

NOVA FORUM

" POETRY ON

THE BEACH "

APRIL 15, 2023

WILL ROGERS BEACH

LIFEGUARD STAND #7



POETRY FOUNDATION

That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection

BY GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

Cloud-puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows | flaunt forth, then chevy on an air-
 Built thoroughfare: heaven-roysterers, in gay-gangs | they throng; they glitter in marches.
 Down roughcast, down dazzling whitewash, | wherever an elm arches,
 Shivelights and shadowtackle in long | lashes lace, lance, and pair.
 Delightfully the bright wind boisterous | ropes, wrestles, beats earth bare
 Of yestertempest's creases; | in pool and rut peel parches
 Squandering ooze to squeezed | dough, crust, dust; stanches, starches
 Squadroned masks and manmarks | treadmire toil there
 Footfretted in it. Million-fuelèd, | nature's bonfire burns on.
 But quench her bonniest, dearest | to her, her clearest-selvèd spark
 Man, how fast his firedint, | his mark on mind, is gone!
 Both are in an unfathomable, all is in an enormous dark
 Drowned. O pity and indig | nation! Manshape, that shone
 Sheer off, disseveral, a star, | death blots black out; nor mark
 Is any of him at all so stark
 But vastness blurs and time | beats level. Enough! the Resurrection,
 A heart's-clarion! Away grief's gasping, | joyless days, dejection.
 Across my foundering deck shone
 A beacon, an eternal beam. | Flesh fade, and mortal trash
 Fall to the residuary worm; | world's wildfire, leave but ash:
 In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
 I am all at once what Christ is, | since he was what I am, and
 This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, | patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
 Is immortal diamond.

Source: *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poems and Prose* (Penguin Classics, 1985)

CONTACT US

2

The Servant-Girl at Emmaus (A Painting by Velazquez)

Denise Levertov

She listens, listens, holding
her breath. Surely that voice
is his—the one
who had looked at her, once, across the crowd,
as no one ever had looked?
Had seen her? Had spoken as if to her?

Surely those hands were his,
taking the platter of bread from hers just now?
Hands he'd laid on the dying and made them well?

Surely that face—?

The man they'd crucified for sedition and blasphemy.
The man whose body disappeared from its tomb.
The man it was rumored now some women had seen this morning,
alive?

Those who had brought this stranger home to their table
don't recognize yet with whom they sit.
But she in the kitchen, absently touching
the winejug she's to take in,
a young Black servant intently listening,

swings round and sees
the light around him
and is sure.

PLANTING A SEQUOIA

Dana Gioia

All afternoon my brothers and I have worked in the orchard,
 Digging this hole, laying you into it, carefully packing the soil.
 Rain blackened the horizon, but cold winds kept it over the Pacific,
 And the sky above us stayed the dull gray /
 Of an old year coming to an end.

In Sicily a father plants a tree to celebrate his first son's birth—
 An olive or a fig tree—a sign that the earth has one more life to bear.
 I would have done the same, proudly laying new stock into my
 father's orchard,
 A green sapling rising among the twisted apple boughs,
 A promise of new fruit in other autumns.

But today we kneel in the cold planting you, our native giant,
 Defying the practical custom of our fathers,
 Wrapping in your roots a lock of hair, a piece of an infant's birth
 cord,
 All that remains above earth of a first-born son;
 A few stray atoms brought back to the elements.

We will give you what we can—our labor and our soil,
 Water drawn from the earth when the skies fail,
 Nights scented with the ocean fog, days softened by the circuit
 of bees.

We plant you in the corner of the grove, bathed in western light,
 A slender shoot against the sunset.

And when our family is no more, all of his unborn brothers dead,
 Every niece and nephew scattered, the house torn down,
 His mother's beauty ashes in the air,
 I want you to stand among strangers, all young and ephemeral
 to you,
 Silently keeping the secret of your birth.

EITHER-OR

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If God incarnated himself in man, died and rose from the dead,
All human endeavors deserve attention
Only to the degree that they depend on this,
I.e., acquire meaning thanks to this event.
We should think of this by day and by night.
Every day, for years, ever stronger and deeper.
And most of all about how human history is holy
And how every deed of ours becomes a part of it,
Is written down for ever, and nothing is ever lost.
Because our kind was so much elevated
Priesthood should be our calling
Even if we do not wear liturgical garments.
We should publicly testify to the divine glory
With words, music, dance, and every sign.
If what is proclaimed by Christianity is a fiction
And what we are taught in schools,
In newspapers and TV is true:
That the evolution of life is an accident,
As is an accident the existence of man,
And that his history goes from nowhere to nowhere,
Our duty is to draw conclusions
From our thinking about the innumerable generations
Who lived and died deluding themselves,
Ready to renounce their natural needs for no reason,
To wait for a posthumous verdict, every day afraid
That for licking clean a pot of jam they go to eternal torment.
If a poor degenerate animal
Could have reached so far in his fantasies
And peopled the air with radiant beings,
Rocky chasms with crowds of devils,
The consequences of it must be, indeed, serious.

We should go and proclaim without cease
And remind people at every step of what we are:
That our capacity for self-delusion has no limits
And that anybody who believes anything is mistaken.
The only gesture worthy of respect is to complain of our transience,
Of the one end for all our attachments and hopes,
As if by threatening indifferent Heaven,
We fulfilled that which distinguishes our species.
Not at all! Why either-or?
For centuries men and gods have lived together,
Supplications have been made for health or a successful journey.
Not that one should constantly meditate on who Jesus was.
What can we, ordinary people, know of the Mystery?
Not worse than our neighbors and kin,
We pay homage to it every Sunday.
It is better that not everyone is called to priesthood.
Some are for prayers, others for their sins.
It's a pity that their sermons are always so boring
As if they themselves no more understood.
Let scientists describe the origin of life.
Perhaps it's true, but is all that for human beings?
Day follows night, trees bloom in the spring—
Such discoveries are certainly less harmful.
May we not care about what awaits us after death
But here on earth look for salvation,
Trying to do good within our limits,
Forgiving the morals their imperfection. Amen.

HELENE

Czeslaw Milosz

Here we are on the other side.
 Expeditions. Demesnes were leased out. Steam rose from the cinders.
 It must be Helene over there, dancing between the flames.
 Perhaps she knows now the secret of particular existence.
 All my life I tried in vain to comprehend it.
 You suffered much, Helene, and said nothing.
 Hungry, you didn't even ask for help.
 And hospitals, that bodily misery wanting to love itself;
 Hating itself, it weeps in a dirty hallway.
 Who would have thought, Helene, that our youth would turn out this
 way?
 The garden glowed in the sun and summer lasted forever.
 Later for a long time we learn how to bear what is borne by others.
 And how to bless a moment if it is without pain.

Czeslaw Milosz*Six Lectures in Verse**Lecture IV*

Reality, what can we do with it? Where is it in words?
Just as it flickers, it vanishes. Innumerable lives
Unremembered. Cities on maps only,
Without that face in the window, on the first floor, by the market,
Without those two in the bushes near the gas plant.
Returning seasons, mountain snows, oceans,
And the blue ball of the Earth rotates,
But silent are they who ran through artillery fire,
Who clung to a lump of clay for protection,
And those deported from their homes at dawn
And those who have crawled out from under a pile of bodies,
While here, I, an instructor in forgetting,
Teach that pain passes (for it's the pain of others),
Still in my mind trying to save Miss Jadwiga,
A little hunchback, librarian by profession,
Who perished in the shelter of an apartment house
That was considered safe but toppled down
And no one was able to dig through the slabs of wall,
Though knocking and voices were heard for many days.
So a name is lost for ages, forever,
No one will ever know about her last hours,
Time carries her in layers of the Pliocene.
The true enemy of man is generalization.
The true enemy of man, so-called History,
Attracts and terrifies with its plural number.
Don't believe it. Cunning and treacherous,
History is not, as Marx told us, anti-nature,
And if a goddess, a goddess of blind fate.
The little skeleton of Miss Jadwiga, the spot
Where her heart was pulsating. This only
I set against necessity, law, theory.

The Still Pilgrim Talks to Her Body

Angela Alaimo

O'Donnell

I blink awake in the soak and sweat,
the odor of my own slick skin,
my pillow damp, my red sheets wet,
my bed a swamp we're sinking in.

I swing each leg, my heavy bones,
and drop each foot upon the floor.
I rise up straight. We stand alone,
my horse, my hound, my paramour,
and step together toward the door.

We're twinned, a long conjoined pair.
I wash you, dress you, brush your hair.
You sing with me even when
I sing the same old song again.
And every breath you take I share.

FOR EILEEN ON HER BIRTHDAY:
WALKING WITH HER
AROUND SAINT JOSEPH'S LAKE

She drives the car but when we park,
she hands me the keys to carry.
Before I can knock out my pipe
she has crossed the paved road
and stands ready like a traffic cop
to signal me a safe moment to join her.
Then she bounds down the concrete steps
as if she's going to hunt something
we can bring home to eat for dinner.

We stand together on the path that will
revolve us around Saint Joseph's lake.
She announces our starting time.
Although her watch is faster than mine,
I say nothing. For a few paces
we exchange banalities about weather
and temperature, and then she is off,
soon ten yards ahead. After we have rounded
the boathouse curve of the path and are
coming to the weeping willows
I run to catch up to her and make
some hard-breathing comments
about the patterns of shallow waves
woven in the water and the nuances
of cloud-colors reflected on the dome
and spire on the other side.

She has already observed them
and maybe dismissed them.
She begins to talk about details
of foliage and flowers along the path
that I haven't seen. I lag behind.

By the time we get to what is left
of the woods I wonder if the joggers
who pass and meet us know we are walking
together. They greet us separately.
Maybe they think I am chasing her.

I am. At the tall colonnade
of walnut trees she is out of sight,
until I see her sitting on the steps,
waiting. "Although, looking back,
I couldn't see you," she says, "you're only
three minutes late." Space and time.

I think back to my many years
of illusion: me sitting still
through long hours but striding
through thoughts and images
of muscular language builders
of books while she lay sleeping.
The race between tortoise and hare,
but when Saint Joseph of the Lake
tells the fable, which is which?

Last night, calling from Los Angeles,
our daughter asked me, "Did you ever
think you'd be married to a sixty-eight-
year-old woman?" But our daughter
was inside our marriage for only nine months.
I try to think from the outside, like her question
But it's beside any point I can make.
Instead, I try to think, What if
her mother had never been born? I can't.

In the innocent parabola of the path
around Joseph's lake there must be hidden
some mechanism that betrays little
but means everything. Like a clumsy
gears wheel meshed with intricate
accuracy into a smaller, faster one,
for no reason, except that it works.

I try to imagine myself circling
the lake alone at my own pace,
greeting the joggers with a nod,
but never geared to anyone at all.
I can see only incalculable disasters,
like suddenly, in mid-stride, forgetting
how to walk, or plodding around
and around in a void with no one
sitting on the concrete steps
to tell me when and where to stop.

Ernest Sandeen 10

"CAN THESE BONES LIVE?"

Ezekiel 37:3

From the clock I've always lived in the presence of
but have never seen I sense a warning
more intimate than touch that I am nearing
the event which is as desperate as birth.

Small wonder, then, that I have misgivings.
For instance, I've never been taught how to crawl
out of a human skeleton decorously and with skill.

If only I could remember how I managed
to infiltrate this nest of bones—
in the first place—
but I can't.



41

Quid Pro Quo

Paul Mariani

Just after my wife's miscarriage (her second in four months), I was sitting in an empty classroom exchanging notes with my friend, a budding Joyce scholar with steelrimmed glasses, when, lapsed Irish Catholic that he was, he surprised me by asking what I thought now of God's ways toward man. It was spring,

such spring as came to the flintbacked Chenango Valley thirty years ago, the full force of Siberia behind each blast of wind. Once more my poor wife was in the local four-room hospital, recovering. The sun was going down, the room's pinewood panels all but swallowing the gelid light, when, suddenly, I surprised not only myself but my colleague

by raising my middle finger up to heaven, *quid pro quo*, the hardly grand defiant gesture a variant on Vanni Fucci's figs, shocking not only my friend but in truth the gesture's perpetrator too. I was 24, and, in spite of having pored over the *Confessions* & that Catholic Tractate called the *Summa*, was sure I'd seen enough of God's erstwhile ways toward man.

That summer, under a pulsing midnight sky shimmering with Van Gogh stars, in a creaking, cedarscented cabin off Lake George, having lied to the gentrified owner of the boys' camp that indeed I knew wilderness & lakes and could, if need be, lead a whole fleet of canoes down the turbulent whitewater passages of the Fulton Chain

2.

(I who had last been in a rowboat with my parents at the age of six), my wife and I made love, trying not to disturb whosever headboard & waterglass lie just beyond the paperthin partition at our feet. In the great black Adirondack stillness, as we lay there on our sagging mattress, my wife & I gazed out through the broken roof into a sky that seemed

somehow to look back down on us, and in that place, that holy place, she must have conceived again, for nine months later in a New York hospital she brought forth a son, a little buddha-bellied rumpstiltskin runt of a man who burned to face the sun, the fact of his being there both terrifying & lifting me at once, this son,

this gift, whom I still look upon with joy & awe. Worst, best, just last year, this same son, grown to manhood now, knelt before a marble altar to vow everything he had to the same God I had had my own erstwhile dealings with. How does one bargain with a God like this, who, *quid pro quo*, ups the ante each time He answers one sign with another?

From *The Great Wheel*, published by W. W. Norton & Company, 1996. Copyright © 1996 by Paul Mariani. Reprinted by permission of the author. All rights reserved.

Notice – by Steve Kowit

This evening, the sturdy Levi's
I wore every day for over a year
& which seemed to the end
in perfect condition,
suddenly tore.
How or why I don't know,
but there it was: a big rip at the crotch.
A month ago my friend Nick
walked off a racquetball court,
showered,
got into this street clothes,
& halfway home collapsed & died.
Take heed, you who read this,
& drop to your knees now & again
like the poet Christopher Smart,
& kiss the earth & be joyful,
& make much of your time,
& be kindly to everyone,
even to those who do not deserve it.
For although you may not believe
it will happen,
you too will one day be gone,
I, whose Levi's ripped at the crotch
for no reason,
assure you that such is the case.
Pass it on.

Still Life

John F. Deane

We have slipped by here, scarcely noticed,
for generations; the trees we planted,
oak and birch and eucalyptus,

scarce reached our knees those days, now they rise
stooping amongst scattered stars, against
turquoise deepening to blue-pink, emerald, cobalt;

we know—after the old folks with their hearth-music
abandoned us—generations are layered beneath, and still
the young hare leaps in the joy of morningflush

while the mismatched mistlethrush will cock
her speckled chest into the northern breeze:
as it was, we say, in the beginning.

I will turn soon into the broth of dreams,
blue-pink, emerald, cobalt, a blade of grass
of being, but for now I hold my hand

against the sky and watch a star
between my fingers, see the webbed flesh, feel the blood
pulsing, and listen to the soft sigh lingering.

for Michael Schmidt

One Flesh

by Elizabeth Jennings

Lying apart now, each in a separate bed,
He with a book, keeping the light on late,
She like a girl dreaming of childhood,
All men elsewhere; it is as if they wait
Some new event: the book he holds unread,
Her eyes fixed on the shadows overhead.

Tossed up like flotsam from a former passion,
How cool they lie. They hardly ever touch,
Or if they do, it is like a confession
Of having little feeling; or too much.
Chastity faces them, a destination
For which their whole lives were a preparation.

Strangely apart, yet strangely close together,
Silence between them like a thread to hold
And not wind in. And time itself's a feather
Touching them gently. Do they know they're old,
These two who are my father and my mother
Whose fire from which I came, has now grown cold?

Substance Theory



[Laura Reece Hogan](#) July 27, 2018

The skin of the persimmon is not what it used to be

Who is to say that it is a less lovely sphere dulled to ripe auburn pulp
and although pecked, sun-patched.

Thee tree speaks them tenderly into being each season. Each in turn turns to teach
the turn to the one sweet heat.

A hachiya meets its appointments, matures beyond the astringent orange sheen,

reaching for Teresa reaching for Thérèse reaching for Teresa reaching for the utter center
of the divine diamond fruit, an arrow into flame

and in living flame, leaps and ignites the next. Incandescent in the setting gold embrace,
she gathers her ruddy round wisdom, flares her warm fragrance on high:

I have kept both fresh and mellowed in store for you, my love.

I can say I love ardently, I will say we cradle stars

I can say I hold the key, I will say we usher others through.

Root wither, wind bite and branch bend lead us here, a final kiss for the crumbling
leaf crown, a release of the heavy soft body

In the time of their visitation they will shine, and dart about as sparks through stubble;

Perhaps you will just make out the glimmer of each autumnal halo in the dusk,
and it will light something inside, in the juiced middle, near the seed-heart

Who is to say the puckered rusted red flesh
is less lovely when it may be taken,
consumed, and dissolved
into molecules into
acid nebula into
fusion into
fire

Luminous Mystery V: This is My Body

I must admit: sometimes it disgusts me,
the night-lit piranha jawing at my breast,
the feel of knotting flesh just before he gets

what he needs: water to slake his thirst,
cream to fatten him up.
He gulps and grunts, the sound we heard

in his first few minutes. Babies, born with
collapsed lungs, inflate them
with their first breath. Plucked from an incision,

he struggled—blew a hole through
one small lung sac, alveolus,
sent air into his chest. They wheeled him away

in a small glass box, and a nurse
shampooed his sticky hair,
gave him a bottle: plastic ease. Not until

twelve hours later did I get to hold him,
trailing wires behind him like a fish
who's always broken the line.

Yet here we are, madonna and child
at four a.m. in a secondhand rocking chair.
He bops my sternum with one hand,

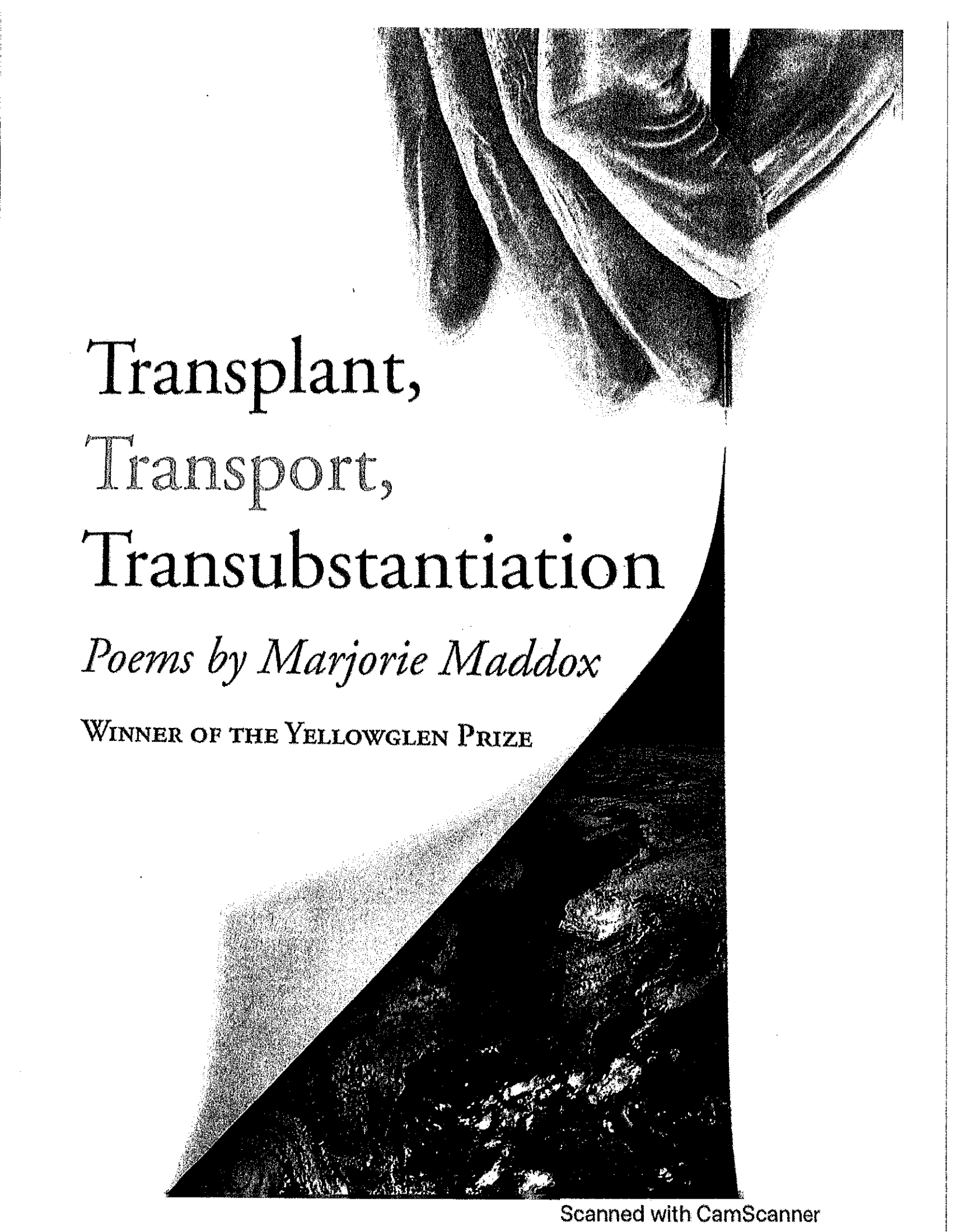
scratches at my pajamas with the other
as he sucks down my blood
in altered form. Little dude, I give you

my body, fat and fluid retaining;
my blood, which will carry your
own cells, microchimeras, till they lodge

in my liver, heart, brain. I give you fats,
sugars, proteins—and also,
in small amounts, paint thinners,

dry-cleaning fluids, rocket fuel, pesticides,
and flame retardants. I cannot help
but feed you the world as it is,

filtered by a process so natural
it gives you everything I have,
even what I would rather not share.



Transplant,
Transport,
Transubstantiation

Poems by Marjorie Maddox

WINNER OF THE YELLOWGLEN PRIZE

The Sacrament of Marriage

I. as baptism

Wet this wonder of will-be,
 this hole of hope, brim-full and poured
 on our bodied souls; this ecstatic cleansing
 sinless and sanctioned. O, Solomon sing louder!
 Aria of rivers, curved limbs, shores of skin,
 mellifluent unction, sweet healing of liquid,
 fully immersed in this sprinkle

of symbol flowing our yes and no,
 the hard edges of bone; this christened ocean
 of union, the blessed affusion, *Agnus Dei's* streaming
 across the uplifted, eyes inlands of prayer;
 the bright bowl of our bondage

and deliverance, high in the arch of light,
 in this Pentecost of pleasure, this divine bestowment:
 your spirit in me, infusionism become human.



II. as confirmation

yes and yes and yes
chosen and spoken.
Beloved wedding guest's,
the Spirit's, token

of wisdom, knowledge,
counsel, holy fear,
true godliness, strength
consummate in years

of doubts, questionings,
yet unbroken creeds:
these worn wedding rings—
our gold string, prayer beads

of matrimony.
Up front and aloud,
we cite the "I believe . . . ,"
confirm our vows.

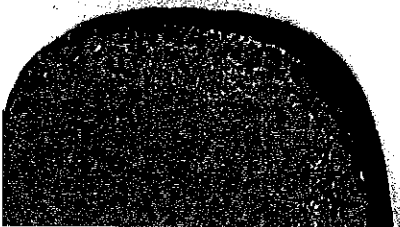
III. as eucharist

My body for you, my blood,
iron-poor but flowing
into your veins still bloated on red-cells,
my blood for you, my body,
creaking and open, bending and broken,
my hair, my ribs, my teeth, my lungs, my arms, my heart,
my toes, my liver, my breasts, my knees, my sex, my kidneys.

Take. Take. Take. Take. Take.

IV. as orders

This
 is the house that
 God built. This is the bishop.
 This is the priest. This is the deacon.
 This is the father. This is the mother. This is the child.
 obeyobeyobeyobeyobeyobeyobeyobey
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V. as penance

Like Peter's, our feet stink:
dusty, shit-stained, fish-smelling.

This day-to-day
one-foot-in-front-of-the-other ritual
cripples rigid bones, leaves us
hobbling: stubbed joy, twist of promise,
the blistering steps of hurt and heal.

And so we kneel,
with tattered sponges washing
the road from our soles
and ankles, each holding up
worse sores, each confessing
the muddied and clear; administering
sacred balm in the clean light
of an average kitchen.

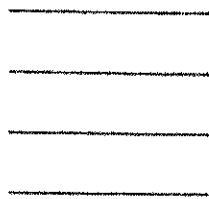
VI. as extreme unction

And in the dying:
the howls and silence of the always-ill,
laments for the loss of the once loved,
the minutes misunderstood as misery.
What is undone in the unforgiving
are the alms of the everyday,
the laying on of hearts.

Too long the cup cracked,
the crusts of bread molding on the counter,
a trail for rodents.

Anoint and save, blessed Savior,
this failure to sustain
a sacrament breathed-out, sick of spirit,
and ready too late to right its life
in this the last-chance
miraculous rite.

four
testimonies



poems

KATE DANIELS

Louisiana State University Press

Baton Rouge 1998

IN PRAISE OF SINGLE MOTHERS

25

acknowledging C. S.

That I have closed myself into my study at 8:45 P.M. on this Thursday
evening in early October,
the paper before me, the word processor whirring for revisions, the coffee in
its thick blue mug
fragrancing this small space beside the washing machine
which, too, whirs companionably (fifth time today).

That my chores are done, my children sleeping, and I have just begun to
make relation with words again,
a sweet tinkly string of them tumbling lightly, back of my teeth,
about to erupt, when

The magisterial Peter Augustus, forty-five months on the planet today,
only recently weaned of his bedtime bottle,
the one with black hair and big ears
whose eyes squint suspiciously at every encounter,
it was he, intelligent and terrifying, who took the key
to the minivan and started it up, and drove it in reverse
one hundred yards down the boulevard, trying to stop it
with his hands pressed to the roof, ignorant
of steering, grim-lipped and dry-eyed, stalling out,
thank God, on the lip of a curb, placed there, obviously,
for just that reason. He, he is the one
who pushes through the bifold doors of my makeshift study
and holds forth his sippy cup with furious civility.

That I love his fierce will, his inability to compromise,
his sweet, sleek ass, the thumb in his mouth, the pale skin tightened
over the harp of his ribs. That his ear
is a spiral of unspeakable wonderment, a pinkish
cornucopia lined with hair, buttered with gold—
and down deep, last week, the black bean blocking the outer canal.

That I give thanks for his uniqueness in the universe
 and fill his cup and chat quietly,
 and pick him up in his Tiger t-shirt,
 his long legs wrapped around my waist,
 sucked thumb sickeningly scented,
 mouth working busily at the plastic cover of his drinking cup.

That I carry him back upstairs, fifty-four pounds
 straining my back, my neck tense, quadriceps pulling manfully,
 and lay him down in his bed and lean into him again and again,
 finally inhaling one last time, and tiptoe out, taking his beloved odor
 with me on my fingertips and cheeks.

That I enclose myself once more in the laundry room/study, pondering
 briefly
 the nature of discipline, remembering the self-sacrificing saints, especially
 St. Zita, lifelong servant, patroness of washerwomen, charladies,
 housekeepers, cooks, and St. Paula, widowed at thirty-three with five
 small children, renowned for her "excessive" self-mortification.
 I try to be like St. Theresa of Lisieux, that exquisite
 Little Flower, not mystic at all, living her simple life, finding
 sainthood and sanity in the daily round of cleaning up and bringing order.

That I am not a saint, my days are marked by bitten lips and cutoff, angry
 words, my voice
 rising impatiently with creatures too undeveloped to understand
 those wings inside me, rising up wildly in protest of one more interruption.

That the Hail Mary calms me with its lovely images, its soothing rhythms,
 its praise for women, I say it like a mantra.

That I say three, then four, then close the study door again, shutting myself
 once more into solitude.

That I whisk my mind into a stiff froth of egg white-like consistency and
 lower myself into it as a mother and arise, rinsed into a poet, baptized
 back into words.

That something flows. The liquid of language, that liquor,
the familiar warmth, the watch melting off my arm, body
disappearing into timeless space: a sound, a rhythm, an urge
to follow. That I am flying here, and floating there, and rising
and writing . . .

Like a snake in unfamiliar territory, advancing warily, but slowly gaining in
confidence
and volume, a sound is born.

That she wails, she wails, she wails.

That I arise and go to her automatically.

That this one, at least, is quiet, can't talk, and fits
into one arm's crook, tightly bound inside a blanket,
I am thankful, and so race to retrieve her.
That the breasts turn on in concert, predictable
as a percolator on automatic timer, the milk
warming and rising, the breasts suddenly stuffed
sausages, uncomfortable and embarrassing.

That I love my milk, my mother's milk,
thin and sweet, yellow and oily,
and she does, too, wailing now
at a volume that threatens the sleep of the others.
That I lift her up hastily with one hand,
the other ripping at the clever closing
of the nursing bra, the pads already soaked through
and dropping to the floor with a sodden thunk.

That she clamps on with a moan, and wrenches
my nipple with her toothless, bone-hard gums,
reproaching me for my tardiness.
That my last line written downstairs—was it
a line? an entire line? maybe just an image, fleeting but brilliant—
that last hard-earned line (or whatever it was) must still be blinking behind



the cursor, mustn't it? Unless
I forgot to save it again.

That the milk is flowing now,
the endorphins surging through my head and torso,
even the pads of my feet feel good,
we tumble backward, she and I, onto the futon
her father and I conceived her on.
That I think about that for awhile, body swelling
and pulsing in various locations.
Whatever that line was, I can't
worry about it now, the machine
has it, surely. Entirely, I trust
technology, though I'm milk
and heat, white softnesses and the smell
her mouth emits opening to switch
to the other tit.

That we sink into it, whatever we are,
whatever I am, nursing mother, postpartum
poet-on-pause, being suckled and holding,
sucking and being held, mother and daughter,
her mouth on my breast, my hand on her head,
our eyes on each other's.

That she drains me and I do not
even care, holding her there
in the time-stopped, milky darkness.

That the two of us are lovers.

That I love her.

That I love her more,
much more, than poetry.

That the cursor blinks blankly
at the end of an empty line.

