

Poems

Elizabeth Scott Tervo

Relentless Thought

There it goes again
 corkscrewing through the mind's eye:
 the dry carcass of a crooked bird on the roadway,
 ants approaching.
 No.
 A thought is just a bee buzzing around your head, that's all.
 Look at what's really around you:
 tall pines, pine needles,
 and the sea like a gray woolly blanket.
 But a bird on the roadway.
 No. It's just a bee buzzing.
 You can't help the bees buzzing sometimes. Keep looking.
 Sky. Clouds like continents and vertebrae.
 The bones of a bird. A dry bird on the roadway.
 Here is it again. The ants are black and bulky.
 No. It's not your fault but you can't entertain it.
 Say Lord have mercy and put it away.
 Think the next thought, and the one after that.
 The flesh was all dry—
 but put it away. Try again.
 Blue sky, tall pines, and the sea like a blanket.
 Clouds. Now *there* is something for the imagination.
 Cloudy wind-faces,
 Zephyrus himself blowing—
 the wind blew you there, my robin, under the tire.

Stop. Don't interact with it.
 Blue sky.
 It's done. Dry bones.
 It's over. Dry flesh.
 Clouds. Blue sky. The water.
 The water!
 A fish leaping, turning, turning like a flipped coin
 and splashing, splashing under the blanket again.

. . . Now what was that relentless thought?
 It's gone.
 All gone.
 Now a fish. Just a fish. Wet. Shiny. Swim.



Deprogramming You

In the evenings, you had to reveal every thought
and you received shame in exchange for your honesty.
Black nights, you thought you saw the dawn of your own insanity
rising over the bedside, clanking like an enormous brass sun.
Keep your cards close, keep them breast:
if you cry or lose your temper or fall in love
it's all over, meaning: you're crazy with evil.
You had your own personal Stalin.
They taught you that unsleeping vigilance.
Your tender soul, Russian soul, little pink worm
in the barbed wire crush. It's you.

Daylight faded the cage into misty ropes of thoughts.
You don't have to loop them around you now.
You can grow an ordinary shell like an ordinary snail.
True, you won't be unique anymore. That is a loss.
You're not the great sinner you thought you were.
In fact, you are rather good.
God created everything good.

"Take every thought captive" — yes, but to a point.
When a thought crosses the map,
no need to dramatize your elegant refusal
or give chase with yet another net of further thoughts.
Let it go on its way, and so, slowly, will you.

Ghost Apple

A round emptiness dangles in the air
Still waiting
A ghost apple is hanging there

It refuses to stay put
It follows us wherever we go
Distracting us from our proper work

Taking Creation in Vain

Reaching for the apple of course was wrong
but the act had a certain splendor
That's the false beauty, the Other story

Even if you stop, and draw back your hand,
still, there is an apple-shaped hole inside of you
and always will be
Because you have a choice, at every moment you have a choice
even if you train yourself not to take it
Even if you train yourself not to want it
there is still an emptiness
because we came out of emptiness
and every day we live with emptiness.
An apple-shaped hole in the fabric of space-time
an apple-shaped dent in the gravitational field
An apple-shaped blot on the world *



Elizabeth Scott Tervo's poetry and stories appear in *St. Katherine's Review*, the *Basilian Journal*, *Eye to the Telescope*, the *New Haven Review*, and Waystone Press's anthology *Visions of Paradise: Eucatastrophe*. Two of the four poems included in this issue of *The Wheel* belong to her novel-in-progress *Forgiveness Sunday*. Her memoir about the end of the Soviet period, *The Sun Does Not Shine Without You*, is forthcoming in the republic of Georgia. She is also co-coordinator of the Doxacon Seattle writers group for Christianity and Science Fiction/Fantasy.