

A Book of Hours
by Jefferson Holdridge

The one always contains the myriad.

The look of the individual child

Shaped by arbitrary forms

And faces not necessarily ours.

A moment at noon, a period

Of thought reflected off the stones

On the hill, so carefully piled

Surviving the Heraclitan storms

That bore such delicate flowers,

Gracing the moment, faces, bones

Of one and many. The wall warms

And Sofia walks out of the wild.

A symbol awaited and bid.

An unnamed god. A book of hours.

Come to test our faith and devotion
Mocking the “meta” and the “physics”
That built the church and support it
With the towering credo: God exists.
Come in unheralded exacting tasks
That demand our love not to fall short,
That demand again when we do,
And pound out thoughts and emotions
So supple we both become mere mimics,
Who take what we’ve shared and contort it
Beyond recognition. Each of us asks
How shall we return? The gods abort
Their plans. The woods in their darkest hue.

Lost in the wilderness, she cries
To see the animals stalk each other.
Enough once were mouth, nose, eyes.
Now the romance of father and mother
Begins with signs and the mark of the beast.
A primordial image and sweeping wind
Fecundate the scene of the feast,
Levi's or the pagan who has sinned
Against his household gods and must
Propitiate with sacrifice
Or child murder — breaking trust.
While below the cross, they roll the dice,
The skies lower, the child is bidden.
Sofia stands who once was hidden.

Suffering like the open sea
That embraces the drowned sailor and
Offers succor in the form of Mary,
Starcrowned idol of the land,
We give her medicine and she
At first rejects it, then swallows
Its sweetness and wants more, free
For a moment from her sickness. She knows
The thin line between pain and pleasure.
We ourselves float past spheres of worry
Close by the beach's sensual leisure,
But are thrown in windless fury
To make her better tomorrow or soon.
Each day is a gift. She is our boon.

Christmas was in summer's shadow.
The trees around the house were hung
With paper ornaments. Our parents
Welcomed and walked us into the den
To say that they were dying. Each
Had been happy to be together,
As during their final years' escape
From decades of mending their lives. Again
We were packing our suitcases. We'd sung
Our carols and the pain began to show.
No one cared about the weather,
Only the atmosphere and the distance.
On google street, one cannot reach
Beyond the turn. The house is in landscape.

Poetry can't say what it meant
Later in the living room when they
Were so happy, except in the negative —
All that's never expressed is present —
And embodied: they'd watch play
Their fifth grandchild, who'd live
Only after his death and her stroke.
It must become something strange.
Making an art of how it broke
Or drifted through a mountain range.
A severed head upon a stream
Singing of the body left behind.
Out of sight, but still in mind.
It even fails its home in dream.

You know as no one else knows here
How intimate these ancient lands
Are with their coming and going
The presences that are never moral
Like time in nature, they meander
Through seaswept caves, on burning sands,
With fisherman who are towing
Their catch, on trains charging at night,
By flowering poison oleander,
In bedrooms meant to challenge sight,
With silverfish among the coral.
For those who feel their new emotion,
The gods appear and disappear,
Surface, light and vast as the ocean.

On the bottom of the sea, lights play
In shifting squares that match the surface
Waves, reflecting the sun in motion.
The two levels mirror, but only blend
At night, fractured every day.
Across the stones, an intricate lace
Of moss has grown in broken sun.
Subconsciousness will never end
In search of what is always missing.
The seafloor fissures. The water's wild,
As lava makes titanic war
Until it hits the surface hissing
Of currents, tides, the changing shore.
The waters break and bear the child.