

## Poem

by Paul Quenon

### Hermit's Yard

*for Fr Louis Merton*

Sleek grackles  
slink past  
black  
one stretched  
neck  
oil-slicked  
blue  
checked out this  
dude

dead set  
one white-ringed eye  
on him  
judged him  
one dud

too wooden to slide  
tip to tail  
one slippery wave  
sheer rhythm  
high-stepp'n in grass  
made smooth as wax  
on jazz club floor

one up-beat  
leap  
and off he flew  
dropped behind  
one white  
scat  
to tell: for me  
that's enough of you

and for you  
O Hell  
that's enough of that.

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### Little Scribe\*

Each instant at my desk  
lays down an unwritten line  
in some psalm undisclosed  
~ the quill and scrape  
on parchment, rough on my palm,  
the faint click of a latch far  
down the hall, and silent lamplight  
watches on.

A moment to go, or two,  
and the bell must tell me  
the spell is broken and shall  
cast itself larger yet in choir.

The instant, suddenly shortened by half  
precludes my writing more ~ O

fear not, little scribe,  
obedient, distressed,  
you'll return to the rune  
left off on the page,  
its uncompleted O  
gilded with silence.

Precious the gap  
that arrests the line  
from circling to a close

the curve suspended  
from completion in time  
where every instant,  
its circumference hesitates,

breathless, to complete,  
its script

in the timeless.

*\* A legendary Medieval monk was a scribe, diligent for his work and for obedience. When the signal for the Divine Office rang, he immediately laid down his pen before finishing the illuminated letter. When he returned, he found the letter was completed in gold by an angel. In Zen calligraphy when a circle is drawn, the brush is lifted before closing the form.*

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### The Un-named Cat

A radioactive atom  
unobserved  
is in a state of decay  
and non-decay  
at once

In the black box  
Schrodinger's cat  
dependant for its life  
on that atom  
left unobserved  
is dead and alive  
both

Two stone Buddhas at  
Polonnaruwa  
the one awake, standing,  
the other lies asleep.

Both, when you are jerked clear  
out of the habitual,  
half-tied vision of things  
are one Buddha  
asleep and awake.

Unpublished photograph  
in the locked archive cabinet  
of the monastery dark-room:

two monks, one prone  
cottonballs blocking nostrils,  
another standing by at watch.  
Black and white image:

Fr. Louis dead, Dom Leclerque alive  
both, one monk,  
dead and alive both  
when

left  
unobserved.

**Brother Paul Quenon** OCSO has been a monk of Gethsemani Abbey since soon after leaving high school in 1958 and was a novice for two years under novice master, Thomas Merton.