



The Windhover

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30.1

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Spring 2026

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David Hill

Cover: *TheHungering Dark*

by David Hill

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University of Mary Hardin-Baylor Press

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Statement from cover artist, David Hill:

THE HUNGERING DARK IS a reflection on sainthood and holiness in a world full of darkness. The figure was punctured repeatedly, an act that hints at violence but serves to activate the surface and light up the interior in the process. Each hole is a question with answers not easily found. Will the light bring relief, or will the darkness devour us?

STATEMENT FROM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: WHEN I saw *The Hungering Dark* featured in an exhibit at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor last fall, I was struck by its depth and wanted it to grace the cover of a future issue of *The Windhover*. David Hill is a talented artist and invaluable proponent the high quality work we seek to promote. He is too humble and professional to offer his own work for the journal, so I requested this piece for the cover. I am thrilled that he consented and that we can present this work to our readers from *The Windhover's* own Art Editor.

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://www.umhb.edu/windhover>

The Windhover is a proud member of CLMP
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CONTENTS

Note: Titles in italics signal prose works. Titles without italics signal poetry.

Shivpreet Singh

Gaudi's Naked Christ 1

Sheila Murray-Nellis

Wilson Falls 2

Emma Galloway Stephens

Apocalypse Sonnet II 3

S.D. Carpenter

Cain's Complaint..... 4

Andrea Potos

Two Sisters at the Dinner Table..... 6

Eric Cyr

Bell Lap..... 7

J.D. Smith

Prayer for Sowing..... 18

Patricia L. Hamilton

Blueprint..... 19

Karen D'Anselmi

Statues on the Reredos 20

A.Z. Foreman

Otta in the Convent: 1303 A.D. 21

Eric Colburn

September Foliage..... 22

Sarah Ashbach

An Oklahoman Preaches on Heraclitan Fire..... 23

Christine H. Boldt

To the Non-Poets in My Writing Critique Group, Who Listen Politely When I Read—And Then Don't Know What to Say..... 25

Ray Carey

Reverberations 30

James Owens

Kairos 31

Kelsey Peterson

They Will Find It a Place of Springs 32

Home Game 33

Lauire Klein

O Pistachio! 35

Bonnie Day

The World Soul..... 36

Jennifer Raha Newhouse

Effulgent 44

Emma-Jane Peterson

Does Mother Robin Grieve 46

John Philip Christie

Smoke Signals 48

Carla Galdo

A Few Suggestions..... 49

Mark D. Bennion

By Night 51

Susan McLean

The Unicorn [translation of Rainer Maria Rilke's "Das Einhorn"] 52

Eric Potter

REVIEW [*Dimestore Saints: Sonnets from the Gospel of St. Matthew*] 54

Contributors 57

SHIVPREET SINGH

Gaudi's Naked Christ

On the far side of the unfinished cathedral,
where cranes keep a century's patient psalm,
he hangs—stripped of every ornament—
a body fluent in the grammar of pain.

Not the robed Christ of colored glass,
not the serene white of Easter morning,
but the weight of flesh: ribs and sinew,
the courage of a love that chose to be seen.

What is art if not the risk of looking,
a mirror that does not blink
while we learn to keep our eyes open?

And I, before this unadorned mercy,
feel stone inside me shift—
as if truth, left bare, could raise a nave
within the heart: stone by stone, gaze by gaze—
until the cranes can go.

SHEILA MURRAY-NELLIS

Wilson Falls

On the walk in, I step on roots that bulge
varicose over dusty ground. My legs,

as usual, balk at carrying me,
but when has that curbed my desire?

At the path's edge I gasp; still I spiral
down to the sound's source; now dew-drenched droplets

cling to the leaves, and then—past that branch—I
get my first view: thundering on boulders,

a steaming veil, the bursting splash, my hair
a magnet for spume. My cotton shirt is

damp; I scramble up to the shaky
shelf as when once a year the ancient priest

enters the holy of holies. How can
I still be loved in the face

of my failures?—the power of this dangerous place,
the abyss where I stand now, arms outstretched;

here your mercy pours,
pours over my stone heart
and cracks it open.

CHRISTINE H. BOLDT

To the Non-Poets in My Writing Critique Group, Who Listen Politely When I Read—And Then Don't Know What to Say

“A great fire burns with in me, but no one stops to warm himself at it, and passersby see only a wisp of smoke.” —Vincent Van Gogh

[“You’re in poetry?]. . . I guess I’d better watch my grammar, huh? —Donald Hall

THANK YOU FOR BEING willing to listen to my poem. I need to hear it read aloud before a group so I can make it better. Not so I can finish it, because a poem is never finished, but to make it more welcoming to my listeners.

Please pay close attention to the sentence or two of introduction I may offer to my poem. I have been brooding about the thoughts and feelings I try to express in this poem for a long time. I recognize that you have not. In my brief introduction I am trying to invite you along on a journey I have been taking. I am hoping to get you up to speed.

Your best sign post for this journey may be the title of my poem. I have tried to pack it with as much information as possible: perhaps the title will tell you the season of the year, the subject I am exploring, something about the character who I am using as my mouthpiece in the poem. That character might or might not be me. I may have created her because I am curious about someone who lives a life like hers, thinks thoughts like hers, and the only way I can imagine her more clearly is to crawl into her skin for a while. Or she may be a mask I wear so I can speak more freely. Think about this as I read my poem. If I don’t tell you the identity of this character, it may be because I don’t know it yet.

I may offer you another road marker for the direction my poem is about to take: Look for a quotation nestled just after the title of my poem. You may wonder why, if I have something to tell you, I would stop to recite the words of some poet or thinker from ages past, or a headline from yesterday’s newspaper? If the person quoted has said something meaningful, why don’t I just read what he said and sit down?

The answer to that question is, most often, that my poem began as a response to the quotation I am sharing with you. The man or woman I quote

has said something that changed or challenged my way of thinking or offered me a new experience. My poem may be my response. I may want you to understand that I had help arriving at the insight I am about to offer. I want to acknowledge the person whose words have inspired me. Or my poem may be my defense against what the quoted author has said. In that case I am giving him or her the floor before I begin to speak.

If you are looking at a copy of my poem as I read, notice the placement of the words on the page. White space is a poet's friend. Think about why I have chosen to let my words scroll in a narrow band down the center of the page, or why the lines are stuffed in from one margin to the other, looking more like the prose you write? Why are my words clustered in stanzas, a poet's version of your paragraphs?

Does each stanza, like a paragraph, focus on one idea? Is the idea in one echoed or refuted in the next? If so, you may wonder why it is so difficult to find a topic sentence. Is one single line set off by itself for a reason? Does it perhaps hold the key to the entire poem? If I run a thought from one line to the next without stopping to draw a breath, is that because I couldn't think of how to end the line, or because I am so eager to tell you my thought that I even ignore the parameters I have given myself? Assume every choice I made was deliberate, unless you have evidence to the contrary. And if you do, let me know by your questions that I need to keep revising.

Some contemporary poets have forsaken punctuation. To essay- and fiction-writers who deliberate over each comma in an effort to make their meanings clear, this may seem like an abomination. Even I, who still use punctuation, believe that line-breaks can do some of the heavy lifting that punctuation once accomplished. I try to find other ways to be emphatic. Like other poets, I sometimes like the look of nothing but words on the page. But if my omitted punctuation detracts from your understanding of what I am saying, I need to know that. Then I will evaluate whether shape or substance is more important to me.

Please listen for music as I begin to read or speak my poem. You may find it is different from that you create in your essays. From my perspective, your writing has the music of a full orchestra playing a piece in which the themes have been harmoniously resolved. As my stanzas unfold, you are more likely to hear the thud of the heartbeat I experienced on my morning walk while placing these words together. You might catch the sound the windshield wipers slashed that night when I waited for my lover at the train station. You

might be aware of a child's repeated wail, or the whimpering of an old man in hospice care as I bathed his forehead. But most likely you will hear the din of a question I am struggling to answer: an aria rather than a symphony.

Nevertheless, sound is important to me, I may have combed through my poem several times looking for places where I could create a feeling of excitement or somber reflection by switching one word for another: I might have replaced "a cry" with "a shriek." or "darkness" with "gloom." I am grateful if you notice such small touches.

When you read your essay, there is no doubt that it is your voice I hear. Are you curious about who is talking in my poem? The title may or may not tell you. If the speaker in the poem calls him or herself "I," that person might be me or someone I am pretending to be. Is that important? If an unidentified voice is speaking to someone called "you," I maybe the speaker, or the person called "you," who is receiving a message. I could also be both of these characters. If the person whose behavior is put under a spotlight is called "he" or "she" by the voice narrating the poem that character might be me, or I might be the narrator. This may all seem very slippery, but perhaps I want to create for you the same disequilibrium I feel about the experience I am trying to understand in the poem.

I know that as you write you attempt to use words that will express your thoughts most clearly. Do you find the level of my vocabulary off-putting? Do I seem to be showing off? If I have been brooding on a topic for a while, its more arcane lingo may be in the forefront of my thoughts. Most poets think of our poems as offerings to Who or whatever it is that allows us to reflect on beautiful or important things. As we might go to church with polished shoes or a clean heart, as we might offer a beloved only the most beautiful of bouquets, we come to our poems bearing our very best words. Even as we know words cannot contain what we are trying to express, we present the ones we hope will fail less completely.

For example, in the very last stanza of a poem, I may use a five-dollar word that I found in my thesaurus. I choose it not to flaunt my scholarship, but because it approaches what I have been struggling to express up to that very moment. How that word happened to rhyme with the last words in the four preceding stanzas is a gift I will never understand. But gifts are for sharing, and if you notice this wonder, I am happy to share it with you.

Oh, yes, rhyme. Some poets still do use this poetic technique. If we think of our poems as finely wrought objects such as a welder or wood turner might create, we may add the flourish of rhyming words to display our craft, to

enhance the pleasure of our listeners. But like all flourishes this one can be abused. Please notice if I have contorted my poem to fit the rhyme. Rhyme should enhance what I have to say, make it more memorable. If it obscures my meaning, please tell me, in your kindest words.

Perhaps the single most defining characteristic of a poem is the comparison. We poets take on the challenge of trying to say what can't be said, though not with a presumption that we, or anyone else, will ever succeed. We simply think it is important that people keep trying. The comparison is there to help. It may go by such names as metaphor, simile, analogy, parable, symbol, or personification. Often the comparison is set up to say: This object (value, person, experience) is a bit like that one over there. I hope, if I show you the ways in which two things are similar, you may have a greater understanding. Sometimes the comparison is in the style of Sesame Street: One of these things is not like the others.

You are familiar with these devices and make deft use of them in your essays when you want to clarify or intensify something you have said. For poets a comparison is not an embellishment or a technique for furthering clarity. The comparison is at the heart of the poem.

Sometimes the comparison is overt. Often it is concealed. The poet hopes that, if you discover it on your own, it will take on more significance. Much confusion about poetry exists because we poets withhold explanation in order to offer you the delight of discovery. We have faith in your ability to divine what we have in mind. Bruce Springsteen says folks attending his concerts want to experience something new and at the same time want to feel at home. This is a delicate balance. If I assume what is obvious to me will be obvious to you, I am delusional. But if I over-explain you will yawn and turn away. If I do not give you enough clues to successfully discover the comparison I am working with, you must tell me or we will both have wasted our time on my poem.

Once I have finished reading my poem, you and I will arrive at that awkward moment when you do not know what to say. You may feel guilty because, when I listened to you read your essay, I both praised your words and told you where I was confused. I suggested where I thought you could improve. Because of my responses, you know I listened carefully to your work. Please show me that you listened to my poem. You cannot possibly have had no reaction to my words. They are the same units you use to build your essays and memoirs.

Please wonder aloud about the thoughts that might have been playing hide and seek in my poem. Question why I chose to cast the lines in a certain pattern and not in another. Notice if I varied from that design and ask why. Ask me where I found the quotation that starts the poem. Inquire if I am a fan of that author. Say that your father once told you something similar to the observation offered in the quote and you resented it, or that one of your teachers liked the poet I quoted though you never could see why. Tell me that it seems apparent that I do not like the character who speaks in my poem. Or that you do not like that character. Mention why. Say there are too many words in my poem that require help from a dictionary. Too many ideas to allow me to make my meaning clear.

Tell me whether or not you accept the comparison on which my poem is based. Do you understand a reference to Cyrene, or to what Winston Churchill said in Gallipoli? Have you ever heard of a narwhal? Would you be willing to look up one word in order to better understand my poem? Two? Three? Is the comparison at the root of this poem a Keep Out sign that declares this poem is not for you? Is the metaphor so obscure that you can't even find it?

I may not be able to respond to all your comments. I may choose not to respond to a question because I haven't figured out the answer yet, or because I know the answer all too well and it scares or embarrasses me. But I also know, when I revise my poem, it will be better for your having asked the question. And if by chance my poem has caused you to think of a word, an idea, or a person, in a fresh way, please say something about what I haven't been able to say.

CARLA GALDO

A Few Suggestions

do not pray if you cannot wait

- Jan Twardowski

Don't walk outside at night
if you can't bear the trellis twined
with limp, deflated blooms, like a bunch
of lost balloons, caught fast.

Postcards scrawled home are best
avoided if you can't recall
the word for *stamps*. Beware of children
especially your own:

they bolt, like lettuce crops
in summertime. Do not expect
a hummingbird, a golden egg,
or a month of paid time off.

Unfortunately, tattoos
won't age as well as wine. Don't read
old diaries, notebooks, poems—
for the person that you were

would like a word with you.
Don't put stock in *déjà vu*, don't tap
the shoulder of that guy who passed—
he's not the one you knew.

But on the other hand,
sometimes, the silences are laden.
You're not alone in solitude,
and the lost might still be found.

Your mother's recipe
may actually be the flat-out best,
so call her for a change. And watch
while summer sunsets pierce

the rounded sky. Your mind
cannot catch fire. Hold memory
like roses, loose—its thorns will prick
the ones who cling too hard.