



CONTEMPLATIVE NETWORK

NEWS & VIEWS

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FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Centering Prayer

My Journey Hidden with Christ in God

By Carole Pentony

It's a privilege being with readers who are willing to spend time with my story. Thank you!

I grew up a devout Catholic in the 1950's; as a teen I was recruited to become a nun. Too late. I had discovered boys! However, from childhood, prayer was important for me to the degree I would often slip into church during recess.

In my mid-forties, I began waking up desperately praying, "Help me, God! Help me!" I didn't understand; nothing was going on to explain my frantic plea. I was happily married with two beautiful children and had a successful psychology practice. I slowly realized I was being invited to grow closer to God. I was drawn to silent prayer.

In 1991, I attended a workshop about Centering Prayer; I found my next step. The workshop was taught by Fred Eckhart, a life insurance salesman. I soon learned at any event with Fred, there would be a feast of jokes regarding prayer as life insurance. He knew Thomas Keating. Fred had given him numerous ideas about how to expand teaching Centering Prayer.

I joined a weekly Centering Prayer group. I finally found peace. I was learning the virtue of humility by finding contentment being hidden. This was a challenge. Professionally I had learned to network to build my practice. God made it work; I learned to be content with a smaller practice.

A retreat was being offered at the Houston Cenacle on BioSpiritual Focusing, a wisdom method based in the body. The Holy Spirit drew me to attend. My body was SO ready to FINALLY be listened to with respect. I left in a happy daze and couldn't stop talking about my experience. The Cenacle had a monthly group where we built our skills. After a few months, I became certified in Focusing, which is the larger context for BioSpiritual Focusing.

Father Thomas taught the importance of open mind, open heart and open body for consent to the presence and action of God within. In one of his early books, he mentioned BioSpiritual Focusing as beneficial. I wrote him about teaching Focusing as a way to extend the consent practiced in daily Centering Prayer. He gave an enthusiastic endorsement. I began those workshops in the mid-90's.

As founder Fred Eckart's health declined, Bob Hesse and Kim Kehoe became more active. In 2011 they co-founded the nonprofit, Contemplative Network, to support ministries based on Father Keating's commitment to teach Centering Prayer, interspiritual dialogue and sponsor scientific research on the holistic health benefits of Centering Prayer. Bob, our newly elected Board Chair, is a commissioned teacher of Centering Prayer. His credentials are impressive; more information is available on our web site.

One of the things I appreciate about Bob's leadership is how he quietly helps

our prayer groups. My weekly group was one of the first in Houston to go virtual when Covid started. At our first meeting, Bob, who had never been to our group, was there when I showed up to host. He was the first arrival for months; as a result, I felt anchored and welcomed. Despite Covid, we always found ourselves laughing, an added gift.

At our Board meeting in February 2022, we revised our vision statement to be more consistent with Oneness as Fr. Thomas described in *Oneness: The Secret Embrace*. Our statement reads: Our ultimate goal is recognizing the spiritual significance of silent prayer in healing the whole being's oneness: mind, body, soul, heart, energy and spirit.

Hallelujah!

A CONVERSATION WITH...

The Hesse Brothers

As a contributor to and editor of several newsletters, I have had the privilege of interacting with a variety of people. The encounter with the Hesse brothers was on a different level. As we collaborated on this article, I was struck by the boys' (as I came to think of them) openness, honesty and love. Thank you, Bob, Paul and John for allowing me to witness your growth as loving brothers and giving Christians. A special shoutout to John whose story was the inspiration for the theme of this article. Here is a glimpse of their journey and the impact it had on them during the first Kolbe retreat at the Michael unit of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. Paul, the middle brother sums up their growth:

"I am very proud of my two brothers. They have grown to be good men and great examples of what it means to be Christian. I say "grown" because like the rest of us, they have been on a journey, a pilgrimage in search of becoming the best version of themselves. As they have grown, they both have drawn me into their journeys first through my older brother, Bob, and more recently, through my younger brother, John."

Early in the new century, Bob invited John to an ACTS retreat (Adoration, Community, Theology, Service). John had been to many retreats so declined,

even though Bob explained these retreats are different. John was adamant; he wasn't interested, especially since Bob suggested it.

Bob convinced Paul to attend an ACTS retreat. Paul was "overwhelmed by the experience" and he too began to encourage John to attend. Finally, he reluctantly agreed. It was a life-changing event. Even though John is "terrified of public speaking," he became one of the leaders of ACTS retreats and introduced them to his home parish. Eventually a fellow parishioner suggested they bring the retreat to prisoners, "one of the most overlooked" group of men. John asked his brothers to join him on their first Kolbe retreat.

They all describe an ACTS retreat as a life-changing experience "steeped in the power of forgiveness." A Kolbe retreat has been called ACTS on steroids; it is "much more intense due to the prison environment and long-standing desire of so many for forgiveness." None of the brothers knew what to expect as they entered the prison. The experience in their own words:

John, the youngest brother,

"Initially, I rejected Jerold's [a fellow parishioner] invitation, in fear of going behind those walls, facing the unknown, and fear for my life... Receiving an abundance of mercy in my life, I accepted Jerold's and others' invitations to this ministry.

I asked my brothers, Paul and Bob, to join me on the Kolbe retreats... The look we receive from the offenders when they know we are brothers is interesting. Many of them say, "Why would you give up your time to come to a place we so desperately want to leave, and not just one of you, but all three brothers?"

Paul, the middle brother,

"It was about the time the steel doors of the prison cell block entry slammed shut behind us that I began to wonder, "What have I allowed my brother to talk me into".

On the first day of the retreat, 66 offenders (retreatants) are led into the room as our team forms two lines, one on each side of the entry. As the prisoners are led in, they extend their hand to greet us, but our team reaches out with both arms to give them a huge bear hug. For many, it is the first hug they have received in years. The surprise on their faces is the first thing we notice...

When the offenders are all seated, we serve them large platters of fresh fruit, apples, bananas, grapes, cookies, etc. Their eyes grow large at the site of

these platters of food. Many comment they have not had a banana or fresh apple in years. They are all here because they have signed up to take this retreat of their own free will, but the food is a big draw. The fastest way to a man's soul is through his stomach. Jesus taught us this when he feed the 5000.

The oldest brother, Bob:

"Sometimes we are delayed in starting our retreat due to a fight or a stabbing in the morning, which brings the reality of the situation starkly into focus. On the bright side, I discovered the inmates already practice Centering Prayer at the Michael Unit ... I attend these retreats to serve the men, but in the end, they serve me immensely in my spiritual journey. I find God in the suffering and dignity of each of them. I am struck with a sense of profound irony. I was originally self-imprisoned without love; I became liberated with love. It happened in a prison through the selfless love of so-called prisoners."

The Hesse brothers plan to continue their ministry inside the Texas Department of Criminal Justice when the COVID restrictions are lifted. Please pray for the "outside" team as they bring God's love to these forgotten men.



The Hesse Brothers (circled) at TDCJ Michael Unit. They joke if their mother knew her three beloved sons would all end up in the Texas state penitentiary, at the same time, she would be spinning in her grave!

We're all just walking each other home.

Ram Dass

MESSAGE FROM THE MYSTICS



Thích Nhất Hạnh was born in Hue, Vietnam, on October 11, 1926; he passed peacefully at Tu Hieuon Temple in Hue on January 22, 2022 at the age of 95. He was a spiritual leader, author, poet and peace activist. Known as *Thay*, Vietnamese for teacher, he was considered by Buddhists as second only to His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama in his global influence. He is recognized for spreading mindfulness and “engaged Buddhism” (a term he coined) in western culture. He was ecumenical, cosmopolitan, politically engaged and creative.

As a peace activist, Thay was vehemently against the war in Vietnam. He and his followers tried to continue life as if the war were not happening. That approach proved impossible. Soon he was engaged in peaceful protests. As a result of being nominated for the Nobel Peace prize by Martin Luther King, Jr, he was exiled by both the north and the south for 39 years.

Thay lived as a simple monk teaching humility, compassion and mindfulness. He established numerous monasteries around the world. Thousands of people have committed to following his code of universal global ethics, “The Five Mindfulness Trainings.” These ethical guidelines are central to the practice of his Buddhist belief system.

In Hanh’s words, the following is a summary of **The Five Mindfulness Trainings** from the website of the *Community of Mindful Living*:

Reverence For Life

“Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating the insight of interbeing and compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill...I will cultivate openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment to views in order to transform violence, fanaticism, and dogmatism in myself and in the world.”

True Happiness

“Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and

oppression, I am committed to practicing generosity in my thinking, speaking, and acting... true happiness is not possible without understanding and compassion... I am aware that happiness depends on my mental attitude and not on external conditions, and that I can live happily in the present moment simply by remembering that I already have more than enough conditions to be happy."

True Love

"Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society... I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct ... I am committed to ... cultivating loving kindness, compassion, joy and inclusiveness, which are the four basic elements of true love ..."

Loving Speech and Deep Listening

"... I am committed to cultivating loving speech and compassionate listening in order to relieve suffering and to promote reconciliation and peace in myself and among other people, ethnic and religious groups, and nations ... I am committed to speaking truthfully using words that inspire confidence, joy, and hope ... I will practice Right Diligence to nourish my capacity for understanding, love, joy, and inclusiveness, and gradually transform anger, violence, and fear that lie deep in my consciousness."

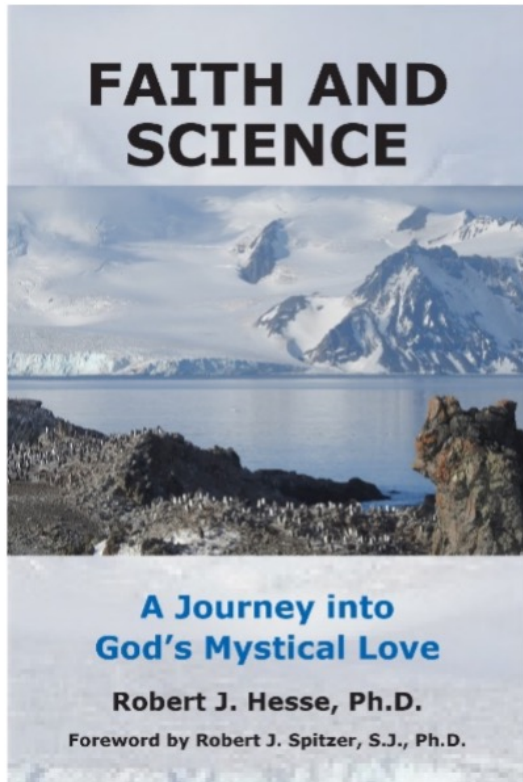
Nourishment and Healing

"... I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming ... I will practice coming back to the present moment to be in touch with the refreshing, healing and nourishing elements in me and around me ... I will contemplate interbeing and consume in a way that preserves peace, joy, and well-being in my body and consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family, my society and the Earth."

Remember:

"Precepts are ... insights born from mindful observation and direct experience of suffering. They are the guidelines that help us train ourselves to live in a way that protects us and those around us... That is why it is appropriate and helpful to describe them as 'mindfulness trainings.'"

A RECOMMENDED READ

**BOOK:**

Faith and Science: A Journey into God's Mystical Love

AUTHOR:

Robert J. Hesse, PhD

PUBLISHER:

Crossroad Publishing

Editor:

Jan Masterson

Note:

100% of the author's royalties are being donated to Contemplative Network. The book is available from [Crossroad Publishing](#) and [Amazon](#).

Faith and Science: A Journey into God's Mystical Love introduces a fresh voice into the sometimes polarizing subject of faith and science. Our chairman, Deacon Robert J. Hesse, offers a unique look into two subjects, which seem counter-intuitive. How can these topics come together? In what ways do they meet? Does one take a backseat to the other? The book explores the asymptotic convergence, approaching but not touching, of faith and science over a broad range of disciplines including: physics to creation, chemistry to life, biology to consciousness and psychology to mysticism; all accessible in language non-scientists can understand.

Using his compelling personal story, detailed images and colorful pictures, Hesse leads the reader on a fascinating journey through the universe, which led him back to his religious roots. He shares his pitfalls, side trips, assumptions and questions as he explores and explains scientific theory from

the Big Bang to ultimately finding serenity in God's indwelling presence. He wants you to know, believe and accept God exists in every human, no matter gender, race, creed, ethnicity. It is an interesting, questioning, heart-felt quest to experience God's awe in a very personal way.

A word from the author:

My story is a strange one. From clerical betrayal to mystical union. From science to faith. From seminary to sin to ordained Pontifical University Instructor. Everyone told me science would lead me away from faith. Instead, I found God in the Big Bang and stars, in the God particle and DNA, in free will and consciousness, in contemplative prayer and ecstasy. I learned St. Augustine was right: "Miracles are not contrary to nature, but only contrary to what we know about nature." Join me in discovering the real miracle, God's love in creation itself.

Hear a message from the author...



Robert J. Hesse, Ph.D.

Meet the Author:

May 14, 2022 9:00am: In-person at the Emmaus Spirituality Center in Houston. Tickets available.

[Buy Ticket](#)

May 26, 2022 noon Central time: International Zoom meeting sponsored by the Institute for Spirituality and Health.

Tickets available.

[Buy Ticket](#)

FINDING FAITH IN FAR FLUNG FIELDS

The Virgin Mary's Late in Life Home

By Linden Price

Travelers to Ephesus today will find an historical treasure chest. Once a port city on a major trade route of the Roman Empire, its location is about 5 kilometers inland from the port of Kusadasi, Turkey. Ephesus remained one of the most significant cities in the region well into the first millennia.

A visit to Ephesus today presents the traveler with a variety of sites. My wife, Patti, and I had the opportunity on a vacation cruise of the Mediterranean Empires. We both have undergraduate degrees in history; Patti taught ancient world history to high school freshmen. To walk among the ruins of a once mighty city during and after the lifetime of Jesus was awesome.

As incredible as seeing the ruins of the Agora, the Library, the Marble Road and Theater were, what really peaked our interest was the excursion to the site of the home of the Virgin Mary. Historians and biblical scholars believe the area surrounding Ephesus is where St. John the Apostle brought Mary to live during the later years of her earthly life. Mary's care had been entrusted to John by Jesus as He was dying on the cross; she stayed with John until her death.

It is thought St. John and the Blessed Mother traveled to Ephesus sometime between 37 and 42 AD. The place John selected to have a house built for Mary was not in Ephesus proper, but in the countryside. The dwelling was constructed on a hill on the road to Jerusalem.

The 1881 discovery of the dwelling's remains were made by following a description of the visions of Anne Catherine Emmerich, a nun and visionary. The description included enough information for the locale, surroundings and topography to be identified. Even though the Church has never made an official pronouncement on the house as belonging to the Virgin Mary, there has been a steady flow of pilgrims to the site, including Popes Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

The reconstructed shrine is a small, two room stone structure. The preserved stones used in reconstruction have been dated to the first century AD by carbon dating coals found in the area of the ruins. Outside the



shrine is a prayer wall, which pilgrims use to place personal intentions on paper or fabric, one of which was left by my dear wife. A fountain of water flows nearby; some pilgrims believe it has healing powers.

On the day of our visit, the weather was beautiful, enhancing the feeling of peace surrounding the home of the Virgin Mary. There were other visitors, all of whom were respectful, quiet and looking out for one another. There was a short queue waiting patiently to enter the house, many with a rosary in hand. Entering the house, one could almost visualize the presence of the Blessed Mother going about her chores prayerfully, welcoming neighbors, soaking in the beauty of the surroundings. It is easy to imagine Mary's assumption into heaven following her death. The aura of the place convinced me we were indeed on holy ground. It was an experience I will never forget.

An Interesting Journey Godward

By Alex Torres



I must admit when approached by Deacon Bob and Ms. Jan Masterson about *Contemplative Network News and Views*, I thought simply my portion would be a single interview. I learned later the invitation included naming the column and contributing regularly with updates. So with that in mind, I begin with the following.

Prison is a slow-paced environment in comparison to the events that take place in society. Much of what happens here may be viewed as trivial and not worthy of consideration.

Despite the differences, however, there are common experiences. For example, we share religion, education and work, to name a few. I have chosen these three themes for a couple of reasons. First, it is reasonable to surmise, the average person would consider each one or perhaps consider them collectively, as important ingredients for nurturing well-being. Second, in the past decade The Texas Department of Criminal Justice has gradually shifted its focus from punishment to rehabilitation with religion, education and work as the recurring themes. I suppose a reasonable administration in Huntsville and at the legislative level have discovered the value and importance of nurturing the well-being of the residents; after all, at some point in time, the majority will be released. According to U.S. census statistics, 95% of incarcerated people are eventually released.

Due to Omicron and a staff shortage, within the first weeks of January, the administration at the Polunsky Unit decided to suspend the bulk of activity under the umbrella of religious activity except for primary services, which are considered essential components for practicing one's faith, i.e., Mass for Catholics and Jumma for Muslims. The suspended activities included Kairos weekly meetings, Kolbe monthly reunions, Bridges to Life and Centering Prayer. Other programs such as trade schools and GED classes were not affected. All offender work assignments continued to operate as normal. The Faith Based Pods and dorm continued to function when possible. Thankfully on February 24th, I was informed all programming would resume to normal operations on March 1st.

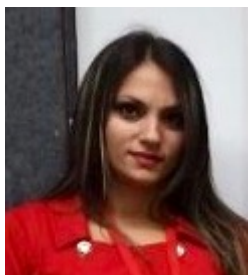
I continue to study in preparation to take a final exam on Catholic Morality, Part B from Catholic Distance University. The exam was supposed to have been taken in November 2021, but for some reason, I have not received it. I'm fairly certain the delay may have something to do with Covid.

It is Saturday, February 26th. I am writing from a transient cell at the Byrd Unit. On Monday, I will be taken to the hospital in Galveston for an examination of three broken ribs suffered from a slip and fall in front of our shower on the first floor. The fall occurred February 10th. My cellmate and I have just returned from the chow hall where we enjoyed corn dogs for our evening meal; we shared details about our families and our faith. Upon returning to Polunsky, I am scheduled to participate at a Kolbe retreat. occurring on March 4th, 5th and 6th.

In whatever set of circumstances we encounter, the Almighty is always present, thanks be to God.

Alex Torres

RESEARCH UPDATE



CONTEMPLATIVE EXPERIENCE IN THE TREATMENT OF PARKINSON'S DISEASE

By Dr. Yanin Machado

Institute of Neurology and Neurosurgery

Havana, Cuba

As a neurologist, I have been involved in diagnosing and treating many Parkinson's disease (PD) patients. The disease is named after English doctor, James Parkinson, who published the first detailed description in 1817. Public awareness campaigns include "*World Parkinson's Day*" (on the birthday of James Parkinson, 11 April) and the use of a red tulip as the symbol of the disease.

I commented on this experience to my father. He suggested I call Dr. Hesse who showed great enthusiasm about these experiences. He proposed we begin

a protocol on the use of Oneness Prayer to treat Parkinson's disease (PD) patients.

I have a close relationship with a PD patient who is my neighbor. Despite high doses of drugs, his PD symptoms are severe. He is depressed and suffers from anxiety. I began to teach him the Oneness Prayer. He received the gift of a spiritual contemplative experience (SCE.) After three weeks of training, I took a video before and after OP. The patient was in the "Off" moment of his treatment, i.e., he was showing tremors, stiffness of the limbs and trunk, and slowness of movement. The tremors completely disappeared, with great improvement in his motor function. I was shocked.

Dr. Hesse chaired a session where he taught the audience how to practice Oneness Prayer (OP), which is an interfaith version of Centering Prayer (CP). OP can make the practitioner more available to the gift of SCE. I was impressed. After several minutes of listening to Dr. Hesse's instructions, I felt a real out-of-body experience and an immense sense of peace. Moreover, although I did not see the tunnel, I saw images of relatives (the most vivid was my grandmother's face). I also commented on my experience with several colleagues. One of them, who affirms he is an atheist, also felt an out-of-body experience. He was stunned.

I learned that over the centuries, the wisdom literature in most faith traditions has reported mystical experiences, which we call spiritual contemplative experiences (SCEs), and near-death experiences (NDEs), are both altered states of consciousness with similar attributes. My father, Dr. Calixto Machado, a world expert on brain death, consciousness, and disorders of consciousness, invited Robert Hesse, Ph.D. as a key-note speaker to an international symposium.

While available medical therapies are usually effective for controlling symptoms for the initial years following diagnosis, higher doses of multiple drugs are required over time, with increasing side effects and non-effective control of symptoms. I often felt disappointed and upset when I increased drug doses in my patients without a manifest improvement, instead finding side-effects and clinical deterioration.

PD affects millions of patients in the world. It is a devastating disease, leading to significant motor and cognitive disabilities, which gradually worsens over a

decade or more, resulting in an estimated 70% to 80% loss by the time of diagnosis.

POETRY CORNER

In the Garden

By Karen Camerino

In the early morning the garden was still.
Not a single bird could be heard in the silence.
She stood there, overcome with grief, unable to pray,
And so she listened and repeated his name: Jesus.
That became her prayer.
She became aware of someone standing near.
She said, "Where have you taken him?"
He said the only word that mattered to her "Mary".
The garden was suddenly filled with birdsong.
Joy filled her heart for she knew who stood there with her.
Jesus had risen.
Alleluia!

MUSINGS FROM THE EDITOR

Bloom where you are planted. I had heard that suggestion many times through the years and always thought it was an interesting approach to life but didn't really grasp its meaning until four years ago. I was in a meeting; a member was



asking for help at our community's assisted living and memory care facility. She was citing all the advantages of becoming involved when she said, "God expects us to bloom where we are planted and the facility is fertile ground for all of us to grow." I felt like she was speaking directly to me. As I look back on that pivotal moment, I realize it was God telling me I was needed and it was time

for me to step up and do my part; to bloom where I am planted. For the next two and half years, I volunteered every Sunday at the interdenominational worship service. These days I am occasionally asked to give the message; it is a privilege I take very seriously. My time at the worship service was the beginning of blooming where God planted me.

Thinking about the last four years, that challenge started a chain of events I never would or could have predicted. It changed my life. So many people, so many opportunities and so many insights have come to me as a result of that one decision. I gradually learned even messed up me can be effective doing little things like picking up a dropped song book, helping someone get comfortably settled in a chair, fetching a walker. My heart has opened up in a way that made me receptive to invitations and requests to help with various projects, all of which enriched my life and helped me recognize God dwells in everyone. Anyone can bloom where they are planted if they just take the first step and answer the first call, no matter who asks or what the request. As Theodore Roosevelt said, "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are."

We are all unique human beings. We each have a sacred responsibility to do what no one else can. If we don't, whatever our assignment is, won't get done. I don't know about you, but I don't want to try and explain to God why I didn't respond to His call to use the talents He gave me. When I sometimes doubt whether I am doing what God wants me to do, I remember the words from Fr. Thomas Merton's book, *Thoughts in Solitude*, "...and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you." It encourages me to keep trying to be a better person today than I was yesterday and to keep trying tomorrow. A powerful goal when made with love.

Stay healthy. Stay positive. Stay loving.

Jan

*Your talent is God's gift to you.
What you do with it is your gift back to God.*

Leo Buscaglia

How to Do Centering Prayer

- Set aside 20 minutes, twice a day if possible. One time is better than none.
- Sit comfortably on a chair with your back straight.
- Close your eyes. Settle into the deepest center of your being.
- Silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
- As thoughts and feelings rush in, silently and gently repeat your sacred word until they go by. Thoughts are normal. Let them come, accept them, let them go. Do this every time thoughts grab your attention. It will get easier with practice.

[Brief introduction to Centering Prayer \(pdf\)](#)

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To submit a book review, essay or poetry for possible publication, it must be an original composition attached as a Word document in Times New Roman, 12-point font. Accepted length is 350 to 500 words for book reviews and essays and no more than 20 lines of poetry. Submissions are subject to editing. Be sure to keep a copy; submissions will not be returned. If your review, essay or poem is selected, you will be notified prior to publication.



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