# BY OUR LADY

## A Brief and Eclectic Survey of Art as Potential Prayer from the 7th Century to the 21st

Jordyn Christine Rector Murray

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Washington

2019

Committee:

Linda Bierds

Richard Kenney

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

English

University of Washington

## Abstract

BY OUR LADY
A Brief and Eclectic Survey of Art as Potential Prayer from the 7th Century to the 21st

Jordyn Christine Rector Murray

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Linda Bierds

Department of English

This paper examines works of poetry, visual art, and performance art from a variety of cultures and time periods in an attempt to approach an understanding of the defining features of prayer, to the extent that these might exist. The paper probes the extent to which various kinds of art can operate as prayer with and without regard to specific religion, identified speaker, or even language. An eclectic sampling approach is utilized, and the materials discussed include (but are not limited to) Cædmon's Hymn, Meredith Monk's *Dolmen Music*, Johanne Laache's *Winter Choir*, the evolution of Mexican ex-voto artwork, and Jasmine Khaliq's vasco road poems.

## THE SOUND OF PRAYER

is not one single thing. To the question *is it prayer?* I have found that I can never issue an answer of *no*. This is because, ultimately, prayer (not necessarily the situation of formalized prayer, but rather, *spiritual communion*) is an individual action and an individual experience. Ilya Kaminsky has thought quite a bit about this. In trying to open up the poetry of "true mystic" Adélia Prado to readers, he invokes Edward B. Taylor's definition of prayer as "the address of personal spirit to personal spirit."[1] ("I pull on his white beard./" writes Prado of God; "He throws me the ball of the world,/ I throw it back.")[2] Indeed, if such is prayer—and I eventually find myself arguing that prayer may be so very personal as never to leave the fragmented but closed system of the self—then it is impossible to say that a work of art or an experience cannot constitute prayer. But, moving in the opposite direction: if there is always potentially a chance that an experience be prayer, what makes it more likely that it *will* be prayer for any given person? And (particularly important to me): can there be prayer without religious belief? Can one create what others might experience as prayer without oneself believing? Can an individual working within one religious belief system create work that can be understood and experienced as prayer by individuals who adhere to other systems of belief? Can a believer create work which is prayer even to a nonbeliever? Again, it is my contention that the answers to all of these questions are *yes*. This hypothesis has personal and poetic implications for me, but it also has implications for a world in which one formalized religion is constantly being pitted against another. As contemporary philosopher and theologian David Reinhart asserts, "...when a place of prayer is proposed within blocks of the former World Trade Center, it becomes difficult to assess

[1] Kaminsky 6.

[2] From the poem "Two Ways" (Prado 11).

the proposal in a rational way. Simple prayers that are intended as sincere acts of devotion are sometimes heard as a challenge from another continent or another religion. It becomes more important than ever to understand the sameness of prayers and discuss how particular prayers participate in a shared experience and are not a threat."[3]

And yet, my hypothesis remains just that. There is no way for me to attest to others' experience of prayer except by repeating or interpreting their words and actions. I do both in this essay as I examine the work of poets and artists who take the form and content of prayer into their own hands that they may better express their need and question their (and our) situation. I also present poetry and art that posits prayer as potentially universally understandable (and affecting) regardless of language or even in its absence. Ultimately, though, when I draw conclusions about whether a work can function as prayer, these conclusions speak only to my own experience of the work and to the work's potential, as I understand it, to produce comparable experiences in others. As Reinhart acknowledges, "How one hears a prayer can depend on one's narrative identity; the stories by which one understands oneself."[4] I would expand the sphere of this dependence to include the stories by which one understands others, even and especially others with differing religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. This is to say that I believe we may be more open to experiencing as prayer not only that which resembles prayer within our own religious, spiritual, or cultural traditions, but also that which we believe to resemble prayer within other, different traditions—although this too constitutes only a part of what may be experienced as prayer. The more we know about different forms and discourses within prayer, the more capacity we build for understanding (and potentially experiencing) work

[3] Reinhart 2.
[4] Ibid. 25.

as prayer. The likelihood of my apprehending prayer has increased even as I have been writing this essay.

## A WORD ABOUT METHODOLOGY

As a politeness to my readers, I would like to acknowledge at the outset that the instances of potential prayer examined in this essay may seldom seem immediately or obviously related to one another. They do not, for example, all come from Western history and literature, though I may speak much and know most of the West. Nor do they all hail from poetic works and the bodies of criticism concerned with these, although it is with poetry that the degree for which I do this work is principally concerned. I cannot even boast a highly academic treatment of religion, an aspect of human life I readily admit to having little firsthand experience of. Instead, I draw case studies from my personal life—tied up as much with visual art as it is with literature, and with Spanish sometimes as much as English—and my own reading history, many entries in which are the products of translation. The sections of this essay and their topics and approaches may seem greatly disparate at times. My work here has consisted in attempting to build a large number of small bridges between these disparate parts of my own experience in order to come even slightly nearer to an idea of prayer and what makes it possible.

## "BUT WE *ARE* PRAYING."

This assertion came from a member of the professional choir attending a suddenly loud and seemingly overcrowded performance planning meeting hosted by artist Johanne Marie

Aagaard Laache at the close of summer 2017. The chorister spoke in response to Laache's attempt to answer a question raised by one of her fellows about what, exactly, their choir would be doing in an imminent performance at Oslo's Kulturkirken Jakob. The question was not about what the choir would, in the letter, be doing during the performance—its members fully understood what was being asked of them technically. Choristers would interpret in real time the sounds they heard through headphones which played to each singer their own randomly ordered sequence of twelve different five-minute recordings—or actually, the same recording, with volume profile altered in twelve different ways. The choristers themselves would serve as a further filter of sound, each necessarily altering what they heard to a certain extent in attempting to repeat it. The performance would run for a single hour, and be the last in a series of three almost identical events, two of which would be conducted in Christian churches. The recordings, the choir understood, were of an excerpt from the *Salah*, Islamic daily prayer.

The chorister's question, then, addressed the spirit of the choir's performative task.

Laache had asked her performers not to attempt to make their rendition of the voice recordings playing through the headphones sound like language at all, and in particular not to try to make it sound like Arabic. As she explained in an interview this winter, "The prayer and what the prayer meant wasn't the point at all...the point was what the choristers actually interpreted; the point wasn't Islam, or to show something about Islam, but to show what these men and women interpreted as Islam with their voices and, I guess, bodies and expressions."

Nevertheless, the choristers knew that what they would sing would be prayer, in some sense—and their audience would know this, too. In the summer and autumn of 2017, 24-year-old

Laache was somewhat frantically pulling together a public performance piece on a scale she had never before attempted: she would orchestrate performances by three different Oslo choirs, each member of whom was to perform a cycle of twelve versions of a recorded excerpt from the *Salah*. Two of the three performances were scheduled to take place in local Christian churches, a source of some public discussion in the months preceding the events themselves. Laache's primary design, however, was not to provoke. Or rather, not to provoke alone, but to "study the defining moment where we make up our minds about something we're unfamiliar with".[5] Laache wanted to allow both the choirs and their audiences to experience the sounds of the sampled prayer for the first time in the moment of the performance, and to experience them, in effect, as differently embodied. I wanted at first to write 'disembodied', and that was indeed the midpoint of the process—the prayer as it existed in the recording Laache altered for her choristers—but ultimately, the process was one of shifting a series of sounds from a Muslim body to non-Muslim (and in all likelihood nominally Christian)[6] bodies. Laache, like all of the choristers with whom she made *Winter Choir* (the title of the series), is ethnically and culturally Norwegian.

It is difficult, from a distance, to tell exactly what the Norwegian public thought about the cultural and religious implications of *Winter Choir*. Most articles and interviews addressing the piece take a neutral tone, alluding to rather than interrogating Laache's decisions with respect to her own positionality. In some cases they make light of these through jokes or wordplay ("Kor(an)sang til ettertanke"[7] is the title one Norwegian cultural newspaper gives an interview

[5] Laache 2017.

[6] In Norwegian culture, confirmation into the Lutheran church is a coming-of-age rite now understood by many as more of a cultural than a spiritual event. It may also be useful to note that in a similar spirit, Norwegian churches are commonly used as venues for cultural events (such as musical performances) as well as worship.

[7] "Kor" is the Norwegian word for choir, while "Koran" is the typical Norwegian spelling for the holy book of Islam. "Kor(an)sang til ettertanke" can thus be translated into English (bereft of its pun) as "Choir/Koran song for reflection". Castello: https://www.utrop.no/Nyheter/32198

with Laache). On the other hand, however, many churches declined to host the planned performances—all of the churches, in fact, with whom Laache inquired in her own hometown and the neighboring municipalities. A mosque in Oslo, which had originally shown interest in collaborating on the piece if an explanation of the prayer's meaning could take greater precedence in it, ultimately dropped communication with Laache, though admittedly without explanation of its reasons. There were certainly both choirs and individual choristers who refused to take part in the work.

*Winter Choir* can be understood as a groundbreaking work demonstrating simultaneously the great plurality and universality of the spiritual. It might also be construed as appropriation or, in the worst case, blasphemy. How we understand it depends in great part upon our relationship to Islam, and to religion—and prayer—in general. Based on what I understand of *Winter Choir* formally, I'm inclined to think of it as a piece in which many people try very hard to understand something that is foreign to them, and create something beautiful out of it. As for the audience, I imagine that some, at least, experienced something intimate and arresting. In her press statement about *Winter Choir*, Laache discusses her desire to probe the moment of prejudice formation. "I wish to ask the question: what does Islam look like before we learn what it is? Or said in a different way: what does Islam look like before we learn about the brutalities of ISIS?"; "[The choristers] will have no time to ponder what they are hearing and how to interpret it. This is also how prejudices are formed: in the microsecond as we meet something new and foreign."[8]

To me, though, the performances seem to be trying to take prejudice right out of the array of possibilities, by bringing the contested and maligned yet also holy thing so close to the

[8] Laache 2017.

performers and the audience, and they likewise so close to it, that there may be no room for anything but wonder, or, possibly, some kind of religious experience.

But suppose it became necessary to determine whether the *Winter Choir* performances would, in fact, amount to prayer. How would we go about deciding?

At this point I feel I should explain that Johanne Laache is my best friend. We met in high school and went on to attend a fine arts college together. We've made a lot of work collaboratively, and for many years our artistic vocabulary and intentions seemed to evolve very much in tandem. *Winter Choir* was the first large performance piece Johanne made after returning to Norway, and also one of the first points at which I began to feel that our artistic lives had diverged. Immediate and seemingly innate comprehension of Johanne's work, which had been a given in my life almost from our first meeting, now evaded me. I was also further away from her work physically than I had ever been, attending graduate school for creative writing halfway across the world while she was scrambling to make ends meet as a professional artist in Oslo. Doing my best to stay up to date on *Winter Choir'*s development through emails and letters, I understood both that Johanne had an immense desire to make this piece and that she had some quite serious doubts about it, mostly in response to the reactions of certain individuals who had been asked to become involved with the piece and declined. At a certain point, she asked me to look carefully at the plans for *Winter Choir* and give her my own evaluation of the piece. And so her concerns became my concerns.

I had been especially curious about *Winter Choir* since early on, when I heard of the chorister's confident assertion that what her choir would be doing would indeed be prayer. I, too, had always assumed that the piece would somehow be prayer, but now it fell to me to think about those particular people for or to whom it might be prayer, and the implications of this. I've

spoken with many people in the intervening time about what prayer might be, and a good number of them have very little interest in the question, concluding quickly that anything and everything can be prayer, or that there is no point in discussing it if only the individual can finally determine whether an experience is prayer to them. For me, though, there was a great deal riding on the answer to the question.

Furthermore, the avenue of inquiry seemed to me not completely impassable, as I considered that there might be certain formal features of an event or object which could signal its intention to facilitate, or openness to facilitating, the experience of prayer. In other words, I suspected, and suspect, that some things are more likely to be or encourage prayer than others. This possibility is significant to me as a poet because one of the principal functions of poetry in which I am interested is the making-holy of a thing, or the creation of a site for religious or spiritual feeling, whatever its genesis or provocation.

*Were* Laache's choristers praying? Would their performances constitute prayer if they believed this? If others believed it? Were the performances necessarily prayer because the sounds produced in them were representations (albeit distorted) of Islamic prayer? Or were actual belief and intention to commune/icate with a higher power prerequisites for prayer? If so, were these necessary on the part of the performers, or only on the part of the audience? At the time, I had only Johanne's intentions to refer to in thinking on these questions. Returning to them now, over a year after the performances took place, I have many more resources available to me.

Late in 2018, I finally sat down to watch the video documentation of each of the *Winter Choir* performances. I was planning to interview Johanne about the work, and it seemed only right that I begin by experiencing it—or the closest thing to it—myself. I watched the video of the performance in Ekebergparken (a public sculpture park in Oslo) first. Then I moved on to the

two church performances. Almost immediately I was struck by how very much the performances in Grønland Kirke and Kulturkirken Jakob resembled Meredith Monk's *Dolmen Music*, or at least my impression of that piece. Excited by the similarity, I went back to Peter Greenaway's 1983 documentary *4 American Composers – Part 2*, which includes footage of Monk and her collaborators performing *Dolmen Music* in London in the early 1980s.

## THE LIKENESS OF PRAYER

The performers of *Dolmen Music* are seated on chairs arranged in a semicircle open toward the audience. Three male performers are seated on the left of the semicircle, one supporting a cello, and three female performers, including Monk herself, are seated on the right. All performers (the cellist excepted), are seated with hands resting on thighs, wearing white shirts and black pants. All performers rock forward and backward in their seats intermittently while singing. They work in and out of individuality: one female singer sets up a high-pitched rhythmic cry of repeated note progressions interrupted by glottal stops, which overlaps the other two female performers' sung exchange, and is in turn overlapped by a melodic chant carried by all three men which dissolves into urgent mumbled speech-sounds with no graspable semantic meaning. Especially during the more speechlike segments of the music, those who are 'in conversation' exchange meaningful looks with one another. The male and female performers each lean and gesture particularly toward the others in their own group, and apart from the occasional turn of Monk's head to her right toward the three men, the trajectories of the two groups' voices seem distinct for most of the piece. They layer, however, to evoke a space in which both groups exist—I think of a town square. Perhaps this interpretation comes partially from the resemblance of the singular

voices to the repetitive, attention-seeking calls of marketplace vendors. When Andrea Goodman sings alone, though, I also think of a person in the public square having a fit, excitable and a little fragile. I think too—and this seems important—of birdcall. So the tonalities extractable from the music itself, not even to speak of posture, are multiple. The division between the male and female performers seems consonant, too, with an idea of the collective as a kind of archaic human community, which multiple critics have suggested, and Monk acknowledges as an acceptable interpretation of the piece.[9]

In *4 American Composers*, Monk explains that *Dolmen Music* was created in part as a response to seeing *La Roche aux Fees* (The Fairy Rock), a dolmen[10] in Brittany thought to be the largest in France. The piece resulted from her "having this strange sensation that [the dolmen] was made by people or creatures from this Earth, but," Monk clarifies, "also the feeling that it could have been made by creatures or people from another planet. And so I was trying in *Dolmen Music* to get a feeling of…a very old reality, but also, you could say, a very futuristic kind of interplanetary feel to it; I like to have a very ancient and very futuristic feeling simultaneously."

*Dolmen Music* and *Winter Choir* share a number of features rather unusual in singing as carried out by professionals contemporarily, but ultimately, their effects on an audience are quite different. There has been much discussion of *Dolmen Music* as evoking an archaic community (or a futuristic one, as Monk suggests), but no suggestion, in any of the critical material on the piece that I have read, of its intimating or setting off a religious experience. We might pay attention, however, to a note from K. Robert Schwarz, applicable to Monk's work in general, that

[9] Greenaway.

[10] Dolmen: *passage grave*; in Breton, 'stone table'. https://thejournalofantiquities.com/category/fairies-rocks-at-la-roche-aux-fees-in-brittany/

her preference for non-vibrato vocal performance is reminiscent of medieval music[11] And indeed, early European examples of polyphony were mostly intended for worship. Western plainchant, the most well-known variant of which is Gregorian chant, is a prime example. It is also true that, as in plainchant, there is almost no instrumental accompaniment to the voice in *Dolmen Music*; there is, instead, instrumental alternation with the voice. Other sound work of Monk's has been understood as "intensely spiritual",[12] but it should be noted that the recording that garnered this reaction features versions of Monk's compositions which have been "normalized" for performance by a conventional choir. Moreover, the recording was made in a cathedral, the acoustics of which may imbue song with religious connotation. The juxtaposition of Monk's work with such obviously ecclesiastical song as Bingen's also seems likely to open listeners to spiritual experience in a way that the visual and sonic quirkiness of Monk's work as performed live or seen on film, as well as the secularity of her normal performance venues, might discourage or dampen. An important feature of *Dolmen Music*, and indeed much of Monk's work, consists in the fact that her singers are trained in vocal and movement methods she herself has developed, and that each piece uses relatively few singers. The overall effect of Monk's song, then, tends to walk the line between polyphony and cacophony, in the sense that individual voices are often sharply distinguishable from one another, and seem to have different communicative intentions. There is a diversity of personhood or being-hood implied in Monk's work which distances it communicatively from plainchant despite the apparent stylistic relationship between the two. We hear not a semblance of multitudinous angelic voice, but

[11] Demaree 1.

[12] See Eric Salzman's analysis of segments of Monk's opera *Quarry* as presented in *Monk and the Abbess*, a recording contrasting Hildegard von Bingen's chants and organum with Monk's work.

human voices, which suggest human personalities and ends; or then again possibly animal voices, which raise other thoughts entirely.

Laache's *Winter Choir* arguably takes both individuality and cacophony further than *Dolmen Music*, which is especially intriguing given the single voice of the source sound recording. Conceptually, the transformation of the single original recording into twelve times twelve distinct sound sequences, multiplied by the number of performers, is a successful realization of Laache's goal "to take the most fundamental, primary prayer in Islam and show a great number of interpretations of this prayer. To show how many ways there are to see, hear and voice the very same verses."[13] What the piece accomplishes practically, though, may be different from or more than what Laache reckoned on bringing about.

Laache's performers, unlike Monk's, do not interact with one another visually or physically, only sonically. In each of the two church performances a twenty-person choir is spread throughout the venue. Choristers are within one another's field of vision (unlike in the Ekebergparken version of the piece) but do not look at one another; many performers stand; others sit; they face in various directions. The audience can walk freely about the space, and come as close to the performers as they would like, for the most part, although there are a few choristers in audience-inaccessible places, such as the raised pulpit, or a balcony. Many of the singers' glances are cast slightly downward; heads move from side to side and brows furrow occasionally, perhaps as singers encounter difficulties in keeping up with the sound playing to them. The choristers wear modest black clothing. Most keep their hands at their sides as they sing. Visually, the entire scenario accords with the idea of the pious receiving transmissions from on high, though obviously with a more contemporary technological twist. This is a very

[13] Laache 2017.

important point of distinction between Laache and Monk's works: the extent to which another will, voice, or text is implied as the audience-inaccessible genesis for what performers are heard and seen to express. In practical terms, Laache's choristers are indeed repeating transmissions: they have never before heard the prayers they are asked to interpret in song in the present of the performance, and do not understand their semantic meaning. This condition is in fact the reason for Laache's decision to commission three different choirs to perform the piece on three different occasions. It was very important to her that the choristers' interpretation of the prayer excerpt be simultaneous interpretation. In contrast, *Dolmen Music* is very obviously a meticulously composed and carefully rehearsed performance. Of all the individual performances in *Dolmen Music*, Andrea Goodman's is the closest to evoking transmission, and yet transmission is not necessarily or consistently what we understand from it.

*Dolmen Music* and *Winter Choir* again align with one another in presenting asemic song––song empty of identifiable words—but the temporal and tonal structures within which they place this song differ greatly. Laache and Monk seem to have moved in opposite directions to arrive at their intently asemic song, Monk having begun by witnessing in Brittany the *Roche aux Fees* (an ancient stone structure), and Laache with excerpts from the Islamic *Salah* (a religious text full of words whose semantic meaning carries great weight). And yet both *Dolmen Music* and *Winter Choir* present the seeming of language, which is accompanied by the seeming of meaning—of the transmission of a meaningful message from performer to performer (in Monk's case), or from sound-source to performer and performer to audience (in Laache's). Both performances teach those who experience them that patterning—in this case the modulation and layering of voices, and body movement—can create apprehensible meaning, and even narrative, in the absence of language. In Laache's work, randomizing elements applied to repetition result

in the visual communication of a religious archetype, whereas in *Dolmen Music* the clear trajectory of rehearsed sound gives us a building sense of narrative. To afford some idea of the ways in which Dolmen Music reads as rehearsed: toward the end of the approximately 24-minute performance comes an instrumental interlude during which the men use the cello as string and percussion instrument simultaneously. The layered voice work then recommences, rises to fever pitch, and stops completely for one beat, after which the whole group comes together in identical song, guided by an arm gesture from Monk. In many ways, Monk's work is quite distinct from traditional choral practice, but the arm gesture, especially, signals very strongly the world of composed and practiced music.

Asked about the absence of the word in the piece, Monk says, "...in *Dolmen Music*, it's funny, I never think about it, because my feeling was much more as if you were overhearing some mysterious conversation that you couldn't make it out: you couldn't make out the language and you couldn't make out the, you know, what they were saying. And you were hearing it from far away."[14] To the ears, *Dolmen Music* may play as though from far away, but if one is experiencing the performance as a whole (that is, the presence of the performers' bodies in the space and their interaction with one another), one experiences also a scene of lively exchange with an obvious progression. *Winter Choir* is comparatively static or looplike, temporally. To me, this too puts it nearer as performance to prayer than conversation between humans. Although prayer can certainly be spontaneous and generative, in the context of organized religion it often takes place in regulated times and spaces, and consists in a repetition, commonly in the presence of others, of memorized texts which address themselves to a higher power. We recognize this

[14] Greenaway.

framework easily and cannot help but be influenced by it in our reception of a piece like *Winter Choir*.

Although Meredith Monk's *Dolmen Music* opens onto profound thought about communities and conversations as both ancient and not uniquely the domain of humanity, it seems neither to be intended as prayer nor to be actually hortatory of it. Outlining some of the distinctions between *Dolmen Music* and *Winter Choir* may have helped to demonstrate certain ways in which we might distinguish spiritual from non-spiritual discourse with reference to the admittedly limited framework of the predominant monotheistic religions in the world today. But are the trappings of religious discourse as exhibited by *Winter Choir*—transmission, repetition, communal song, the religious venue—sufficient to induce the feeling of prayer, or support its purposes? What are the feelings and purposes of prayer? Does it make sense to attempt to define the genre by these features, which may not be apparent on the surface of the practice? I must also inquire after the difference between initiating or performing prayer and receiving prayer as a witness. Perhaps we can distinguish between these positions toward prayer by calling them *active* and *passive*, respectively. To return to my phrasing at the very beginning of this essay: does the letter of the prayer ultimately matter for a person engaged in it passively, as long as the spirit of prayer is sensible or activated? A more practical version of this question would be whether the versions of Islamic prayer overheard by the audience to *Winter Choir* were capable of inciting prayer in those members of it who professed other faiths. Another question, which for me reflects directly on poetic practice, is whether these versions of Islamic prayer were capable of inciting prayer in those members of the audience who professed no faith at all.

## A SHORT BREAK

It is often said that spoken Norwegian sounds like singing. Most dialects have tones. Admittedly my ability to evaluate the nature of these tones in terms of descriptive linguistics is limited; nevertheless, I think there is something in the idea that the songlike aspect of Norwegian speech arises in part from its being a language of geminate consonants. *Alle sammen*. Gemination (literally, 'twinning') occurs when a language has distinctive long consonants; that is to say, a long consonant is written and spoken differently than a short consonant—*ll*, for example, as compared to *l*. In English, gemination occasionally occurs sonically between words or in the middle of a word—"tranquil life"; "barroom"—but our written notation does not distinguish geminate consonants from instances of consonant doubling in spelling which do not denote distinctive long consonants in sound—"purring"; "runner"; "attentive".[15]

In Norwegian, geminate consonants produce minuscule moments of stillness in which the tongue rests stretched up to the roof of the mouth—"a*ll*e"—or the lips press together—"sa*mm*en"—at the center of a word. The voice dips down to these moments of stillness and then rises and goes away from them again. The more slowly one speaks a word, the more pronounced this effect.

When the monk and poet Shuken was twenty-five years old, he grasped a koan of Unmon's while listening to a biwa performance of song from the *Heike monogatari*. His Zen master Kaso then gave him the Dharma name Ikkyū. Ikkyū—*hitoyasumi*, in the Japanese reading of the kanji used to compose the phrase—can be translated into English as *one rest*; *one slumber*.[16] In Sonja Arntzen's 1970 thesis presenting Ikkyū's life and a selection of translations

[15] See the discussion of gemination in the second edition of *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (David Crystal).
[16] Arntzen 12.

from his *Mad Cloud Anthology* (nowadays more commonly referred to as the *Crazy Cloud Anthology*), she points to a poem composed by Ikkyū himself upon receiving his new name:

| | |
|---|---|
| From the realm of illusions, | uroji yori |
| We return to the realm of no illusions, | muroji e kaeru |
| One rest. | hitoyasumi |
| If it rains, let it rain. | ame furaba fure |
| If the wind blows, let it blow. | kaze fukaba fuke[17] |

Here, she explains, the phrase is used as "a metaphor for our short human life. The implication is that if one arrives at the state of mind where it is evident that from birth to death is really only a moment, then griefs and cares in this life seem small things indeed."[18] I find it concomitantly intriguing that Arntzen's translation of *ikkyū* as *one rest*, especially when contextualized within Ikkyū's own poem in the *uta* (song) form, leads me instantly to the musical application of the word 'rest'. Think again of Meredith Monk drawing her arm inward semicircularly, stopping it (silence among the singers), and then retracting it and once more pressing inward, to exact sound. Japanese is also a language of geminates—the word *ikkyū* (ikkyuu) itself contains both consonant and vowel geminate pairs.

Is there space for two prayer breaks in a single word? Seven prayer breaks on a single breath? In Tessa Rumsey's poem "THE STRANGER", we see prayer emerge from brokenness because brokenness—in this case an irregular pattern of forward-slashes tipped into lines arranged in couplets—provides a moment of pause in which one's trajectory can be reevaluated, and perhaps reset.

[17] Ibid. 12.
[18] Ibid. 12.

[...]

Coins of dusk rushed through my chest
As I fell to the east / As I fell to the west

City of burning shepherds across the desert
A flock of phantom smoke took flight

My eyes black maps / As the light
Shone through me. A body broken

May pray to begin again / Let me please
Begin again. The sun was drunk

And stumbling. There was a hawk
Whose wings had been torn off

Inside my chest. Something deep
Was dying, fighting for a last and a last

Breath. Death ripened on the orchard's
Ashen branches, corseted tight with bees

[...][19]

"THE STRANGER" consists of twenty stanzas, nineteen of them couplets, and the twentieth a single line. Often in this poem, the mid-line breaks delineate halves of some kind of whole. In one instance these halves are opposites, mirror images of one another (in quotation I will bold the mid-line forward slashes to distinguish them from line breaks): "As I fell to the east **/** As I fell to the west"; in another they are strongly contrasted features of a single body: "My eyes black maps **/** As the light / Shone through me." What I consider the turning point of the poem begins in couplet seven but occurs mainly in couplet eight: "A body broken // May pray to begin again **/** Let me please / Begin again." After this point, the mid-line forward slashes disappear until couplet eighteen: "Right hand slits coyote's throat **/** Left / Hand caresses his shoulder". The "body broken" in line 14 can be understood as the speaker's own body, but

[19] Rumsey 26.

doubles as the poem itself; in line 15, the speaker prays to "begin again", and does; following this entreaty the poem returns to linear wholeness almost until its conclusion. Rumsey's poem leads up to and then away from the point where she positions prayer. I understand this point as prayer thanks to the prompting of Rumsey's own diction—"pray to begin again"—but also because the eighth couplet is the only place in the poem where Rumsey uses the second person.[20] The poem does not explicitly attach any specific identity to this second person addressee. I read it doubly as Rumsey's audience and God, another mirrored pair. In one side of the mirror image, the speaker's entreaty reaches further into the world of the poem, to its deity; in the other, the speaker reaches out of the frame of the poem all the way to another entity who exercises control over the poem's life—its reader. In either case, oneness and order are granted or subsist temporarily, only for the poem to return, in the situation of the trapped coyote, to the persistent problem of duality.

[20] For further discussion of the second person and devotional art forms, see page 24.

## EX VOTO SUSCEPTO

Ex-votos in Frida Kahlo's house in Mexico City, 1951. Gisèle Freund.

If, as Anne Carson writes, the inhabitants of *Sanguinia* "came forth strong in war",[21] then the people of many Spanish-speaking regions—places where it is not uncommon to name a child *Jesús*, or, then again, *América*—come forth strong in prayer. The people of western Mexico, for example, have long nurtured the tradition of combining image and language to attest grace granted. Patricia Arias and Jorge Durand note in *La Enferma Eterna*, a study of women and ex-

[21] Carson 86. ("Canicula di Anna" section 52, in *Plainwater*.)

votos in Mexico, that the first painted ex-votos brought to the *santuario*[22] of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico City date to the mid-sixteenth century.[23] An ex-voto, explain Arias and Durand, is "gratitude for a favor received, understood as a miracle, of which one must make a public and enduring acknowledgement."[24] *Expertise*, a Firenze-based vendor of ex-votos (the tradition is also particularly strong in Italy), clarifies that

> "Ex voto" is a Latin phrase; the complete expression "Ex voto suscepto", which could be translated loosely as "in fulfilment of a vow", indicates the text that was included with objects that faithful worshippers offered at shrines or churches to receive grace from God [...] By extension, it is the very object of the offering that is referred to as *Ex voto* and that in its various forms and ways represents the tangible evidence of a former vow, an appeal, of the unmerited grace received from God, or of an expression of thanksgiving that follows God's favour...

*Expertise* also defines the ex-voto more concisely as "A prayer translated into image."

It is intriguing that these definitions seem to contradict themselves in trying to articulate the temporal relationship of the prayed-for thing to the creation of the ex-voto and its placement in the *santuario*. Indeed, the practice in Mexico was for centuries almost entirely confined to thanksgiving for grace *already* received in answer to prayers. If we understand the ex-voto itself as prayer, then it is originally a prayer of thanksgiving which acknowledges in very specific terms the desperation preceding the miracle it attests. Additionally, it was traditionally considered crucial that the material part of an ex-voto be made by someone other than the party who offers it to the image of God or the Virgin. In *Los Exvotos del Occidente de México*,

---

[22] "*Santuarios*, those spaces where faith, devotion and gratitude to sacred images are made public and patent, form a most intimate, shared and enjoyed part of the geography of the Catholic flock since colonial times. The legends and accounts of astonishing miracles that flowed from mouth to mouth made it so that each locality, each microregion, learned to recognize, and recognize themselves in, images and *santuarios* whose relative nearness made it possible to beg and receive favors for which to be able, one day, to come forth to give thanks, to send a *retablo*. The veneration of a determined image and the habit of giving thanks by means of *retablos* can be seen as a special tradition learned at home and transmitted from generation to generation..." (Arias and Durand 19) (Translations from the Spanish throughout are my own.)

[23] Arias and Durand 26.

[24] Ibid. 23.

researchers Marianne Bélard and Philippe Verrier speak with two renowned *milagreros* (painters of ex-votos and other devotional wares), Genaro Almanza and Leonardo Rivera. Although the two men differ significantly in their approach to the profession when interviewed in 1991 (Genaro is embittered by the Church's failure to protect past ex-votos from theft by those interested only in their aesthetic value, while Leonardo isn't against making up an occasional "false" ex-voto for a buyer without actual religious intentions), both agree that "an ex-voto, in order to be valid and successful, must be commissioned from another person."[25]

It was during the nineties, however—as word processors, Xerox machines, and personal computers became increasingly accessible even to rural farm workers in Mexico—that ex-votos began also to be fashioned by the donors themselves. These homemade ex-votos may have accounted for a relatively small percentage of the total annual offerings to a particular image, and yet their appearance is quite significant if we consider (as Bélard, Verrier, Arias, and Durand do) that they function as both prayer and a cross-section of the concerns and lifestyles of the vast majority of the Mexican population who identify as Catholic. It is important to remember that these offerings are made to a sacred image, but displayed in cathedrals or cathedral-adjacent spaces where all visitors can see them. The ex-voto has long functioned as an important source of information from the people to the people. The popularity of pilgrimages among groups of family and friends as well as, for example, sports teams, ensures that the main *santuarios* receive high-volume traffic even today. Ex-votos serve to reinforce devotee faith in the capacity of the sacred images to grant miracles, but also to enlighten city dwellers about the concerns of the rural population, broadcast changes in gender roles over time, attest to the efficacy of modern medicine, and more.

[25] Bélard and Verrier 40.

Commissioning an ex-voto is a serious financial commitment to many members of the Mexican population, especially those who must travel to the city where their *santuario* of choice is located and commission the ex-voto there, then wait for it to be finished, all the while paying for food and accommodation and missing days of work. Having the option to craft one's own ex-voto quickly and cheaply reduced both the time commitment and the financial commitment that becoming a donor had previously represented. It also meant that a donor had greater freedom to determine the content of the ex-voto. Homemade ex-votos draw on the language of traditional ex-votos made by *milagreros*, but also alter this language in significant ways.

First of all, explain Arias and Durand, donor-authors have begun to use the *tuteo*, the informal second person pronoun and accompanying verb conjugations, in the text with which they address their venerated images. This results in a "colloquial, dialogic way of communicating with the image".[26] Consider the following text from 1995, written by Ms. Blanca Estela Rivera Guerrero, on an ex-voto written on a word processor and accompanied by a photograph:

> "I'm coming to thank you lord because even though I am a sinner you put your merciful gaze on me and with your mighty power and goodness permitted that my longing to be a mother become a reality. But above all Lord, I thank you for having given me a healthy son, whom I will teach to love you and I will make it so that his faith in you grows each day, so that he is a good christian and helps and loves his neighbors just as you want. I offer you this humble photograph as a small symbol of my gratitude, but you who see all know that for the rest of my life I will carry you in my heart and in my mind thanking you day after day for the allowances that you make for your humble daughter."[27]

Another homemade ex-voto from the 90's reads:

> "Lord of the Conquest, I give you thanks for what I have asked of you and what you've given me. I hope you will grant me the rest of what I asked for. I hope that it will be a marvelous day take care of my children for me wherever they all go. My house and my whole family [...] Thank you Lord of the Conquest, me, my husband, my children. M.R. Family."[28]

---

[26] Arias and Durand 143.

[27] Ibid. 143.

[28] Ibid. 143.

In contrast, the text of a professionally painted ex-voto from 1942:

> "In el Patolito Salvador Rodriguez was criminalized badly before the Government and entrusted himself to the Most Holy Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos who favored him and in gratitude for the miracle he presents to her this Retablo January 26th of 1942."[29]

We can immediately identify several differences between the professionally made ex-voto and the homemade. Most noticeable among them is perhaps the use of the third person in the professional example. This functions dually as an acknowledgement that the work is being completed by a go-between—the *milagrero*, working as 'intercessor'[30]—and as a manner of humbling the donor before the venerated image by creating a linguistic distance between the two. The same documentary third-person is also seen in official written communications between monarchs and their people during past centuries. *Let it be known that this day of the Year of Our Lord 1790, Her Majesty Queen XXXX of XXXXXXX has declared a state of emergency...* In a way, then, the text of the 1942 ex-voto is in the voice of the donor as well as of the *milagrero*. Just as with our imaginary Queen and her scribe, the fusion of the donor and *milagrero* voices becomes the formula for historical documentation of a development that the ex-voto's donor wishes to highlight as significant.

In contrast, there is obviously still a documentary function to the homemade ex-votos from the 1990's, but they do not exhibit the same talelike removal as their 1942 counterpart. Rather, they sound like letters, and letters written to a correspondent with whom the writer is very close, despite the acknowledged indebtedness of the latter to the former. In one of them, the donor-author even signs off as she would were she writing a letter: "...me, my husband, my children. M.R. Family." Their content is also markedly distinct from that of the earlier ex-voto.

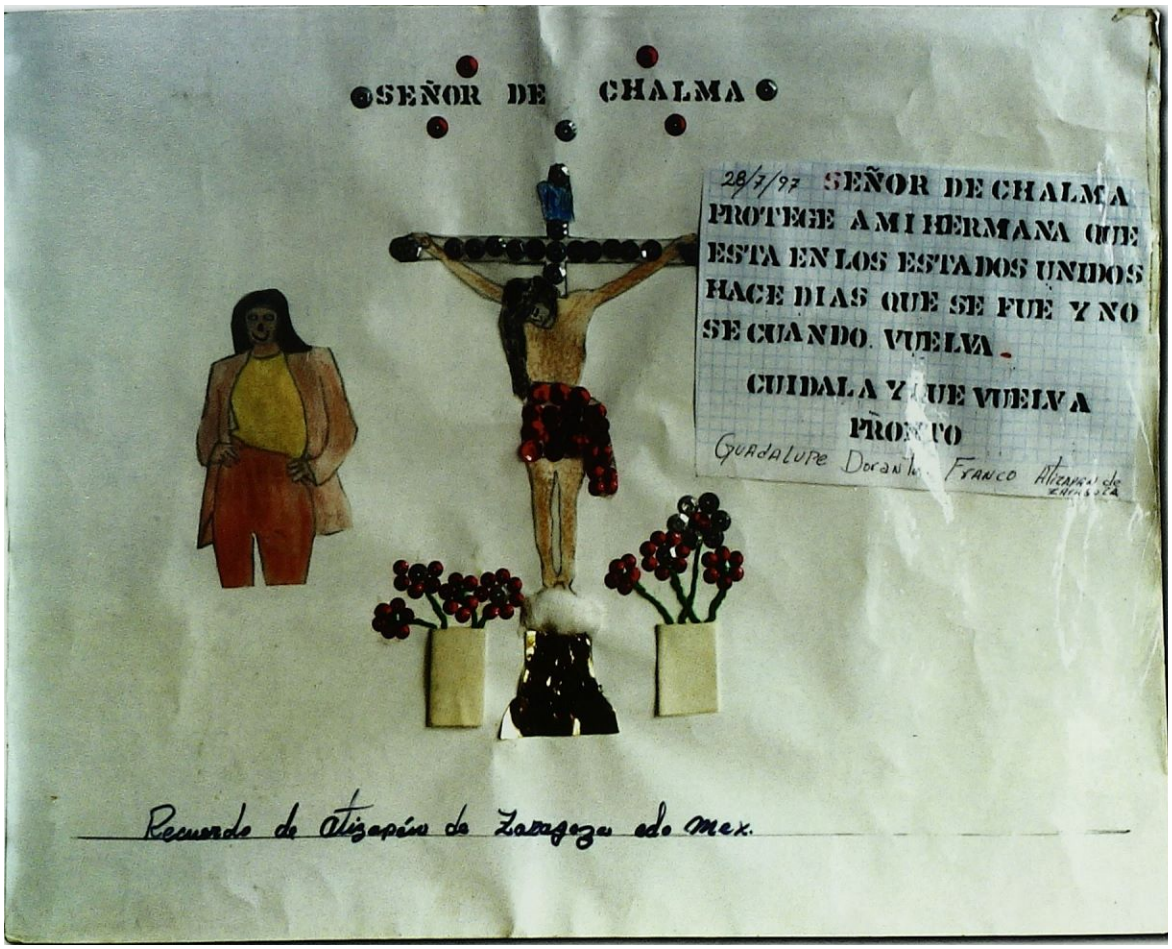
---

[29] Bélard and Verrier 31.

[30] Ibid. 41.

They exclude the earlier specimen's precise notation of dates and places which figure in the miracle story. In the second example (the M.R. family's ex-voto), the author does not even explain fully the nature of the request made of the Lord of the Conquest and the (apparently partial) miracle granted.

The most significant difference of all, however, may be the allusion, again in the M.R. Family ex-voto, to miracles not yet granted, and the reminder written out to the image of the Lord of the Conquest of those tasks he has yet to complete. This is something simply not seen in earlier ex-votos, whose messages were mediated by the *milagreros* commissioned to paint them up. It seems to me that there has occurred quite an important transition when a devotee feels comfortable using the ex-voto as a place to make requests in addition to acknowledging those which have already been granted. There may be, in the more open relationship intimated by the *tuteo*, an increased sense of entitlement on the part of the devotee.




A homemade ex-voto. Arias and Durand 215. *Retablo de Guadalupe Dorante Franco, 1997*. Prismacolor-collage on paper. 28 x 21.5 cm. Santuario del Señor de Chalma.

Inscription: "28/7/97 LORD OF CHALMA / PROTECT MY SISTER WHO IS IN THE UNITED STATES / IT'S DAYS SINCE SHE WENT AND I DON'T/ KNOW WHEN SHE'LL COME BACK. // TAKE CARE OF HER AND MAY SHE COME BACK / SOON"

## AN AMERICAN GOTHIC

Californian poet Jasmine Khaliq has a family of writings she refers to collectively as *the vasco road poems*. Core among these are three prose poems on landscape-oriented pages: "vasco rd", "calves", and "an american gothic". As far as I am aware, it was not Khaliq's intention that these poems should resemble retablos. Nevertheless, parallels are apparent between the two on

several levels, and inform my reading of the poems. Since this essay is in the business of discussing poetry and art as they *might* be understood as prayer, and because Khaliq's poems for me exemplify David Reinhart's idea of "post-religious prayer", I will elaborate the points of connection as I see them.

According to Reinhart, "post-religious prayer...uses the language of a religious tradition, lives inside a tradition and is nourished by it, but is capable of suspending and questioning all its claims."[31] Reinhart also posits prayers as "one way, maybe the most used way, to navigate the subtleties of memory while also listening to them."[32], and asserts that prayer speaks within a normative discourse "[g]iven that a cosmogony is at least implied in each prayer."[33]

Khaliq's *vasco road* poems, while avowing no specific religious belief or affiliation, carry out a kind of post-religious prayer which can easily be compared to the retablo ex-voto. Khaliq's poems are nourished by the ideas and imagery of Christianity in the American interstices. They also suspend and question many of the claims of this Christianity, but indeed Christianity is only one aspect of the questioning in *vasco road*. It is there because it is entangled with the landscape, as is the poems' speaker. In two of the three poems, the speaker moves through this landscape—the landscape of a once-rural, now largely developed California—toward a certain site. In 'vasco rd', the destination is the speaker's grandmother's house; in 'calves', it is a manger where cows can sometimes be seen. These two might be thought of as poems of pilgrimage. Recurring visitation is implied or explicit: "the hills here are bleached butterless, almost endless. you don't know the name of the place they let out to, but there is a / Wienerschnitzel there, a big rust, and it

[31] Reinhart 18.
[32] Ibid. 19.
[33] Ibid. 6.

means you are halfway to Grandma's house..."[34]; "...why I stumbled over crumpled fence telling myself, *well they might come this time* and, *I might get to see the baby one, plush and brown,*"[35].

Why think of the *vasco road* poems as prayer? One doesn't need to, but they lend themselves to it because of the yearning they foreground and—to my eyes—because of the compositional similarities they bear to both traditional and "new" (homemade) ex-votos, as well as the way they enact and trouble notions of pilgrimage. As to yearning: in "calves", the speaker alternates between a deep tenderness and vulnerability and a fox-and-the-grapes, self-second-guessing sort of attitude when the cows she and her grandfather have driven and walked out to a remote area to see do not appear. This situation of this poem especially bears great resemblance to a religious pilgrimage to see an image, not in the sense that there is something beyond the cows (in the way that there is something beyond the Holy Child of Atocha, who is an intercessor for devotees with God), but in the simpler sense that the cows are figures for adoration—or would be, if they could be found. The poem perhaps describes thwarted prayer at the same time as it is itself successful prayer. The absent image (to use the word in the ex-voto sense) suggests uncertainty in both the devotional and the geographical landscapes of the speaker's world—return to a place these days and you may not find there what you left.

Returning, then, is itself an act of faith. "calves" begins tender—"lining up teeny sweet potato pies in the manger" and ends tender and wishful—"*I might get to see the baby one, plush and brown,*", despite a drop into "wondering why I bothered saving them up when the cows don't come anyway" in its midsection. The prevalent mode is desire. If the poem is a kind of ex-voto, then the sweet potato pies the author places in the manger in hopes of attracting cows are an

[34] "vasco rd"

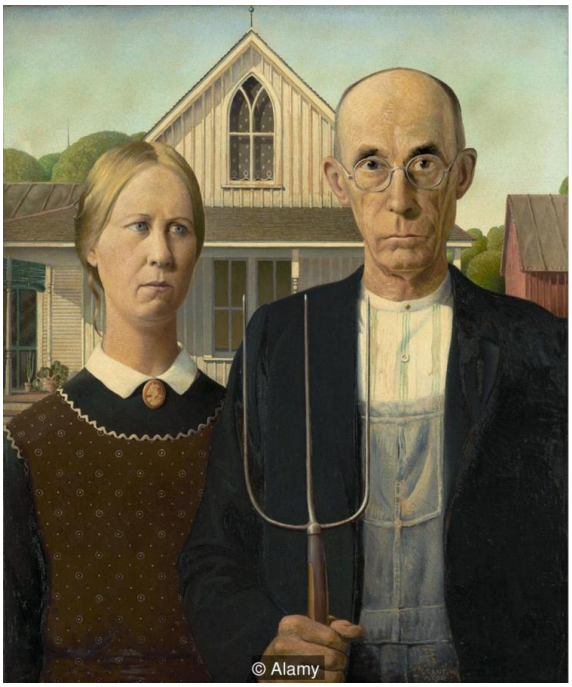
[35] "calves"

offering within an offering. The fact that the poem ends on a comma, too (after "*plush and brown*") places the entirety of it for me within the subjunctive mood. Of course the poem is not actually using the subjunctive, but to me, one of the principal ideas of the subjunctive is the leaving open of things. This is better articulated in Spanish than in English, where the word *ojalá* alone can articulate the entire spectrum of praying, hoping, crossing one's fingers, not getting too cocky, humbly saying 'let's wait and see'.[36] The *vasco road* trifecta all end on such commas, which intimate simultaneously the obscuring of the way forward and hope. In "vasco rd", Khaliq concludes 'and, *what does this big cross mean*,". There is confusion: "it is hard to know / the white crosses from the cows and the windmills from colossal white crosses". The condition might be childhood, half-sleep, myopia, or, then again, dystopia; scale is no longer an indication of identity on its own; a familiar religious symbol's name is known but its meaning is not. The reader is left with a weighty question. And yet the poem has not closed itself; the movement it makes goes on, thanks to the comma ending, and so there is hope, and an implied destination still somewhere ahead.

But let us return to the visual composition of the *vasco road* trio. In all three, we are located in an American pastoral—among mangers, farmhouses, and hills, but also a rusted Wienerschnitzel, two-headed rabbits, and spider-eyed sheep. The images of "calves" and "vasco rd" effect a simpler nostalgia than "an american gothic", which has a post-apocalyptic feel to it despite being written in the future tense. "an american gothic" is nevertheless working within a model of the rural American life. The work of setting the scene is begun by the title, a reference to *American Gothic*, painter Grant Wood's depression-era portrait of a farmer (who half-resembles a pastor) and his wife or daughter. As you can likely tell from the qualifications I've

[36] See THE SUBJUNCTIVE AND PRAYER AS AN EXPRESSION OF DESIRE for further discussion of the form. (p. 39)

had to make in trying to describe the image in a single sentence, it is a painting much of whose attraction resides in its ambiguities. It seems simple enough at first: the basic family unit; the homestead in the rural American Midwest; the close-up portrait in good clothes. But even these seemingly straightforward components of the painting include anachronistic or evasive details: the wife or daughter's clothing rather old-fashioned for the time; the curl escaping her stern hairstyle at the nape of her neck; the ambiguity of the relationship between the farmer and herself; the direction of her gaze; the ornamental Gothic elements in the architecture that is background to the portrait.




Khaliq's poem, then, starts out in the tradition of all-is-not-as-it-seems America, but a firmly rural all-is-not-as-it-seems. It upgrades to *aspirational* all-is-not in its opening line: "when we're older, we will live in a white farmhouse." It becomes swiftly stranger and bleaker as it lays out the rules for this imagined existence: "in the mornings, you will collect blue eggs to eat and I

will pour blue milk. / we will love each other less." The dystopic oddness of breeding two-headed rabbits and dreaming of spider-eyed sheep has soon become the solidity in a poem riddled by absence; white spaces in the middle of lines suggest the misplacement of pieces of the narrative, or pauses in its telling. These ideas are compounded by the inclusions among the poem's rules of such as "I will forget to wear shoes." and "by then, I will have stopped dreaming about my great-grandmother, the one photograph I've seen". Further categories of information are effaced as the poem progresses, including the very name of the speaker: "I will baptize myself in our wide farmhouse sink / the light, my new name, unrolling over me

windows all open Xs painted my absent past will horizon over me,".

Like its companions, 'an american gothic' ends on a comma. This one is perhaps a rather more ominous comma than the others, following a last image evoking not only the complete erasure of the past, but also the sensation of the nearness of the sky when a storm is coming.

Khaliq is creating in her *vasco road* poems a landscape which is increasingly troubled by contemporary concerns, but remains firmly rural within the frame of the poem. In this sense, the place-images of the poems—the forms of farm buildings, of animals, of dry hills—are very similar to those seen in the traditional retablo ex-votos of western Mexico, many of which are offered by devotees from rural communities. The poems also resemble ex-votos in the arrangement of the bodies of text which comprise them. Arias and Durand describe the traditional practice of the painted ex-voto as "maintaining invariably the division of the ex-voto into three well-delimited, separate fields: that of the image[37], always at the top; the pictorial segment, at the center; and the text, in the lower part of the plate."[38]

---

[37] "*imagen*" in the original text here refers to the image to which the ex-voto is offered—that of the localized religious figure who is understood to be responsible for the miracle documented by the ex-voto.

[38] Arias and Durand 142.


Arias and Durand 193. *Retablo de Antonia Piña*, 1938. Alejandro Polo Rojas. Oil on metal. 25 x 18 cm. Santuario del Señor de Chalma.

While Khaliq's *vasco road* poems do not incorporate images in their current form, each is landscape-oriented, featuring a title in the upper left corner of the page, and an upper-central text block four or five lines in length spanning the page width. The title of each poem can be understood in the light of an 'image' in the devotional sense given the fact that, understood within the context established by each poem, it points to an absent or inaccessible entity. In "calves", for example, the cows, which I have discussed above as figures for adoration, do not show themselves. "an american gothic" points to *American Gothic*, already an actually venerated

image among secular pilgrims (museumgoers), which presents a deeply ambiguous image of much-idealized rural American life.

The body of each poem might then be considered a combination of the pictorial and text segments of the traditional ex-voto. It is the location of images of places and events which the poet wishes to historicize due to their personal significance to her, and it is also the location of an explanation of these images, such as that may be. 'an american gothic' may be readable not only as a series of declarations or determinations but also as a series of promises. "I will forget to wear shoes" may describe a future of habitual absentmindedness, or even senility. But it can also be read as a vow made in exchange for the granting of a miracle—that miracle perhaps nothing more than the dubious idyll that is rural American life. What is promised? The repetition of a penitent omission from one's outfit, out in the country. "I will have stopped dreaming..." and "I will baptize myself..." are likewise understandable as promises, in which sense they resemble the promises often made or renewed in traditional ex-voto retablos as further thanks for the miracle received—for example, that the devotee will visit the *santuario* every year. 'an american gothic', with its future-tense rules or promises, is actually edging into the territory of homemade ex-votos, those which make requests in addition to or rather than offering thanks for grace already granted.


Arias and Durand 229. "Retablo de..., s.f." Oil on metal. 25 x 19 cm, Santuario del Señor de la Conquista.

## CÆDMON

The *Norton Anthology of Poetry* begins its timeline of English-language poetics with a transcription of an oral performance. “Cædmon’s Hymn” is, in one version of events, the seventh-century song of an illiterate cowherd who received its God-praising words in a dream. The Hymn and its genesis are famously mythologized in *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* by Bede, a Benedictine monk who lived and wrote in Northumbrian monasteries through the end of the seventh century and into the beginning of the eighth. In Bede’s account, Cædmon’s story is appended to the story of Hild, Abbess of Whitby (then known as Streoneshealh). Here is the section of the story directly following Cædmon’s dream:

> In the morning he went to the steward, his master, and told him of the gift he had received; the steward led him to the abbess, who ordered him, in the presence of many learned men, to recount his dream and repeat his poem, so that they might all decide what it was and where it had come from. It was clear to all of them he had received a gift of heavenly grace from our Lord.[39]

And this is where things gets interesting, for my purposes. "*It was clear to all of them he had received a gift of heavenly grace from our Lord.*" *Our* Lord, here, of course, the Christian God—the *we* Bede's audience, British Christendom. Within the myth of the Hymn's creation, the abbess's conclusion is strongly supported by the fact that Cædmon ends up at a Christian monastery with his song, and that he is taken into the monastery himself following some further tests to ascertain his gift, and is reported "a very devout man, humbly submissive to the discipline of monastic rule."[40]

However, in more recent times, there has been considerable discussion among medievalists about the actual life- and language-context which might have given rise to the Hymn and to Cædmon's celebrated and unique Christian bardship thereafter. Was he, in fact, an aspiring oral performer from the beginning, brought out of his excessive shyness by a miraculous dream?[41] Living in a culture where oral performance was the preferred entertainment, had he unconsciously absorbed language-formulae for praising gods and heroic figures, and found himself able to apply these to praise of the Christian God when called upon?[42] Or was he already an accomplished oral poet at the time of his first encounter with the Whitby monastery?[43]

---

[39] Bede IV. 23-4

[40] Ibid. IV.23-4

[41] See F.P. Magoun's "Bede's Story of Caedman: The Case History of an Anglo-Saxon Oral Singer", pp. 59-61.

[42] Donald K. Fry, "Cædmon as a Formulaic Poet", p. 48.

[43] John D. Niles, "The Myth of the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet", pp. 15-16.

The last possibility in particular strikes me for the several parallels it makes to the performance given by Laache's choristers in *Winter Choir*. In "The Myth of the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet", John D. Niles asserts that

> "If lurking beneath Bede's account there does exist an historical Cædmon, then that man would have mastered the arts of song gradually as he matured from being a passive tradition-bearer to being an active or strong one. Cædmon's originality would not have pertained to his gift of song per se. Rather, it would have consisted of his appropriation of the native verse-form and poetic vocabulary of the Anglo-Saxons to express, for the first time, themes drawn from Latin Christian letters."[44]

Niles foregrounds Cædmon's role as a translator of Christian ideas into English verse, arguing that considerable training would have been necessary in order for Cædmon to do this work, and that he was unique not as a poet, but rather as the first documented Anglo-Saxon oral poet of his time to work with Christian themes. As far as we can tell by reading Bede's account of Cædmon's life, the poet's success lies in the fact that the beauty of his poetry resulted in a religious experience for those who listened to him. I myself am tempted to think that early British Christianity created the perfect context for such a hybrid form to flourish—the desire of the church to gather followers and to reinforce its authority and attractiveness through stories of miracles must have been so great that any doubt as to the provenance of Cædmon's poetic skill was readily ignored. Besides, Cædmon proved to be an effective poetic praiser of the Christian God not only in his initial miraculous Hymn, but also throughout the remainder of the life he spent in the Whitby monastery. The particular religious context of Cædmon's songs was firmly established for his listeners, and so set phrases of praise quite likely recycled from songs about pagan gods and heroes inspired "the minds of many […] to despise the world and to long for the heavenly life."[45]

---

[44] Niles 15-16.

[45] Bede IV.23-4

The performers of *Winter Choir* brought a comparable formal preparation (choral training) to a task that can, in one interpretation, likewise be understood principally as translation. The choristers, like Cædmon (in whose time scripture was read, written, and discussed in Latin), did not understand the original language of their subject matter. The bulk of both parties' work therefore consisted in translating whatever they were given into beauty. I say 'beauty' because I think the main operative element of both translations is that their result is beautiful to an audience already prepared to have a religious experience. Cædmon's poetry does in fact translate Christian ideas into another language: the English vernacular of the time. Laache's choristers translated their source material only into asemic sound. In both cases, though, the religious context of the performance was clear to the audience from the outset. Cædmon's performances were sponsored and documented by the Christian clergy, and his works were popularized as miraculous poetry made possible by the Christian God. Two out of three performances in the *Winter Choir* series took place in Christian churches, and publicity for all events explained that the source material for the choristers' performance was an excerpt from the *Salah*. These conditions, I would argue, increase the likelihood of the audiences' experiencing the performances as prayer. I would argue further that both performances might be so compelling to an audience as to make negligible the actual religious affiliation of their performers. Does it matter whether Cædmon was in effect a mercenary pagan poet? Does it matter whether he himself experienced his work as prayer? I think not, and my inclination seems to be supported by the definitively Christian religious experience his poetry triggered in those who lived and worked with him, and, later, those who copied and read transcriptions of his poems.

One can witness the practices of a religion that is foreign to one's own experience as nothing more than an interested observer. One can also witness such practices and be spiritually

moved. In the former case, one is experiencing someone else's religion or spirituality. In the latter case, I believe, one is experiencing one's own religion or spirituality, which has in that moment expanded, and become able to be called forth by unfamiliar practices.

## THE SUBJUNCTIVE AND PRAYER AS AN EXPRESSION OF DESIRE

> *In the world, all existents are born from the there-is,*
> *and the there-is is born from the there-is-not.*[46]

When I think about the subjunctive mood it begins to seem to me that language is a game we play with God. That is to say, whether or not we believe in a higher being actually, our language is hollow at the center for *a hearing other*, much in the way that whether or not a clay form is meant to hold water, it is necessarily a vessel by virtue of its hollowed-out interior. The practice of emptying out the centers of clay forms is customary even with statuary, in order to reduce the probability of uneven drying and subsequent shattering in the kiln. Comparing a human to a clay form[47] may be useful in allowing us to acknowledge that there is a fairly large part of human existence that is external to what we think of as the body. The desires of humanity—species capable of considering the contrafactual—come not only from the body.

I am tempted to theorize that the other we address by means of the subjunctive mood is the remainder of any of our given bodies. I address my own remainder, in other words—that which I can conceive of, or even feel, which is greater than my body should allow. Such address, and the desire that is its root, is categorically distinct from a sensation such as thirst. We become

---

[46] François Jullien, *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting,* p. 20

[47] (something done repeatedly, and very early on, in various creation myths)

thirsty because our body can and wishes to accommodate more water. We desire to see our dead grandmother because she both exists and does not exist for us, and because we can imagine what a resolution of this contradiction would look and feel like. Yet we know such a resolution to be impossible. (Or many of us do—and this may be the point of distinction between prayer and magic. What is not considered impossible may be sought by means of magic.)

A traditional ex-voto was and is a means of thanking the other for translating one's unactionable or body-insoluble desires into reality. *Te vengo a dar gracias señor porque […] permitiste que mi anhelo de ser madre se hiciera verdad.*[48] For a prayer to be answered is indeed for the impossible to happen—that, anyway, which is impossible to effect from within the limits of our bodied agency. So then, by this essay's most current definition of prayer, we must update the definition of the ex-voto. It is, on the surface, a record of prayer, and it continues to be prayer insomuch as it anchors a contract between a human body and its hearing, and granting, other. If a person returns each year to the *santuario* where she has deposited her ex-voto because she vowed that she would do so if her prayer were granted, then the ex-voto is a piece of an active prayer. Say someone who was ill has been healed miraculously. The donor of the ex-voto thanking the image held responsible for this outcome continues to visit the santuario in fulfillment of her original vow (that which she leveraged against the impossibility of the realization of her desires). It may appear that she is merely carrying out to the letter a contract whose object has already been secured, and that her actions are therefore meaningless. However, the spirit is still present: the parentheses on this prayer are still open. A main motivation to prayer—and, I suspect, the first—is that humans are in many respects powerless over the

[48] Arias and Durand 143: *I am coming to thank you lord because […] [you] permitted that my longing to be a mother become a reality.*

circumstances of their own lives. That a miracle has once been granted does not mean that miracles will continue to be granted, nor does it mean that the miraculous state (in this case, of health) will continue indefinitely. And so the donor continues to visit the *santuario*, and the ex-voto exists as witness to an unfinished act of prayer.

So to me it seems that the English language—and many others besides—contain in such forms as the subjunctive the means for continuous and simultaneous acknowledgement of both the incapacities of humans and our fervent, outsized desires in spite of these. To use the subjunctive is to assert the existence of a hearing other. To speak to that other is to admit the depth—and often the hopelessness—of one's desire.

That we have and use the subjunctive mood, however, does not in itself mean that we pray. I do not mean to assert that the evolution of a language corresponds directly to the evolution of its speakers' beliefs. Can we map declining religious belief in English-speaking populations onto the decline of the usage of the subjunctive mood in the English language?[49] Can we ascertain whether those who use vestigial forms of the syntax of desire are aware of what they do, and whether they carry the old meaning, or some echo of it, through to us? Perhaps not, and to attempt to formulaicize such correspondence is not my business here. I admit an irrational attraction to these questions, but here is an example of the reason they will not be further pursued in this particular essay:

The word 'bloody' (in its British expletive aspect) is reported by some to have begun as a contraction of 'by Our Lady'. Although its grammatical function today does not make a minced-oath etymology obvious, even the fact that expletives are referred to as 'oaths', and using one is known colloquially as 'swearing', suggests that there is an element of appeal to a higher power in

[49] See Wayne Harsh's analysis of language in English translation of the New Testament from the ninth century to the twentieth in *The Subjunctive In English*.

these small sayings that come almost unbidden out of us. On the other hand, considering the use of the intensifier ‘bloody’ as evidence for an unbroken line of subjunctive thought in the English language through hundreds of years of its development seems more wishful than defensible. The ghost of the subjunctive mood in ‘bloody’ seems as faint as any hint of blasphemy in it. The collapsing of a holy figure’s name into a colloquial intensifier will have happened on a time scale too grand for many speakers of the language to comprehend or keep track of.

Obliquely subjunctive phrases fail to prove immediately our constant reckoning with desire through a faith sometimes more syntactical than it is concrete. Despite this, I remain convinced that the subjunctive persists as a mode of thinking in English, and that we often use it as a way of recognizing potential prayer. If this is true—and by my reckoning, all seven of the poems I have discussed as prayer in this essay make use of the subjunctive—then recognition of the subjunctive in a speech-event or art-event can open its receiver to the experience of prayer. It may not always, on its own, consummate the experience, but it can at least serve a priming purpose.

In *Darling: A Spiritual Autobiography*, essayist Richard Rodriguez reminisces about his mother's use of the ubiquitous Spanish-language phrase *ojalá*—the first example of the subjunctive that comes to mind for me any day, not least because of its etymology. His elucidation of the word's function and history are as good an answer as any to David Reinhart's call for an understanding of "the sameness of prayers" and their participation in "a shared experience".[50]

> I catch a glimpse of my mother through the doorway of our kitchen. I am just about to leave for school; it must be cold—I am zipping up my jacket, my binder between my knees. "See you later, Mama."
>
> *Ojalá*, my mother calls.

[50] Reinhart 2.

> My mother appended *ojalá* to every private leave-taking; my father never did. I heard the Spanish expression pristinely—I had heard it all my life. *Ojalá* meant *ojalá*. If I'd had the best friend I dreamed about, someone who would follow me about, who would want to know what everything meant, I would have told him *ojalá* means something like *I pray it may be so*—an exclamation and a petition.
>
> Growing up, I thought the American expression *God willing and the creek don't rise* to be a variant of my mother's *ojalá*, which it is. I learned only this year, however, that the expression refers to Creek Indians, rather than to a swollen waterway.
>
> In fact, the name of Allah was enshrined in the second and third syllables of my mother's *ojalá*. I doubt my mother knew that, though maybe she did. I didn't. The expression is a Spanish borrowing from the Arabic commonplace prayer *Insha'Allah*—God willing.[51]

Rodriguez concludes this meditation a page later, after a small series of digressions:

> As many as four thousand Spanish words derive from Arabic. In 1492, when Columbus sailed the blue, when the Moor and the Jew were, by order of the Crown, expelled from Spain, Barbary already peppered the tongues of Spaniards.
>
> Spaniards took Arabic words, or variants of remembered Arabic words, to the New World and salted the raw backs of Indians with them or whispered them in lust. So that, five centuries later, my Mexican mother, as a sort of reflex, would call upon Allah to keep the expected structure of her world intact. *Ojalá, Mama*. If the department store sale is still on. If the fog lifts. If it doesn't rain. If the results are negative. If we are all here next Christmas.[52]

Meanwhile, Reinhart questions the intentions of another example of the subjunctive in common usage—the more overtly prayerful phrase 'God bless America':

> Perhaps speaking with G*d cannot be separated from listening to others. When one refuses to listen then prayer becomes a monologue, a speaking *at* G*d, an existential dead end. For example when one says, "God bless America," this oft spoken phrase is rarely uttered as a prayer that questions but more like an announcement, a declaration of fealty to a certain America, rather than a questioning that might include other Americas: South, Latin, or the diverse experiences of America. Might one say that it is more like a prayer if it listens carefully to how others experience the word "America" and then questions its meaning as heard by others, even as it is heard by the deity referenced?[53]

One night not long ago, I sat listening to music with several friends. We agreed extremely readily that the violin is the most human, the most godly, the most compelling, the most

---

[51] Rodriguez 11.

[52] Ibid. 12.

[53] Reinhart 10.

heartbreaking of all the instruments. Jasmine (the aforementioned Khaliq) hit upon why: because of the back-and-forthness of the sound, owing to the bowing. It is like breath; it is like crying; it is like singing almost higher than one can; it raises the hair on the back of the neck. Violin music does to me what I believe prayer can do to a person, because, like the subjunctive, it is both that *there-is* and that *there-is-not*.

## THE SOUND OF PRAYER

In the poem "The Stonemason's Son Contemplates Death", Pakistani-American poet Shadab Zeest Hashmi posits prayer as comprehensible above or outside of particular religion, language, and even humanity.

> Because my heart
> became a kiln
> I wished to die
>
> The inscription on the tiles
> made a prayer in butterfly script
> crowning your well
>
> May the water refresh your soul
>
> The clanging of keys became loud
> A soldier stood behind me pissing in the well
>
> Someone sang in the distance
> Couldn't tell if she was a Jew
> Christian or Muslim
>
> It was a devotional song[54]

I see two instances of prayer in Hashmi's poem. The first is the prayer above the well, transcribed for the reader: "May the water refresh your soul". This first prayer is identified by

[54] Hashmi, in Kaminsky et al. 140.

that name, and we can also see that it makes use of the subjunctive mood, which aligns it with an understanding of the syntax of prayer—or blessing—as commonly expressed in English regardless of religious tradition. The prayer over the well is also remarkable, within this poem, for issuing from an unidentified and therefore religiously unaffiliated 'you', perhaps the owner or builder of the well—in one reading, the speaker's god—or, even more broadly, from the well itself. The 'you' and/or the well therefore pray out of and into no specific religious tradition. This seems to be important within the poem, whose speaker expresses quietly a desperation. The cause of this desperation is concisely rendered in details such as the fact that there is a soldier; that the soldier stands behind the speaker, giving rise to a feeling of insecurity; and that the soldier is desecrating the blessed well, whose owner—whether god or human being—we come to feel that the speaker has an intimacy with.

The second prayer is the devotional song addressed in the poem's last two stanzas. Here we have a more straightforward formulation of this poem's understanding of prayer. In the poem's fifth stanza the speaker is unable to identify the religion of the overheard singer. This doesn't matter for two reasons. First, the poem's speaker has not mentioned any religious affiliation of their own. Second, the last line tells us that the song "was a devotional song", and this on its own lifts the ending of the poem into a kind of calm determination despite the speaker's obliquely desperate circumstances. In other words, the poem seems to assert that prayer's comprehensibility and effectiveness need not be related to specific religion and language, but stem rather from some greater impulse, perhaps identifiable as music, or the tone of a particular emotional state. What seems to be common to the two prayers of this poem is their benevolence. This is explicit in the first prayer and, I would argue, implicit in the second. The devotional song issues from an unidentified woman singing a distance away from the distressing

events of the speaker's immediate surroundings. It comes therefore cleanly into the scene; it does not mean to assert its will over the speaker, or anyone that we know of. It simply exists, presumably as a piece of beautiful sound. It is the speaker who chooses or is able to access the prayer. This fact gives back a certain agency to the desperate speaker, ending the poem more calmly than it begins, while also possibly emphasizing the misguidedness of conflict on the grounds of religious difference.

The compression of poetry allows a productive ambiguity to exist in certain poems which, like Hashmi's, might wish to address a god without naming that figure. No one need know incontrovertibly that the *you* of such a poem is its speaker's god. This can create a space of great intimacy for the poet, while also opening the poem to any reader—no matter their spiritual or religious practice—who can apprehend this dialogue as prayer. In the section *Ex-voto Suscepto*, I considered the expansion of the ex-voto form to include the homemade, the *tuteo*, and the mention of unfulfilled desire. I also noted the agreement of the *milagreros* Genaro Almanza and Leonardo Rivera that an ex-voto must be commissioned from another person in order to be valid and successful. I feel warmed by this idea; perhaps I am warmed by the history of magic it limns. Yet, given my later consideration of the subjunctive mood as indicative of the condition that makes prayer possible—and therefore perhaps fairly often present in prayer itself––I do not wish to exclude the homemade ex-votos of author-donors from the category of potential prayer. Whether one has commissioned a work of art to witness and anchor one's prayer, or makes it oneself, the crucial components of prayer are present. In both cases there is a hearing other (perhaps, in one understanding, a fragment of the petitioner's self), and there are human witnesses: other selves. In both cases the work of art is intended as a primary document

of desire. Those who could not write and could not paint asked others to pass on the message for them. Those who can write, in increasing numbers, create their own documents of desire.

These documents perform an important displacement of selfhood which perhaps allows us to act, in the process of reading them, as someone else's remainder—as that part of the donor or the author or the speaker which wants too much and feels too deeply to subsist in the body alone. Both ex-votos and other written works, poems among them, permit us to read *as though we were that remainder, that granter of grace* when they are written in the second person. It is my belief that as readers, we respond immediately to the second person pronoun as we would to our own given name being called. For the first moment of its appearance, it does not matter to whom the name or pronoun in fact refers, because we can know ourselves as the referent, and therefore, for however short a time, do. This moment might be all that a reader needs to continue occupying the position of the remainder, even if with a ghost body while their substantial body continues to make rational sense of the poem, extrapolating a different addressee. Such displacement may be crucial because in the exchange it effects, we are able to sense another person's felt self in a way that might approach its totality.

## Bibliography


**Poetry:**

Carson, Anne. *Glass, Irony and God*. Introduction by Guy Davenport, New Directions Books, 1995.

Carson, Anne. *Plainwater: Essays and Poetry*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

Goodan, Kevin. *In the Ghost-House Acquainted*. Alice James Books, 2004.

Hashmi, Shadab Zeest. "The Stonemason's Son Contemplates Death". *In the Shape of a Human Body I am Visiting the Earth: Poems from Far and Wide*. Edited by Ilya Kaminsky, Dominic Luxford, and Jesse Nathan, Poetry International and McSweeney's, 2017.

Khaliq, Jasmine. "calves". 2018. Unpublished.

Khaliq, Jasmine. "vasco rd". 2018. Unpublished.

Khaliq, Jasmine. "an american gothic". 2018. Unpublished.

Prado, Adelia. *The Alphabet in the Park: Selected Poems of Adelia Prado*. Translated and with an introduction by Ellen Watson, Wesleyan University Press, 1990.

Rumsey, Tessa. *Assembling the Shepherd*. University of Georgia Press, 1999.

Seferis, George. *Collected Poems 1924-1955*. Translated, edited and introduced by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard. Princeton University Press, 1967.

Seferis, George. *Three Secret Poems*. Translated by Walter Kaiser. Harvard University Press, 1969.

Sōjun, Ikkyū. *Crow With No Mouth: Ikkyū: Fifteenth Century Zen Master*. Versions by Stephen Berg, Copper Canyon Press, 2000.

**Artwork:**

*Four American Composers—Part 2: Meredith Monk & Philip Glass*. Directed by Peter Greenaway. Trans Atlantic Films, 1983.

Freund, Gisèle, Gérard de Cortanze, and Lorraine Audric. *Frida Kahlo: The Gisèle Freund Photographs*. Abrams Books, 2015.

Laache, Johanne Marie Aagaard. *Winter Choir*. Performed by Olso Domkor, Kvindelige Studenters Sangforening, and Ensemble 96. 2017.

Laache, Johanne Marie Aagaard. Personal interview. 23 and 25 December 2018.

Monk, Meredith. *Dolmen Music*. Performed by Andrea Goodman, Julius Eastman, Robert Een, Paul Langland, Meredith Monk, and Monika Solem. ECM New Series, 1981.

*Two women attending a man in bed and appealing to Sansovino's Virgin and Child*. 1888. *Wellcome Collection*, https://wellcomecollection.org/works/a48kug7k?query=italian%20ex-voto%20sansovino%27s%20virgin%20and%20child&page=1.

Woods, Grant. *American Gothic*. 1930, The Art Institute of Chicago.

**Essays/Critical Works:**

Amundsen, Arne Bugge. *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, Vol. 63*. Swedish Science Press, 2007.

Arntzen, Sonja Elaine. "The Poetry of the Kyōunshū "Crazy Cloud Anthology" of Ikkyū Sōjun". Master's Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1979.

Bede. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England: A Revised Translation*. Translated and introduced by A.M. Sellar. George Bell and Sons, 1907.

Castello, Claudio. "Kor(an)sang til ettertanke: norske kor framfører koranresitasjoner i urnorske omgivelser." Utrop 38, 2017. https://www.utrop.no/Nyheter/32198

Cronan, Dennis. "Cædmon's Audience." Studies in Philology, Vol. 109, No. 4 (Summer, 2012) (published by University of North Carolina Press), pp. 333-363.

Demaree, Robert K. "Review: Monk and the Abbess. Music of Hildegard von Bingen and Meredith Monk." The Choral Journal, Vol. 38, No. 5, 1997. pp 58-59.

Duggan, Joseph J., editor. *Oral Literature: Seven Essays*. Harper & Row Publishers, 1975.

Ehrlich, Uri. *The Nonverbal Language of Prayer: A New Approach to Jewish Liturgy*. Translated by Dena Ordan. Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1999.

Engberg, Siri. *Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980-2005*. Walker Art Center, 2005.

Everist, Mark, and Thomas Forrest Kelly. *The Cambridge History of Medieval Music: Volume I*. Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Frantzen, Allen J., and John Hines, editors. *Cædmon's Hymn and Material Culture in the World of Bede*. West Virginia University Press, 2007.

Fry, Donald K. "Cædmon as a Formulaic Poet", *Oral Literature: Seven Essays*. Edited by Joseph J. Duggan. Harper & Row Publishers, 1975. pp. 41-61.

Grossman, Allen. *The Long Schoolroom: Lessons in the Bitter Logic of the Poetic Principle*. University of Michigan, 1997.

Gupta, Nolini Kanta. *Seer Poets*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1970.

Kaminsky, Ilya. *It's the Soul That's Erotic: An Essay on Adélia Prado*. Orison Books, 2017.

Kawano, Satsuki. *Ritual Practice in Modern Japan: Ordering Place, People, and Action*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.

Magoun, Francis P. “Bede’s Story of Caedman: The Case History of an Anglo-Saxon Oral Singer”, *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (1955). pp. 59-61.

Niles, John D., “The Myth of the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet.” *Western Folklore*, Vol. 62, No. 1/2: Models of Performance in Oral Epic, Ballad, and Song (2003). pp. 15-16.

Reinhart, David. *Prayer As Memory: Toward the Comparative Study of Prayer as Apocalyptic Language and Thought*. Pickwick Publications: Princeton Theological Monograph Series 186, 2012.

Rodriguez, Richard. *Darling: A Spiritual Autobiography*. Penguin Books, 2013.

Ruefle, Mary. *Madness, Rack, and Honey: Collected Lectures*. Wave Books, 2012.

Salzman, Eric. “Monk and the Abbess: Music of Hildegard von Bingen and Meredith Monk.” Stereo Review volume 61 Issue 10. 1996. pp 122-125.

Stewart, Susan. *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*. University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Turk, Milton Haight. *An Anglo-Saxon Reader*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930.

Uebel, Michael. *Ecstatic Transformation: On the Uses of Alterity in the Middle Ages*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Wilkinson, Joshua Marie, editor. *Anne Carson: Ecstatic Lyre*. University of Michigan Press, 2015.

**Art History:**

Arias, Patricia, and Jorge Durand. *La Enferma Eterna: Mujer y Exvoto en México, Siglos XIX y XX*. Universidad de Guadalajara/El Colegio de San Luis, 2002.

Bélard, Marianne, and Philippe Verrier. *Los Exvotos del Occidente de México*. El Colegio de Michoacán/Centre Français D'Etudes Mexicaines et Centraméricaines, 1996.

Expertise. "Ex voto: a vowed offering in gratitude for God's grace." expertise-firenze.it/en/2016/03/11/ex-voto-per-grazia-ricevuta-2/. Accessed 10 January 2019.

Jowitt, Deborah, editor. *Meredith Monk*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Jullien, François. *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject through Painting*. Translated by Jane Marie Todd, University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Marranca, Bonnie. *Conversations with Meredith Monk*. PAJ Publications, 2014.

Threadgould, Michelle. "The Rebellion of Rosary Beads". *Racked*, https://www.racked.com/2017/4/26/15305022/rosary-beads-fashion-history.

**Descriptive Linguistic Works:**

Auer, Anita. *The Subjunctive in the Age of Prescriptivism: English and German Developments during the Eighteenth Century*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2009.

Coulson, Seana. *Semantic Leaps: Frame-Shifting and Conceptual Blending in Meaning Construction*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Crystal, David. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language, Second Edition*. Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Gibson, Edward, and Neal J. Pearlmutter, editors. *The Processing and Acquisition of Reference*. MIT Press, 2011.

Harsh, Wayne. *The Subjunctive in English*. University of Alabama Press, 1968.