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Poems

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Poems

NANCY THOMAS

A Psalm for High Places

Praise the Lord!
 Praise him in his sanctuary,
 Andean framed and cirrus vaulted.

In the late afternoon light
 elongated shadows
 sway their gratitude,
 and every bush burns.
 The high plains blaze with praise.
 Wind whistles a litany
 in minor key
 and cuts its message through my coat,
 a piercing word and true.
 Young girls head herds
 toward home, walking into the sun.

The flocks skip only in metaphor
 and bleat their slow songs.
 Praise the Lord!

Praise him with pinquillo, zampona, quena.
 Twang his worth on mandolin and churango.
 In chorus chant -Yupaychanañ,

Yupaychanañ.-
 Gnarled hands and creased brown faces
 reflect his image,
 receive his word.
 Adobe and prairie grass
 house his glory.
 Incense of prayer mingles with llama dung smoke,
 rises and pleases him.
 See! The Lord exalts the humble
 and bends his ear to the poor!

Praise him!

Praise him, creatures of the heights!

Llama, vicuña, alpaca
 offer proud and swift praise.
 He alone fashioned the strength
 of legs, the proud arch of neck.
 They pound the earth with joy.
 Condors and hawks dip
 and swoop and rise again,

giving high praise,
 cutting the wind to worship.
 Small creatures--guinea pigs,
 vizcacha, prairie snakes--
 burrowing, know his secret name
 and rejoice.

Praise the Lord!

Praise him, earth!

Clap before him!

Lay down your offerings!

The fields bow low, rise, bend,
 feathering the air
 with their gentle harvest dance.
 Wheat and barley heads sway.
 Quinoa purplely praises,
 and underground
 even potatoes know
 that the Lord of the Harvest
 is also Lord of the Dance.

Praise him!

Praise him in the yesterday rocks,
 the blue and silver stones,
 the silence of Tiahuanaco,
 for he was,
 and is
 and evermore will be.
 Bow quietly before him and

Praise!

Praise him in the heights!

Bright Illampu, Hayna Potosí,
 Illimani, Mururata,
 white angels, guardians,
 praise him splendidly.
 "Lift up your eyes
 unto the hills,"

is a commandment easily obeyed here.

Praise him!

Titicaca!

Praise him deeply, hilariously!

Light skips off the white caps
and a cold wind fills sails
with gladness.

Be joyful quickly, for the Lord has spoken!
From his words alone poured forth these waters!

Totora reeds bends low
before such magnificence,
and from deep down
frogs give comic obeisance
only he can hear.

Praise the Lord!

Praise him boisterously,
cacophony of thunder,
hail on tin roofs,
a dark wind that howls his might.

Fear him.

Tremble.

For the lightning destroys
and the darkness screams
the terrible names
of God.

Worship his awful ways.

Yes! Praise the Lord!

Praise him in the brash and bustle
of Chukiago, city of uncertain peace,
inverted ant hill,
pulsing with motion and noise.

Praise his energy,
his activity,
his ongoing creative life.

Praise the Lord!

Praise him in the cold wind
and the slanting light!
Praise him in the high thin air!

Let everything
that has breath
praise the Lord!

Yes! Praise him!

Praise the Lord!

Notes:

pinullo, zampoña, quena—Andean wind instruments

churango—Andean stringed instrument

“Yupaychañan”—“We praise” in the Aymara language

llama, vicuña, alpaca—Andean animals of the camel family

vizcacha—small animal, similar to a rabbit

quinua—Andean grain

Tiahuanaco—ruins of an ancient Aymara civilization

Illampu, Hayna Potosí, Illimani, Mururata—peaks in the Andes
Mountains

Chukiagu—ancient name for La Paz

I Love Tangents

I love them in all colors.

I love the orange ones that shock me
with their brazen gestures and their teasing.

I love the lavender tangents, and the tangents
that shift from blue to green; I love
their innuendoes, their hisses,
their strange and lovely lies.

I love them in all shapes and sizes

–the small round tangents, deceptively
easy to handle, but once lost, impossible
to retrieve;

–the proper boxed tangents, predictable,
safe, they serve as hobbies
on application forms.

I love the scent of tangents

and how you can always know
when one's coming by the slight pungency
humming on the edges of the afternoon.

Once an unusually potent tangent

let me go on it and we rode for miles,
clear to Montana and back in less time
than it takes to whistle the 1812 Overture.

I still haven't recovered.

God at “The Penguin”

Outside “The Penguin”
on Citrus and Alostá,
the August evening hummed with traffic.
Sitting around a polar-white metallic table,
we spoke of silence and longing for God,
“as a deer pants for the water brooks.”

Kids cruised the parking lot,
impressing with the volume of their stereos
and the screech of brakes.
My yogurt cone collapsed,
and Beth rescued me with a dozen napkins.
The store next door announced 25% off
on all clothes—while they lasted.
The cinema offered a choice: Tom & Jerry,
Terminator II, or I Married an Axe Murderer.

You asked, “Does he speak into the silence,
or is the silence itself his speech?”

We wondered, sitting there at the corner
of Citrus and Alostá on a warm August evening,
sharing the silence,
knowing the kingdom come.

Metaphors for Transformation

I like a quick miracle—
the slap-dash comedy
of a here's-mud-in-your-eye healing,
the hilarity of the lame man's leap,
the now-you-see-it-now-you-don't vanishing act
of the leper's sores,
the amazing multiplied bread.
I love to see him pull death
from his black forever hat,
and instantly change it to a pidgeon
or a sun-flower.
I wish all transformations were so quick,
so silver-slick and sudden.

The deeper changes move slowly.
The Maker nudges,
and root hairs grope in the dark,
grubbing the soil
for the words that bring life.
Sap swims slowly up the trunk,
heavy, thick, resisting the downward pull.
In a narrow path it feels its way,
searches all trajectories,
inches out to the tips of the smallest twigs.
As it goes it hums a subtle song,
a dim but certain gospel.
The tree hushes in anticipation,
waits for spring.

An Ecumenical Quaker Draws the Line

Can't say I'm not open.
I meditate with Mennonites,
chant with Catholics,
and belt out Baptist blues with the best of them.
I cried at my daughter's marriage to a Nazarene,
and once I even rolled the aisle with a Pentecostal.
But with funerals I reach my limit.
When my time comes
I will insist on my own homespun,
tried and true Quaker version.
I just wouldn't feel dead
without it.