



# The Windhover

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Cover: *Mother and Child: Reading Lesson*

by Sean Oswald

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Statement from cover artist, Sean Oswald:

The practice of painting and drawing for me is partially about quietly and thoughtfully engaging with a subject, content, material, and myself. I think that an individual's perspective and voice is extremely important and somehow my acts of creativity are a performance of that. This can be seen in my work when I choose to flatten space, or mess with perspective, or to paint something differently than I perceived it. Sometimes a gesture can be a work of imagination or intuition, and sometimes it is a response to what I am looking at.

I love authenticity and confidence in artwork and I try to have these in mind as I create. These things manifest as bold colors, and expressive or gestural marks. I seek to tell things poetically and beautifully. The question that has been challenging me lately is, "is this good, true, and beautiful?"

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## CYNTHIA A. CRANE

### *IV. Montmartre: Sacré Coeur and Faith*

from Paris Notebooks, 2005

Jesus is the heart. A prayer is displayed next to a bronze statue that appears to be Jesus. Two Indian men touch the robe's hem and the figure's worn brass foot, first kissing their hands and then touching the front of the statue's robe. Then they cross themselves. Another Caucasian man comes forward and grabs the statue's foot after first putting his own right foot on the pedestal to boost himself up; his left foot dangles like a useless limb. Others pray behind, in front of, alongside statues of saints. Each saint has his or her own section in the church. One man is talking to himself in an African dialect with a communion cup in his hand. In this international cornucopia I ponder if Sacre Coeur, like Notre Dame, is yet another site for babbling in tongues and worshiping the golden calf, or is merely a contemporary way to share symbolism across primarily Christian denominations. For some reason, despite the focus on Jesus in Sacre Coeur, the Old Testament predominated, as I envisaged the money changers and the Tower of Babel, Job confused, and Moses reposed, before God.

For a fee, you can purchase paraphernalia. A tiny candle gets you a small prayer (2E) and a large candle, a sizeable prayer (10E). Or perhaps the inverse: the smaller the candle the bigger the prayer. Is the large candle a display of wealth or faith? Could it be both, or is that not possible? These two nouns referencing the profane and the sacred tend to exist separately; as illustrated in the Bible, the faithful, humble and poor consistently inherit the Kingdom of God, whereas the rich, primarily rulers, are scalawags of little or no faith who inherit nothing much. Of course exceptions abound, as Biblical leaders, often wealthy and flawed, were called upon to uphold their faith, wield their sword, and lead.

I wondered about the profit margin on this abundance of religious merchandise. Is it a racket, acknowledged and accepted? Everyone can have a piece of God or Jesus or a saint if he pays for it? Purchasing piety is not new: witness questionable believers buried in Westminster Abbey who paid handsomely for a spot. Perhaps this "worship" is part of keeping the Deity high up, revered, or is more visceral, a part of us that fears the hand that smites, a Higher Power that can crush us if we do wrong, as stories confirm from

countless sacred texts. That is the one-sided God I used to believe existed: angry, admonishing, capricious, even violent. Now I see God as a basket of complexity; not a dichotomous either/or, this/that, clearly defined, but something unfathomable, not pertinent to rationality, and frankly beyond intellectual dissection. If we had the capacity to comprehend God fully, we would lose our awe, and Sacre Coeur and all of the great architectural monuments to faith would have few pilgrims.

\* \* \*

My older brother talked to me on the phone before I left for Europe and argued that Christianity—all religions for that matter—was a crutch. It's for people who can't stand on their own, who can't live life without someone coaching them. In other words, he said, people who are too dumb to make their own guide map; they need someone else's to follow. I mention Christian friends who don't appear to use religion as a crutch, but maybe it *is* a replacement for their former drug- and alcohol-infused lives. If so, faith is the better option, the better crutch, of the two. My brother, on the other hand, ingested myriad drugs in his hippy days, yet he claims he came out of it from sheer will, his own volition. Rather, the death of countless friends in drug-related accidents frightened him and precipitated his abstinence. I have doubts that his use of recreational drugs could be defined as drug dependent.

I said to him, "People get addicted. It's complex. Even scientists haven't figured it out."

He snorted and said, "Doing drugs, drinking, sleeping around, shopping to excess, watching too much TV, blah, blah. They're all the same. All weaknesses. And they can be stopped."

My brother, consistently cynical, sees most people, including himself, as slothful. I did not view his list as one of weaknesses, but fallibilities, descriptors of human behavior; imperfect, as we all are. Unfortunately the current proliferation of quick fixes in our culture—plastic surgery, pills—has the potential to make us indistinguishable from one another, and perceived blemishes and weaknesses—a crooked smile, a neurotic personality, even a cigarette—will be sadly absent.

Does one hunger then for faith from a lapse in intelligence or, more likely, an emotional crack that only profound connections inherent in the spiritual can fill? If we are the master of our universe, the master of our destiny, as philosopher Jean Paul Sartre argued, then a God is superfluous. Some people reason that belief is weak and easy, when, in fact, it is the opposite,

and challenges the secular world at every point. What we see every day on the surface of life, because we are a visual culture, is a lavish plateful of fake promises, tempting, but airless and fleeting.

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In Sacre Coeur, more demonstrative believers and proselytizers fill the nooks and crannies of the church, seem to crowd out the tourists and wanderers, those who do not believe or are not sure what to believe. I envy those lovers of and talkers to the statues for their unswerving faith, at the same time I see them as comical freaks, performing their one act for other visitors.

I sit on a bench in front of Jesus and think about how even a dank church such as this one used to infuse me with admiration, and I would write poems about its awesomeness. Without color periodically interspersed to fill in the black around me, I shortly fall into a morbid reverie of Halloweenish proportions where the statues begin to appear ominous and look like monsters from mythical tales, eerily whispering, "Get out, get out." Soon I hear German floating by me, a most familiar language, and I feel re-connected as I watch a group of Germans talking in low voices, but loudly enough, about how stunning Sacre Coeur is. I sit still on my bench and wonder if I have missed something, thinking that Notre Dame, a decidedly gloomy cathedral, is still not as dark as this one. The dome, however, has beautiful gold inlay, and offers some absolute brightness. The photo police are everywhere, as clearly the church has trademarked all of its images and wants visitors to purchase those images, not to make any of their own. I keep my notebook and pen in my lap, my hands folded, and my camera tucked away.

## CONTRIBUTORS



**ASHLEY ARCHULETA** lives with her husband and ten-month-old daughter in Houston, Texas. Her poetry has been published in *Agape Review*, *Ever Eden Literary Journal*, and *Laurels*.

**JOAN BAUER** holds a master's degree in English and has worked as a trust officer in a bank. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Amethyst Review*, *Dappled Things*, *San Antonio Review*, *Heart of Flesh*, and *Tiny Molecules (Observations)*. *Consignment*, a novelette, is forthcoming in August from ELJ Editions.

**JEFF BENDER** is a writer/artist who writes about life and has a life that is about his art. Always supplementing his stories with constructions and collages, his artwork is held in collections both public and private, both regionally and internationally. In addition to his experience as a feature story writer, he has been published in several journals including *Club Plum*, *Embers*, *Press Pause*, and *North American Review*. He holds an MFA in printmaking from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville and a BA in Art from the College of Wooster.

**RICHARD BERNARD** lives in Oklahoma City, though his roots are in Louisiana bayou country. His short fiction has been previously published in *The Windhover* and his poetry in UVA's *Plume & Sword*. His musical "Joan at the Mardi Gras," a retelling of the biblical story of Jonah for which he wrote book, lyrics, and music, was featured in the Summer 2021 Newsletter of the National Opera Association.

**MICHAEL BROOKS** is a graduate of Pacific University's MFA program. He teaches writing classes at Hope College in Holland, Michigan.

**CYNTHIA A. CRANE** is Associate Professor of English at the University of Cincinnati, a Fulbright scholar, and author of the historical nonfiction *Divided Lives: The Untold Stories of Jewish-Christian Women in Nazi Germany*, and for young readers, *All About Winston Churchill*. Crane has appeared on national radio and TV, and her work has appeared in many publications.

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