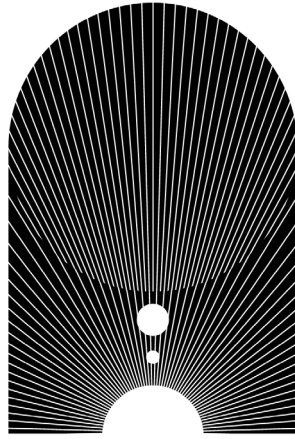


SOLUM JOURNAL
SPRING 2022



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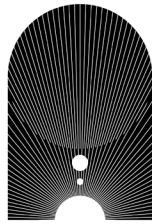
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To Dad

“You have seen Hell; you are in sight of Heaven.”

- C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*



CALL TO PRAYER

MISCHA WILLETT

Light, Bulb

“You have the words of eternal life”

What a spring was vaulting
from the snow so new so thawed
the ground so sopped the thought
drawn blank from bank to the bank
you take it to. What heat
what new fruit what news to know
now how deep a sleep the baked
ground blankets beneath as
we too and soon enough. What sweet
then. What swoon.

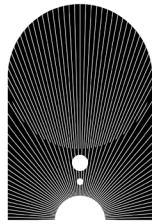
Still, till noon drives light into loam
and seeds filagree forth, we wriggle and rest.
Who times these falls? Who said it best?

In a Dark Wood

Why am I so jealous of the duck
That has been swallowed by the wolf?
Because he has slippers
and a peg on which to hang his coat
and a rug on which to place the slippers?

In the same way, I wish I was the bunny,
always, but especially in Spring,
because I think of his hook,
and the tree he's in
and the snow outside
and all the hawks he doesn't
hear hunting, until he does.

Mischa Willett is the author of *The Elegy Beta* (2020) and *Phases* (2017) and editor of Philip James Bailey's *Festus* (2022). His poems, essays, translations, and academic articles appear in a wide range of venues. He teaches English at Seattle Pacific University. More information can be found at www.mischawillett.com



POETRY

CAMERON BROOKS

The Seagull Scans a Fallow Field

The seagull scans
a fallow field
in search of God

knows what.
Have you lost your way,
mistaking this God

forsaken wilderness
for the shores you were
created for?

Perhaps you were gulled
by the Prairie
waves into believing

that you had discovered
country good for more
than flying over—

maybe even a place
to stay; it's okay,
so did we.

Cameron Brooks is an M.F.A. candidate at Seattle Pacific University. He holds an M.A. from Princeton Seminary and serves as Managing Editor for [Vanora](#), an artist collaboration website. His poems have appeared in *Poetry East*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Ekstasis Magazine*, *Ad Fontes*, and elsewhere. [Cameron](#) lives in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

PATRICK REARDON

Adman walked south

Adman walked south on Leviathan Boulevard
toward Brooklyn,
announcing:

*I will anthem sing tomorrow, prophet talk.
I will speak in tongues.*

*I will page poems, climb tree, sweep dirt,
change rules.*

*Draw the map,
find the Savior; publish diligent voices.
Hearken to the sound, scratch the itch.*

It was Manhattan so no one paid him mind.

He wore camo sweatpants
below a sharp white shirt
with a blue-pattern tie from his fraternity.

He dragged behind him on a leash
a black and white stuffed puppy, not large.

*Rise up, set down, push away,
elbow, head-butt, go, come, go,
let my skin find the secret commandments.*

I will oath. I will shut. I will vex.

Tomorrow, not today.

He stopped in the McDonald's
near Avenue of the Saints
and took his Egg McMuffin up to the second floor,
empty except for a Bible study group.

He was sure they were praying for his soul.

He went over
and whispered into the ear of the young pastor,
fresh from his riverside jog:

*I will bring frogs to the altar
and unguents, oils from Arabia,
first-born live stock
for the gleaming blade.*

*Interview the lost tribes.
Survey the communion of saints.
Answer aboriginal questions.
Submit to interrogatories.*

Touch brass. Touch gold. Touch water-worn wood.

I will open my mouth tomorrow to the rain.

The paster continued without missing a beat,
“Turn your prayer books to Chapter 13.”

And Adman left his table unbussed.

On the sidewalk outside, he opened his arms wide
— forcing several tourists from Chagrin Falls
to step into the street,
scrunching noses as if he smelled (he didn't)
and already composing texts back home —
and sang out:

*Fire the newspaper. Fire the straw.
Fire my infant photos.*

Walk the sidewalks bellowing, free or mad.

Grope. Grasp. Grip.

*I will plant the sunflower.
Crush the rotten peach under my heel.
Spill the rotten milk on soil.
Step past the nest-fallen egg.
Intoxicate on grass mown aroma.*

On that short Dutch street, Numbers Avenue,
Adman refused to look up
at the shrine towering over him
and all the other small beings
skittering the concrete lanes.
No romantic, he.

He was in the subway that day
and came up to the rain of bodies.

He has stored in his closet
all the clothes he wore that day.
still covered with gray dust.

He almost wore the outfit this day,

I will proverb tomorrow, psalm a lamentation.

I will flee down Chronicles Road.

Sightsee Transfiguration.

Circle the Black Stone.

Dine on the Mount.

Leave a footprint

on my brother's bloody backyard sidewalk.

Tomorrow I will roll the stone away.

Answer the bell.

Answer the phone.

Answer what is not asked.

Fire the wood idol.

I will tell the story of my life.

At the Bridge, he turns back.

He will not cross water.

He takes out his cellphone

and calls his dead mother.

*I will fence land.
Carve soil.
Follow lines to their end.*

Fire the evidence.

*Observe the proprieties.
Provide the necessities.*

Tomorrow I will be human.

My foot will step in the right direction.

She picks up as he finishes the message.

She tells him to straighten up
and fly right.

She tells him to hold that tiger.

The *Tribune* writes the Bible

We are not afraid of height.
During slack summer, we will write a better Bible.

This will be a new Genesis, new Exodus.
A chart-able Jesus. Lots of graphics.
Revelations galore.

Clearer language. Our copy desk will see to that.

Nothing will stand in our way.
From our glass offices, we will assign
Proverbs and Mark, Ezra and Colossians.

No lede buried.

We will win a prize.

Sixty-six parts, give or take.
Why 1 and 2 Kings? 1 and 2 Samuel?
Simplify, clarify.
Sprightly, compelling, spread over two months.
Trim to fit.

The almond tree will blossom,
its leaves weighed down by grasshoppers.

Day-to-day, the Professional will be team leader.
We will take bodies
from sports and features and from the suburbs.
The bureaus, too — Washington, Moscow, the rest.

The Professional will follow our orders.
We will whisper in his ear.
He will move the hand of each writer.

The first books, in two weeks.
No time to waste.

Get to it.
The sun is setting.
Mourners go about the streets.

Patrick T. Reardon, a three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, has authored ten books, including the poetry collections *Requiem for David* (Silver Birch), *Darkness on the Face of the Deep* (Kelsay) and *The Lost Tribes* (Grey Book). Forthcoming is his memoir in prose poems *Puddin': The Autobiography of a Baby* (Third World). His website is patricktreardon.com.

VERONICA MCDONALD

little one

a small boy's head
 soaked in blood
is he my son
 or the son of my enemy
either way I am
 created to love
the way a mother should
 after the birth pains
when life emerges from
 blood sweat feces
a crocus grows
 under ice and snow
then dies in four years
 in a stranger's arms
cracked concrete chunks cover
 soft spring grass

Veronica McDonald is a fiction writer, poet, visual artist, and founding editor of Heart of Flesh Literary Journal. She is a former atheist turned Christian, and thanks Jesus everyday for turning her world upside down. Visit her at veronicamcdonald.com.

BEN EGERTON

Long Time Caller, First Time Listener

It's late, gone nine. I'm driving home
from Palmerston North along the back road

through Tokomaru and Shannon after
another session with the teachers. There's

never consistent reception on that road.
It's not until you're almost at Levin

that you can hear what Bryan is saying
on *Nights on RNZ*. So I auto-seek

because it's not good to drive that stretch alone
with your thoughts, especially after

a session with the teachers, especially
as parts of that road are so dark. The worst

patch is around Tokomaru. The steam
museum at Tokomaru still hadn't sold.

About 18 months previously I didn't take
that back way to and from Palmerston North

with my parents because I didn't want dad
to see that it was for sale and think

it would be a good idea to buy it.
There's a good reason why steam museums

on back roads to Palmerston North remain
on the market for so long. The auto-see

settles on a talkback station. The host
provokes his callers with his devil-

may-care attitude and his devil's-advocating
and it's easy to be an advocate

for the devil when you're broadcasting
to people driving in the dark, heading home

on back roads to Wellington after sessions
with teachers when the reception is a bit iffy.

You might even expect to see the devil
loitering at the crossroads, like with Robert

Johnson down on his knees in Mississippi, except
in the Manawatū at the junction where State Highway

56 meets State Highway 57—which would have taken
the blues down a different route. The topic

of conversation isn't all that
controversial, something about dairy

export prices. This year farmers aren't getting
their forecast dividend. The fields I drive past

are full of cows whose production worth
might be less than it was on my way up.

Even at night the Manawatū is dairy country.
Fields still full of cows by dark.

But there are methane flares. Flares that may
or may not be aliens—or aliens that may

or may not be methane flares. The methane flares
probably interfere with radio

reception, especially if they're real
aliens. Perhaps living with the threat

of aliens is another reason
why steam museums linger on the market:

steam can't really compete with space technology
any more than cows can. About 3km

from Levin, still on the back road, more or less
where the streetlights start, I flick back

to *Nights with Bryan Crump* cutting off
the talkback host just as he's devil's-advocating

for dairy nationalisation. And in the re-tune
there is the briefest of pauses

like in the surprising emptiness
of a lighter-than-expected box or that breath

after a gust of wind has just blown through—
and you're standing at the mouth of the wind's cave

in the silence of high mountains and the silence
of heaven—when for the first time

on the back road I really listen and the reception
is so *crystal* my ears tingle.

Ben Egerton is a poet and education lecturer from Wellington, New Zealand, where he teaches in the Faculty of Education at Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington. Ben's poetry has been widely published in journals in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and at home in New Zealand, including in *Relief*, *The Windhover*, *Ekstasis*, *Landfall*, *The Cresset*, *Cordite*, *Among Winter Cranes*, and *Magma*. Ben was runner-up for the Magma International Poetry Prize (2018, UK) and the Kathleen Grattan Award (2019, NZ) and shortlisted for the Beverly International (2020, UK) and Christopher Smart/Joan Alice (2022, UK) prizes. Follow him on Twitter at [@ben_egerton](https://twitter.com/ben_egerton).

PETER SPAULDING

After the Burning of Moscow, 1812

A peasant turns to the only standing structure in sight,
the wood-smoke fires still pattering through the rainfall
in the flattened city; a thin stone wall cuts the horizon.

In the nave, he runs his hands along the stone
that he may have cut or hauled himself last winter in Siberia
while others raid the sanctuary behind the templon's sad Christ.

After a few moments they realize they have nowhere to take the gold,
waiting out the rain with their riches in the cold narthex
where all the remaining others flock to escape the rain.

Peter Spaulding is a graduate student at Marquette University, an adjunct instructor at John Brown University, and an Assistant Editor at *Renascence*. He has published poems with *The Dewdrop*, *Penumbra*, *Ekstasis*, *Portage Magazine*, *Fathom Magazine*, and others. His academic interests are Milton, the English Renaissance, the epic tradition and Christianity, Russian Literature, Japanese Literature, and Contemporary Literature. He received his M.A. in English Literature from Marquette University and B.A. in English from John Brown University. His non-scholarly interests are generally much more lighthearted: groundskeeping, watching European football, listening to hip-hop, and taking walks with his family.

RUSSELL ROWLAND

Not Looking for Angels

A pair of herons passed over earlier,
the union two make. You've seen how stilted
they walk, mirroring their reflections

as they stalk shallows for fish—
well, I can report that overhead they appear
as aerodynamic as the Concorde.

I don't look for angels as such.
That's testing. I want to see what's up there,
when other heads are bowed.

Perfectly fine people keep vigils
in a way that suggests our bluebirds, hawks,
ospreys aren't heavenly enough.

These good folk haven't realized
the psaltery that goes on at cloud level,
or matched feathers to the rainbow.

They expect a Host, and I hope
they get one. Two herons did for me today:
their flightpath was their praise.

Seven-time Pushcart Prize nominee **Russell Rowland** writes from New Hampshire's Lakes Region, where he has judged high-school Poetry Out Loud competitions. His work appears in *Except for Love: New England Poets Inspired by Donald Hall* (Encircle Publications), and "Covid Spring, Vol. 2" (Hobblebush Books). His latest poetry book, *Wooden Nutmegs*, is available from Encircle Publications.

LESLEY CLINTON

Cassiopeia A, circa 1690

The light from the supernova has just reached Earth.

Ten-thousand years ago, the neon rush
of hydrogen expanded, lavender

and shock-white, formed in spectral web and dust.
It swept up space debris in widening clouds

that now and many generations hence
will radiate a hundred-thousand times

our Sun's ignoble energy. Asleep,
snug in the glow, there floats an infant star.

As ruddy arrogance is sometimes stripped
away by rival arrogance, so this

red giant tore away the other's skin—
an envelope of hydrogen, we'll learn

some centuries from now. This violence
bore all the gravity of insult fed

and pressurized. The fighter's stance of these
two stars led to a grand finale loosed

in shockwave with a flash of insight, late-
learned hamartia on a solar scale.

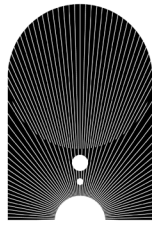
Who sees the smudge of light for what it is?
One amateur, stargazing fool. The odds
of witnessing a reckoning like this
are miniscule. The learned astronomers
were dozing while this putterer, with tired
and star-strained eye, chanced on the gruesome fall,
the supernova of the fiery queen
whose might had once seemed unassailable.

How rarely we discern what's happening
the moment of the star's collapse. We miss
the trident strike that hurls the proud queen deep
into the sky, enthroned but bound to wheel
around the North Celestial Pole and cling
tight, hanging upside down, through half the year.

Fate will judiciously seize fire from one
and dole it out to others, leaving naught
of the progenitor except that dense
core known as shame, but, too, new life, as here:

the infant neutron star tucked warmly in
its mist of carbon, lost in guiltless dreams.

Lesley Clinton's chapbook, *Calling the Garden from the Grave* (Finishing Line Press, 2020), won second place among books of verse in the 2021 National Federation of Press Women Communications Contest. Lesley's poems have appeared in publications such as *THINK*, *The Windhover*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *Ekstasis Magazine*, *Grotto*, and *Reformed Journal*. In addition to holding an MA in Teaching from Grand Canyon University and a BA in English from University of St. Thomas, she is pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing from University of St. Thomas. Lesley is a member of Strake Jesuit College Preparatory's English Department and is Editor in Chief of *The Chronicle of Strake Jesuit College Preparatory*. Visit her at lesleyclinton.com.



FICTION

ELIZABETH GENOVISE

Van Gogh at Dawn

There must have been a perilous moment, a juncture at which he could have shelved palette and paint prematurely, like a weary traveler at an oasis who submits to tardy comfort until his purpose has faded from memory. He might have chuffed out the candles and tucked the empty chairs beneath the table, as one does with unwelcome questions—or ghosts. Surely the tea-kettle and the cotton called his name, and like softly-falling rain, the murmur of city voices, of crowds, reached him at the blue hour to whisper its hypnotic refrain. Perhaps there was a night in which he stared out the clouded glass at the amber wink of distant life and thought to himself, *no further. I am tired.*

On this night he collapsed onto his battered bunk with a muffled moan. As he passed fitfully into sleep he had the errant thought that the soul inhabited a house not entirely its own. In this house a stern father ruled, and a passionate son was sometimes in, sometimes out, and a little spirit moved like smoke through the halls. It was the spirit-child—who liveliest when the son was away—that Vincent yearned always to catch in his arms. From time to time, he had attained his end, or perhaps the child had caught *him* and held on. In these moments, what was true made itself known in yellow and cobalt blue, and oh, what the canvas spoke . . . but at what cost? It was not just bodily depletion Vincent feared, the sapping of muscle and bone. It was that if he remained so caught, the little spirit on his back would compel him into new rooms, new landscapes too dense and palpitating for the constitution of an ordinary man. The fruit spangling the trees was too rich in its bittersweetness; the air was so charged that it passed over dry fields like a great crackling comb until even the cast-off seeds stirred themselves into cyclones that leaved and budded against all laws of nature. Sometimes, in his weariness and fear, Vincent had let the spirit fall from him even as he set his brush aside. Sometimes he dreamt

of weightless flight, and could almost prefer this easy ride to the trials and excursions of a soul on foot.

For him sleep has always proffered a velvet relief, until this night when he finds himself on the twilight shore of a colossal sea. Sand glitters beneath his feet, studded with tiny round stones. Heavy indigo clouds, their bellies refracting the coral blush of the falling sun, are mirrored in the waves so that two worlds seem to envelop a third, a midgard, as the past and future cradle the present between them like a child. Vincent steps closer to the water's edge and peers down. Here is a black opal's trembling borealis, waters brimming with occult blue and scarlet and green. He is two men as he stares into the deep: now chilled with fear, aching to turn back, and now enthralled with desire, pressing forward until the water laps his feet. What long-submerged secrets await here? He has seen the throb of the iris, the winter sky's violence; has known the olive tree's commiseration and the stars' libations. But this—

Slowly he wades knee-deep into the blue-black lake. Far beneath him, past the quivering line of a sudden drop, is the glimmer of unknown things: not the baubles of some broken treasure-ship, but relics, older and stranger than what man has made, each a sacrament enrobed in waves. Their shapes ripple and blink, toying with Vincent's gaze, refusing definition; but he is certain of his mission. He will have them. He must have them. He forgets that his limbs are untested in such waters; he does not consider the power of the undertow, the piercing pain of stolen air. He stretches out his arms to swim, poises to propel himself there, down there—

Voices startle him into stepping back. There is a faceless crowd gathered on the shore, on higher ground, and they call out to him as one to come back, it is not safe, he will die . . .

"I have to go in," Vincent cries, but he can hear the terror in their reply.

"There are better ways," they beseech. "Down the beach—you will find a store. Everything in the deep, is also there; but it is clean, and you need not drown for your prize. Please, take our advice—"

Vincent squints. He is at first disbelieving, but in the distance is the outline of a thatched little building, its roof catching up the remaining sun through a gap in the clouds. How peaceful it looks, even from here. There is a murmur of approval as he returns to the sand and starts toward the store. It seems it will be years before he reaches its door, but the miles dwindle to mere steps, so that it is only seconds before he has passed through the straw frame into the dry space within.

The attendant is grizzled and bent, his white hair falling to his shoulders. He sits behind a high counter and eyes Vincent without a word. The register at his hand is dustless, strangely current in contrast with both its keeper and the hut's crude walls, but in a moment, Vincent has forgotten this. He wanders through the shelves agape with wonder at what merchandise rests there, each piece tagged with its price and sparkling in the artificial light.

He cannot give a name to a single article, though there is a faint gleam of familiarity in each, brief and heartening like an old cadence woven into a foreign song. Words and memories, sensations and histories, flutter birdlike in him and then explode into flight, soaring beyond his reach. He touches a surface here, a texture there, and each time pulls back, shocked by its verve. To steady his nerves he wraps his arms around his waist, only to find a canvas bag belted there, laden with silver. He is at first bewildered—then voracious. Heady with the understanding that he can have whatever he wishes, he rushes to a table in a corner and lifts his trophy from its surface.

It is a seashell, but not. Massive, intricate, labyrinthine, it spirals outward only to loop back upon itself in an impossible design. In its opalescent skin Vincent finds sable and rose and the coral of the blushing sky. And there are hieroglyphs, missives from another world, etched into the curves like the figuring of a burl. When Vincent holds it to his ear, there is a waterfall's din, and then, he has a vision: a lone man paddling downriver, toward a frothing drop he cannot possibly survive . . .

“Is that what you wish to buy?” the grizzled man asks.

Vincent jumps. “Yes.” He approaches the high counter with his prize in his arms. Oh, what he will do with this, and how deliciously easy it had been to attain! A simple lifting from a table—an exchange of coins—against the agony of long afternoons in the field, the torture of sleepless nights! Why had he wasted so much time? And to think he had come so close to the deep dive, the plunge into the black where he might have lost his life—

He is triumphant, almost smug. He is about to reach for the silver in his bag, when the shell trembles of its own accord. Then horror: a black, slithering creature, many-eyed with glinting teeth and long claws, darts out of the shell’s belly toward Vincent as if its sole object is to consume him.

Vincent screams. He drops the shell and the hideous creature slinks away, glancing back at him with a simpering smile before it vanishes down a hole.

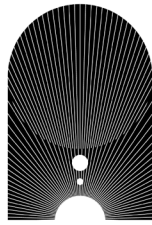
The old man is unsurprised. “Guess the shell wasn’t yours to have,” he says simply. Then he points out the door. “The sun is coming down. You don’t have much time.”

Nauseous and shaking, Vincent exits the store. He hikes back up the shore—the distance is real now, the trek long and taxing—toward his beginning. At last he reaches the place where the dream first led him. The crowd resorts to begging him, protesting his choice as he passes them by. They remind him of the danger, ask him why, why . . . He turns to tell them about the shell, then stops, realizing they don’t want to know. He faces the water alone. He fixes one foot on the pebbled shore, feeling the stones dig into his soles as he anchors himself there. Then, still shaking, he lowers the other foot into the depths, and reaches down.

The sun is gone but it does not slumber. Somewhere beyond Vincent’s vision it falls into contradiction, sweeping its lighthouse beam across its own story in the wake of munificent glory. Vincent reaches lower still. His fingertips brush something that cannot be bought, something for which wars must be fought. This is the lesson; this is the way. If only he could remember it by day . . . He can feel himself waking. In fear of forgetting,

he builds a prayer like a bridge between the sea that he dreams and the land that he is. *Oh God, let me be a fertile field, so that each time You pass through, whatever falls from Your pockets will take root.*

Elizabeth Genovise is an O. Henry Prize recipient and has been nominated several times for Pushcart and Best of the Net awards. She is the author of four collections of short stories published via small or university presses, the most recent being *Palindrome* from the Texas Review Press (Fall 2022). Her stories have appeared in over two dozen journals. She is currently completing her first novel.



VISUAL ART

BRITTANY JARBOE



JARBOE, *We Call This Friday Good*. Matte black paint and graphite on YUPO®, Translucent paper, 9"x12".



JARBOE, *Resurrection Morning*. Matte black paint and acrylic paint on YUPO®, translucent paper, 9"x12".

Brittany Anne is a visual artist and cellist in Louisville, KY. She has shown in shows around the Ohio River Valley since 2009. Though she has a B.F.A in Painting from Western Kentucky University, she left behind the paint to pick up the pencil. Her work ranges from detailed portraiture of trees and reflections on motherhood to meditative drawings focusing on the passage of time in our changing natural environments. Natural environments and transcendence also feature in her first cello album of personal compositions. She is active in her community as a cellist and in her church as a visual artist. Find updates on Instagram @ [brittandthecello](#) and also on Spotify as: [anne saint x](#).