



The Windhover

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Fall 2024

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Cover: *Altar for My Home*

by Sam Shamard

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Statement from cover artist, Sam Shamard:

USING ANIMAL BONES FOUND on my family's Central Texas farm, I create delicately slip-cast ceramic objects that hold the integrity of the original form. I draw heavily on the influence of Mexican Catholic iconography and Southwestern decor with a swirl of my own experiences growing up in suburbia in the 90s and 00s. This melding of my mixed Latina-American experience yields a playful exuberance through patterning and color choices, with each object becoming its own memento or talisman to a playful sense of home and history.

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NATHANIEL LEE HANSEN

A Farewell

NINETEEN YEARS AGO, I submitted a packet of poems to *The Windhover*, and several months later, I received a generic rejection letter. Twelve years ago, I became the editor. And now, the journal has a new editor.

During my tenure, I have sought to make each issue a collection of pieces that speaks of the true, the good, and the beautiful. Over twenty issues, I've had the privilege of publishing hundreds of authors and meeting some of them at conferences and festivals. Some of these authors have even become friends.

In 2012, I accepted my teaching position at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor primarily because of the journal's editorship. When I resigned from my professorship to pursue freelance editing, I knew the most difficult part—by far—would be handing off the editorial baton.

But the moment is here. Dr. Toby F. Coley, my good friend and former colleague, is the new editor. There is *no one* whom I would trust more in this role. Toby will bring thoroughness, excellence, and creativity to a job that largely flies under the radar. I am confident that *The Windhover* will continue to flourish under his editorship, and I look forward to its future even as my work here is done.

TOBY F. COLEY

An Introduction

FOR THE PAST TWELVE YEARS, Dr. Nathaniel Lee Hansen has nurtured and grown *The Windhover* from a yearly publication to twice-yearly, while streamlining its content to offer readers a quality literary experience. As a personal friend, I am grateful for Nate's leadership of the journal and the biennial *Windhover Writers' Festival*. Since his arrival at UMHB, we've spent many hours talking, reading one another's work, attending conferences, and playing boardgames. It is an honor to take over where he leaves off after editing for such a long time.

When Nate chose to pursue freelance editing several years ago, he continued to edit the journal on a contract basis while we diligently searched for a new faculty colleague. It seems that after two unsuccessful searches, God willed that I step in and take over the journal, the festival, and the creative writing courses at UMHB.

I am humbled by the trust he and my colleagues have placed in me and will strive to continue *The Windhover's* quality and influence while seeking to grow its readership. Nate's presence will be missed as an editor, but continues as a friend and hopefully future contributor.

The Windhover's mission as a Christian literary arts journal continues with the contributors in this issue, seeking to explore the boundaries of our faith and the nature of beauty to point us to God's truth and goodness. We do not shy away from difficult topics, nor do we pretend not to wrestle with doubt and God's ever-new overflow of grace. I hope readers and contributors find this issue as powerful as previous ones and eagerly look forward to how writers of faith in future issues will bring their own stories to fruition in prose and poetry.

AUDREY LAINE STREB

The Inevitable

A WAX CANDLE FLICKERS beside a man hunched over an easel, hands and robes stained green and blue. His painting, once a convoluted kaleidoscope of brushstrokes, was now a detailed scene. In the foreground treads a medieval farmer, plowing his field while prodding his stead. A shepherd stares at the sky, his sheep grazing at the dying grass beneath his feet. And a fisherman readies his rod, unaware of Icarus, drowning before him. His melted wax wings were like the candle beside the artist, decaying and drowned. The flame chokes and sputters on the wax engulfing it, while Icarus's likeness flails in the water, legs kicking in desperation. The flame and Icarus both would succumb, a single twirling plume of smoke left in their wake. That may have been the image within the painter's room. We'll never know.

Housed in Brussels, the *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* hangs and watches tourists shuffle past, their tennis shoes squeaking on the marble floors. Occasionally one will stop to *really* read the inscription, note the moral, and drink in the colors—one may even snap a picture, the flash of their camera detonating, their attempt at preservation only causing the pigment to rot sooner. Though honored now, one day it won't be, as the legend of Icarus and the brushstrokes of the unnamed artist will melt into inevitable obscurity.

Percy Shelley knew this secret when he wrote about Ozymandias's cold sneer and wrinkled lip, lying lonely on the leveled sands. Did Ozymandias witness similar images to *The Landscape*? Did he see clueless tourists poke his nose, their dusted fingers smudging his visage? Were careless travelers known to stomp on his pedestal, stained sandals blotching his declaration? Nonetheless, we know not which ancient land he hailed from; we are a stranger to his land that was forgotten along with their ruler.

Consider that Ozymandias, "king of kings," could have looked over the banks of Iran, then Persia, to see the wind carry sand and suffocate homes, markets, and palaces. Later, he would have seen water erase the sand, scattered and eroded sandstone revealing his forgotten kingdom. His old treasures were bartered and sold until the authorities realized that those starving on the banks of Iran had uncovered a great secret. Archeologists carved the land, elated at discovering any old and odd trinket. They spent and spend years observing mystery devices and architecture fragments, the backbreaking ingenuity of his people reduced to a puzzle.

Consider that of an equally forgotten status—a forgotten Egyptian city along the Nile, that was not revealed, but instead buried, by the changing of the river. Their source of life and neighboring fountain became their source of extinction and eroding rain drop. Like a cat watching water circle down a drain, they watched their life source seep into the rocks. And just as archeologists scoured the ancient Iranian valley for a portal to the past, so they dug and puzzled over the clues encased in the Egyptian sands.

Would they be honored or haunted by our curiosity? Would it be flattering that we dedicated five years to define an artifact? Or would they be horrified that it would take half a decade to piece together the identity of something used so commonly among them? What would we do if we saw the bewilderment over an unearthed electric toothbrush thirteen thousand decades from now?

It seems that as soon as we learn to live, we must learn how to die. It seems that man refuses to learn the second lesson. Perhaps it is because we belong to Eden, and death was not supposed to befall our race—or possibly it is because we rose from the dust, and our shiny new consciousness refuses to return to it. No matter one's interpretation, as a forgotten poet wrote in a forgotten poem, men alone are dread-haunted still.

The burial masks across cultures tell that story, as well as the frenzies that ensue when another ancient inkling is uncovered. To preserve their identity in death, Mayan kings were entombed with a mask that portrayed their visage. These mortuary masks were used by the Incas, the Egyptians, the Mesopotamians, and Cambodian royalty. Assembled jade pieces, like that of a Turkish mosaic lamp, donned the Mayan masks—including that of the Great Pakal. Because of the green collage of his death mask, the modern world, who does not care for his values and may never transcribe his words, knows he once was. A Mayan queen's mask, whose name was lost to time, at least is recalled by her stone carved mask, embellished with curled jade ornaments.

Would they rejoice in the fact that even their most distant descendants were invested in their existence? We know they once breathed air and loved beauty... traits now eight billion of us share. Could it be said that their identity was truly preserved, then?

One “well-preserved” relic revealed our obsession with immortality when he resurfaced in 1992. A mummified man, found encased in ice, created a worldwide fever: everyone wanted a piece of “Iceman”: to know his origin, to know if they were one of his offspring—some even wanted to know if they could have his offspring. And for heaven's sake, why?

Our past enchants us like a moth to a candle; we grasp at it as we forage for a manual that could map out our steps. Our future could be found in the past...or even our own selves. The glacial and glistening sheen around “Iceman” reflected his finders’ faces, and the world hoped he would reflect more than just that. This mystery mummy posed a question in everyone’s mind: if *I* were dug up ten thousand years from now, would people care about me? While they may have cared, they cared more about what this man could gift to them—whether it was fame, fortune, or a clue about their cultural history and identity. Even if these seekers had gained all these gifts from the iceman, what would it all be for?

As you read this, a river erodes a once impressive hillside, Venice sinks like that candle in wax, and the sun beats down, unforgiving, on Southern California. Not all of them will remain forever. Likely, none of them will—for even the unsinkable ship rests below the Atlantic, and the indomitable Roman empire lies in ruins.

Yet Rome is remembered, and we know the stories of its emperors, and we care for its mythology, art, architecture, and wars. We can scale their buildings and imagine what their reliefs were quite like before the pigment had faded from them.

The same is true of the Mayan temples and the Grecian statues—all once alive with color, they have faded to simpler cobblestone carvings or white-washed figures. Art that was once like a flash card that reminded the viewer of their history has become an indistinct vignette, divorced of much context.

Just like those who clung to the idea that the death masks might salvage their identity, these cultures faded long before they could realize that their remains reveal so little.

Though we gape at the impressive remains of the Colosseum and the Pantheon, our minds are littered with misconceptions and willful misunderstandings. We imagine the gladiators how we wish—and *if* we study the historical writings, can we really know what their life was like? How can we know if we have the complete image of any historical icon?

As the great tribesman Okoye was reduced to a footnote in a novel, and the legendary Icarus a stain in the ocean, so will our ways and likeness morph into dust—or at best—a puzzle.

So, why then, do we live? Should we still strive for posterity, despite its clear and inevitable failure?

Some have embraced the moment, consumed with their passions, to burn with regret after receiving the fruits of a life undisciplined.

Others strive to relive Babel, cheering on their fellow man as they collaborate to craft a world more beautiful, more reflective of the long-lost Eden.

Then there are others that resent that solution, as they, for various reasons, believe man to be incapable of joining hands.

As Dostoyevsky argued, man will conceive chaos in protest of being played like a piano key; they would have clawed apart Babel themselves if that could prove their liberty of will. Though young and bright minds and old and compassionate souls long for a world where we all understand one another, what if the man from the crawlspace was correct, after all? For most around us try their hand at a moral and rational life each day, only to realize later that our cards were stained and bruised—and we swear that we know better now.

Yet history reveals that we never quite know better. We choose our demise, again and again, whether through greed or sloth or even good intentions. And if we did it all right, perhaps nature would still swallow us whole.

Perhaps the opposite is true. For there is beauty in man—he is not all monster. With the same hands that he uses to murder or steal he uses to plant daisies, change a diaper, or paint the *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. With his mind he designs cities for children to play and craftsmen to trade; he longs to gaze upon and build upon the evident beauty in creation. It might be that the *imago Dei* is insuppressible, or that the unlikely consciousness that haunts us has also opened our eyes to beauty and goodness. Either way, if enough of us joined hands, could it be that the love for loveliness would win out?

Let's say it is true that the reason God intervened and scattered the builders of Babel would be legitimate; that nothing is impossible for man if they are united, and utopia is right around humanity's corner. What would its purpose be? Would it be to preserve man for all eternity? And what kind of man will they have preserved at the end of it all? We better man's existence...and then what? He will still fade. Perhaps he'll morph into another being that we didn't mean to preserve. And if we live to make the world *better*, what is *better*?

During the same period in Ancient Greece, *better* for Sparta meant a strong military, while *better* for Athens meant more leisure time to compose poetry. Athens taught their children in theater and democracy. Sparta expected their boys to become unforgiving soldiers, and their girls to birth these soldiers at an unforgiving rate.

Today in the West, we have “mommy-and-me” classes, and are careful to ensure that our newborns can bond with their mothers through skin-to-skin contact directly after their introduction to the world. Their first experience,

besides the brutal process of birth, is to be encircled in warmth and love.

Newborn Spartans were immediately inspected by a militia, sized up to be future soldiers. If they were deemed inadequate, meaning these soldiers struggled to see a newborn wielding a sword, they were tossed into a ravine from the heights of a nearby mountain. This was the better alternative in their minds. Better than raising a defective soldier.

Again, all at the same period, *better* meant repression and structure in Victorian England, while *better* meant resilience and liberty for the Wild West, and *better* meant nostalgic trips for the brittle and wheezing post-antebellum South.

Who defines *better*? Perhaps it is for every generation to preserve what they want, to call what they wish beautiful, and to cross their fingers that hopefully they will be remembered. They will numb themselves any way they know how when the existential thoughts come, we will wall our hearts up, determined to keep the doubts away.

Packing the mortar of our hearts with hazed distractions and lukewarm passions, they will be shattered once again—by an old friend’s aging face, by glass shards and auto parts in the street, by the widow down the road who could never have children.

Maybe we could be merely splintered by all these—only if we’ve found a greater hope beyond the grave. Where could this be found in a world of mere matter? Could it be enough to embrace a little life filled with the lovely and the twisted, colored with a wrestling between contentment and aching for something more?

Dunbar bled through his pen, his prose declaring that the masks we wear conceal the cries of our tortured souls. Even still, our papier-mâché smiles, thickened with different layers over the years, suffer to conceal the restlessness. Perhaps we can put our souls to rest if we accept the second lesson and allow ourselves to die.

For some this death is literal, and they allow themselves to hope they’ve lived a moral and rational life and to accept that they will be forgotten, despite their efforts.

For others, like the Christian, this death is first to themselves. Wrestling is between the tangibility of the earth and the antiquities and promises of heaven—between the ever-evident present and the hints at eternity in the beauty of unfurling ferns, the laughter of brooks after swelling with snow, and the sequence of the moon, always aglow with the vow that there is more beyond us. To the Christian, the second death means beginning.

Does the night sky expand into oblivion, tapping its foot until it collapses on itself? Or were the stars named and all matter truly matters, from the dirt on a worm to the sinews of our contradictory hearts? If it weren't for our condition—for our fading minds, running out of time—perhaps we would not face Him, The Inevitable.

Now, a silent room holds shifting and sweaty tourists, eyes pinned to the walls and ceiling. Gold and stone and color form the tales of old and the building, once a wild array of rocks, is now a reliquary. The marble slabs are no longer encased in a mountain; a mountain of ideas is encased within them.

It is one idea at the heart of the centered painting. Man, lying on a lonely hillside, reaches out to Him...or it is that He reaches out to man. It is man that imagined Him, or it is He who envisioned man; the dyed stone is a collaboration of melting matter, or the brushstrokes are alight with Truth. Man will reach, it's inevitable; and will he find more than mere matter among the white abyss? Or will he close his hand and continue to barricade the walls of his heart and the cracks in his papier-mâché mask, all of it shattering as he collapses into the sea, drowning like Icarus?

DANIEL COWPER

Making My Confession

This is a true story. One wet
March night when I was nearly set to wed

the Wrong One, a friend's semblance shaking
with anger barged into my dream. *Making*

yourself miserable, it spat, *and what for? What for?*
My friend's image stamped its foot and swore—

I woke, and called my would-be fiancé
to break it off. *Why? Why?* What could I say?

A dream told me to? The guilt, like liquid glue,
hardened. But what the dream said was true,

and undeniable once heard, like the tale
Jonah told of flightless birds inside the whale,

bony feathers clacking like the hollow limbs
of crabs. Within our fog of wants and whims,

something's emitting heat as if it were alive.
It hums in there like a fire or like a beehive,

and I'm grateful for it, for the lizard's tails
it ejects, writhing, on the hearth's cracked tiles.

Frightening questions, warnings sent—like that wet
night in March, when I was set to wed.

RONNIE SIRMANS

In the Belly but Near the Heart

Jonah 2:1-9

Surely, my God, I feared I had died.
I breathe the stench of a dark harbor.
Is this a sea-faring beast or a miracle?
This gullet holds an expanse like none
I have ever seen. The seas and skies
lack the grandeur of this slick galaxy.
But, my God, how long must I stay?
I cannot hear the world outside. No.
But what I do hear is a giant heart,
it beats, it's all around like an echo
that has become lost. Yes, I know
that is how your heart must sound
when I am swallowed after this life.

WILLIAM A. SCHREIBER JR.

What Is Good, Stays

The incoming tide through the bay's inlet
ripples black, gray and white froth in the current
as at the end of my fishing line, I reach forward
to pull back again and again until the snag
finally lets go, gives the lure and bait back to me
in the first lightening of the dark dawn
that was an early rain.

Nothing from a distance looks broken,
but past the last marker
far out until the sea and the grey of the sky
become one long line leading to
the rainbow sheen of oil on water,
dead fish and garbage bobbing
amongst gentle quiet waves.

It hurts how beauty is easy to see,
like the impossibly perfect stars in a night sky,
but come close enough,
they twist and writhe in fire,
finally wither to embers.

Still this place cannot hide
the play of light on water as a fish leaps clear,
the blue of ached air at salt's blurred borders
crusting on beach sand left
by waves on falling tides
as campfire cinders smoke.

And the good stays—
a sunlit square through a window
almost big enough for the dog to lie on,
a sapling birch growing in a cup of dirt
left in the crack of a rock,
a room filled with music through an open door.

RUSSELL ROWLAND

Advisories

This ambivalent summer, we the vulnerable
are in double jeopardy—

floods and heat coming, chastisement by weather.
(Could not one righteous person

be found?) The heat
will desiccate us, floods wash roads, foundations

from under. Neighborhood trees
just stand their ground. We, nonarboreal, talk

of putting down roots; they do it:
get a grip. We advise each other to take the heat;

they take it—make prolonged seasons out of it.
We could seek out oak,

maple, birch, for advisories:
how to bend, bring forth, relinquish. Carry on.

Or, one righteous person might suffice to save,
if we can bargain that far down.

JAMES OWENS

The Holiness of Minute Particulars

Tipsy on air as this amazed
parula warbler who discovers

the sun over and over, whets
his song on the edge of the oak's

shadow, what the field guide calls
a "rising, buzzy trill," noting

the yellow patch on the back,
narrow eye ring, broad white

wing bars. The world of spirit
sustains the world of things.

Or is it the other way around?
Like this: the parula warbler

perches on a dogwood twig.
Like this: a dogwood twig

lifts the warbler up. And which
is the spirit, which is a thing?

THE WINDHOVER WRITERS' FESTIVAL

We are thrilled to announce the return of the *Windhover Writers' Festival* on **February 19-21, 2025**, after a five-year hiatus. The festival promises to be a vibrant gathering that explores the profound intersection of faith and writing with a central theme of "**The Vocation of Christian Literary Arts.**"

The *Windhover Writers' Festival* is a cherished space for writers, scholars, and readers to connect, share their work, and delve into the power of words. We invite proposals for individual or panel discussions that explore the theme. Here are some potential areas of focus:

- The role of the Christian writer in a secular world.
- How faith informs and shapes the creative process.
- The ethical considerations of Christian storytelling.
- The unique challenges and rewards of writing for a Christian audience.
- The intersection of faith and specific genres.
- Examining the legacy of Christian literary giants.
- The evolving role of Christian publishing.
- Fostering a vibrant Christian literary community.
- Craft talks on specific elements of the writing process.
- Community involvement projects and discussions.
- Creative panels/papers will also be considered on a limited basis.
- Proposals that explore the theme in new and innovative ways.

Submission Guidelines

Proposals should be no more than 300 words and should include:

- A clear and concise title for your panel.
- The names and brief biographies of all panelists (including yourself).
- A description of the panel topic and its relevance to the festival theme.
- Format of the panel (e.g., lecture, Q&A, creative writing exercise).
- Please submit your proposal by **November 15, 2024**.

All proposals should be submitted through the *Windhover* Submittable page:
<https://t.ly/YRGkc>

We look forward to receiving your proposals and to welcoming you to the 2025 festival. For more information and updates, please visit our festival page at **www.umhb.edu/writers**.

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