

Thom Caraway is the editor of *Rock & Sling* and the publisher-at-large at Sage Hill Press. Caraway's poetry is indicative of the the Prophetic Mode in Theopoetic Poetry. Often defined by its subtly assertive reach toward the holy, and its innate desire to record and account, Caraway's work bears witness to and provides a clear vision of the way people value God-made landscapes, natural resources, and personhood. Alongside this vision lies a deep understanding for how our current social context has affected our humanity, community, politic, and spirituality – our collective health in a world that God so loved. Fundamentally, Caraway's poems unpack – sometimes with exacting directness, sometimes with tender observance—revelations of the fragility of our creatureliness and how it can, should, and must be cared for in order to preserve our awareness to the divine in and about us. Rooted in exploration and wide-eyed awe, Caraway's poems shake us by the collar and call us into the wilderness of our experience. He lives with his family in Spokane, WA, where he was selected as the city's first Poet Laureate.

Bridge

Fifteen years ago, a boy was beaten
to death in the alley behind my garage.
Last week, a man was shot and killed
a few blocks away. Homes have burned
at both ends of the street. One faulty wiring,
one meth lab. We grow Oregon Grape
six feet high around the perimeter of the yard.
Across the street, condos and townhomes,
men working at 7 a.m., new streets
formed on top of old. The decay of fall leaves
means fertile soil by spring. Down the road,
a house is empty, the cats the man kept
freeze, as winter settles pale as milk.
Walking the alleys is a tunnel of barking dogs,
black labs and pit bull mixes. We keep so much
inside, yards and homes in yellow light.
Stripped—bare shrubs jeweled in ice,
and at last, the work has stopped.
Silence comes with the snow, and down
the steep bank, the river burns on and on.

The Names Of Things We've Lost

Shoulder deep in berry bushes,
the trail is hard to see. Hiking Montana
means bears. It's best to make noise –
shout or whistle, carry bells. We shout, Hey bear,
we shout, don't eat us, or eat someone else.
Approaching Stoney Indian Pass, we meet a man
shouting, Chloe. Over and over again. Chloe.
I make a dumb joke, ask, Have you lost someone?
Once, he says.

Walking the continental divide isn't easy.
You have to get there. People collapse
over Swiftcurrent Pass. The trail seems
etched on stone, impossible switchbacks
down a rough cliff, over rivers
and into the valley at last. The heat,
the wind. At some point you're alone
on the trail with nothing
but time, wind, and sun. Trees,
and the noise you make
to keep the thought of bears away.

After Stoney Indian, I think about the things I've lost.
My wallet. Poems. A Tonka bulldozer left too near
the garbage cans when I was five. Joes. Kristas.
Nine years of my son's life. Of the things I do well,
I'm best at absence.

At the end of the valley, some are finished,
the long trail too close to the sky to go on.
But many of us are still out there,
wandering the Highline Trail, the Northern Loop,
stuck under Cathedral Peak in the brief lee
of a blown-down storm shelter,
shouting into empty canyons,
the names of things we've lost.

What The Sky Lacks

The skies I've known —
sheared against mountains
so that the puzzle is not where sky ends
and land begins, but can I touch it
from Mica Peak or Diamond Head.
Absence is not a definition,
but the Dakota sky billows.
I've been told about this sky,
piled high all around, no escape,
no horizon. But horizon
is what the mountains define,
what the sun sets behind.
What is there to aspire to
if nothing approaches the sun?
How else to know I am home
until Mt. Spokane appears
in the west, a pole star, constant,
bare granite upper slopes giving way
to pine and fir? When the sky allows,
the weather station sparkles, high above
Kirk's Lodge, and the road climbs,
past Pennsylvanian time,
through Mississippian, Devonian,
and Ordovician time to arrive
shining at last among rocks
formed in the first hours of the earth.

And there, the sky does the slow work
of erasing.