

“Did you really tell him [Job] to curse God and die?” And she answers, “Yes I did” (131).

These illustrious quibblers bring to the fore the question of why so many of us have been so cautious and submissive with the brethren for so long. What makes us so afraid to ask one simple question: How can we know ourselves if we do not know her? This volume rings with that query, indirect or full-bodied.

As so many of these poems acknowledge, God is a remembering of who we are; and if God is home, then Mother must be there. As Robert A. Rees imagines it, Mother is our “deepest memory” (“Mother,” 175), or, as Nola Wallace pens this is our deepest woe, “Let me know you that I may know myself” (“A Psalm,” 117). Carol Lynn Pearson doesn’t let it go, in so many of her poems, wondering, ironically, why we must leave Mother hidden in that room of Her own.

We worshippers of Mother remain a cult within a cult if she is not known more widely. Indeed, we need this volume of poetry to prepare us for the revelations at hand.



Morning Has Broken

Robert A. Rees. *Waiting for Morning*. Provo: Zarahemla Books, 2018. 145 pp. Paper: \$12.79. ISBN: 9780999347201.

Reviewed by Karen Marguerite Moloney

The day the head gasket blew in the California desert, it was late summer, 1987—and therefore, stiflingly hot. The painter’s van was hooked to a travel trailer, living quarters for my foster brother Karl, his wife, and

their five children while driving back to Utah. But with the van out of commission, they were now not only broke but stranded. An elderly man pulled them to a junk yard, the children were registered in a Victorville elementary school, and Karl walked ten miles for painting jobs—too few, however, and fewer still after the stock market crashed that October. The situation grew desperate. Thirty-one years later, a nephew recalls, “We were living in squalor; we had nothing.” Karl called my mother, then in her seventies and relying on social security, to relay the news. My mother called me, at the time a cash-strapped graduate student at UCLA. I contacted my bishop, Robert A. Rees.

Though members of the Church, Karl and his family were not members of my ward, and Bob had no official obligation to help. Even so, he responded immediately, sending me off to the local bishop’s warehouse. Laden with food, my mother and I were soon navigating lonely desert roads in search of a white painter’s van hooked to a trailer. When we found it, its cupboards were bare, the family beyond hungry. The food we delivered was a lifesaver.

I’ve wondered sometimes at the alacrity, with so few questions asked, with which Bob responded to my plea for help. But now, having read *Waiting for Morning*, his recently published, de facto “collected poems” (and window to his soul), I wonder no more. “Heart-rate Variability” and “Indigos of Darkness,” for example, both recall the day his mother left their Durango home with a boyfriend—and never returned. Bob was seven, his siblings nine and four. For two weeks, until the police arrived, the trio were on their own.

Bob recalls:

We charged food at the store next door,
mostly candy and soda pop.

When we ran out of clean shirts,
we wore pajama tops to school

Then stayed home
when kids teased us. ("Indigos," 37)

Eventually the children were removed to a foster home and their father summoned, though the letters took months to reach the young seaman, recovering from extensive shrapnel wounds "in a Navy hospital in Oceanside" ("Indigos," 38). When the letters finally arrived, as Bob recollects in "Heart-rate Variability," the seaman received "special leave from the hospital. / One day he knock[ed] at the door" (35).

As Bob's readers and friends can attest (I count myself a member of both camps), that seven-year-old boy not only survived this turmoil but grew up to become a deeply sensitive and optimistic man, a caring humanitarian, and a keen observer of the natural world (not to mention a Mormon bishop par excellence, one whose compassion for a struggling family he'd never met inspires me to this day). But Bob is also more than the sum of these parts. At age forty-five, he began publishing poetry, and *Waiting for Morning* tallies for us that venture's exquisite results over his next nearly four decades.

The poems' themes are wide-ranging. A native Californian, I especially appreciate Bob's evocations of the northern California coastline: "the sea's soft sibilants, the pelican's / cry, the liquid splash of dolphins" in "Gene at Wilder Beach" (61). I relish as well his depictions of the Santa Cruz Mountains: the shadow of their redwoods in "Washing Your Hair in the Kitchen Sink" (126), their "granite / outcroppings" in "I Will Carry Stones from the River" (131), and the "blue-gray herons / above the San Lorenzo" in the haiku "[Two blue-gray herons]" (137). I smile at the California poppies growing "All along / Pacific Coast Highway" in "April" (69). As I read "Praise," I close my eyes, better to savor the "Rainbow-winged butterflies, / harlequin dragonflies," and "spotted salamanders" along King's Creek, tributary of a Sierra Nevada watercourse. Normally afraid of snakes, I even admire

a royal four-foot snake
absorbing summer sun,

its black and white bands
 dividing the world
 with absolute certainty. (70)

I'm back to smiling as I read "Morning Glory," in which Bob makes a litany of the state's

purple larkspur,
 starflowers,
 wild lilac—and
 morning glories
 climbing the ancient oaks. (75)

California's trees also merit praise: jacarandas flourish in a series of delicate haiku ("Jacaranda," 77–78) while persimmons, bearing "endless seeds / and blossoms" ("Sun Seeds," 81), host starlings ("Turning," 83). And a eucalyptus shelters a "black-cassocked crow" ("Forgotten Birds," 84). In these poems and others, Bob transports me to the landscape of my youth.

Bob also takes us with him far beyond the Golden State's borders. Citing only a few examples, together we visit Anne Frank's hiding place ("For Anne Frank," 22; "No. 263 Prinsegracht, Amsterdam," 23); accompany Bob on a tour of China (see all seven poems in the section "China Poems," 43–51); stand by him Christmas morning in a Lithuanian orphanage ("Blackbirds," 20); sit beside him at a Chekhov play in London ("The Dancing Beggar of London," 6), and fish with him on the Upper Weber ("Fishers," 87–90). We go back in time, too, as Joseph struggles with the news that his new wife Mary is somehow, mysteriously, pregnant ("The Cradle," 115); as Joseph Smith chooses to unearth the gold plates, no matter the personal consequences ("Salamander," 105–11); and as a young Japanese woman "fears she will go mad" in 1942 at Heart Mountain, the Wyoming Relocation Camp, in a poem of the same name (5).

For me, sometimes a poet and always a teacher of verse, there are additional sharp pleasures. Bob observes in his brief introduction, "The

list of poets living and dead to whom I am indebted are too numerous to mention" (v), which may be true, but his poetic mentors are not so great a throng as to blur together, fading from sight among his lines, and their bright appearances increase at least this reader's delight. I'll likely include "Plums," the first section of his two-part "Poems" (58), for example, when I next teach William Carlos Williams's "This Is Just to Stay"; I'll juxtapose "Praise" (70) with Gerard Manley Hopkins's "God's Grandeur"; and offer "In the Leningrad Metro" (138) when we read Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro." When we study Seamus Heaney's litanies, I can point to poems like the afore mentioned "Morning Glory" for comparison. This, I will tell my students, is one of the ways poets create new poems: learning their craft, but also drawing fresh inspiration, expanding the meaning and relevance of the original examples, pleasing not only fellow poets and teachers of poetry but also those who, unaware of links to past poetics, nonetheless appreciate the present.

I could go on. I could speak of Bob's spare yet heart rending approach to grief, sincerity in love, bonds with a grandson, appreciation for other religious faiths, masterful haiku, and cleverly arranged "found poems," but I'd rather have you pick up the volume for yourselves. These are poems by a Mormon poet, yes, but one with an ecumenical, all-embracing heart. Read his poetry, and I believe you'll agree: the poems exude universal appeal and deserved first publication in national journals. They are that good.

I have one quibble. The small lines that appear at the bottom of every page fail to communicate whether the poem at hand continues to the next page. This is confusing, unnecessarily breaking a poem's flow as the reader turns the page, checking to see if there is more. Why not remove the small line on pages where the poems continue? Readers would know then whether to bask in the self-contained beauty of a one-page poem, or hold their breath, turn the page, and read on.

Meanwhile, morning has broken. These poems may help me understand Bob's compassionate response to my brother's plight—he was in

a position to help; he could do nothing else—but they also allow me to rejoice with the poet in the world around us. Bob may have come to poetry later than most, but he has more than mastered his trade. He tells us he is “Waiting for Morning,” but as far as I’m concerned, he need wait no more.



It’s Lonely at the Top

Ryan Shoemaker. *Beyond the Lights*. No Record Press, 2018. 192 pp. Paper: \$15.00. ISBN: 9780983586029.

Reviewed by Alison Brimley

The train, where I do most of my reading these days, can actually be a hard place to read. It can be difficult for the characters in a book to compete with the characters I encounter in front of me—the patrons of mass transit striking up conversations with each other, and sometimes, at random, with me. Ryan Shoemaker’s collection *Beyond the Lights*, published earlier this year by No Record Press, had no problem contending. His stories are immediate, accessible, and by turns humorous and heartbreaking.

The structure of *Beyond the Lights*—which is in fact divided into three disparate sections—makes you feel as though you’ve read three collections in one. The first chunk, consisting mostly of short, funny, fragmented tales of fatherhood and family life, contrasts sharply with the second section, in which one gets the sense that Shoemaker is stretching his limbs: these stories sprawl and dive deep into their characters’ psyches. Many of the stories in this second section also center on Mormon characters, though I wouldn’t say they deal deeply with Mormonism