of Literature and Art*, *On the Seawall*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The Adirondack Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *The Literary Review of Canada*, and elsewhere. Her first collection is due out in the spring/summer of 2020 with *Circling Rivers*. She lives and writes in a small town in northern Ontario, Canada.

The Windhover

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CONTRIBUTORS

Erin Anderson

Andreas Fleps

Forrest Rapier

Devon Balwit

Maryanne Hannan

Luci Shaw

Mark Bennion

Max Harris

Brooke Stanish

Mark S. Burrows

Carrie Heimer

Stephen Tuttle

Stephanie Chambers

Robert Manaster

Donna Walker-Nixon

Todd Copeland

D.S. Martin

Hallie Waugh

Will Cordeiro

Susan McLean

Holly Wells

Pamela Cranston

Joy Moore

Shanna Powlus Wheeler

Robin Storey Dunn

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

Erin Wilson

Ben Egerton

Daye Phillippo