

The Killing Fields, 2014

Sun rises,
peeling back shadows
and lighting truths

as feral dogs
roam with great purpose
down gravel paths

and free-range chickens
peck at seeds that
lie between teeth

long separated
from their owners—
mother, father, sister, brother

and the babies.

Bone fragments
crowded like prisoners
in small cells

rest now
in plastic cases
fogged with time

and skulls stacked
like columns of bowling balls
hold frozen expressions

staring out,
long past their frantic pleas.

Grass covers hillocks
and watery pools
are filled with remnants

of lives clothed
in colors
other than red,

as visitors bear witness
to the leavings
of inconceivable acts.

TEMPLE DOGS

In Mandalay
the temple dogs lie
in perfect equanimity
with the Buddha's attitude
of calming the seas
and the quarrels of relatives,
guardian companions
seated at the base of golden pagodas
and strewn across the steps
covered with the shoes of the faithful.

The temple dogs wait
with the quiet patience
of saints
as seekers light candles,
pour cups of water
over the heads of small Buddhas
to heal earthly ills,
problems that protrude
like the ribs
of hungry cats
that lay curled
at the feet
of the standing Buddha,
waiting for more auspicious times.

The temple dogs follow
the line of nuns
draped in pink cloth,
carrying broad baskets
atop shaved heads
to collect rice
from the villagers
who cast scraps
of chicken or beef
to the animals
with keen noses
for survival.

Temple Dogs, new stanza

As the street dogs climb
heaps of garbage
looking for leftover sustenance,
corrupt Generals
cast out by the righteous
cower in the basements
of their conscience,
exiled from their ill-gotten gains
and facing reincarnation
as beggars.

THE CARRION GANG

In the Arizona desert,
black-caped marauders
ride thermals
in the sky,
long finger-like feathers
at their wingtips
ripple
then flatten

as they coast
to ground
in search of
small cooling bodies
of roadkill,
consummate scavengers
serving us all
as they clean up
the countryside

then wait
in a dark cluster—
a committee
of feathered hunchbacks
resting in the rising warmth
as day opens
over asphalt—
waiting
for the inevitable.

In Tibet,
it is believed
that vultures are *Dakinis*,
the equivalent of angels,
who take souls
into the heavens,
preparing for
the transmigration
into another circle
of life.

They soar over
human corpses
laid out

The Carrion Gang, continue stanza

on steel gray stones
atop wild plateaus,
naked and cold
as the barren landscape,
stiff and still, waiting
as the living
give up
the departed
to the sky burial

and pay solemn respect
to these creatures
of the air.