

# On the Parts of Animals

by [Michael Yost](#) (July 2025)



The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man (Peter Paul Rubens and Jan Brueghel the Elder, 1615)

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*According to the Church Fathers, the confusion of languages gradually destroyed the purity of the sacred language which was spoken before the flood. –Vico, New Science, Book 1.9*

*So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. –Genesis 3:24*

Once Adam spoke to Eve in sacred tongue

Kenned from the Godhead who would walk with him  
When Eden and the World were bright and young  
In words that wrought that world in thought and hymn.

Once, all the animals, loins forward rolling  
As tide thick on the shores of the muscled sea,  
Before man, giver of their true names bowing  
Lifted their horns to him beneath the tree.

The Finches' brightness, Panther's breath corrupt;  
They were named beyond mere recognition.  
In mind's red soil the words and world were cupped,  
Were sun and sown seed, in their fresh ignition

In the burning center of the Logos' light.  
Now, as weak paper curls away from flame  
Our eyes roll backward from that too-real sight  
Into the darkness, seen without a name.

For then was love and knowledge warped to use,  
And cunning wrenched from faith and contemplation,  
And strength confined to seizure and abuse.  
And we are still no farther from temptation,

For east of Eden, Adam's curse is this:  
Man's language ramifies, and then declines,  
Makes fraction of each thing's hypostasis  
And hides the substance underneath its signs.

And ignorance of life's name, nature's essence  
Compels us to pile high the holocaust  
That fires us to gradual recrudescence  
Within our long, indifferent Pentecost.

**Dwelling**

We've just begun to settle in. My books are all still packed;  
The clutter of possession spreads; the sink has sprung a leak  
And I've been scraping and repainting wall; for months we've  
lacked

Our home's habitual order. As the deal dragged week by week  
And as repairs delayed, the petty subterfuge of sale  
Stank in my soul like car exhaust. Thank God, that now its  
done.

All the utilities are on and paid for, and our mail  
Is forwarded to this address. Leisure and work resume.

It's strange to walk through someone else's house, for even  
after

The previous owner's things are gone, the place is haunted,  
fills

With memories you do not know, with clues of silent laughter  
And silent anger, stains, a bottle of expired pills  
Left in a cupboard, screws drilled into walls at random  
places;

The lingering effects of other's choices; lives they'd won  
From time's encompassing destruction. In the mirror, faces  
Loiter, conspicuously absent. Yours seems barely there.

This place helped them construct a self. Remember as child  
How your house was the real one; each of us recalls  
One house like that: your very home. Each one is sold,  
defiled,

Or simply left to rot. The old glass windows and the halls  
Are not now as you would remember them – the human soul  
Assimilates these things unto itself. Our youngest thoughts  
Involve Victorian banisters, stale whiffs of dust, a bowl  
Of rose leaves, and the marriage portraits of the ancestral  
dead.

We change the locks. It's ours now, not another's; soon our  
minds

Will paint our loves and fears upon the walls, will decorate  
Each room with our religion's furniture. The blinds  
Are tacky still with dust and yellowed tar; our joy and hate  
Will leave its own peculiar residue. As history  
Receives installments of our mortgaged years, anew the plots  
Of hyacinth and roses will be turned and watered; we  
Will weed them till the autumn soil lies usable and bare.

Our duplex was quite different; quite impersonal; the vinyl  
Clapboard lining plaster walls, the minimalist grey  
That dampened all the sunlight; ceilings low; the flooring  
vinyl  
And the back deck vinyl. Every piece in every way  
Was utterly replaceable, would match with anything.  
A home is different: it becomes more real because of our  
concern,  
by taking on its master's virtues, flaws; his care will bring  
Grace to the dwellers, give a warm beneficence to friends.

Such are the ends of man: communion, feasting, contemplation,  
Both craft and ritual, the child-like play that follows on  
The work for mere survival – born of our participation  
In order we perceive and imitate. When we are gone,  
We leave behind alone such works and days; they shine and ring  
Being joined in order's dance; its liturgy: nought else can  
burn  
Meet fuel for the flame of that eternal mind who knows  
And loves itself, itself the vision of its endless sight.

And by these means we found a home at last: through sacrament  
Of eating, hanging the old pictures on the wall, of prayer,  
Of holidays, of sleeping, waking, with the intent  
To build a garden once the snow is gone, to mend the stair  
That moves too much on our back porch, and to restore some  
glory  
To this too human dwelling. I recall a line from Larkin:  
"A serious house on serious earth." In story after story

Men war for such a place, and die, and smile as the story ends.

For it is here, within this serious house that we perceive  
The moving image of eternity; in well-wrought rings  
Of habit, years, and slow persistent work. And I believe  
That in the beauty which we steward here, which sings  
Of life beyond, we hear its prelude, see it through dark glass  
And see it even as the evening and our own eyes darken:  
And yet the vision now is nothing. Another will surpass.  
Then image will give way at last to truth; to light; more  
light.

### **At the Grave of Keats**

*Rome, 2016*

I've brought a bottle of Italian wine  
And for a corkscrew my old pocketknife  
To pour libations on your ivied grave.  
I drink a glass myself, and crack the spine  
Of your collected works. There is a life  
In ordered, beautiful and measured speech  
That may outlast the man when time's next wave  
Erases him, his name, and every line  
That is not worthy to remain. How rife  
Is error; and mankind will only save  
Poems that matter; and the sun will bleach  
Both Roman marble and your grave's gray stone.  
Wine spatters on your leaves, and each to each  
Gray pigeons wing their passage; mute, alone.

### **On Returning to New England from Rome**

The dawn is cool as marble in a church,  
And slicked with dew, like carvings in a crypt.  
Like columns of a baldachin, the birch  
Honors the earth's concealing sacrament.

The growing sunlight plays with shade; as free  
As angels dallying within the vaults  
And arches of the oak's clerestory.  
You hear their wings beat, green and cool and fresh.

The shadows frescoed on the walls of leaves  
Depict no saint, nor resurrection save  
Their own. Who comes to worship, who believes,  
Receives the grace that was his own before.

It is a testament itself to art  
That it should seem so easy to perceive  
The architecture of a forest's heart;  
To grasp some wisdom from the wilderness

And yet to know that it is not our own  
Nor proper to us; radiance of a mind  
Unfathomable save within the stone  
And color of the Word's analogy.

Creation is procession and return  
And we bisect that circle in its path;  
Between the light before which we must burn  
And too the blackness of creation's birth.

### **The Jade Collector**

Thigh deep, she wades in, water's liminal  
Bright surface lapping up and down her skin.  
Alone, as if within some private park

She has disrobed. No-one is there, except  
The crane, who stands, at distance, on one leg,  
As motionless as if in bas-relief,  
And does not know the beauty that he spies  
With eyes antediluvian and severe.  
She does not seem to walk, but rather moves  
Through water as a temple moves through mist,  
Or as trees move through wind that they've kissed; yet now  
She raises up her arms to knot her hair,  
And shows her neck; bare, white, and sculptural  
Upon her snow – pure, barely heavy breasts,  
The river's crests have sprayed, and each small drop  
Now runs its course in one slow perfect curve.  
The gentle down upon her neck is bright  
With drops distilled from all the river's fog,  
While her brown nipples harden in the chill.  
Her gently cursive legs are pillars cut  
From whitest limestone for a palace tomb;  
Her waist flares like the round of some fine vase.  
She has disrobed, the better to be found;  
The stone will find its way towards her flesh  
As sunlight flashes on damp muted earth,  
Called to her womanhood as flame to flint  
Or spirited desire towards its rest.  
Activity desires its own end;  
Love longs to be extinguished once for all;  
And so, she is an elemental lure,  
A receptivity of gentlest touch,  
To call the hardness of the sacred jade,  
And in her black eyes even living stone  
May find its natural and final place.  
She then proceeds, and presses with her feet  
To feel for jadestones in the river bed.  
The rocks are friendly, smooth to walk upon,  
And meet the questions posed them by her skin:  
"Where is the essence of heaven and of earth?"

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