



The Windhover

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Statement from cover artist, Tessa Davidson:

My work is a blend of contemporary and traditional media—combining performance, video, sound, and representational oil painting. I am inspired by historic forms of the human figure, particularly when the figure is integrated into sacred art. Symbolic gestures, objects, and themes of Medieval and Renaissance art heavily influence my subject matter. Through odd juxtapositions, my paintings and performances are infused with absurd, poetic elements, allowing viewers to puzzle at the content individually. By masking traditional elements in contemporary veils, I aim to highlight humanity's ongoing existential quest for hope, meaning, trust, and belief.

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SORAYA QAHWAJI

Flowers in Hand

God knows I love him
if only because I have no one else.

He knows how far I have come
even if I have the wrong address.

Mercy for the stranded lover
waiting by the wrong door.

WILLIAM LITTLEJOHN-ORAM

Flyover

Abilene, Texas

Three weeks since the death
of the fox on the side of the road,

the sun still beats down on its eyes,
sealed and dried by the wind.

The construction worker found it
during routine road maintenance.

Its paws black, and its tongue,
bright pink on the asphalt. Hair blowing

in the wind beneath the yellow hard hat
of the man. In his hand, the shovel,

propped, ready to scrape the bundle
of dried skin and bones from the blacktop.

In the passing shapes of the clouds,
the man sees himself kicking down

the gates of heaven with the body
of the fox draped in his arms,

sees himself dipping the creature
into holy basins,

tar still caked under his fingernails
and gritty blacktop gravel clinging

to his pant legs, to his reflective
orange-yellow construction vest.

Tonight, the man will wake in bed,
his pillow soaked from his own tears,

and think he hears, in the woods
behind his house, foxes barking.

KATY CARL

Perspective

[an excerpt from *As Earth Without Water*, forthcoming from
Wiseblood Books]

In the garden the cold has deepened. Thomas Augustine shifts uncomfortably on the rock wall. Speech has failed: his breath comes in uneven bursts. His panic frightens me; I hide my distress in the hope of soothing his. But I hide it badly.

“Hey. Hey. That’s okay. Everything’s going to be okay. Don’t worry, don’t try to say it again right now. Tell me again how you decided to stay here.”

That story is easier; he has hinted at it in his letter to me, he must have told it in depth so many times by now. His face changes shape, relaxes into its old assurance.

“I painted my way in. People talk about painting themselves into corners. I painted myself out of one. I thought I was only making images until I realized I believed in the power of the images I was making. And I didn’t believe that power was coming from me.”

“What are you working on now?”

“I’m learning to make frescoes, or canvases that mimic them. I’m spending a lot of time in the library, studying Fra Angelico. It’s incredible work. The scope, the size. The sense of completeness. It’s so different from the Renaissance. I could sit with it forever.”

“Still. Art is one thing. All the rest of this”—I wave my hands: tonsure, habit, guesthouse, high wall, pavilion, cypresses—“doesn’t fit with who you were when I knew you.”

“I changed slowly. I thought I didn’t believe until I realized I did.”

“But—everything?”

“Everything, of course, how else?”

“Don’t you reject the—the attitudes—do we really have to spell out—all the problematic—?”

“It looks like we do, Ange.”

I try to put it more clearly. “You’ve adopted a whole system here, one that places you outside the pale in several important ways. Also that places you outside its pale.”

“That isn’t how I’d put it. Not at all. That’s not the truth. The truth is—complicated. And simpler than we make it.”

“So you’d say you’ve been, what, accepted the way you are?”

“More. Loved the way I am. Called, the way I am.”

“I’m not sure how it’s different.”

And here he breaks down.

“It considers me worthwhile. Worthy of learning to live a vision. A vision—”

And I no longer know anything. And I’m not the first to know it either, this nothing, this darkness he has had to face alone. He had had to tell someone, because he had been bleeding. Afterward. He hadn’t known even this at first. He had had only a bit of trouble walking, had thought he was fine until he returned to his cell where he had started shaking, trembling, and couldn’t stop. Collapsed. Had discovered his wound, had had to find someone to help him: the need to tell had followed from that. Otherwise, he says, he would have kept it to himself.

“Everyone here has been kind,” he takes care to say. “It wasn’t anyone who lives here who did it.”

“Who did—”

I am slow to comprehend what must have been done, for him to be saying these things. When it breaks on me I don’t move my body, don’t show my shattered face, don’t give any hint of what the truth does inside me. I hold my breath. Any word, any motion could prove the wrong one, could stop the emergence of the things he needs to say. I listen, and am too surprised to speak, in discovering how deeply his pain can still hurt me: in finding out, in this way, of all ways, after this long, how much, how completely, I still consider him *mine*. My own grief and his pain fall silently into me together, like plumes of ink that sink down and bleed through clear water.

So I keep my eyes on his face, steady, as he speaks, as he looks not at me but at his own finely wrought hands, which clench and wring the cloth of the habit over his knees. Over and over they let the fabric go, crumple and then clutch again as if for safety. Only after I am sure all the words are out, only after he has stood up as if to walk away and then has changed his mind and sat down again in the mulch, careless now of what happens to the white garment, do I feel it is safe for me to move too. I slide down off the wall to sit beside him, still an arm’s length away, in the empty flowerbed.

“I’m so sorry that happened to you.”

“It never should have. I know that.”

“You still want to stay?”

“Where else would I go?”

“Anywhere. Away. Dylan. Let’s leave now. Come on.” I clamber up, lift one foot over the garden wall as if to make for the horizon, as if we could escape so simply.

He shakes his head, shuts his eyes. “This is where I want to be.”

“I wonder. Is wanting enough here?”

He holds his arms out to either side of himself. “Where would I go to get away from where it happened? My body is where it happened. I could leave the monastery, but I can’t leave—this. No—I could, but I won’t. It isn’t that I haven’t thought about it.”

“About—”

“Exactly what you think. But I promise you I won’t ever do it. It wouldn’t be a real means of escape.”

“You don’t have to promise me. Promise your God instead.”

His eyes close on their own as he retreats into some inner room of his mind where I can’t follow him. Yet his face in the moonlight radiates honesty without precedent, and humiliation, and self-consciousness, and—can that be pleasure?

“It means more than you know,” he says, “that you think I’m capable of keeping a promise.”

“I really do. But how could your superiors doubt that, only because this happened to you? Do they think it would make you less able to—keep the vows, to live the life?”

“You’re right. You’re right. They don’t. Shouldn’t. It was just my body that was hurt. Only my body. Not my ability to will—not my *integrity*, not that. So I think I could convince them... They need to know...”

“Slow down. You’re okay now.”

“I mean you know...” He begins to stare at his hands again and then to clench his eyes. He stands up, paces across the flagstones and back, a tight circuit. We are not visible from the main enclosure here, so I must think the tightness is a function of his inner state, not of any risk we might incur. The night wind sweeps freely over us, rustles the branches, shakes their incongruous fragrance about.

“It was terrible. I know.”

“I would never. I would never—But they’ll think I—”

I hold my hands out to him, but he doesn’t take them, doesn’t see them.

“It’s over now. It’s over. You’re going to be okay.”

He sits back down on the wall too, the same as before, within arm’s reach but only just. He brushes at the mulch on the habit. Brown specks of grit cling to the weft of the smooth serge.

“They think that—that the priest who did it—I mean . . . They think that he stole my file. My records. That he used what he found there to. To make his decision. About who to target. Who to pick off. And I don’t think that’s true but I don’t know how to explain. Why I think that.”

“What are you saying?”

“The superiors think I was a target because of what I’d already gone through, what I’d done before. Because of all that, he thought I would be an easier. . .” I supply, in my mind, the word *victim*, which Dylan, which Thomas Augustine, won’t or can’t say. A small noise escapes his throat before he goes on. “And I know that isn’t true. For one thing, it’s not true that the only ones this happens to are like me, with a past like mine. Not by a long shot. Sometimes it’s the best who are chosen, who are stolen—only because they’re the purest, the brightest, and the Devil hates them for that, hates that light. But that’s not why I was. Picked out. Chosen. It was because a long time ago I had been having these . . . I mean you know. Omar. Giovanni. And the ones before, the ones you know about. He knew, too: he already knew about all of it. And. . . he said, if I didn’t do what he wanted, that he would tell everyone here. Not only my directors. Everyone. All of it. And I said *but that’s not who I am*. And he said *but it’s what you were*.”

But *secrets don’t keep in the cloister*: how has this escaped notice for so long? Will it be much longer before everyone knows everything we are saying here, now?

“Where did all this happen?”

“He pulled me into one of the parlors.”

“Pulled you?”

“By the arm. Whispering *Don’t shout*.”

Had closed the door behind them. Had asked for something. Demanded it. Here Dylan, Thomas Augustine, stops telling me, stares at his own beautiful hands again. Clapsed in his lap. A statue.

“Asked for. . .?”

“I can’t say what. Even to you. You know everything I’ve done. But all that’s over. I’ve started fresh. But this was. I can’t. I’m sorry.”

He starts to tell it again: Someone had pulled him into a parlor. Had shut

the door quietly. Had asked for, then had demanded, an act Thomas Augustine had not wanted and wouldn't name.

"And then?"

"Asked again. I was like you are now. Couldn't say anything. Then I said *no*. *Of course no*. I said *I came here not to do those things. No matter what*. Especially not—well. No matter what."

Thomas Augustine takes a breath.

"At first he tried to persuade me. Said that...it would be an act of love. I said *Not here. Not like that*. And he said *Oh, so you do still believe it was an act of love when you did it out in the world*. I said *Who told you what I did?* He said *That's not important*. I said *Well, it wasn't. It isn't*. He said *Isn't what?* I said *Isn't love*. And then. He...started saying other things. Offensive things. I don't want to repeat those either. Then he threatened me. Said that if I didn't agree he would lie to the novice master and say I had anyway. He said he would say that it had been my idea. My initiative. And he'd be believed. Because he was...well, he was someone of importance. And I was no one, just some *recovering prima donna*, some *flaming attention whore*. His words. But if I said yes, then he'd cover for me. Lie for us both. By then I thought he was lying about everything anyway. I went for the door but he got my arm behind my back. Twisted it. Pushed me down, pushed. Up against me. Said: *I'm not going to take you. Not now. But I want you to know that I can if I want. And when I want.*"

He inhales raggedly. The rag is worn but you could choke a man's breath with it.

"And then he said."

Don't move, don't speak, don't look away.

"He said." The breath is torn apart. "He said *you know what. Yeah. I think I will*. And I kept saying *no. No no no no*. And he kept saying *Yes*. Hushing me: saying *stop it*, saying *shh*, just say yes. And—*The universe doesn't run without our saying yes.*"

And the truth had been torn apart and had littered the floor of the parlor. The lie pooled there, spent.

"Then he let me go and stood up. Walked around me, opened the door. Spat in front of me. And left."

I hold him there with my eyes alone, which finally meet his but oh God: what there is in them.

"I'm sorry. I have to ask. You said it wasn't someone who lives here. Who, then?"

Thomas Augustine collects himself as best he can and goes on:

Into one of the early independent shows Giovanni had arranged for Dylan—a show in a tiny gallery, a parquet-floored, jewel-box room walled all along its outer border with plate glass windows, in Chelsea—there had wandered a handsome, sad-eyed priest in a well-tailored clerical suit, not more than halfway through his thirties. Despite the open bar, almost no one else had showed up that night and so the priest and Dylan had sat on a red-leather cushioned bench talking and drinking for two and a half, three hours. It had come out that the priest was, not unlike Beatrice, the child of a wealthy Manhattan family, in his case *nouveaux-riches* financial traders who, in a year or two, would lose almost everything in the market crash. But at the time the young priest had had, besides a modest salary from his diocese, an inheritance from his parents. It was, as he said, “burning a hole in his pocket.” The priest had his portfolio index, monthly stipend, charitable donations all set up by brokers, automated, for him. He had no decisions to make, no difficult calculations constantly demanding recalibration between his own needs and those of others. All his life, the priest said, he had had all his wants met, all his doors opened for him. Now he had begun to search for new goals, new glories he could pursue, could attain, in the world.

The priest then confided to Dylan—in a murmur, as if this were the deepest secret of all—that he himself had started to paint, a bit, in a sun porch off the back of the rectory, in a furtive desultory way. He had placed a few pieces in church-basement gallery shows but spoke yearningly of never achieving the level he saw on the walls all around him—“if I had started earlier. Never now.” He then spoke movingly to Dylan about the motivations of his art, the things he saw. The beauty, the clean lines of the human form. The interplay of parts, the textures and the colors of the different kinds of skin. “A phenomenology of the body,” he called it.

The priest’s eyes had shone like sea-spray, glazed with the effects of wine. When the handlers came to turn off the lights, the two men had exchanged business cards, but Dylan had never followed up.

After that Dylan had seen the priest over and over at his events and openings but had not exchanged more than ten words with him, had not known what was building between the black-draped shoulderblades, had seen no more than the wistful cleanshaven face staring up at the smooth cheek of a Virgin or the complex musculature of a male nude.

By the time Dylan had taken to reading Thomas Merton in secret he had

begun to see the priest's repetitive presence before his canvases as a visible sign, a silent vocable expressing the direction he already so wanted to take. Dylan had not known how to call it what it was. He had not followed the pattern of the purchase manifests as Giovanni had done—Giovanni could have told Dylan what he had seen, if Dylan had wanted to know, if Giovanni had thought it meant anything—which of Dylan's own canvases the priest had begun to collect. Figure studies, self-portraits—not devotionals. Dylan had never imagined needing to reach for the journalist's word *stalker*. Had had no realistic frame of reference for such a thing. The lines of casual talk that could be unobtrusively followed up after Dylan's disappearance to trace him to Our Lady of the Pines, the stay that could so easily be arranged, the willingness to exploit the monks' rule of hospitality, all spoke of questions Dylan had never thought to ask: some that ought to have been asked and weren't; some that never should have had to be.

PAUL J. PASTOR

Prayer (From the Bottom of a Cistern)

Christ, make me a lash
in the eye of the proud,
hard rain on their new perm,
salt in their sugar bowl;

let
me be their too-big bite
of horseradish, their coming
sneezes that will never converge,
their itch between shoulder blades;

also
the chip in their new windshield,
the tear in their old poncho,
the bit of last night's beef
caught flosslessly behind a molar;

make
me a splinter of your cross,
loved all flunkways, bit of sharp compassion
shoved sideways in the finger
of a comfortable world,
untweezable, the holy inward blister,
floating just beneath the skin.

JANICE L. FREYTAG

The Silence of Carrots

See if this isn't so the next time
you water your garden.
Feathered greens receive
the gift with quiet grace.
Nothing echoes back
unwanted.

See if this isn't so, that nails
pressed into flesh move
noiselessly, bruising
their way into dark
adamah, searching
for the color of dawn.

CAMILA RING

Semantics

sometimes God is
a star
in my throat

nothing me to the sound
of myself—

sometimes
the silent sweet gust
of a calm
in my gut
teeth
mouth—

sometimes
God's not.

sometimes I mean to accept how
questions pant
at my elbow:

can my stomach breathe?
can the tips of my fingers
the stretch of my legs take in
air

is my body
a prayer

does the head
in my voice
think:

swallow a star
till it sinks
to my gut—till my gut

turns back
why
not?

sometimes the voice
in my head
is the star
in my throat that says

*you can afford
you can afford
to mean something here.*

MATTHEW J. ANDREWS

Sentence

Take the words of the Lord, the statutes and commandments He dropped to earth like an anchor, and write them on the walls, one verse at a time, until your whole house is a confession. Etch them onto your skin, in a helix over your hands and arms, until scarring elevates each word. Paint them on the inside of your eyelids, bright enough so they illuminate as lightning when you blink. Write them outside: with dead leaves on the lawn, hot urine in the snow, abandoned crab shells on the shore. Arrange the clouds into a testimony, drops of rain into a witness. Teach the stories and psalms to the birds so it is a constant choir as you walk. Form them in the stars, read until you fall asleep, and flood your dreams with incantation, an endless rehearsal for the day when you will be swept up into the text, just one black dot in letters spilled across a sentence.

JEFFREY WALD

Fossil Hunting a Million Years Hence

*Behold, thou hast made my days a few handbreaths,
and my lifetime is as nothing in thy sight.
Surely every man stands as a mere breath!*

—Psalm 39:5

In his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Saint Francis de Sales leads his readers through a series of ten meditations. The first meditation, unsurprisingly, is on creation:

Consider that but a few years since you were not born into the world, and your soul was as yet nonexistent. Where wert thou then, O my soul? The world was already old, and yet of thee there was no sign.

As I sat pondering these words recently, my mind was drawn to a little hillside near the Mississippi River by my house. This is the spot where I go with my boys to fossil hunt. We love to dig under the maples and oaks, where, among the dirt and grass, we find crinoids (sea lilies), bryozoans (little twig-like fossils), and brachiopods (clams).

Natural history books tell me these fossils are the lithified remains of an enormous Ordovician sea that covered the Midwest 450 million years ago. Having lived in North Dakota/Minnesota my entire life, I am well aware that I have always lived about as far from the ocean as one can in America. And to think, an ocean once moved upon the very spot that I now fossil hunt.

For the past year, I have had the singular desire to locate a fossilized shark tooth while scavenging with my boys. Alas, I was recently informed by an expert at the local science museum that my pipe dream would not come to fruition, at least where I was searching near my house. The reason? The fossils along the bluffs are too old, the younger fossils, including shark teeth, having been bulldozed away by enormous glaciers that covered this area approximately 45,000 to 12,000 years ago. Oh mystery of mysteries; how does one piece together the ancient past? It is like putting together an enormous puzzle, where half the pieces have been hidden by your younger sister.

I find it humbling to hold a fossilized brachiopod in my hand and consider that the encrusted clam was alive something like 45 million years ago. I am 34

years old. It is difficult for me to imagine the year 1980, much less time reaching back 45 million years and beyond.

But as difficult as that thought experiment is, it is perhaps easier than imagining time stretching out in the other direction. Consider Earth 45 million years from now; or, consider it even 12,000 years from now. Can you do it?

We seem to live in an age of widespread apocalypticism, both secular and religious. On the one hand, there is environmental apocalypticism, Trumpean apocalypticism, democratic apocalypticism, Russian apocalypticism, and a host of other real—or imagined—apocalypticisms (might this be the year we are finally visited by soldiers from another galaxy?) In a bit of enormous hubris, *Time Magazine* went so far as to label 2020 “The Worst Year Ever.” The brachiopods might take issue with that.

Christians are not immune from apocalyptic thinking. Indeed, one gets the sense that for many Christians—the author (sometimes) included—the Parousia must be imminent. Is it possible that, even as I write, the Four Horsemen’s nags are stabled near D.C.? Perhaps we would not go so far as to say 2020 was the WORST year ever, but many Christians would probably say it was the worst year they had ever personally experienced. Fair enough. Since the advent of Christianity, Armageddon has been a pillar of belief. And since at least Saint Paul, the belief that the Parousia is *imminent* has remained a pretty constant theme.

But what if the Parousia is not imminent? What if Earth has another 45,000 years in it; or 45 million years; or 45 billion years. What then?

I remember reading *The Shadow of the Torturer*—Book One of Gene Wolfe’s tetralogy *The Book of the New Sun*—a few years back. I at first did not understand what was going on. Where was the action taking place? Was this Earth? If so, why was the moon green and daylight red? Even more uncertain, *when* was the action taking place? Was this an imagined past? A time in the near future? Many have acknowledged that Gene Wolfe’s fiction is no beach read—*The Book of the New Sun* has been called science fiction’s *Ulysses*—but I will fully admit that I was more lost than, I suspect, most readers.

Then I did a little digging around the internet and learned that, yes, in fact the action takes place on Earth. But in a far, far distant future. Millions and millions of years in the future.

I was shocked. Millions and millions of years in the future? I understood this was science fiction, but this was far beyond any frame of reference I had.

I now see the reason I had such a difficult time comprehending basic realities in the book was because of a lack of imagination. It is one thing to imagine a very

different reality from our current situation in a not-so-distant age, like Walter Miller does in *A Canticle of Leibowitz*. A nuclear holocaust will change things pretty dramatically pretty quickly. But several million years in the future? Now that's a different proposition entirely.

I'm not sure why, but there is something about imagining the world continuing for another million or billion years that is a challenge to my faith. At least a challenge to my perception of reality. Why is that? Is it that somehow my days—numbered as they surely are (seventy years, eighty if I am strong)—seem to diminish in importance in proportion to the total number of days Earth has left? Is it that I question the wisdom and power of a King who would let his Kingdom flounder for so long? Is it that I've already given up on the goodness of this world and its possibility for redemption, and am excited at the prospect of watching it erupt in flames?

Time. No one on Earth knows when time began (some would say it had no beginning). A simple Google search says that Earth is 4.543 billion years old. Does it have another 4 billion years in its tank? Or is the Parousia imminent?

Scripture tells us that "Heaven and earth will pass away," but "of that day and hour no one knows." Will it be tomorrow? Perhaps. Will it be a million or a billion years in the future? Perhaps. Jesus is patient; for Him, "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

And so we wait. Trying our best to prepare for His coming. Trying our best to be Kingdom people even now. Trying our best to live the present moment well, to live well whatever time we have left. But it's hard. We are impatient (well, let me speak for myself; *I* am impatient). We live in a strange world, in strange times (all times are strange, I suspect; time, itself, is strange); we are the not-yet people, existing somewhere between Christ's ascent and his Second Coming, watching with veiled eyes the unfolding of salvation history. And how veiled at times my eyes are.

But here's the rub: in the words of Walker Percy, what's a person to do at 2 p.m. on a Wednesday? I don't have the answer for you. But as for me? I think I'll take my boys fossil hunting; hike down that little hill and pick up some crinoids and brachiopods and revel in the mystery that perhaps 450 million years ago, God looked on them and smiled and saw that they were good. In another 450 million years, will he still look down upon this spot? And if he does what will he see? A son with his children, searching for fossils; what will they find? My own lithified remains? I don't know. But maybe it's all for the better. Maybe it's enough to know that as he looks down now, he beholds my boys, scratching in the dirt and weeds; looks on them, considers them, and sees that they are very good.

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MATTHEW MILLER teaches social studies, swings tennis rackets, and writes poetry—all hoping to create home. He and his wife live beside a dilapidating orchard in Indiana, where he tries to shape dead trees into playhouses for his four boys. His poetry has been featured in *Whale Road Review*, *Earth & Altar*, *Ekstasis Magazine*, and is forthcoming in *Relief Journal*.

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CAMILA RING is an English PhD candidate at Case Western Reserve University, where her research focuses on theophanies of distance in the poems of Dickinson and Hopkins. She lives in Cleveland with her husband and nine-month-old son. She is especially interested in how embodied religious experience shapes and is shaped by her own poetic practice.

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JEFFREY WALD writes from the Twin Cities. His work has previously been published in journals such as *Dappled Things*, *Touchstone*, *The New Oxford Review*, and *Philosophy Now*.

R.S. WILLIAMS is a poet, technologist and mountain enthusiast living in Colorado. Much of the imagery in his poetry comes from the impressionable landscapes he's encountered while climbing the high peaks in the Colorado backcountry. He often characterizes his work as a journey from isolation to community by way of solitude.

The Windhover

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