The Windhover

The Windhover

25.1

The Windhover

25.1
Spring 2021

Cover: ***Stall***
by David JP Hooker
earthenware

The Windhover is published twice a year, in February and August.
Subscriptions are $22 (two issues).
The most recent issue is $12.
Back issues are $6.

For full submission guidelines, subscription and purchasing information,
and samples of back issues, please visit *The Windhover* homepage:

http://undergrad.umhb.edu/english/windhover-journal

The Windhover is a proud member of CLMP
(Community of Literary Magazines and Presses)

CONTENTS

AMY NEMECEK

The Language of the Birds

On the fifth day, your calloused fingers
stretched out and plucked a single reed
from the river that flowed from Eden,
trimmed its hollow shaft to length and
whittled one end to a precise vee
that you dipped in the inkwell of ocean.
Touching pulpy nib to papyrus sky,
you brushed a single hieroglyph—
feathered the vertical downstroke
flourished with serif of pinions,
a perpendicular crossbar lifting
weightless bones from left to right.
Tucking the stylus behind your ear,
you blew across the wet silhouette,
dried a raven's wings against the static,
and spoke aloud the symbol's sounds:
"Fly!"

MATT MILLER

Milkweed Prayer

I am driving along Interstate I-80 in south-central Nebraska, a stretch of land I have known all my life, and known as a classically grim Midwestern roadside: soybean fields, feedlots, gas stations, trucks passing at 85 mph.

Today, though, as I race by the fields myself, I see milkweed. Milkweed in the margins of the highway and on the edges of the fields, milkweed in great clusters for miles along that conduit for haste, milkweed waving its green spiked hands in the ever-present wind of the plains.

Milkweed in the highway margin. What a wonder.

I suppose it is well known by now, the urgency of milkweed, the need monarch butterflies have for it, its loss to the herbicides of agriculture and development, and so the loss of monarch butterflies. Milkweed has been absent from the Nebraskan landscape for a long time, dominated as it is by giant, weed-free farming operations. Then we all started getting worried about the monarchs.

Butterfly gardens at libraries and in backyards are well enough, but to see the highway margin and the edge of the cornfields dense with milkweed? Well. I take the milkweed, named *Asclepias* for a god of health, as a glimpse of the healing of this place.

I recall the dragonfly day. I was maybe ten. A summer day, glittering with countless iridescences in the air: tiny damselflies and massive darners; bluets and skimmers and emeralds. Blue green black orange white blue green, humming through the air so thick that I couldn't cross the yard. Our elderly white cat performed a standing leap five feet into the air to bring down one of the largest, yet the air still sizzled with thousands undisturbed.

As a child I witnessed such insect migrations often—the dragonfly day stands out in my memory only for being specially lovely. I remember the monarch butterfly migration as an ordinary beauty, an annual blessing.

Now things are different. I live in a forest where insect life teems around me: walking sticks, wheel bugs, carpenter bees, even stray dragonflies. If I see a single monarch, though, I thrill at it. I call my children. Not for their childhood the giant flocks, but the monarch as another solitary specimen.

So when I spot the milkweed waving its hands in the margin, I raise my own hands in acclamation. I have no idea who allowed the plant to flourish

here, whether by seeding the sides of the highway or merely ceasing to eradicate it, but I bless them. And I pray:

Give us this day—milkweed, O Lord.

May its floss be set before you like incense.

May it lift up its hands to you by the roadside, may it call to those rushing by.

Asclepias, pray for us.

May there be a day when the roadsides are thick with it. A dragonfly day.

Let the opening of its blossoms and the spread of its pollen be acceptable in your sight,

O LORD God of milkweed and monarch alike.

JACK AUSTIN

St. Barbara and the Boys

I stand in the woods. I stand in the road. I stand everywhere simultaneously. There is a bolt of lightning that killed my father 1600 years ago that follows me wherever I go. Both it and I are invisible. There are chains around my ankles, and when they shake it's a clean rattle. No one can hear them, though. I am here to watch, to wait, and to guide when necessary. I am the patron saint of armorers, architects, and those who die in explosions.

There's a small town cut through by a river and a pair of train tracks. Between these two currents there's nothing but forest and trails. Under the oaks, I watch mostly young boys. The drugs are a kind of detonation, and so they are my new wards. They get high, then higher. Each time they throw a party, it reaches for the sublime, and so each party is a failure. They think they haven't smoked enough, or found the right social balance, but that's not it. There are no shortcuts.

They spend decades failing. Time is not simultaneous, and although I am powerful, I can neither see the road ahead, nor alter their course. Instead, I stand here and watch them lose their minds. Summer nights get thinner, go wintry, and accumulate.

The lightning is my only company. Whenever I turn around, it's there, white with even more whiteness in the middle, like a suspended camera flash. It rubs my back to keep me warm, but it does not make time go any faster.

It feels silly to pray, having to answer so many myself.

Yet, I can't help it.

It's been seven centuries of explosions. Grant me strength. The lightning is dull and time is getting heavy. Lord, God, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, grant me strength or give me some better charge.

Today, it is zero degrees. The lightning wraps itself around me. The boys have to take their gloves off in order to pass a joint. When they are finished, they look around, but cannot see the path which leads back to the road. They aren't scared, though. They have no reason to be. In an hour, maybe, but, for now, the sideways snow and the drift of chemicals pair beautifully. For one of them, it's the happiest he's felt since he first started smoking. The boy has a Greek last name and black eyes, like me, so I pay special attention to him.

I'm not sure if it's right to call them "boys" anymore. Most boys don't grow beards, or visit the graves of other boys. Most boys don't have boys of their own. Some of them forget to pay their bills. Some have become assistant managers, or sous chefs, but, no matter what, they always come back here. The number gets smaller, but they stay the same. They live for the almost. The moment of near bodilessness at the top of their highs.

They're lost, and so St. Christopher appears. He has the body of a mason, but the head of a saluki. We do not speak. I look at his long, thin muzzle and feel unearthed. It's exciting to watch a dog-headed man. He stands behind the boys, pushing them in time with the wind, towards the path.

"Sister," the voice rolls into my head.

He looks only at the boys, though, making sure they continue on the right path.

"Brother," I reply.

Then, one by one, they are swallowed by woods and whiteness.

This is not the first time I've been in a car with one of them. The unusual thing is that it is only one and not the entire group. It's the Greek boy, and he's not thinking anything. He's drunk. His car is like any of the other cars: grey interior, salt-stained, and a black dashboard. There are crumbs in the gear shift. I know the fact that I've been called here can only mean one thing.

I look out the window and wonder where it's going to come from.

Is there a deer out there?

It's impossible to see anything through the underbrush. I cannot tell if the forest is empty, or full of eyes.

The lightning is in the back. I can see it in the sideview mirror, brilliant, but contained. It gives off no light.

I feel a thought surfacing in the boy's head. It's a memory, over twenty-years old, now. He's hiding behind a couch, back when he was small enough to do so. No one knows where he is. There's a low voice looking for him. He hears his name. He hears his mother start to talk, then the low voice gets louder. The boy feels his name in the floorboards. No matter what, he will not come out from behind the couch.

This fear is familiar to me. I ended my life chained to the floor of my bedroom, watching my father's men cut away my skin, inch-by-inch. When I was finally executed, the lightning came to strike my father down. Now, it waits with me in the car, looking out for deer.

I can leave my memory, but the boy cannot. His name shakes through the cool wood floors of his childhood home, up into his palms. When the low voice leaves, the boy stands up. He's not tall enough to see over the back of the couch, so he gets down on his stomach and crawls out. As he looks up, a ray of sun shoots through the house, all the way from the backdoor window to the living room.

It's a truck.

Of course, I still feel pain. It's the only way I can do my job.

There are a couple minutes between the accident and when the boy goes. He's in shock and his brain is underwater. There are sparks here and there, but nothing connects. The front end of his car is collapsed like a folding fan and the windshield glass has broken up into rough cubes. Outside air and inside air mix. There's a dry funk of a heated car, pine needles, and gasoline. In the last thirty seconds, the boy's brain does its light show.

He remembers his mother. In spring, summer, fall, and snowstorms, she's overweight and sweet. There's the old kitchen, and a trip to Lake Superior with black fish. He remembers a patch of freckles on her forearm, and goes.

He's lucky.

I stand in the road, with the lightning, and wait.

NICHOLAS SAMARAS

Directions for Walking on the Holy Mountain

1.

The trip begins before the trip.
The trip begins with the thought.

2.

Whatever you do, don't walk between monasteries.
A walk from one monastery to another monastery
can mean life or death. If you are ever caught

out at night, climb a tree and tie yourself in.
You will stay awake by the scrimmage
sounds of wolves and wild boars.
Every night here is the twelfth century.

Don't walk between monasteries later than any afternoon.
Wait every morning for the boat to ferry you.
Don't even think about walking between monasteries.

3.

As you are walking between monasteries, pack light.
Gravity will sap you quickly.
Remember to begin your walk as an old man,
and finish as a young man.
Understand what this means.

Walk deliberately and slowly, thinking with every step.
Even with good directions, you will lose the road.
Your black shirt will streak white with salt.
Walk in any shade you can find.
Where you find water, drink and rest there for fifteen minutes.

When leaving, walk with the cool held in your mouth.
Hold the last swallow for as long as you can.
There will be distance between water.

4.

If darkness begins, your chances for survival go down.
The underbrush rustles near your feet.
Don't be there to encounter the darkness.
Regret you ever thought of walking between monasteries.

5.

Between water, you will learn to cry for help.
Cry for help.

Lie on any shaded part of the stones for rest.
If you die, try to lie down in the open.
Your body may be found like this, in a number of days,
by other walkers who also didn't wait for the boat.
Keep your passport in your front shirt pocket, to be identified.

6.

While dying, you may hear voices miles away, carried on wind.
They will sound like murmurings.

If they are angels, let go.
If they aren't, struggle to stand back up on the path.

7.

Drag your bag, rather than lifting it.
Eventually, a stone wall will mean civilisation,
as much as anything in this place can mean civilisation.

You will give your life for water.
You will beg for forgiveness.
The sight of the monastery gate
will strengthen you for one more step.

8.

Coenobitic monks may find you at their gate entrance.
They will bring you water and a thimble of hard alcohol for revival.

9.

Make sure to spend two days resting there.
Think of the walk that was stupidity,
and what wisdom came from the walk.

Attend the church services.
Rise at four a.m. and ponder the marvel of the stars
in that land of least electricity.

You don't know what you walked for, but this is it.

10.

You won't leave this monastery
until the Elder gives his blessing.
You won't leave until he says, "Go, and you will see."

In the clarity of morning, wait for the boat
to ferry you to the next monastery.
Whatever you do, do not walk between monasteries.

You will go, wiser for the road.
You will go.
You will see.

ANTHONY R. LUSVARDI, S.J.

Consider the Hyrax

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Nairobi was just a tented rail depot. Even in the 1950s, it remained a mere frontier outpost where zebra wandered across the airport's landing strip. Today the city is home to almost seven million people and bristles with construction. The rise of African Christianity, no less meteoric than that of the megalopolis itself, has also made Nairobi an important theological center, and, consequently, I was in the city for an academic conference.

Several of my Jesuit confreres in Rome, where I'd gone for graduate studies after being ordained a priest, talked up Kenya's beauty. They raved in particular about the retreat center where the conference was to be held, in Karen, the Nairobi suburb named after Danish colonial writer Karen Blixen and the setting for *Out of Africa*.

Nestled between national parks and forest sanctuaries, Karen did not disappoint. I pulled back the curtains of my window, and a vervet monkey scampered across the grass. Palm trees with hoary trunks shaded a stately path to the retreat center's main entrance, and its sprawling lawn gave way to a view of the Ngong Mountains. I tried counting bird species during breaks in the conference: a hawk circled far above; barrel-chested yellow finches, like tennis balls with wings, bounced among the shrubbery; other birds looked mundane on the ground but when they took flight showed plumage more elegant than an Armani suit; starlings appeared in enough colors to fill a paint catalogue—my favorite, indigo and ginger, I learned was aptly named the "superb starling." By the end of the first coffee break, I'd lost count.

The Jesuit custom is to make an eight-day silent retreat every year, and since I was at a retreat center already, I decided to stay on in Karen after the conference. In the silence after the other participants had left I explored the grounds alone; some plants I recognized as mammoth versions of Midwestern houseplants: aloes the size of compact cars, snake plants reaching shoulder height, cactus arms twisting to embrace the sky. Wildly shaped succulents and carpets of purple leaves lined the pathways; blood-red blossoms drooped from spiky stems that looked like medieval weapons; vines and creepers curled around trees; green tubes pointed skyward, like alien fingers yearning for home. A snail the size of my fist traced a slimy trail across a stone; a tortoise sunned

himself in a pool of lily pads with white and lilac blooms.

I was in no rush either, enjoying the lightness of the first day of retreat, cell phone and laptop packed away, the week's only task prayer and the freedom to doze and stroll. And so it came as a surprise that evening as the Ngong Mountains faded into sunset and I sat down to pray—beginning by recounting the many blessings I had received that year—that what I felt was sadness.

*

It was a quiet sadness, peaceful in its way, but still somehow inapt, the sort of feeling one expects amidst ruined English abbeys, not the lush edge of the savannah. The words of Scripture that came to mind were not from the Bible's numerous hymns of creation—*You birds of the air, bless the Lord!*—but melancholy Ecclesiastes, the Old Testament's black sheep. Qoheleth as the book is sometimes called—"Qoheleth" translates into something like "preacher;" "Ecclesiastes" refers to the assembly in which he speaks—does not mention the Promised Land or the Covenant, nor does it offer messianic prophecies or hope of future deliverance. Some have suggested the Preacher's worldview resembles that of skeptical Greeks like Epicurus and Euripides, but nothing in the book's language suggests Greek influence. An editor seems to have added a post-script to the original text reminding readers to approach the Preacher's words in the context of the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures.

As for the book's message—

> *Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity…*
> *I have seen everything that is done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind…*
> *The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it…*
> *All is vanity.*

Qoheleth does not share the New Testament's hope of justice in the afterlife; instead, for him, death is just the petering out of life. He is neither an atheist nor a secular progressive; he looks rather scornfully, in fact, on utopian aspirations. A wealthy man, Qoheleth once enjoyed his possessions, but such enjoyment has been fleeting. On balance, he supposes, it is best to do right instead of wrong, though he knows equally well that life gives no lasting rewards for good behavior. In the end, the righteous and the wicked share the same fate.

A less-adventurous editor than the Holy Spirit might have dropped Ecclesiastes from the canon, but the Church has judged it inspired. The book is, among other things, extraordinarily beautiful, the balance of its poetry

perennially compelling—

> *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:*
> *a time to be born, and a time to die…*
> *a time to kill, and time to heal…*
> *a time to weep, and a time to laugh…*
> *a time to love, and a time to hate;*
> *a time for war, and a time for peace.*

Even if not quite Christian, Qoheleth expresses something dignified and true, in the wise but weary tone of one who has seen the seasons come and go and realizes that we too will come and go. The balance is calming if not quite comforting: good and evil always pass; good and evil will always return. Knowing this adds a note of sadness to every celebration and endurance to every sorrow. Nothing worldly lasts. *All is vanity.*

*

A week before my trip to Kenya, my great-aunt Ida died. From Rome I took a high-speed train to Modena for the funeral. My grandmother, who immigrated to the United States in the 1950s, was the penultimate of ten children who grew up on a farm in northern Italy during the Depression and the Second World War. Ida fell somewhere in the middle of the clan and was one of my favorites. Slight and sweet, she hardly seemed related to two older great-aunts who'd been built on the chassis of a tank and had personalities to match. But even if growing up she preferred chores in the kitchen to work in the fields, Ida still possessed the toughness that characterized her generation. I remember visiting Italy as a teenager and taking a trip with Ida, a great-uncle, and a younger cousin to Assisi; we traipsed through town and across a woodsy hillside and felt our way through dark stone passages in a medieval fortress; from time to time my great-uncle would ask, "Is anyone tired?" Ida was always the first to pipe up, "Not I!" My image of Italy is still Ida standing in front of the door of her modest house, over which she always hung a cheerfully colored curtain to shade the sun, a beatific smile across her face and arms outstretched in welcome. Often enough, she was still wearing her apron, which meant tortellini waited inside.

It was different the last time I visited her some twenty years later, just after having been assigned to Rome for studies and not long before she died. She was suffering from throat and stomach problems, unable to eat more than a few bites at a time and always at risk of coughing up even that, her breath a wheezy rumble. She'd always been tiny, but by then there was not much left of her at

all. Her husband, son-in-law, and most of her siblings had already passed away. At the funeral I shared memories with cousins but realized my family tree, withering in Italy's demographic decline, had come to resemble a funnel. The place I remembered simply wasn't any more.

*

The longevity of my grandparents and their siblings had given me access to another world, like glimpsing a mountain valley through the window of a train passing in and out of tunnels. It was one of the blessings I counted that first evening of retreat, and there were many others. I thought of friends and teachers who'd been there for me through the slings and arrows of adolescence, the places I'd traveled—desert, jungle, mountains, cities—the joys of priesthood, the great adventure of Jesuit life. At first I wondered if the pang of melancholy I'd felt signaled ingratitude, a reminder of how much I am still original sin's spoiled progeny. Or perhaps it meant a defective faith, that even after the Resurrection, I'd returned to the grayscale world of Qoheleth. Isn't God the Lord of the living, not the dead? Or was this just the way one felt upon reaching what was, by the Psalmist's measure, the midpoint of life's journey—*seventy is the sum of our years, or eighty, if we are strong*. In the end, the feeling passed, but the question mark it created remained.

*

For a retreat center, my lodgings in Karen turned out to be surprisingly noisy after dark, louder than my quarters in central Rome. I heard chirps and growls, yelps and caws, screeches and hisses; rustling and scratching against my door; thuds that were either small birds or giant insects colliding with the windows. The next morning I identified the sources of some of the noise—dogs in a kennel on a neighboring farm, geese that produced a kind of throaty growl instead of quacking—though much of the cacophony remained mysterious. I'd mostly forgotten the strange sad feeling of the previous evening when I stopped in the office of my Jesuit host to make some practical arrangements. He asked how I'd slept.

Well, I answered, though I'd been surprised by the nocturnal commotion.

"The worst are the hyraxes!" he exclaimed. "They look small, but what a racket!"

"Hyraxes?" I said. "You have hyraxes?" I tried to muffle my enthusiasm so as not to seem untoward. Of all the animals I'd read about before coming to Kenya, the one that most intrigued me was the hyrax.

"Tree hyraxes, oh yes, we have plenty," he responded. "They are like—well, like very large squirrels."

After lunch I went out for a walk again—alert this time for my quarry—and, sure enough, I heard something overhead between a chirp and a squeak, but throatier, like a smoker imitating birdsong. I scanned for rustling in the trees and saw a furry streak, a leap, and branches swaying. Then more of the noise, not quite squawking and not quite braying. This one was relatively mellow; the nighttime racket made me imagine a cross between a distempered donkey and a turkey resisting torture.

I stayed still, and he descended to a lower branch. Boxier than a squirrel and without the tail—the body shape of a giant hamster—his dark fur reminded me of a beaver pelt. He paused and stared when he saw me—saucer eyes, mouse-like ears, puppy muzzle, whiskers, a mouth that seemed to smile. On the cute side as jungle creatures go, but too rodent-like to rival the teddy bear. After a moment, he judged me neither a threat nor particularly interesting and began to climb back upward. His body stretched awkwardly as he clambered from branch to branch, seemingly too bulky for his habitat yet still somehow making it work.

I hadn't yet gotten near enough to see what most interested me about the species, however, and the tree hyraxes of Karen would prove too standoffish to allow for a closer encounter. For that I would have to wait until my final day in Kenya and a safari to Hell's Gate National Park. As we were just about to leave the park the guide casually mentioned that Fischer's Tower—a column of volcanic stone jutting from the plains like Wyoming's Devil's Tower—was teeming with rock hyraxes. "Can we go?" I burst out, then added more soberly, "I mean, would it be possible to stop on our way out?"

At the base of the tower, a pair of locals was renting out rock-climbing equipment spread across two tables. "Excuse me," I said after wishing them a good afternoon, "I heard there might be an animal—some rock hyraxes—living near the tower. Do you have any idea where I might have a chance to see them?"

The lanky fellow who seemed to be in charge broke into a broad grin. "Do you mean this one?" he said and slowly turned his head to glance over his shoulder. And sure enough, barely an arm's length away, a furry critter poked unhurriedly at leaves and stems on a chest-high rocky shelf.

I didn't bother to disguise my glee. "May I?" I asked, pointing to his side of the table.

"Of course!" he said, and stepped aside, finding a spot in the shade in which to stretch out while waiting for other visitors. I moved cautiously at first,

but this hyrax seemed to enjoy the attention, preening a bit and remaining nonchalant even when, a few minutes later, a busload of Kenyan schoolchildren arrived to ogle alongside me. The hyrax and I regarded each other amicably for a while, and then I got down on a knee to try to get a view from below.

The owner of the climbing equipment chuckled from behind me. "You are trying to see the tusks?" he said knowingly.

And that, of course, was exactly it, the hyrax's most singular characteristic and the reason for my fascination—the miniature pair of tusks the creature reveals when yawning. These pointy protrusions—not its genial whiskers, trundling carriage, or fur—are the key to the hyrax's genealogy. It may look like a rodent and is sometimes misidentified as a badger (as happens, by the way, in most translations of the book of Leviticus, which declares eating hyrax unkosher), but the hyrax's closest living relative in the animal world is the elephant.

"Look at the feet," the man behind me advised, because the creature's three rubbery toes also replicate, in miniature, the feet of its enormous cousin.

*

Why did the hyrax's little tusks fascinate? Perhaps the thought of mini-elephants excited whatever childlike impulse circuses appeal to; the creature combined all the best acts—animals, dwarves, and, in the case of tree hyraxes, the flying trapeze. But there was something else, too, the mind-boggling evolutionary chain required to get from elephant to hyrax or vice versa. One does not need a PhD in evolutionary biology to realize that we are talking here not about a missing link but about a whole chain of intermediary species and subspecies that must have flittered into and then out of existence over the course of millennia of millennia. And the hyrax is hardly Africa's only *hapax legomenon*. The medley of birds I counted in Karen is barely an overture to Kenya's thousand-plus avian species that range from the superb starling to the rather hideous vultures that nest near Fischer's Tower and have managed, over the years, to turn the red sandstone cliff in which they live white with their caustic excrement. Which calls to mind Africa's five thousand species of dung beetles, who collectively prevent the savannah from becoming an uninhabitable sea of grossness. The dik-dik and the giraffe are both ungulates, but the dik-dik stands barely a foot tall, while the giraffe's heart alone is sometimes twice that size. The veins in its gargantuan neck contain special valves to keep its blood flowing against gravity. Africa's varied geography and climatic zones have given rise to flamingos that thrive in volcanic waters toxic to everything else,

to hundreds of species of cichlid fish that live only in Lakes Tanganyika and Malawi, to aardvarks, ostriches, serval cats, shoebill storks, crowned cranes, scaly anteaters, wildebeest, hyenas, and, of course, the hyrax.

I was marveling at all of this on my retreat, walking back from my encounter with the tree hyrax, when I first felt the inkling that the creature's existence somehow answered the question that had troubled me the night before. The hyrax—with the whole magnificent, living coat of many colors that is Africa—exists thanks to the alternating lush and desiccating seasons to which the continent is subject, to the warm currents of the Indian Ocean and the cold currents of the Atlantic, to mountains and jungles so massive they create their own weather, to tectonic fissures on either side of the Great Rift Valley that coat the plains in molten ash, to the soil that results—too thick for trees—and the rich grasslands that grow from it, to the great herds of herbivores that feed on the grass and the predators that feed on those herds, to the migrations in search of food that occur every year and the famines that occur every so often when food becomes scarce.

I continued to puzzle out the implications of this inkling after the retreat, wrapping up my African sojourn with a budget safari. At breakfast outside Masai Mara National Reserve, a group shared pictures from their early morning drive, reporting rather breathlessly on the thrill of watching a cheetah stalk a Thompson's gazelle. The feline glanced up from its kill on the camera's screen, paws and beard stained pink. The woman—American, early thirties—who was narrating while scrolling through the photos stumbled just a bit on her excitement, adding, a touch embarrassed, "Of course, we didn't really want the gazelle to die—but you know."

And, of course, I did know. I understood the complex interplay of moral instincts she felt but also knew that the thought didn't quite make sense. The cheetah does not hunt for the entertainment of safari-goers, but to eat. If the gazelle doesn't die, the cheetah will. There is no way to weave the coat of many colors without the crimson of the cheetah's claw and the vulture's beak. Qoheleth intuited this reality, and his poetry simply doesn't work if there's a time to be born—but, then, you know.

The Bible is less sentimental than we moderns tend to be. "The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God," says Psalm 104. Life means dying and becoming, and if that stops there is no more life.

The melancholy I had felt a few weeks before was not unlike that "—but you know," a sentiment that came naturally enough but didn't quite make sense.

Perhaps it was the soul's reflexive wince at loss. In counting up my blessings I'd become aware of the many dear people who had passed into and then out of my life; I'd day-dreamed for a moment of how wonderful it would be to return to those places that I'd left behind and catch up with everyone right where we'd left off. And I felt the impossibility of that too. Friends move away and drift apart and die, and they do so for the simple reason that that is what it means to live a human life. If we care for them, we feel sorrow for that loss, but somehow this, too, is good. God, after all, is the Lord of the living. Life means delightful little creatures like the hyrax—and losing all those links on the evolutionary chain so that hyraxes might be.

*

Hebel—the Hebrew word that is repeated twenty-seven times in Qoheleth to indicate the fleetingness of everything we try to grasp—does not translate exactly. It is usually rendered as "vanity," which captures its moral import. The more existentially inclined have suggested "incomprehensible" or "absurd," though Hebrew converses in the concrete, not abstractions, so something like "air" or "steam" or "vapor" is probably closer to the original sense. Fleeting, faint, perceptible for a moment—then gone. Perhaps the best translation is *breath*. For breath comes and goes, but without it there is no life. And so the word allows us to express the transitoriness of all things, to feel the ache of loss at the memory of those we will not see again and still somehow to feel gratitude for that ache too, to smile even at the vulture circling overhead, at both the lion and the instinct to run from him, to say *yes* and *thank you* for it all. Life is breath, and is it not beautiful to breathe? Qoheleth's editor was right to assert that "uprightly he wrote words of truth," even if not giving him the final word. For *hebel* too is breath, and melancholy passes, and perhaps there can be no real conflict between the Preacher's word and the Resurrection because if we are alive we are still becoming.

LISA BROGNANO

Gospel of John

Illuminated by souls' glow,
a portfolio of saintly achievements,
the rich luster of sacrifice,
and deeds inflated with love, the far
off heavens, the physical world's
top layer of bright white,
remained especially distant,
untouchable by lowly mortals in medium-
sized yards, particularly one harboring
a felled cherry tree that marked
the property line, its weathered bark
lifelessly split in front of knee-high
Queen Anne's Lace

Grayed from winter,
it waited to be milled into planks
by a hydraulic machine's violent teeth

But she felt God's disapproval
in destroying the *drupe*, harmless stone
fruit, as a footprint for recreation,
a chlorinated pool in a fiberglass shell,
unable to glorify the Sea of Galilee
in color or current,
irrelevant to the Gulf of Aqaba
and the waters of Bethesda—
with luscious sheep gates, colonnades,
and miracles

HANNAH MARSHALL

After Psalm 136

Though we continue to expand,
the stars shivering millennia of distant ripples,
our specks of hunger, cancer, morphine, sex
flung wide, what is everlasting?

If you ask the Big Bang, all human stories
are new as infants. Shakespeare and Beowulf
wet on the page, the hymn to Inanna sung
in yesterday's garden, the earth transitory and trivial.

Each creation myth we tell to keep our pulses confident
still must be built *upon a time*—everlasting is impossible
and inevitable, while time rings us all in
one band of gold or another.

Tonight, somewhere in the Midwest's driftless hills,
my grandmother Dee lies dying,
and though death seems everlasting,
nothing else has proven to be.

We play at *forever* in churches, wearing white,
but what is everlasting
when the dress is folded in its box,
and the body, too?

We want so much for things like *love*
to be colorfast. We dream of something more everlasting
than the rhythm of quaking aspens, than a jawbreaker candy,
than a smile fading from embalmed lips.

CONTRIBUTORS

DAVID ATHEY's stories and poems have appeared in various journals, including *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *Christianity & Literature*, *Seattle Review*, and *Tampa Review*.

JACK AUSTIN is a writer from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He is a graduate of the Hunter College MFA program. In 2016, he won the *Epiphany Magazine* Short Story Award.

AMY BORNMAN is a poet and artist living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her first book of poetry, *There is a Future*, was a prize-winner in Paraclete Press' inaugural poetry prize and will be published by Paraclete Poetry in 2021. She studied theater at Wheaton College. You can find more from Amy at amybornman.com.

LISA BROGNANO is the author of the novels *A Man for Prue* (Resplendence, 2017) and *In the Interest of Faye* (Golden Antelope, 2017) as well as these books of poetry: *The Willow Howl* (Nixes Mate, 2017), *The Copper Weathervane* (Luchador, 2020) and *Royal Blue Shutters* (Fernwood, 2021). Her poems and fiction have appeared in national and international literary journals.

KIT CARLSON is an Episcopal priest and a life-long writer with work appearing in publications as diverse as *Seventeen Magazine* and *Anglican Theological Review*. She is a Pushcart-Prize nominee, recently published in *Little Patuxent Review*, *Rock and Sling*, and *The Windhover*. She is author of *Speaking Our Faith* (Church Publishing, 2018). She lives in East Lansing, Michigan, with her husband Wendell, and Lola, a nervous rescue dog. Find her at www.kitcarlson.org.

LIZ CHARLOTTE GRANT is an editor and columnist at the *Curator Magazine*, and she has published or has forthcoming work at the *Huffington Post*, *Christianity Today*, *Hippocampus Magazine*, *Defenestration Magazine*, *Ruminate Magazine*'s blog, *Geez Magazine*, *Dappled Things*, *Mothers Always Write*, *The Other Journal*, and others. You can find her online at Instagram@ LizCharlotteGrant or at LizCharlotteGrant.com.

CARRIE HEIMER teaches and writes in Fairbanks, Alaska. Her work aims to celebrate abundance that comes quietly out of what feels like scarcity. Her new book, *Ships in Small Bottles*, is available on her website: www.poetryissalt.com.

MATTHEW E. HENRY (MEH) is the author of *Teaching While Black* (Main Street Rag, 2020), editor-in-chief of *The Weight Journal*, and the editor of A Game for Good Christians' anthology of spiritual literature, *This Former Present Glory*. His recent theological works are appearing or forthcoming in *The Windhover*, *The Amethyst Review*, *Pensive*, *Presence*, *Rejection Letters*, *Rigorous*, and *Spiritus*. His second chapbook collection—*Dust and Ashes*—is forthcoming from Californios Press. MEH is an educator who received his MFA from Seattle Pacific University, yet continued to spend money he didn't have completing an MA in theology and a PhD in education from other institutions. You can find him at www.MEHPoeting.com writing about race, religion, and burning oppressive systems to the ground.

LAURA REECE HOGAN is the author of *Litany of Flights* (Paraclete Press, 2020), winner of the Paraclete Poetry Prize, the chapbook *O Garden-Dweller* (Finishing Line Press, 2017), and the spiritual theology book *I Live, No Longer I* (Wipf & Stock, 2017). Her poems are featured in *America*, *The Windhover*, *The Christian Century*, *Dappled Things*, *Anglican Theological Review*, *First Things*, *The Cresset*, *Whale Road Review*, *U.S. Catholic*, and other publications. Find her online at www.laurareecehogan.com.

DAVID JP HOOKER is an artist and full professor at Wheaton College. He received an M.F.A. in Ceramics from Kent State University and a B.A. in English from Furman University. His works have been exhibited both nationally and internationally, and he has twice been part of the Dunhuang Ceramic Residency in Lanzhou, China. When David is not freaking out over deadlines, he enjoys spending time with his wife, Elaine, his children Abbey and Samuel, his dog, Meg, and his cat, Evee. www.davidjphooker.com

MARCI RAE JOHNSON is a freelance writer and editor, and the poetry editor for WordFarm press. Her poems appear or are forthcoming in *Image*, *The Christian Century*, *Main Street Rag*, *The Collagist*, *Rhino*, *Quiddity*, *Hobart*, *Redivider*, *Redactions*, *The Louisville Review*, and *32 Poems*, among others. Her most recent book, *Basic Disaster Supplies Kit*, was

published by Steel Toe Books in 2016. https://marciraejohnson.journoportfolio.com/

MILTON JORDAN is retired and lives with his wife, the musician Anne Elton Jordan, in Georgetown, Texas. He has published essays, poems, reviews and stories in literary and general circulation journals. His poetry collection *What the Rivers Gather* was published by Stephen F. Austin University Press, 2020. Milton edited the anthology *No Season for Silence* (Kallisto Gaia Press, 2020).

KIRSTEN KINNELL lives in Columbus, Ohio. She studied at Ohio State and currently works as a freelance editor. Her poems are forthcoming or have recently appeared in *Quarterly West*, *Dappled Things*, and *Slant*.

SARAH LAW lives in London and is a tutor for the Open University and elsewhere, Her latest collection, *Thérèse: Poems*, is published by Paraclete Press. She edits the online journal *Amethyst Review: New Writing Engaging with the Sacred*.

ANTHONY R. LUSVARDI is a Jesuit priest who spends the academic year in Rome teaching and writing and summers hiking in South Dakota's Black Hills. In addition to academic work, he has published short fiction and essays in the *Mid-American Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *America*, *Plough Quarterly* and elsewhere. He received the 2016 VanderMey Nonfiction Prize from *Ruminate Magazine* and the 2015 J.F. Powers Short Fiction Prize from *Dappled Things*.

MARJORIE MADDOX, professor of English and Creative Writing at Lock Haven University, has published 11 collections of poetry—including *Transplant, Transport, Transubstantiation*; *True, False, None of the Above*; *Local News from Someplace Else*; *Wives' Tales*; *Weeknights at the Cathedral*; and *Perpendicular As I*—and the short-story collection *What She Was Saying*. In addition, Marjorie is the co-editor of *Common Wealth: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania*, assistant editor of *Presence*, and the recipient of numerous honors, including Pushcart-Prize nominations in poetry and fiction. Her book *Begin with a Question* is forthcoming in 2021. For more information and reviews, please see www.marjoriemaddox.com.

HANNAH MARSHALL lives in south-central Illinois, where she works as the advising editor for Greenville University's literary journal, *The Scriblerus*, and as the poetry editor for *South 85*. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry Daily*, *New Ohio Review*, *Anglican Theological Review*, *The Madison Review*, and others. She received her MFA in creative writing from Converse College.

D.S. MARTIN is the author of four poetry collections, including *Ampersand* (2018), & *Conspiracy of Light: Poems Inspired by the Legacy of C.S. Lewis* (2013), 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* (2016), *Adam, Eve, & the Riders of the Apocalypse* (2017), and *In A Strange Land* (2019).

MICHAEL ANGEL MARTÍN lives in Miami, Florida. His poems and book reviews have appeared in a variety of journals and magazines, including the *Anglican Theological Review*, *The Cresset*, *America*, *St. Katherine's Review*, and elsewhere.

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*, and a book of verse translations of the Latin poet Martial, *Selected Epigrams*. Her translations of Rilke have appeared in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Measure*, *Transference*, *Peacock Journal*, *The Windhover*, *Presence*, *Blue Unicorn*, and *Subtropics*.

MATT MILLER, a native Nebraskan, now lives and writes outside Reeds Spring, Missouri, where he is reforesting his quasi-suburban lawn with fruit trees. Find him online at matt-miller.org.

LAURENCE MUSGROVE is a writer and teacher. His books include *Local Bird*—a poetry collection, *One Kind of Recording*—a volume of aphorisms, and *The Bluebonnet Sutras*—Buddhist dialogues in verse. He received his PhD in English from the University of Oregon, Eugene, and currently teaches at Angelo State University in San Angelo, Texas. He offers workshops on the Buddhist wisdom tradition, drawing-to-learn, and the causes of beauty in poetry.

AMY NEMECEK has loved words from an early age. Her Pushcart-nominated poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *St. Katherine Review*, *Whale Road Review*, *The Windhover*, *Stirring*, *Time of Singing*, and *The Sunlight Press*. Amy is a book editor living in west Michigan with her husband, son, and two cats. When she isn't working with words, she enjoys taking long walks in nature and traveling with her family.

J. PERRY practices poetry at the University of Memphis MFA program. His ex-girlfriend's great aunt once broke up with Hemingway, so he's got a lot to live up to.

STEVEN PETERSON is a poet and playwright living in Chicago and northern Wisconsin. His poems have appeared in *The Christian Century*, *Dappled Things*, *First Things*, and are forthcoming in *America*. Several of his plays have been produced around the country. He is currently a Resident Playwright at Chicago Dramatists, waiting eagerly for our theaters to reopen.

BRIAN G. PHIPPS is the author of *Before the Burning Bush* (Univ. of St. Katherine Press, 2018), a collection of poems. His poetry has appeared in several literary journals, including *St. Katherine Review*, *Rock and Sling*, *Relief*, *The Other Journal*, and *Anglican Theological Review*, and he is as an editor for a book publisher in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In addition to writing, he plays ice hockey and is a chanter in the Greek Orthodox Church.

RYAN RICKRODE's work has appeared in various publications, including *The South Carolina Review, Dappled Things*, and *The Common*. He holds an MFA from the University of Montana and currently teaches English and creative writing classes at Susquehanna University in Pennsylvania. You can read more of his work at ryanrickrode.com.

WHITNEY RIO-ROSS is the author of the chapbook *Birthmarks* (Resource Publications) and poetry editor for *Fare Forward*. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *America*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Rock & Sling*, *New South*, *3Elements Review*, and elsewhere. She teaches English at Trevecca Nazarene University in Nashville, Tennessee, where she lives with her husband.

RUSSELL ROWLAND, seven-time Pushcart-Prize nominee, writes from New Hampshire's Lakes Region, where he has judged high-school Poetry Out Loud competitions. His latest poetry book, *Wooden Nutmegs*, is available from Encircle Publications.

NICHOLAS SAMARAS's first book, *Hands of the Saddlemaker*, won The Yale Series of Younger Poets Award. His next book, *American Psalm, World Psalm*, came out (2014) from Ashland Poetry Press. Individual poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *New York Times*, etc.

MELANIE S. SMITH is a 2019 graduate of the GrubStreet Writers Memoir Incubator. Since graduating, she has been published in *Ruminate Magazine*, *Prometheus Dreaming*, and *The Coil*, as well as an anthology of writing by women over forty. She has also had residencies at the Elizabeth Bishop House in Nova Scotia and the Vermont Student Center. She has been teaching writing at Boston University since 2008.

BILL STADICK has published poetry, fiction and creative nonfiction in *Relief Journal*, *The Christian Century*, *Dappled Things*, and *The Cresset*. His poetry chapbook, *Family Latin*, is available from Finishing Line Press, and a selection of his work appeared in *In a Strange Land: Introducing Ten Kingdom Poets*, available from Wipf and Stock as part of its Poiema Poetry Series.

KELLEY JEAN WHITE, a pediatrician, has worked in inner-city Philadelphia and rural New Hampshire. Her poems have appeared in *Exquisite Corpse*, *Rattle*, and *JAMA*. Her recent books are *Toxic Environment* (Boston Poet Press) and *Two Birds in Flame* (Beech River Books.) She received a 2008 Pennsylvania Council on the Arts grant.

The Windhover

25.1

CONTRIBUTORS

David Athey
Jack Austin
Amy Bornman
Lisa Brognano
Kit Carlson
Liz Charlotte Grant
Carrie Heimer
Matthew E. Henry
Laura Reece Hogan
David JP Hooker
Marci Rae Johnson
Milton Jordan
Kirsten Kinnell
Sarah Law
Anthony R. Lusvardi, S.J.
Marjorie Maddox
Hannah Marshall
D.S. Martin
Michael Angel Martín
Susan McLean
Matt Miller
Laurence Musgrove
Amy Nemecek
J. Perry
Steven Peterson
Brian G. Phipps
Ryan Rickrode
Whitney Rio-Ross
Russell Rowland
Nicholas Samaras
Melanie S. Smith
Bill Stadick
Kelley Jean White