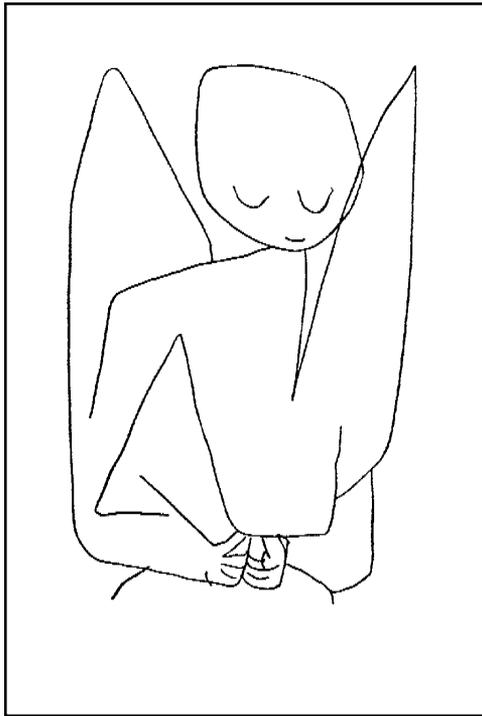


# A Small Book on Sacred



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

# S A C R E D

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“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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*Poetry East* #70

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“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*

