Promethia is the literary journal of the Oral Roberts University English and Modern Languages Department.

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Cover art by Megan Escareno.

Layout and design by Rachel Vaughan and Rachel Whitlock.
PROMETHIA
2009-2010
A Note from the Editor

Recently, I have been meeting with an old friend to talk with while we hang around a fire in his backyard. Mostly our conversations are about the fire, our lives, our experiences. The night crawls around us, and I realize that the fire is a sort of living thing. It’s funny how interesting it is to the both of us. We’ve been around fire our whole lives, but still, when the flame begins to die, it feels sacrilegious to just let it go out. So, we ignore the hour of night and rustle through his backyard looking for anything that will keep the fire fueled. The flame must have burned down four or five times, and yet we reason every time that it is illogical to let the orange embers breathe black; only when it is absolutely necessary do we give up and walk away, when there is nothing left to burn.

Prometheus, the Greek Titan known for his intelligence, stole fire from Zeus to give to the humans. The other gods had wished to keep it for themselves and were so upset with Prometheus that they chained him down on a rock to let an eagle peck at him for eternity. Of course, this is myth, but we must not neglect the metaphor. This was no mere gift. The ability to create is more a delicate duty than it is a meager livelihood. We take the fire seriously and let it burn how it will; to let it go out is to forsake ourselves.

But all things do end. Finally, at about 1:30 in the morning, with nothing left to burn and our responsibilities waiting for us on the other side of 8 a.m., we walked away. After a few feet, it wasn’t possible to feel the glowing embers at our backs. We were crazy for the flame. It was like a steady beast, patient, calm, and horrible. The fire exists, it seems, regardless of oxygen, wood, or desire. The fire is always there, but only the ones who use it properly really benefit from its being.

Joshua S. T. Lacy
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For A Mother

Keith E. Gogan

The day the doctors told my dad and me that she would never know us again
They stuttered and stammered jargon while Dad choked up and
I strained to understand and
We knew she was not Mom, not Honey, anymore
Unable to even breathe on her own, her chest rising and
Falling, a metronome in a tuneless room
In which we decided that machines
Should not play God
One day later, I’m waiting for the phone call that means that
Permanently closed door
Or, really, the open one
And I whim a Google search of Mom’s name: Lynn P. Gogan
Finding nothing,
No cheap shiny plastic badge pinned on her name in cyberspace
However, she had been a Registered Nurse, an RN
But I liked to call her Registered Nut
Because it made her laugh and because
She understood me, her utterly odd one who
Never married or produced grandkids:
She didn’t care.
She did care for her three kids who are generally
Happy and
Unfamiliar with jail cells
Gifted with a mother who made
Mrs. Walton look like a fraud
Whose resume walks this planet
As two daughters and a son
Inclined to ask
Mr. Google, with all due respect,
What the hell do you know about anything?
photo by Pierce Nix
St. Aldate’s, Oxford

Bryce Merkl

This sacred day, the bells still ring
Among the dreaming city spires,
And people gather yet to sing
With everything that praise inspires.

Hands lifted high, knees bent in awe,
The music once again resounds;
The nave is shaken to the stones
Down to the crypt, the rattling bones.

Next, creeds, and then, to prayer withdraw
In quiet mood while light surrounds,
Each ray transforming through the stain
Of every brilliant coloured pane.

Then bread and wine, with love are served,
And gifts are shared for those with less;
The sacraments are all observed—
In richer ways, none could express.

True worship brought before the King
Is that to which this church aspires;
Such beauty should with wonder draw
Us all to barefoot-holy grounds.

Their faith—if paint, then bolder tones,
If music, then a deeper strain,
If drama, then most unreserved,
If dance, surpassing all finesse.
Dad Has Cocktail Weed Down Here

Amber C. Earls

Once upon a time
I ventured to my father's basement-room
Where mousy rodents played miniature golf
And spiders spun silks for next season's collection

Dad had no idea that I knew.

He had a private bathroom there
Even with the door closed
Miss December winked at me from the crack in the flap
Sending a sickly shudder up my spine
I later told my brother and he still thinks Miss September is better

Dad still had no clue that I knew.

A coffee table hosted a many “feel-good” things
Booger sugar and Devil’s Snare
Pasty-wrapped ganga and amber-tinted gin
Packages of
Chocolate-flavored hookah
Meant for a bad argument or a backstabbing one-night-stand for
Younger-lady entertainment...

Dad didn’t know that I knew.

Cocktail pity-parties for
A possible sneak around
With the haunting remnant of the sound of
Passion that my mother didn’t feel

I’m pretty sure my father didn’t know that I knew.

I climbed the stairs of the Father-Room
And looked my Father in the face
Pupils dilated with a smoke-and-mirror shame...

He knew.
In Medias Res*

Rachel Whitlock

Boy,
did you ever see the shout in my hands?
Or hear the fever in my nouns?

Perhaps.

Your sap-like tears stuck to jeans as you fell
from troposphere to trench—
Her, her, her.

I spout chicken-soup truths—
rewind, repeat,
and still,
all you see is the charred forest,
not the infantile green that reaches from beneath it.

Boy,
did you ever feel the thoughts that bowed my head?
Or taste the fear in my smiles?

Perhaps.

I go fetal and concave at the thought of you,
my phantom limb.
And, while I cannot keep you,
I will not recite futile he-loves-me-he-loves-me-nots
to a God that I pretend grants all my
white-dress-red-rose dreams.

Boy,
I'll stop asking.
I doubt you even know what I mean.

*"In medias res" is the name of a literary technique in which the author begins the story "in the middle of things."
"Please take out your hymnal and turn to page 12, Amazing Grace," I instructed my congregation of stuffed teddy bears and cream-colored dolls, who were all dressed in their lacy, white, Sunday dresses. I might have only been six and not quite ordained as a minister, but I was going to change the world with my revolutionary new preaching. My church building was my enclosed front porch, and my stage was the faded, light pink carpet that was not exactly practical for indoor/outdoor carpet. However, this did not hinder my quest to preach the gospel.

I sang along with my inanimate toys, not bothered by the fact that my voice was the only voice to be heard. In my real church, different people led the singing and did the preaching. I, on the other hand, had to take on both roles in my tiny service. I ended the song service and began with the reading of the word. Not being able to read all of the words in my picture Bible, I just copied the sermon from the last Sunday. It was a good sermon worth repeating, and my people needed to hear it.

In the middle of my own rendition of Sunday church, my brother burst through the front screen door. He paused to look at my toys and me. He then turned to leave, and I jumped into action. This may be my only chance to have a breathing church member I thought to myself. “Please stay,” I asked him. I added that there would be a baptism after the service, and I needed a person to baptize. He grudgingly complied, and became my first human congregant. It thrilled me to no end that he would actually participate. Although, I was older than him and I could make him stay if I wanted. It came time for the baptism, and I quickly noticed that I did not have a place for water. Oh well, I thought, we will have to pretend. I motioned for my brother to join me at the front. I announced to my congregation that we had a saved soul searching for redemption. I felt very grown-up and in control. I held my brother in my arms, and put one hand on the back of his neck, like my pastor always did. Then I used my other hand to cover his nose (even though we had no water, I wanted it to seem real). So I slowly bent my brother backwards, holding his head, and declaring in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When I got to the Holy part, my brother became too heavy for me to hold, and I realized I couldn’t hold him anymore. Since he was already halfway to the floor he didn’t fall too hard, but hard enough to feel a slight sting. I was just a little embarrassed. I mean, real pastors don’t drop people when they baptize them. They are always in control.

So, in what I thought would be a smooth move, I grabbed one of my brother’s arms and yanked on it. He paused to look at my toys and me. He then turned to leave, and I jumped into action. This may be my only chance to have a breathing church member I thought to myself. “Please stay,” I asked him. I added that there would be a baptism after the service, and I needed a person to baptize. He grudgingly complied, and became my first human congregant. It thrilled me to no end that he would actually participate. Although, I was older than him and I could make him stay if I wanted. It came time for the baptism, and I quickly noticed that I did not have a place for water. Oh well, I thought, we will have to pretend. I motioned for my brother to join me at the front. I announced to my congregation that we had a saved soul searching for redemption. I felt very grown-up and in control. I held my brother in my arms, and put one hand on the back of his neck, like my pastor always did. Then I used my other hand to cover his nose (even though we had no water, I wanted it to seem real). So I slowly bent my brother backwards, holding his head, and declaring in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When I got to the Holy part, my brother became too heavy for me to hold, and I realized I couldn’t hold him anymore. Since he was already halfway to the floor he didn’t fall too hard, but hard enough to feel a slight sting. I was just a little embarrassed. I mean, real pastors don’t drop people when they baptize them. They are always in control.

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My parents knelt over my brother while he moved into the screaming stage. He had quickly navigated out of the crying stage. My mom looked kind of worried, and my dad was trying to see what the problem was. They finally picked him up and headed inside to call the doctor. Shortly after, I was deposited at a family member’s house while the rest of the family rushed to the doctor. I quietly played by myself while I waited to find out if I had killed him or something.

What seemed like forever later my mom called my aunt, and told her that my brother had dislocated his arm. But all was back in place now, and they would be by soon to pick me up. After the call, my aunt informed me of all that my mom had said. It was so hard for me to realize that I had hurt my brother so bad. I also thought about how I would have to explain everything to my congregation of toys.
This is Not a Love Poem

Alycia West

He is Nikes, mesh, and cotton
Legs, arms, and dimples.
He is run dart leap air catch grass run—touchdown.
And then he’s walking to me,
So I sacrifice my fruit punch Gatorade
A faultless lamb
Offered up to a partial-deity.
He is heel toe heel smile—
A little king with his victor’s crown.
And I’m a lowly jester—only a source of amusement.
Only for right now.
My Love

Becki Hardy

My weekend work family
Checks the international news and greets with kisses.
Left, then right, then left again.
And breathing in the sting of hummus in
My morning nostrils, I hear my Mother call
“Habibi,” (my love)

My Father brings lunch on Saturdays,
Except during Ramadan, and hugging,
His full olive skin meets my pale, American face.
Freshly mowed grass mingled with old leather
Assures me it was a fine day for golf.

Of the three daughters,
I am the odd one out.
Caramel hair and no accent,
Except for the word “Habibi” and
The way I’ve learned to say their names.
But Houda and Ata, family for four years
Would claim me as their own, regardless.

At closing time,
My Father promises me,
“We’ll take you to Palestine so you can learn to
speak Arabic and understand the
Palestinian state. Then you will be
On our side.”

Proud, my Mother’s eyes interrupt him.
And through her porcelain teeth she smiles.
“She is on our side.”
Left, then right, then left again.
Parting with kisses, I keep “habibi” for
My weekend family
Wasted
Nicholas Harness

The morning after she wakes up
feeling Jack-Hammered and dizzy-sick.
She had that dream again,

And for a moment she's untainted and ten
holding her teddy tight like it's
Innocence.

The dream fades like childhood play,
leaving blemished Time streaking across
blushing cheeks.

She gazes down at bare breasts, monuments
of womanhood turned tombstones,
epitaphs reading aloud the
elegy of a girl who grew up, too fast.

Pink-cotton-candy lips smeared
across an unfamiliar pillow makes
nausea rumble in her empty stomach and she
pretends like she's in bed
alone.

Glossy baby-blues framed in black hold
back rivers;
She pulls sheets around her like
a mother's protective arms,
But it's just material.

She gave us what we wanted, what we call
"The Inalienable Right of Men." We say
"Never hold back Brilliant America by her
platinum hair.
She's free to be what we want her to be,
a sugary-sweet carnival ride."
So play on playboys. Step up to claim
the prize while she's still got cubic zirconium in
her eyes;

We got her right where we want her.

Cheap, Easy, and

Wasted.
I am a 22-year-old senior in college. I am single. I don’t have any children, and yet, somehow, I am the proud mother of three. Jaden, Isabella, and Olivia are the children of dear family friends. I have had the privilege of being the favorite babysitter since the eldest, Jaden, was three and a half. He is now eight and three quarters.

Trial and error, as for any parent, has made the journey interesting, to say the least. Bus stops and bubble baths, critters and chaos, burns and bruises have made their stamp upon life’s passport. I have found myself saying things that I thought only came out of my mother’s mouth, things like, “If you two don’t stop that right now...” or “If you don’t eat your veggies, then you won’t get any dessert.” I have caught vomit in my hands countless times. Now, by natural reaction, when I see a child heaving, my hands automatically are cupped in front of them. Don’t get me wrong; it is not like I enjoy catching “tossed cookies.” In fact, I don’t even have a strong stomach. I just know that I have a problem to solve, and my hands can be the solution, temporarily.

I have taught and been taught. So often it’s assumed it is the adult who does all the instructing, but much of my “growing up” has come as a result of their tutelage. They have taught me to see the world as simple. It is by their gentle confidence I have discovered I can really sing. I began singing them to sleep just for the fun of it. Honestly, it was because they were too little to tell me I couldn’t carry a tune. Who knew that singing “The Lion Sleeps Tonight” would help me to overcome my fear of being heard? They now beg me to sing to them. They’re good for my ego.

I have laughed uncontrollably at situations that wouldn’t have been funny if not for childlike simplicity. This summer we planned a beach day at a shore I had never been to. Their dad gave me the directions but left out one small detail. We came to a busy three-way intersection. I had no idea where to go, and it was my turn. I yelled to the back of the van, “WHY WAY?”

Jaden pointed and said, “That way!”

Now, I know that a mom is supposed to be Wonder Woman, but I couldn’t tell which way he was pointing. Bella joined in the commotion. She is a proud backseat driver. We continued to yell back and forth as chaos quickly ensued. I had to make a decision. I turned left, which was where they were trying to direct me. I couldn’t help but laugh out loud. I said, “You guys are too funny!”

Bella looked at me with her ever-so-serious gaze and said, “Hey, that’s just how I roll!”

When I moved 900 miles away from home to attend school, my heart broke. They cried when I left, asking if I’d be back home for every imaginable holiday, including my brother’s birthday (he lives in California). For two weeks after I left, it rained, every day. After 14 days of downpour, Bella looked up at her mom and said, “See Mom; even the sky is sad that Megan left.”

Adulthood often dulls the colors of life. Failed aspirations jade the heart, but innocence refreshes the soul, unveiling that jubilant world of a child. Imagination is a wonderful gift, and these children have it in spades. Through their eyes, I have been a gourmet chef, having cooked in only the finest Italian restaurants. I even had a poorly attempted accent. Kaleidoscope worlds are my artistic specialty. I have instructed dance. Bella and Liv are now professional swing dancers. They have developed a taste for Bing Crosby and The Andrews Sisters. Jaden is a break-dancer with some pretty sweet moves. He is quite loyal to TobyMac. Once, I was even a ninja. Most of the time, I am the reigning queen, and they are my faithful subjects. However, out of all these “accomplishments,” there’s one place where I have fallen short. I am not a very good wilderness guide, as I am terribly afraid of spiders. Because I only go into the woods if my feet are completely covered, Olivia will not trek out unless she is wearing snow boots, even in the middle of summer. I am learning the power of influence.

A mother’s hands teach, correct, build, and heal. My hands are being broken in. As the saying goes, the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. Although I am not yet a mother, my hands have rocked many a cradle. I only hope the world is a better place for it.
Go, they say, go.

We have the fire that these peoples do not, the shoes and the packets to become food and the dazzling crest smiles, all this brought to the have-nots.

I’ve heard that I will not see enough distended bellies or bare-bones dwellings in the artichoke heart of my dream.

For, if they have running water and if the homeless and penniless are fewer and easier to ignore, and if they are highly literate (with a standard of living to match), they are not sheep -- so I’ve heard.

The people I love will not marvel at Nikes or nihilism and are more likely to be found with a baguette in hand than that “collection of fairy tales,” dutifully highlighted and underlined.

I have walked and loved the streets of the skeptical, who take the politics of food more seriously than the politics of agape.
(though Paris is viewed by outsiders at the "city of love")
and have tofu-firm opinions
spiced by lively debate with others.

Go,
they say,
go.

But they,
the starched and pressed opinions of the traditional church,
cannot circle
the land of cheese, wine, and bread, and tell me
they are less worthy
than the rest.
Segregation in Small-Town Oklahoma
Joann Furlow Allen

From the highway leading out of town,
A side view in passing:
One dusty street,
Buildings wanting paint,
A solitary figure,
Crossing at an angle.
Dark skin, red dress,
Straight-backed and lovely.
An African Village?
A Primitive Print?
Exotic and Shameful.
Just “across the tracks.”
They say he liked Doritos and Cheetos.
And Raisin Bran for breakfast.
And it sounds so
normal, like an uncle
or friend or college kid.

I watched him die that night,
like millions of others.
A rope around his neck
and his truth in his hands.
Eyes anticipating Jannah* or Jahannam*.

A cell phone camera captured it all,
and fed it to the internet—
a triumph of twenty-first century technology.

A fallen king in a fallen land,
a man who deserved to die
for his many sins.
I knew this,
but when the floor disappeared
and the rope fell taut,
I had to look away.

No manila folder
or milk crate in my brain
for images of dead tyrants
or sadistic saints,
but I saw both.

And cried for the dictator.

* Jannah is the Islamic equivalent of Heaven.
* Jahannam is the Islamic equivalent of Hell.
At the Intersection of Hope

Dr. Mary Alice Trent

Hope passed the comb through her curly black afro, for she had been gifted with a slim waistline and well endowed hips and shapely buttocks, but she had a very small chest, so she often overcompensated by padding it with some old-fashioned toilet paper. The olive color of her straight-length dress complemented her smooth sable skin. Staring in the mirror, Hope saw a woman whose self-worth had been beaten by the hands of time; she felt ugly and uncomfortable in her own body.

She promised herself that she would not go on another stupid blind date, but Martha Lee, her flamboyant best friend since the time they were in diapers, vowed on the church’s pulpit Bible that this new choir member was “the one.”

Sighing and then taking in a deep breath, blowing it out again as if to blow out candles on a birthday cake, Hope put the finishing touch on her decorated face: her earth-tone lip gloss.

“Hope,” her momma shouted, “your date is here.”

Hope could feel her pounding heart as her palms started to perspire, exciting the fumes from her Sunflower perfume. She walked down the stairs, painfully reminiscing about blind dates she had been on, knowing this guy would be another casualty to add to the list of forgettables.

She took one look at her blind date and thought to herself that she’d scheme a plot to get even with Martha Lee, since this date did not remotely resemble the image she had described.

“Happy Birthday, Hope,” he said in a tenor tone.

Hope was speechless as she felt an overwhelming nausea ravishing her midsection; putting her hands on her stomach, she ran to the bathroom around the corner from the kitchen. Her momma went to the bathroom door to check on her while her date, who had studied classical music and jazz at the local university, found his way to the piano in the living room and began to play the melody of “You Are So Beautiful.” Then he bellowed out the soulful lyrics to the song with such passion that he could have awakened a comatose person. His long fingers massaged the keys as he closed his eyes and rocked his head from side to side, his dreadlocks swaying in the air.

Hope and her momma stood still in the doorway of the living room, as motionless as shallow water on a lake on a windy day, as he played on. He opened his eyes again when Hope and her momma began to clap their hands, applauding him on. The man that seemed to have been possessed by a love potion now sat silently at the piano; his dark fingers fixed like the keys on the piano. His piercing black eyes gazed into Hope’s eyes.

She had waited twenty-eight years to the day to meet someone whom she could call “the one”; here he stood, a stranger yet perfect in a new way. Suddenly, he looked more handsome than before.

As Hope and her date made their way to the front door, she caught a glimpse of herself in the hallway mirror. For the first time in her life, she saw what the songbird had seen, and she smiled, as the front door closed behind her.
Grandma the Gardener

Joshua Lacy

I remember you most as a gardener
rather than a Grandma: your knees
never clean, but brown with top-soil in your pores, and grass stains on
your socks—the colors of summer labor;
Though I loved you, I did not know you

I remember my uncle in the limousine;
he said, "I thought she'd outlive us all."
I just squeezed a laugh because I couldn't cry,
and wondered who would mow the lawn
for Grandpa and trim the edges
of the chain-linked fences and
water the Azaleas around the wooden porch

So many years have gone by now, but
I still see you gardening, your strong, thin hands
up to their wrists, plowing up old stars
from the giant sky-fields and tilling new night
with humongous clouds to plant young stars
just before dawn dusts the moonlight from your shins
The White Rose

Bryce Merkl

I didn’t really wake up until my feet slapped the cold floor of the basement bathroom. The single window had been left open overnight, serving as a replacement for the nonexistent ventilation fan. Over the sound of my electric razor I heard a knock on the door.

“Can I go pee?” the voice on the other side asked quietly.

I opened the door. It was my little sister, Alaina. Actually, she was my older sister, but ever since I’d outgrown her my sophomore year of high school, I’d called her my “little” sister.

She was barely awake. Her hair was frazzled, eyelids heavy, and makeup absent—hardly looking like a bride on her wedding day. She smiled when she saw it was me.

Even though we had always shared our regularly prescribed sibling disagreements, that broad smile was nothing short of pure love and warmth. Before marrying her to Justin—my brother-in-law-to-be—Pastor Dannie would comment on that smile. He said her smile just lit up the room. And it did. It was my little sister’s smile.

“Happy Wedding Day,” I said, slipping out of the bathroom.

“Thanks,” she yawned.

As I sat alone at the breakfast table, I could hear the house waking up. Every bed in the place was filled with wedding guests and participants. After all, it was Merkl headquarters. Alarms, stretching, yawning, grumbles, and complaints. As I spooned down my Honey Nut Cheerios, my aunt Kathy, still in her pajamas, let the dog out.

“Good morning,” I beamed. She only responded with a grunt.

Down the hall I could hear people beginning to stir some more. Lights flashed on, showers started up, and curling irons began to warm. Most people went about their beautification silently, their eyelids still heavy from the shortage of sleep.

I was supposed to wake up Justin at six, but after finishing my breakfast I still had a few minutes to spare. I stepped out onto the dewy back lawn. The yard was an oasis. It was small with a double-high fence covered in ivy. The dark green leaves of the vine covered the birdhouses and feeders along the back fence, their graspy tendrils working all the way down to the long grass—a wall of spinach green broken only by a rhubarb bush and the shrines of Sts. Francis and Mary. The saints stood quietly, reverently today, a bit of an expectant smile on their stone lips—they must have known about the wedding.

The morning hubbub of traffic on nearby Wadsworth Boulevard was unusually quiet today. Somewhere out of sight, a lone cricket still chirped the last of his evening song. As I wended my way through the yard, soaking in the sights, the smells, and the solitude, I was overwhelmed by a sense of complete and perfect peace. It transcended all understanding.

Just as it was time to go, my eyes drifted to a flower bed in the center of the yard. My grandmother always liked planters like these, especially the ones that made lawn-mowing difficult. Maybe that’s because she never had to do it herself. This bed only had a single rose bush in it. The plant hadn’t been trimmed or taken care of for quite some time, though it looked like someone might have come along a few years past and tried to fix it up, only making it appear botched and mangled. But despite the disheveled appearance of the rose bush, it had still managed to produce a single, beautiful white bloom.
I took a minute to bend down and stare. A few drops of dew rested on the smooth petals, each one perfectly unfolding in its proper place. In the verdant yard, this bloom stood out like a bold declaration of something different, something special. Even among its tangled mess of leaves, thorns, and haywire stems, this dazzling rose had still succeeded in blooming. It was a miracle.

A minute late, I went back inside and woke up Justin. By that time, almost everyone was up and tingling with the wedding nerves—a highly contagious disease known especially to infect females on wedding days. By the time the five hairdressers arrived, Justin and I were ready to take off to set up for the reception later that afternoon. Just before leaving, I gave Alaina a hug. She smiled and said she’d see me there.

Three hours and many wedding-stresses later, I watched as my father walked my little sister down the aisle. I fought back tears as they walked together to the lyrics of a song Justin had written just for the occasion. Alaina looked beautiful. Her hair, her dress, and most of all her smile radiated that she was a woman who was perfectly in love. My little sister was all grown up.

On the dance floor at the reception, I caught a glimpse of Alaina for a brief moment. As she spun, swayed, and twirled, I could see her smile sparkling brighter than the tiara that she wore that day. The smile went beyond just happiness—she was emanating joy. The joy of a life perfectly and utterly fulfilled. And on Justin’s face, there was the same smile. Different, yet somehow the same. They were now one.

If there was one image I could use to describe their heart at that moment, it would be just one thing: a single white rose, a few drops of dew gently sprinkled on its smooth petals, each one perfectly unfolding in its proper place.
“Death,”
Says the priest,
“Was never part of the plan.
It’s a relief from exile. That’s
Why we call it sleep, instead.”
The breeze blows the edges of his vestments
Like flags at surrender.

A week before your funeral,
As this summer finally slid off into
The shimmering air where all dead weather goes,

I marveled at how October had ripped the green from the neighborhood,
And left, instead, its best impression of fire.
I cut branches from the front bushes,
Leaves lit red and yellow, soft like dog tongues,
And stuck them in vases all over the house.

The day of your funeral, I remarked to my husband
That the effect had not been so lasting as I’d hoped.
The fireplace mantle was a small yard
In need of a small rake,
And in each vase was a skeletal hand,
I frowned. “All the leaves fell off.”
“Yes dear,” he replied, “that’s why we call it the fall.
Thank our proximity to the sun.”
But everything changes.

The universe is expanding.
Did you know, where you are now,
That the universe is expanding?
And the sun, it’s
Limping along towards supernova,
And when it gets there, it’s going to roll over
This solar system
Like a ball of dough becoming a tortilla—
Spread like your wife’s arms over your casket,
Like a mother bird,
Like something trying to carry you home.

I wonder if you will see it,
The sun finally scorching the earth,
Making ash mannequins for a new Pompeii.
Forest fires always make for the greenest beginnings.
Do you believe in Armageddon Spring?

“Death was
Never part of the plan,”
The priest says. “That’s why we call it sleep, instead.
We sleep until the trumpets shout.
‘Till then, we live in exile.
That’s why we call it The Fall.”
The red leaves stir on the mound of dirt like a volcano;
The machinery creaks like a monster to lower you,
And I wonder,
Do you hear it in your sleep?

Do you think it’s childish
To believe the End will save us?
I don’t.
The sun is coming,
Filling up orbits like wedding rings.
I wish that I could ask you:

Are you excited?
The last thing we’ll see
On this earth
Will be light.
The Eucharist and Metaphor

Joshua Lacy

Sacraments, according to the early church, are the most sacred of actions. They are the mysterious actions the church partakes in to bring them closer to God. As Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev says, “In [the sacraments] our union with God is realized as far as it is possible in this earthly life” (Alfeyev 130). The sacraments are the medium used by the church to commune with God, and they are so named because they are not fully understood. “Each of the sacraments involves both visible and invisible aspects. The former consists of the rite, that is, the words and actions of the participants, and the ‘material substance’ of the sacrament (bread and wine in the Eucharist). The latter is the spiritual transfiguration and rebirth of the person for whose sake the rite is accomplished” (Alfeyev 131). Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev goes on to say that the mystery exists mainly in the invisible portion of the sacrament (Alfeyev 131). The sacrament of communion is the centerpiece of a traditional liturgical service. The rest of the service is a way to work up to, or a sort of preparation for, the Eucharist. The idea behind it is that the church can continually partake in the Mystic Supper (Alfeyev 138). “The Eucharist is a sacrifice in which Christ himself is ‘the Offerer and the Offered, the Receiver and the Received’” (Alfeyev 139). And it is the very action the church takes part in that signifies transformation from old to new (Alfeyev 144).

Art, too, can be seen in this light: as a mystery, the communion between the creator and the created, the dialogue that exists without words. It involves both visible and invisible aspects: the materials are the substances worked with, and the mystery the creative process and the transfiguration and rebirth of the artist. The creation of art is not only a medium by which the artist communes with the artwork, but a metaphor of Holy Communion with God.

In the case of the Eucharist, there is the material substance, which becomes something entirely different and sacred. “The power of the mysterious transmutation permeates the nature of the bread and wine and changes it. They become other than themselves, other than what they are as things of the physical world […] the miracle of the transmutation of the Eucharistic elements is therefore not a physical but a metaphysical event” (Bulgakov 63). The bread and wine have their own purposes for this world, namely food and drink. And when they are applied to the sacrament of communion, they do not change physically, but they become a metaphor that links, quite literally, the spiritual to the physical. Works of art can be viewed similarly. The pen and the paper are the physical things of this world, and with both, information can be communicated. However, when the pen is used to communicate an experience or to draw a picture, the paper can be transmuted and can become art—the mystery that shares a piece of the artist as the artist is a part of his work; as is realized in Holy Communion, not only is Christ in the body, but the body is transformed, being in Christ. Susan Srigley states, “Fiction is an incarnational art because it offers a concrete representation of life and human existence in the facts of the story, but within these representations it can also reveal spiritual mysteries and meaning” (Srigley 17). Or as Flannery O’Connor asserts, “the meaning of a story has to be embodied in it, has to be made concrete in it […] The meaning of fiction is not abstract meaning but experienced meaning” (O’Connor 96). Good works of art as well as the Mystic Supper share this concrete experience, but the experiences are both physical and spiritual.

The Eucharist can only be approached with a delicate attitude, a “paradoxical” attitude including both solemnity and joy (Alfeyev 144). Bishop Alfeyev refers to Holy Communion as “a solemn thanksgiving, fundamental to which is praise of God” (Alfeyev 143). When artists set their mind to create a piece of art, it seems it is approached in much the same way: joyful in what they are about to partake, and solemn, perhaps, because of the weight or burden of responsibility that inevitably comes with creativity. Nevertheless, it is created, and something new arrives, not only the artwork itself, but the new person the creator becomes. O’Connor suggests that “To know oneself is to know one’s region […] and to know oneself is, above all, to know what one lacks. It is to measure oneself against Truth, and not the other way around” (O’Connor 35). The transfiguration, in terms of the creative process, is more a self-discovery. The creative process is integral with spirituality, and this is a process to which, like communion, the artist is committed so that he may know himself or realize his transfiguration.

The communicant approaches the chalice fully expecting the bread and wine to become something greater and fully
accepts the change that is to follow, and he does so on a regular basis. If he does not he is not a responsible Christian. Alfeyev asserts, “Outside the Eucharist there can be no salvation, no deification, no true life, no resurrection in eternity […] which is the aim of the Christian life” (Alfeyev 141). The great mystery of art is not only in the art itself but in the process of creation. The artist does not know why the art does what it does, but the artist allows the art to do what it is going to do, otherwise he is not a responsible creator. “There is in the human creator a parallel desire to create something that shall have as much free will as the offspring of procreation” (Sayers 64). She also declares that the “simplest and worst thing the author can do is to behave like an autocratic deity and compel the character to do his will…” (Sayers 68). Responsibility plays a pivotal role in the artist’s life; if the artist is not responsible, he does not create, and therefore, does not come to the full realization of his transfiguration.

The Eucharist and the creative process are mysterious actions that are not fully understood. There is more than bread and wine in the chalice, and there is more than just a story of a father dying, but both are paths to God and self-discovery. Without denying one’s religion, they are just as interchangeable as two peas. The Mystic Supper and the creation process are both perfect communion with God, and they are both necessary. Regardless of whether the artist feels he should put mouth to cup, or Christian put hand to clay, they are both responsible. With both, there are two aspects: visible and invisible; in the one hand, substance, and in the other, miracle.

Works Cited