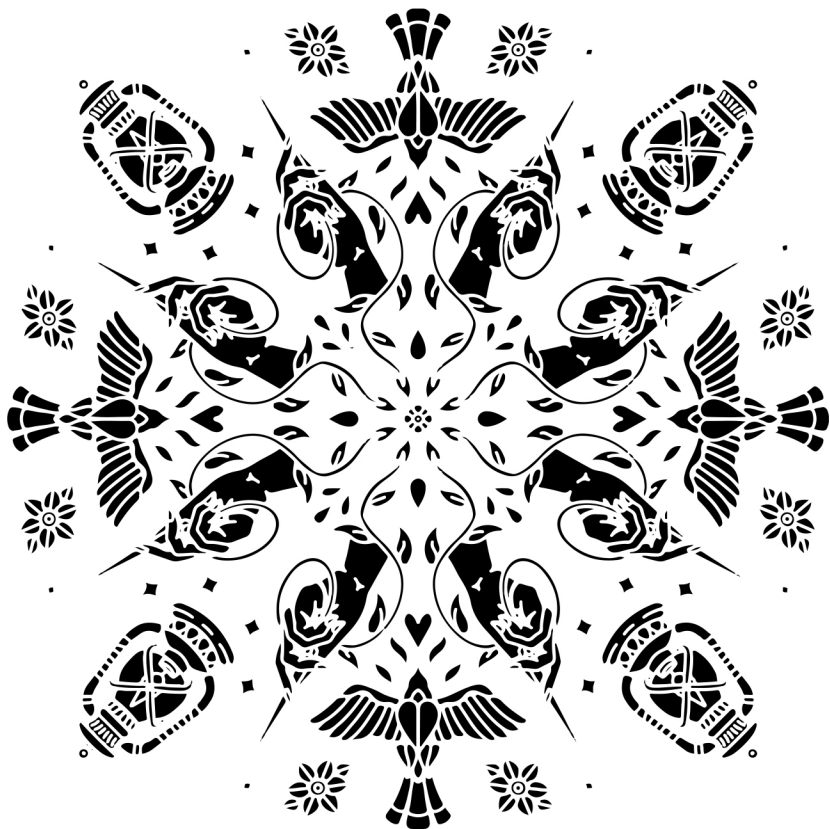


A Thing Worth Living In

POEMS BY PHYLCIA MASONHEIMER



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Introduction

I have been writing poetry since I was twelve years old. I entered my first poetry contest around that time and to my astonishment, won a national award for middle school poetry. I continued to write poems until my early twenties, when the whirlwind of a full time job, schoolwork, and engagement pushed the gentle art of poetry aside. I spent ten years without writing a single poem.

In 2021, I made a goal of writing one poem a day during my daily prayer time. It was a simple practice, meant to rejuvenate a side of my mind and heart too long neglected. I began sharing a few of these poems online and was stunned at the response. Nervous as I was to share the artistic side of my work (I typically write theological nonfiction), I continued to post the pieces. By the end of 2021 I had written almost sixty new poems, many of which are included in this collection.

Every poet has a unique style and inspiration. My mother read poetry aloud to us as children: Frost, Dickinson, Yeats, Emerson, Barrett-Browning among my favorites. I used to think I had to mold myself to the melancholy of modern works, feeling a bit like a church lady for how “Christian” - and structured - my pieces tend to be. I have since realized that poetry is the outpouring of a creative heart; what is inside will be revealed. The despairing heart will reveal despair; the confused spirit will reveal confusion; the hopeful heart will reveal hope. Though I have suffered my share of hardship (including in the year these poems were written, as some of them will indicate) I am at my core a person of hope. My art reflects the delight of exposing one’s inner turmoil to the light and finding, as the sun glints on it, less darkness and more diamonds.

An inspiration for this collection came from one of my favorite poets,

Wendell Berry. His piece “The Country of Marriage” reflects the beauty of a peaceful, ordinary life, a recurring theme when I sit down to write:

*“Sometimes our life reminds me
of a forest in which there is a graceful clearing
and in that opening a house,
an orchard and garden,
comfortable shades, and flowers
red and yellow in the sun, a pattern
made in the light for the light to return to.”*

The oldest pieces in *A Thing Worth Living In* were written from the farmhouse where I grew up. The newest pieces were written from the farmhouse where I now live with my husband and three children. Like Berry, I am rooted in a rural, small town (albeit Michigan, not Kentucky), working out the big ideas of the universe while working soil and tending kids (goat and human). My life is a tension of fast and slow, extremely public and sweetly private. Perhaps that’s why I love Berry’s work so much; I, too, want my days to be “a pattern made in the light for the light to return to.”

Berry once said in an interview, quoting Mallarme’, that the poet’s duty is to “purify the language of the tribe”. My tribe is the Church. While Christian nonfiction writing, particularly on theology, is succinct and dogmatic, poetry captures those concepts and ushers them with feather-like touch to the heart. Some people are better taught the truth about Christ’s goodness through a poem than they would be through a whole book on doctrine.

Perhaps one of these truths will resonate with you and, if the time and tone is right, become “a thing worth living in.”

Phyllicia Mazonheimer

Part One



The Wishing Well, 2010

*There was a time, when in his arms
I felt secure and safe and blessed.
There was a time when in his eyes
I saw affection's softness rest;
I heard within his gentle voice
A seed of hope I thought could bloom;
A promise I put faith upon,
But found that love denied a room
Within his heart. Was only I
Who trusted soon, when time could tell
Affection's guess would prove too weak
To bring the wish from out the well.
Those days, so sweet to memory
Are all that's left of him and me.*

Nameless, 2010

*When I cease to measure
And with others to compare,
I see the only Standard shine
And am blinded by the glare;*

*For in perfection's piercing light
My every flaw shows through.
There is no hiding sin's dark stain
From Him who is the truth.*

*Yet by that Light, my sin exposed,
A gracious hand extends
To turn my wandering heart around
And leave me pure and cleansed.*

Nameless, 2010

*You say I think in terms too narrow
To hold the breadth of swollen hearts;
You think I say my choice was easy
To slit the hope of dreaming souls.*

*You say I think myself too worthy
To walk with you down winding roads;
You think I say my heart is fearful
To trust in you, and take your part.*

*I say you make a choice too narrow
To see beyond a present pain—
I know you think the terms too easy
To earn the love you wish to gain.*

*I say you think your heart too worthy
An assumption you may soon regret—
But you are right. My heart is fearful
To trust in you and take your part.*

It Was Because I Loved You, 2010

*It was because I loved you
I had to let you go;
Because your heart was dear to mine
I opened wide the door—*

*You thought it pain, I knew it joy,
Though you nor I felt joy's sweet glow.
It was because I loved you
That I had to let you go.*

*It was because I loved you
I took the "I" from "we,"
To give you back your vision
So you could clearly see.*

*You thought it blind, I knew it sight,
Though you nor I saw future's scheme;
It was because I loved you
That I took the "I" from "we."
It was because I loved you
My hand relinquished yours;
You need them both to plant a dream
And tend it as it grows—*

*You thought it cold, I knew it kind
Though you nor I
could view the course.
It was because I loved you
My hand relinquished yours.*

*It was because I loved you
That I ceased to walk your road;
The dream, the goal that you pursue
Is better chased alone—*

*You think it hate, I know it love,
Though you nor I desire to go;
But it is because I love you
That I leave you freedom's road.*

Unity, 2008

*When two souls have brought their differences
And differed all the more,
When friendship's life is threatened
By the friends that travel there,
And two have felt the speechless pain
They've never felt before—
When they reach the journey's end, these friends
Will be in peace... or war.*

*They cannot stand without a word
In silence undefined;
They cannot live in apathy
Unhappily resigned.
No—they either separate
Each his path to find,
Or when they reach the journey's end
They call each other "mine."*

Fatherless, 2008

*To yearn, to reach, to seek, yet not to find;
To search for years for that which always flees,
What evades the heart I seek with my mind
For naught escapes what reason can achieve.
There was a time I barely can recall
A foolish child loved with heart and soul.
But since, I've learned that love is thin and small,
Itself too empty to fill my heart's hole.
Abandoned when my faith was young and strong
Left me wandering, not directed where to go.
Alone to finish what had been our song—
A twisted solo from a tortured soul.
No—faith and hope and love—they chose to leave.
With nothing left, why should I then believe?*