

Tiferet

LITERATURE, ART, & THE CREATIVE SPIRIT

SPRING 2015

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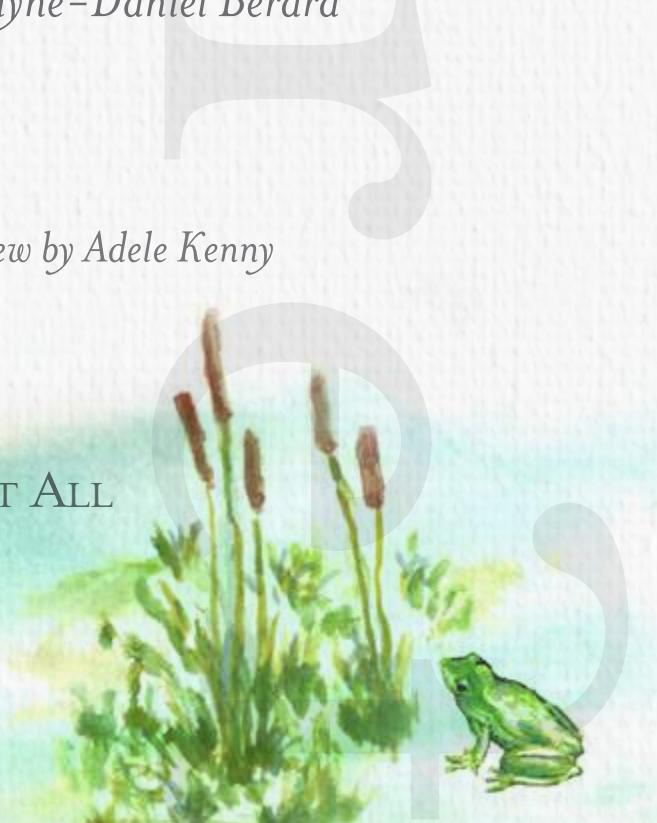
ARTWORK

"THE EYES OF NATURE" by Conny Jasper

BOOK REVIEW

A LIGHTNESS, A THIRST, or NOTHING AT ALL
by Adele Kenny • Review by Alex Pinto

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REVELATION *by Fred LaMotte*

The old Rabbi said, Torah contains all revelation.
The Brahmin said, Vedas reveal everything.
The Gospel is the end of it, said the priest.
Then I went to a Mosque, where the Imam told me,
Those old books were corrected by the last Prophet:
no revelation after holy Qu'ran.

But a funny thing happened when I heard them:
my heart contracted in breathless withering,
I felt my juices drying up.
So I walked barefoot through my own back yard
and consulted the first plum bud.
That tiny green nipple gushed Torah,
Veda, Gospel, Qu'ran: new juices
blushed up the twigs in my body.

Allah struck dumb by the fragrance of that pollen,
the breasts of El Shaddai could not contain the milk
that sparkled over those naked branches
and bubbled up in mushrooms.

Forsythia dripped golden sweetness,
tipped the tulip cup and spilled
bright God all over the moss.

The original prophet was the Robin.
Then came the grace of the messenger Bee.



At night I heard Upanishad intoned by frogs,
ten thousand little pundits in the wetlands!

At dawn, I was moved into deeper silence
by the Sura of the Sparrow.

I could not fathom the verses of the Thrush,
feathered rishis in the apple trees.

Books are for Winter, calligraphy of frost.

I love to read, but when Spring comes,

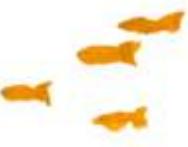
Epistles are written in the petals of the rose,

I Ching cast in blossoming sticks on blue sky.

As long as seasons unfold

like wings of Presence from old cocoons,

revelation will never cease!



FRED LaMOTTE is an interfaith chaplain at the Evergreen State College and a teacher of World Religions.

He also offers instruction in meditation and gathers circles that hold space for the celebration of mystical poetry and song. Fred has degrees from Yale University and Princeton Theological Seminary. He lives in Washington State where he loves to hike in the wilderness, play tenor sax, and provide shamanic empowerment for the Seattle Seahawks.

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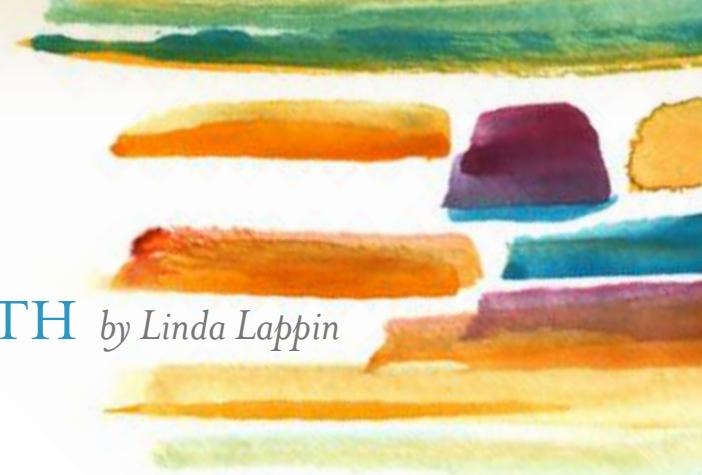
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A SIGN *in the LABYRINTH* by Linda Lappin

1.

I stroll barefoot on the beach at Spinalonga across the crushed luminescence of tiny abalones. Scanning the shore for pocketable souvenirs, I note a cube of rock, striped with bands of red and green. An inscription appears as I look closer: spidery white script engraved upon the bands of red, and thick, black gothic strokes across the green. The inscription runs along four sides of the chunk in an unbroken stream of notation.

I dip the rock into the sea to refresh its colors. A few letters leap out, unmistakable: alpha, theta, but the rest are illegible. On the lowest band is a row of white triangles resembling a highly stylized delta, all identical and evenly spaced, as if punched in the rock with the same carving tool. I am standing only a few feet from the crumbling Venetian bastions of the last leper's colony in Europe, shut down over a half century ago. Could this have been scratched by an inmate on those dilapidated walls? Or has it been washed up from some far more ancient, sunken ruin of Byzantium?

Excitedly, I show it to my husband who stares at it amused and says I am imagining things. He sees nothing but the scribbling of sediment and sea worms on metamorphic rock. The inscription I see is merely an illusion, not archaeological artifice, he claims, and points out the rough edge where this piece has clearly broken off from a larger slab. The squiggles I call writing also appear on the part which would have been inside the slab. If you break this piece in half, he suggests, you'll find the same squiggles and triangles inside, too.

I consider this argument and gradually yield to his logic. The shapes of the letters are transformed beneath our scrutiny, becoming less regular and defined, indeed less like writing. What I imagined as an inscription is not a text to be read by human eyes.

Not willing to give it up completely, I drop the rock, weighing about ten pounds, into my beach bag and drag it back to the car where I toss it in the backseat, along with piles of salt-stiffened beach towels, bricks of olive oil soap, bags of pungent oregano and mountain tea. As we drive around Crete, I take out the rock whenever we stop, douse it with water and examine it anew. Sometimes the signs align themselves into script, but mostly they elude recognition. When the water dries, the markings fade.

2.

We are on our way to walk a labyrinth. This being Crete, what better place? This is the home of the labyrinth, the maze built by King Minos' architect, Dedalus, to imprison the Minotaur, his monstrous stepson, who demanded a sacrifice of Athenian youth every nine years. To put an end to all that, Theseus slayed the Minotaur and escaped the labyrinth, thanks to Mino's daughter, Ariadne, who had taught him how to find his way out using a ball of thread. Abandoned by Theseus, Ariadne was courted and wed by the god Dionysus. Dedalus emigrated to Sardinia, where he imparted the art of spiral architecture to the native people there. The labyrinth remained bereft of its celebrated resident, but continued to resurface in art, dance and narrative on every continent.

Mythologists, archaeologists, philosophers, and mathematicians have debated the meaning of the labyrinth for centuries. The myth arose, claim some, from the thick mesh of passageways and cubbyholes beneath the palace of Knossos, laid bare in the last century by the excavations of Sir Arthur Evans. No claim others, it is a model of an anthropomorphized universe, a map of how nourishment moves in our entrails or of how synapses fire in our brain. By no means, protest the symbolists, the labyrinth is a universal symbol of gestation, death, rebirth, or a depiction of the underworld. Above all, it must be experienced in movement. Its meanders were designed to guide dancers along a ritual path, poised between sky and earth, beginning and ending in the same spot. Lastly, the labyrinth is associated with the Mother Goddess, she with the naked breasts and conical skirt, gripping two writhing serpents in her upraised fists, icon of Minoan culture.

For years, I came to Crete nearly every summer, to traipse through the mazelike rooms of Knossos and pay my homage to a small ceramic sculpture of the goddess on display in the Heraklion museum. From there I took a bus to the same village



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*The Tiferet Talk
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which over twenty years grew from a cluster of stone houses unwired for electricity to a sprawling town of air-conditioned supermarkets. A hiatus of ten years followed, during which I sought shores closer to home – Sardinia, Etruria, then one day woke with the obsession that I had to go back. In the meantime, I had heard, a group of German women had built a labyrinth there, assembled out of stones gathered from those sun-scorched hills, laid out in the pattern of the Chartres Cathedral labyrinth. I knew I had to walk it. So we packed the car, bought ferry tickets, and set off from the Italian port of Ancona.

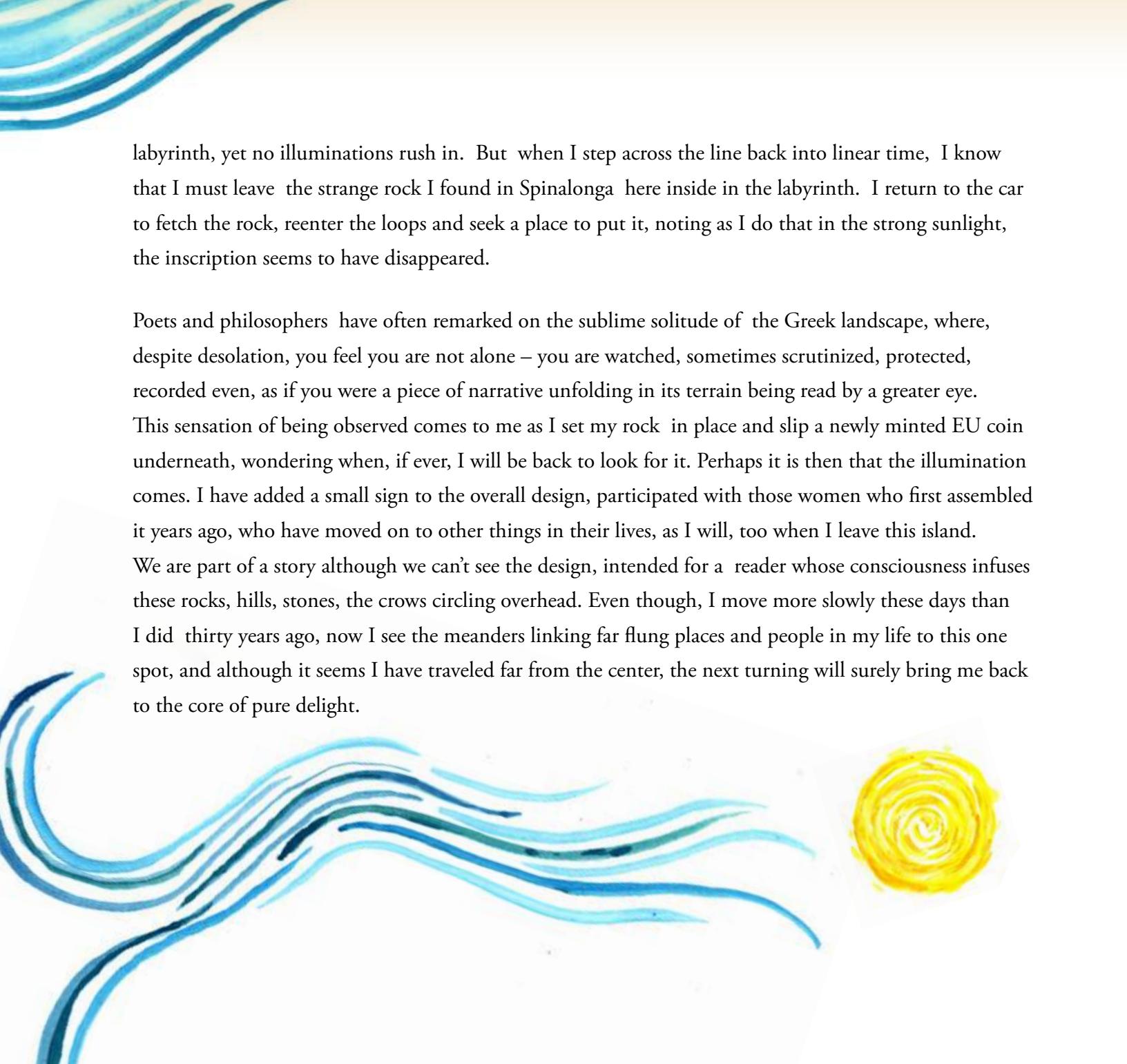
A friend has told us where to find the labyrinth: not far from a threshing floor on the barren hillside on the outskirts of the village. There were several circular threshing floors in this village once, slabs of concrete edged with paving stones, last used perhaps thirty years ago at harvest time. On summer nights I often sat within that magic space stargazing at the frothy spirals of the milky way and in the day time, sometimes, I danced. No other landscape had ever inspired me to dance with joy as Crete did when I was twenty-five. Observed by no one but the rocks and a friendly donkey tethered nearby, I whirled in a purple granny dress and flung my arms out towards the cobalt sea in gestures of longing, benediction, and pure delight. I did not know then that dance was a form of worship in ancient times, but something in the landscape spoke directly to my body and my feet.

3.

Today, we scour the hillside in search of the rocky spiral, and at last find it, though heavy winter rains washing down the mountain and grazing goats have wreaked havoc of its pathways. Goat droppings sully the sacred center. Under the blazing sun, we set about reconstructing the trails, brushing away rubble and debris with fragrant twigs of thyme, lining up the scattered rocks to mark the turnings. When it is complete, we begin our walk.

The first few steps lead me toward the center, creating the expectation of easy arrival, but then I must rotate on my axis, as I am propelled to the outermost edge and spun a hundred and eighty degrees to the far side, like a drunken planet wobbling in and out of an uncertain orbit before being drawn swiftly back towards the sun. You cannot really see the pattern when you are inside it. What feels like a deflection, a wrong direction, is only one folding of the weft.

As I walk the loops, I try to bear in mind the three phases of the labyrinth prayer. Concentrate on a question or need as you wind towards the center, open yourself to higher forces when you reach the heart, release your desire or need to the cosmos as you exit the boundary back to ordinary space where answers shall be forthcoming. I am uninspired it seems, I have come thousands of miles to thread this



labyrinth, yet no illuminations rush in. But when I step across the line back into linear time, I know that I must leave the strange rock I found in Spinalonga here inside in the labyrinth. I return to the car to fetch the rock, reenter the loops and seek a place to put it, noting as I do that in the strong sunlight, the inscription seems to have disappeared.

Poets and philosophers have often remarked on the sublime solitude of the Greek landscape, where, despite desolation, you feel you are not alone – you are watched, sometimes scrutinized, protected, recorded even, as if you were a piece of narrative unfolding in its terrain being read by a greater eye. This sensation of being observed comes to me as I set my rock in place and slip a newly minted EU coin underneath, wondering when, if ever, I will be back to look for it. Perhaps it is then that the illumination comes. I have added a small sign to the overall design, participated with those women who first assembled it years ago, who have moved on to other things in their lives, as I will, too when I leave this island. We are part of a story although we can't see the design, intended for a reader whose consciousness infuses these rocks, hills, stones, the crows circling overhead. Even though, I move more slowly these days than I did thirty years ago, now I see the meanders linking far flung places and people in my life to this one spot, and although it seems I have traveled far from the center, the next turning will surely bring me back to the core of pure delight.



LINDA LAPPIN is a prize-winning poet, novelist, and travel writer who divides her time between Italy and the USA. She has published three novels, *The Etruscan*, *Katherine's Wish*, and *Signatures in Stone*, which won the 2014 Daphne Du Maurier Award for mystery writing. Her newest project, *The Soul of Place Creative Writing Workbook— Ideas and Exercises for Conjuring the Genius Loci* will be published in May 2015 by Travelers' Tales. One of the exercises in the book previously appeared in the Tiferet newsletter.
www.lindalappin.net

THE ORIGIN *is* ONE by Susan Rogers

for Kotama Okada

The dove knows the way
follow her.

Your heart knows the way
listen well.

Within your deepest self
are wings of light.

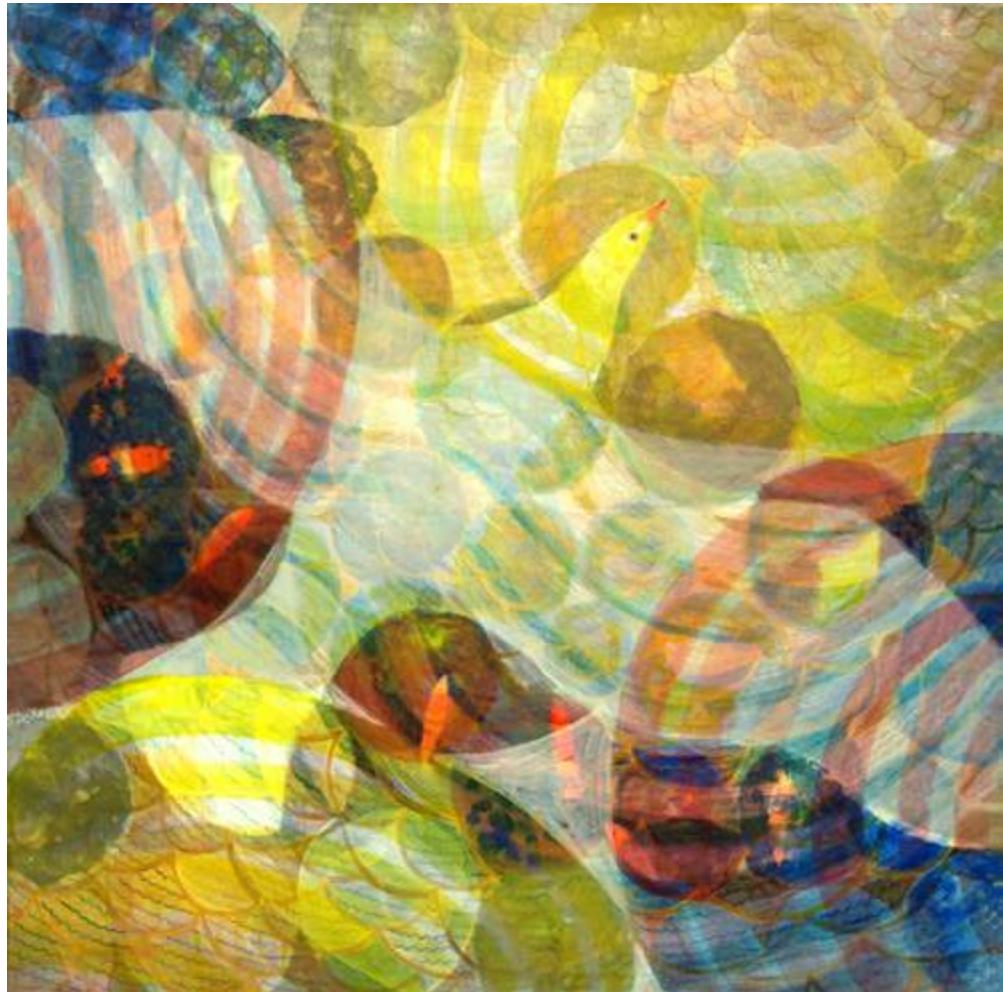
They cover the earth
with waves of love.

Do you remember?
You once knew.

Stand in the warmth
of sunlight and recall.

The origin of the world
is one.

The origin of religions
is one.



"SEARCHING" BY SUSAN DOBAY

The origin of all
humankind is one.

Circle back.
Imagine the great will
of all things
stirring in your fingers.

Reach out your arms
and open your palms
to the sky.
It is time.



"The Origin is One" appeared in 2012 in the online Saint Julian Press, Inc, edited by Ron Starbuck.



SUSAN DOBAY has served as an illustrator for advertising agencies, magazines, and newspapers. She has also exhibited with the Alliance of Hungarian Artists. She is a member of the New York Artists' Equity, and has helped found the Arany Janos Hungarian Literary and Cultural Circle. Her work has been exhibited worldwide in museums, galleries, public buildings and in private collections. In 1994 a Documentary Video was made about her and her art.



SUSAN ROGERS considers poetry a tool for exchanging positive energy. She practices Sukyo Mahikari—a path promoting positive lifestyles: www.sukyomahikari.org. She is a licensed attorney and Pushcart Prize nominee. Read her in *Meditations on Divine Names*, in collections including *San Diego Annual: The Best Poems of San Diego* and online. Her poetry was part of audio tours for the Pacific Asia Museum. Lois P. Jones' interview of her on KPFK's Poets Café is archived at <http://www.timothy-green.org/blog/susan-rogers/>

DESERT REVISITED by Yahia Lababidi

under a whirling skirt of sky
streaming light and stars
groping for that tremendous hem
gingerly over quicksand

as though steadied
beneath some tongue and dissolving
not the absence of sound
but the presence of silence

or, as if transfixed
by a gaze, stern-serene
surveying a dream
foreign-familiar

incorruptible starting point
inviolable horizon
where eye and mind are free
to meditate perfection

there, begin to uncover
buried in dust and disinterest
the immutable letter
(first of the alphabet) *Alif*

under the ever watchful eye:
fearsome sun, forgiving moon
bless the magnificent hand
all else is blasphemy, a lie

experience quietude
the maturity of ecstasy
longing to utter
the unutterable name

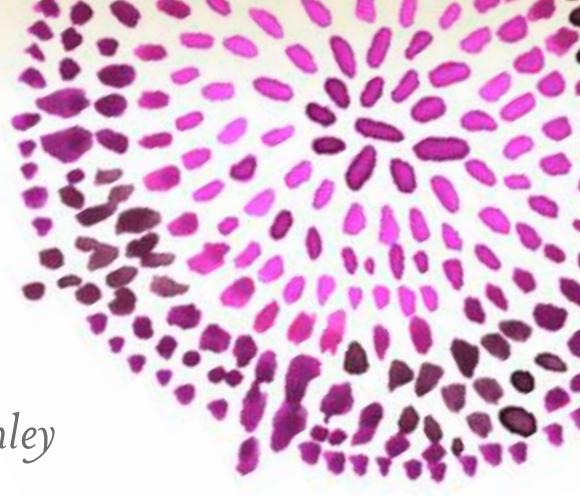
only striving supreme or pure
can ever hope to endure
the absolute face
the awesome embrace.



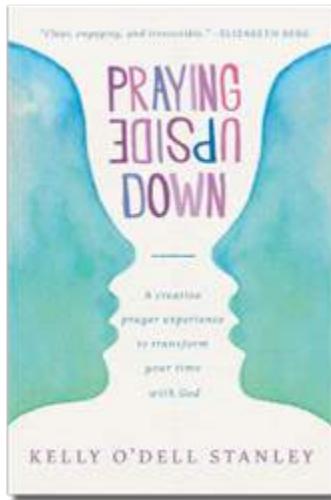
YAHIA LABABIDI, Egyptian-American, is the author of 6 books. His latest, *Balancing Acts: Collected Poems (1993-2014)* is forthcoming from Press 53 Silver Concho Poetry Series.

For more information, please visit: <http://amazon.com/author/yahialababidi>

EXCERPT from PRAYING UPSIDE DOWN by Kelly O'Dell Stanley



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Praying Upside Down: A Creative Prayer Experience to Transform Your Time with God

Releases on May 1 and is available for pre-order online.



ART INTIMIDATES PEOPLE. Ask the person sitting nearest you in the coffee shop, passing you on the sidewalk, or in the next office at work if she can draw. Nearly every time, you'll hear, "I can't even draw a straight line."

Why would you want to? I mean, how often do you really need a straight line? Curvy ones are so much more interesting.

When you let go of the idea of having to pray with straight lines, you're asking God to show you a new reality—His. By not limiting your discovery to what you imagine or assume to be true, you will cut through prejudices and assumptions and judgments. Look objectively at your motives.

My favorite verse in the Bible is from the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus is asked to heal a boy, and the boy's father cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24) It has been in those moments when I didn't hold back, when I told God how much I hurt, how desperate I was to understand an apparent contradiction, how much I longed to get closer to Him, or how much I resented His answer—when I faced the truth, no matter what it was—that God's answers changed the way I saw Him. And changed who I am.

Realism is familiar. You may know what a Norman Rockwell, Andrew Wyeth, or Edward Hopper painting looks like. The prints on your doctor's walls or in a hotel room are likely representational—showing something we can recognize and understand. Modern art is a different story altogether; many of us don't get it. The giant painting on the museum wall, according to the tiny plaque next to it, is a groundbreaking, significant work that changed the face of modern art. To us, it may just look like a big red square. Or a grid with a couple squares colored in. Or maybe paint splatters very similar to those made by your toddler. Even I could've done that, we think. And maybe that's true.

But one aspect of modern art is particularly relevant to prayer. Modern art is remarkable, not because of the skill with which the brushstrokes were applied to the canvas or the selection of colors or even because of the accuracy of the drawings, but because the artist portrayed something new. These works are mostly celebrated because the artist saw his subject in an innovative, unconventional way.

Art doesn't have to be your greatest talent in order for you to make art. It's all about practice, about your willingness to keep trying. If you don't observe your subject matter carefully, though, you won't improve. Truth is at the heart of all art and all prayer. Even in non-representational art, the artist is often using the tools at his disposal to elicit some kind of truth in the viewer—an observation, an insight, an emotion, a feeling, a reality—even if it looks nothing like the object that inspired it.

People who are adept in drawing are actually displaying a heightened sensitivity to visual facts. To draw well, you must learn to see facts such as size, shape, and color. By paying close attention, you'll start to notice the details—a splash of vivid colors, the underlying form giving shape to an object (is it a sphere? a cube?)—whether you're looking at the original object right side up or upside down. The more you practice, the more accurately you will see.

The same goes for prayer. You've got to keep your eyes wide open to see what God is doing. No special talent is required. There is only the act of prayer—which in its most basic form is simply communication with the Almighty—and practice.



Be open to the possibility that prayer will look different for you than it does for a friend, maybe even like nothing you've seen before. Prayer can happen when you're alone with coffee at 5 a.m. in a blessedly silent house or late at night when the kids are in bed. In a circle during Bible study, squeezing hands to pass the prayer to the next person or gathered with your family around a grave on a hot sunny day, when the heat of the sun can't evaporate the tears as fast as they fall. Listening to worship music in your car. On your knees during Mass, when you're suddenly aware of how much bigger the Lord is than you, and how powerful it is to pray with hundreds of others. In the collective silence of a Friends meeting. Or from the front row of an evangelical church, reveling in the upbeat music and emotion swirling between the upraised arms.

Prayer may take place as you lie facing away from your husband in bed, trying to hide the sounds of your crying as your heart breaks for a friend—or for yourself. Sitting on the porch swing, listening to the birds and feeling the breeze, silently talking to God about your day. Flat on your face in your bedroom in the middle of the morning when you get a call about a tumor in your friend's son's chest. Spontaneously gathering around a friend during book club, when her sadness about infertility becomes your own and as a group you reach out to God together.

Prayer can take place around a campfire with marshmallows melting on sticks and acoustic guitars strumming. Or on a train in the midst of a sea of commuters. In line at the drugstore, while the elderly woman in front of you discusses the complicated side effects of her husband's blood pressure medication. It doesn't have to happen at an early hour, on your knees, Bible open before you. It doesn't have to happen in the church sanctuary, although it can. Prayer is not limited by time or place or even by the one who is praying.

Don't worry if your prayer doesn't look like your best friend's or your sister's or your boyfriend's or your father's. Expect that it will look different from year to year—or day to day. Prayer is fluid, and your relationship with God will change over time and through different situations. It may not always be pretty. It may feel hectic and disjointed; you may start praying in the shower and then get distracted and not finish until you're waiting for the water to boil for spaghetti at dinnertime. The good news is that God always shows up when you look for Him.



Realism is relevant to prayer because we live real lives. And we serve a real God. Focusing on the truth of what we see, feel, and experience is one way to find the very real presence of God in every moment. This contradicts what some of the world believes, and naysayers may use words like "coincidence" and "luck" to interpret the same events. But that makes the truth no less true. It only means we need to open our eyes a little wider, craning our necks if necessary to see around the assumptions that block our view of reality.

Because with God, the possibilities are endless.



KELLY O'DELL STANLEY is a writer and graphic designer. While waiting for the May 1 release of *Praying Upside Down*, she wrestles with doubt (and faith), maintains a calendar that fills up way too fast, and enjoys living these crazy moments with her husband and three kids. www.prayingupsidedown.com

Painting by Rob O'Dell

This watercolor painted by Rob O'Dell, Kelly's father, depicts a typical Indiana scene in a realistic style. Rob has spent his career as an artist representing the beauty he sees in the everyday.



EPILOGUE: REMEMBERING *a SON and VENICE*

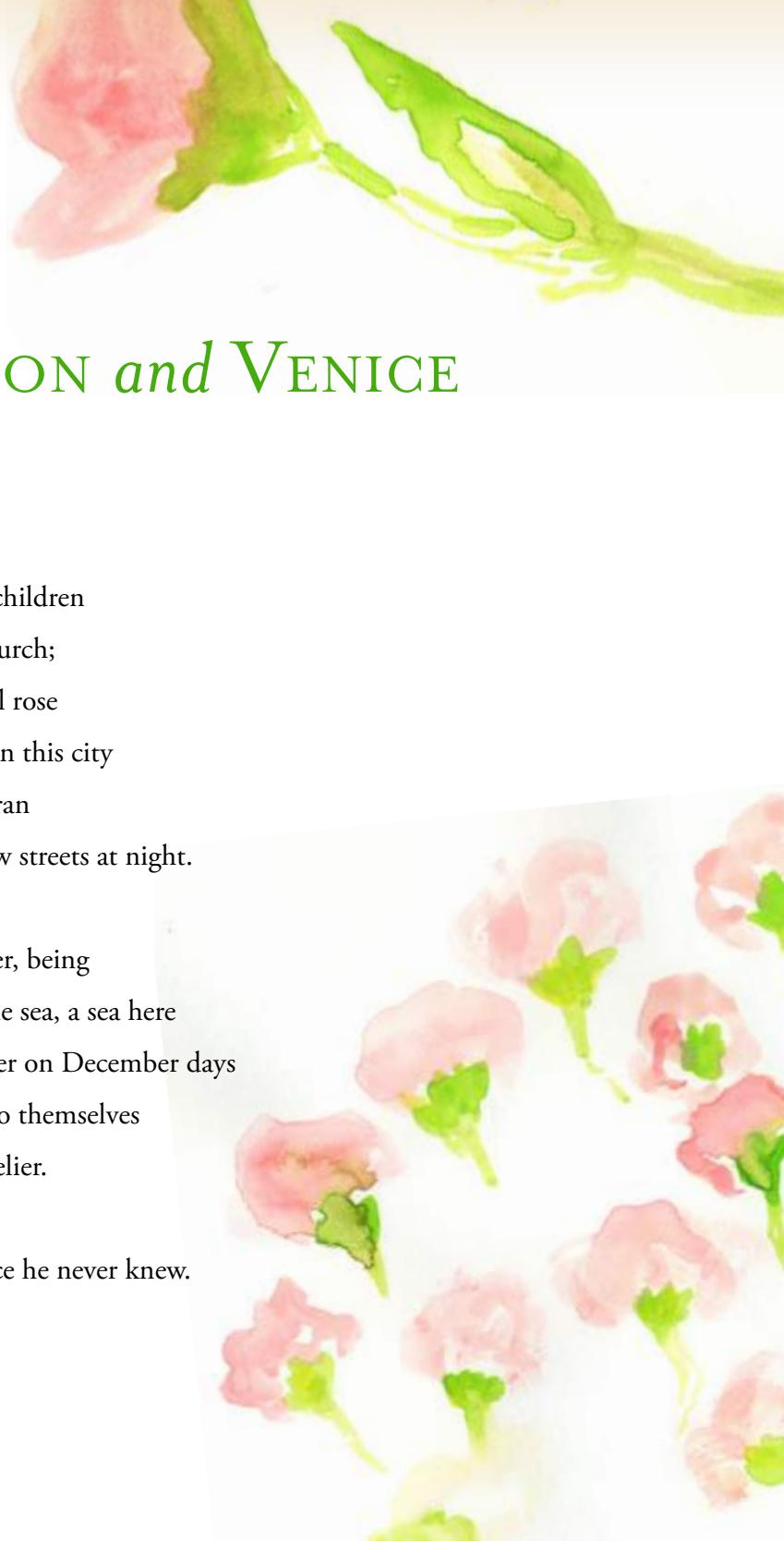
by Wanda Praisner

Just weeks ago in Venice my grandchildren
lit candles for him in an ancient church;
I took a photo of a last perfect coral rose
in a sheltered courtyard. Years ago in this city
he bought a gold Cartier band; he ran
with his brother through the narrow streets at night.

Once it hurt too much to remember, being
bereft of him. Eyes, greener than the sea, a sea here
in New Jersey I visit with his brother on December days
when rhododendron leaves curl into themselves
and hang like prisms from a chandelier.
I place lighted candles in windows,
wrap gifts for the nephews and niece he never knew.



WANDA S. PRAISNER, a recipient of fellowships from the NJ State Council on the Arts, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, and VCCA, has work in *Atlanta Review*, *Lullwater Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*. Her latest books are: *Where the Dead Are*, (CavanKerry Press, 2013) and *Sometimes When Something Is Singing*, (Antrim House, 2014). She is a resident poet for the state.



THE LAND *of the* BREATH ARTISTS

by Wayne-Daniel Berard

I am writing to you from the Land of the Breath-Artists, and it is everything one could imagine it to be, believe me. ‘Designedly dropt’ in the very center of this compact but diverse ecosystem, The Land reminds one alternately of a Mahfouz fable where, quite matter-of-factly, the borderless air breathes Koranic verses, and one of Hermann Hesse’s märchen, in which magical ideals press in upon you from the green and gold of a thousand northern linden, and pale, irresistible water maidens you half-recognize as an old school crush or last night’s waitress rise from every stream to stare - or perhaps to sing - for you. You should really be here. To write from this place is to know the obverse of magical realism.

Even as I first arrived at the border (a remarkably friendly experience, by the way), I felt very much at home here, which surprised me. How many of our friends would feel at ease if they were suddenly dropped at the gates of their father’s Galway City (where there is no green beer, and the thick brogue fills your ears like sopped peat!), or if they were to turn and find themselves alone on a street in (*gasp!*) darkest Sicily - just them, the shadows, and their “*Italian Stallion*” tee shirt?

Yet in this Land it all seemed incredibly easy - or rather no, *naturally* so, *naturally easy*, so much so that I didn’t remark upon it till much later. At the border I was only welcomed; my small bag (I was rushed here so quickly I’d left almost everything behind) wasn’t even checked, just carried for me by a porter who seemed genuinely pleased to do so. Yes, I was asked to take a deep breath, and then to breathe out - a sort of entrance ritual, I later learned, rather than a requirement. I did so, and in the still-cool morning air (I’d traveled all night), the white mist of my breath crystallized for a moment in front of me. Whirling like a star squall, my unconscious, automatic exchange with all there is rolled in and around and through itself, a mini-galaxy being born, with a strange, undulating rhythm, like the blood stream of a tall, beaten drum. Then it stopped and just hung there in rather an hourglass fashion: hundreds of minute, suspended, white-silver sparks looking as if they’d just left off moving the second you’d looked at them, and would start up again the moment you’d turned away. (Or were they really rows and curves upon curves of tiny pin-pricks in the hard-baked layers of genesis, piercing through to the good stuff in the center, marking the atmosphere as only the puffed up container of light?)

I was smiled at and quietly (almost everything here is done quietly) welcomed back to the Land of the Breath Artists, although I explained that I’d never actually been here before. They just summoned a cab for me and carefully fit my breath-sculpture into the back seat (and through the sun roof - small car or windbag?) I then was whisked off to a guest house with a lot of waving and such.

This may seem odd to you, but the most striking thing about this country is not the breath art itself, though that's amazing enough. It's the stillness, the serene quiet that glides through the streets here like water after a shower back home. It's not an enforced quiet, no one says, "Shhhhh!" It's rather the case that stillness, not noise, that itchy-scratchy, bumping, self-excusing product of compulsion, is the base reality here; the day, one's work, one's *life* begins from a starting point of quiet, while noise makes the Breath Artists as uncomfortable as any real, prolonged silence does people in our own land.

The stillness is liquid here, it is soaked up by the hot sky every day until peacefulness hangs in the air in tiny, refreshing droplets, and collects itself into communities of drifting, white contemplation, happy to place themselves between you and such a blunt, uncouth sun.

When the people rise in the morning, they do not yawn gaped-mouth like cows, or make sounds as if the body were a shaken up bottle, and the soul coca-cola. No, they acknowledge each other with the eye and the embrace, speak little if at all, and begin their day. The same is true on the sidewalk (almost everyone walks everywhere); business is conducted with the reverent hush of the sanctuary, school in the example of the zendo. For one such as I, both anchored and propelled by words, to spend any time here is to become accustomed to weightlessness.

Actually, I remember my parents as possessing just this sort of stillness. It's a pity you never met them. Although they were both clearly bright, even gifted, they each gravitated toward those unrecognized occupations that accommodate quietude of heart. My mother stayed at home, straightened, cooked, cleaned, refused several offers from a well-off neighbor to manage her office, even though Mother's capacity for - what shall I call it? - *organic organization* was a wonder. Our little home always looked as if the pillows had just grown there at the corners of the sofa like lily pads in the tiny lees of a pond; every inch of the kitchen walls was covered like an ivied trellis by shining copper pots and pans; old and comforting spoons hung vertically from pronged racks like tennis rackets do in department stores. Mother didn't like cupboards - actually, it was closed doors she couldn't seem to abide - so everything, from our exquisitely unmatched plates and saucers to the clothes she'd dye for us in the patterned colors of her home (so lovely and so embarrassing for a young urban know-it-all!), all these hung from the walls, or from ceiling hooks like pink and scarlet fuchsia or translucent green ferns.



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The clothes I liked, levis and sweatshirts with team names (or worse) screaming from them, swung from two long dowels that ran along each side of my room, or sat in open wicker baskets (Mother had confiscated the lids) on the floor. I especially liked the dowels; they spiraled into odd dips and shadows that were almost faces. Each looked as if it had grown right out of a skull on the cover of a Lovecraft paperback, of which I was reading many back then. I didn't learn until much later that they were the last pieces of breath art my mother had done as she had prepared to emigrate.

As for my father, he had tried several different jobs, until finally being hired as the janitor/sacristan/groundskeeper at a local Catholic church. Odd, in that Father wasn't a Catholic, or a professor of any set creed I knew of. Still, the quiet was there, the candles and the white linen, and the burnished gold of the sacred vessels that Father would spend hours polishing. I would go with him some days if school were out; he would hold a chalice or paten in his big, brown hands and smile at me - a smile that was a wink. Then he would rather theatrically look about to see if anyone were watching, look back at me, and *breathe* on the gold as it would glide across his cloth. What secret help was my father to the faith of that congregation when the priest would elevate the vessels and the bells ring? Nothing miraculous was ever reported, yet that small church has quietly thrived in continuity, while many around it have struggled and changed and faded.

Looking back, I think that all the thick foliage of home, the clothes and coats, the arches of heavy books, the dunes of sand-colored baskets filled with dried fruit and beans stood more as insulation than anything else, a sound-proofing against the constant rush of breath around my parents, breath that caused no art. My mother's favorite recreation seemed to be just to sit in our small parlor on the floor, in the sound-shade of a grove of sky-dyed shirts and white trousers, propped against a giant's causeway of red-bound books that framed one wall like a huge literary mantle. She spoke no word, but with her deep breathing, her long dark hair and lashes, she seemed to be drifting in the stillness like an opulent jellyfish in a warm gulf. She rode a current I had no desire to touch even a toe in then, I with my transistor radio permanently plugged into my ear - that much deference I had. I would sway silently to my music while she reverberated to the touch of that silence like a harp in an open window. Quite a picture we made, I half-dancing the stroll soundlessly in the non-doorway between my room and the parlor, she, dark eyed, breathing in and out, smiling that tiny smile that always reminded me of the little flag on the eighth note, and gazing delightedly, it seemed, at the one uncluttered wall of the house. One wall, she insisted, always be kept clear and blank.

I write this in my little room in the guest house. Its west wall is blank. And there are no closets here, just ceiling hooks and calm, amberish dowels, Eastern in their mystery, Shaker in their simplicity. There are wicker baskets on the floor, woven in patterns of intricate ease. Each seems unique, personal, irrepeatable forever. Do I remember once being told that each pattern belonged to the individual Breath -Artist, signaturing him or her in the same way that woolen links in sweaters once named their weaver in Connacht or the Highlands? Why, then, can I not recall the pattern in my own family's baskets? I can't visualize any of it. When my brother and I cleaned out the house years ago, I think we filled them with junk, and left them at the curb - do you believe it?

Everything's still in my suitcase. I haven't been able to bring myself to unpack, to use the baskets,

though several times I had actually to resist the urge to pick them up and hold them, almost to hug them like an old teddy bear. But I haven't. And so far, no odd impulses regarding the hooks on the ceiling . . .

Someone *breathed* this room into existence, the dowels, the furniture, maybe even the headboard and footboard and supports of the bed on which I sleep. The comfortableness here is the inside of someone's gracious heart, someone's center made visible.

And *sleep!* Sleep is just amazing here. At first I was a bit frightened, I don't mind saying. What would the breath of my dreams leave with me? Anything? Was I actually a Breath Artist at all, despite the parlor trick at customs? Is our friend Vanderman, two generations and a cultural universe removed from emigration, really still Dutch? Or does he merely forget that he dreams about flooded fields, wild storms and sand-bags piled onto dikes night after night? Would my sleep in this torturous, beautiful place trigger God knows what reaction in my spirit-genes? What if it did? What if it didn't?

I slept. The next morning, I awoke with the covers over my face. I looked around the room; there were no breath-monsters beneath my bed, no shocking oedipal statuettes of my mother and I on the night table. Personalized versions of Maurice Sendak nightmares were not floating, pulsating overhead.

I sighed, not knowing how to interpret my sigh. Then I turned the covers back and saw. The hospital-white sheet I had pulled over my head the night before now glowed; it shimmered, it breathed with color. A pattern in swirls and ripples, bright and wildly intricate like Keltic illumination, but soaked in a sort of batique nativeness, absorbing, not controlling patches and shades of space - this greeted my opening eyes and swelled the moment in my lungs. The pattern was unfamiliar, but unquestionably mine.

I unshuttered the window and looked into the early square. Quietly, with a delicate pace, as in some sort of offertory, men and women were leaving their houses to begin their day, many with some sort of breath art, their evening's dream, held in their hands. I cannot describe the shapes for you, the colors, the textures, the motion, the stillness carried in these people's arms as the new sun glided gold filament across the roof lines it would soon rise above. You'll see when you arrive. Suffice it to say that none resembled the Lovecraft vision of my mother's departure from this place. All were lovely, except for one. I saw a young boy leaving his home with a gargoyle clutched to his chest like an infant; he was running for his front gate. A man in a suit (unusual here) caught up with him just as his hand was on the latch. All in silence, he took the child by the arm, and boy and monster disappeared inside.

A half-hour later, when I took my walk, I recognized the shapes and rhythms of these dreams here and there, where their artists had left them and just continued on: along a low wall like rows of statues in a renaissance garden they stood, or as colorful forms of random beauty deposited in the center of a traffic island. Some joined their brothers and sisters for a swim in a sculpted fountain. I noticed one piece placed just under and back from an open balcony. Don't ask me how, but I knew that someone's love was still asleep inside; there was a pleading in it, and a teasing, and a joy.

And all around, other patterns, rainbowed and earth-toned sheets and sea-deep blankets, hung from second story windows. The whole town was alive with unfurled dream-banners,



and the still-warming wind now began to handle them all, to rub its sleepy face into them, and shake them out like a carnival opening on a new day.

I turned back. The minute or two it took me to tack my own sheet to the sill and sail it from the window were the most intense - I must tell you - the most intense of my entire life - more so even than the endless moments when I sprinkled a handful of soil into my father's grave, more so than those soaring, sinking minutes during which you realize that you are actually, for the first time, going to make love. (The tacks, by the way, two of them, I'd found sitting on my pillow when I returned. Breath-mints? And my clothes had been unpacked and I had no anger.)

But still, in all the elation, I know I held my breath.

I wandered about the rest of the day, watched and listened, napped, ate a little, napped again and longer. Debt (jet?) lag. Then I dressed to go out.

This evening, Friday evening, I attended a reception in a magnificent, graceful place the Breath Artists call "The Orchard." It's a great, rolling garden lined, but not enclosed by flowering trees, modest in size, whose crowns spread multi-colored fire across patches and shades of space, to meet overhead in long rows of beckoning arches. At the same time, sections or rooms of the garden are framed only in running streams with tiny arched bridges of polished red wood or ivy-plumaged stone, and by deep green hedges that would honor the most proper and aristocratic estate. Again, the fusion of east and west, north and south amazes; the *harmonics* of it all, of mogul palace and Rhenish forest, suggest a song older than distinction. It is as if it were from this place that the original river ran, breaking off only later into the separate tributaries and rivulets beside whose banks we built our younger, all-knowing cultures.

The conversation, as always, was guided by that reverence for words - for anything born of our breath - that precludes their chatty, crude abuse. Much more attention was given to the indescribable treasures, the masterpieces of breath art displayed throughout the grounds. We would wander under colonnades of lush, luminous flowers, turn the corner of a hedgerow, or cross a stream so clear one wondered if only warm air rippled over its smooth stones, and stumble upon yet another more heart-pressing, trance-laden, razor-wondered example of . . . of what? What shall I call them for you?

Here I saw creation after creation more demanding of, more wondrous to, yet less needful of the human eye and nod than the next, more piercing and less intrigued with our situation and its self-indulgence than any I had ever dreamt possible. And I shouldn't call them creations; they were the very height of breath art, unplanned except for the consent of the artist to once more take into him or herself that which was outside of them, to agree to continue to make of it their bone, their flesh, their thought and passion - to breathe consciously, with awareness; to *decide*, that moment, that breath, to



live. And at the same time - yes, you must know this - they are breath gifts, presents to the present and the future, returned to that life in gratitude (and question and pain).

All that was within the artist cascades out, nourishing, in its turn, the green and gold of trees, the willful, dry grasses, and all those flowers - now breathing-in the life of the artist and making from it their life around us, our universe, ourselves. Of course, this goes on in all places at all times, it goes on at home, but here, *here* somehow it becomes art. The interchange of all that has ever been or will be, the way things are and can only be, takes on shape and dimension and motion; we can *see* life, we can *linger* before it, focus on it, hold it in our eyes, touch it, and know it, and have no anger at not comprehending, not controlling it.

So what shall I call them for you, this priceless and only fruit in The Orchard? What is it our favorite poet says? "*Whatever is unsure is possible, and life is bigger than flesh . . .*"?

At this time of year the sun sets late here. As layers of sky lined up neatly to receive their good night from their fiery parent, we guests and our hosts gathered in a silent, green bay of the garden, and watched. Unhurriedly, the hot-orange disk lowered itself to meet our horizon, and sliced, as it came, through each individual strand of sky, exquisitely undoing them, one by one, with a burning sharp kiss, releasing the color and light buried deep within the commonality of their blueness. It was a sacred descent to long, sacred elevation. I thought I recognized the sky-dyed pattern cast by the leaves upon the garden floor; I thought I could almost hear the hiss and gasp and sigh of it all, and knew the smile in the eye that is the world as it winked, then closed into that oblivion it now wanted more than anything.

But it wasn't my imagination. The hiss and sigh continued; it filled completely the darkening sky and the garden, it swirled and drifted, until it seemed to swallow up the entire Land of the Breath Artists. Our hosts were very calm about it; they smiled and silently turned away toward the east, waiting casually, drinks still in hand. What had begun as an ambitious breeze soon became an overriding current, unstoppable, irresistible, then a whirlwind, an absolute storm of breath and energy, quite nearly a maelstrom. I grasped on to one of the wrought iron tables, anchored, I was glad to find, by cement to the ground. But the others merely continued to stand or sit where they were, quite upright and unconcerned, smiling, turning their faces into the terrific wind, tossing their hair. Their spirits and bodies were *bathing* in it, its pummel was for them almost a massage, its great roaring stillness a concert that moved them nearly to joyous tears.

The wind ceased rather suddenly, becoming a small, still whisper. This seemed to affect the Breath Artists most deeply of all; some closed their eyes or covered them with their hands, several bowed to the east and to each other. Then, just as spontaneously as it had recessed, the party recommenced, with people walking about, admiring the breath art and quietly acknowledging each other. Finding myself in a sheltered corner of the garden with one of our hostesses, I asked her what had happened. She replied, in the hushed tones native only to these people and to warm comforters on winter nights, that this was Friday evening.

There were Jews, she said, living in the very center of The Land; each Friday just before sunset, they leave their homes and go out to welcome the Sabbath. They are said to be the descendants of Gershom, Moses' only son, who, their own midrash claims, left the camp at Sinai after his father ordered the Levites to slaughter brother, friend and neighbor, anyone involved with the calf of gold, but spared his own brother,

Aaron.

In obedience to their Law, these Jews create no images with their breath, but each Friday, as they stand on the outskirts of their villages and await shabbatShabbat, they inwardly pray the utmost prayer in all their Torah, the holy Shema: "*Shema, Israel, Adonai Elohanu, Adonai Echad*" - "*Hear, O Israel, hear: the Lord your God, the Lord is one!*" They pray and they breathe, and each sabbathSabbath the wind fills the Land of the Breath Artists in its entirety, a wind to part seas, a wind that is a fiery chariot, a wind that becomes a whisper.



And there is more. Listen. There are Buddhists here as well, scattered across the more outlying areas of the Land. Every now and again, often at dawn, sometimes in mid-afternoon, every single breath of air in this Land will fall still; not a leaf will rustle, not a cloud drift a millimeter from its mooring. Time does not so much stand still as it ceases to have ever existed. Without time, the Land around one, all space itself, *individuates*, no longer ceaselessly hurrying to become something else. It is as if the creased, uneven hand of Being, heavy with its laws of motion and force, had just that moment lifted from this one spot on the earth.

The grass seems to spread back, smooth and countable, no blade the shadow of another. The mind settles into, does not run upon, this wonder: one unmarried moment, a knot in the reel, a shuttered frame, a calm, fresh pond not a stone's throw, but still infinitely removed from the salt, obsessive sea.

At these moments, which arrive irregularly but frequently enough to suggest condition rather than accident, the Breath Artists will turn to each other with a sip of the essence of a smile, and a gesture, index finger lightly pressed to thumb as if holding a flower. My hostess quietly explained this as a way of saying, "... and also with you."

A thought of my father shown in my mind as she said this. I asked her, a bit more excitedly, perhaps, than is prudent here, if there were any Catholic churches nearby. She seemed, for the first time among those I've met, a bit taken aback, though not surprised - as if she were expecting, but not so soon, a question such as this.

The Rite celebrated here, she then told me, though still recognized by the Church, had always been held somewhat suspect by its authorities. Its practice was forbidden outside the Land, and many even in Rome were not aware of its existence. The principle article of contention involved the consecration of the elements. In the Land of the Breath Artists, the priest, at the proper moment, would bow deeply over the Eucharist bread and silently *breathe*, not speak, the sacred words upon the host, with a fervor and intensity before which the congregation gladly knelt. He would then add words not found in the Church's missals: from Genesis, "... and He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" - here the priest would rise, noiselessly breathing the quotation also upon the worshippers.

He would do the same with the wine, and as he breathed upon it, its surface would ripple and stir with, tradition (unapproved but deeply held) maintains, a Divine revelation meant for the celebrant alone. As

he again rose, the priest would breathe yet another Scriptural passage over the people: “*. . . and God's spirit hovered on the waters . . .*”

“Have you received this communion?” I asked her - her eyes widened, but did not answer. Still, she promised to take me to dawn Mass tomorrow in a small oratory, the oldest continual church in the Land.

It was dark as I made my way back to the guest house alone. Lights had been placed in the niches and curves of the breath art so designedly dropt across the city that morning. People seemed to be out walking for no other reason than to see each other in that light.

As I approached the always-open door to the guest house, a muezzin began to call the faithful to their evening prayer from the top of a breath-art minaret, stately and tall, yet not domineeringly so in this Land nearly free of pretense and ambition. I did not *hear* the verse he called, of course, but rather *saw* each syllable emerge as a burst in a string of cool white fire, without explosion but with full reverberation, to light up the tower, silhouette its creator, and reflect itself back to me in the soft puddles beginning to form in the streets. It was starting to shower.

I turned up my collar and lingered in the doorway for a moment, listening. The Breath Artists embrace a fascinating belief concerning the rain; they hold that the few words that are spoken here, the songs that may be sung, the audible sighs or the laughter, are taken up into the sky with the water vapors, and later return in the rain.

Often here, as in the height of summer back where you are, a shower will fall on one side of town and not another, across one street of a neighborhood and not the other. But here it becomes even more singular; at times one house only, one yard, one room will feel and hear the rain gently bathing it, while the next house or the windows in an adjoining room remain dry and untouched. The Breath Artists seem to make much of this.

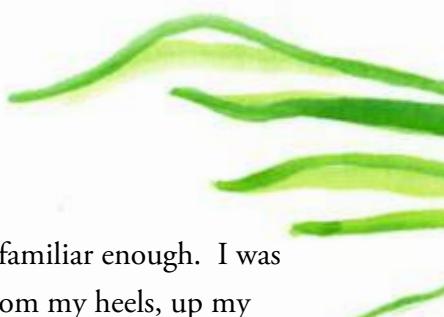
As I was about to go in, the rain paused momentarily, as if the sky were catching its breath, and then, just barely, it began again. One could hardly call it a shower, just a few drops falling at my feet, irregularly, but frequently enough for one to sense continuity in them, almost purpose. Then, as the drops fell upon the street, a *voice* seemed to be released from each, as from the calm, unchanging center of a tiny, exploding, liquid star. One drop followed another, one tone joined another, until the voice - this was clear to me - became a song, a *lieder*, teasing or perhaps pleading with me, a lullaby:

Where have you gone with your dark eyes?

Dark eyes . . . dark eyes . . .

Where have you gone with your dark eyes?

Ah, dark eyes . . .



No, I did not recognize the voice, although the silence in-between the notes was familiar enough. I was swayed by it. Neither can I recount for you the feeling, the reverberation that rose from my heels, up my spine to the hair on the back of my head as the first syllable of the song's last line cascaded through me in a string of five clear notes, only rising as they fell, into that joyous embrace, the delicate impact of oblivion welcomed by five drops of rain re-meeting their ground.

And that is why you must come here, my friend - come right away, today, the moment you read this. You know what time it is, have for some while, I'm certain of it. "*I know you, what you are,*" to quote another sad emitter from this Land. Don't deny it, no, nor your inheritance, nor your own disquiet. "*Character and fate are two words for the same thing,*" says our friend Hesse; "*Honor your father and mother, that you may have long life in the Land,*" commands both the Holy Koran and the Torah. And what was the poem you yourself quoted me before I left? "*I too love oblivion why not it is full of second chances?*"? Breath Artist! Breath Artist! Breath Artist!

And there is another reason why you must come, as if that is not sufficient. Even here, in this Land, things are changing, are threatened. Some are beginning to speak here (that is remarkable enough!) about the émigrés, their loss, and soon the talk turns to economics, to factories and production. Already, here and there, people's minds begin to waver, and as they do, so wavers their ability to create. Already, in designated zones (so far, but we all know how that goes) the atmosphere becomes soiled and approaches ugliness, and breath art fails. Of course, the "progressives" lament this as inevitable - they mourn but they approve. Some of the more outlandish, and therefore most admired voices among them call for the eventual "preservation" of those Breath Artists who still create in special "Artistic Sites," where they will be designated national treasures and displayed for the envisioned tourists.

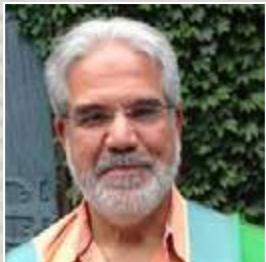
The Breath Artists abhor politics and its division. Still, there will be a ballot and a question, and you must come. You don't have to vote, just be, that is enough. A percentage of the population is needed for approval (Wisdom!), so walking through The Orchard with me or listening to the rain alone on election day is as effective a means of civic responsibility as any. As for citizenship, your border-crossing should confirm that - we both know this. Come now.

I must close here. I asked the woman in the garden, in a whisper born of myself and my home, and not of shame, to come here tonight - and I hear, I think, the light, strengthening breeze of her walk upon the stair. Do not be shocked or concerned. I am ready not to hold my breath.

I haven't told you yet about the snow . . .

Leave now, the moment you finish this. Don't worry if you must bring your gargoyle.

I'm breathing these last words into the envelope as I seal it. That is why you will find what you have found when you open it.

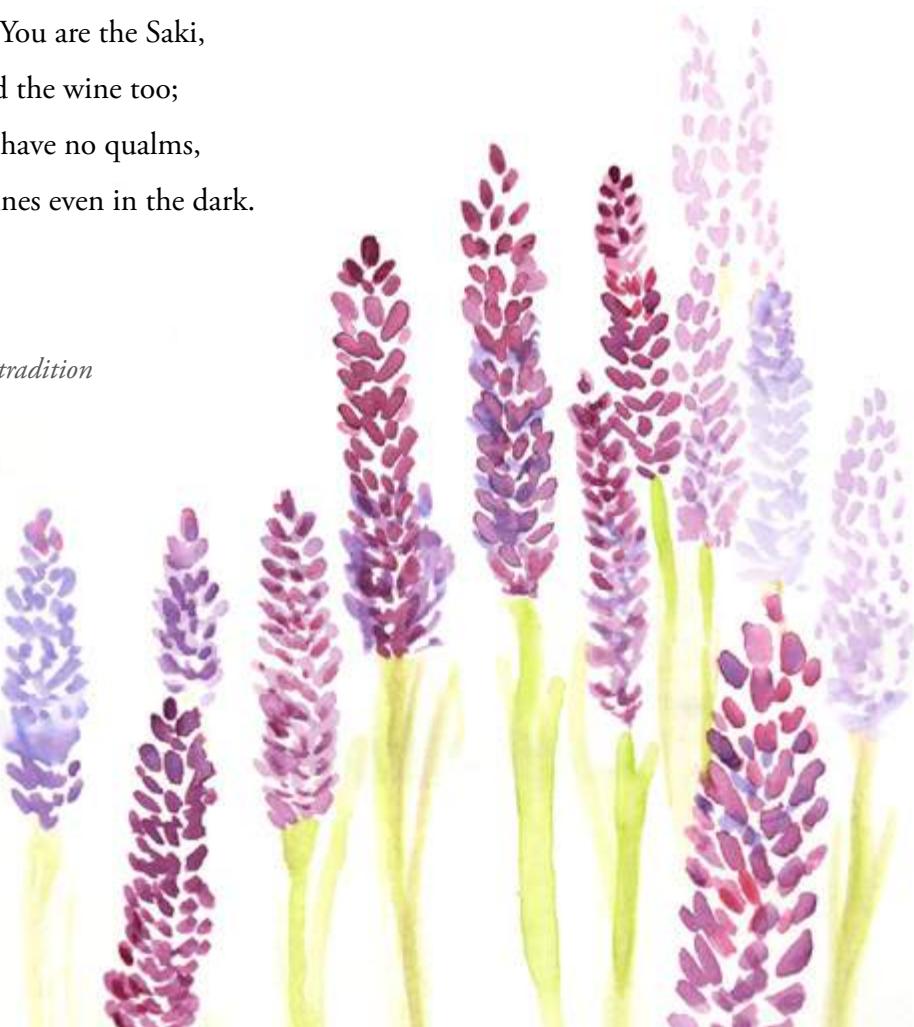


WAYNE-DANIEL BERARD teaches English and Humanities at Nichols College in Dudley, MA. An adoptee and former Franciscan seminarian, his birth-search led him to find and embrace his Jewishness. Wayne-Daniel is a Peace Chaplain, an interfaith clergy person, and a member of B'nai Or of Boston. He has published widely in both poetry and prose, and is the co-founding editor of *Soul-Lit*, an online journal of spiritual poetry. He lives in Mansfield, MA with his wife, The Lovely Christine.

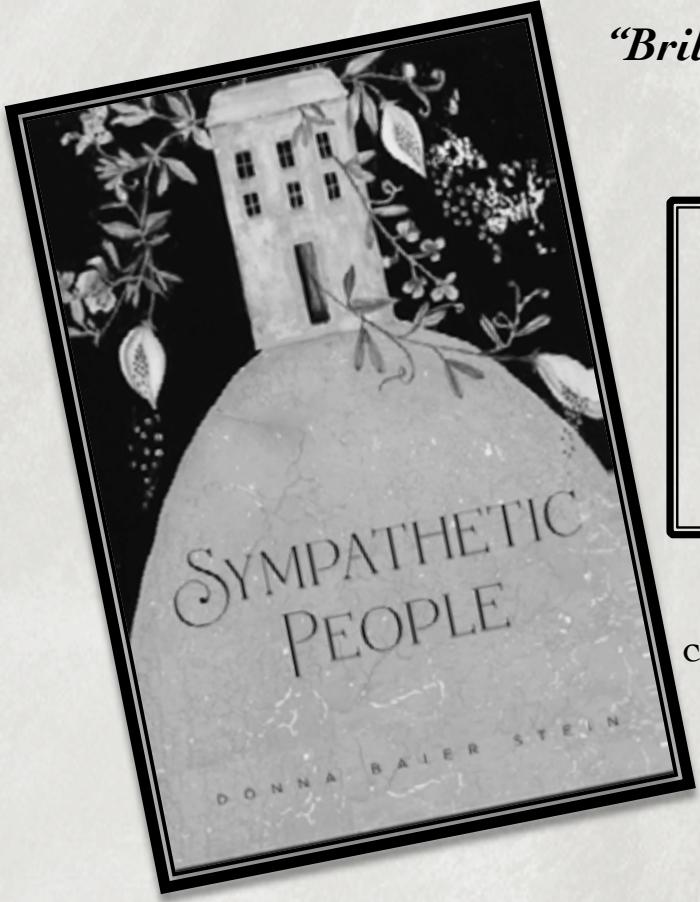
SUFIYANA by Sunil Uniyal

Who will not drink if You are the Saki,
And Yours the cup and the wine too;
This moonless night I have no qualms,
Beloved, Your Face shines even in the dark.

Poem written in the Sufi tradition



SUNIL UNIYAL, from India, has been writing poems and haiku for the last 30 years and many of these have appeared in e-journals like Muse India, Kritya, Notes From the Gean, A Hundred Gourds, Poetica, Sketchbook and the Ghazal Page. He is also engaged in the translation of Hindi, Urdu and Sanskrit poetry. His publications include 'The Target is Behind the Sky- Fifty Poems of Kabir' (Low Price Publications, Delhi, 2012) and 'Tears of Blood- Selected Verses of Ghalib'(Partridge Publishing, July 2014).



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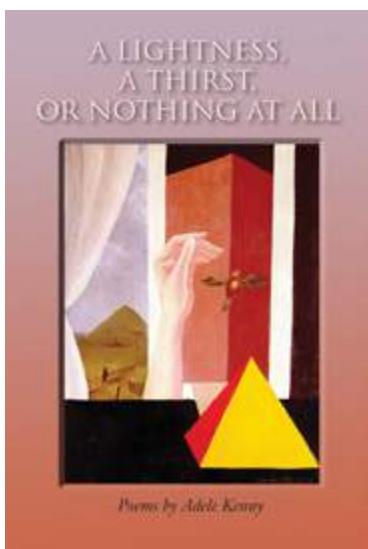
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A LIGHTNESS, A THIRST, or NOTHING AT ALL by Adele Kenny

Book Review by Alex Pinto



A Lightness, A Thirst, or Nothing At All

by Adele Kenny

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The fifty-two prose poems in this new collection by Adele Kenny incorporate both world and spirit through technical proficiency, haunting imagery, and rich meaning. As the front jacket flap states, these poems are “intensely focused, compressed, and sharp-edged.” In this work, Kenny turns prose poem form into a conveyance driven by poetic sensibility, word placements, and tightly packed language as in this excerpt from “Always That Thought.”

Always that thought when you least expect it—the one your life trips on—when the sky falls, one blue grain at a time, and you tumble the way Alice did through the hole. (4)

By definition, prose poems are neither blessed nor bound by lineation. Without abandoning her signature elegance, Kenny incorporates such prose poetry elements as complete sentences and deliberate fragments; she speaks the language of dreams and nods to the surreal as in the poem “No One Said.”

We know something of what happened: the way she tied herself to the world through memory, how she trusted the past, even the wreck and debris of it. Predictable diminuendos.

Tonight it’s one part now, four parts *déjà vu*. A white mouse in the door of her dream looks into the trap when everything, it seems, means something else. (12)

The mysterious poem “Oh, Leonardo” is distinguished by a touch of surrealism and dream-like imagery. Like a number of poems in the collection, this poem takes risks and succeeds because of its skillfully precise language and complex levels of meaning. Such poems call to mind Dylan Thomas’s statement, “You can tear a poem apart to see what makes it tick ... You’re back with the mystery of having been moved by words. The best craftsmanship always leaves holes and gaps ... so that something that is not in the poem can creep, crawl, flash or thunder in.” Kenny leaves enough unsaid to invite questions, and there’s ample room for the reader to fill in the blanks; most importantly, there’s always an insight that creeps, crawls, flashes, or thunders in.

... What never happened will never change. ... Lately, I have this sense of nothing that makes sense; and these regrets, like all regrets, have come too late. I have no idea what I would do differently, what old hope we felt, or what the one thing was that neither of us could name. The dark is convincing but, oh, Leonardo, it's morning somewhere and maybe, just maybe ...
(14)

In all of these poems, Kenny’s images are like suspended presences that begin and end with the feeling that there is much more subject matter than the obvious. Throughout the collection, there are bedrock themes of connection and associations, as well as voiceless communication in the spaces between stanzas. In “Just Perhaps,” we encounter Shakespeare’s Ophelia as portrayed by Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais and, then, there is an unexpected shift to a friend’s suicide. This poem, like so many in the collection, goes far beyond mere observation. As the poem moves from Ophelia to friend, the reader wonders if Ophelia in the poem, the one still alive and singing is, in fact, the author or any one of us who has been, in some way, left behind.

And just perhaps, as Hamlet’s mother said, she’s still alive and singing—see, her mouth is open, and her eyes; and just perhaps, she doesn’t know how close to death she is—or why this painting makes me think of you. *Your* death was not offstage the way Ophelia’s was (the ladder placed, the rope around your neck); nor was the way you parted from yourself, the silent swinging—only air beneath your feet. (33)

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this collection is its sense of spiritual autobiography and the way these poems continue the journey begun in Kenny’s award-winning collection *What Matters*. As always, in Kenny’s poems, individual experiences may be different from our own, but the core of her reflections touches each of us. Consider this excerpt from “You Reach a Certain Age”

And sometimes the weight of it gets to you, this language of leaving, of holding on. It’s nothing to do with what gets lifted up—a river holds whatever the sky throws into it, a bird that has no need of earth flies away. You reach a certain age and begin to see how things unwind, the way it

all plays out. You learn what's essential, what's not, and it hardly matters what the world was like when you first tried to exalt it. (48)

Hardwired by Kenny's gift for dimension and her profound understanding of the human spirit, the poems in this collection show us the healing power of attention and awareness. Kenny's words move associatively (and swiftly) through image and sound, and she makes a particular music that is uniquely her own. Impelled by lyrical precision, these poems cast light on what we are learning, and what we already know, about ourselves.

All notion of distance disappears—what feels like entering. Suddenly (like walking into a light you know), you discover this: the certainty that nothing is certain, the deep relief of your own incredible smallness. (56)

This collection contemplates the ways in which the “interior life and the outside world intersect” and is a must-read for anyone interested in looking beneath the surface of things. In addition, through the process of these poems, Kenny leads us to see that, as C. S. Lewis wrote of the spiritual journey, “... there must be a real giving up of the self.”

“What You See All Night” bears the full weight of Kenny’s message. It is the poem that gives this *tour de force* its title and for which the Magritte painting was chosen for the cover:

The wild bird you catch and let go—what you see all night at the corner of your eye (along the outline of unfolded wings)—when the self gives itself up (a bell diffused into air)—more idea than expression:

a lightness, a thirst, or nothing at all. (54)



ALEX PINTO is a poet and nonfiction writer from the former Portuguese colony of Goa. He holds degrees from Seton Hall and the University of Bombay and has been a Roman Catholic priest for 45 years. His poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Black Swan Review*, *Exit 13*, *Modern Haiku*, *The Troubadour*, *The Voice*, *Tiferet*, and others. He has served as a grants review panelist and guest artist for a variety of arts and educational agencies.

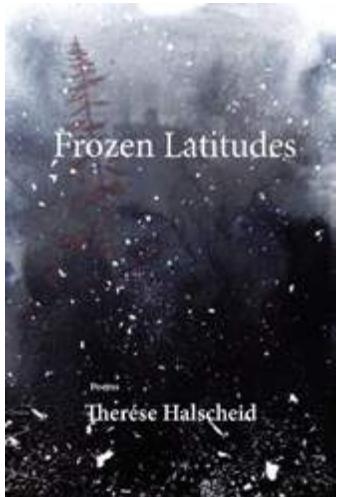
THE EYES OF NATURE



CONNY JASPER is a professional writer, artist, and life coach. She has been creating photographic images for over 30 years. In college, she majored in psychology and minored in art. Her mission is to inspire others and assist in advancing the positive development of humankind. Her website is: <http://home.earthlink.net/~connyjasper/>

FROZEN LATITUDES *by Therese Halscheid*

Book Review by Adele Kenny



Frozen Latitudes

By Therese Halscheid

Press 53

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90 pages

\$14.95 U.S.

Thérèse Halscheid's is an elegant voice that "speaks" through exquisite poems. In this new collection, she takes on the challenges and demands of a beloved father's illness, caregiving, and the necessary distance she makes into another geography.

Yesterday, my father greeted me
from another time—

I was his sister,
and the day before that I was his wife,
tomorrow I might be his mother (6)

There is a tremendous sense of the physical body in these poems, but the spirit is equally present.

we are going into its untamed center
into a flow that never finished
until we become like the clouds
the river takes to its surface,
and the mirrored trees,
the shadows suddenly stretched ... (8)

Halscheid creates an integrated whole of language, form, and meaning as she explores, discovers, and situates being human. All of these poems work through a strong emotional center and examine the complexities of human relationships to, and within, the natural world. Halscheid brings deep emotion to these poems, along with skillful mastery of music and line. Her images are stunning, not just for their power, but for their descriptive clarity, nuance, and insight. Also noteworthy are the ways in which this poet finds beauty and significance in unexpected places. These poems incorporate silence and awe that reflects the haunting trajectory of her spiritual migration from daughter to caregiver and from New Jersey to Alaska.

In a place of always light or always dark, in the arctic north,
there are no required hours, no hurry for the future
and little thought of the past

the present is one continuing moment—
the body moves to natural rhythms, is fluid with seasons,
living the way a river does (14)

These poems take on the sadness of watching a beloved father slip slowly from brain damage into dementia. They express ineffable sadness but avoid the snare of sentimentality. They hold on and let go at the same time, marking the universal and transparent boundaries between what we can and cannot keep:

You can at least call me loyal.

Say I obey your dim, whispering mind —
what's left of it.

Admit that I honor its Will
to keep moving

trying, but not as we once did
all those fragrant morning

plucking summer flowers for Mary,
your wife, while she lay sleeping.

How very much I loved
our life then ... (39)



These poems bring two journeys together—one the metaphorical winter in the landscape of loss,

I can no longer stand
how you are something alive,
but not quite living (53)

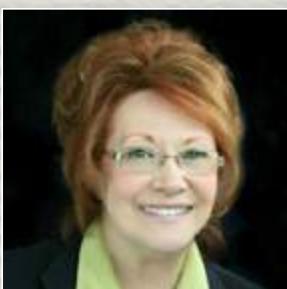
and the other a literal landscape where the author experienced the actual Yukon cold. It is as if the iciness of the latter taught her something about the former and that the demands of both challenges brought the experiences together in a way that allows Halscheid to define the victory that exists beyond loss.

Today, while the brook announces itself, my hand
skims its surface before sinking
down to these small bodies of rock, back
to the clarity our fingers first had
before time. (55)



Halscheid takes us into the deep reaches of the human heart through these poems. She shows us that we cannot control how things in our lives will unfold but that we can surrender, accept our own vulnerability, and seek ways in which we will find healing. For Halscheid, these poems are clearly part of that process. The “frozen latitudes” in this book are not comfortable ones, but while the “geographies” are specific, the spiritual location of these poems is fluid, never stationary. The poems are courageous and look to the processes of dealing with both moment and memory while moving forward.

Thérèse Halscheid writes from the perspective of one who has “been there,” one who knows what happens when the world doesn’t tilt in your favor, and one who understands the profound wrestling with life that is part of being human. Most importantly, from these “frozen latitudes” comes a sustaining warmth—the poet’s abiding sense of dignity, compassion, and love.



ADELE KENNY'S poems, reviews, and articles have been widely published in the U.S. and abroad, and she is the author of 23 books (poetry and nonfiction). A former creative writing professor, she is founding director of the Carriage House Poetry Series and has been poetry editor of *Tiferet* since 2006. www.adelekenny.com



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