Cover
Lisa Daley
Vessels; coil built & thrown then altered stoneware
10"
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>Homeward Bound</td>
<td>Audrey Orteza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Poem</td>
<td>The Invitation</td>
<td>John Hare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Story</td>
<td>The Laying of Hands</td>
<td>Tina Boscha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Poem</td>
<td>Raisin the Host</td>
<td>Rob Huie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Poem</td>
<td>A dubiousdoubtful Eden</td>
<td>Laura Veltman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>From Patriarchy to Partnership</td>
<td>Gregory Heille, with Christine Byl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Poem</td>
<td>jericho</td>
<td>Lambert VanPoolen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>Blue Gardens</td>
<td>Alan Aukeman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Poem</td>
<td>STREETSigns</td>
<td>Jennifer Gillenwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Portfolio</td>
<td>The Further Adventures Of...</td>
<td>Matt VanderPol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Yuk-Yuk</td>
<td>Herman Newt Tickles Circle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Untitled Photograph
## Visual Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Medium/Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kim Fynewever</td>
<td>Untitled; photograph; 6.5&quot;x 9.75&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Untitled; photograph; 7&quot;x 9.75&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave Mantel</td>
<td>Untitled; photograph; 9.75&quot;x 7.25&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen Bulthuis</td>
<td>Child Fears; woodcut; 13.5x15.25&quot;</td>
<td>Movement; woodcut; 15x21&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Quist</td>
<td>Untitled; stoneware; 10&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva DeGroot</td>
<td>Untitled; Stoneware; 12&quot;</td>
<td>Untitled; mixed media; 20x30&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynelle Regnerus</td>
<td>The Fenceline; oil on canvas; 18&quot;x15&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen Bulthuis</td>
<td>Tribal Dance; woodcut; 7.75&quot;x6&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave Mantel</td>
<td>Untitled; photograph; 7.5&quot;x10&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Last summer, my parents moved out of the house in which I had grown up. Driving down to visit them in their new home, I was struck by a feeling of homelessness. Morgantown, the place where I grew up, seems like the only place which I can truly call my home. Yet it doesn't feel right to call a place I visit three weeks of the year home. Although I can rattle off the local history of the places and people in Morgantown, I walk through the streets of the town out of time—seeing things not quite as they are, but as they were. Since I've been in college for the past three-and-a-half years, I have spent my summers living in Washington D.C., and nine months in Grand Rapids. Neither of these places seems like home either. There is another place, the place I was born, the place my parents call home. It is on the other side of the world and I haven't been there for years.

I remember the first day of class in America. After the morning bell, we were asked to stand up to pledge allegiance to the flag. The other kids pushed their seats back, stood up, placed their right hands over their hearts; I stayed in my plastic chair fiddling with my pencil. My first grade teacher, Mrs. Riley, asked me if I wanted to join the class. I shook my head no. Back then I felt no allegiance to the flag which hung over the blackboard. My home was a whole day away by airplane; I was a stranger to this place. Within a week, I began to stand. Probably I feared being seen as a pariah more than I didn't care about the flag. This question of home disappeared as I began assimilating into American culture.

In the meantime, home would be dictated by geography. The place I lived I called home. But is geography what defines home? Are we constrained by where we are? Driving around the grid layout of a Chicago suburb recently, I felt trapped by the place. The houses looked very similar from block to block, all uniformly low on the horizon. Heaven and earth were clearly divided: the openness of the space above and the rigidity of the space we've constructed. Even the small patches of green surrounding the houses were neat and trim. In a space where everything is neat and orderly one comes to impose such order on one's experiences. There is a tenuous connection between where and why, between who I am and where I am, where I choose to live because of who I am.

I looked into the windows of those split-level homes wondering if the people inside
them also had their lives spelled out in calendars and planners. Living life in boxes. In this box I live; and in the next box my neighbor; within these boxes a thousand more containing individuals, ideas, beliefs. I looked closer, searching for a man, woman, child, gone mad because their identity could not, would not, be contained by space—and I caught a reflection of myself in the car window.

The hills and mountains in Morgantown make it virtually impossible for any road to continue on a straight line very far. There are twists and turns in the road which take one up and down the town. Some roads just end in an open field. Unlike the houses of a fairly young suburb, the houses I see are spread out, separated by creeks and trees and hills. The houses are built where the land cooperates, or rather, where we have found ways to manipulate it. In such a space, where all one can see is fertile land melded with the open sky, what can one expect? How does our place, our geography factor into who we are, and who we were? It seems that my identity is rooted in places I know well. It is these places I return to when I feel disconnected. Home. Where I know who I am and where I come from.

A friend tells me that his home is not America. He has never lived anywhere else but America, yet he feels estranged from the people. He found his place among his father's family living in Holland. He thinks he must go back to his roots, so he can finally be at home. Whenever I step into my parents new house, I feel I am home although I have never lived there. How can this be? Is it because we are social beings and a part of who we are depends not on where we are on the map at the present time? Are we shaped both by the lives of those around us, and of those who came before us?

Homelessness stems not from lack of a physical place. It comes from lacking a place I've come from, from standing alone, apart from everything else. Sometimes I wander off dropping no bread crumbs to follow when I finally turn to go. I wonder what it would be like for me to return to the Philippines after such a long absence. Would I be at home in a place where my ancestors lived? Or are my ideas of living in a third world country based not on reality, but on the romantic ideas of my childhood? Everytime I go back to Morgantown, I notice that my conception of life there is skewed. The physical distance I have from that place has created this feeling of homelessness. I am left questioning where I came from. Where I am going.

In a few months I will be moving again. I wonder what will become of me. In some ways I am ready to leave, to move on. In other ways, I am still trying to braid together the strands for a more cohesive picture of myself. Is that little girl in me refusing to buy the idea that place means home? Or is she still trying to understand the significance of the flag? ☯
The Invitation

The sun withdraws below the lake,
Rolling out just before she goes
A scarlet runner across the waves.
She summons me to join her.
And I would;
Except that the cry of the gulls,
And the deepening dark,
The pull of the surf on the stones,
And the sense that this moment is
Quite complete without me,
Hold me in a stillness which I cannot break.
Lori took the program from the usher, slid halfway down the bench and sat down. She performed her usual routine, taking off her coat and folding it next to her, putting her purse on the floor, and flipping her hair behind her shoulders as her eyes scanned the area, looking to see who was there. She did not recognize any of the few scattered people.

The clock read 1:35 pm. She had arrived twenty-five minutes early, and the auditorium—too large to call it a sanctuary—was rather empty. The smiling usher seated her three-quarters of the way down the row of seats, leaving her close to the stage. A sound check was in process as she settled in. A man was hissing and tapping into two microphones that were set up in front of the stage. He finished there and skirted a long wooden table on his way back to the sound room. The table was in between the two microphones, in the area between the pews and the pulpit. The table reminded Lori of a similar one from her home church. That one was stained green and the side that faced the congregation read in carved letters: **DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME**. Lori didn’t know what to make of it, since it was used for both the Lord’s Supper and funerals. She understood who the **ME** was for the sacrament, but did **ME** mean the deceased in a funeral? She was glad to see nothing carved on this table, just a wine-colored cloth laid over it.

People started to file in. Betsy was right, it was wise to come early. The other day when she had talked to Betsy about going to this event, she had doubted that the attendance would be high. The speaker wasn’t very well known; at least, she’d never heard of him. And what he offered to those who came did not easily escape skepticism. Goodness knows she had hers. Lori still couldn’t believe that she was sitting there, program wrapped in a tight scroll in her hand, her crossed leg swinging rapidly and sometimes loudly hitting the wooden seat in front of her. She had come only at Betsy’s suggestion, a last resort. Lori reasoned to herself that Betsy was not in any way a flake and that she truly wanted Lori to get some help. Betz claimed it had worked miracles for her, maybe it would for Lori.

Her watch said 1:40, recess time. Her third graders would be getting ready for afternoon recess, just finishing with math. It was a bad choice of days to take for a personal leave. Division is tricky to understand, much less teach, but Christmas break loomed in two weeks and she had to do something before then.

A breeze floated past her as the usher led a young mother and her child to their seats. Lori watched them as they sat two pews ahead, to her left. She couldn’t see what the mother looked like but the little toddler, a girl, turned around in her seat and stared at Lori with eyes strangely similar to her own. The dull blue of her irises took Lori aback, her mind reeling uncontrollably with thoughts she had avoided for twenty-one years.
"I will not eat them in a box. I will not eat them with a fox..."

The little girl paused to look up at her mother seated at the table across from her. Mommy did not meet her eyes but kept them rigidly on the underwear piles she was folding, her lips mashed together as she moved on to fold the socks.

"I will not eat them here nor there. I will not eat them anywhere."

The door opened and Aunt Sally walked in, holding her son's hand. The aunt and Mommy exchanged a quick greeting and then the aunt set her attention to the little girl as she continued to read. Her cousin Ricky came up to her and stood at her side, staring at her with big eyes.

"Sah! Listen to her. She's reading."

The little girl, pleased to have an acknowledgement, kept reading in a louder voice.

"I will not eat them with a goat. I will not eat them in a boat."

"Oh, she's not reading. She's memorized all her books. For heaven's sake, Lori's just three years old. She ain't reading."

Mommy put the laundry into the basket and put it onto the floor.

The little girl ran to her room and got a different book, one she had never read. She began reading again, but the tea was made and the two women were speaking in their own language. Ricky kept watching her with his big eyes.

"There once was a hungry caterpillar..."

Nothing.

"I can read."

Her mother's eyes watched her spoon stirring the pale tea. Auntie looked at her and smiled.

"Sure you can, honey. Sure you can."

Lori searched the heads in front of her to find the little girl. Her chest ached and she felt drained, as if waves of zeros were her heartbeats. She couldn't find the girl since more people were seated and blocked her vision. The back of the pew found Lori's shoulders as she gave up her search, almost glad not to see her so she wouldn't be reminded again.

The organist began playing his prelude, traditional hymns as if it were a Sunday, not a Friday. It didn't look like a Sunday service though, at least not for this church. The people seated resembled nothing like the usual suits and dresses Lori knew. Today denim and fleece and cotton, and some suits, filled the pews. Metal of a few wheelchairs lined the outside aisles.

The structure of the place looked different. Lori had been to a church service at this place before, but then the choir loft had been full of swinging robes of blue and gold, singing the background to swaying vocalists. The music from guitars and keyboards had filled the area, and the people in the pews clapped in time to the contemporary music. Banners and props for dramatic readings were already set up before the preacher had come down the aisle, and when he did he had a microphone in his hand. He had called upon them to stand and shout to the Lord,
and had started singing himself, his face twisted in exaggerated emotion.

Today, all that was missing. Only one banner hung, a white background with a single cross.

Lori liked the clean bareness. It calmed her.

Strands of hair flew into her eyes as someone abruptly sat down behind her. Lori pushed the hairs back and heard a coin drop. It rolled to a stop at Lori's feet. She bent over and picked it up and then turned around to give it to whomever was sitting there. She saw the adolescent girl take back the coin, and Lori felt thrown a hundred yards. Her thoughts again consumed her

* * *

The girl was sad the parade was over, but soon she would go home and have Debbie over for their picnic, and then later sit on top of their roof and watch the fireworks. Thinking of that took the sadness away.

Daddy was walking funny and Mommy took his arm. He was carrying the cooler they had brought that morning and it careened dangerously from his hand. Nothing in it was for her. She was thirsty and Mommy finally gave her money for a lemonade. Daddy sure was selfish today!

It was perfect for a picnic. Lori called Debbie on the phone and asked if she wanted to come over for their barbecue. Lori's cousins Ricky and April would be there and the four of them could play Kick the Can, and maybe Maureen and Donny would come over too. Lori was excited, and when Auntie Sally asked her to find Daddy to set up the barbecue, she didn't object. She wanted a hot dog and baked beans but no one could find Daddy. He never let anyone near his grill, and everyone was hungry.

Lori heard coughing sounds coming from her parents' bedroom and thought maybe Daddy was in there. She started walking in that direction, recognizing Daddy's voice as he started singing some peculiar song she didn't know. Good! Now they could start the picnic.

Her mother's hand shot out from behind and pulled Lori around.

"Where are you going?" Her mother looked angrily at Lori, keeping her grip tight. Lori wanted to yank away but didn't, afraid.

"Auntie Sally wanted me to get Daddy so we can have our barbecue," she whimpered back, wondering why Mommy was looking at her like she was doing a bad thing.

Before either of them could continue, the door opened
and Lori saw her Daddy walk out, his hair disheveled and his eyelids curiously drooped. “Hey, punkin, lez eat . . .” He stumbled and put his hand out to the wall.

Lori started toward her father but her mother whipped her around again, pushing the words out of her teeth. “Don’t you go near him, don’t you go near! Stay away from Daddy, he’s sick!”

Uncle Pete cooked at the grill that day; Lori’s Fourth of July wasn’t quite as bright.

* * *

The church was almost full by now, five minutes before the service was scheduled to begin. Lori’s back ached from the wooden pew. It had been hurting off and on for a year, ever since she started teaching third grade. Her back was strained daily since she constantly bent over at little desks and picked up crying children. But that was only a small part of the reason she had come today.

The speaker walked down the side aisle, almost as if trying not to draw attention to himself. Lori studied the man who said he could help her and everyone else there. Pastor Felix Underwood, her program read.

Well, Felix, Lori thought, you aren’t making much money at this. His drab grey suit was wrinkled from travel. His jacket had suede patches at the elbow and his tie was too short to tuck nicely into his jacket. Lori watched him finger it as he sat down at the chair behind the pulpit. His face was smooth and calm except for crow’s feet at his eyes, giving him a look of youth just beginning to fade. As he crossed his legs his ankles were exposed, and Lori was shocked to see a blue stripe at the top of his white socks. This man who said he had the healing powers of Jesus Christ was wearing tube socks?

An usher stood next to her, his eyes searching the pews for an empty seat for the young woman beside him. She looked desperate to be there and craned her neck to find just enough space for her body to sit, wanting badly what everyone else wanted. Lori moved over as much as she could and watched the girl, no more than seventeen or eighteen, sit beside her and go through much the same routine she had followed. Their eyes met when the young lady’s hand put her blond hair, wavy like Lori’s, behind her shoulders. Watching the girl’s actions propelled Lori back seven years, conjuring images as vivid as yesterday.

* * *

Uncle Pete’s car, Donna and Steve’s car, Reverend Hoekstra’s car, and some strange car with Minnesota license plates . . . Lori scanned the parking lot of her father’s carpet store from the living room window. She wondered what her dad’s reaction would be when he found his entire social circle waiting there when he and Mom arrived to work on their new accounts.

Eighty-three minutes later her mother came home accompanied by Uncle Pete’s hand on her shoulder. Donna and Steve also came into the house and took positions in the kitchen. Lori noticed that the Minnesota car was pulling out of the store’s parking lot, and she saw her father’s head in the passenger seat. It looked like he had his hands to his face, but the car turned and she couldn’t see them anymore. He would be gone for eight weeks.
Uncle Pete was saying something about calling there that night.

“We should've done this a lot sooner, Jane, a lot sooner.” Pete shook his head over the coffee in his hand. Lori stood there amidst the crowded kitchen, unacknowledged. Her mother kept her lips characteristically tight, nodding.

“Seventeen years. That's a long time for this to be going on... I knew he was out of control... Dammit! We should've done this sooner.”

Her mother nodded again, visibly crumpling under the weight of those years, but no tears fell. Donna hugged her and Uncle Pete held her hand and her mother could only stare at her cup, eyes wide and helpless.

Lori wished for someone to see her crying in the corner, thinking about how for all of her sixteen and a half years, her father had been a drunk.

* * *

“How great thou art...” The hymn ended and those who were able to stand began to sit down in the slow motion familiar in a church setting. Lori had been so enveloped in her memory that she had never risen. She wondered if the people around her thought she was one of the unable. Her hands were shaking, so she stuck them under her thighs and tried not to look next to her.

The pastor began his speech, his voice overpowering his tattered image as he began to talk about the powers of the Holy Spirit. Lori tried to listen intently, noting how he didn't stray much from the pulpit but used his hands to add force to his words. His eyebrows drew across his forehead when he wanted to emphasize his message. Lori couldn't rid the image of his tube socks from her mind, blue stripes mixing with statements about Jesus healing on the mountain, on Sundays...

Her attention went elsewhere. The girl next to her must have relocated because she wasn't there anymore. Lori thought she saw her on the other side but realized it wasn't her when the woman turned her head a bit, revealing a slack jaw and one drooped eye. Lori quickly looked away.

She contemplated leaving until Pastor Felix Underwood said, “I have been blessed to be a medium for the Holy Spirit to work through. I do not heal you, but He does. It is God's will to choose who he wants physical miracles to work on, and if you do not see what you want to see, I invite you to ask God to heal your heart first. This world needs a spiritual miracle, for the unbelievers are taking over. Come up here, and pray fast to the Lord for your own healing, and may he work through me to help you.” He moved away from the pulpit and stepped down to the table, scanning the congregants, his mouth pursed and his eyes expectant. The stained glass behind him shone and cast a yellow glow around his figure. Lori watched the silhouette. This is what she came for.

Slowly the seated people began to move. Waves of motion rippled through the crowd as people began to come out of their pews and walk towards the healer. Lori shifted her legs to the side to let out an elderly man who gestured to her. She understood as he put his finger to his mouth, like he was saying, “sshhh,” that he could not speak. Her heart felt for him as she watched him go up to the front, eager to be healed and given his voice back. Poor man. He would be disappointed for sure.

Lori kept her eyes on the old man, her hand covering her mouth and her other
arm crossed over her stomach. She watched as Pastor Felix took the man's hand in his own and spoke to him. The old man made the same motion as he had to Lori, followed by a hand put over his heart. She didn't quite understand what that meant but the healer seemed to. He assisted the man onto the table and asked him to lay straight. Still holding the man's hand, he closed his eyes tightly and tilted his head. It was cool in the church but beads of sweat popped out on the preacher's forehead. After a moment he put his finger on the man's throat, then his lips, and then his head. The elderly man jerked slightly and opened his eyes. He smiled at the preacher, wiping tears from his eyes. Lori couldn't see what he did then as he turned his head and faced the preacher, blocking her sight.

Then she saw the elderly man shuffle to one of the microphones and her heart dropped. The man opened his mouth and moved it, nothing coming out. Lori cringed. His mouth was still working and he swallowed and beat his chest with his hand.

"I... love... I love..."

The voice croaked and the man, overcome by his own words, pointed towards heaven. The crowd threw out a throng of sighs and "Praise God!" An usher took hold of the man and hugged him, leading him back to his seat. People cried and watched, joy emanating from everywhere.

Unbelievable.

Then her eyes saw the little girl somewhere in the crowd. Before she could focus, a beckoning hand distracted her, and she saw it belonged to the adolescent girl that Lori thought was sitting behind her. She was near the front row, and next to her was the young woman that had moved away from her.

It must have been her legs that propelled her to walk towards the front because she could not remember ever making the decision to stand and begin the journey down the aisle to the healer. It was only when she looked into the green eyes of Pastor Felix Underwood and heard her voice telling him that her heart ached and that she couldn't forgive, that Lori truly believed she was up there. He helped her onto the table. A tiny hand held hers, but she did not open her eyes to see who it was. He other hand was squeezed tightly by the preacher and though she could not audibly hear his prayer, the words appeared in her head.
...Terrible pain... forgive her father for the suffering in her life... heal her heart so she may forgive her mother, who loves her but cannot show it... heal it, Lord, please...

A shock jolted her as if someone had put electric hands on her heart, as if she were dying in a hospital emergency room. Her legs jumped, followed by the rest of her body, and her chest felt as if a bonfire had been lit inside it. The preacher asked her how she felt, was she okay, and Lori could only smile as she sat up, feeling no pain in her back either.

On the way back to her seat she could not see the three girls, but she knew they were present somewhere.

Christmas break arrived and it was time for Lori to return to her childhood home for the holidays. She was nervous when she boarded the plane and more so when she got off. Her mother and father were there to greet her when she walked into the gate, and they hugged her and told her she looked well. Each squeezed her hand and she felt better, but she couldn't completely shake her uneasiness.

The previous two weeks had been glorious. Lori felt no anguish in her heart nor any pain in her back, truly healed from that Friday convention. She had prayed that night feverishly, thanking God continually for the miracle He had worked on her. It was the first time she felt life in herself, the first time she felt she could say “I forgive” out loud with her parents’ names following. The zeros inside had grown to hundreds and she felt satiated with feelings she had no names for.

But now Lori faced them, the members of her family that had diminished her. She still believed that a true miracle had taken place, but her humanity stepped in and caused her to doubt. The whole ride home she prayed she wouldn’t see the cars of her siblings in the driveway, wishing for a night of peace before she tested the miracle’s longevity.

“Hey, Lori’s home!”

Voices greeted her when she walked in. Lori struggled to look glad to see everyone as she received all the welcome home hugs. She nearly forgot her uneasiness, caught up in arms. She sat at the kitchen table across from her mother and took a cookie from the tray in front of her. Her father passed out of the room.

Lori glanced at her mother across the table. Panic struck, and her breath came in short gasps. Her brother-in-law came into the kitchen and stopped at the sink to wash his hands of cookie crumbs.

“So, Lori, are you glad to be back?”

She smiled and released a long breath. “Yeah, sure I am. I was getting tired of school.”

“Hey! Whoa!” Steve snapped his hand out of the water.

“What happened?”

“I don’t know... I got shocked, like a power surge went through the water.”

Lori’s heart jumped just as the lights flickered and the numbers on the microwave ceased to read the time. ☢️
Raisin the Host

“This freedom
for which fire itself became man”
Andre Breton, “Le marquis de Sade…”

On A Day’s Away

Raisin the host
Call forth the ghost
Make present the present
Sprinkling the heaven-sent
Bells o’ the crossing crowd.
Soon to kneel proud!
Quick to spring up!
Grab for that cup
Lust for that flesh
(though t’aint so fresh)
Stand in the line
For glories sublime
To fall from above:
Faith, Hope, and Love.
(it’s hope for the Pope
that I like the most)

Raisin the host,
What am I fed?
The scabs of the dead?
The ears or the toes
Of Aaron or Moses
Or Dan or Zeke or Zach?
O thirsty, step back.
It's the eyes of faith you have
‘Tween your teeth and lave
With your tongue. You thought
To see with ‘em, but not;
We’re all surprised.
You may have surmised
From our advent carol
That if he's as sterile...
Chewing something unpleasant
With eyes down, knees bent.
(with a leader like that who
won't ooze sap or fat you
have nothing to boast)

Raising the host:
The bells are behind
You, afternoon is unkind
To a hapless young soul
Who'll not pass the bowl
But kick down the temple.
So smooth and so simple
To slice what's inside;
Sever bridegroom from bride
You scrape out your lungs
While they're speaking in tongues
To curse the ingrate.
(So the collars relate,
But you already knowest.)
Raising the host.

Postscript

Likewise am I, the second to lowest
Lifted by seraphic winds or human hands
Lying on my side, enclosed by bands
Only to be split along the seams of my symbol
Needled by the cosmic finger's pushing thimble
Defying the gravity of the robes' deepest rose
Cast from the unroofed chapel--have thus I chose?
Suspended above your altar, just as at birth
Heaven ((I taste you and float)) Earth
A dubiousdoubtful Eden

i rather suspect the lion
will mew and whimper
[a contrite echo] almosting reverberation

-are there cliffs and
valleys hurled
humanity sinks and

sags
cannot break

(can it?) to bouncebottom
an endless gag

feasting on Adam's rib
in neverrotting applied groves

the zookeeper snores again,
rolls over, engenders another
world into existence.

why me—anyone?

herbivore vampires, all.
The Fenceline

Oil on Canvas
From Patriarchy to Partnership

I hadn’t been to church regularly in several years, at all in several months, when I heard Father Greg Heille give a homily at Dominican Chapel/Marywood, the chapel associated with the Dominican Sisters here in Grand Rapids. I don’t what made my mind and heart open, for once, to the things I would hear from the pulpit. Perhaps it was a beautiful day, the company of friends, the simplicity and inclusiveness of the liturgy. Likely, it was a combination of these. But the words I heard from Father Greg that Sunday morning struck chords in me that hadn’t reverberated for a long time. His words filled me with a sense of acceptance and peace, not the feeling I was accustomed to in church. He spoke passionately of gender reconciliation, of the reality of a broken world, and of a radical gospel in a way that I had longed to hear, but never had, from the pulpit.

Later in the homily, I found out that it was Father Greg’s farewell sermon to the congregation he had been with for nine years; he was leaving to take a post as a professor of preaching at Aquinas Institute of Theology in Saint Louis. I wished that morning that he would be around for many more months, time enough for me to drag my soul into his office and unleash upon him all the questions and doubts I could never seem to ask. Questions about doubt and inspiration and anger and silence, my spiritual struggles that seemed humbly validated in the few words I heard him speak. When I spoke to Father Greg after the service, I didn’t know what to say, afraid I might cry or swear or beg to be baptized. I ended up asking him if I could interview him for Dialogue. This conversation, which happened by fax machine some months after our first meeting, is the fruition of these questions.

-Christine Byl

Spiritual leaders often speak of being “called to their work.” What drew you to the ministry initially and what continues to fuel your commitment to it?

I was raised Catholic by my Roman Catholic father—a high school teacher—and my Presbyterian mother—a homemaker. I went through a conversion experience at the age of 16, under the influence of a young priest—Father Paul Schumacher—in my hometown of New Ulm, Minnesota. In an evening religion class in the church cafeteria, Father Paul spoke about the resurrection, and I was so astonished at what I was truly hearing for only the first time—that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead—that I went up to him afterwards to find out if I truly had heard him right. That was the beginning of a conversion experience.

When I think back on it, I realize that for me, coming to believe in Jesus Christ and feeling an inner call to be a priest were one and the same thing; I never have believed outside of seeing myself as a priest. This is quite remarkable, given the anticlerical tone of my
Catholic-Presbyterian family. When I entered seminary after finishing a math degree at Saint John’s University in Minnesota, I’m sure I thought, “Ministry equals priesthood.” Now I realize all ministry flows from baptism and that ordination is one ministry among many. One of my students recently defined ministry this way: “Christian ministry is the activity of a baptized follower of Jesus, which originates in and is sustained by God’s call, is undertaken under the auspices of a Christian community, serves human persons, and helps actualize the Reign of God.”

You mentioned Galatians 3:28 in your homily as the text that has shaped your spiritual commitment, specifically that there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus. Can you expand on this?

Saint Paul says, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” As the result of a long process of personal conversion and formation, this verse, more than any other, has come to express my sense of personal mission as a Christian minister.

As a young priest I worked in suburban Chicago on the pastoral team of the Saint Giles Community—a small community of highly committed families. Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids would be a similar community. Many of the baptized with whom I worked in that community were far more experienced in theology, ministry, and life than I. And many of those with whom I worked most closely were women. Through six years of mutual accountability and collaboration, I came to understand that in Christ, there is no longer male or female. I came to believe that the greatest social issue in our day—to the diminishment of all of us—is the rift between men and women, and I believe the most important movement of God’s Spirit in my life is the call to work toward the healing of sexism.

Later, in Grand Rapids, working as a Grand Rapids Dominican in close association with GRACE (Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenicism), I began to learn that in Christ there is no longer Reformed or Catholic, Jew or Greek. In Grand Rapids, I also came to know Mr. Bob Woodrick, the chairman of D & W Food Centers, who has dedicated his life to the healing of racism, and I began to understand that in Christ, there is no longer slave or free.

Now that I live in Saint Louis with a community of Dominican men—black, brown, and white—from the United States, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Columbia, Poland, and Russia, I continue to learn about human diversity and our oneness in Christ.

You also said that you believed the alternative to patriarchy is partnership.

Peter Block, the author of Choosing Stewardship Over Self-Interest, says patriarchy is essentially a way of controlling institutions rather than a description of gender. He contrasts patriarchy with service and servant-leadership. Only by choosing service over self-interest will we face up to the issues of power and control which underlie racism, denominationalism, and sexism. There is an alternative to the polarization that defines our society, and that alternative is partnership.

Do you feel like the Church, in the larger sense, supports this emphasis?
As divinely inspired as we hope the Church to be, it remains nonetheless a human, and therefore a sinful, institution polarized over many issues of power and control and often distracted from the issues that touch people’s lives. It is frustrating and embarrassing when churches seem to be the last institutions to undergo conversion and can seem to be the last institutions to acquire the specialized knowledge and partnership skills for public service. Yet, this may be understandable, given that the Church embodies the sacred history, or mythos, of a society, and mythos is inherently conservative and easily self-absorbed.

Unfortunately, American Evangelicalism often uses the Bible as a tool for supporting an agenda that inhibits, not intensifies, unity between people. How does your reading of the Bible, specifically the teachings of Jesus, diverge from the tendency towards legalism?

In my own mind, I often use a framework taught to me by Manfred Halpern, a Holocaust survivor who teaches political science at Princeton. Halpern writes, “We need to know how self and other bind each other in collaboration, yet free each other for conflict from opposing positions, how they assure continuity in their relationship with each other, yet allow change, and thus produce justice.”

Halpern knows that people and institutions are fragile. Things fall apart, and when they do our first impulse often is to try to patch the old structures back together again. This can work as a temporary strategy, but oftentimes, if people hold too rigidly to fragmented structures from their past, they become controlling in a fundamentalistic or even violent sort of way, leading only to further polarization and fragmentation in the community. Is the Bible fundamentally a proof-text for this kind of control, or is it meant to assist us in grappling with our human impulse toward polarization and violence? Does the Bible allow for conflict? Does the Bible support the possibility of change?

The challenge is one of language and leadership. We search for language to enlarge the meaning of our communal experience in light of the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus. And we search for language to enlarge the number who find common ground for action, without resorting to polarization and violence.

I have learned in the pulpit that no matter how diverse the experience or ideology of a congregation, every member shares the pain of polarization and social disintegration. The challenge, in fidelity to this shared experience, is to make common ground for acting toward a transformed future.

This is the work of leadership. Robert K. Greenleaf, a pre-eminent authority on leadership, writes, “Part of success in leadership towards consensus is faith—confidence that the language exist that will provide the common ground if one will persevere and communicate this confidence to all involved.” I believe the Bible gives us a shared story and language for seeking that common ground and for giving this kind of leadership.

Catholicism is often thought of as one of the most hierarchical and traditionalist denominations. To what extent is this true in your
experience? Where do you agree or differ with mainstream, Pope-John-Paul Catholicism?

One could ask, “Is the Catholic Church a patriarchy or a partnership?,” and I suppose the answer would be it is both. On the one hand the Catholic Church is a patriarchy—in Peter Block’s sense—when it values control, consistency, and predictability over the moral values of self-expression and self-responsibility.

On the other hand, the Catholic Church is a partnership. This is seen in our evolving understanding of liturgy as a partnership of ministries and in a very rich social gospel tradition which espouses the dignity and rights of the human person and a social contract for the common good.

A point of tension for many, of course, is Catholic sexual teaching. In fact, for many people, the Catholic church is identified with a “jurisprudence of sex.” Admittedly, the issues are complex. And I think a lot of the polarization and dissent we are experiencing has to do with ordinary Catholics longing to be included in the conversation on the basis of their experience. To what extent is sexuality only about biology and to what extent about relationships? How can Christian faith help us to be self-responsible in relationship? Can faith help us to disagree about these issues without condemning one another? In the midst of the complexity of the issues, can we worship at the same table?

Calvin College is rooted in the tradition of Reformed Protestantism. I’ve found in my own readings and in conversations with other people, that the progressive branches of Catholicism and Protestantism have much common ground between them. What do you think of this claim? Where have you experienced positive ecumenical partnership?

I did my doctoral studies in the Doctor of Ministry program at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, and so my most recent immersion in Reformed Protestantism has been through the Reformed Church in America. I see a remarkable convergence of reformed and catholic Christianity in the liturgy: while Catholics are reappropriating a love of scripture and preaching in the Mass, Reformed communions are reappropriating a sense of ritual and a longing to gather more frequently at the Table of the Lord. Our worship may begin to look and feel more alike than different. This should be a cause of great rejoicing for us both.

In the 30 years since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has been in a process of “reformation.” Meanwhile, through the World Council of Churches and ecumenical dialogue, Christians are seeking a common understanding about baptism, eucharist, and ministry. This, too, is a sign of God’s Spirit active in the Churches.

I have experienced a wonderful ecumenical spirit in Grand Rapids, thanks in large measure to the Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism and to many denominational and congregational leaders and institutions. The Body of Christ is One and therefore essentially cannot be divided. In this understanding, anything other than ecumenism would be scandalous.

In a postmodern and “culturally relativistic” age, religious belief that is tolerant or aimed at unity is often accused of being “PC.” What are your thoughts on this?
The phrase “politically correct” makes me think of another expression: “The political is the personal.” The politics—the institutional dynamic—of faith ultimately comes down to being very personal. We say, “In Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female.” And yet we discriminate in so many ways according to race, class and gender. When we do so, it is individuals who pay a very personal price. I think, for example, of women’s overwhelming and utterly exhausting anger at the sexual apartheid of the Church. For individual women, this anger is becoming more than a political problem with the institution; it has become a personal problem of faith.

We Christians need to begin by putting our own house in order. Then perhaps we will have the wisdom to consider the implications of our faith in terms of tolerance and unity with those who live outside our Christian tradition and yet who share the planet and share humanity with us.

As a person committed to gender reconciliation between people, what do you think about our current conception of God as a gendered being—male—and what steps can or should we take to rediscover God as unbounded by gender claims?

I like the translation of Genesis 2:7 which reads, “Then Yaweh God formed the earth creature [ha’-’adam], dust from the earth [ha’-’adama], and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life, and the earth creature [ha-’adam] became a living being.” “Adam” means “undifferentiated earth creature,” from whom, I think it is proper to say, the two genders simultaneously were then differentiated because “it was not good for the earth creature to be alone.”

In Genesis 1:27 we read, “And God created humankind in-his-image; in-the-image of God created-he him; male and female created-he them.” Biblically speaking, the image of God is male and female. It won’t do, therefore, for males to re-create God in their male image.

Though many people readily agree with this, there is nonetheless the problem of how to address God in public prayer. Jesus, of course, used the expression “Abba.” How do we retain this sense of intimacy in addressing God in public prayer without re-creating God in a male image?

Calling God “Mother” tends to polarize the community and doesn’t necessarily solve the problem. Likewise, we must be sensitive to the fact that the word “Father” is painful to some Christian ears. When I lead public prayer, I do not refrain from the traditional use of “Father,” but I also look for other ways of naming the Gracious One, and I assiduously avoid when possible the incessant use of the pronoun “he.”

What drew you to the Dominicans?

You may have noticed that Dominicans—both men and women—put the initials “O.P.” after our names. These initials mean “Order of Preachers.” Our order was founded in the 13th century by Dominic Guzman, a Spanish saint, in response to a need for doctrinal preaching to counteract the Cathari, an heretical sect in southern France. Because of our mission, the Order of Preachers quickly became involved with
teaching and doing theology in the major universities of Europe. The intellectual vigor of Dominican teaching and preaching was a major new thrust in the Church's ministry for that time. Like his contemporary, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Dominic also embraced an "apostolic life" of community and solidarity with the poor.

Of course, these founding values of study, community, and solidarity in a ministry of preaching and teaching continue to be a significant and attractive way to spend one's Christian life. I came to the Dominicans from college out of a gradual process of discernment, and I still find the "Holy Preaching" to be a challenging and satisfying way to respond to God's call with my life.

What writers, spiritual or otherwise, have influenced you?

I try to read broadly. Some of my favorite writers of English are Laurens van der Post, Annie Dillard, and Chaim Potok. Two marvelous Christian thinkers are Gerald May and Douglas John Hall. Some of my favorite books of spirituality are by a Vietnamese Buddhist—Thich Nhat Hanh. And I have to mention one of my favorites, A Testament of Devotion, by the Quaker teacher, Thomas R. Kelly.

Often in Calvin's tradition, theology and intellectualization of belief leads to passionless faith, out of touch with the Spirit as a personal presence of God. Do you see this trend? How have you experienced the Spirit in your spiritual life?

Many times it is easier to intellectualize or to pietize God than to name the grace of God and to find images for God in our own experience. We think we know what God looks like, even as we re-make God in the ever-popular male image of our patriarchal society. Or we reproduce European images of a white Jesus and dismiss remembering him as the Arab or Palestinian Jew that he really was. The fact is we can't go into the heavens to see God, nor can we go back in time and place to see Jesus. We do, however, have this theological belief that we are the body of the risen Christ, that Christ lives in us, and that the human face in all its diversity and suffering and glory is the face of Christ and that in this face we can see the divine.

In the Bible, the word associated with the Spirit of God is dynamis, an act of power. Power in our society is reconfiguring itself from patriarchy to partnership. The movement from ignorance, fear, self-protection, and control to knowledge, collaboration, and servant leadership is the movement in our hearts and the presence of the Holy Spirit, in my opinion. When we experience this movement in our hearts and in our lives, we stand on holy ground in the presence of the Divine. This is what God is like.

I am reminded of a souvenir I have from Newfoundland—a tiny killick. The killick—a large stone tightly encased in a buoyant wooden frame or cage—is a hand-made anchor used by Newfoundland fishermen. Its purpose is to provide an anchor-hold, while still allowing a small boat, or punt, to move freely in the water. In wind and storm, then, the punt can ride with the waves and not be lost or smashed.

Perhaps doctrine and theology are the substance and stone that anchor our faith, while suffering, hope, reconciliation, and love are the passion—the saving buoyancy of faith. May we all be blessed by this presence of God's Spirit as we move freely—in a partnership of divine power—through the waters of our life. ◊
What was it like?

For forty years the Jericho residents must have heard the rumbling of people afar off in the desert until the music was too loud?
In the afternoon of March 30, 1994, I joined a line to enter the Alahambra in Granada, Spain for a second time. I had been there almost a year before; both visits started in nearly the same manner. As I waited I stood between a young British couple and three Spanish families with ten noisy children. My first visit began at a YMCA white elephant sale where I found Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alahambra* between stacks of Harlequin Romances and *Reader's Digest* condensed books. Ever wary lest I be blind-sided by a crazed bargain shopper, I made my way home with my newfound treasure.

I began my summer with princesses in need of rescue, enchanted caves populated by entranced Moorish armies, bands of Gypsies, and tales of hidden treasure. Irving enabled me to spend my mornings in the Lion Court and my afternoons in the cool gardens of the Generalife. But a year later, as I found myself with the silent British and raucous children, I felt defeated. How could Irving withstand this assault? The slower the line moved the faster my hopes sank. I forgot that I had found him in a warehouse full of white elephants.

But when I entered the grounds of the Alahambra, I was in the midst of one of Irving's tales, my fears forgotten. I first went to the gardens of the Generalife, and all the tension of waiting in line evaporated. I saw the British couple sitting quietly on a bench and the Spanish children become calm. I knew immediately that Irving had not surpassed his subject; I felt the power of the Alahambra that armies, earthquakes, and now tourists could not destroy. Irving's words still held my imagination, but for that day they were rivaled by the color and the fragrance of the wisteria that filled the garden air.

As I tried to capture that day's events in my journal, my inability to find the words to match the experience brought me to a line from Kipling: "The Glory of the Garden it abideth not in words." It is
taken from a poem entitled “The Glory of the Garden,” in which he uses the image of a garden as a metaphor for England. His expression of patriotism may be dated, but apart from the metaphor this line captured my experience. Kipling ends the poem with this line: “And the Glory of the Garden it shall never pass away!”

Not everyone enjoys gardening, but like the tourist who never sets foot in a church will go silent when visiting a cathedral or a chapel, most people will be affected by a garden even though no two gardens are alike. They range from the Mediterranean gardens of the Alahambra to the sprawling opulence at Versailles to the precision of the British Royal Horticultural Society at Kew and Wisely, and from each of these to the backyard garden. When asked in a London Telegraph interview what he thought a garden was for, Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe, perhaps the most renown English landscape architect today, answered:

I suppose it's an extension of the ethos of a person into the landscape. When you go into a garden, you enter a place that lifts you out of the everyday world and all its worries into paradise...

Jellicoe understands what Kipling sensed when he wrote, “But the Glory of the Garden lies in more than meets the eye.” In his designs, Jellicoe tries to appeal to the conscious and the subconscious, claiming that when the two work in harmony, a work of art is produced.

Writers and poets have long tried to account for the affect of gardens on people. Many have taken their cue from Genesis 2:8: “Now the Lord planted a garden in the east, in Eden.” T.E. Brown wrote, “A garden is a lovesome thing, God wot!” (“My Garden”). Abraham Cowley completes the equation with this line from “The Garden”: “God the first garden made, and the first city, Cain.” Accordingly, Francis Bacon in his essay, “Of Gardens,” honors gardening: “God the first garden planted, and indeed it is the purest of human pleasures.” Dorothy Frances Gurney makes a stronger claim which has found its way onto sundials and garden plaques:

The kiss of the sun for pardon,
The song of the birds for mirth,
One is nearer God's heart in a garden,
Than anywhere else on earth. (“God's Garden”)
Whether or not her claim is true, she has helped to sell a lot of sundials and birdbaths.

The Eden-esque imagery often includes Adam and his role to work and care for the garden. Working the soil is seen as something basic and therefore desirable. The gravedigger in Hamlet says to the other clown, “There are no ancient gentleman but gard’ners, ditchers, and gravemakers; they hold up Adam’s profession” (VI.30-32). If he knew of Eden, Horace might have agreed with Shakespeare’s clown when he wrote, “This is one of my prayers: for a parcel of land not so very large which should have a garden and a spring of ever-flowing water near the house, a bit of woodland as well as these” (Cred et Judaeus Apella.) If he knew the story of Cain, he might have agreed with Cowley, too.

The English love of gardens seems to identify strongly with an idyllic image of the garden. An English park may be only an area of hills, ponds, and pastureland, and still be called a garden. In broad terms, an English garden is one that is intended to look natural but not wild. Plants are allowed to escape the formal bounds defined for them, and formal plantings and brick and stonework are used to emphasize how natural the plants are, not to confine them. Jellicoe tries to explain this:

England is an offshore island. Europe is classical but we are a country folk and we have a domestic, romantic nature in keeping with our very moving landscape, those downs and so on. We don’t want straight classical lines running through them. Because we are romantic, we look backwards for strength, the Europeans to the future.

The greatest English landscape architect distinguished himself by breaking with the classical formality of the continent. He was Lancelot “Capability” Brown (1715-1783). Setting the standard for the English park, he defined how the gardens and parkland surrounding the great English manors and country homes ought to look, comparing his work to the composition of a well balanced sentence. He did not impose geometrical patterns on nature, nor did he use cut stone or other architectural forms. Brown only used grass, a few species of trees, still water, and the roll of the land. Achieving a natural look sometimes required altering the original lay of the land, but his style was a radical change from the prevalent style on the continent.

But there is a problem with an idyllic conception of what a garden is or is supposed to do. It is not necessarily a problem with the English idea of a garden, but with the way I
initially interpreted my experience at the Alahambra. It involves the “if only…” musings one can hear in Horace’s words and in the words of busy, “modern” people who romanticize about a little place with a few acres and some chickens. It is the idea that gardens lift us out of this world and into one more solid, bringing us back to a simpler, more wholesome time. But this belief misses the sense of mystery; gardens are illusions. Eden was not, but every garden since has been—even Brown’s natural landscapes are imposed on nature. I don’t know who the Diwan of Zeb-un-Nissa was, but his lines would be better placed on a sundial than Gurney’s:

The rapturous nightingale sings  
Wooing the rose  
In the midst of the Garden newborn  
But only the gardener knows  
Of the labor that brings  
To the Garden its beauty; he toiled all day in the heat  
And his feet  
Have been wounded by many a thorn.

Somehow, a garden is a magical place where the nightingale does sing to the rose, but is not a place to escape reality. One needs to be lifted out of the everyday world, but it is refreshing insofar as it helps one to live better in it. Poetry and literature ought to have the same effect: to quicken the imagination. I think this is what Jellicoe is aiming for when he tries to create more than the eye can see. Marianne Moore calls for poets to do the same thing in “Poetry”:

No[t] till the poets among us can be  
‘literalists of  
the imagination’—above  
insolence and triviality and can present  
for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads in  
them, shall we have  
it.

And we need it. Feet will still be wounded by thorns, but I much prefer Rupert Brooke’s garden in “Old Vicarage, Grantchester” to William Morris’ in “The Wanderers.” Brooke:

And in that garden, black and white,  
Creep whispers through the grass all night;  
A hundred vicars down the lawn;  
Curates, long dust, will come and go  
On lissome, clerical, printless toe;  
And between the boughs is seen
Morris:

Forget six counties overhung with smoke
Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
Forget the spreading of the Hideous town;
Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
And dream of London, small white and clean,
The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green.

Brooke does more to stop the spreading of the hideous town with his vicars than Morris could do with a million “forgets.”

It would be nice to prove Kipling right and to find something in the garden that cannot be found in words. But I now suspect that the glory of the garden can abide in words, though not the words I was looking for, but in the words of those “literalists of the imagination.” Irving’s words are nearer to the richness of the wisteria than I first thought. I still like Gurney’s lines and those like them; they are catchy, easily remembered statements of the mystery—cliches. But they are no longer satisfying, for the thought expressed in them is self-contained, keeping me in the everyday world, frustrated because my imagination is not invited to work.

It is important to know how to be refreshed—to know what to do when in words a garden with real toads appears—to be able to dance with Brooke’s vicars. When glasses are heard clinking at one of Gatsby’s parties: “In his blue gardens, men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars,” I wish I was with the one Lord Herbert of Cherbury was writing to when he penned, “Now that the April of your youth adorns the garden of your face” (“Ditty: Now that the April”). And it is with her that I wish I could say with Robert Bridges,

My delight and thy delight
Walking, like two angels white,
In the gardens of the night.
(“My Delight and Thy Delight”)

But I must first learn how to walk in the garden. ∞

Write with your spade, and garden with your pen,
Shovel your couplets to their long repose.
And type your turnips down the field in rows.
(The Georgiad pt.ii by Roy Campbell)
STREETSings

When I see street signs bend from left to right,  
"hang a left, then a right,"  
Across the line of straighter brighter street lights,  
I like to think that some boy's been counting them  
But counting them doesn't steal them away  
As some boys do to brag.  
Often you must see them through the seasons  
In the rain and the snowy months.  
The weather in the windy city cases them to rust  
flaking off familiar green peeling paint.  
Repainted and replaced from time to time  
Yet they still stay on their corners.  
Cracking concrete causes them to loose their roots  
And so they bend from left to right.  
But, I was going to say when Truth rudely interrupted  
With all her matter of fact about the STREETSings,  
I should prefer to have some boy count them,  
"39th... 43rd... 47th... 51st...,"  
and swing them like maypoles  
As he went out to run an errand for his mother  
To the store to fetch a 40 ouncer.  
"...boy...and don't you forget the milk"  
Some boy too far in town to swing on birches,  
Whose only play was what others pushed on him.  
One by one he counts the signs  
Over and over again until he is dizzy, dazed out, dreaming of where  
they go. Where do they go?  
One could do worse than be a counter of street signs,  
Swinging them like maypoles,  
Dreaming of destinations.
The Further Adventures Of...

In my hero comics I want to make good and bad characters black and white again. In comic these days, they are often so ambiguous that you can't make distinctions. It is my hope to leave the little boys of America—and anyone else who reads my comics—with good characters and a positive message.

-Matt Vander Pol
LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHIN', DREAMBOY: GRIMMULS ONLY EXISTS IN YOUR HEAD... BEIDES...

YOU SEE, POPS, YOU HAVE TO SAVE YOURSELF. AIN'T NO ONE GONNA HELP ANYONE. IT'S A NASTY DOG EAT DOG WORLD...

...AND YOU'RE A DOG THAT HAS GOTTEN A LITTLE TOO OLD FOR THE TRICKS.

SIMPLE AS THAT...

THERE YA GO, SEDRICK. JUST A FEW MORE KNOTS AND WE'RE OFF TO LANG-LIN...

...AND THE BUNNY GOES IN THE HOLE AND OUT AGAIN... PERFECT... COMFY?

I'M JUST FINE THANK-YOU.
YOU SURE IT'S NOT TOO TIGHT, NOW? WE DON'T WANT THE QUEEN'S PRECIOUS LITTLE DIAMOND LOOSIN' HIS CIRCA-LANON!

O00Okay... GUESS THAT MEANS WE'RE READY TO LEAVE. HEAD ON HOME, SEDRICK.

IF WE HURRY, WE'LL BE BACK IN SWEET OL' LANG-LIN BY SUNDOWN.

WORD OF OUR VICTORIOUS CAPTURE SHOULD BE WELL SPREAD BY THEN. WE'LL BE HEROES...
...BIG HEROES.

I CAN SEE IT NOW: "LORD HENCH." YEAH... YEAH... I LIKE IT...
...YOU'LL BE LORD SEDRICK, OF COURSE.

SECOND ONLY TO ME.

CONTINUED...
Is this funny?

(It's a matter of interpretation...)