


AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Victoria D. Dorshorn for the Master of Arts
(name of student) (degree)

in English presented on April 12, 2002

Title: A Time for Poetry, a Place for Faith: Defining the Space for Contemporary

Christian Poetry and a collection of poems, *Out of Time, Out of Place*

Abstract approved: 
(Thesis Advisor Signature)

This thesis explores several forms of contemporary poetry and the place of Christian poetry among these forms. It considers the differences between lyric, image, discursive, and narrative poetry and the subjects appropriate to each, citing examples from various poets. Techniques used in writing poetry are a vital element of the subject and form of the poem, and this thesis examines the choices other poets have made to develop these relationships. The determining factor for any contemporary poet in making these choices--form, technique, subject, and style--is voice, which emanates from the poet's worldview. As a Christian poet, the author finds that faith influences voice and thus plays a major role in the making of these other choices. What the Christian poet must do is to avoid using poetry as a medium for evangelism or doctrinal teaching. The thesis discusses pertinent subjects and approaches to spiritual themes, suggesting the exploration of story, parable, nature, and self as means of discovery. It lists as worthy aims of poetry the sharing of emotion and experience and the seeking of positive social change. The thesis philosophically touches upon the ideas of time and space in the experience of place. Following the academic treatise is a collection of poetry that practices various forms and subjects discussed in the introduction.

A TIME FOR POETRY, A PLACE FOR FAITH: DEFINING THE SPACE
FOR CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN POETRY
AND A COLLECTION OF POEMS,
OUT OF TIME, OUT OF PLACE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Department of English

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Victoria D. Dorshorn

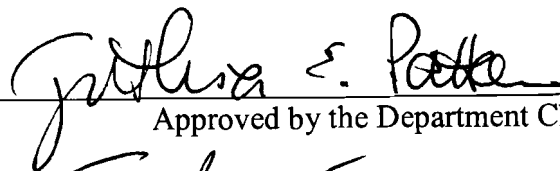
May 2002

Copyright 2002


Victoria D. Dorshorn

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Thesis
5004
D



Approved by the Department Chair



Approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest thanks to my thesis chair, Dr. Philip Heldrich, and committee members, Professor Amy Sage Webb and Dr. Richard Keller. Their help in the writing of this thesis will always be greatly appreciated. A special thanks to Dr. Cynthia Patton, to the creative writing instructors, and to other professors for their inspiration and helpfulness. I am also grateful to Kay Alden for benefacting the Kay Alden Creative Writing Scholarship, which enabled me to complete my studies at Emporia State University. I would also like to express sincere gratitude to my husband and to other family members and friends for their encouragement, love, and patience.

PREFACE

This thesis consists of two major divisions. The first is an academic essay that considers current trends in contemporary Christian poetry. I examine the ways poets can share experience and emotion, explore self, history, and place, and investigate matters of faith. The Reference page concludes this segment. The second division is a collection of poetry, *Out of Time, Out of Place*. It contains forty-three poems in five sections, arranged thematically around the idea of space, time, and place. Almost all of these poems have been written during the two years of my study in the Masters program at Emporia State University, and of the few that are older, all but one underwent major revision.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTSiii

PREFACE iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS v

INTRODUCTION

A TIME FOR POETRY, A PLACE FOR FAITH: DEFINING THE SPACE OF

CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN POETRY1

REFERENCES 33

POEMS

OUT OF TIME, OUT OF PLACE

SECTION ONE: FELICITOUS SPACE

Profiles of Courage 39

Travel Time 40

In My Young Dream Growing Old 41

Other Worlds 42

Mary's Part 43

House Hunting 44

Felicitous Space 45

Late for Dinner 46

SECTION TWO: IN EVERY LAND

Ode to West Kansas Wind Looking Back 48

What Happens When Disease Rots a Tap Root by the River 49

In the Moorland 50

Same Song: Another Verse	52
Wars and Rumors of Wars	53
In the Silent Sepulchre	54
Foreshadowing	55
To Lucy: in the 46 th Precinct, circa 1996	57
To Make a Mark	58
At Malvern, Worcestershire, UK	59

SECTION THREE: OUT OF PLACE

Enseñar por ejemplo	61
The Visitors	62
The Color of Paper Money and Early Apples	63
Naturally Inferior	64
Out of Place	65
January Spring	66
On Seeing a Funeral Procession While Walking Home from School . . .	67
Jubilation Lilies	68

SECTION FOUR: TO EVERYTHING A SEASON

What Eve Ate	70
A Holy Sonnet	71
Icarus Dreams of the Grand Canyon and Better Wings	72
Recalling My First Visit to New York City	73
Heart of the Matter	74
Marriage Song	75

In Time	76
Duende	79
Exploring Dover Beach with My Husband in 1999	80

SECTION FIVE: OUT OF TIME

Consequence	82
Reduction	85
Rite of Passage	86
Where It Is	87
Ever After	88
Rising	89
Three Elegies for My Dad	92
Ontology of a Butterfly	95

A Time for Poetry, a Place for Faith: Defining the Space of Contemporary Christian Poetry

The challenge I face as a new poet is to discover the space for faith in my contemporary poetry, to find a place for Christian poetry in the midst of (not opposed to) the fresh variety of forms, structures, subjects, and techniques available today. Other contemporary poets have also faced this challenge. In a discussion reported in the *AWP Chronicle* about Christian poetry, Mark Jarman asserts that "Language comes out of human beings the way silk comes from a spider" (Lythgoe 7). If we accept the claim that "Poems are intervals of freedom and excitement in the language" (Stafford 77), we realize that a poem should especially flow, or "come out," like living lace, that the poet is entrusted with spinning special silk, silk that enrobes, adorns, defines, and yet reveals. This spinning is the art of poetry; it is the art of communication; it is voice in action. Other metaphors work as well, such as the house metaphor that Gaston Bachelard sets forth in *The Poetics of Space*. I propose that the attributes and aspects of poetry are the exterior design and architecture of the house; contemporary forms (modes of presentation--like lyric, narrative, and discursive-- rather than formal structures--like sonnet, ballad, and ode) are the rooms in that house; and subjects that correspond to forms are the decor and furniture, which vary from room to room. Contemporary Christian poetry can occupy a space in each of these rooms--lyric, narrative, and discursive, for example, and when it seeks, according to E. Ethelbert Miller, to "explore issues of religion through self discovery, history, and place," (Lythgoe 10) its publication chances are greater than when it merely sets forth doctrinal creeds or "statements of faith," as described by Andrew Hudgins (Lythgoe 6).

John Haines writes, "A poem is a composition of words in space and in time. It is the structuring of thought and emotion" ("Further" 85). This connection of space and time is an idea that intrigues me, for I see it as integral to my poetry--indeed, integral to the human condition. We occupy space and inhabit time; this locates us in *place*, and *place* influences thoughts and emotions, which poetry attempts to structure in lines. Charles Simic says, "For me the sense of the line is the most instinctive aspect of the entire process of writing. The content imposes a time scale: I have to say x in x amount of time" ("Some Thoughts" 93). To compose words in time, the poet needs a sense of the line. However, intuitively knowing (or consciously learning) where to put the line breaks requires experience, as I have found with my own work; this experience--living and writing--occurs in a *place*, and it takes *time*.

This experience of the poet's life both emanates from and amplifies in the poet "a strong sense of voice" (Haines, "Further" 86), for the poet cannot express any thought or emotion without a voice. Thus, the poet's individual voice provides the quintessential energy for the decision making that he faces, and that voice speaks out of the worldview that he holds. In a sense then, his worldview affects his decisions as to subject and form, style and technique. Accordingly, Haines says, "It is the voice of the poet, no two alike, that determines the line, the rhythm, structure, everything" ("Further" 86). Included in that *everything* are such choices as form, subject, technique, diction, and style. Choosing among these necessary elements is mandatory. Simic says, "One needs the line, and later the larger field of the stanza or whatever you care to call it" ("Some Thoughts" 93). So the poet, developing a dynamic voice, selects from the fresh variety of forms, structures, and techniques the stanza and line length appropriate for the chosen subject as spoken by

her voice. This process allows the poet to share thoughts and emotions in space and time. In discovering one's place in contemporary poetry, the endeavor is the same for a Christian poet as for a poet who holds dear any specific religion or set of beliefs. As a Christian, I am interested in Christian poetry, though, in this thesis, I do mention as examples poems by authors of other faiths as well as poems by Christians. I use the term *poet of faith* to refer to anyone who shares through poetry spiritual or religious beliefs. In my poetry, examining and testing faith adds to my exploration of self, history, and place; for me, these are all connected to a larger inquiry into space and time.

Tess Gallagher talks about the poem *becoming time* as it works "like a magnet which draws into it events and beings from all possible past, present, and future contexts of the speaker" (109). She says, "In poem-time, the present *accompanies* memory and eventuality" (110). What I see here is a sense of space that holds all sorts of possibilities --events, people, landscapes, and phenomena--which in real life are constrained by human time into what actually happened or is happening in a specific place; however, in the world of the poem, the time constraint is removed so that any number of those possibilities may coexist: time is transcended and transcendent. Gallagher says, "The poem is the place where the past and future can be seen at once without forsaking the present [. . .] Poems are excursions into belief and doubt, often simultaneously" (115). These are the excursions upon which I have embarked in my poetry, exploring belief and doubt from a Christian perspective within a time-space-place relationship, often while investigating matters of faith. The experiences of my life have given me a Christian voice, which determines the forms and subjects I select. I hope that this voice will be heard as non-judgmental and non-condemning; it is my intent to speak with the love and

compassion of Christ, whose primary precept was to "love one another." Thus, I experiment with different forms, structures, subjects, and techniques in the poems that follow, collected under the title *Out of Time, Out of Place*. These poems, which I hope are viewed as special silk, could occupy space in any of several rooms in a metaphorical house of contemporary poetry.

Bachelard connects this house image to poetry when he writes, "Through poems, perhaps more than through recollections, we touch the ultimate poetic depth of the space of the house" (6). Ontological attributes of a house are that it provides a place for the intense experiences of childhood as the individual's "first universe" (Bachelard 4), as well as for mature life; it is a space where surprising events, often unplanned, may happen; and through time it allows discovery of memories of the past and opportunities for the future. A house, then, is like a poem in that it "reminds us that the past is not only that which happened but also that which could have happened but did not. The future [. . .] holds not only that which will be, but everything that *may* be" (Gallagher 114).

A poem that bridges this time-space continuum most likely will remain with us, communicating passion and thought in an upward spiral; houses in which we bridge this gap remain in our memories as places of safety and rest. John Haines takes this bridge a step further in his essay "The Hole in the Bucket," where he speaks of an awareness that the moment we enter the world of the poem we are participating in another episode of the myth-journey of humankind; that a voice has taken up the tale once more. The individual experience as related or presented in the poem renews our deep, implicit faith in that greater experience. A poem remains with us to the extent that it allows us to feel that we are listen-

ing to a voice at once contemporary and ancient [. . .] Behind every word is the memory of another, spoken a thousand times; in the intonation of the voice, in the rise and fall of the syllables, memory does its work and reconciles the poet and the reader to a world difficult and strange. (136-37)

Poems with this kind of transcendent human experience move him, Haines says. Another poet, Robert Pinsky, also favors this spanning of physical and spiritual worlds. He states in an essay, "Poetry and the World," that many of his "favorite works, recent and historical, involve a bridge or space between the worldly and spiritual" (331). In analyzing how this bridge crossing or reconciliation of space works in a poem, I see three similar qualities that are generally present in poems that move me: the poem itself is a compact and profound experience; the experience and the poem contain surprise; and the poem resonates with recollection and insight that cross time and space.

The experience of a poem depends in part upon the technique of the poet, upon such things as melos, alliteration, lyrical imagery, or the presence of a sincere narrative voice or persona, upon the choices of form and structure. This experience should have an impact on the reader. Walt McDonald writes in an online edition of the *Valparaiso Poetry Review* that "The poem is an *intense experience*; it doesn't merely tell me about something." He is speaking of poems that are for him successful and well-written. He suggests that often this success has to do with the type of language used: imaginative and emotional rather than utilitarian and informational. Image and sensory detail are two ways to achieve maximum intensity, while generalities and abstraction generally imprison the poem, McDonald says. Poems so jailed are consigned to the dungeon of trivialities, so far removed from the domain of the house as to produce only the most

humdrum and banal experiences. They are, as Simic points out about Milosz's assertion, only glimpses of the poet's "tedious everydayness" ("A World" 16). In contrast to these, the kind of poetry that I attempt to write--what I call good contemporary poetry, including my Christian poetry--will be an *intense experience*. Such intensity is its first attribute.

Another characteristic I strive for is surprise. In *Writing the Australian Crawl*, William Stafford demonstrates his process of starting with an impulse or speculation and seeing what it suggests; then he takes that thought and lets it suggest something else and something else, and so on, until the poem is complete (29-30). He asserts that "Writing is a reckless encounter with whatever comes along" (67). This encounter, being reckless and undetermined, should result in surprise. Stafford suggests, "The practice of writing involves a readiness to accept what emerges, what entices" (52). McDonald quotes Robert Frost as saying, "No surprise in the writer, no surprise in the reader" (qtd. in McDonald). I have occasionally been surprised by the poems that emerge from my own dynamic and intriguing rendezvous with words. Sometimes the surprises are good, and sometimes they are shocking.

A third trait of contemporary poetry important to my work is the resonance of insight, the delight of discovery. McDonald says that "Poetry is not autobiography, but art; not merely facts of your actual life, but invention; not confession, but creation--*discovery* of poems you wouldn't have found if you hadn't begun to write." This attribute is a twin of the second one, for surprise lurks in the process of discovery. What I think is central to this third characteristic, however, is the *delight* in that process. A quickened vitality should resound from the poem, be it a lyrical image, a meditation, or a narrated story. McDonald encourages in his online article, "Down there--buried inside you--are

regions you haven't touched for years or decades, or ever, except in hopes or dreams or nightmares. Those are the bits and remnants of all you've taken in--the lost cities of Atlantis, the elephants' graveyard, the forgotten playgrounds and bone yards of your life." When the poet digs into those deep places, he discovers the intense experiences and profound "reminders of [his] past," to use Bachelard's phrase (Bachelard xxiii). The poet can delight in this discovery and rejoice in the reverberations and repercussions that the images echo. This discovery can be viewed as the result of Lorca's *duende*, which is "a power, not a work. [. . .] a struggle, not a thought" (Lorca 49). Robert Bly says *duende* "is the sense of the presence of death" (*Leaping* 29), and Lorca himself says it is "a mental wind blowing relentlessly over the heads of the dead" (Lorca 62). The *duende* is not a demon, stresses Lorca, but it is different from a muse or an angel (49-50). He says, "The *duende*'s arrival always means a radical change in forms. It brings to old planes unknown feelings of freshness, with the quality of something newly created, like a miracle, and it produces an almost religious enthusiasm" (53). The artist must reach deep within himself (like McDonald says) to summon the *duende*; and it "does not come at all unless he sees that death is possible" (Lorca 58). This possibility of death resides in Gallagher's "poem-time," where all possibilities exist simultaneously in the time of the poem; achievement of this enlightened jump across the chasm of space and time brings a delight in discovery that completes the architecture of the "poem house."

At work with these three attributes--the architecture--are four aspects or modes of contemporary poetry--the design. These aspects consider the approach to or the aim of poetry. I point first to a purpose of language. Jeanne Murray Walker says, "I think of language as the attempt to catch the thing. Never, not now or ever, the thing itself"

(Lythgoe 8). Of course the purpose of language is to communicate. However, language is theoretically abstract, Robert Pinsky asserts in his book *The Situation of Poetry*, and thus, "the poet's medium, then, is abstract" (5). The poet's problem is the same as that of any speaker in any language: to bridge the gap between the thing and the word that represents it, just as Walker says--"to catch the thing." Pinsky says that this problem "between words and things does not change, from one time to another, however much stylistic responses to the dilemma may vary" (*Situation* 87). The contemporary poet faces the same struggle that the Modernist did, which was the same challenge the Romantic faced, and the Renaissance poet before him, all the way back to pre-literate orality. The poet's job, now as in past periods, is to close that gap between thing and word--to communicate.

This communication should have certain positive results. In *Missing Measures*, Timothy Steele writes that "poetry can and should fulfill an important role in our culture" (293). Contemporary poetry can give us hope and "connect us with the future" (293), he asserts, listing cultural qualities that enhance our lives:

What is most essential to human life and to its continuance remains a love of nature, an enthusiasm for justice, a readiness of good humor, a spontaneous susceptibility to beauty and joy, an interest in our past, a hope for our future, and, above all, a desire that others should have the opportunity and encouragement to share these qualities. An art of measured speech nourishes these qualities in a way no other pursuit can. (294)

These qualities represent beneficial elements of a Christian worldview; they are things I hope my voice communicates in my poetry. Haines writes that most poets understand

that perhaps the most important characteristic of poetry is "that it enhances life for us" ("The Hole" 133). To do this, he suggests, the "I" of the poem must make his experience a universal human one (133). This cannot happen unless the experience is touched with what Milosz calls "historical reality," which Charles Simic interprets as a "sense of the tragic, which is borne of the experience of collective misery" ("A World" 16). When Milosz wrote in an early poem entitled "Dedication," the lines "What is poetry which does not save / Nations or people?" (qtd in "A World" 16), he was not referring to evangelical salvation, but to the fostering of the cultural qualities of which Steele speaks, the enhancement of life that Haines proposes. I hope that my poetry of faith provides these benefits as it communicates emotion, experience, and evidence of historical compassion.

Of course, a general goal of poetry of any kind is to communicate, and I categorize this communication into four approaches to contemporary poetry. These approaches are also evidenced in Christian poetry, and I link them to the attributes of poetry, as well as to subject and form. They are a bridge conveying the poem's emotion and thought from the mind of the writer to the mind of the reader. In my own poetry, when I find disparity between the substance and its expression, I know I need to drastically revise or start over. When I find clarity, I am struck by surprise--that attribute which makes a poem sing. Therefore, I believe an analysis of these aspects is important.

The first of these aspects is to share experience and identity in the poem. I couple these two abstract terms because so much of who we think we are depends upon the experiences we have had, and who we appear to be depends upon the experiences we choose to reveal. Pinsky emphasizes that experience happens in the unconscious mind, and language (which requires thought) occurs in the conscious mind. He suggests that the

conflict between the unconscious and conscious must be resolved in order to write good contemporary poetry (*Situation* 47). William Wordsworth addresses this when he predicates his purpose in the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*":

The principal object [. . .] in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way [. . .] Low and rustic life was generally chosen. (241).

Jonathan Holden asserts that the core idea of Wordsworth's "Preface," was "that it is permissible for a poet to bring his personality, his individual voice, back into a poem and to place it in a prominent position" (*Rhetoric* 123). This, of course, permits the poet to share experience and identity, and to seek to make sense of both. A poet who does this well is Walt McDonald, whose poetry transforms ordinary events (such as a camp out or sitting on a deck recuperating from surgery) into extraordinary experiences in such poems as "Before the Glaciers Melt" and "Watching Dawn on Padre Island." This sharing of experience and identity in the poem fosters a sense of shared humanity, a crossing of that bridge between separate lives in time and space.

A second aim, closely related to the first, and also considered by Wordsworth, is to convey emotion. Just as Aristotle recognizes the importance of emotion to tragedy and the epic poem, prescribing catharsis as an ultimate objective, so also Wordsworth proposes, "All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Wordsworth 242) and originates from "emotion recollected in tranquility" (250). Moreover, he asserts

that "the feeling [. . .] gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling" (243). The mixed emotions portrayed by Philip Levine in his poem "Getting There" give significance to the simple action of a farmer helping a man and boy with car trouble. The poem brings tears to my eyes just thinking about not only the emotions that the poem's persona experiences, but the whole realm of possibilities in that moment of time, in that poem-space. Donald Hall's poem "Names of Horses" also crosses this bridge of time in its conveyance of emotion.

A third aspect of poetry I want to write is the exploration of values and worth. Horace asserts that the aim of poetry is to "delight or enlighten" (75). Many spiritual contemporary lyric poets seek enlightenment, and their poems serve as the mode of discovery and the means of sharing that discovery with the reader. Mark Jarman asserts that, "The attempt to discover and represent meaning and value is, I believe, nearly always a search for transcendent meaning and value" (Lythgoe 9). This is a search, an exploration, in which the poet attempts to discover for himself the possibilities that inhabit the time and space of the poem, and he seeks to share the results of that discovery with the reader. The poet need not necessarily explore issues, stories, and language that are considered Christian, religious, or spiritual; any endeavor to understand reality fits this search for value and worth. Much of Denise Low's poetry fulfills this role, such as "Starwater," "Inside the River," and "Summer River," where the poet's inquiry leads to an affirmation of human connection to nature and the value of that connection in the scope of time.

Holden says that this process of inquiry is a trend in contemporary poetry away from "personal testimony whose prime test is sincerity and authenticity" toward "poems

that invite the reader to 'suppose' and that then proceed to spin a mythology" (*Rhetoric* 136). This endeavor to explore issues, stories, and hypotheses can result in a heightened awareness of life, a deeper understanding of what it means to be human. In an interview published online, Scott Cairns expresses that his poetry is "an ongoing, developing engagement and obsession with theology, parabolically--which is to say, NOT systematically--expressed" ("Amazon"). His focus is on supposition as it relates to parables, which, after all, are myths spun to make a point. Explorations of this kind are neither apologetic dialectics nor rousing sermons. They are poetry--intense experiences that surprise both poet and reader with a delightful and insightful discovery. Excellent examples of this parabolic exploration are Cairns' poems "Another Crucifixion," Judith Wright's "Eve to Her Daughters," and Donald Hall's "A Carol." Writing from the Jewish perspective is Shirley Kaufman, whose poem "His wife" explores in fourteen lines the story of Lot's wife, providing yet another example; Cairns uses a slightly different approach to explore this same story in a prose poem in his collection *Recovered Body*.

The fourth aspect that I consider here is a critique of culture. Poetry offers a forum for advocating social change. The editors of *American Diaspora* note that contemporary poets in the United States "speak for the psyche of America" (Suárez and Van Cleave xi), the milieu of the society. If poets speak for the national mindset, they can also call for change in an attempt to improve culture. Shelley called poets "the unacknowledged legislators of the World" (Shelley 802), and while it would appear today that movie makers and television producers have a far wider sphere of influence, contemporary poets can stand ready to reclaim the responsibility. To do so, they must respond to Haines's caution about "the extent to which poetry is becoming merely a

verbal event, separated from the reality of the life around us" ("Further" 86). They must make the poem relevant to individual and social need, connecting to reality.

In this exploration of reality as it appears in everyday life, contemporary poets can speak for the culture, can call for social change by preserving and exposing the past. In *The Best American Poetry 2000*, Gabriel Spera says, "it's the first job of a poet to ensure that history--personal and public--is neither erased nor rewritten" (247). His poem "In a Field Outside the Town" is an example of this cultural criticism. Poets of faith can invest in social improvement as well as in individual discovery and growth; they can do so without preaching or condemning, by simply revealing reality and encouraging appropriate sentiment. Sometimes this involves first a "need to make peace with a difficult past" (Suárez and Van Cleave xii) before a new beginning can come, as it comes to the immigrant--full of "hope of the future, of reinventing ourselves, of starting once again from scratch" (xii). Milosz contends that an experience of historic upheaval and a perception of the relative importance of various events in our past are necessary to develop a sense of the tragic (ctd. in Simic, "A World" 14, 16). This sense of the tragic, of collective suffering, is necessary to shape a social climate conducive to starting over. Carolyn Forché's poem "The Colonel" and Denise Levertov's "It Should be Visible" are examples of poems that address social ills by facing the past; these poems, voiced sincerely by poets of faith, seek positive cultural change.

As I noted earlier, I use the term *poets of faith* to include both Christian poets and those who are not professedly Christian who share through poetry their spiritual and/or religious ideas and experiences. This vibrant act of sharing what is vital marks the poetry as spiritual. Philip Zaleski writes, in the "Preface" to *The Best Spiritual Writing 1999*,

that "spirituality is more than psychology, philosophy, politics, or physics; it is the secret life that animates these realms and all else that falls within human experience. [. . .] Spiritual writing takes anything as its subject--and then bores straight to the heart" (xi-xii). He does not limit spiritual writing to religious ideas or themes, and he includes nature writing within the scope of what he terms "good *spiritual* writing" (emphasis added), which "is, always, good writing," he says (xiv).

This suggests a need to define good writing. In discussing his criteria for good poetry, David Lehman says it is easier to explain what a good poem is *not*, than to describe what it is:

Bad poems are slightly unreal. You feel you are encountering not a person behind the poem but rhetoric, a received style, a received vocabulary, diction self-consciously "poetic." Bad poems lack individuality. They do not entertain except perhaps inadvertently and at their own expense. They may embarrass. (21)

On the other hand, he explains, "Good poems give pleasure. Good poems have enough reality in them to resist the merely poetic. They smell of the street rather than the museum. They establish their individuality without delay" (Lehman 21). To achieve that effect, one would need to write from the depth of his soul, or heart, or spirit, or whatever term he prefers, and to write sincerely. Zaleski sums it up well when he affirms that "great spiritual literature is the result of absorbing, filtering, and refining the wisdom of the past in the light of one's own lived experience" (Zaleski xiv).

With those qualifications in view, I would conclude that, for me, the spiritual poetry I seek to write would share my experience and identity in the poem, convey emo-

tion, explore values and worth, and, in some way, seek to improve culture; moreover, the poem itself would be a compact and profound experience that contains surprise and resonates with recollection and insight that cross time and space. To accomplish this, I think that subject matter and form must fuse so that the poem works as a window through which the reader can view what I have placed before him. McDonald uses a window metaphor when he says, "we look through the glass of a window to see *through* the glass, not to focus on the spots or streaks." He quotes Louis Simpson as saying that the goal of poetry "is to make words disappear"--like the glass of clear, clean window--invisible.

To get this clarity, I am learning that certain forms work best for certain subject matter. For example, to add discursive material to an image poem defeats the purpose of the image as articulation of an idea: it clouds the window. One of the problems I found (and still occasionally do find) with my poetry writing is this: I'll get the window clean and clear, and then, just to make sure I make my point, smudge it with a statement that summarizes what I am trying to communicate or crack it as I try to *hammer home my point*. My continuing study of poetic theory and a continuous reading of the contemporaries is teaching me to control that urge--to let the window perform its job.

Additionally, not only do windows allow vision outward, they also let light into the room. Marilyn Nelson says of her poetry, "I hope my work brings light into the world" (Lythgoe 15). A window covered with dark and fancy drapery will not let in light; likewise, the poem must be clear, stripped of any unnecessary words, refined as gold or silver. In the online *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, McDonald encourages the learning poet to "go beyond first thoughts," to "hold your poem to the fire; burn away all chaff, all that isn't your poem." This takes work. This takes sacrifice. This takes

experience. I continue to gain this experience as I work with my poems, filtering out that which disturbs the communication, polishing the diction, lines, and details, and improving my voice and choices of form, structure, and subject. I am learning to avoid discursive lines in image poems, to avoid stating a "moral" in narrative poems, and to let nature poems stand on their own without my added interpretation.

Each of these types of poems--image, narrative, and nature--along with lyric, landscape and formal, could occupy their own room in a metaphorical house of poetry, and spiritual poetry--including Christian--could have its own space in each of those rooms. As my title and thesis statement indicate, my purpose is to find a place in contemporary poetry for my Christian poetry. I look first at the image poem.

Marvin Bell quotes the way Ezra Pound defines the image in *Poetry*, March 1913, as "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (Bell 111). This complex is, by implication of the word image, a picture that suggests or resembles something else; it is usually a sensory perception that brings to mind or represents something abstract, and does so *immediately*, as Pound suggests. Bly states, "The power of the image is the power of seeing resemblances" ("Recognizing" 105). When the image *works*, that power is as instantaneous as electricity: the resemblance is communicated the moment the switch is flipped.

However, this power can be either short-circuited or overloaded. Short-circuits occur when the resemblance is of something insignificant and forgetful, something trivial and tedious. Bly says that the question to ask of our poem's image is, "Does this image retrieve a forgotten relationship, or is it merely a silly juxtaposition, which is amusing and no more?" ("Recognizing" 105). If I keep that question in mind, along with Milosz's

ideas of "historical reality" and "hierarchical experience," I can avoid short-circuiting my images. Opposite of the short-circuit is an overload of power, which occurs when too many words or the wrong kind of words are forced through the image, blowing a fuse and halting the power-flow. Non-sensory language represents the wrong kind of words to use in image poetry, though they sometimes come easier. McDonald says, "Accept the truism that it's harder--but more effective--to write lively images than to settle for general statements and abstractions." The repeated and redundant use of certain symbols can also overload an image poem.

Another practice that can overload a Christian image poem is to use clichéd symbols or hackneyed images in commonplace and mediocre ways. This would be like cutting the wire and stopping the flow of power. This additional pitfall, of course, is a danger to any poet, but particularly to the Christian poet because of the widespread over-use of Christian symbols, due, in part, to the internalization of scripture as far back as the Renaissance writers and more prominently among the Romantics. Thus, while being true to her identity, the Christian poet must strive extraordinarily hard for the element of freshness and surprise if she is to write poetry that is well-received. The appearance of manna and crosses or multiplied loaves and fish can become bombastic. My own particular battle is to resist the urge to sermonize, to evangelize, or (in some cases) to pronounce judgment.

However, a poet should not feel the need to drop all spiritual focus. E. Ethelbert Miller says, "One's religion, like one's politics, should serve as a foundation. It defines who and what we are. The poetry and art we produce should embrace our vision" (Lythgoe 7). To embrace the vision without preaching, it is necessary to keep from

cutting the wire through which the power flows; to avoid an overuse of abstract language in an image poem is necessary to achieve instant representation or suggestion. Examples of successful image poetry within the Christian notion are "O Taste and See," by Denise Levertov, and "Men Against the Sky," by John Haines.

Although not suitable for the image poem, abstractions and generalities do have a place elsewhere. They belong in the room of discursive poetry, which has been increasing in popularity. In 1986 Holden proposed that there was beginning to be a "decline of imagistic poetic convention in favor of [. . .] more abstract styles of discourse" (*Style* 1). Pinsky refers to discursive poetry as a "quality" rather than a "kind" of poetry (*Situation* 134). It is "organized around a setting forth of material"; it is "inclusive" rather than "intuitive," by which he means that it "include[s] many of the mind's steps and many of its interesting travels" (134-35). Discursive poetry is different from a persona poem in that it does not merely express an event, experience, or emotion from the point of view of an "I"; it also communicates the thoughts and the thought process of the poet. Pinsky says that its purpose is neither the subject itself nor the manner of expressing that subject; it is the accomplishment of expression (*Situation* 135). He says that abstract diction has two effects, which I think complement each other. "On the surface, the effect is an air of dogged sincerity, an almost clinical honesty [. . .] In a deeper way, the abstractions do what abstractions always tend to do: they assert the presence or pursuit of an absolute, some value transcending the particulars of experience" (142).

This putting forth of an absolute or transcendent basis of life is where Christian poetry could excel. This is also where the danger exists of falling into a didactic sermon-like discourse, making the poet seem to be hypocritical rather than sincere, fanatical

rather than honest. I see this type of poem as possibly the most difficult for the Christian poet, although there are examples of spiritual poetry that accomplish the task well. Two illustrations are "Watching the ancestral Prayers of Venerable Others" by Pattiann Rogers and "The Soul May Be Compared to a Figure Walking" by David Hopes. Several of Scott Cairns's prose poems show the use of discursive elements blended with image, such as "The Sacrifice of Isaac"; Mark Jarman's "Epistle" does this as well. However, these poets avoid sermonizing. Andrew Hudgins says in an interview, "My poems are about Christian subjects and they may be about a longing for faith, but they are not statements of faith" (Lythgoe 6). In the room of discursive poetry, the Christian poet must walk with wisdom, avoiding a potential impulse to present statements of faith, logical apology, or evangelistic sermons.

A combination of the image and discursive poem is the non-autobiographical narrative poem. Instead of presenting a persona in action or reflecting about an event or experience using an "I," this type of poem tells a story, generally using third person and past tense. These have as subject matter other people in other situations, told to make a point to the reader about the human condition. Of course, they were the ballads of earlier literary periods. Holden says that the trend for these poems, whether prose poems, free verse or new formalist, is to draw from other genres--fiction, essay, and lyric poem--the elements to dramatically present "unconventional subject matter" (*Fate* 136-37). He explains the significance of story telling to the contemporary reader, and quotes Robert Stone: "'Story-telling is not a luxury to humanity; it's almost as necessary as bread. We cannot imagine ourselves without it, because each self is a story'" (qtd. 81).

There is a wealth of story telling in the Bible and an abundance of stories to be told. Paul Mariani speaks of his interest in writing "a poetry which shadows some of the narrative strategies of the parables" (Lythgoe 11-12), and Eric Pankey says, "The stories and language of the gospels [. . .] are threads that are woven into my own stories and language" (12). Because this type of poetry lends itself well to the parables and stories of the Bible, it is a superb form for the Christian poet to grasp, although, as with other forms, I need to remember not to "moralize" at the end by stating the point; the story itself must carry the theme. Scott Cairns has mastered of this type of poem, as evidenced by "In the Well of Joseph's Deep Despair" and "The More Earnest Prayer of Christ." Walt McDonald's poem "Crawling Through Caverns," though written in present tense, is a narrative poem. As already noted, "In a Field Outside of Town" by Gabriel Spera is an excellent example of this form.

Another form, lyric poetry, combines aspects of discursive poetry, imagism, and the narrative, and generally uses first person, employing a persona. What distinguishes lyric poetry from other types of narration is the presentation of the lines as though the poet/speaker were talking to himself or another, disregarding the reader. Holden quotes Northrop Frye's definition: "'The lyric poet normally pretends to be talking to himself or to someone else: a spirit of nature, a Muse . . . a personal friend, a lover, a god, a personified abstraction, or a natural object . . . The poet, so to speak, turns his back on his listeners . . .'" (qtd. in Holden, *Rhetoric* 61). However, the reader is free to eavesdrop.

There are a few restrictions to the lyric: if the poem is in past tense, it can't pretend this eavesdropping of the reader, and if it is in second person, obviously the reader is being acknowledged. In these cases the poem should be considered a narrative.

Other characteristics mark the lyric poem, as Holden explains. He says that lyric poetry insists on each line leading to the next, like measures of music, though meter and rhyme are not necessarily used. Each stanza and the poem itself must end on the right note, just as one would not end a B flat composition with a C sharp chord, I would suppose. The correct ending conveys the emotion the poet/persona is experiencing or intends to convey (Holden, *Rhetoric* 63). Most of Walt McDonald's poetry is lyric, spiritual, and good; other examples are "Loves: Magdalen's Epistle" by Scott Cairns and "Elegy for My Father, Who Is Not Dead" by Andrew Hudgins.

The lyric poem is distinguished from the discursive poem by the presentation of subject; the lyric poem uses concrete, sensory detail rather than abstract discourse. It is also different from the image poem by its use of a persona's strong voice. Holden cites the distinction given by Stanley Plumly as being that of sound, asserting that the image poem uses "the rhetoric of silence," whereas the lyric poem uses "the rhetoric of 'voice'" (qtd. in *Rhetoric* 11). Larry Levis is a master of this type of writing, as is Walt McDonald, as already noted.

Much lyric poetry is presumably autobiographical, the sharing of an event, situation, or experience--and the emotion attendant--by an "I," who appears to be, for all practical purposes, the poet himself. These poems allow the Christian to explore the emotions and experiences of our shared humanity (such as the loss of a loved one, a sense of despair or joy, a realization of the passing of time and the futility of material gain, or the shock that attends the recognition of social injustice or crime), and to thereby offer hope or comfort to the reader. Again, I realize the need to avoid religious jargon and an arro-

gant attitude since sincerity is a key component of voice in these poems. Jack Stewart does an effective job of this in his poem "Bible Studies," as does Mark Jarman in "Stars."

The success of those poems could be attributed to their adherence to Holden's advice. He urges the poet to use language that sounds like natural speech with unexpected line breaks and present tense to provide a "greater urgency, greater immediacy, as if the narrator were re-experiencing the occasion of her poem even as she uttered it. [. . .] to maximize its intensity" (*Rhetoric* 6). This reminds me of Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquility," although this type of poem does not focus on the emotion, but on the experience, presenting information that might otherwise appear in a creative nonfiction essay, "dramatically rather than as exposition [. . .] as [. . .] interior monologue of a person in action, of a person doing anything" (Holden *Rhetoric* 16).

Of course, a lyric poem can be written using a persona that is not the poet himself. An example might be one of my Vietnam poems or wounded veteran poems; I have not been in the military or had close family or friends serve in Vietnam, but I lived through the era that now informs much of my thought and writing. Pinsky says this "use of a borrowed voice or alter-identity, as speaker or central character partly distinct from the poet" helps move "the poem away from the abstraction of a statement, toward the being of an object" (*Situation* 14). This "being of an object" is the use of image to avoid abstraction, the use of concrete details to emulate the sincerity of personal testimony. Holden paraphrases A. Poulin, Jr.'s comments about the degree to which most contemporary poets "admit themselves into their poems," saying that if they make only oblique reference to themselves, then (as Plumly asserts), the poem will "depend on image rather than on narrative 'voice,'" and will generate a greater risk of the poem's seeming

"insincere" (Holden, *Rhetoric* 13-14). The reason for this sense of insincerity is that to use image "requires premeditation," which "requires some aesthetic distance between [the poet] and his material" (14). This employment of image to supplement the *testimony* of the voice of the poem sets persona poems apart from autobiographical narratives. What is important to determine in persona poems is, as Holden suggests, "*who is speaking to whom, through what mask, and for what ostensible purpose*" (*Rhetoric* xiii), because the style depends upon the mask: the deployment of first person singular requires a certain style of exposing one's assumed self, which requires a higher level of perceived sincerity (xiv). Skilled at this is Donald Hall, who has several poems that appear to be persona poems rather than autobiographical, such as "Edward's Anecdote" and "Carlotta's Confession."

Sometimes to preserve the sense of sincerity, persona poems use the second person pronoun (sometimes a "blurred you"), to create ambiguity, hide the invasion of privacy, imitate universality, or mask what is really just a confessional poem. Holden says that the blurred plural *you* is "too often [. . .] being misapplied by poets in poems that have a basically testimonial or a narrative character--poems that should remain in the first- [sic] or second-person singular" (*Rhetoric* 40). I think that in Christian poetry, the use of second person could tend to isolate the reader by sounding judgmental or *holier-than-thou*. This effect would be as detrimental as the use of the first-person-plural, sermonic "we," and could alienate readers not belonging to the poet's particular faith-based discourse community. However, an example of a poem that uses the blurred-you successfully is "Natural Theology" by Kelly Cherry.

Of course, any of these forms of poetry--image, discursive, or lyric--can be written using a formal structure, as well as in free verse. "New formalism," in which meter and rhyme are being rediscovered to fit late twentieth and early twenty-first-century culture, puts "free verse poets in the ironic and unprepared position of being the *status quo*," says Dana Gioia (15). "Free verse, the creation of an older literary revolution, is now the long-established, ruling orthodoxy; formal poetry the unexpected challenge" (15-16). A particular danger accompanies the employment of new formalism to poems expressing faith, and that danger, for me at least, is to succumb to inverted syntax and trite rhymes in order to maintain the form. For that reason, I find a need to limit my use of structured forms, though occasionally a narrative insists on formal treatment rather than free verse. Several poets have proven themselves in both styles, including Walt McDonald, Mark Jarman, and Scott Cairns. Gioia's advice is to write both free verse and formal verse. He asks, "Why shouldn't a poet explore the full resources the English language offers?" (27).

Certainly in the realm of non-literary Christian "poetry," a lot of formal *verse* continues to be written. While these communicate emotional and theological truth and experience to readers within specific discourse communities, the average reader (whether *literary* or simply *non-Christian*) would find them lacking in aesthetic appeal because of their didactic statement of doctrinal creed or overt effort at evangelism. When considering contemporary poetry, the same constraint applies to formalism as to free verse for the Christian poet who is concerned with the *art* of poetry, the *literature* of poetry. However, specific to the contemplation of formal verse is an additional insight provided by Gioia:

Soon, I believe, the central debate will focus on form in the wider, more elusive sense of poetic structure. How does a poet best shape words, images, and ideas into meaning? How much compression is needed to transform versified lines--be they metrical or free--into genuine poetry? [. . .] At that point the real issues presented by recent American poetry will become clearer: the debasement of poetic language; the prolixity of the lyric; the bankruptcy of the confessional mode; the inability to establish a meaningful aesthetic for new poetic narrative; and the denial of musical texture in the contemporary poem. The revival of traditional forms will be seen then as only one response to this troubling situation. There will undoubtedly be others. Only time will prove which responses were the most persuasive. (27)

Regardless of one's opinion of the new formalism, what appears to be most important is restoring the polish of what Milosz calls "realistic poetics"--the poetry that comes, not easily, by respecting the things of the world "more than we respect aesthetic values" (qtd. in Simic, "A World" 16).

Part of this respect of the world is a focus on creation--on the natural world as it exists around us. "Poetry celebrates creation," David Lehman says (18), and I think that whether one believes the theory of evolution or of creation, to be in awe of plants, animals, oceans, forests, and stars is a natural human response to the beauty around us. To enjoy a bird in the backyard can be as eventful as climbing Mt. Everest; to watch a sunset over the ocean can be as thrilling as riding a raft through the Grand Canyon. Often such portraits of or experiences in nature will suggest deeper truths about our humanity,

and the nature poem is a marvelous way to communicate these discoveries. Mary Oliver's poem "Hummingbird Pauses at the Trumpet Vine," Mark Jarman's "Wave," Denise Low's "Kansas Grasslands" and "We Wait at the River," Annie Dillard's "The Naturalist at Large on the Delaware River Marshes," and Donald Hall's "Old Roses" are good examples of nature poetry that celebrates creation and expresses deeper insight.

Another type of nature poem that lends itself to the spiritual writer in particular is landscape poetry. I have enjoyed writing landscape poetry since grade school, even though I could never quite describe the colors of a western Kansas sunrise or sunset exactly as I saw them. The words "crimson," "scarlet," "red," "purple," and "gold" just don't carry the full sense of the range of color that spreads across the sky at dawn and dusk. There is an explanation for this, and the new landscape poetry seeks to avoid that which Pinsky calls "the tyranny of adjective and simile" (*Situation* 104); instead, it leans toward the elements that Holden says language can perform more eloquently than can paint: "Action, a sense of the passage of time, a sense of process and of things not immediately, physically present or visible" (*Style* 146). What the poet must remember, according to Holden, is not to try to capture the visual elements of color, shadow, and light on what is visibly present, but to capture a sense of the "duration" of the landscape, making the scene the "protagonist of the poem" (148). Though paintings can achieve a sense of temporality, the landscape poem can effect a sense of all the visual appearances of that space at different times and compress them into one work. The poem can be, as Wordsworth said, a "'spot of time'" (qtd. in *Style* 148), and can also transcend time. Gallagher says the "poem enters and becomes time" (Gallagher 107). Examples are "Men Against the Sky" by John Haines, and "First Snow in Alsace" by Richard Wilbur.

The idea of a landscape poem crossing the bridge of time has much to do with a theme of my collection, how place is a function of time and space. As events occurring in a landscape change over time, the very character of the landscape, the "place," changes as well. Following Holden's advice presented above helps the poet bridge time and achieve a sense of the continuation of the place. The painter's techniques can help build this bridge if the poet understands how to move from the medium of paint to the medium of words. The artist starts with a "high viewpoint" and a distant horizon with visible planes between; he uses shadow and light to lead the eye from the foreground into the painting toward the horizon, keeping the penultimate plane in sunlight; he presents the objects (trees, boulders, etc.) to scale within each plane (Barrell 7-9). If the poet can translate these techniques into his medium, he can capture a sense of time and change advancing through a single space. To enhance this effect, the poet can mimic the painter's technique of exaggerating the progression from plane to plane by leaps, rather than as "gradual diminution" in the relative size of objects. The painter smoothes out those transitions by a connective bridge, slope, or road "which runs diagonally across the picture" to reconcile the viewer "to the rapid diminution in the size of things" (9-10). An artistic landscape painting invites the viewer to step into its new little world; an aesthetic landscape poem invites the reader to share the poet's view of historical reality. Richard Hugo's poem, "West Marginal Way," exemplifies what I mean by this translation into the medium of words the artist's techniques on the canvass; that poem, read autobiographically, communicates additional *planes* of "truth" beyond the reality of place.

Helping Hugo's poem to work is the addition of plot and people, which provides the necessary sense of action, movement, and passing of time. These elements enhance

the human connection possible with such poetry. Scott Cairns predicts, "the turn American literature in the twenty-first century will take" is "a post-post-modern turn toward the natural world, the wilderness, as an empowering scene of encounter with what Coleridge would have called the *pre-phenomenal*, what we will entertain here as the *sacred*" (Olsen and Cairns xiii). This gives the Christian poet a whole world to work with, without didactic preaching and overuse of scriptural stories and parables, to present significant truths. After all, the Bible declares, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (*Zondervan, New International Version Rom. 1.20*).

Since landscapes are part of the natural world, they are a *place*. Lynda Sexson says, "Place is a collection of memories--a human imposition upon the planet" (139). This connects the landscape poem to the autobiographical narrative or lyric. Shirley Kaufman says, "A place is what happens in it and the memories that flow from it," and she insists that "Memory is always connected to a place" (Kaufman 209). She demonstrates that place is "set in time" and "also outside of time" because it is "a fixed point that gives meaning to our movement through time and space, from beginning to end, from here to there" (207). The physical landscape, the phenomenon, attests to our being, to our ontological experience. Larry Levis says that "a place in poetry, if it is good poetry, may be a spiritual state and not a geographic one" (Levis 224). A poet can describe a spiritual place in terms of a landscape that mirrors the condition of the psyche, using concrete details instead of abstractions. These details are not necessarily a random stream of consciousness, however. Robert Duncan says in his essay "Equilibrations,"

"The poem is not a stream of consciousness, but an area of composition in which I work with whatever comes into it" (628).

I call this area a *mindscape*, and I see as far back as Keats the unfolding of mindscapes in poetry. In many of Keats's poems this imagined space becomes real or immediate, as he describes emerging landscapes and peoples them, with a passion of association that Robert Bly would no doubt praise. In his "Ode to Psyche," Keats writes "In some untrodden region of my mind, / Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain, / Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind" (51-53), letting the imagined trees moan in an imaginary wind. In a letter to John Taylor on February 27, 1818, Keats writes, "if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all" (891), and in a letter to George and Georgiana Keats in 1819, he declared, "Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced" (897). I think he really experienced his mindscapes, not tangibly of course, but with the sureness of imaginative genius.

Keats's poetry reinforces for me an idea I have been contemplating regarding a theory of poetry. With respect to my own creative writing, I find that what happens is this: A space opens up in time and I must fill it--with images or discourse--with words whose sounds resound with fragrance, flavor, and savor to the ear, whose sense gives meaning and identity to that new place created which neither mirrors the real nor is fully imaginary--it is that moment's vision or remembrance of the way a certain space, actual or fanciful, looked or could have looked at any other specific time. In this way, place is a function of both space and time; mindscape is the setting that is bound by neither space nor time--it merely emerges from the mind and takes shape, and, as previously quoted, a writer should be prepared "to accept what emerges" (Stafford 52).

Sometimes what will emerge will be an image poem, sometimes an autobiographical narrative, sometimes a landscape poem; what entices may be a free verse, or a sonnet, or a quatrain; sometimes rhyme will electrify, and sometimes not. What starts this process is a mental image or thought sparked by visual input, by a word or sound heard, or by any number of sensory data; this spark triggers a recollection that creates, for me, the opening and starts the flow of words. This is the genesis of a poem, and though the stimulus comes from without, the poem arises from within, words gushing to fill the opened space. Once it is full, the process of discovery begins. I determine what thought, emotion, story, or image filled the space and what voice expressed it; I ask myself if the poem worked. If not, I decide what voice can best express the poem's sense; that answer determines form--lyric, autobiographical or persona, narrative, imagistic, descriptive, or discursive. Other choices follow, including questions of rhyme and rhythm, formal meter or free verse; last are decisions regarding line length, stanza, syntax, diction, and words. In all these choices the goal is communication.

Because communication is the act of sharing emotion or experience, my poems must not only sound good, they also must make sense. Sometimes what emerges must be taken to the fire and to the anvil, must be melted down, cooled, hammered, shaped, and wrought, must be cut, trimmed, embellished, fashioned, and polished in order to communicate well--to let the sense of the poem merge with the sound, so that both qualities abound. It is here, upon revision, that I have to consciously consider voice, form, structure, subject, and technique, and choose correctly from among the alternatives so that each poem will best bring experience and emotion together, will *communicate*. Because experiences and emotions vary, different voices and subjects do require different

styles to handle the various aspects. To meet this imperative, Pinsky claims, the poet "seems to need or prefer separate styles" (*Situation* 129). These styles include the forms I have covered in this thesis--the lyric, discursive, narrative, persona poem, for example, and range from free verse to formal poetry.

I think what Feirstein says about new formalism in his introduction to *Expansive Poetry* can be applied to free verse as well, can apply to any approach or aspect of the art of poetry:

[The] intention is to expand the possibilities for form and content in poetry. We don't want our work as a movement to be transformed into a new conformism in which superficial elements are reduced to a fashion and a set of formulae to be duly retailed in the creative writing schools. The reason to use narrative and meter and rhyme is not to be fashionable but to open worlds of reality and imagination to the poet which might otherwise be shut off. (xv)

A fusion of form and content (sound and sense) enables the poem to communicate. This empowerment cannot be set forth as a set of rules such as to insist that *to communicate x subject, one must use y form or style*. There must be no formula or forced conformity to a certain fashion because if the vehicle of communication is not open (that is, poetry), then the "worlds of reality and imagination" certainly cannot be opened. As a poet, I must be free to make whatever choices are necessary to mold that initial in-rush of words into a work of art that communicates emotion, experience, discovery, and insight, that fulfills the attributes and aspects of poetry that I have presented in my thesis.

I hope that as I grow and mature in the art of poetry, my decisions more frequently become spontaneous and occur during that inceptive rush of words, as now only occasionally happens. Making the right choices, and learning to do so intuitively, will enable me to write good spiritual poetry, about which Kathleen Norris says:

Spiritual writing is an attempt to describe this experience to another in such a way that a stranger can experience it in their own terms. [. . .] The best spiritual writing is hospitable to the reader; it offers an open door. Its language is approachable, accessible to the many and not just the few. While it may aim for the stars, it is firmly grounded in the material of ordinary experience [. . . it is] the hard stuff of the world come together with the deepest desires of the soul. ("Introduction" xxi, xxv, xxii)

Thus, to share experience, my poetry must spark in the readers certain recollections of their own experiences; these shared recollections then stir similar emotions; this sharing of experiences and emotions bridges time and place to achieve communication.

Therefore, as poetic spaces open up for me, I hope to fill them sincerely and clearly, in a way that shares emotion and provides insight on the human condition. In poems that are imagistic, discursive, or lyric, my desire is to express positive qualities that communicate hope and connect to reality, in words that surprise and delight, in poetry that bridges time and space. In the creative portion of this thesis I present a collage of diverse forms of poetry that, I hope, reverberates with historical reality and duende. Exploring place as a function of time and space, this collection, *Out of Time, Out of Place*, addresses the temporality of what is real and the reality of what is timeless.

Works Cited

- Abrams, M. H., and Stephen Greenblatt, eds. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Romantic Period*. 7th ed. New York: Norton, 2000.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*. 1958. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon, 1994.
- Barrell, John. *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1972.
- Bell, Marvin. "Noun/Object/Image." Friebert, Walker, and Young 111-14.
- Bly, Robert, ed. *Leaping Poetry: An Idea with Poems and Translations*. Boston: Beacon, 1978.
- . "Recognizing the Image As a Form of Intelligence." Friebert, Walker, and Young 101-09.
- Cairns, Scott. "Amazon.com Talks to Scott Cairns." Interview. *Amazon.com*. 8 January 2002. <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/show-interview/c-s-airnscott/ref+pm_dp_1n_b_8/002-8346881-1768837>.
- Duncan, Robert. "Equilibrations." *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*. Ed. Paul Hoover. New York: Norton, 1994. 626-28.
- Feirstein, Frederick, ed. *Expansive Poetry: Essays on New Narrative and New Formalism*. Santa Cruz: Story Line, 1989.
- Friebert, Stuart, David Walker, and David Young, eds. *A Field Guide to Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*. Rev. ed. Oberlin: Oberlin College P, 1997.
- Gallagher, Tess. "The Poem as Time Machine." Hall 104-16.

- Gioia, Dana. "Notes on the New Formalism." *New Expansive Poetry*. Rev. ed. Ed. R. S. Gwynn. Ashland: Story Line Press, 1999. 15-27.
- Haines, John. "Further Reflections on Line and the Poetic Voice." Friebert, Walker, and Young 84-87.
- . "The Hole in the Bucket." Hall 131-40.
- Hall, Donald, ed. *Claims for Poetry*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1982.
- Holden, Jonathan. *The Fate of American Poetry*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1991.
- . *The Rhetoric of the Contemporary Lyric*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980.
- . *Style and Authenticity in Postmodern Poetry*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1986.
- Horace. "The Art of Poetry." Trans. Smith Palmer Bowie. *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. 2nd ed. Ed. David H. Richter. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998. 68-78.
- Kaufman, Shirley. "Here and There: The Use of Place in Contemporary Poetry." Friebert, Walker, and Young 206-22.
- Keats, John. "Letters." Abrams and Greenblatt 890-903.
- . "Ode to Psyche." Abrams and Greenblatt 847-49.
- Lehman, David. "An Interview with David Lehman." Laura Pinto Orem. *The Writer's Chronicle* 34.3 (2001): 12-22.
- Levis, Larry. "Eden and My Generation." Friebert, Walker, and Young 223-39.
- Lorca, Federico Garcia. *In Search of Duende*. 1955. New York: New Direction, 1998.
- Lythgoe, Michael H. "Writers & Their Faith: Christianity in Contemporary Poetry." *The Writer's Chronicle*. 31.1 (1998): 5-15.

- McDonald, Walt. "Advice I Wish I'd Been Told." *Valparaiso Poetry Review: Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*. 1.1 (Fall/Winter 1999-2000) 22 November 2000.
 <<http://wwwstage.valpo.edu/english/vpr/mcdonaldessay.html>>.
- Norris, Kathleen. "Introduction." Zaleski xv-xxv.
- Olson, W. Scott, and Scott Cairns, eds. *The Sacred Place: Witnessing the Holy in the Physical World*. Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 1996.
- Pinsky, Robert. "Poetry and the World." Hall 331-44.
- . *The Situation of Poetry: Contemporary Poetry and Its Traditions*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976.
- Sexson, Lynda. "Home as Eden's Picture Book: The Fiction of Sacred Space." Olsen and Cairns 135-52.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "From *A Defence of Poetry*." Abrams and Greenblatt 790-802.
- Simic, Charles. "Some Thoughts About the Line." Friebert, Walker, and Young 93-94.
- . "A World Gone Up in Smoke." Rev. of *New and Collected Poems, 1931-2001 and To Begin Where I Am: Selected Essays*, by Czeslaw Milosz. *The New York Review of Books*. 20 Dec. 2001: 14-18.
- Spera, Gabriel. "Contributors' Notes and Comments." *The Best American Poetry 2000*. Eds. Rita Dove and David Lehman. New York: Scribner Poetry, 2000.
- Stafford, William. *Writing the Australian Crawl: Views on the Writer's Vocation*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1978.
- Steele, Timothy. *Missing Measures: Modern Poetry and the Revolt Against Meter*. Fayetteville: The U of Arkansas P, 1990.

Suárez, Virgil, and Ryan G. Van Cleave, eds. *American Diaspora: Poetry of Displacement*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2001.

Wordsworth, William. "From Preface to *Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems*." (1802) Abrams and Greenblatt 239-51.

Zaleski, Philip, ed. *The Best Spiritual Writing 1999*. San Francisco: Harper, 1999.

The Zondervan Parallel New Testament in Greek and English. King James Version and New International Version. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975.

Out of Time, Out of Place

Felicitous Space

Profiles of Courage

Word spread at noon like a tornado's
vacuum overhead, unleashing wind
that shook foundations, rattled lockers,
slammed them shut. A kid
I'd thought was cool said
I hope he dies.
My parents voted Republican;
I knew little about the Bay of Pigs,
Marilyn's escapades, Southeast Asia,
but I knew by heart the verses of
"PT109" and the immortal Tiresian words:
"Ask not . . . but ask . . ."
That was before our space-suited men
left their footprints on the moon;
before our violent protests
demanded peace, burned flags,
before, like Menoeceus for Theban glory,
our nation's young men offered
their lives and limbs to appease Ares.
During lunch break that day, teachers
stood in classroom doorways,
too horrified to sit at desks
piled with books, too stunned to cluster
in their lounge until the next bell
tolled, too shocked to scold
unruly students in the hall.
Maybe they just wanted
us to know they were there,
like hands on a clock,
like yard lines on a football field.

Travel Time

We can travel through space at speeds that amaze,
that compress time to a single grain of sand;
we can imagine alternate realities, parallel universes,

all the while balancing lives and places.

My great grandmother, if she were still living,
could tell me about the Civil War's end (born that year

to parents who saw Gettysburgh's battle: one a German
descendant and one a full-blooded Moravian Delaware);
she could tell how she came, with her parents

in a covered wagon to settle the Kansas plains.
It took them months from Pennsylvania, whereas I
made the trip in two days.

I could have made it in four hours by air. (It only
takes three days to fly to the moon.) Yes, the same moon
my great grandmother, if she were still living,

would say could tell a man when to hunt--(when
the powder horn could slide off the moon's vertical
slice in the phase between quarter and new)--

when to stay home to harvest winter wheat.

In My Young Dream Growing Old

In my young dream growing old
I move from room to room in the big house,
searching: Where is the closet I hid in
on that late afternoon in June,
while boys outside cried
"Come and play! We're waiting."
I didn't go out, then or ever,
Thought my dark corner safest at dusk
When the wild boys roamed looking for love.

All night long I sat in the closet weeping:
Where was the knight in glistening steel
who would defend and protect?
He never came, and I learned to wear
the shining coat of mail myself,
to roam the dark streets alone or
in company with others of my rank.
Together we climbed from the cellar
to the attic, emerged from the turret, ready
to joust for our lives, our dreams.

Night returns, and with it the million
eyes of heaven, searching: Where is the girl
who hid in the closet weeping? She wanders
from room to room, cellar to attic and back;
the main floor creaks with her weight,
each step groans at her passing. When she
turns off the light, she will sleep.
In the morning she'll wake to a bright new day
when the dream ends and the wrinkles fade away.

Other Worlds

Before Armstrong took his
"one small step for man"
Captain James T. Kirk
hurled through space at Warp Nine
--when Scotty came through for him,
just in time
to save the day and the Enterprise.
Nothing procreates
as fast as Tribbles;
silicon-based life
is possible
(just ask the Horta);
Vulcan minds
can meld with anything
intelligent, understand
both science and logic;
everywhere the universe
is peopled by strange folk
with large heads,
blue skin, disfigured faces,
or scaly, lizard-like bodies.
Models of tolerance,
the Enterprise crew,
quick to follow the prime directive:
no interference in other cultures.
Which makes me wonder
if we are the strange ones,
dreaming up such people and places,
as if our globe were not enough
to teach us dominance.
Did we long for an origin
other than our own
or seek an alternate
destination? Or,
maybe we just wanted space.

Mary's Part

". . . which shall not be taken
away from her"--Luke 10.42

Before Pizza Hut
someone had to fry
the fish, bake bread; maybe Martha
wasn't with them in the desert
when Jesus multiplied miraculously
what food was there--twice--
with leftovers more than what they had
to start. Mary did the good part
and listened to Jesus; she hung on every word
he spoke, while Martha played the perfect host
and cooked. Mary didn't boast about her choice,
nor did she offer an excuse for listening
or criticize her sister's busy role.
She sat and heard the Word while Martha worked.
Jesus was a friend to both.

House Hunting

When I was nineteen and went to this address with him when his wife was out of town, this house smelled of cherry-blend pipe tobacco--the scent of home and love. Now, thirty years later, my husband and I step across its threshold with a real-estate agent who tells us the stale stench of mildewed rugs and rotting wood is not from water damage--the owner smoked a pipe. I smile, knowing all about the pipe he smoked, and notice the stained and tattered carpet (which had been clean and thick that night it was the bed). I open frayed curtains, pregnant with dust, to peer out windows almost opaque. In the kitchen hang cabinets decades out-of-date. How could she--his wife--have lived here all these years without any changes?

My husband and I talk about the possibilities and how much time and money it would take to make this house ours, to get rid of the odor of mold and rot. "The neighborhood is fine," my husband says, looking out at the landscaped backyard that sends all rainfall down the grassy slope to the walk-out porch off the master bedroom. He can't open the sliding glass door because of mud and rust in its track. I recall the envy that gripped me years beyond that one night. "I like the location," I confess. And then I have to chuckle: "But this house just won't do."

Felicitous Space

". . . space that may be grasped, that
may be defended against adverse forces,
the space we love"-- Gaston Bachelard.

In my mother's bedroom,
thick with new smoke,
my father lingers in the blue air.
(I don't think she knows
he is there.)

He would be saddened by her resolute
rush to a quickened death;
he would have her attempt
health, long life,
even joy.

He was always that way--
seeking the best for others,
his own heart laden with love
to the point of buckling,
each beat at the end
a labored plodding
as through thick, sucking mud
or quicksand,
until it just gave out
and sank.

Late for Dinner

A velvet sky glows
with chips of diamonds sprinkled
like salt on burnt fish.

In Every Land

Ode to West Kansas Wind Looking Back

"The wind is oceanic in
the elms"--Ted Hughes

They say this state was once an ocean floor,
that tons of sea helped form its smooth terrain;
it's true, I think--just listen to its voice:
wind through prairie grass or fields of grain,
through cottonwoods or nest-filled ash and oaks.
The heartbeat of this land, a steady pulse:
rivers that flow slower than the air,
lakes that hold with fossil fingerprints
sea water without salt, fresh-water fish.

I once imagined seeing white-capped shores
that roared as tide swept in remains of water life:
clumps of stringy sea-hair, slick and green,
shells which once held creatures of the deep
like this one--curled and pinkish white, smooth as pearl.
My grandma gave it to me when I was twelve,
when all around me rippled seas of grain.
In Kansas, I only dreamed of ocean waves,
thought, *One day I'll go there--I will see
what is this voice I hear within the shell.*

Across the miles I traveled east and west:
to England's shores and California's coast.
I found it is the same: the marching tide
will sometimes only tiptoe on the sand,
at times will slam against the rocks with salty force
that mimics prairie sound: west Kansas wind.
Or does the prairie echo the ocean's song,
alluding to a past topography?

What Happens When Disease Rots a Tap Root by the River

A tree plucked up lies
like discarded flowers in
shallow water, still.

When rains come, its roots
won't be nourished; the tree'll float
on river rising.

Trunk, limbs, branches, twigs,
abandoned bird nests--all will
move downstream: driftwood.

In the Moorland

I

Nothing depends upon
the gray stone fence

protruding like vertebrae
out of the land.

II

An old man
in a wool cap
calls to a lad who's
dancing on the wall
like a barefoot girl
playing hop scotch.

Herding fat sheep,
they follow the fence away.

III

Long ago, armies
clad in steel
watered the ground
to the sound of bagpipes crying;
arrows shadowed grass
in passing,
opened the dry stone fence.

IV

A cloud peers down, dumps
sweet rain,
moves on.

Morning paints the sky
red, pink, gold;
paints the fence white.

(continued, section break)

V

Breeze becomes wind
sharp from the north
to sweep clean the blood
of horses and men,
to echo the cry from
both sides of the wall.

In the distance
the bleating of sheep
grows faint.

VI

Evening,
a bat swoops.
A mouse darts under
the moon-lit fence.
Night passes.

VII

Trailing into the horizon
just before dawn

the gray stone fence
stretches on.

Same song: another verse

"Humanism cannot explain
the nature of man"
--Ravi Zacharias.

It's only a rock, the neighbors said, just a rock:

thrown by teens to shatter the night's calm,
scattering in pieces the pane.
It's more, we said, like before,

sinking to gather the glass
shards before dawn, when our children
would wake, wonder *why this mess*

on the living room floor? How
could we tell them it was only a
stone--a stone and nothing more? A breach

of our home like years ago in Germany,
Selma, L.A.; like now: Jerusalem,
Dublin, New York City.

You should be glad, the neighbors said.
It could have been bullets.
What precious relief! The glass sliced

my hand like olives. I wish
I could have seen the vandals' faces
when I picked up that rock,

flung it back out, bloody,
what was left of the window
collapsing like icicles to the ground.

Wars and Rumors of Wars

"the life of the flesh is
in the blood"--Lev. 17.11

Who can say
how blood spreads through ocean waves
or how its hue seeps through sand
and leaves no trace,
how the stain of it bleeds into deep, white snow,
how it pools in dense timber like thickened rain,
how it colors concrete sidewalks, paved streets
until sunlight bleaches it pale?

Who can know
how it waters prairie grass
or soaks into soil to make clay,
how it flows through the veins like a river at flood time,
how it contains singularity, life,
how it can kill with skill when laced with germs,
how it expunges the serpent's poisonous bite,
what the lack of it means?

In the Silent Sepulchre

Naked
on the marble
crawls a fat white worm
travelling to another dish
to eat.

Foreshadowing

We were having afternoon tea,
barred from walking footpaths
we'd chosen, yellow tape
announcing, like a crime scene,
"Do Not Cross."

Our waitress said three
prize bulls were sacrificed nearby
though none were really sick:
the owner ruined, ready to quit.

At the table next to ours,
veterinarians from Portugal
who worked in herds with BSE
told us how this slaughter
wasn't necessary,
how vets could test blood,
determine whom to kill,
whom to let live. "Such
tactics were not employed here,"
our waitress uttered, bringing
the scones thick with clotted cream
and strawberry jam.

Instead,
cattle on the hills,
sheep piled high like mountains
of auto tires, torched;
healthy sheep slaughtered,
dumped like sacks of trash,
stacked in heaps,
bulldozed into ravines, while
soldiers stood guard,
their red berets
gleaming in the sun.

We later saw,
marked with yellow tape
beside the road,
a field on fire,
grass and heather ablaze.

(continued, stanza break)

"You're lucky they stopped burning,"
our waitress volunteered.

"The clouds made it hard to breathe,
not to mention the stink."

The veterinarians sighed
as if to say:

Such sacrifice was not necessary.

"But, oh," the waitress said,
"you should have seen the sunsets--
they were beautiful for awhile!"

To Lucy: in the 46th Precinct, circa 1996

She dwelt in projects packed and cold
and wandered room to room;
her clothing smelled of mildewed mold
and cheap was her perfume.

She painted her face and spiked her hair
before she went outside,
legs, arms, and shoulders bare,
(though she longed to be a bride.)

Mistaken for the OGE's friend,
massacred with a gun,
her hopes came to a bloody end,
and made a difference to none.

Oh, that she'd known the One who cared
enough to die for her!
How different might her life have been,
and eternity for sure.

To Make a Mark

What were you thinking, Demas,
turning your back on Paul
and the others?

Did some bauble of a possession
clasp you,
string you up?

Did some great thing
you wanted to accomplish
loom larger than faith?

Oh, to be loved by the people!

Never mind which ones,
or for what.

Paul's work I remember,
how he sang in prison,
survived a stoning and shipwreck,
wrote letters still read today;
I recognize the deeds of Timothy,
Titus, Luke, and Mark--
they wrote, preached, stood firm.

What did you ever do, Demas,
but leave?

At Malvern, Worcestershire, UK

I filled a bottle with
water filtered
through layered rock;
it surges in streams
from the earth's core,
free for the taking.
I'm told that the Queen
bottles this water
to drink while abroad;
it's like the water
that flowed from flint
when Moses struck the rock--
Malvern's water
has no flavored taste:
so pure that neither salt,
nor sweet, nor bitter, nor tart
tickle the tongue. Like
the Spirit welling up
in believers, pouring forth
rivers from the heart.

Out of Place

Enseñar por ejemplo

To the old park across town
I went for the baby shower
 (though I had a million
 other things to do)
to honor my soon-to-be
bilingual grandson and his mom,
my freckled skin and
accent out of place--
 olla, como estaw, bee-en, gracias, daynada.
I thought, maybe we won't play
those stupid shower games like Anglos do.
But we did.
For two hours.
I laughed, had fun, forgot my accent.
Then pin-the-bottle-in-the-baby's-mouth.
I, in my thick-lensed glasses,
wanted to pass--"let the children go first."
No, no; I had to take my turn among the guests.
I didn't notice
anyone else being turned three times
before they started,
blindfolded, toward the target.
With eyes closed and covered, I
tottered forward, arms extended,
until I touched the poster board;
like the ladies before me,
I felt for the edges, brought my hands together,
felt up from the bottom and stuck
my paper bottle.
When I pulled off the blindfold,
asked for my glasses,
I saw that I had hit the target dead center.
"You cheated," they told me
to explain my apparent skill with blindness,
to interpret the children's refusal now to play,
to inform me of the custom:
 the women go first and fail
 to give the young girls courage to try.

The Visitors

Born in western Kansas, they were "good country people" who had gone through high school with my parents. I met them

the week-end of an all-school reunion, first I'd ever attended--33 years post graduation, over 50 for my mom. After

my class party I went to the house, these long-ago friends there to visit. I opened the door, moved a wooden leg on the floor.

Flustered, I stepped over it, cautiously. Introduced, I shook hands the room around starting with the man who didn't stand,

his leg on the floor. Later, my mother said how glad she was he felt at ease, comfortable enough to take off his leg in her presence.

I remember a kid who swam one-legged on the swim team when I was young, and tap-danced to prove he could do it, as whole as anyone.

This man, his leg on the floor, had known my dad, played saxophone with him in the band. He'd had two legs then, received this replacement after

the war--or was it diabetes? I didn't watch when he strapped his leg back on to go, but my mother said he did it quick and smooth

as sand in a funnel. All I could think was, how I hadn't even noticed his wife--*what color was her dress? Did she wear glasses?*

The Color of Paper Money and Early Apples

Under green trees by green grass growing around a black marble wall, I heard a green-eyed boy with freckles ask the man--his grandpa, I assume--who sat in a non-electric wheelchair with a padded green cushion (it was camouflage green): the boy said: "Why do you come here? It's just a black wall."

You would have thought the old man had been kicked in the groin the way his face went white. "See the names on that wall, boy," he said, not even calling him son, or grandson.

The boy nodded.

"Every one named there gave his life for something in that war. Some were just left there." His finger trembled as he shook it.

You could tell the man was remembering one special day in the tall, razor-sharp, hot green grass, when the platoon was surrounded and his buddies went down. You could see the fear and pain in his once-green eyes, now gray with longing as down he went in the thick green growth, a bullet having shattered his knee cap and all around him men screaming, "Medic! Medic!" and himself calling out, "I'm hit!" and the awful waiting for the shot of morphine to deaden his awareness--praying a chopper would arrive before the enemy broke through the thin, green line to put a bullet in his skull and end all pain forever.

You could see him writhing in the bed sheets turned yellow-green with pus, calling out, "No! I need that leg!" and the doctor saying, "It's a million dollar leg--you're going home, son," just before he went under and woke up with only one left foot--not having to worry about stepping on Susie's feet as they danced ever again.

The boy grew solemn as his grandfather wiped moisture from his eyes and leaned over, stretching out his arm to point to one name in particular on the wall.

"He gave his life that day--a new guy--green--didn't know--"

His voice faded. He turned the wheelchair around and slipped his left-over green beret back onto his head. "Let's go." He struggled to get the chair onto the sidewalk that was surrounded by neatly trimmed, early-summer-fresh, cool green grass.

The boy fumbled with the handle bars of the chair. "Do you want me to push?"

Naturally Inferior

"You can be anything you want to be, do anything you want to do," Mrs. Goodwin proclaimed. "Anything." She would have been a good girls basketball coach. I believed her. In my mind I could sing soul like Mahalia. But every time I opened my mouth to try, the sound that came out was the flat voice of a monotone white girl--which I was. I guess I knew then that Mrs. Goodwin, though she meant well, just didn't know the whole score.

Out of Place

1 Fishing at Georgetown Lake off of I-70

Greener than a thousand trees,
the water glimmers while the cool
late summer breeze ripples
a hundred fish bubbles, brings
tiny droplets from a gray sky
to dot the lake in concentric rings,
sings a melody of pines
and dancing aspen leaves.
A Rainbow jumps near my line
as cars zoom by.

2 Eating Fruits and Vegetables

When pears hang sweet, ripe
on the bean bush, you will know
time is all used up.

3 Surprise at the End of the Road

Snow mounts deeper the higher we go;
pine-tree arms wear white gloves, point
upward to crisp blue sky; winter-bright
sun blinds the eyes, makes driving difficult
when the road zig-zags like rick-rack trim
and weaves scenes that change in shape and hue.
Ears pop until at the top, Echo Lake glistens
crystal ice--
Why had I expected shimmering blue?

4 Fishing in Kansas

A few crackling brown leaves,
having clung all winter long,
whisper in March wind,
then let go. Am I a fool to expect
fish to bite today?

5 Indication of a Change of Seasons

When you see autumn winds blow in a way that
coaxes spring leaves to bud and grow; when
the sun sends icicles to coat full limbs--then
you'll know: random madness has begun.

January Spring

White-trunked maples
glisten like glittering snow
in the woods. Months ago,
their flame-touched leaves
trembled amidst yellow and
brown, fluttered down.
Now, warm air lures alpha buds
to disregard decrees, to open.
Such untimely new growth
will, in next week's freeze, die.

On Seeing a Funeral Procession While Walking Home from School

Whose burial it was I do not know,
who passed me by proceeding to the plots:
a long white hearse, lights on, and
four cars following; four, no more.
The UPS truck stopped from courtesy,
while I kept walking, held my hurried pace.

Respect for family might have urged me stop,
extend the slightest sign of sympathy.
But I was heading home with things to do,
papers to write, to grade, books to read,
and tasks enough to swallow all my time.

Jubilation Lilies

Hold my breath long enough, I could grow gills
you told me; salamander slime cures sunburn;
so gullible at ten, I believed you, my best friend,
even when you whispered that in your garden lay a
decomposing spaceman: that brown mass with beetle backs
sticking out--alien bones. You were oh, so wise,
I believed you, believed everything you said.

When Mrs. Henson asked in second grade
why Eskimos jump into the snow after a bath,
I shot my hand straight up, knowing I knew
because you had told me: to dry off.
When she swooped to my desk with her answer book,
flapped it over my head, sent pages fluttering like
frightened chickens, I wondered when the answer changed.

Now you say that being one with all is everything,
that you can know the secret of the universe,
your heart pulsing with the great spirit of life
in syncopated tempo with the world, that the stone
around your neck gives you power, personality,
peace, that everything is true, right, good.

Pulling last year's dried weeds out from between
young tulips, I avoid touching the brown matter
a toad left behind, thick like mashed potatoes or
cold oatmeal. I loosen the soil so my Jubilation Lilies
can burst forth in vibrant pink for Easter, plan
where to plant the watermelon out back in the garden,
or shall I swallow the seeds to see what grows inside?

To Everything a Season

What Eve Ate

Everyone says it was an apple,
but they can't prove it.
God doesn't even say.
I think it was a peach,
summer-sweet and drooping from the bough,
ripe and golden yellow blushed with pink,
syrupy juice dripping from flawless flesh,
and there--
at the core--
the red pulp
clinging to the seed.

A Holy Sonnet

"And seeing is believing and
being seen"--Mark Jarman.

It was yet dark when the angels rolled away
the stone blocking the tomb. What light
shone forth from inside out, showering
the soldiers whose course it was to guard--
to make the body stay dead and buried there?
They had no prayer when it was time for Christ
to rise, step out, clothed, alive. The folded
blood-stained shroud no longer needed, he left it
in the place where he'd been laid, dead, days before.
The women who came first to the tomb found
it empty, except for angels and grave clothes;
if I am dead and buried when Gabriel blows
the resurrection trumpet, I'll exit the ground,
seeing and seen, clothed with Jesus' glory.

Icarus Dreams of the Grand Canyon and Better Wings

"you have seen . . . how I bare you
on eagles' wings, and brought you
unto myself"--Ex. 19.4

Sheer
rock
walls
plunge
straight
down
from the heights;
waxless, the eagle climbs
toward the sun, glides
 through summer air, almost there.

Below,
water boils
bubbly-white on
time-smoothed rocks where
 no long sunlight
warms the shadowed shore;
a yellow
fly
 flits,
flitters,
floats just beyond
the hungry jaw of
rainbow stripes
that glimmer,
shimmer
 when the trout
 jumps.

The sure-pinioned eagle
 dives,
 swoops
 straight
 down
 from
 the sky;
taloned fingers
snatch up dinner;
 he rises,
 dry,
 soars high
 on wings that hold.

Recalling My First Visit to New York City

I might as well have been squirrel hunting
strolling up Fifth Avenue
neck strained to see windows
taller than trees:
what nests there
behind golden
mirrors and black
reflective glass
encased in steel
and concrete?
In the woods,
soft with last year's leaves
you can see the nests,
hear the squirrels climbing;
and you know--
if the tree comes down,
the squirrels that survive
will just build again
somewhere else.

Heart of the Matter

When my son killed his first deer,
he gave me the heart of it
to slice and fry, floured, in a skillet with oil.
But first I had to clean it:
I removed the transparent film that encased it--
placenta-like shroud that resisted the knife blade;
I rinsed the skinned heart whole in the sink,
kneaded the smooth muscle like dough
to force out the blood and bubbles of air
trapped behind valves and flaps
where aortas had once connected the pump
to its body for life.
I carved it cleanly from the bottom up--
thin cross-sections of animal pulse,
salted and soaked the slices to lure
out the blood like drawn dye.
The meal tasted bold, pleasant,
and I ate it all, remembering times
when my heart had been squeezed
like garlic through a press--
when my sons, at ages 12 and 13,
chose to live with *dad* instead of me.
That wound healed; they returned,
the hunter last, first to leave again--
grown, ready to live on his own,
to share his bounty with me.

Marriage Song
For Rick

Nestled between your chest and arm,
I hear the ocean on your skin

drawn tight over muscles scaled,
stretched across sanded bones,

joints hammered in place, throbbing
to the whine of the saw, to the

penetrating drive of the drill.
I pack your lunch every day, choosing

pastrami, tuna, or roast beef,
sautéed mushrooms, peppers with garlic,

apple, pear, or home-canned peaches.
Tonight we ate ice cream

from the carton with one spoon;
you went to bed. I stayed up

to section grapefruit, start
the coffee in its clock, hang

your freshly-laundered jeans.
Now I press my night-chilled skin

close to yours, recall last fall,
collecting mussel shells, pebbles,

sand dollars--pieces of the beach.
Even in sleep you respond to my touch,

turn toward me, our bodies
seeking to fuse, to merge

like silver drops of mercury.

In Time

"the desert shall rejoice, and
blossom as the rose"--Is.35.1

I

Close to the wire trellis
a tight-lipped rose holds
all its fragrance in,
bowing to the blossoms
that dance around it,
testing thorns in the wind;
sunlight, watered soil, time
will coax the bud
to loosen its grip on life, open
like an infant's mouth
crying for breasts,
release its breath of scent, milky,
soft essence of what it wants to be:
like all the surrounding roses
(but not exactly alike)
each bloom different in how its petals
open, linger, let go, drift
down like feathers fallen from a nest,
shower the ground,
grains of life
in the garden.

II

Deep red rose buds--three--
on my dress of turquoise blue
sent fresh fragrance
to grace our small wedding;
we chose no flashy ceremony,
no elaborate trimmings, just a
simple confession of love,
traditional promises given,
a minister, two witnesses, and God.
In days the roses faded:
pressed and dried
they're in a drawer somewhere
tucked safely away for posterity.

(continued, section break)

III

From our kitchen window
we watch red-feathered cardinals
and brown,
play in the rose bushes
beside the fence.

IV

In the room
a dozen roses spray
their fragrance into air.
They can be
whatever color you wish.
They will open fully,
drop their petals
like autumn leaves
or aging hair.
We can dry the soft
pieces of rose skin,
display its fragments
like memories in a dish.

V

A single rose
laid alone
upon the closed casket lid
speaks louder than
two dozen roses and greenery
in a spray.

VI

I remember my favorite
cologne of the 60's--
"Roses, Roses, Roses" by Avon--
oh, the scent of thick-honeyed
sweetness,
perfumed innocence
that faded like white spring lilies
when our freedom marches turned
to a funeral procession.
Shreds of the dream
fell like loose rose petals
and dried.

(continued, section break)

VII

Now it is potpourri
every room displays
in small woven baskets or
dishes of etched glass,
flowers my mother-in-law
made of old silk stockings
or dyed nylons atop green wires
in tall crystal vases,
the 400 mg dose
of rose hips vitamin C
that we take every morning
to maintain health,
especially in winter.

Duende

For David, who worked on the 79th Floor,
WTC South, 11 September 2001

How could we know, over Italian sausage
grilled with peppers, onions, in Glen Island Park,
as we chatted about work--accounting, finance,

career paths, directions--that three months later
the building you worked in would collapse in a cloud
of powdered plaster and smoke on national TV?

Watching, I prayed for your safety, and waited.
Through busy circuits my call somehow crossed
jammed lines, connected with family to learn:

you were late to work, two blocks away when
the second plane hit. Six months later you told me
how bits like meat and other debris rained

from the sky to speed your retreat, how you
crumbled inside like the steel and glass
fell in seconds. What you didn't say was how,

after all this time, the dust still lingers.

Exploring Dover Beach with My Husband in 1999

--"The Sea of Faith was once, too
at the full"--Matthew Arnold

We stand on chalk towers,
lean into the wind, daring it
to throw us down
or carry us across to France:
So this is Dover Beach.
I recall Arnold's "grating roar of pebbles,"
sound of sadness, "naked shingles of the world."
I cannot hear the sea.
You answer, *just the wind rushing inland.*

From Europe sixty years ago
came shells, round on round, driving Britons
underground with whistled warnings.
Sixty seconds they had from the whistle
to the blast. Not long enough for some,
lucky if they were moved
to the hospital hidden
in the belly of the cliffs.
A command post chambered the planners of war

next to its wounded, behind that rock shield,
concealed in stone like medieval royalty.
I point to Shakespeare's cliff,
ask if we can walk there from here
to stand where King Lear stood, look below
to "such a fearful sight."
It's just as fearful, here, looking down
to where birds dance on polished stones,
dodge the white-tipped tide rippling in.

We pretend to scale the chalk cliff
then take the powdery path higher,
finger tips touching in single file,
until the wind rolls around us, enfolds
our furled hearts against the autumn chill.
Still, we listen for the sound of water
revolving in its course,
wrapped and enraptured by this mighty wind:
God's breath blown out strong.

Out of Time

Consequence

1.

O Eve,
that forbidden fruit oozed
honey-sweet rain
from your delicate hand
as you shared
the bold taste of it.

What did you know of death,
having never seen anything die?

Something required
the animal-skin robe
and drops of blood.

Not the fruit
(which turned in the stomach
to sour wine, bitter
like hemlock).
Not the knowledge
(which burst with each bite
a taste of shame and blame).

It was
snake-inspired desire,
secret,
ripe:
to be like God.

2.

Samson,
when you
pulled down around you
that heathen temple, slew
more in death than life,
did you stop to think
if you had controlled your lust
you might have died
with sight, of old age,

(continued, no stanza break)

long locks of gray hair flowing
down your back, drooping across your
shoulders like royal robes?

But ah-h-h, Delilah.

Was she worth it after all?

3.

How your heart, Mary,
must have swelled
full with glory
when that holy cloud
rested above you,
descended into your womb
in ways no man can ever know
infused the seed
that growing,
became your door to heaven.

4.

Herodias,
you hussy.
Was it worth it
after all--
winning your private war
against the baptizer
who blasted you?

What thrill
must have pulsed in your veins
to think you'd defeated
the prophet who exposed
your sin (adulteress,
scheming to marry a king
while married to his brother).

I wonder,
did Herod Antipas
ever look at you with passion
from that time hence?

(continued, no stanza break)

Did you notice the coldness
of his lips on yours, the distance
between you in the bed
though limbs entwined,
the stare of his eyes when you spoke--
dead as the eyes in that severed head
on the plate?

5.

I understand how you felt, O Judas,
slighted all those times.

Tough, wasn't it? To hear Peter praised,
to see him walk on water;
to watch John lean close, and James:
what did they see on that mountain top
and in the house of Jairus?

It wasn't fair, was it?

And after all of that--
seared hands,
discarded coins.

Reduction

All those trips across America
and abroad, art work, clothes,
furnishings and furniture,
the loves you shared, lost,
all memories,
memory itself,
your very personality,
where the body dwelt and dwells
(this side of heaven)
reduced now
to a jar of ashes.

Rite of Passage

When breath wheezes out
through tired lungs, gasping,
rasping, and the pump ceases,
blood turns stagnant without oxygen cargo--
at that very moment,
behind the eyes a light fades,
leaves the body empty:
a sign hung up--
"vacancy."

Everyone dies alone in the end,
when the last breath drawn
hisses out like steam,
transports the soul (which
can't be seen, touched, known)
through invisible air
to--where?

Where It Is

I

brighter than the sun
on diamonds or still water,
believers remain.

II

Ah,
to eat
the word of God
dripping with dew
in the morning.

III

At dawn
comes the still voice
speaking love
(sometimes at dusk).

IV

The noon sun gives warmth
even in winter;

V

the full moon
has no heat, no light its own:
its shadow, dark--

VI

darker than Calvary
that afternoon, or the tomb--
where the doomed dwell.

Ever After

"I need a metaphor to sleep
tonight"--Mark Jarman.

After the buying and selling of lands,
of houses, property, stocks, and bonds,
after the parties, dinners, feasts,
after life's costumes, trickery, treats:
a narrow plot to feed the worms
or smaller still--a space for the urn,
one foot squared or six feet deep,
a season of rest, a time for sleep.

Rising

"Vaults of pliant and
complete surrender,
rising"--Lucia Perillo

1

In a Meadow by Estes Park, Colorado

A thousand thousand aspen leaves
are carried by an autumn breeze.
They glisten in the sun-warmed air,
shimmer, glimmer, hold, then float
with snowflake lightness to the ground,
rise rustling when the wind picks up,
flutter like golden butterflies.

2

In My Back Yard in March

Grackles thick as new spring leaves
perch in naked winter trees,
fill the sky with hungry chatter
scatter as a swarm of bees,
a thousand wings unite to shatter
evening sky, when they take flight.

3

In a Churchyard by Olney, UK

Fresh-winged flies
paper graveyard stones weathered
smooth, illegible, fill in letters
that remain: *1815 plague*
That's a long time for flies to rise
from well-fed worms
centuries in the tomb. Their song
a buzzing louder than bird calls
in the full-leafed oaks. A nearby
cracked vault spills its contents
into air, flies liberated
by time and decay.

(continued, section break)

4

In the Park Near My House

On the deep pond
ducks paddle the blue
mirror of sky and cloud
while yards away,
on the shallow pond,
geese skate on green glass
that shines like rippled water,
their wings lift for balance
as they tiptoe across it to the edge,
where, skipping to land, they pause
a moment before the applause of flight.

5

In My Back Yard in October

Grackles thick as fallen leaves
dot the lawn beneath the trees
swoop up in unison whenever
my small black dog goes charging near.
Over the house they fly as one,
a cloud of birds into the sun,
drift down as autumn leaves caught by
October's wind--discordant cry
a screech, like rusty hinge--they're gone
to pick the bugs from my neighbor's lawn.

6

At 30,000 Feet

Country roads: a hieroglyphic puzzle from this height;
in the distance, cotton rain or snow drifts in the air,
rose gold hues that stain the deepening blue;
I wonder if the soul sees such views,
when it rises, steady, smooth,
to take its final flight.

(continued, section break)

Departure

Try with all my strength,
I cannot fly; like a tree whose roots
grow deep into solid soil,
I'm held fast,
toil notwithstanding,
earth-bound.

man-made vehicles
can carry me high
no sky off limits,
if I have money or training to go.
You won't see me, though,
when I rise,
translated and disappear,
atmosphere no limit,
gravity no root to hold me here.

I'll just be gone.
If you go, too,
we might smile in passing,
or clasp hands,
rising together,
faster than we can blink.

Three Elegies for my Dad

An Elegy

At the dirt mound
sunken after three years
to nearly ground-level,
the wind in the trees
sounds like the tide
flowing from cold seas
onto sand, rocks. You
would have enjoyed
hearing about my trip
to the coastal town in Yorkshire
from whence James Cook sailed
to discover New Zealand
and other island paradises
before his Hawaiian death.
Ships you sailed on flew
past places he only glimpsed,
dreamed about, forgot.
After the war you settled
as far away from ocean scenes
as you could get--not especially
to erase the sound of seas,
the trace of salt spray
on your skin. It just
happened that way,
coming home to a family,
business, responsibility
that outweighed your dreams.
I thought of you
when I raced the waves
past rocks, climbing away
from the cold, rising tide,
frozen for a moment,
awestruck at the ocean's power,
as you must have been
in ships at sea. When I looked
down from the cliff,
the ocean's roar reminded me
of prairie wind
in grass and scattered trees,

(continued, no stanza break)

like the sound I hear now
in this gusty, salt-free air,
standing at your grave.

A Dream

For nearly fifty years
you hung on to the business
clung to the job you didn't like,
even when you saw
none of us kids wanted to keep it,
even when the EPA
threatened to close you down,
until, finally, you just let go
too late to follow your dreams,
swallowed what pride was left,
said, *Enough--the bank can have it.*

Isn't this America where
you can be anything you dream?
Maybe if I put everything on the line,
follow mine, it will be
like you did it, too.
This much--and more--
I owe you.

Looking Back

What a day that was when you rode
with me to take my son, your grandson,
to work. We dropped him off,
took a drive south to the little town
my husband and I wanted to buy a house in,
and would have, but it sold to someone else.
Aspen leaves were turning gold,
a cool mist glazed the air, isolating the
town with an elegant glow, almost snow.
We drove to the house by the town park,
sat where pine trees oozed incense, talked:
my writing, your surgery, the kids,
how you had wanted to move the family to Denver
but we kids—my brothers and I—didn't want to go.
Then we left my dream spot, drove home,

(continued, no stanza break)

stopped for gas along the way, cleaned
the windshield. At home, mom was frightened
being alone in my neighborhood,
had called my brother's wife, made
arrangements not to stay with us
as many days as planned. She would have
stayed in that little town,
watched blue jays dance, leaves change colors
like chameleons. Sometimes now
I still spend precious time with you;
but when I wake up, I know
there will never be another day like that,
when the sky shook out flakes like
flattened drops of not-quite rain, not-yet snow.

Ontology of a Butterfly

Who is to say the monarch
doesn't prefer his life
before the cocoon--
a worm whose sticky feet like fingers
hold him upside down
on stalks and leaves, where
everything around him is food,
his only task to eat
until the hard shroud forms around him--
his darkened tomb--
who is to say he doesn't feel safe there
before the shell splits open,
and he struggles out
to flutter his paper-thin fingers,
lift off familiar stalks,
and sail on wings of wind.

I, Victoria D. Dorshorn, hereby submit this thesis/report to Emporia State University as partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree. I agree that the Library of the University may make it available to use in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I further agree that quoting, photocopying, or other reproduction of this document is allowed for private study, scholarship (including teaching) and research purposes of a nonprofit nature. No copying which involves potential financial gain will be allowed without written permission of the author.

Victoria D. Dorshorn

Signature of Author

4/30/2002

Date

A Time for Poetry, a Place for Faith:
Defining the Space for Contemporary
Christian Poetry and a collection
of poems, *Out of Time, Out of Place*

Title of Thesis

Ray Cooper

Signature of Graduate Office Staff

4-30-02

Date Received