

Symeon Stylites

Matthew Robb Brown

He ... took upon himself a form of asceticism ... previously unknown. He stood day and night on a pillar, in unceasing prayer. Symeon endured countless assaults from demons, but conquered them all by prayer to God. [He] healed by word and prayer many who were afflicted.

The Prologue of Ochrid

1

Symeon dug a deep foundation trench. The Lord said, "Deeper."
He dug down to weary, with pickaxe and shovel. "Keep going,"
the Lord said.
When he came halfway down to dead, the Lord said, "Stop, it is
sufficient. Now
build what you wish to build, for nothing will succeed without labor."

*He stood day and night on that pillar, in unceasing prayer
—wove a web of prayer, to stick the world together.
He built the way the top of a tree builds,
with what is given, what is essential.*

Symeon conversed from his perch:
"Don't disturb me now, Mother,"
"If we become worthy of the next world,
Then we shall embrace."

*My body keeps on trembling. This column
crucifies me. Where can I get my tree-legs now?*

Beneath Symeon's feet, pilgrims gathered fruit.
Mary the weary picked up mercy. Theodore the turncoat
turned to repentance. Alexander picked up his bed and walked.
Barry's eyes met those of his father; they leaped to an embrace.

So what will I build, then?
Have mercy on me, I am still digging.

2

Were I stronger, I'd swing with every wind,
rock with the breeze, wet with the rain.
I'd be the baby in the trust of the tree.

On the column that has risen from a sprouting blade
of leaf, a column standing on a seed that died,
I will let it lift, to lift me
some sweet distance toward you.

Orders of oak support no Parthenon;
but their windy random rocking
supports the saints in green.

Elms buttress and arch the ceiling; I see my limbs
lifted over the echoing nave. I side with the Stylite
though vertigo binds me from joining him.

Have mercy.

To add to my height above the narrow ground,
I will approach the light,
getting to the teeth of the wind,

become its prey, consumed in it;
become its prayer.

Matthew Robb Brown has been writing and publishing poetry since 1969. He earned his master's of fine arts in poetry at Ashland University (2016) and has had work appear in numerous magazines, small presses, and anthologies, most recently in *Image*, issue 102. His first full-length poetry collection, *Again With the Light*, was published in 2020 by Resource Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock.

Icon Clock: Jim Forest Remembers

Matthew Robb Brown

He peered at the clock above the elevator door.
Then he remarked, simply, how, centuries before,
a crucifix would have hung in such a space.

Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese poet, contemplated
things I took for granted. We rotate more
with the hands of a clock, than we seem to hang

with the arms of our Lord and Savior, stretched
for our sins. It has become our icon of unity,
the thing we all appear to agree on, while we agree

on little else. An object of faith, a judge of how
we are doing. It can get us to rush by someone who
may need us, to miss the beauty of the thousand things

we might pass every day. We need to know the time,
don't we? But, in a different way, a crucifix could,
also, have told you the time. You would know that

it is the last days, of our lives if not of the world;
it is the day of Grace, not Law, the day the door is
freely open to us, if we will change our minds.

Edited, in conjunction with the author, by Sydney Lea

Light

Matthew Robb Brown

Light. Light we can see, light we can touch,
light we can taste, that nourishes us.
Light in the branches; light that is bird's songs,
light that is blossoms; light in aurora's ropes
and curtains. Reflected light, deep in a well,
light in the middle of darkness, light that darkens
the way of schemers. Light that throws off the aim
of the violent. Light speeding the prayer of the faithful.
Homing the shots of the simple. Uncreated light,
light in the mountain, in folds of the Savior's clothes:
Confounding minds, feeding hearts, our terror and hope.
Light on the printed page where we live, and light
beyond all words, where we also live.

O light, O light, O light
Light of mercy, light of Christ, Light of the Virgin
—when all is dark, a shadowed womb admits the Sun.
Thief steals in; thin dawn pilfers night.
Vesper light, taking leave, leaves light.
Light on finished saints, on struggling faithful;
light on icons and the people
fills the Temple, then and now, here and there,
for all the faults, for all our darkness—Light.