

IMAGING

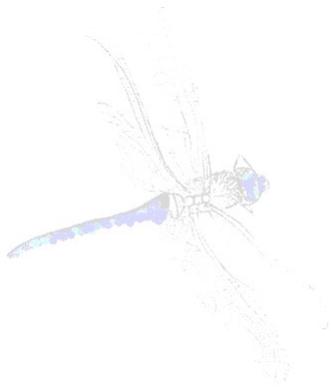
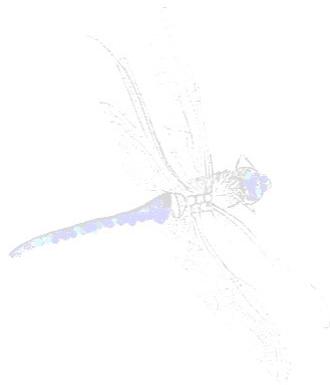


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RICERCAR



Wildflowers

A dandelion dances in the wind,
dusts against the grass a spray

of lemon yellow
petals. Seeds float away,

scatter and break
into orange indian paintbrushes

blooming where they fall. Their yellow
and apricot bristles

bow to the wind and shake
open into daisies,

lengthen into tiger
lily trumpets, spreading yellow

petals. Pollen in the hazy
air breaks into blossom. A voice

cracks the silence: 'Flower,' and
daisies explode as yellow

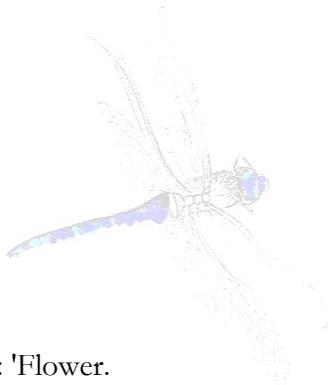
and white fingers fly poised
on the wind, while the crickets chirp: 'Flower.

Flower. Flower.' Tiger lilies crumble
in a jet of yellow

petals. Sepals shower
down, broken and bent.

The fugue slurs on: 'Flower. Flower.
Flower. Flower. Flower.'

Paintbrushes shrivel, yellow
dandelions send pent
up wind-blown petals storming.

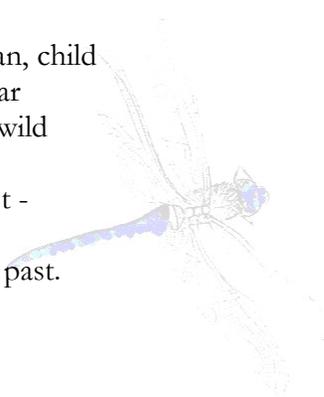


*A Musical Offering*Johann Sebastian Bach's *Ein Musikalisches Opfer*

Two violins, behind them a third,
echo a melody.
Beneath them bows a soft cello dirge
opposing polyphony.
The strict *canon perpetuus*
puzzles lovers of counterpoint.

Variations of a *cantus firmus*,
retrograde or out of joint,
lead *virtuosi* in search of sound
and sense: a royal palindrome.
Long life rewarded those who found
its perfectly balanced metronome.

Each audience tunes its own ear.
With hesitant steps, each man, woman, child
joins in the dance, poised till they hear
their entrance cues. Then, caught in wild
flight - free, they think, to improvise
their lives according to their own cast -
augmenting, moving contrariwise,
yet still they cling to this fugue, their past.



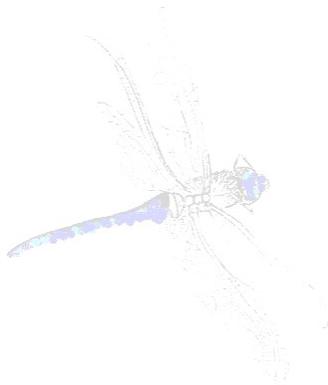
Discard

A tattered cigarette pack
the cats chased dried freesia
dusty crumbling to the touch

shards of a Chinese vase the crane
symbol of longevity
severed a Noah's ark

of comfort food wooden, plush
and plastic animals tangled
Springsteen tape unfinished *crèche*

origami paper hearts
edges frayed your faded blue
ink in flowing hand *Be Mine*

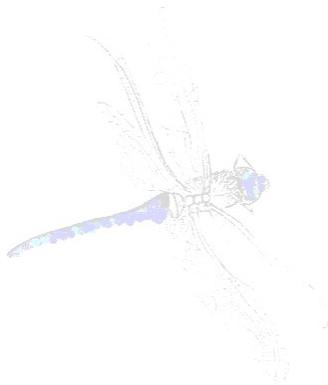


Watermark

Listen: Too many words. Fix
that with enjambment. Hold
it to the light until we hear
your watermark.

Consider the sonata:
conceive economy
with symmetry of theme
and variant in imagery.

So dense and dark.
Let in some air. For the ear,
lace it with raspberry. Mold
tart into your chocolate mix.



Homecoming

Slowing down for the turn, bald tires slip
on frost stippled gravel. Rubbing the side
of your hand in circles on the window,
you peer through snow flakes for the first sight.

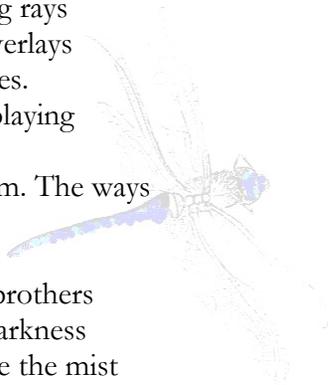
The old house sags, caving in on itself.
Sepia watercolors invade the roof,
the ceiling and the walls. And still more proof
of dry rot hides behind the crumbling shelves.

In kitchen and bathroom, the plumbing's not quite
functional, inside uneven carpentry.
Windfall apples rot beneath the trees
and redwood panels painted out in white

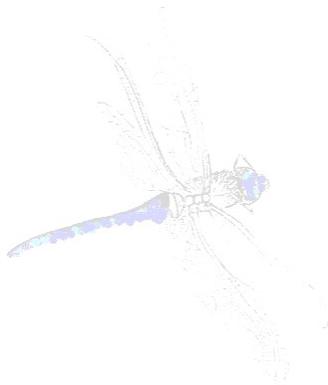
are framed by plastic siding. Glancing rays
of sunlight strike the stained-glass overlays
thrusting ruby throats at trellised roses.
Children grown and cast away hide playing
inside happy graduation photos.
Footsteps trace the path to your room. The ways

of the family dictate dinner and tea.
At midnight you'll gather with your brothers
to drink vodka or vermouth in the darkness
and hear the truth. But now you wipe the mist

in cold circles from your glasses and wait:
peering through their smoke screen for the first sight.



COURANTE



Susannah

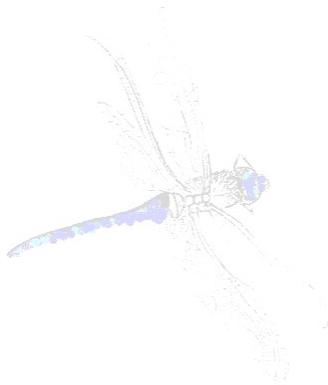
Fresco of *Susanna & the Elders*, at the Catacombs of St. Priscilla in Rome

The elders in her garden
unveil her, caught in their net,
her lover their silent

partner. Innocence no
defense in schemes of false
witness, Susannah chants

kaddish. Child reader of hearts
and minds, stirred up in his
holy spirit, Daniel finds

desire's dwelling.
The trickster homes
clarion redeemed.



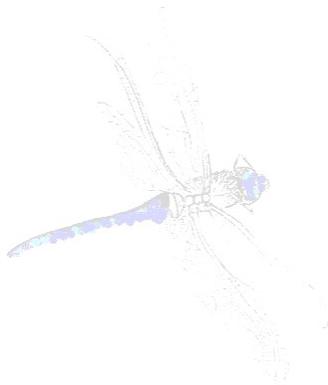
Ruth

Better two than that you walk
this road alone. As for me:

where you go, I go. Among
your kin in *beth lechem* we

bake our bread. I bear your son
and draw your land after me

with love as strong as death. Just
bind your seal upon my heart.



Judith

Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, at the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence

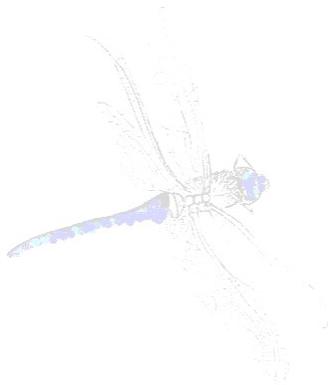
Can you plumb the depths
of the heart or grasp
men's treachery?

Who forsakes a feast,
renounces flattery,
resists lust?

Listen Israel: What I,
Judith, shoot of Elijah,
am about to do, not young
men with swords nor old
men's fragrant offerings
can realize.

Behold: warriors boast
to torch my *wadi*, dash
our infants against stones.

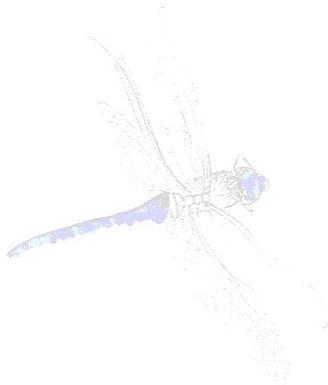
Sing a new song: rocks melt
like wax and Babylon
burns. I carve prayer in flesh.



Esther

Without restraint we feast, connive,
steep a year in oil of myrrh
before we try the court mosaic:
lapis, marble, porphyry, pearl.

Golden goblets overturned; the stake
you built to impale me bears your ten
sons fifty cubits high. One decree
in fear of death breeds another.



David

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's *David with the Head of Goliath*, at the Borghese in Rome

Body count: a genealogy of death.

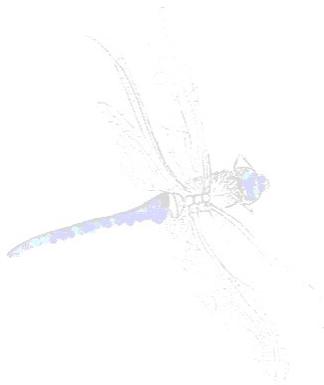
Saul, Jonathan, Michal,
Uriah and Paltiel:
collateral damage.

Saul's house: Rizpah's two children
and five of her daughter Merab
sacrificed for peace.

Your own: Bathsheba's unnamed son,
Tamar, Amnon, and Absalom –
the cost of saving face.

As you lay dying,
Adonijah and Solomon
lust after your throne.

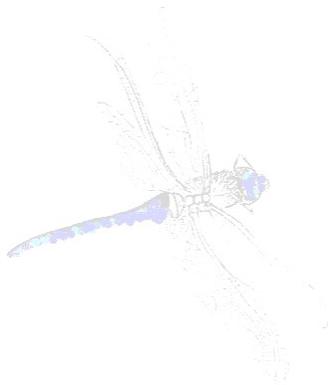
Legacy: Wisdom kills his brother.



Job

My lyre is tuned to mourning
and my pipe to the voice
of those who weep.
Let that night be barren, its dawn
star dark; let it hope
for light in vain; may it not see
the eyelids of morning.

Earth brims with creatures,
most mere fools. Some, bent on malice
destroy the righteous
to test hearts. Friends share their treasure
when evil tears tents.
If innocence repents
the Adversary wins the wager.

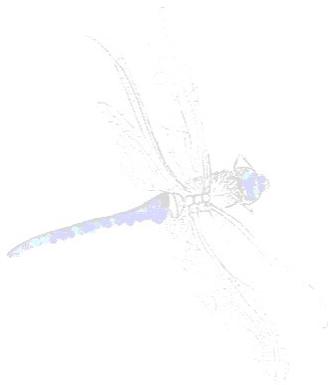


Beatrice

Clothed in a Gambian beige
batik gown, she shed cordials and cake
as she trailed the narrow wake
in the living room set of his stage.

She knelt at his feet, tuning the page
of a guitar concerto, or to make
sure we caught the words, for his sake,
to the art songs of a colonial age.

Tilting her head, she smiled when he joked
or when we practiced his classic
farewell. She followed French fashion
in makeup, manner and dress and smoked
Gauloises, fingers tapping against plastic
lips, cast in a role lacking passion.



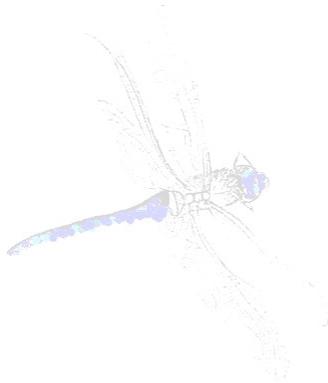
Brigid

When I come to judge the earth,
weave my crucifix of sea
rush, for death no longer rules.

I brand you fisher of men
where wolf and lamb alike uproot
fresh shoots, lion and ox crack
wheat and dust is serpent's meat.

Not one shall spy or slander
there, in all my sacred hill;
neither spoil her holy well
nor quench the eternal fire.

Martyr of pretenders, I
bear witness to you. Now go;
tell that fox: truth eviscerates.

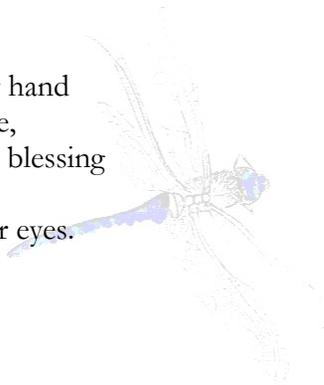


Sor Juana de la Cruz

History rhymes. In a courtyard
pomegranates clutter the ground
where she hovered, wings shadowing
my cheek. And you? You never knew
her; nor peacock ever crew, nor
glittered feathers gold and blue sopped
her sweet wine; yet history rhymes.

By chance you found a pearl of great price
and, swift to know her worth, stripped the film
of time in one deft twist from her flesh.
Nacre drifting free, petals to guard
her heart's core – tender now, luminous –
you buried her once more in the field
and, fleet to heap up thirty coins
of silver, bought that barren land.

Only then did bloodprints stain your hand
as, when fingers vaguely bruise a rose,
pollen clings. Hands you claimed for blessing
of her cradle shroud my necrotic
jewel: These are scales that were your eyes.

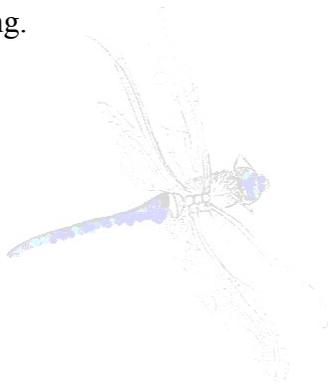


Aletheia

ears she boasts, but cannot hear, her
eyes lack sight: mendacity
knows no boundary. her voice
reverberates 'love, love, love',
self lost in echo. no woman
she, scarce human, nor ever male.

mere idol, clever mockery –
heartfelt at a distance – yet turn
your gaze on her and note her dance:
she owns no feet, and cannot move.
her double, true model, fingers
dolor, tracing tender lip to learn

care as, pearl by oblate pearl,
her necklace of tears comes unstrung.



Eros

As tangled knots of tapestry
floss caught by a needle's eye
drawn haphazard through my skein,

their traces of courtship twist
from leaf to stem. No virgin, he.
Piercing a pedicel, his failed

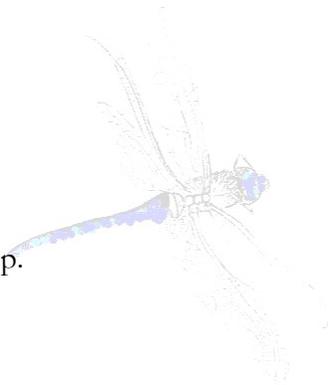
love dart sparkles in the rain,
its cross a week in creation.
Ascending the inflorescence,

her radula scrapes a calla
lily's calyx and they cache
their brood deep in trumpet furl.

An old grifter on the beach
drinks of a conch shell liquor,
bows down his fingertips in prayer

to sift pink pearls amid sand,
sorting *ragazzi* into sweet
young boy and weak: goat from sheep.

Lost, a pilgrim snail, replete
with sibling embryos, marks
the cloister melting in sun.

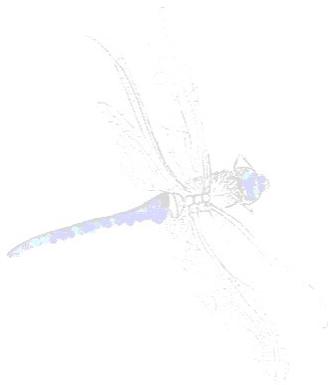


Penelope

Heart's window:
candlelight on yarn
slant teeth locked in a row
raveling out a constant
skein of silk.

Labyrinth:
serpent enfolded,
lament of water bathing
glass in colored light, vibrant
exile harp.

Silence ends:
unsheathed arrows, shards
of flesh loose in the night, track
the zodiac cleaving
his dear mouth.

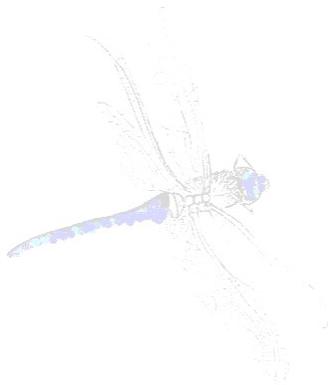


Psyche

Lured to my rooftop garden
monarch pilgrims savor jasmine
then, frantic to travel on, cast
against glass walls. Drumbeat
of their souls, wings litter window
seats, trailing leaves and cobwebs.

Caught in my hands, one sheds
tattoos: copper, cream, silver, black
powder prophecy. Sweetpeas
magenta, cream, cream, rose
crêpe paper eyelids close.

Articulated legs grip fingers
clean antennae. Soft fur hinging
wing to triune torso ripples
spread and shut. Sun healed
she creeps along rising palms
and turns on breath, alight.



Rhiannon

her solemn profession
aged six, ever
the sly magician

corralled in a circle
stroking four unbroken
Arabian mares

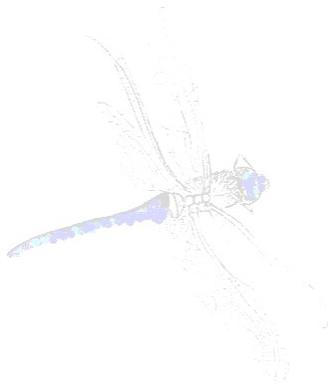
Call Me Cleopatra
tenderly picks doughnut
holes off her open palm

affinity
for gazehounds she prowls show
rings tracking saluki

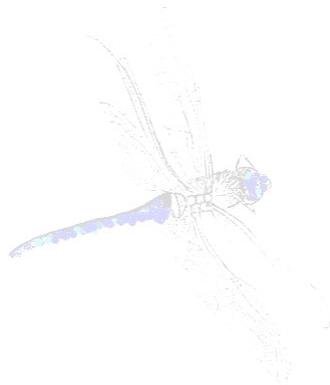
borzoi, whippet, grey
elusive azawakh
prefers the sweet and spiky

pick me up Italian
tiramisu chasing
fireflies and hares

cast *tarot* for a tree
of life: now sing, ride
horses, handle dogs



SARABANDE



*Desolation**The Rule of St. Benedict*

a solitary desert hawk hangs
eremite in updraft, red-tailed
unseen, known only by repute

on the path a lone lizard waits
frozen between death and life
concealed while still sunning

his mate slips off her ivy alb
and two small brown *cenobites*
resurrect all my lost lizards

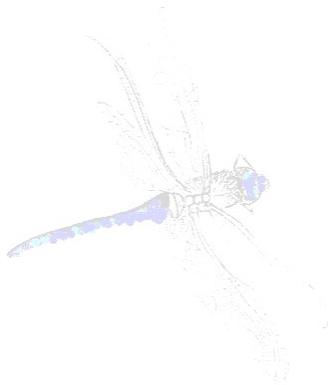
green and golden *gyrovagues*
traversed the walls of Dakar
feasting on mosquitoes

a translucent eft newt, soft
as *sarabaite*, caught in the grass
and lured into our window box

art deco, the leopard gecko
hiding in my pocket, licks
his eyeballs, or clicks all night

cocking a reticulated
head, stalking the writhing mass
of waxworms in his tiny dish

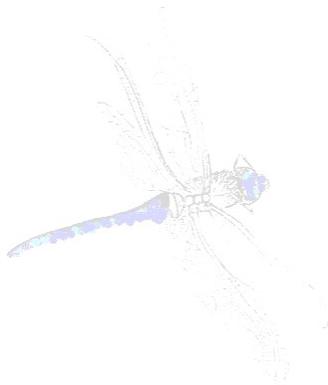
at sundown storm clouds gather
all manner of thing will be well
hawks keep watch on our holy hill



Communion

heat waves across dry grass
bee harmonies carpet trees
desert's midday silence breaks
up in angelus bells
tolling triplets as birds bank
on a harmattan breeze

voices thick and slow we mass
swallowing *quilismas* – smoke
jerks out breath – our teeth grate
on bread sprouting wet flesh
tears sweat each wine red cheek
this blood stains lips salt plum



Dragonfly

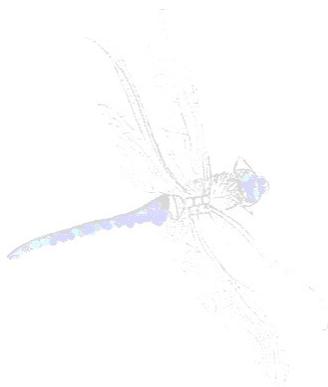
ultramarine shadow on cobalt
blue sunlight sparks flickering
wings afire two dragonflies trend
toward melody

tarry around the evening
incense its rose liquor
cast cut and bleeding
beside your bed

turn inside the silence
tracking this pilgrim touch
who seduces you to sleep
with sharp thorns

dance among the pungent
petals his mouth an acrid
seal pressed melting against
your throat

listen beloved:
the music beckons
taste and see its sweetness
fly to me
the water is wide
my wings are swift and strong



Annunciate

Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* at San Marco Monastery in Florence

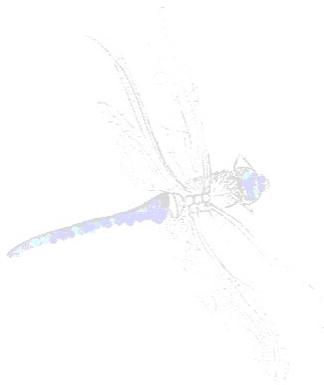
Who is this Mary?
Not quite a plain Jane,
but she puts on no airs:
a thoughtful child sitting aside, stunned
by the magnitude of his proposition.

The tales she heard tell at night
around the campfires, when tents
were struck, the camel circle
kneeling in the sand, and fragile

fish and bird bones sucked clean and dry;
when women lit their smudgepots
of incense and stars lit themselves
in the night sky as flame leaps

from tree to tree; then men began
to weave their web of ancient
stories around those ancestors
who wrestled with God and angels

An angel folds rainbow wings
bending low with gentle hands
and eyes of flame, sings
that she is queen of heaven



Feel the knife in the heart, the wool
in the mouth, a stirring of seed
in the womb; tiny white flowers
in the grass, white and blood red,

face chalk, lips part, hair slips
from beneath its band; azure
cloak drooping from shoulders, fingers
cradle her womb, cheeks crimson

Who is this Mary?
Not quite a plain Jane,
but she puts on no airs:
a thoughtful child sitting apart, stunned
by the magnitude of his proposition.

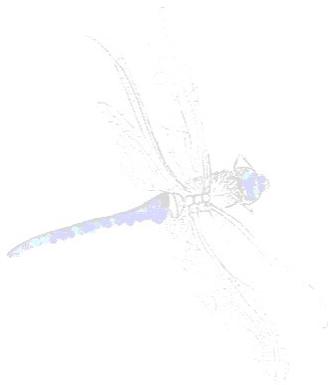
Panagia

The Master of the Retable of the Reyes Catolicos' *The Annunciation*, at the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco

This holy thing a child with midnight
fevers, retching in my arms; a peasant
boy burrowing among the neighbor's sheep
for warmth; an artisan lacking home
and land forever beholden to Rome.

Who in Israel bends the knee
of his heart, brings offering? Who
offends the patronage of kings? (*Baruch*
atah adonai elohainu, melech
ha'olam.) Who prays these days
for justice, kindness and compassion?

Trabe me post te: I knew no man,
yet I know men betray such babes.



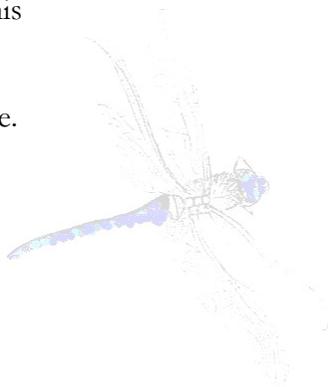
Theotokos Eleousa

Blood and water stream from her thighs:
caught inside the crush, Mary's tears
scrim eternity. Outside
Jerusalem he disappears.

At harvest they winnow wheat,
shake olives from trees. Grapes stain
his fingers at *Kfar Cana*. Now
crowds clamor for signs on the plains

mountains and seashore, crave loaves
and fishes, chasing the kingdom
betrayed by delusions
of power. Fresh bread, oil slick

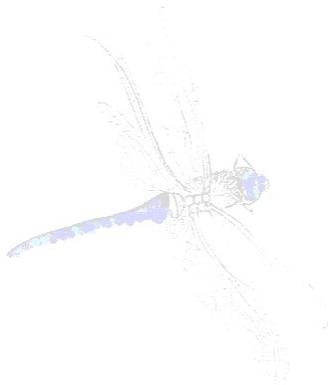
and warm, crushed in his hands: 'This
is my heart, broken.' His body
collapsed, naked on Calvary:
Blood and water stream from his side.



Candlemas

Clean: the last dust of Egypt
shaken from sandals, coins cashed
in for incense at the Court
of the Gentiles – our regal gift
impure to legal minds – fresh
from the bath, this child holy
(worshipped by kings, hunted by kings).

Joseph holds him now: Joseph bought
us, outwitting that old fox Herod
Antipas. We left tracks everywhere
that midnight. I hold the lamp
as we offer his son to our God.
Oil scarce this dark day and land
lost, we chant covenant.



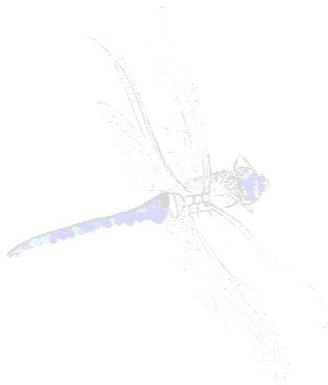
Nunc Dimittis

Death explodes. In the midst of life
blood blossoms as velvet wings
bend, bruise, break the bamboo reed.

Red pearls cluster, edges fluted,
rising from fingers and feet.
The riptide of debris unfurls:
shrapnel of his broken heart.

Who runs to meet the bridegroom,
wick trimmed, lamp brimful of oil?
Who opens a hand to reveal
ten talents, hard-earned? Who pulls
the ram from the thicket, the babe
from the Nile, the man from the tomb?

Nard overflows an alabaster jar.



Pantocrator

Eyes glazed in tears' nacre, hair
still tangled with nard: love
charms your bloody face, anoints
you for our marriage bed.

Burst from your binding cloth!
Leave that enclosed garden, its
pomegranates split open
seed scattered on the wind.

Roll away the stone and let
the sealed fountain spring to life
in beauty and danger, flow
with precious oil and water.

Face one: immanent transcendence
calling, your sweet mouth alight.
'Mary, why weep?' The silence
sifting my soul like wheat.

