



# **WHERE TIME FALLS INTO ETERNITY'S RISING:**

## **POEMS ON THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH YEAR**

by  
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# WHERE TIME FALLS INTO ETERNITY'S RISING: POEMS ON THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH YEAR

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# ADVENT

## Advent

It is a familiar place,  
all this darkness,  
where we hide out  
in bomb shelter constructs  
meant to protect,  
that now imprison us  
with safety.  
Wrapped against the cold  
in dark chocolate velvet,  
we console ourselves  
in empty isolation  
brooding over  
our existential situation  
in acedic despair.

Now here we sit,  
isolated individuals  
waiting,  
listening in possible hope  
for the imperturbable sounds  
of rustling in the distance  
of an approaching rescue,  
until candles defiantly  
stabbing the night  
in vigil  
reveal that deliverance  
already among us  
in plain-chanted longing  
that breaks silence  
as together we breathe  
and feast on promised Word.



Photograph by [Lorie Shauli](#)



Wieslaw Sadurski, [\*Snow River Sun\*](#), Digital Painting, c. 2015

## Advent Office

Awakened out of sick sleep  
on a work day,  
I stand at the window  
fascinated and just watch  
the afternoon sun  
move light around  
the sailing clouds  
in a sea of sky  
that turns from  
grey to choppy blue  
to golden glowing purple  
on an ordinary  
Advent day  
when bare branches  
click praise together  
in wailing wind.

I was too sick  
to go in today,  
so my office  
is merely to witness  
and testify  
to this background  
of grace  
in which we live and move  
and have our being—  
a glorious truth  
we often fail to see  
except when we watch  
and pray  
and join the praise—  
not a bad day's work  
after all.



## Winter Solstice

It is the nadir of the year,  
the longest night  
when all is darkest.

The Christmas lights try  
to hide this scientific fact  
with a brave cheer

that illumines the fog  
on the damp dark night  
of the soul.

But out of Elijah's cave  
the soul cries for Presence:  
"Where are you, God?"

only to hear,  
"What are you doing here,  
Crouching Caveman, in fear?"

At your baptism you were given fire,  
a little candle of Spirit  
to stab against the night.

Though not a burning bush  
or a torch touching martyrs' fires,  
it is enough.

Hold it high  
and lift up your head  
to scan the dark horizon

where suddenly New Life  
will burst onto the scene  
in a blazon of activity

as the light grows  
ever brighter,  
ever deeper

until all will be encircled  
and absorbed whole  
in Dawn's Long New Day."



Johann Conrad Seekatz, *Ein Mädchen mit einer Brennenden Fackel*, c. 1760, Städelsches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie, Frankfurt, Germany

## CHRISTMAS

### **The Incarnation**

The year my husband died  
I began to understand  
the need of Incarnation.

Though love's bond  
endures eternity beyond death,  
it wants flesh.

Indeed, love needs flesh.

Though actuality annoys  
in all its ambiguities  
toward death's wind-up,

ideality of anticipation  
and remembrance  
is empty without incarnation,

a mere phantom figment  
projected against heaven  
in an image of our own making.

One cannot ignore  
an other's obdurate flesh  
that defies our own ideations,

in the vulnerability of a child's need,  
the riskiness of political protection,  
the messiness of love

beyond Word  
in words made flesh  
dwelling delightfully among us.

## First Widowed Christmas Alone



ΣΧΣNIKA-888, Photograph, Annunciation of the Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Cathedral, Toronto, 2009, Wikimedia Commons

In the deepest darkness of the year  
I drag myself from embered hearth  
to bundle against death's cold  
and gather with the other crazies  
somewhere near midnight  
on Christmas Eve  
in the cavernous tomb of a sanctuary.

Alone in the darkness with strangers  
I listen to the bleak midwinter song  
and am not warmed by the brass.  
I should have stayed home in my grief.  
There is no joy to the world for me,  
and the angels someone else has seen on high  
do not sing to me—not even second-hand.

I can't seem to find myself in this story anymore.

I must be the shepherd who stayed behind  
to tend sheep while others went to worship.



So I sit resigned, resolute,  
a dark lump wrapped in shadow.  
Except that . . . here I am—  
in worship with other hazy figures  
huddled in muffled hope.

My neighbor carefully lights  
her insignificant candle  
and holds it aloft for me to light mine.  
I, in turn, hold forth my unsteady light,  
for another to light his.  
The exchange pricks holes in our surrounding darkness.

Together we stab our flickers of hope  
into the silent night  
like ancient people keeping  
wild beasts at bay with torches of fire,  
wide-eyed with wonder that it works.  
We watch the Light gradually break forth  
with the singing of the age-old song.

And suddenly I find myself found.

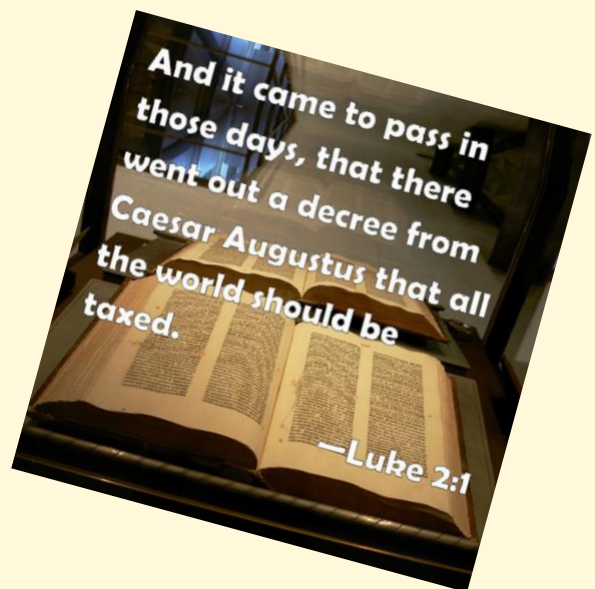
## Incarnation Narrative

What is it that becomes incarnate?  
Is it a story stitched together  
Around oppression's political hopes  
and the birth of a child?

Is it respectability for a suspect conception?  
Or is it PR spin for a new religion  
that needed God to be born  
in order to keep up with the emperor?

Perhaps these things. Who knows?  
But mostly what becomes incarnate is love  
woven out of seductive stories  
that keep hope alive in dark times.

And as the story goes,  
so reality becomes.  
And perhaps this is God with us  
after all, all along, which the Child embodies.





Anonymous, Photograph, Kneading Bread in Bread Bowl

## Christmas Miracle

There in a feeding trough  
in Bethlehem,  
the house of bread,  
lies the Bread of Life—  
a little lump  
of bastardly yeast  
that will be pummeled  
and needed,  
before laid to rest  
to rise  
and feed the world.

## Calling for Care

Because sometimes  
there are no words  
for this disaster of a world,  
the silent Word comes  
to watch  
with wide-eyed  
newborn tears.



Baby Girl, Photograph by [Photography by Laura Rose](#), 2023

## Ding Dong Dung

Into the dung of human existence  
covered over with clean straw  
so we can pretend all is well,  
He comes—  
divinity comingling with humanity  
to change a politically muddy Jordan  
lurching through time  
into a sparkling River of Life.  
Like a drop of clarifying dye

into a bloody beaker of night  
He comes—  
And somehow, beneath it all,  
in the midst of the painful cry,  
all is indeed well after all.

## IFS Christmas Credo

Beyond the protective guard of Herod  
who wants nothing more than to be in powerful control  
out of fear of being dethroned  
by what cannot be explained—  
the divine mystery at the heart of it all—  
lies a little child, helpless,  
yet full of all power.

The old story is true at depths beyond language,  
testified to by prophecies continually being fulfilled,  
with storied words to help us see

the child who cries  
cries for each of us,  
with Wisdom's knowing  
that even in some perverted way,  
the one who rules with all demand  
rules for me.  
This one new born  
has borne me in all my helpless power  
while I waited in darkness  
for hope of light that didn't come to save  
in the way I, in my desire for control, commanded.

Yet once again the ancient wisdom of story  
comes to birth at last  
in the little child who leads us all  
(as little christs) beyond our Herods within  
by going straight into the adders' den  
to embrace as Lamb our devouring wolves  
until killed by death's poisonous sting,  
the child who cannot die  
transforms all through understanding the ravening,  
offering all to be taken in by our ritual  
remembering and consummation  
in the confusing Mystery's embrace of grace.

Wolves, while still wildly seeking  
independent control,  
thus become domesticated  
into wily companions and devotion's friend.

Now here, at the cusp of this new day dawning,  
face to face again with my child who lay cold  
and hunted by grandiose Herodian dreams,  
I understand better Love's sacrifice  
in this child willing to be sacrificed for me  
to aid in love what must be at last—  
the quelling of Herod's governing guard  
enforcing a rule of fear that swallows all in death—  
that I, though refugee in Egypt for awhile,  
might live and live free.

## EPIPHANY

### Starlings in Epiphany Snow



Photo by Simon Burchell

They come at dusk,  
squawking in dark ominous circles,  
a constant swirl of swooping activity  
that demands distracted attention  
until they settle into branches of beauty  
to cling like dark knots  
clogging sapped trees.  
They are gathering like Advent darkness  
in a world gone mad,  
waiting . . .  
stealthfully waiting  
like bombers for orders to Iraq.

Something unknown startles

and they fly, a retreating dark cloud  
in protest-screach against grey skies  
leaving . . .  
leaving bare intricate trees  
wrapped up in spring dreams  
dusted with brilliant snow

gleaming in the silent light  
of a single streetlamp,  
an urban Christ candle  
illumining the Way  
of snowflakes dancing in delight  
for momentary peace.

## Feast of the Holy Encounter

Like an ancient WalMart greeter,  
the grizzled old man  
stood at the gate  
into the temple  
and asked to bless the babies.

Hesitant mothers  
watched with alarm  
as Simeon's trembling hands  
reached to embrace  
such promise,

but he was so tender,  
so delighted, as he hunched  
over like a brooding hen  
to look into their cuddled babes' eyes,  
that they relaxed into smiles.

So he spoke blessing upon blessing,  
his warm breath upon their face  
sending startled little arms and legs  
stretching in reflexive motion  
as they clucked their spittled response.

He came each day for morning prayer  
and kept his commanded, wearied watch,  
for the Master had told him  
he wouldn't be released from his post  
until he beheld promised consolation.

Simeon's withering body ached,  
standing for hours among the shuffling heat  
of dust's rearrangements  
as weary travelers  
sought mandated holy encounters.



Rembrandt, *Simeon Houdt Jesus Vast*, c. 1669,  
Nationalmuseum, Stockholm



Still, Simeon bent forward  
into a question mark  
reaching for babies' sentences  
as a reception of sheer gift,  
hoping that this time, maybe this time . . . ?

And he continued to bless  
every bless-ed day in day out;  
he eulogized newborns  
with his own hope:  
“Now, Master, may your slave depart . . . ?”

This day was no different.  
As She did each morning  
the Spirit led Simeon forth  
for morning prayer  
and more beatific babies.

Each child he took up  
was thoroughly blessed  
in hope with his prayer  
that perhaps now  
he could finally find life's release.

In each child he saw  
the light of God's future's hope  
as longed-for from of old,  
and that day was no different  
until the verb changed

from modal to indicative.

For this babe—Jesus (and mother—  
heard and took up Simeon's blessing,  
not as future anticipation but present declaration,  
reaching out to embrace the ancient promise  
of release for captives here and now.

## Baptism of Our Lord Sunday



Photo by Kaihsu Tai of David Hamid, suffragan bishop in Europe, administering an Anglican confirmation

The bishop made those being baptized  
redo their renunciations  
so that they rang out louder, stronger,  
for he knew they would need it  
when evil's fear plays hide-and-seek  
so well in our lives that no one can find it  
so they just give up looking,  
letting fear surreptitiously run the show.

One day during a youth lock-in  
we were playing Sardines,  
and Glen went to hide,  
only we couldn't find him,  
as the game requires.  
He'd slid through the secret door  
of the pipe organ's Victorian oak paneling  
into the compartment  
that concealed all the pipes,  
the place where the organ repairman works.  
There, in that secret chamber,  
Glen couldn't hear us calling and calling.

When we gave up (figuring he'd show up soon)  
and turned our attention to other games,  
he fell asleep.  
When he didn't appear, we grew alarmed,  
secretly panicked that he might have been abducted.  
We ran around the church checking the locks  
until at last the youngest kid there remembered  
that she'd seen an opening into the bottom of the organ  
through the door at the back of the sanctuary  
when she came to church early one morning long ago  
to help her father put on the coffee and turn up the thermostat.  
Knowing that Glen was an organ student,  
we tried this last spot before calling the police,  
groping the oak panels for a latch  
like actors in an old Hollywood movie  
looking for a secret passageway behind a bookcase.  
At last, we found it  
and sprang the dazed and dusty Glen into manifestation at last.  
We'd spent so much time searching for him  
that we'd had little fun and too much fear.  
Glen, too, was shaken and stuck fast  
with the rest of the group all night  
until his parents claimed him in the morning light.

Metaphors fail in calling out evil,  
for it hugs shadows, seeping into those places  
so hidden away as to be forgotten,  
sometimes sleeping, awaking only to feed on fear.  
It especially enjoys languor in adjustment spaces  
where we try to fine-tune ourselves,  
forgetting the grace of being found.  
The latch that springs us, as the bishop knew,  
is a resounding renunciation  
of evil's perennially hidden desire  
to let fear play all our stops  
until sin sends us rogue.  
So in the midst of searching saints  
he made us practice  
faith's dogged daily office  
of renouncing evil and resolutely adhering  
to the One who finds, tunes, and holds us fast.

## Evensong in Bleak Midwinter<sup>1</sup>

Like the elevated Host,  
the full moon rests  
in raised boughs of evergreen priests  
surpliced in newfallen snow  
descending in honor to greet  
hills' horizon of purple dusk  
with kiss of liminality.

Speeding down dark highways  
snaking across frosty purity,  
snow blind, we do not see,  
until, chased by rising  
in rear-view mirrors,  
we glimpse the divine gift exchange  
catching us up *in medias res*.

Blessed by backward vision,  
we pull over and turn to watch  
the ritual dance of day's demise.  
Breathless with beauty, we stand in  
respect  
like elderly southern farmers  
going to market who stop their trucks,  
get out, and stand with hatless heads bowed

before a funeral procession  
of someone they do not know  
out of deference to their known future.  
Then, vespers' recession over  
with night's descent,  
we climb back into the car  
that propels us forward

into a numb sense of loss  
gliding toward town's artificial lights  
beguiling us into a happiness  
that cannot satisfy  
like wafered moon  
raising up the evocation  
to pause and praise.



Teresa Eisenlohr, *Moon on Top of Evergreens*, AI Generated Image, Canva

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<sup>1</sup> This poem was previously published in *Ohio Bards Poetry Anthology: Poetry by Ohio Poets*, James P. Wagner and Stasha Strange, eds. (Long Island: Local Gems Poetry Press, 2023).

# LENT

## Imposition of Ashes



Photograph in *Brooklyn Eagle*, 4 March, 2014

In the same lines they form  
during communion by intinction,  
an endless stream of saints  
slithers forward like one long snake.  
They expose foreheads  
to receive the sign of the cross,  
this smudge of ashes.  
I (yet not I) baptized some of them,  
sealing them in like manner  
with Holy Spirit water.  
“Remember, you have been baptized!”  
I want to shout with the wild-eyed Luther.  
“Turn away! Look to the cross  
Where the serpent writhes!  
Choose life, not death!”



For something in me resists all this  
wallowing together in the dust  
of our own petty pietistic sins  
imposed with the grace mark of Cain  
and the inevitable pronouncement:  
“Remember you are dust  
and to dust you shall return.”

After so many, they become like walking dead,  
zombies conveyed forward,  
corpse upon corpse without reality  
like cordwood-stacked Holocaust victims  
rolled into the gaping jaws of open pits  
in army films of camps’ liberation.  
Out of this endless streambed of death  
floats up the stench of deeper sin  
that lies buried, unnamed,  
yet looming on the horizon  
with the threat of war—  
an utter helplessness  
before the onslaught  
of row upon endless row  
of cross upon cross  
marking so much waste  
in national cemeteries.  
Lord, have mercy!

Then something changes.

As eye meets eyes searching  
for my acknowledgement  
of what this ashen stain means  
for the beloved before me  
just diagnosed with terminal cancer,  
the unspoken knowledge  
that our time is precious,  
that we may never share this ritual again  
before we are locked in deathbed struggle  
against the serpent slithering through dust,  
I am overwhelmed.  
Tears begin flowing  
into the pyx of ashes.  
I pause,  
breathless.  
Memory stumbles  
as words fail, and, forgetting my role,  
I can only whisper, as with ash I sign:

“Remember . . . remember whose you are.  
In life and death you belong to God.”  
Then I kiss her smudged forehead  
as with babies fresh from the font.  
Out of this sudden baptism of Spirit Compassion  
springs forth others’ sympathetic tears  
with the wild crying priest marking all  
with sign of both life and death.

In the sacred space hovering hushed  
beneath brooding angels’ wings  
in the shadow  
of the sanctuary’s huge suspended cross,  
the numb dance of death  
becomes a stately minuet of life.  
Corpses come to life again as,  
through the baptism of all our tears,  
we begin to see Something More come forth:

A child clings to her father’s knees,  
crying, “But Daddy, I don’t want you to die!”  
A couple, secretly estranged,  
now reaches silently for hands,  
exchanging a wedding-vow gaze.  
Behind them the snaked line of individuals  
begins to slough off  
as folks now step up two-by-two,  
wordlessly knowing we cannot face  
this awful truth alone.  
The body-pierced Green Hair tenderly  
helps the immaculately suited Blue Hair  
accept her fate.  
The CEO who fired two workers just last week  
steps in line with the long-unemployed ballerina.  
At the rear, the two ushers  
who ordinarily can’t stand one another,  
bow together before me,  
united with us all at last  
in accepting their communion  
in death to all death  
under this transfigured sign.

## Lenten Discipline

Around the abandoned well  
gallop horse weeds in a tangle  
that no doubt holds snakes deep within,  
yet she pulls her way through unafraid.  
After all, she knows how  
to take the clearing rake of bronze  
and catch the writhing serpent,  
casting it far away overhead  
so that it slithers back to whence it came  
from long ago in some nearby far-off realm  
where dew shines like jewels in the morning sun.

So she patiently proceeds,  
not knowing exactly why,  
except that some force compels her  
to make her way in to the well  
capped like an ancient altar  
upon which fish were sacrificed  
for sacred meals. This land taken  
from her ancestors is not hers, but she knows  
its course in her own ancient river  
of blood that cries out not for vengeance,  
but restitution's peace.

Thirsty now, she cuts through  
all the dying underbrush  
with its wild-rose thorns, greenbrier,  
and sawgrass ripping into her legs.  
Raw hands grasping solid coolness,  
she struggles to roll away the stone  
to the sweet aroma of living water  
at the bottom of the dark,  
as a flash of light proclaims  
its rippled praise  
in earthen rain from above.

Most passersby glimpse  
native itinerant farm worker  
clearing an overgrown land,  
if they see her at all.  
But those who look more closely,  
over history's penumbral edge,  
into her searching deep black eyes,  
may find hope's just desolation  
reflecting back a promise



Nikolay Andreyev, Untitled, 1930, Wikimedia Commons

with mourning's demand for reconciliation  
in Providence-dripping fields.

## TRIDUUM—THE GREAT THREE DAYS

### Foot Washing

Did anyone ever think  
they could get in God's good grace  
by taking out the garbage?

That shit's for the privileged few  
who idealize their servants  
to keep them in their place

by lauding them as greater  
in the Kingdom,  
as Jesus' foot washing implies.

Except that's not exactly the story.  
Because it's not about the servant  
as much as it is about the guest

being clean enough to be ushered in  
to the host's household  
with newly washed feet.

Always jockeying for position,  
the disciples wanted their share  
in Jesus' royal household.

So Jesus became their servant  
to make them clean enough  
to enter the host's banquet

and to show them how to get in—  
by serving all—not with self-righteousness  
that I'm so good I can lower myself

to wash feet, and thus earn God's favor,  
as the ritual's become for us,  
to Paul and Luther's dismay—



Illustration by unknown artist, c. 1100, in *Otto III Gospels*, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich

but as an extension of the invisibility  
of quiet service on behalf of others  
getting in on divine grace

without even an inkling of hope  
about ourselves being invited to join  
that table ourselves

like the least of household servants  
who washed the feet of honored guests  
as they entered, moving from out to in,

or like that unnamed woman  
so grateful for something Jesus had done for her  
that she burst into the meal to give thanks

and offered what she had,  
tears and hair and perfumed oil,  
used in her sinful trade

to wash her Lord's feet,  
not to drum up business anymore,  
but just to show abject gratitude for grace

despite the shame she drew  
from the upright community leaders  
around that table in her prostration.

For she already knew she was out,  
not in, as we're sure we are,  
when we kneel to wash another's feet.

Maundy Thursday's not about us  
washing grody feet as idealized servants  
of the good gatekeeping folks we are.

It's about being washed  
like babies and infirm folks  
having diapers changed with tender care

by the One who loves us enough  
to take on the shame of what's to come.  
And falling down grateful, so awash in tears,

we forget the seating arrangements  
to help everyone else with their shit,



Print by Michiel Natalis, after Reubens, c. 1650



so all are in—baptized, perfumed, and whole.

## Langston Hughes on Maundy Thursday

When dreams die  
they land with a dull thud  
like a prizefighter,  
who was supposed to win,  
down for the count  
never to stand again.

Age knocks most of us out  
with the push of youth  
coming behind us,  
and we defer,  
deafening our ears  
to visions' music

until our life lies  
like a beach splayed out  
against the sky's ocean  
with the stinging slap  
of cruel waves  
as grief ebbs and flows.

What's more real—  
idealism's sunburned glory  
or pragmatism's obdurate  
sideways dance toward survival  
like crabs upended  
in time's surf?

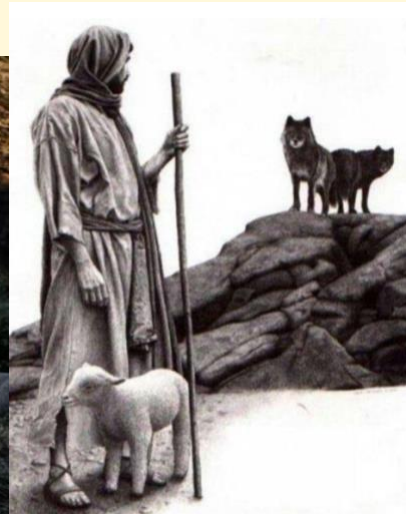
I don't know.  
Instead, I avert eyes,  
pass by on the other side,  
like any good priest,  
avoiding words  
stripped of meaning.

For Hughes knew:  
all dreams die eventually,  
and the broken-winged dove  
cries and limps,  
unsure of how—and whether—  
to go on.



Rembrandt, *The Denial of Saint Peter*, 1660, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Rembrandt captures the moment when Peter's denial coincides with Jesus being led to Pilate's court in the shadows of the upper right background.

## Scattering



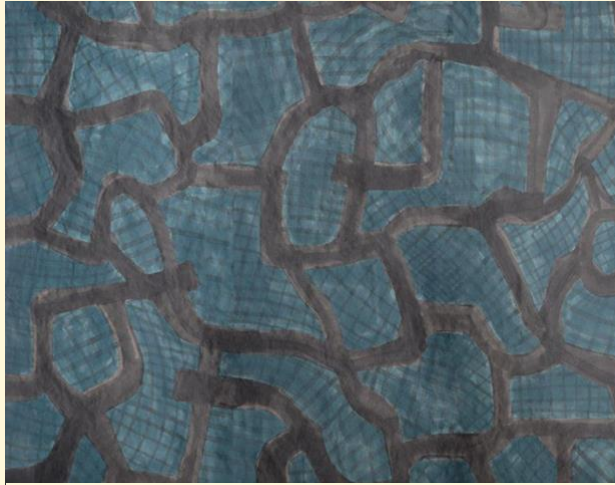
To trick the devouring wolf  
the shepherd smears himself  
in the blood of his dead branded sheep  
attacked earlier by wolves  
so that the predator comes for him.  
Thus diverted, the wolf  
meets shepherd's crook  
while lambs scamper safely away.

So goes the Good Shepherd  
in solidarity sheep's clothing among wolves,  
stripped and dressed as Passover lamb  
thrown to military pack of snarling rage  
so that all humanity's lost sheep  
can scamper safe into the arms of God  
bleeding out love, branding all  
with a cross, "Beloved."



Delacroix, *Christ on the Cross*, 1846, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MD.

## No Light Without, No Light Within



Although this is a wallpaper and fabric design by [Porter Teleo](#), it is similar to what stained glass windows look like with the tangle of lead being their prominent feature when it's dark outside.

In the gathering gloom we gathered  
in an out-of-place Gothic cathedral  
rising above nail salons and wig shops  
policed by the poverty of sired fear,  
and we heard of The One nailed  
and crowned to the taunts and jeers  
of steely drunken soldiers  
anointing courage with vinegared wine.

In the descending doom of evening,  
light through the stained-glass windows faded,  
obscuring pictures of divine life shining there  
until eventually all we saw of Christ the King  
was a tangle of lead like that that tipped the whip  
beating a bloody course of chaos across meaning  
as one by one dimly burning wicks were snuffed out  
and humanity's degradation, lifted up in darkness,  
rose higher with the simple cry, "Forgive."

## ***Strepitus***

*an elegy for DGB*



[Antoni Gaudi, Tenebrae Candelabra, Museums of the Sagrada Familia](#)

The Good Friday readings  
roll like a stone downhill  
gathering speed  
until they slam  
the tomb shut  
on our Lord in death.  
The liturgical strepitus  
shocks/scares us  
into silence.  
I know it's coming, of course,  
but it gets me every time.

I don't like loud noises  
that startle suddenly  
like a crashing emergency  
that slams life down  
and pins it to the mat  
like some abducting wrestler  
named God  
wounding Jacob  
in order to win the day.  
We knew you were dying  
but it crashed/crushed us still.

Usually the strepitus  
involves a little stagecraft—  
shaking a metal sheet  
like a Foley artist making thunder  
or dropping a heavy stone  
on a wooden sanctuary floor  
so no one knows what happened.  
But it doesn't sound good,  
like when kids are playing  
upstairs and something falls  
to send parents running, alarmed





Paschal candle, Church of St. Mary, Rotherhithe, England, [Wikimedia Commons](#)

I heard of a pastor once  
who took the Paschal candle  
from the year passing  
and smashed it violently  
on the altar table  
until old Mrs. McMurphy  
was picking shards of wax  
out of her wig for months afterwards.  
The congregation had no light  
of the world for a whole day,  
no surety of its return.

After your funeral  
I sit shocked in your office  
amid your myriad books,  
remembering all the times  
I'd sat in that chair  
talking sacraments and Word  
and performance theory  
with you so lively, so alive,  
a big fluffy dog spread out  
between us lapping up affection  
and laughter flowing with tears.

Shards of those times  
pick up speed,  
threatening to melt  
my Stoic façade.  
I need to process, think, honor  
with thoughtful words of gratitude  
for how your gracious care  
changed my life, but all crashes  
on the word you taught me,  
the only word that comes:  
“Streptitus!”



## Mary, The Next Day

Past all tears now,  
Mary sits very still  
like a rabbit  
frozen  
in underbrush of cover,  
waiting for time, like danger, to pass  
over and around and through her  
in the hope  
that by marking its flow,  
she can bathe in its mourning  
until all will somehow be safe  
and cleansed into deliberate motion  
again.

Perhaps then,  
refreshed and renewed  
through grief's undying vigil,  
the promise that was hers  
will rise reborn someday,  
and she will revel once more  
in Love's eternal entangled forest  
that holds both her and time secure.

But today,  
in these murky woods  
where praying wolves howl,  
hope lies  
like a faraway angelic dream  
of Messianic ideals  
among shattered limbs  
cut down by high winds,  
and tossed into time's dark stream  
that nonetheless babbles  
the obdurate eternity of love,  
Mary sits still,  
very, very still.



Guercino, *St Peter Weeping before the Virgin* (cropped),  
1647, Louvre Museum, Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois,  
France

## Holy Saturday Gardening



Collage of photos from various seed catalogs and Martha Stewart's azaleas

It is too bright for our eyes--  
all this chartreuse and fuchsia  
bursting through blossoms of  
intense lily white.

The colors' riot feels all wrong.

The perfume of hyacinths  
hangs humid and still  
in the waiting air straining  
toward . . . something more.

Could it be a sweet-smelling sacrifice?

No, we still hang suspended  
in the tortured screams  
of last night's Good Friday  
whose darkness is our reality.

Our world is black and white.

So this blasphemy of blossoms  
on choired birds' breasts  
mocks us with wanted hope  
we cannot yet believe

but wish we could.

Blinded and still,  
we strain toward tomorrow,  
perched to wait and watch  
and perhaps (who knows?) to see

what rises right in front of us now.

## EASTER

### A Little *Hilaritas* "What If" à la Elijah

What if,  
lying in the tomb  
the Light overshadowed  
the darkness  
and called Jesus' name:  
"Arise, shine!  
*Anastasis*: Stand up.  
Be resurrected!"

And Jesus had replied,  
"No thanks.  
I'm tired, and I hurt.  
Do you know what they do to people?  
Why would I want more of that?  
I'll just stay here, safe.  
Leave me alone  
and let me die already!"

Then he turned away,  
curled up into the dark  
and stayed dead.  
No one could have blamed him.  
It IS all too much—  
this dying and rising—  
all this fuss for so little  
yet so much, for everything.

*Easter is like a divine prank played on evil. Evil thought it had vanquished God's Way in the world with the crucifixion of Jesus, but, like a classic trickster character, up rose Jesus. The resurrection should be announced with resounding laughter, which is why some places celebrate Easter with hilaritas, humor. Despite the very real tragedies of this world's crucifixions, Christian faith is ultimately a divine comedy, a cause for joy and celebration and merry-making. It is in this tradition that this poem was written, imagining Jesus as a complaining Jewish comedian.*

*N.B.: Anastasis is the Greek word for resurrection. It literally means "to stand up or be raised."*

## Milton on Easter Monday



Jacob Jordaens, *Adam and Eve*, 1642, Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio

Dejected, I ride home from my Milton class.  
After all the great beauty of Paradise,  
God conversing with Adam and Eve  
in the cool of the evening—  
a picture of all we long for as human beings—  
I had hoped that maybe, just maybe  
the story might turn out different somehow.  
But they fell just like they have been forever.

Last Friday I sat in church remembering  
a petulant teen who balked at going to Good Friday services.  
“It’s the same every year,” he protested.  
“They kill him every time.”

Why do we keep subjecting ourselves over and over  
to the same old trauma of the cross?  
It IS pretty much the same every year.  
The story doesn't change.  
We hope it'll go otherwise,  
but we know better.

We know about Bosnia and Rwanda,  
conscripted child soldiers and baby doll sex slaves  
satisfying the appetites of those with purchase power.  
We can smell the terror of those hiding from raging abusers  
drunk with staggering guns,  
see the fear flash death against a black hoodie  
of an African-American teen just walking  
his way home in innocence.  
History piles up the evidence like Ezekiel's bones  
from mass graves in forests unknown.  
It howls at us from the screech of police cars  
or the starving accusations of babies with vacant eyes.  
We know how the story goes.  
It's the same old same old year in, year out.

From a certain perspective, evil is without novelty,  
despite its intensification of intrigue and gore—  
the stuff that makes for good Hollywood box office receipts.  
Every year it's the same sniveling religious leaders,  
brutalizing soldiers, jeering crowd,  
cowardly pompous Pilate  
ignoring a wife's whispers in the background.  
It's practically boring because it's all so . . . predictable.  
Sad, lamentable, of course, but also expected  
like Milton's fall in the lush narrative:  
fear of threat, shuffling of shadows, snuffing of light—  
1, 2, 3 like a Tinseltown script—  
same old same old boring,  
these powers of destruction.

Oh, you say this is sacrilege, blasphemy even,  
perhaps an occupational hazard  
of theologians who know  
how the sausage is made—  
by requiring the death of an intelligent pig  
who, while baptized in mud,  
somehow knows how his story will end, too.  
Or perhaps you'll chalk it up to old age  
in an age where after awhile  
our culture's novelty wears off



leaving nothing but a thin veneer of ennui  
no longer affected by others' suffering.  
Maybe it's the narrators of the story  
who read the Passion passionless each year.  
But I don't think that's it.

The torture still kicks the breath out of us.

It's just that destruction is  
so cause-and-effect predictable,  
like a science experiment of chemical reactions  
with explosive results,  
as boring as the lecture of an academic  
who no longer does field work  
and has taught the same intro course  
for decades with nary a change.

Compare Good Friday to Easter, though,  
and surprise abounds.  
We know that story, too,  
how on the first day of the week at daybreak  
the women were just going to anoint the body  
and found everything awry, amiss,  
and confoundingly back in order.  
It seems no one still knows what happened  
because the accounts form infinite variety.

Something deeper beyond the historical familiar is at work here—  
unique creativity, astonished whispers of resurrection.  
Not restoration or repair of what's broken  
or flower dying in winter and returning in spring.  
But something so new we can't rationally comprehend it  
even as we know its truth beyond images,  
for it surges through creation's song itself.  
Each year, yes, the lilies stifle with sweetness.  
Scrubbed acolytes still process protecting precious light.  
The choir sings the same songs they've been butchering for ages.  
Yet somehow it's all breathtakingly new,  
fragile and strong  
as hope itself winging across the world  
encountering astonishing novelty of choice  
among humans who should know better  
but who refuse destruction's predictability  
in the embrace of resurrection's storied creation *ex nihilo*.

# PENTECOST

## Pentecost Invitation

Spirit beguiles through preachers' cooing  
like a Frank Sinatra crooner: "Come fly with me."  
So we climb aboard the snow-white dove,  
nuzzling into innocent irenics of soft-feathered down  
while soaring up, as on eagles' wings,  
exhilarated by drunken joy of transcendent viewpoint.

Then the dove dives straight into the wound of Christ's side,  
bloodied with painting the town red,  
bursting full-heart into the flames of a suffering world  
before out Christ's mouth She's hurled in a torrent of Word.  
Baptized in fire, molten,  
we're sobered silent into shock.

Still on the dove rides, dive-bombing an eagle,  
weaving, bobbing, careful to avoid the eagle-on-top  
shredding with razor-sharp talons.  
Frightened, we scream to get off this kamikaze bird  
like children on a rollercoaster that looked like a blast  
until the first long drop with the loop-de-loop.

But on the dove soars, violently pitching on hurricane winds  
that dance like wildfire across tinder woods of creation  
until, burnt and babbling wild as prophets,  
we hang on (we can do no other),  
finally accepting our place under blessed wings of consolation,  
smoldering still with memory, that fold tenderly at last

in wisdom descending  
to roost peacefully camouflaged in clefts of rock,  
preening beauty with dust and water-splash alike,  
until once more it is time to spread breathtaking wings  
over the abyss and ascend into next mission of divine invitation  
to our delirious crowing delight.



Alex W, [Dove and Flaming Heart Painting on Canvas](#), 20th century, United States

# ORDINARY TIME

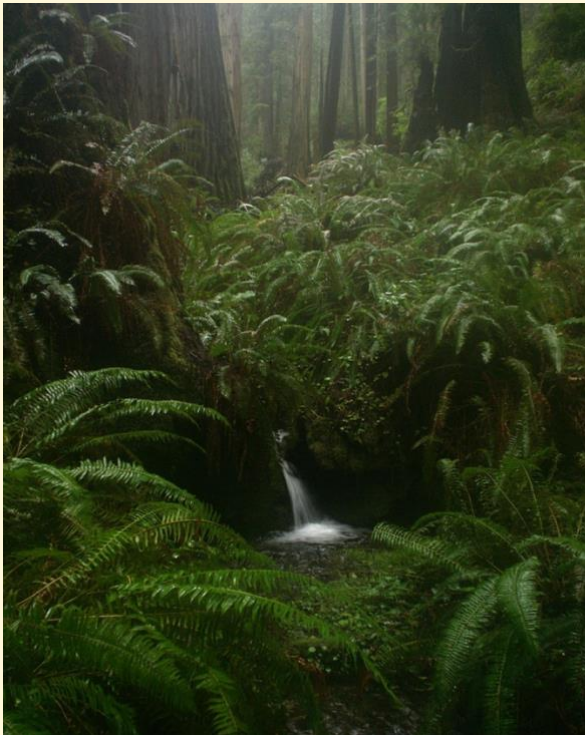


Photo by Owen Lloyd, Rhododendron Trail, Prairie Creek  
Redwoods State Park, Humboldt County, California

## Ordinary Time

Ordinary time!  
How could this possibly be?

Time itself,  
descended from eternity,  
stretches forth beauty  
all around us  
as its lava flow  
hardens into  
rocks carved by rivers  
that feed ferns  
in the depths of shadows  
that eventually  
tumble into pools  
of splashy light  
bathing us all  
with flesh  
touching flesh  
and tenderness  
as a mother  
counts newborn toes  
wet from the womb,  
pondering  
the love that made all.

Ordinary?  
Hardly!

## Feast Day of The Blessed Mother

A medieval illuminated manuscript shows Mary, who's handed Jesus to a mindful angel for safe keeping while she, sitting atop the devil like some WWE wrestler, beats the shit out of him. In another, she's poking the devil's eye out or punching him in the face or both. It's not clear which. In one she stands atop Satan driving a cross into his heart. Another wrestling one depicts Mary holding Beelzebub's arm behind him with one hand to get him to cry "Uncle!" as she flogs him with the other hand so that he's vomiting up Theophilus' contract. In yet another she's beheaded Satan with her terrible swift sword, victorious like St. George with his dragon. When Jesus gets a little older, she raises a rod to some chicken-footed demon, as if to thump him aside so she can cross the street safely with her boy in hand. And then there's the one where she's hammering on the devil's head like a wild blacksmith while a grown Jesus, hanging out in a cloud, looks down with his hand up as if to say, "That's enough now, Mother." The angels in all these works look a little alarmed. As are we. Here's a woman who outmatches the devil in her blue dress for sure.



Illustration, *Taymouth Hours*, c. 1240, England, British Library, London



Illustration, *The De Brailles Hours*, 13th-century MS, England, British Museum, London



Illustration, *Taymouth Hours*, 14th century MS, England British Library, Yates Thompson MS 13





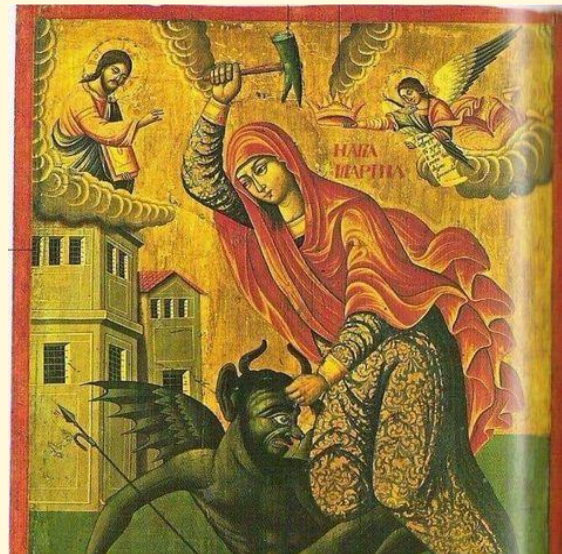
Illustration, *Smithfield Decretals*, c. 1300-1340, France, British Library, Royal MS 10 E IV



Juan de Miranda, Painting on Canvas, 1778, Iglesia de la Concepción, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain



Giovanni da Monte Rubiano, *Our Lady of Succour*, c. 1506, Caltavuturo



Ikon of St. Marina, c. 1850, Greece, Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens. Though not Mother Mary, Saint Marina is acting in accord with the tradition of good women beating the devil.

I confess: I never much cared for artistic depictions of Mary. She seems an insipid vessel for men's salvation, painted as some passive, acted-upon milk cow cowering before the male gaze when she wasn't expressing the Milky Way from exposed breast. She's merely there to hold the baby most of the time, like too many women—mother meek and mild, never any trouble, draping her blues about her



with lilies tucked away somewhere for abused consolation.  
Every now and then she gets to play the Queen  
as men dress her up in ermine and jewels  
like some ancient beauty pageant goddess  
sitting atop the world's pedestal in a gold throne.  
But mostly she's just there  
to further someone else's plotline.  
The blessed mother, blessed because she's mother,  
not real, flesh-and-blood woman.

I prefer the wild wrestling Mary  
because these crude depictions are true.  
Real mothers beat off the devil all the time  
for the sake of furthering their children's plots.  
They submit to the surgical rape of childbirth  
to ensure the first gasping breaths of someone else's life,  
endure bleeding nipples and mastitis seven times  
as they wonder if they'll ever wear anything  
but this blue nightgown ever again.  
A real mother leaps out of her car  
to bless out some careless kid driver  
who didn't look before turning  
and almost hit her car where her baby sat.  
She stops the car in the middle of the street,  
blocking the driver's way, knocking on his window.  
"Look! That's my baby you almost hit! No, don't you look away!  
Look at what you almost did! You need to pay attention!"  
Shocked into meek and mild, the boy driver cowers before her  
and promises to be more careful.  
Bullhorn in hand, a real mother protests before capitols,  
rhetorically wresting rulers into submission  
to the demands of justice for the least of these.  
A real mother, upon seeing a stranger pull her child into his car,  
picks up a rock and hurls it through the windshield,  
startling the driver to release. Then, holding her child's hand,  
she marches down to the police station to give a statement  
and description that nails the culprit, saving others.  
A real mother responds to her sassy child saying  
she hates her when she won't let her do something harmful  
with "Yeah? Well, I love you enough to have you hate me."  
And when she suspects drugs might be involved,  
hell hath no fury as the battle lines are drawn  
and won with surveillance, locks, and tender tears.  
Motherhood is not for the passive, decorative faint-of-heart  
but for valiant warriors who'll harrow hell itself  
for the sake of their child.

So give us more of the WWE Mary  
with flailing arms and legs on prayers  
while shocked angels wonder  
what in the world  
God has done now  
with the creation of such awesome women  
that even startled demons run for cover—  
as they should.

*\*\*For more on this more robust tradition of Mary, see Vanessa R. Corcoran, "Queen of Heaven, Empress of Hell," Contingent Magazine, 25 April 2020, accessed online at <https://contingentmagazine.org/2020/04/25/empress-of-hell/>.*

## A Preacher's Prayer



Photo courtesy of [www.ForestWander.com](http://www.ForestWander.com)

Here in this foggy clearing of words,  
may your Word emerge  
like a deer from the forest  
to grace with a glimpse  
of breathtaking beauty that gazes  
with soft eyes of wondering kindness  
before leaping once more into cover.

I understand I cannot look upon You  
too long for fear my soul  
will be burned into blindness  
like eyes that gaze upon the sun.  
Every now and then, though,  
peek through fog with white flick of tail  
so I remember this weary chase is not in vain.

I keep watch at poetic edge of language,  
like a child mesmerized by lava lamps  
where molten fluidity rises  
in ever-unique amoeboid shapes  
on a journey destined  
only to fall back down again  
into fiery primordial ooze.

My fellow creatures know our place in time:  
death has numbered our days,  
but it cannot change  
your ways of Be-ing itself,  
and your first law of thermodynamics:  
matter is neither created nor destroyed;  
it's all only energy changing forms.

We're but earthly lava lamp lumps  
rising to fall back into  
your glowing meonic potential  
at the end of foggy language  
where hidden Word awaits revelation  
in glory's full fire,

uncontained by any form,  
yet resurrecting all fallen shapes  
with animating Be-ing-Itself,  
transforming even death  
into fiery minuet of glory  
that discloses oozing forms  
of Beauty's brief emergence.

But while I have breath to praise,  
let me look for graced glance of promise  
on the days' hot haze of horizon  
where time falls into eternity's rising  
and, seeing form approaching,  
give chase through burning fog  
with glowing globs of leaping words.

## Light Interrupts This Program

I weary of worthless words  
in a discount world  
intent upon commodifying all.  
Slogans, op-eds, even sermons  
weave words into ads  
for Wall Street, their maker god,  
trying to capture and sell us like slaves.

Meanwhile, Light reveals  
beauty resting silent all around—  
in that certain slant of sun  
through the early morning window  
providing a pad for stretching cat  
with tips of fur afire;  
in the way our beloved's face shines  
with delight when we enter a room;  
when the baby's insistent wails  
dissolve into giggling smiles;  
when sunflowers someone planted  
by the interstate long ago  
stand at attention  
saluting the One who bids them rise  
and live into their name.  
The spider sits in her glistening web  
broadcasting intricacies of connection.  
Wind rustles through birches,  
as birds sing out praise  
over katydid drone  
and children squeal in distant games.  
Here is life's true background  
in which we live and move and have our being.

Yet we choose to foreground  
incessant squawks  
of artificial TV hawks  
greased by Oxy-Clean ads  
convincing us that we need more light.  
No wonder  
no bushes blaze for anyone anymore  
beneath this sacred canopy  
scorched by the profane hole in its ozone layer.  
We extinguish true prophets for profits,  
leaving them to kill themselves  
out of despair



Photo by [Laslovarga](#), Ontario, Canada, July 27, 2013, Wikimedia Commons.



underneath Cedar-O broom trees,  
forgetting that angels of light come  
with comfort food made by hands of love  
that cradle all in robust songs of praise.

## Walking in a Cemetery on All Saints Day

We've come to commune with the dead.  
Their silence somehow stills and comforts  
the living in its growth rambling all around  
like a mute chained dog frenetic to escape  
into peril beyond the wrought iron fence.

In this soft seedbed of earth  
comingling with stony witnesses  
testifying amid soft mounds and recesses  
to the molten uncertainties of terra firma,  
death and life here meet.

Curious with us and one another,  
the saints beckon from beyond  
with carved words of rock-solid hope  
rent from scripted poetry long forgotten  
by the dog-eat-dog world beyond the gates.

Their beneficent echoes hover hushed for all,  
but for those who can pause to ponder  
the preponderance of our common fate  
and the monumental hope that holds us all,  
the firm death-grip of life eternal still dogs.



Photo by Sally Ingraham, "Cemetery Deer," Allegheny Cemetery, Pittsburgh, PA, Oct. 31, 2013, [Flickr](#).

## A Communion of Saints



Dmitrii Afanasev, *Frozen Fountain*, ©Dreamstime.com

Most folks are home asleep, snug in bed,  
while I, who cannot sleep, walk streets  
cold with premature snow, searching for . . .  
what? . . . some nameless unknown.  
Traveling familiar paths at linguistic edge,  
I have lost my way in thought  
until, drawn by light, I happen upon center.

Victorian streetlamps surround the town square  
with its gloriously carved frozen fountain.  
Like still-life figures carefully placed by loving hands  
around the baby Jesus in nativity tableau,  
the ancient torches stand like sentinels,  
keeping watch over what once flowed free  
and good with summer spray of grace.

Strangely warmed in memory, I find myself found  
on empty benches where daytime pigeons brood,  
dwarfed among stalwart saints that illumine such nights,  
gratefully guided by Christ-candle sentinels  
whose shining still beckons the peripatetic lost  
in dark times, to come keep centered watch  
over what was and is and will flow yet again

## *Ecce Homo*

Behold, our king  
enthroned high  
upon our degradation  
as the lowest of the low,  
a death-row insurrectionist  
hoisted up over a garbage dump  
as a bloodied bronze snake  
was lifted up in the wilderness  
to break the power of snakes'  
forked tongues twitching  
for ordered state torture.

His coronation wasn't much  
of a do, no chariot parade,  
just a make-shift affair  
with a tangled crown  
and a body bruised and crushed,  
installed upon a wooden throne  
made of trees he remembered  
making with tender fingers  
that also curled upon thorned tendrils  
growing like greenbrier's  
hawking of winter's past.

Stripped of royal robes, there he is  
splayed out in the emperor's new clothes  
of love that only eyes of faith  
can see beyond the sanguine rivulets  
of smeared mud and spit  
with which he identified when baptized  
in the Jordan he dug out  
and blew on its way at creation.  
"Wasn't it mud and spit he used to heal!?!"  
the wagging tongues jeered.  
"Where's his healing now?"

No wonder the church has trouble  
with Christ the King Sunday.  
As unruly subjects who, like those of old,  
refuse to be ruled,  
we want to choose democratic leaders  
who are well-groomed with pearly teeth,  
whose charisma translates on camera,  
who give us what we want when we want it,  
and who don't tax us much in return.



Heavenly Saints, Fiberglass Figure, [Christ Scourged](#), 2023

We don't tolerate well the embarrassment  
of a bare-assed king struggling to breathe  
while sweating out blood out on a cross.

Yet *ecce homo*, there he is,  
in all his failing frail humanity,  
the apotheosis of Adam  
and very God of very God,  
confronting us like that billboard  
in *The Great Gatsby* with watching eyes  
at this crossroad of decision:  
Will we be subject to the confounding reign  
of *kenotic* service to all  
or will we clamor for known bandits  
making off with our goods? We choose.