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## Divination: A Collection of Poetry

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**SELAH: A COLLECTION OF POETRY**

by  
**Elizabeth Davenport Stephenson**

**A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.**

Oxford  
May 2005

**Approved by**

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**Advisor: Beth Ann Fennelly**

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I would like to extend a sincere word of thanks to my advisors, Beth Ann Fennelly and Ann Fisher-Wirth. Their enthusiasm in critiquing my poetry has sent me bounding back to the page again and again. As teachers and poets, they have demonstrated to me the importance of discipline and the gift of detail. Their enthusiasm and patience in this whole process is something I will not soon forget.

## ABSTRACT

### SELAH: A Collection of Poetry

This collection contains poetry that I have written during the course of my time at the University of Mississippi. Some of these poems in their first stages were part of my beginning and advanced poetry workshop portfolios. Other poems came from ideas scribbled in my poetry journal that I kept while studying abroad in New Zealand. My advisor and I set a goal of four poems a month for the fall 2005 semester, for a total of sixteen poems. The goal was to have perfected twelve poems for the final collection. I considered trying to conform my poems to a certain pre-determined style or theme, however my advisor encouraged me simply to try to write well. As an unexpected result, my poetry seemed to take on its own structural and thematic tendencies without me having to bend it to match a certain mold. Moreover, at the risk of stating the obvious, I think that much of my poetry stemmed only from bits of actual experience. Many times I found myself taking a feeling and creating a totally foreign situation with the same type of emotion. I noticed some reoccurring ideas in my poetry, among them—relationships and prayer, and scenarios involving the ocean and driving. For me, the title ties these elements together because they all deal with pausing for reflection. I think that my end result is poetry that is tentative at best. During this process I have had a glimpse of how gloriously frustrating it is to write. In the end I have taken from this experience much more than this collection shows in the form of random bits—lines, metaphors, ideas—that were not developed enough to include even in the my very first collection.

## PREFACE

Just as the dusty ground of the Coliseum might inspire a pilgrim to take up a sword, so a literary town like Oxford may incite a person to pick up a pen. Something about this city whispers to the aspiring, *if it's going to start anywhere, it'll be here*. So one afternoon when I was still a first year, I stuck my pen in the ground with the others at Faulkner's grave. It seems that if the desire to write lay dormant in you at all, Oxford will arouse it. At least that's how it was for me.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the Beginning. I can honestly say that from the time I can remember knowing how to scribble on a page, writing has been an important outlet for me. It seems I have always shoved journals under my bed. The older I got, the more they took on themes—travel journals, quote journals, prayer journals, poetry journals. From the start, writing was always my hiding place. Before I was old enough to go for a drive or even a walk outside my neighborhood by myself, I found escape in hunkering down on my bed with blank sheets of paper and a chewed-up pen. This journaling grew to creative essays in elementary school, and I ended up winning a few little contests. For that point on, my family started encouraging me to write, especially my grandmother. She adored a good story, and I will forever remember her bursts of poetry in that ridiculous voice of hers, “whose woods these are I think I know. . .” Her polar opposite, my grandfather, was a sailor when he was most happy. I followed my grandmother to Frost and Poe the way I skipped behind my granddad down that sandy path to the bay. That’s how it all got started.

Writing and Swimming. I have to say that I approach poetry with the same kind of kind of energetic tension that I always used to get before swim meets—ready to jump in, but not completely confident of how I will take to the water. It seems like I started swimming when I started writing. Every race was different. Sometimes I got out of the pool with a soggy blue ribbon in my hand, and other times my goggles fell off. But either

way, I always came away from the experience dripping and exhausted and alive. I think the same is true for me and what I write. It is glorious, the levity a person experiences in a body of water. To me, it is the same with writing. It takes the weight off of me. I still swim almost every day even though I would not longer consider myself a competitor. I appreciate it when I see someone in there who can really swim, who has a disciplined stroke—cupped fingers in freestyle, raised hips in a butterfly kick. The strokes in poetry are no different—fluidity of motion meets disciplined technique. A good poet, like a swimmer, makes it all look easy. Not to mention reflection and solitude, both essential to the process of writing, are found in the silence of water.

Poetry in Motion. In high school, my creative writing teacher, Jon Carter, talked me into working on the literary magazine staff. Mr. Carter was gracious enough to open my eyes to the fact that not every red rose poem is glorious, and tears are always salty and never shed singularly. I thank him for introducing me to Bishop and Berry, Thomas and Heaney, Hudgins and Collins, Kenyon and Keats and so on. He was the first to help me see the chiseled beauty of contemporary poetry.

I think that my poetry has definitely been fine-tuned since coming to Ole Miss four years ago. I started off freshman year by taking a fiction workshop class under David Galef. In his class I was encouraged towards original themes and details that are novel enough to stick with the reader weeks later. Sophomore year I took an advanced poetry workshop with Beth Ann Fennelly, and while it was one of the most time-consuming classes I have ever taken, it was definitely one of the most satisfying. Again, she guided us to the craft of poetry. While abroad my junior year I wrote daily, but I greatly missed having the pressure and critique from a workshop environment. When I



came back as a senior, I was rusty at best. The absence of a writing class made it hard for me to get back into working on my thesis this past fall.

The beginning poetry workshop class that I took with Ann Fisher-Wirth this past winter intersession became my saving grace as far as feeling any sort of momentum again with my writing. The early morning class times dedicated to free-writes were therapeutic, and I know I will come back to a lot of that material later on. Covering techniques in that beginning workshop after I had already taken the advanced workshop was like renewing vows.

More than anything else, I have learned to trust my details, allowing truth and originality to carry a poem inside the reflective space of the reader. Also, I have come to appreciate the necessity of ruthless cutting in poetry. Many times there may be something beautiful in one of my poems, but it can't be seen for all the excess around it. Along with healthy editing is the idea of using white space on the page. I think this will be an area in the future that I would hope to develop, learning how to make space and whiteness work against each other to create the right tempo for a poem. Finally, these workshops which have served as the "research" for my thesis, have encouraged me to go hear poets worth emulating. Oxford is a greenhouse for a poet. In addition teacher-poets, in the past four years I have gotten to hear Billy Collins and Andrew Hudgins, Stephen Dunn and Claude Wilkinson, and each time come away with that levity that makes me want to write and write. I have been reminded many times over that there is no faster way to become a good poet than reading good poetry.

The Process. I think that I have reached a point this past semester where I feel like I actually have enough material to make up a body of work, and so have been able to notice trends in my poetry. Although I run the risk of sounding like a modern day Petrarchan, I think many of my poems center around failed relationships. In the future, I would hope to expand my basis of poetry to much broader themes and ideas, however the universality of this idea is undeniable. Look at the country music industry.

As the title of this collection implies, I feel that much of my poetry is *Selah*, this pause for reflection and meditation. It is in these spaces that we are looking for something. I feel like people who are longing for the intangible, end up finding their way to poetry. St. Augustine once said, “let us long because we are to be filled—that is our life, to be exercised by longing.” The book of Psalms, which has been poetry to me since I was a girl, uses the word *Selah* seventy-one times. In my own poetry, the recurring elements are those filled with pausing for reflection—prayer and failed relationships. Likewise, I seem to write about spaces where I feel the divine, by the ocean or sometimes while I am driving, covering distance. Taking a step back from it, I approach the majority of what I write with satisfaction and disgust, but I hear that is natural. When I get discouraged about writing about the same stuff, I am reminded that just means I need to go out and live a little more.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. Now that I have spent more concentrated effort on poetry than I ever thought I would, I feel like I can confidently acknowledge my strengths and the areas in which I still need development. One thing that I am constantly aware of is the beauty of parallels, and this congruence in life is something I love to include in poetry. The ability to see sameness is satisfying. One example of this is when I

saw some children running alongside a van. The way they clung to the sides of the vehicle reminded me of the way pilot fish swim alongside a whale. This metaphor worked. However, there are equally as many times where I have created metaphors that either are not really the same, or I fail to find a way a graceful way to phrase them. Moreover, my advisors have made me aware of my tendency to stack metaphors, one after another, in a stanza. Many times surplus images or even ones that are too unrelated steal momentum and suffocate my poems. In the same way that I layer images, I also tend to overstate, so that beauty is lost in my attempts to tie it all up with a bow. That is where outside editors have been crucial in helping me see where my poems actually start and end. As one of my advisors pointed out to me, I think this over-telling is part of what keeps me at the cusp of writing like a child and an adult.

Structurally, I have found that my poems for this collection have tended towards prose. Sometimes it has been easier for me to write this way because I feel like I have more range of movement. It is difficult to say what you want within a line. My work with prose poetry has taught me the importance of justification on the page. Also I have tried to be aware of the circular nature of a good prose poem. Both of my poetry workshop classes have provided me with good examples of prose poems. Also in speaking about structure, I feel like it has served me well to pattern my poems after the form of a more accomplished poet. One instance in particular that turned out well was my response poem to Jane Kenyon's "Let Evening Come." Again, in borrowing form, I have learned to let whiteness work against the words.

I also struggle with titles. I feel like once I achieve a certain level of fluidity in a poem, it is hard for me again to consolidate it down to a few words that stand for the

whole. I think that titling, like the other areas in which I need development, will come with maturity as a writer. In general, I have also found myself really coming to grips with patience in writing. For an entire fall semester, I struggled with everything I wrote. The intersession poetry retreat got me inspired again. I think that I wrote well with the intensity of a condensed workshop class. I have learned that I cannot simply write a great poem because it is on my agenda for the day, right between chemistry lab and going for a run. This had gotten me into a major fix as far as deadlines. Many times last fall I sat Indian-style on the couch, staring out of the broad windows of Uptown Coffee and hoping to catch hold of an idea like a long wave. Wash me all the way to shore.

As far as the content of my poems, I feel that many times I have caught myself taking an emotion and making up scenarios that reflect that feeling. I think in doing that, sometimes I have not felt as satisfied as if I had written something straight out of my own experience. This all goes back to something that I learned in my beginning poetry workshop—at some point a poet must determine how much they are willing to let the reader into their most personal spaces. I have found myself struggling with worrying if people will make presumptions about me based on my poetry. I have never really done that until recently, even though workshops have revolved around letting other people (who many times are strangers at the beginning of the semester) read your work. But in my solo preparation for this thesis, I have found myself a little more guarded and self-conscious than I may have previously thought.

The Craft. For some reason poetry to me is equitable with the tea ceremony of a geisha. In poetry there is a reason for every movement, and if done well, everything line has purpose and grace. I would have never considered myself a poetic snob until I went

to Stephen Dunn's reading in the Johnson Commons and sat in the back behind what I assume was a class of freshman comp students. They kept talking, laughing, and rolling their eyes. I got to thinking about how our society of pop lyrics looks for clichéd poems about love and life that are easy as an old sweatshirt. So it must have seemed weird to them. But I remember in the first poetry workshop I attended, we read a poem about a lone red rose, a pale moon, and a salty tear. I was ready to give it a national award until we broke it down in class. Of course good poetry is relative; however there is an undeniable craft to it. It is neat to watch people realize that. I think that is why it was fun for me to take the beginning poetry class after I had taken the advanced class. I was able to see the how far that introductory workshop takes you.

In the End. After four years of splitting my time at this university between English and biology, I have taken a fair amount of science classes that have taught me to appreciate smallness—all the squirming intricacies going on behind the coverslip of a microscope slide. I think the same principle applies to poetry—learn to keep focusing and fine tuning, growing smaller in your field of view for the sake of detail and complexity. It is a process that starts when someone guides you to the lens and teaches you to keep twisting the knob until things grow less and less blurry.

I think that aside from this tentative body of work, I have taken from this process pages upon pages of loosed-leaf paper with metaphors, ideas, and lines. I have notebooks full of pieces that will hopefully ripen into something great. I have been encouraged to respect almost everything I write for its potential, and I have learned to file away the scattered bits. Let things marinate in time. Each day I breathe and write my lens grows slightly sharper.

## Let Morning Come

After Jane Kenyon

Let the pink breath of sunrise  
blow cross the neck of the bay,  
humming over silvery boat houses  
that blink with the breaking light.

Let the sleepy legs of blue crabs  
inch from evening shadows,  
shuffling past piers to warm their backs  
in the sun. Let morning come.

Let the ocean's cup run over  
after a full day's swell  
and pull in its watery limbs  
as tides sink, slow.

Let leather-faced shrimpers  
lift their popping nets  
and steer towards the docks  
of home. Let morning come.

Let the air be soaked  
with salt mist and gull chatter,  
rattling through dry palms  
and under the wings of a crane.

To the silent dunes, to the lumbering barge,  
to the growing sun,  
let morning come.

Oh, Keeper of the Dawn,  
lay me down in sandy sheets  
while I wait on the crest of daylight,  
knowing it, like you, will come.

## Cape Reinga

I tell you I'll never need clean sheets  
since these nights of sleeping  
in our station wagon. Ninety miles  
of sand and two girls, singing,  
salt-wind catches our words  
and throws them back.

Being land-locked makes me suffocate  
so I ask you to stop by the ocean.  
The latch of the backseat is broken,  
we twist around the wheel, under the dash.

*Now I lay me down to sleep—*  
on the plush velvet of a rental car.  
We park by a dark lighthouse,  
where the Tasman meets the South Pacific  
in a white whirl.  
Something about the foamy rhythm lulls us,  
draws us out, like waves, to dream.

You scribble in your journal, leaning into sunset.  
I shut my eyes and see the girl  
spinning a globe in my grandmother's study.  
My fingers trace the smooth sphere  
all the way to this place.

## Driving

There was that night in history,  
you and I on cruise control  
down some two-lane county highway.  
You wore an Easter colored Polo  
and the first sunburn of spring.  
I curled up in the front seat,  
wind smoothing me and moonlight  
through the sunroof draped you like a sash.

We were singing some country song  
when a clip of the president interrupted—  
*we'll not abandon the side of peace.*  
We listened—dogtags, dental records,  
rows of boxes and the wives waiting  
at quiet kitchen tables, *play a song for him.*

That night, you and I didn't pick sides,  
our lives too much the same  
to earn opinion, so we just stared  
at melting lines and deer dancing  
in headlights. You smiled  
from the side of your mouth,  
consoling. My mind left to things  
far from this Mississippi delta—  
souls leaving bodies in the fields  
like a fog in the morning.



## Cuidad Victoria

In high school I spent a week in Cuidad Victoria. It was my first time to leave the country. *The city's name means victory.* I told my mom, drawing broad circles around central Mexico in the atlas. And so I went for a little over a week and we taught Bible stories to school kids and sang "Father Abraham." Broken Spanish mingled with hand puppets, animal crackers, and the ark. They came back every morning to see smiling Gringos and baby Moses on a felt board, and we greeted them with red Dixie cups of warm Fanta. For five days the one-room church was packed. Small faces looking up at me, dark eyes, dark hair. And when the week was over we left the Spanish slur of city streets for quiet villages in the hillsides.

Our fifteen-passenger wheezed up the dusty slope and the youth pastor briefed us on the crumbling commune that waited at the top. He called it "rural outreach," and said the villagers wait for us for months. *Children will hear the van and come running. . . they'll love anything you give them.* I nodded, nervous. I forgot my pocket-translator at the church but remember the thought, *God can make a donkey talk, He can help my Spanish.* My forehead bounced against the window, eyes scanning the glass like a photo copier as rusty tin huts sprung up in the grass. I remember everything in shades of brown. Weeds, dirt, and scattered garbage. I yanked the sliding door, stepping down into hands. In my backpack were our offerings—racecars, toothbrushes, slinkies. *Gracias señorita* rang out like rounds from a children's choir. Polaroids were their favorite. Some posed, smiling with tilted heads and other stood shifting and straight-faced.

*Hermana, hermana,* a little girl led me by the hand. She whispered it over again. I followed through a rusty mattress propped as a gate to meet a girl, her sister. She lay on the packed dirt floor, twisted like a knobby winter branch. A wailing woman knelt at her feet, growing louder when I entered the room but not looking up. *En el nombre de Cristo* she chanted, her fist white where she clutched the rosary beads, crying and swaying. I slumped to the ground beside the girl and sifted through my backpack—bubble gum, bouncy balls, and a red bracelet. I slipped it around her limp wrist, holding my hand over hers. She twitched and her mother cried.

Our van's horn sounded three long blasts, like the sudden end that makes for a bad movie. I left my backpack spilled out by the girl and watched hope fade from her mother and sister. Backing out of the room, I mumbled blessings in Spanish. *What did they think I could do?* The rest of the group loaded the fifteen-passenger with the smiles and waves of a parade. Children ran alongside and clung to the van like pilot fish to a whale, falling off a few at a time. I leaned into the window and wondered what we had left them—a blurry picture of Jesus in a wake of dust and exhaust.

## Wintering Divorce

She thought about changing  
mostly on those nights in mid-February  
when winter seemed to spread across her soul  
like blackbirds on a yellowing field of grass,  
gathering, eerily chattering, in leafless treetops.

But the snow fell so mute  
and salt made its silent work of roadside slush.  
She craved the racket of hard rain,  
pounding the panes, flicking with lightning fury  
in her street like a suspicious lover.

It was then she felt reptilian,  
ready to molt from her one-bedroom  
and work blazer, drifting south,  
warm and invisible as oxygen in the blood  
along sleepy interstates that branch—  
cement, gravel, sand,  
until she touched the gulf.

There she would soak her hardened skin,  
hoping to shed reminders of him  
layer by dead layer.

## In That Kitchen

Few spaces in my life are better than Granny's kitchen on Jamestown Drive. At Christmas time it smelled like her peach cider tea and a pine candle from Cracker Barrel. There she cooked for all of us, mixing everything into casseroles—shrimp and brown rice, bread crumbs and oysters, spinach and feta. She'd whistle and shuffle around the kitchen in her pink apron. Seems like Granny thought all good foods were better served in one dish. Come mid-December she began her sifting, stirring, crumbling. Of course, there were dishes she served simply because *they were Christmas*. Congealed salad, deep purple and wobbly, would stand barely slivered on the dining room table because Granny remembered her mother making it every year.

And at Christmas time, holiday magic flooded Granny's house, leaking under the swinging door of that kitchen. Red bows and picture books, garlands and fat colored lights. Elves sat in the windowsill above the sink and a miniature Mary and Joseph knelt on the countertop beside a bowl of fruit. She played Bing Crosby's Christmas on an old cassette player, flipping that tape until New Year's Day. Granny swore to my sister and me that homemaking was a skill that came with time. We smiled across the table as she dolloped chewy rice and mushy English peas on our plates. But no one argued with her dessert—Charlotte. My sister said when she died she wanted to be buried in a bowl of it. Granny laughed. The secret— heavy whipping cream and a couple extra capfuls of bourbon.

So it was in that kitchen one night when my mother and sister and I were talking, feeling slow and full as one does in early January, that my grandmother told us she had cancer. She said it without flinching, her face smooth as bay water in the morning, not a ripple of emotion. She told us she wouldn't go to Houston for treatment, insisting the greatest remedy was one's own home. *If I start chemo now, I'll be done by December*. She dipped her hot tea bag. *I'm gonna beat it, you know me*.

Months later her words bounced off each other in my head like cars at the carnival as I mashed her potatoes and diced a ripe pear. She said nothing sounded good but potatoes and pears, so I brought them to her but she was already sleeping. I left the plate untouched on the counter beside Mary and Joseph.

## Thing Become a Habit After Forty-One Days

Once I met a woman in a restaurant who told me a gift store saved her life. After her divorce she got up every morning because she had to hang an Open sign in the front window. *In idleness alone is there perpetual despair.* I thought about her four years behind a cash register in a small- town shop of bird houses and homemade taffy. Whatever helps you peel back the sheets and put a cold foot on the floor.

Day twenty-three. I walk to the coffee shop where I work, the same path every day but today I thank the rock along the sidewalk—the one shaped like a giant ear—for being in the same spot as yesterday.

You always wanted me to write you a poem which is funny, because one time we were driving and I read you Heaney and Atwood, but you never understood or even tried. *It's not for all of us.* You playfully turned up the radio. Still I know Larry Mize won the Masters in '87 even though I hadn't held a club before I met you.

Your black lab blended into the dark lawn and I bent over stroking him, then clung to his neck like a sleepless child. I fumbled for car keys, my head full of *I just need time.*

The truth is, poetry's like praying. We crawl to it desperate, otherwise we're too busy being happy to confide in the quiet page, whisper to air. My shift done at the coffee shop, I walk past the ear-shaped stone. *See you tomorrow.* I know it's stupid but I figure I'll keep doing it, keep talking to rocks, hoping time makes things more constant and me less numb. Tomorrow grows closer to forty-one.

## Expectation

is easier to describe  
if you've loved a man  
who drives a diesel.  
You hear rumbling and hope  
it's his heavy boot  
on the pedal of the Ford that rattles  
like a FedEx truck or fruit van.

I was straining spaghetti, listening  
for him in the carport, figuring  
he'd catch the end of sports radio  
then come in and fold me up  
against him like a hide-a-way bed.  
But our street stayed quiet.

Five weeks and what have I gained—  
leftovers in all shapes of plasticware  
and an ear for engine pitches  
in a town I've long outgrown.

## To My Sister Before the Hurricanes

I'm leaving you on the edge of an F5 with sandbags and batteries. Crickets in your front lawn sing, growing louder before the hurricane like drummer boys in battle. Your street is deserted, still I drove six hundred miles to see you. People in the Midwest may have their twisters, but they've never taken this weather like a drunken wailing.

Sure as afternoon storm clouds, he'd come for you too. Looming around the kitchen, swollen with rage. Glass raining down on the linoleum, *my china didn't have four plates anyway*, you say. Your words heavy with excuse. You tell me again. *I don't need your help*. So I back down your driveway, cursing the coastline that taught you to live your life starting over. Board yourself up and wait for pounding on your door, rattling the hinges.

Rain rain on the windows. Somehow the wind doesn't seem as sinister when you think about it coming up from the silent bay. The newsman predicts it'll hit between three and four a.m. Highways thicken with northbound traffic, but your pier light stays on. I tell you there are places you can go—stay with our cousins in Colorado and spend your nights sipping cider by a broad lodge fire. You promise you would suffocate in all those layers and cover your bruised shoulder with thin sleeves. *I will live and die beside this ocean*. I wash my hands of you in the salty water.

## Between Daytona and Destin

I remember you best that last summer,  
when our bathing suits were sea-twisted.  
We body-surfed at sunrise and raced barefoot  
through a parking lot of broken shells.  
You said I looked like I was dancing.

My face was sunburned and smiling,  
along roads lined with live oaks and sand.  
Autumn tailed us and with it, long distance,  
so I offered up worry like incense in salty breezes,  
mile after mile of missed turns behind us.

We peered through the rails of a toll bridge—  
rippling water, white backs of gulls,  
tossed into air at sunset, beautiful as the doves  
of magicians. I couldn't keep you from leaving.  
Soon light would break in your rear view—

But then you loved me  
so I drifted in and out until dawn.

## Storm

My granddad told me he could sense a storm in his shoulder blades. They ached when gray nimbus stretched from the bay to the porch. Since he was a sailor, I believed this tic in a man whose days bent according to the sky like a mainsheet. From the womb, water shifting beneath him—swirling, rippling, still. And then he found his way to the ocean. Like reverse evolution, sunrises sent him crawling back to the sea. I would watch his thick body shuffle shirtless down the sandy path, in deck shoes and khaki shorts. *Salt water heals you*, he'd say when I had a splinter or a head cold. On slack days I swear he could conjure a breeze from the sky invisibly, a composer pulling music from woodwinds and brass.

Storms meant more work to do, still he whistled and sweated. Drag the boat up high in the yard, roll the sail, fasten the cover. Then we'd sit on the porch and wait for water to come sideways through the screens. Pools on the wooden floor.

To this day I see him at the edge of the ocean, searching the sky for a storm like a farmer in a withered cornfield. This image of him will stay with me—his palms upturned, rain falling on him like a Sunday benediction. Water soaked through his shirt, his shoulders, until clouds stirred and the sky cleared again.



## Divination

I've never believed in signs, fortunate stars  
that fall in line behind each other  
like school children. But I do try to see us

in seventy years, our anniversary maybe  
in some Chinese restaurant with a surplus  
of grandkids and white rice. Seems to me,

it was easy back when people spread fleeces  
and followed bright pillars of flame. My prayer  
has always been not to be happy

but to see truth, the kind that spreads  
like hallelujahs in a country church.  
Truth and signs. Well, I'm sure

momma didn't know she'd be cheated on  
the same night my sister was born,  
that thought makes me a shell-less turtle.

You twirl my ponytail and say  
you're going to stay with me,  
making me forget all the signs.

## To King David

After Claude Wilkinson

Once a man gave me poetry  
like a glass of water and reminded me  
of minnows shining and dragonfly wings  
thin as the pages of Psalms.  
And he wrote about Selah,  
a pause weighted with praise  
in the days of lute and the psalmist.  
David, did you sense it

before slingshots and giants,  
when you were just another boy  
with a staff and a field of sheep?  
Selah. Maybe you felt it more  
in palace gardens, dusted white  
with gypsophila and backlit  
by a sinking sun? You pleaded a portion,  
a stony cleft to curl your fingers in.

*O Selah*, I'm saying it over  
and longing to find it, maybe driving  
when everything is touched  
with the willful slowness of dusk,  
like the low euphony of crickets  
in roadside reeds and the sky above,  
a collage of orange and clouds.  
I find my life is everything

falling between whispered prayers.  
Steady humming outside the windows  
and tires smooth on the highway,  
over again, like the refrain of words  
I've repeated since I was a girl,  
*restore my soul*. Sunset is drawn  
like a curtain in your chamber.