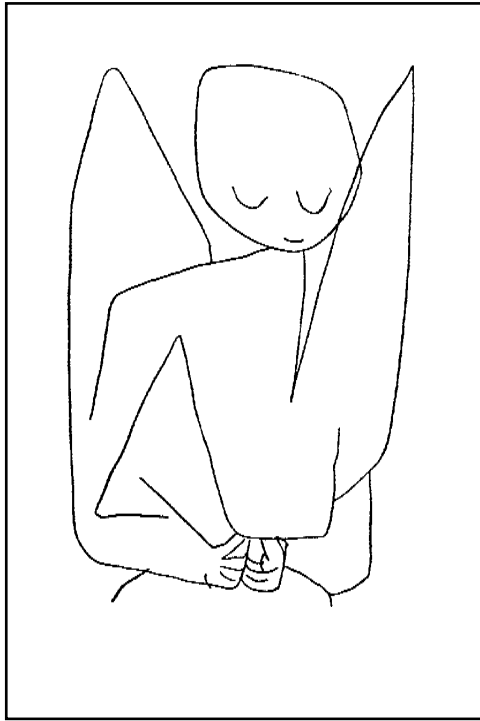


A Small Book on Sacred



*Selected from the Pages of
Poetry East
Edited by Richard Jones*

S A C R E D

“And your very flesh shall be a great poem.”

—Walt Whitman

Bakery in Huron, SD

The people who work the dawn shift
in the German bakery off Dakota Avenue—
they know Jesus,
the whatness of that incarnation
that is mad with dooms of love
for the hungry, the lost.
I love to hear them chattering and laughing
as they upgather into fat loaves
the ripe-yeasted wheat dough,
kneading it through the bone and muscle of their hands,
patting it,
letting it rise, rise
like the sweet-smooth bottoms of babies
lifted by mid-wives
into morning light.
As they work, they inhale
the holy dust of the flour,
saying, without words,
Take! Eat!
This is the body! This is the true body!

Distraction

Why not kill everything, Lord Shiva wonders,
and makes a start, but gets distracted by a pair of
orioles,
male and female, singing in the banana tree.

The Ordinary

Like the faintest smell of rot
before fruit turns, the feeling she had
that she would not keep living—
not the gory dreams of car wrecks
or leukemia, and not suicide,
though she felt a certain affinity
for those who sank into rivers
because they did not belong to life.
Just an absolute sense of ending,
no *she* to imagine one day washing dishes
in front of a window buzzing with flies,
no Sundays, no vegetable garden,
no drive to work, no *she* to live
the ordinary waking in the same
pale sun. No sharp fluttering self left
to feel it. So sure was she
that at a certain age the universe
would pull her from the sky, that when
she was first sixteen, then thirty-two,
then forty-five, she felt oddly
betrayed—how strange, to discover
her life had been there waiting,
green and small.

Historical Footnote

*There has not been a double burial
found in the Neolithic period, much
less two people hugging—and they
really are hugging.*

—Elena Menotti
Archaeologist, 2007

When we dusted them
off enough to recognize
a couple hugging in their grave,
those bones were runes
we didn't know how to interpret.
Then we observed the sunlight glittering
with particles we'd stirred up,
a giant asterisk around the site.

Son-in-Law Song

Jack on his dawn drive
to work, to work in deep fog.
Jack saw them first. He stopped,
backed up, got out to take a look.
In field silence Jack stood
at the edge of the invisible,
at the electric fence, Jack
in dawn-gray cloud fog
saw the bay mare down,
saw the crimson sack slip out,
saw a spindled foreleg poke
through its own warm pond—
Jack saw flattened feathers
of the filly unfold, saw her stand,
shiver, snuff the early air.
What I love is that Jack knew
to turn around, go back, quick get
wife and child; Jack knew
to drop the world hammer, put
his arm around Marie, hoist
sleepy Sarah to his shoulder,
whisper, *look—over there.*

Devotion

Like the burnished body
of Jesus worn smooth
with kisses on the cross
my grandmother carried.

Backwards to Heaven

In the bathtub yesterday my daughter
looked so thin and far away, I thought of her birth.
Paralyzed and drugged, all I could do was watch
while John held her and spoke softly.
In the old stories, children are sacrificed.
Every day I teach my children what to want
while everything tells me my own desire
is too large, like the black bird in the park,
which was bigger than my daughter's head.
In London last summer, I walked around and around
an image of the Prodigal Son naked on his knees.
Not bent in prayer but stretching his body backwards
to heaven. Praising not only his welcome home
but the world that kindled his desire.

Contributors

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“Bakery in Huron, SD”
Poetry East #70

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“Distraction”
Poetry East #70

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“The Ordinary”
Poetry East #76/77/78

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“Historical Footnote”
Poetry East #80/81

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“Son-in-Law Song”
Poetry East #70

Jonathan Blake
“Devotion”
Poetry East #86

Margaret Lloyd
“Backwards to Heaven”
Poetry East #70

*At Poetry East,
we believe in words. We
believe poetry is the highest
art. A poem clarifies our deep
humanity, though its grace remains
a mystery. Poems illuminate the world
we live in—a slow dance in the kitchen,
birds in flight, a loved one's death, silence
in an empty room. As you read these
seven poems, we hope you will read
with fresh eyes and full hearts. Poetry
opens a door, inviting you into its
home. Here, come a little closer,
these are for you.*

Artistic Director: A.M. Prentice

