

# The Windhover

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26.1

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26.1 Spring 2022

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My work explores aspects of Christian spirituality and worship through simple figurative compositions, mixed media collage, and juxtaposition of diverse images. I delve into questions such as how we communicate with God, how people daily act out their faith, and what it is to be living in an utterly broken world. Reoccurring themes in my work are the nature of divinity and its presence in our everyday, imperfect lives; the temporary nature of man as contrasted to the permanent nature of his soul; and the relationship that man has with God, and God with man, and the manner in which that relationship is executed. My primary medium is acrylic, though I also work in encaustic and mixed media drawing. I use each material with intentionality, giving thought to both the inherent qualities suggested through art historical reference, and the visual weight and texture each material adds to a piece. I am drawn to transparent layering of materials and paint application as a method to suggest space and the passage of time, as well as the fragility and ephemeral quality of the subject matter.

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### NATHANIEL LEE HANSEN

### From the Editor

This issue marks the 25<sup>th</sup> year of continuous publication for *The Windhover*, and the 15<sup>th</sup> issue I've edited. During my time, I've refrained from using these pages for my writing (with the exception of my first issue), instead reserving pages for the poems, essays, and stories of our writers. However, given this milestone, I figured it appropriate to offer some reflections.

When I assumed the editorship in 2012, following interim editor Jessica Hooten-Wilson and the second editor, Audell Shelburne, the journal was an annual, with a year-long reading period. Of course, as any editor does when taking over a publication, he or she makes adjustments, re-envisions the publication, etc.

The journal moved from print to online submissions, allowing for greater ease in our contributing editors providing feedback on pieces for consideration. We created a Facebook page and Twitter account. But from the time I became editor, I dreamed of re-envisioning the aesthetics of the journal from the ground up.

With the February 2017 issue, *Windhover: A Journal of Christian Literature* became *The Windhover*. (I wanted a more direct connection to Hopkins's poem.) The measurements of the journal changed, the cover switched from glossy to matte finish, the logo used a new font, and the interior font and aesthetics created more white space. The journal became a semiannual—with issues released in February *and* August—each with its own reading period.

As the dedication page indicates, we lost our founding editor in late 2021: Donna Walker-Nixon. She and her late first husband, George Nixon, founded the journal in the mid '90s, launching the first issue in 1997. She was a visionary, someone who encouraged me in my editorship of the journal. I know that she and George had no idea how many years the journal would last. But here it is, 25 years later, still flying. May it fly many more.

# In Memoriam

# Donna Walker-Nixon

1953-2021

founding editor

# KIMBOL SOQUES

### consent to silence

three times in three weeks: Have you considered silence?

i have (not lately) and i pick it up again

feet flat thigh-bones even
hands balanced open, eyes
also unfocused, so to stay material
the choice of repeated phrase—
a broom to sweep the mind to wordlessness
the timer, that keeps all the this possible

Fr. Keating teaches no less than 20 minutes but i barely agree to 10

resting feet vibrating inside their soles to go do laundry buy the soap as long luscious strings of words link, unspooling like Adriadne's gleam of thread

i invoke *Anam Cara*, repeat Christ's hand pressing hard on my shoulder, five fingerpads gripping *Can you not wait with me?* i certainly can all the while words like foam bubble billow pour across seeping even through his fingers

### **SHELBY POULIN**

# When Air Meets Luciferin: A Collection of Beautifully Useless Things

I believe in a thousand things that serve no purpose.

For example, I'm a big believer in stuffing one's house with useless trinkets, like a vintage 1880s crystal perfume bottle with the puffed atomizer or dank-smelling books with weathered spines and missing titles. After one tussle with minimalism, where I attempted donning sad, sterile outfits and keeping my counters un-cluttered, I threw up my hands. Monkish self-denial and plain t-shirts aren't my thing—and counter edges are made for unpaid bills, as far as I'm concerned.

I'm also a big believer in that fantastical, alchemic explosion of color that most scientists—a wholly unsatisfying term for *wizards*—call bioluminescence. My journey with this sorcery began at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, a time where many people, including myself, wished for immersion into a world less mortal and clinical. A world where magic was a logical answer, a familiar language. I was initially interested in mushrooms, particularly in the folklore surrounding these tiny shrooms, when I first beheld glowing fungi—mushrooms steadily blazing with a cold, green fire. Instantly, I felt a tingle in my marrow. This wasn't chemistry, the dull science of labs and sanitized beakers.

This glow was otherworldly: a mix of chemical, myth, and fae fire.

I longed to know how the enchantment of bioluminescence worked. Turns out, this glow can be reconstructed with a very prim and logical equation, which I have deemed *a spell*:

- -A sprinkle of luciferase (a heat-labile enzyme)
- -A dash of luciferin (pigment)
- -A whisper of ghost breath (oxygen)

The final product is intoxicating: a swirl of neon pink, purple, green, and blue, gleaming like dragon scales against the dark night.

Bioluminescence, as I learned, does have many practical uses. Notice how the word *practical* sounds in the mouth like tiny little bullets spraying out of a semi-automatic rifle, a useful but gratingly painful noise? Even so, bioluminescence helps fireflies locate partners for mating. The seemingly randomized flicker of their bright abdomens is actually akin to a handwritten love-letter, an advertisement seeking a particular soulmate.

Not just any ol' guy need apply, they signal.

Bioluminescent fungi and mushrooms, which use this same alchemic spell to emit their brilliant evergreen glow, attract insects into their mystic light. These insects and bugs then carry the mushroom's spores with them to a new location, and the fungi thrives as a species. *Armillaria mellea* is the most common and widespread of glowing mushrooms; there is something utterly rhythmic in the name—when I roll the scientific term in my mouth, and my throat and tongue sense an iambic heartbeat throbbing in the ancient title. Dinoflagellates too, though not so musically named, are single-cell organisms that glow in water when they are poked, prodded, or shuffled. So-called brilliant researchers (or mages and scribes, depends who you ask) claim that even this light is a practicality, a form of protection against prey.

But bioluminescence is also a whimsical, useless thing. And this uselessness fascinates me most.

Why, for instance, must these meager cells burn such a bright indigo? For what practical use do the flora and fauna embrace a kaleidoscope of color? Surely this glowing tribe of fish and cells and shrooms could have fended off threats with a dull, invisible scent, as skunks do when raising their tails to armed-defense. There are even bioluminescent mushrooms found in deep caves, further down than insects or prey can reach. There is no threat or chance to reproduce, yet these mushrooms burn on with an eternal, elven flame. Why is man the hushed and lucky witness to this cold, magical light?

Shakespeare even questioned the purpose of this ethereal glow. The king of the wild and fanciful—creator of witches, ghosts, moving forests, and *babies somehow not born of women*—found something unexplainable in the bioluminescent glow-worm. The ghost in *Hamlet* retreats from Act I with this fiery companion: "The glow-worm shows the matin to be near / And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire" (Shakespeare 1.5.89-90). *Uneffectual* is a word, the dictionary regrets to tell you, that no longer exists. Another useless thing society quickly tossed. The great playwright asks what I have often pondered: why does an organism burn with such an extravagant fire, a fire with no heat?

Pragmatists might call a fire that doesn't cook or warm or guide a futile one. Yet every time I see fireflies mating in the long grass of Northern Indiana, or dark sandy coasts lapping up glowing purple waves, my eyes widen. I chant to myself in these moments, *I believe in a thousand purposeless things*.

There is no harsher word than *necessary*, a word that slips and sinks like serpent fangs.

\* \* \*

It is this obsession with the mysterious and beautiful, as opposed to the practical, that led me to poetry.

No, it wasn't a choice; I fell in love. It would have been logical to write fiction, to love plots with tidy beginnings, middles, and ends. And yet, I am spellbound by this Odyssean siren—hypnotized by the harsh break of line, the thrumming pulse of rhythm and rhyme, seduced by the good but fickle metaphor.

Songwriting was my introduction to poetry. At sixteen, I wanted to croon like Nora Jones over non-existent, failed romances. I liked a good head-banger too. But whether it was the finger-picking technicality of Ozzy Osborne's "Crazy Train" or the soft sliding of "Blackbird" by the Beatles, I was more enchanted by the way words wrapped around rhythm than the process of playing itself. It delighted me how words like *blue eyes* sounded paired with a G-chord.

I later learned that poetry is similar to song, replacing strings and power chords for the invisible beat of the soul. No instrument is needed, except for your own tongue breaking on the shore of your teeth—anyone can play. See how the tongue advances and pushes at the word *lovely* or raises its hackles, stretching wide with the word *incision*? One cannot read a poem in stillness. You must move. With a song, the music sways you; with poetry, you must conjure the rhythm with your body like stirring an enchanted maiden from slumber with an old forgotten chant. Yet sestet and octave, spondee and enjambment are words that serve the modern man no more than primitive runes or dusty hieroglyphics.

In that way, poems are useless. Poems are not read over the radio as a CEO makes his morning commute, listened to as he's stuck in highway traffic. Poems don't *kill time* during an airport layover. Poems are not played in restaurants as background music. They do not relax; often, they disturb. They don't always ease situations or smooth tensions; no, sometimes they even provoke the lion inside us, challenge us to wrestle with a million unnamable feelings.

Occupationally, the poet's role isn't glamourous. Poets don't longue in million-dollar mansions, living like A-list celebrities. Once at a used-bookstore, I bought five collections of Billy Collins's work for only fifteen dollars—a steal that you'd never see for works of fiction. The cashier, a just-greying man in his late forties, smiled at me with moon-crinkled eyes, knowing eyes that said so you are part of the secret club.

"With poetry, there is never a rise or fall in popularity, just a steady flow," he said, bagging the books. "Like a river."

What he meant to say is that poetry is a small niche market. It's the straight and narrow, not the wide path. Few travel on it, few see its beauty, and even fewer make a living paying homage to its creation. To many, lines and stanzas make a beautiful but worthless bundle of words. Like glowing fungi, poems are not always practical. Both burn with something unexplainable, perhaps something only self-fulfilling.

Why am I drawn to such seemingly frivolous writing? It's hard to say, but when I read Ross Gay's "Ode to Buttoning and Unbuttoning My Shirt," I am stunned as if struck across the face. When he writes that slowly unbuttoning a shirt is "like unbuckling / a stack of vertebrae / with delicacy," I find myself reading the line over and over until my cheeks are wet, eyes are glossy. The poem won't score a box-office victory or crank out millions of dollars. But it shows me the beauty of the smallest, most insignificant part of an ordinary day. A poem is useless, a poem is beautiful—has it earned the right to exist?

I have theorized, which is jargon for *daydreamed*, that life's frills—the fanciful, beautiful, and stunningly trivial—are God's crowning jewels, His way of showing off. I imagine He turned to the angels one day and said, "Let's do this in style." I know because God didn't keep his counters sparse. He is the God of glowing mushrooms, the musical God of cicadas and crashing water, the God of a thousand things that serve no good, humanly purpose but leave you gobsmacked and breathless just the same.

And I believe in them. Just as I believe when God made the first sunset, He sent back the white and black acrylics, stuck His brush in tins of hot pink magenta and chili-pepper red, splashed this kaleidoscope across the sky, and said *just to show you I can*.

# **PAUL JASKUNAS**

### The Remnant

He knows it is Christmas—his radio told him so.

The city streets slick with ice, and still he limps into the morning air.

His cane—a third leg, of sterner stuff than flesh. His face—softened by nine decades of prayer.

How does a man older than church bells measure time? Every Sunday

he makes this walk, Holy Days too—each raised cobble a threat to his step.

He remembers both world wars as if they were last night's dreams.

A soldier who shot bullets into clouds so they would not find bodies.

His wife and sole companion surveys his empty rooms

from the frame in which she hangs on his cracked and cobwebbed wall.

He sees ahead the spires of the church where he'll speak

to a God whose face comes close enough, some nights, to kiss.

He has long wanted to die, his pains older than most men.

His monstrous sins long forgiven, long in flight

from what's left of his life it has curved into its final shape

a question mark kneeling before the Son.

## **JANE GREER**

### Disorder

Decades of bad decisions gather to a greatness, forming a shameful monolith of vast proportions, teaching her not to trust her oldest, deepest instincts: even her best self is unmoored and disappointing.

Memory, like a pill-bug curled on its own innards, cautions her every day to question her flawed judgment, horrid as it has proven (but she needs no warning; she is defined by blunders, sure as death and taxes):

how, when she means to help, she always only worsens; how all her acts become ridiculous and clumsy; how neither heart nor reason serve to lead her rightly. She is a stranger to herself, and inauthentic.

Nothing is left but to explore a new dynamic, pure and complete and right in its inspired directness: she will recalibrate her every thought and action, doing anything other than what she has always done.

### **CONTRIBUTORS**

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**SUSAN McLEAN**, a retired professor of English, is the author of two books of poetry, *The Best Disguise* and *The Whetstone Misses the Knife*, and one book of translations of the Latin poet Martial, *Selected Epigrams*. Her translations of Rilke have appeared in *Image Journal*, *Presence*, *Subtropics*, and elsewhere. She is the translations editor for *Better Than Starbucks*.

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**PAUL J. PASTOR** is a poet, author, and editor (with Penguin Random House). His debut poetry collection, *Bower Lodge*, was released in December 2021 from Fernwood Press, joining his nonfiction works on spirituality, *The Face of the Deep* and *The Listening Day*. His poetry has appeared in various outlets and has been anthologized by *New York Quarterly*. His award-winning writing engages timeless ideas that speak boldly to the wounds and possibilities of our age. He lives in Oregon.

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**KIMBOL SOQUES** has been writing since before she got her first typewriter at age three. In poetry, she strives to pare down to the bone, using white space like breath. Her work has been included in a variety of publications, including *Non-Binary Review*, *Gyroscope Review*, and the anthology *This Present Former Glory*, and has been nominated for Best of the Net. She lives and writes in Austin, Texas.

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