

# Two Poems: “Radical” and “Belief and Blackboards”

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## **Radical**

*“I never dared be radical when young  
for fear it would make me conservative  
when old.”*

-Robert Frost

This is the place to rebel:  
the top of arching treetops,  
sky raunchy in red,  
the wind kicking up a ruckus.  
Nature is never tame or unforgiving,  
the least safe escape from ourselves  
because it echoes back in each twig creak  
the bones we hobble on  
looking for a mountainous Babel  
that lets us come and go  
from here to the ethereal  
and back. Tell folks you write  
landscapes, and they’ll nod,  
buy a book for a cousin in Vermont  
without any suspicion of violence  
bushwhacking through the words  
thick as the vocal vernacular.  
No sweet violets here  
polka-dotting the lawn.  
A tree is a tree is a tree is a birch  
and night a close acquaintance,  
shivering from the frost.

## Belief and Blackboards

The writing on the state  
school's slate, the wall, or the stone  
of ten clear non-cursive commandments  
all clutter different dimensions  
here.

Still,  
sometimes I see  
a film of lamb's blood across the lintel  
or flakes of manna in the unexpected snap  
of chalk, the blank stare of a stalled  
video, the discarded syllabus  
crumpled and tossed on the tile. Or

when the skies slash and thrash with rain,  
and the room pools with shadows, I see  
stigmata, small but perfect in the unexpected  
hand raised charismatically in the last row.

I see so many ascensions: eyes hearing.

Across the hall, my colleague tosses  
"stupid," "blind," "insipid" at her class,  
teaches them to laugh at everything  
crisscrossed with worship. Beneath  
florescent lights, she howls  
at the joke of holiness.

And then a sparrow pecks at the window:  
wanting us, wanting in.  
His beak chips at our thoughts,  
an awkward metronome.

My class and I turn back  
to Herbert and metaphysics;  
in retaliation, discard our chalk or pens.

A student I thought asleep  
starts to read,  
his thrush of a voice  
syncopated by the bird's insistence.

And this is all we need:  
the real, the spiritual, the Real;  
the thin laughter in the background;  
the crescendo of the poem rising, covering each desk,  
each tile: floor and ceiling.