

Season of a New Heart

Poets Corner anthology

Edited by Jude Aquilina, John Pfitzner and Russ Talbot



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Foreword

To ask about the writing of poetry is to wonder about the place of the arts in our society. Why do we – or, those among us daring enough to try – write poems? And why read them? What are we hoping to accomplish when we enter that realm we call poetic, and what do we hope our gestures in this art form might inspire? The Nobel Prize laureate, Czeslaw Milosz, once suggested that ‘poetic *discipline*’ – and his use of this particular word is not unimportant – ‘is impossible without piety and admiration, without faith in the infinite layers of being that are hidden within an apple, a man, or a tree; it challenges one through becoming to move closer to what *is*.’ This kind of faith is the signal achievement of poetry, whether in the hands of the poet or in the mind and spirit of her reader – which the apostle also described as the ‘assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen’ (Hebrews 12:1). Milosz went on to describe this experience as his ‘inner castle’, his ‘castle of prayer’, the means by which he beckons his reader to move closer, with him, to what *is* – poetry as the discipline of holy *becoming*.

In what sense is poetry a form of prayer? Surely not in any conventional sense, since it is rarely hammered into the familiarities of pious acts and too occasionally offered in the churches’ liturgies. But as a form of attentiveness, as an instance of aliveness to what *is*, poems are surely at least this, and their practitioners – whether as writers, hearers or readers – are what Wallace Stevens called ‘priests of the imagination’. We turn to poetry for guidance in our *becoming*, expecting from poems an attentive speech which awakens us to a voice as startling as it is familiar, as strange as it is intimate. Poems invite us to inhabit our world with greater care and compassion, authenticity and courage, than we might otherwise know.

The poems gathered in this marvellous new collection, *Season of a New Heart*, are prayers of this sort. They sing the familiar in new ways. They locate us within the great tradition and common liturgy of language, with all its startling twists and turns. And, yes, they arise from admiration, from that peculiar sense of wonder by which we come face to face with the world in its 'thereness' and our 'hereness'. They offer themselves as gestures of expectancy, asking of us a vulnerability to meaning we might come to *know* but can never fully or finally *manage*. They are prayers of just this sort, not so much *informing* us as *forming* within us ways of new seeing. As such, they offer themselves as what Robert Frost called 'momentary stays against confusion': they alert us, as small epiphanies, to meaning in places and ways proximate to our own experience. They invite us into the communion of a larger and truer vision of ourselves and others than we'd known before. They are, in this sense, agents of compassion.

This is a collection of poetry to 'take' and 'read' slowly, deliberately, expectantly. The poems gathered here offer the harvest of almost a decade of listening and longing, but they are more than this. Greet them as seeds for awakening to a truer sense of what *is*. And, yes, celebrate them as marking the season of *your* new heart.

Mark S. Burrows, Ph.D.

Professor of the History of Christianity

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at Andover Newton Theological School Newton, MA (USA)*

Preface

Good communicators have a knack of freeing up unspoken aspirations. At the outset of an Effective Living Centre program in the spring of 2002, Professor Mark Burrows tenderly read a small section of the Mary Oliver poem *The Return* that included the lines:

*From my mouth to God's ear, I swear it; I want only
to be a song.
To wander around in the fields like a little reed bird.
To be a song.*

Years later, I can still hear the responsive murmur, perhaps even sigh, of *assent*, the connecting point between living metaphor and life-giving desire – in this particular instance, the yearning for simplicity within lives that resiliently ‘sing’ of peace and harmony to a conflicted and compromised world.

In that moment, something in me – and within other members of the audience – saw a new possibility: the celebration of metaphorical, creative language no less, a reclaiming of poetics in an otherwise heavily prosaic, prescriptive and soulless environment, the Christian church and its spiritual practices notwithstanding.

Following Mark's visit, the Sacred and Creative function of the Effective Living Centre began hosting quarterly meetings of Poets Corner. Early meetings were modest in numbers as we keenly gathered around a small circular table offering wines, cheeses and other delectables. Instinctively we knew that poetry and generous hospitality had something very much in common. This was a giving and a receiving that necessitated due care and quality.

Poets Corner began by honouring the poems of well-known poets yet also encouraged the writing and public reading of our own. We even beamed Mark into our midst from Germany one

evening by virtue of the then new technology of Skype. However, it wasn't until Mary Taylor saw a local poet featured in a regional newspaper and booked her to come that the true and infectious character of Poets Corner really began to express itself.

It would be unfair to mention some of our guest poets and not others, so it's enough to suggest that through their approaches to writing, their poems and their unique human stories a climate of encouragement was readily created, out of which this anthology has emerged. Folk who had never written poetry before, nor publicly read anything they had ever composed (with the possible exception of bad experiences at school), gladly found a highly supportive forum or, in some instances, a near second career or vocation!

Season of a New Heart is a testimony to this movement of creative grace. It is, from my perspective, a truly amazing *unfolding*, one born of imagination and simple desire, with no great destination or goal initially in sight, and that being its great beauty and value. In the engaging words of Mark Burrows:

*Again we find ourselves gathered by poems,
by language shaped in the wide and spacious
silences beyond our naming,
a handful of words thrown recklessly
onto the canvas of the same old certainties;
ambitions of war and other efficiencies of state,
the politics that drive the brokers of this world.
And we, sheltering under the tents
of metaphor and desire,
refuse the lure of their strategies,
setting out on paths whose end we cannot see,
steering beyond the maps they have given us,
gathering crumbs that somehow will make a feast.¹*

¹ *Beyond the Maps*. Used by permission

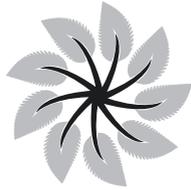
So, 36 poets and 68 poems doing just that! Good folk who have had the inspiration to set pen to paper and, almost as a surprise to some, now find themselves offering a feast of insight and soulful humanity to others. Thank you for your courage and gift.

To Mary Taylor, John Pfitzner, Russ Talbot, Jude Aquilina and Lorraine Merton a grateful acknowledgment of your work in making this all happen, and thanks also to Gary Ayton for the use of his photograph for the cover design. Mention must also be made of the Unley City Council's generous funding of our printing and publishing costs. Thanks also to Cynthia Spurr for shaping up the grant submission. Over its near 13 years of life, the Effective Living Centre has benefited greatly from the local council's support and encouragement.

Finally, to you the reader, savour and enjoy this wonderful collection, of which we are rightly proud. And, even more particularly, why not have a pen and notebook handy? Poems of the heart are surely not to be ignored when they begin tugging at your sleeve.

Rev Sean Gilbert
Convenor, Sacred and Creative Task Group
Effective Living Centre

Celebrating



*a dazzle of sound,
a shaking of mirth*

New hope

Ravaged and consumed
by the raging bushfire of circumstance,
the once blossoming soul
becomes a charred silhouette
on the barren, smouldering landscape.
But in time,
in the season of a new brave heart,
tender green shoots appear –
life emerges out of the desolation.
Sustained by deep roots unaffected by fire,
held safe within earth's protecting embrace,
new life defies death,
singing its resurrection morning song
and life's creative cycle begins again.

Lorraine Merton

Spring welcome

And suddenly she was there.
But was it sudden or was I
inattentive to the present?

True, there were lush green
rose-tinted leaves,
life surging forth
from winter nakedness.

And I, assuming, trusting
in flowering, but not there
in the moment of becoming.

Still there is gladness
in the unawareness
of the swelling bud, for now
I am surprised by joy.
Sweet shock of unexpected welcome,
essence of newness, of spring
treasure, pearl of great price.

And what of you, my dearest
Sonia, rose of salmon pink –
do you sense my love as I
cradle you in my hands and
my face kisses your scented smile?

Mary Taylor

High tides

Unrelenting.

Solid ground gained with every
ripple of wave and white water.

That I might soon be in danger
is an amusing thought –
the limit to such advance
is as high as the banks of seaweed
and impossible as nature itself.

The tide will turn,
its retreat,
gracious and bowing
to forces well beyond my control.

I love this oft-repeated dance.
A rhythm calming to soul
and mind alike
with seemingly
so many reliant upon it:

A majestic pelican gliding
the fuller coastline.
Seagulls fossicking in deeper shallows.
Sand begging to be cleansed of human activity,
re-set for another day.

I marvel at such simplicity.
I am astonished by its call;
relentless, yes,
turning, returning, turning, returning,
yet gently so.
So gently so.

Sean Gilbert

Cool and coiled spring

Strong sturdy lavender blooms
romping in the cool wind.

Golden soursobs
cheery and cheeky as ever
comforting with memories.

Peppertree fronds
browning in their resilience
towards winter's north-westerlies.

Bright sun on rounded hills
and birds
ecstatic with life.

Spring sits coiled.

Another touch
and her energy will surge
briefly
before the southern sun
puts a stern end
to such naïve abandon.

How very tough the seasons of
life would be
without brief springs of abandon.

Meg Butler

God shopping

News Item: A major redevelopment of a large Adelaide suburban shopping centre will include a 500-seat evangelical church, to be built above the retail complex.

Good News! Now I can pick up my physical needs and my spiritual needs all in the one trip, perfect for a busy lifestyle. Butter, milk, Salvital, cleaning products. Then pop upstairs for a bit of soul-vital and sin-cleansing.

I was a bit offput when they combined holy communion with the lady offering try-so-you-buy samples: *this yoghurt is my blood...and also it's very nutritious and 99% fat free.* But I'm ok with it now. Besides I'm sure they would've had Chicken Tonight rather than bread if it had been around then anyway.

Yeah, Good News! Now when hawkers come around peddling door-to-door religion, I just tell them sorry, I did my shopping yesterday and there's nothing else I need, thanks anyway.

Russ Talbot