

"It is a blessing to have another collection of poems by Kilian McDonnell, his third in just a handful of years, and to find in it so many which speak with such clarity to anyone struggling to live an authentic spiritual life. Struggle and imaginative risk-taking are everywhere in these pages, both in the often gloriously subversive, scriptural understories characteristic of this poet, where we are taken inside the lives of anguished personae such as Hagar or Judas or Isaac—"And I must ask what kind / of deity is this who asks this horror, / whose will lies in the absurd / and in the abyss beyond?"—but also, and indelibly, in the vividly personal writing to be found in the third section of the book, 'At Dusk,' where poem after poem resonates with unprecedented depth of feeling and frankness of disclosure. With pieces such as 'Hiding,' 'The Wolf Will Wait,' 'Do You Love Me?' 'In Search of Trust,' 'Cosmic Lazarus,' 'Places I Have Rested,' and 'At Dusk,' to name a few, Kilian McDonnell, in laying bare his soul, has laid up some treasure for his readers, whose numbers will surely continue to grow on the appearance of this brave, revealing collection."

*Michael Dennis Browne, Morse-Alumni Distinguished Teaching Professor of English  
University of Minnesota*

"God's 'desperate love' strides through McDonnell's work; reading it becomes another reason to get up in the morning. McDonnell has heard the Scripture's female voice and, like a faithful scribe, responded 'Here am I' by writing down her intimacies. You'll love the sweet nectar in these poems, their earthy details, the humanness of the women and men who inhabit their rooms. You'll want to sit at Levi's table for his feast, and by the power in McDonnell's words and images, you can."

*Sharon Chmielarz, author of The Other Mozart*

"If what Simone Weil says is true, that 'unmixed attention is a form of prayer,' then *God Drops and Loses Things* constitutes a poet's breviary. Kilian McDonnell's pure attention to the astonishing events and telling details of familiar biblical stories enables him to re-imagine them in ways that surprise and delight the reader even as they instruct. In language that is both classic and colloquial, the voices of antiquity speak to us from these pages and include the likes of Adam and Abraham, Moses and Mary Magdelyn, Jezebel and Jesus, all of whom seem as near to us as the next room. Fr. Kilian, a lifelong Benedictine monk and a learned theologian, brings intellect and imagination to bear on this rich material and offers us glimpses of the wild wisdom of God's ways even as it eludes the speakers of his poems and the actors in the events of salvation history. The poems remind us that ours is a world in which 'splendor barges in' when we humans least expect it, in which 'God drops her hairbrush in the desert' on a regular basis and leaves it to the poet 'to hear it . . . and write it in a book.' In poems that are as brave as they are beautifully made, and as troubling as they are true, Fr. Kilian does just that, much to the reader's pleasure, over and over again."

*Angela O'Donnell, Fordham University, poet and author of MINE*

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GOD DROPS  
AND LOSES THINGS

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LET THERE BE LIGHT

## ADAM'S VERSION

*So when the woman saw . . . that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband . . . and he ate. Genesis 3:6*

I never win, before sin or after.  
Body, soul, spirit she was in  
and with my bone before I was Adam.

*Male and female Yahweh created them.*  
God added nothing to that rib  
except curves, sight around

corners, and nectar. When I see  
Eve, I know I'm male. The first  
miracle tells me who I am.

God saved perfection for the last,  
afterwards was bushed, needed a Sabbath.  
Perfection mastered me, not  
by nectar, but by early lunch.

## IN THE BEGINNING MERCY

*I was a hidden treasure and desired to be known, so I created the world. From the Islamic tradition*

The Lord God who created heaven and earth,  
tamed mists and the disordered deep,  
rummaged among astonishment and mirth  
within the vaults to spill on voids and heap  
vacancies with wonders. The Spirit/wind  
wound through caverns of God's presence for hoard  
to rain down in mercy before we sinned.

*Let there be light*, and rays of God's own self poured  
downward. This, the Lord Yahweh said,  
is good. I will do it again. For five days  
the Lord emptied the chest as though to shed  
in haste the gold saved from always.

Whatever of mercy, whatever of worth must go.  
No glory is safe. All, all are cast below.

## ON HEARING THINGS MALE

*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth  
. . . a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. . . .  
Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.  
Genesis 1:1-3*

Did the author of Genesis hear Yahweh's voice  
like the rumble of thunder over Mount Zion?  
And did the man say to himself, as though spitting  
against the wind, this boom must be male?  
Male ears hear things male. Even medieval giants  
decreed, *Whatever is received, is received  
according to the mode of the receiver.* And if  
Yahweh drops her hairbrush in the desert,  
who can hear it? And write it in the book?

FROM SARAH'S BOOK OF PROVERBS

*I will incline my ear to a proverb. Psalm 49:4*

If Abraham brags of my beauty to men, should I hear  
only complaints of watery wine?

—If Lot says God made him to throw the spear in war,  
did God create Milcah to wait for camels  
carrying home the bodies of her sons?

If Leah has no part in the choice of her man, she can  
drop goat dung in his wine.

—A man may read Akkadian and speak Attic Greek,  
but can he bear the silence of Eve betrayed?

When Abraham obeyed God, I know there was horror  
in his heart as he raised the knife to stab our Isaac.

—When Abraham shouts at me, it's because he's angry  
at himself.

If your tent leaks, do not mend it in a storm.

—When Abraham and I quarrel, I cannot wait until  
we smile and I breathe his breath.

If I have no sons and Abraham loves me, I weep  
because it's not enough.

—When Abraham is sick, I berate Hagar.

If Aram grumbles of sour wine and burnt bread, let him  
sleep under a sheep skin too short to cover his feet.  
—When Abraham is gone to war, I eat six times a day.

If an ant is lazy, the whole colony perishes.  
—If Abraham neglects to say he loves me, let him  
consult the donkey.

If Peleg keeps dumb his wife Anna who milks the goat,  
he's a fool to think she knows only cheese.  
—When Abraham is with me again, I grow taller.

If your dog wags its tail at everyone, do not set it to  
guard your gold.  
—Men say wise women do not wear ankle bells.  
Why cannot we be wise and make music too?

If Abraham obeys God, what about God's command,  
*Do whatever Sarah asks?*  
—When Abraham lies, God does nothing; when I lie,  
God reproaches me.

If Eve comes from the rib of Adam, every man  
afterwards passes through a woman's birth canal.  
—When Abraham travels without me, wherever he goes  
is my home.

If God made Adam to plant the seed in the time it  
takes to saddle a camel, why did God make the seed  
grow nine months in Eve's good earth?

—If God tells Abraham to leave the graves of his  
ancestors, were the bones of my forebears buried  
too deep to mention?

If a man fells an oak, when its roots smell water it will  
sprout again.

—When he gave me to Pharaoh, Abraham got in  
return sheep, oxen, and slaves;  
God gave Pharaoh boils.

If Abraham is unjust to the shepherds, I will hate it,  
but woe to the wife who complains to me.

—When Abraham dies, I will die, and we'll be buried  
together so our bones touch.

## FROM ABRAHAM'S BOOK OF PROVERBS

*How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? Proverbs 1:22*

If you spit at the sun, it does not get wet.

—If God says, *Go!* prepare to die in the desert.

If the rug merchant promises the red threads won't unravel, be ready to sleep on rocky ground.

—If you trust the Hittite on the age of that camel you bought, expect a viper to lick your fingers when you put them down its hole.

If you watch the maize seed sprout, remember it grows when you sleep.

—If God's promise is unfulfilled, it's still God's promise.

If you can build a bridge across a canyon, can you throw a rope to the moon?

—Perhaps you can endure a God who gives commands, but can you live with a God who says nothing?

If every falling rock is a threat to a handsome face, why pitch your tent near Yahweh's cliff?

—If my love for Sarah fails, so will the turpentine of the terebinth tree turn to honey.

If a fool shows you the way to the sea, you may never see water.

—If God leads you in darkness, will you ever see light?

If your camel walks fifteen days without water, do not  
beat the donkey because he needs an oasis twice  
a day.

—If pregnant Hagar reproaches barren Sarah, do not  
expect a quiet soup.

If the man alone decides to pass his son through fire,  
remember the same camel skin covers husband  
and wife in bed.

—If you climb God's mountain of glowing coals,  
expect the soles of your feet to burn.

If you believe there's good grazing on the far side of  
the country, do you want your sheep to die on  
the way?

—If you wrestle with Yahweh, beware of a knee in the  
groin.

If you have faith in God's promise of sons and lands,  
must you die this side of the mountain before you  
see either?

—If God makes a covenant in blood with you, why are  
you surprised to see your flesh upon the altar?