

ABUNDANCE

The Poiema Poetry Series

Poems are windows into worlds; windows into beauty, goodness, and truth; windows into understandings that won't twist themselves into tidy dogmatic statements; windows into experiences. We can do more than merely peer into such windows; with a little effort we can fling open the casements, and leap over the sills into the heart of these worlds. We are also led into familiar places of hurt, confusion, and disappointment, but we arrive in the poet's company. Poetry is a partnership between poet and reader, seeking together to gain something of value—to get at something important.

Ephesians 2:10 says, “We are God’s workmanship . . .” *poiema* in Greek—the thing that has been made, the masterpiece, the poem. The Poiema Poetry Series presents the work of gifted poets who take Christian faith seriously, and demonstrate in whose image we have been made through their creativity and craftsmanship.

These poets are recent participants in the ancient tradition of David, Asaph, Isaiah, and John the Revelator. The thread can be followed through the centuries—through the diverse poetic visions of Dante, Bernard of Clairvaux, Donne, Herbert, Milton, Hopkins, Eliot, R. S. Thomas, and Denise Levertov—down to the poet whose work is in your hand. With the selection of this volume you are entering this enduring tradition, and as a reader contributing to it.

—D.S. Martin
Series Editor

Abundance

NEW & SELECTED POEMS

ANDREW LANSDOWN



CASCADE *Books* • Eugene, Oregon

ABUNDANCE

New and Selected Poems

Poiema Poetry Series

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Poetry

Homecoming

Counterpoise

Windfalls

Waking and Always

The Grasshopper Heart

Between Glances

Abiding Things: poems, stories, essays

Fontanelle

Birds in Mind: Australian nature poems

Far from Home: Poems of faith, grief and gladness

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For my American friends

Dwight & Sheila Randall

Jeannette Crain

Tom & Claire Muller

Les & Gretchen Golden

“we went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance”

—PSALM 66:12 (ESV)

“out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”

—MATTHEW 12:34 (ESV)

Contents

from *Counterpoise*

Counterpoise	2
On Poetry	3
Sehnsucht	4
For Philip	5
Black Holes	6
Gone	7
Shell	8
Mercy	9
Death	10
Cricket	10
Terror	11
I Whistle and They Come	12
Crabbing	14
Prawning	15
Behind the Veil	16

from *Windfalls*

A Remembrance of Robins	18
Hawk	19
For the Force of Flame	20
The Woman Who Found the Well	21
Like Stephen	22
Apart from Blood	23
Grief	24

CONTENTS

from *Waking and Always*

The Horseshoe Shooter	26
The <i>Shodō</i> Egret	27
Sacred Kingfisher	29
Water Tank	30
Poem about Freedom	31
Distortions	32
Dugite	32
Kangaroos Crossing	33
Far from Home, the Blower	34
Sometimes in the Dark	37
In Prison	38
For Fear of Freedom	39
Waiting, Singing	40
Spring Morning with Baby and Birds	41
Lighting a Match	42
In Transit	43
For Grace	45
Ford	46
On Haiku	46
Ford and Trees	47
Snake with Angel	48
Not in Truce	49
Waking and Always	50

from *The Grasshopper Heart*

Into Darkness	52
For the Blind	53
Human Rights Poem for Christmas	54
Golgotha	55
White Gum	56
Bread	57
Marri with Nuts	58
Communion	59
Leaf and Load	60
The Grasshopper Heart	61
Spring, Alfred Cove	62

CONTENTS

from *Between Glances*

The Visitor	64
Between Glances	65
Birthday	66
Wine Country	67
Sunshower	68
Sonnet of Thanksgiving	69
Rhyme	70
Mirth with Meaning	71
Grace	72
This Abundance	74
Kangaroos	75
Happiness	77
Courtyard	78
Tea with Susan	78
Reaction to a Retard	79

from *Fontanelle*

The Sleep of the Upright	82
Impression	83
Apples	84
Conception	85
Opulence	86
Fontanelle	87
The Weight of the Baby	88
Homecoming	90
A Thing or Two about Monkeys	91
Mowing	92
Shock	93
Home	94
White Ibis	96
Rose	97
He Knows a Place	98
Pathos	99
Listening to Louis	99
Journey	100
Christmas Tree	101

CONTENTS

Parable 103
Painting in the Painting 104
Woman Weeping, Sydney 105
Should the Marauders Come 106
Gladdened by Ibises 107
Boat 109

from *Birds in Mind*

Brimming 112
Birds Bathing 113
Each Lily 113
Sighting 114
Menace 115
Black Cockatoos 116
Irises 117
Croaking 117
Fitting 118
Birds in Mind 119

from *Far from Home*

Healing 122
Hurt 124
Fathers 124
You Gladly 125
The Worship Tanka 126
Path 127
Use 127
Bravery 128
Dignity 128
The God of the Glimpses 129
 By My Word 129
 Two Things Unclean 130
 Behind the Glimpses 131
 Going to Zarephath 132
 Gathering Sticks 133
 At the Sight of Her 134
 One Meal More 136

from *The Colour of Life*

The Colour of Life	138
Delay	139
The Gravity of the Slight	139
Finishing Up	140
Prayer Against Pain	141
Bird and Bull	142
Signal	142
Human	143
Me	143
Haijin and Violet	144
Heat	146
Worship	147
After Death	148
Prayer	149
End of Day	150

from *Inadvertent Things*

Envy	154
Going Down	154
Meditations on Pain	155
Azure	156
Tweezers	156
Waterlily Haiku	157
Daffodils	158
Binoculars	159
Radiance	159
Beloved	160
Kangaroo Haiku	161
Wren Haiku	162
Stargazing	163
Navigation	163
Squid Haiku	164
Black Dog, Snarling	165
Black Dog, Dozing	165
Creators	166
Seeing the Sound	167

CONTENTS

Purity 167
Small Matters 168
Pause 169
Sheep 169
Samurai 170
Black Bamboo 171
Reflection 172
Seize the Day 172

from Distillations of Different Lands

Forgetting 174
Recollections of Dread and Deliverance 175
Afterphase 176
Dove Tanka Triptych 177
Wire Wrens 178
Prank Call 179
Dearly Departed 180
Koi Pond Tanka 181
Reading at Lunchtime 182
T'ao Ch'ien and the End of Things 183
Travelling North 185
Canada Geese Near Canada 186
The Martyred Mother 187
The Crimson Maples 188

New & Uncollected Poems

Visiting Bashō's Grave 190
Didgeridoo Player 191
Incidentals 192
Dip 193
Bamboo Forest, Arashiyama 194
On the Substitution Monkey Charms of Kyoto and Nara 195
Temple Ladle 196
The Bodhisattva's Bib 197
The Mother, the Bosatsu, and the Water Child 198
Jizō Stones by the Three-Storied Pagoda 200
Idol Stones 201
First Blood 201

CONTENTS

Apprehension	202
Windbells at Fushimi Inari Shrine	203
Autumn Maples, Kyoto	205
The Easter Trees	206
Gleam	207
Bamboo Dragonflies	208
Little Endings	209
Bamboo Triptych	210
In the Gardens of the Imperial Palace	211
Faces	212
This Woman	212
This Tinnitus	213
Radiance ['Writing the night away']	214
<i>Endnotes</i>	215
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	221

from
Counterpoise
1980

Counterpoise

Light refracting on the reach of the river;
gulls and sails embracing the slight wind;
jellyfish clasping the calm water
or bunting the sand in the basking shallows;
posts of wood barnacled and rotten;
small waves lisping upon the shore:
here is an abundance I had forgotten.

And here and there, a scatter of children
scamper across the lawn like leaves
driven before the tempest of their happiness.
Parents and grandparents are at ease
in the shade of trees and in each other's company.
For these people, things I thought we had lost
have never been open to doubt.

As the sun departs, parties arrive for prawning:
light their lanterns and lay out their nets.
The world again seems young and lovely,
values certain and strong: young men
and old men, friends, fathers and sons
in pairs dissolve into the dark water
and toil together in the hope of harvest.

How ignorant I have been
through these last years of learning,
how weighted down on one side of the scale.
The large, deep things are all
in their own ways dark and hard.
Small things are a counterpoise
to lighten and soften the heart.

On Poetry

for William Hart-Smith

As we sit talking
about poetry

my son (still months
from walking)

lounges without a care
on my knee, fronts

my old friend with
a vacant stare,

spasmodically stops
our talking with

a short sigh,
and lifts and drops

his foot rhythmically
on the flat of my thigh.

Sehnsucht

Everyone else is asleep
and I am up this early
only to keep my small son from crying.

I carry him down to the river.
A slight mist lingers by the bend.
Trees stand on their heads in the still water.

Has he seen a river before?
I can't remember.
He raises his hand,

reaching for it.
He looks back at me
to make sure I have seen it.

How can anyone find anything so amazing?
Yet it's not just the river:
stones, leaves, chickens, fire—

things I still love
though they've fallen familiar—
fill him continually with joy and wonder.

'Oo! Oo!' he says
as if it hurts him
here in my arms, seeing the river

for the first time.
And a familiar strangeness
grips my heart

and I sing to him,
'Jesus loves the little children',
to keep from weeping.

For Philip

This is what death has done:
Changed him beyond belief
Made him blind and dumb

Turned him cold to the sun
Blown him away like a leaf:
This is what death has done.

Can a tune beat time
On the drum of his ear
Now silence is the sound
That alone draws near?

Seeing his form, we are numb:
For whom did we make this wreath?
He is blind and dumb.

We huddle together as one,
Yet each alone in our grief.
This is what death has done.

Can a maiden dance
In the chamber of his heart
Now his blood is still
And he's set apart?

My mother mourns her son,
But tears are cold relief:
He is blind and dumb.

The words that twist my tongue
Are bitter beyond all grief:
Look what death has done—
Made him blind and dumb!

Will the Day Star rise
To the circle of his sight?
Will his tongue peal praise
To the Father of Light?

Black Holes

Everywhere, death. In deep space
there are giant stars collapsed
into themselves, compressed
by their own weight.
As with a terrible grief,
their gravity is so great
not even light can escape.

It is hard to conceive:
black holes—voids
in the vacuum of space.

How long has it been
since the light left your face?
The heavens, my heart—
still I can't tell them apart.

Gone

'Gone!' our son puzzles,
looking for milk in the cup he's emptied.

'Gone!' he says in amazement,
pointing to the lightbulb I switched off.

'Gone!' he urges, tugging at me
as music stops spinning from the record.

We usually laugh: One word
for so many things! 'Yes,' we say. 'Gone.'

But today it is a burden to us
to be reminded all day long.

We are sealed off from joy,
seared by the news of your death.

Shell

Life is no jewel
to the sea

How unconsciously
it must have cast this shell
this white spiral-shell
onto the beach years ago

Its owner died quickly
leaving the house quite empty
except for a ghost
of a smell, which lingered
about the empty stair-well

Without haste
the wind set to work:

Whispered, snickered,
incited the sand
to a sullen fury—
till every grain
on the beach
had raised its grit
to grind the fragile walls

It lies now a house in ruins:

Nothing left but a newel
jagged with the stumps
of several steps

Mercy

Across the footpath (tidy
as Euclid's brain
bar the rude little daisy
bold between two slabs)
the hose
follows itself and

coming suddenly upon its end
throws a tantrum
before a regiment of roses.

But

back along its torso,
in the middle of the path,
a pin-prick spray
sets the daisy dancing.