

Postmodern poet: the casual observer

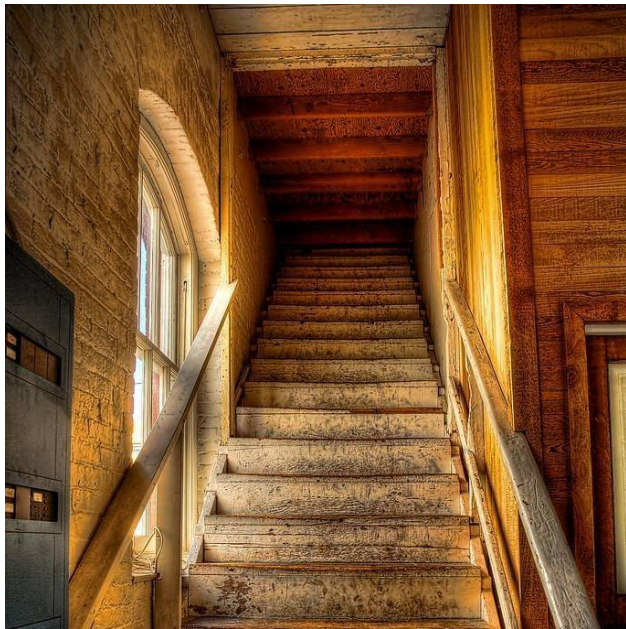


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“Where the sun sets over the city, there is a staircase which remains my favourite place to sit and watch the people pass by. . .” wrote Emily Isaacson, as she began her book of Hours, modeled after *Rilke’s Book of Hours* by Rainer Maria Rilke. Isaacson’s book of hours, also of love poems to God, is written from the perspective of a young nun in a convent. The young nun practices the vows of poverty, chastity, enclosure and obedience. Her life is juxtaposed with that of the Madonna of the streets, a woman who is a prophet sent from heaven and lives very simply among the homeless and poor. In this book, Isaacson’s postmodern poetry, in search of art and its inspiration is conformed in obedience to the gift. Inspired in her work by Madeleine L’Engle and C.S. Lewis as well as Ruth Pitter and Rilke, Isaacson waits for just the right moment to speak her poetic justice into the Roman Catholic Church. This time again, her words are veiled, “through myth and symbol, through character and atmosphere, through

description and abdication—so it remains respectful of other’s truths. That is the onus of poetry.”

Isaacson has always been a people watcher, and felt that her most valued perceptions were sharpened by the astute observation of people and their behaviours. She remembers being as young as four, sitting on the sidewalk and watching the world pass by. As such, she is a student of human nature at a university of observation—“there are friends/ in this neck of the woods/ who are not afraid of the dark,/ but hang out the moon each night” she wrote.

In Isaacson’s first book, she refined and polished her stylistic and lyrical poetry, as predictable as the symbol under which she wrote, that of the gilded lily, the “fleur-de-lis”. This was her unfailing symbol of peace and innocence. She was educated at Bastyr University of natural medicine and drew from her knowledge of botany, nature, and science to write her life’s work: she eventually composed the three volume set of postmodern poetry called ‘The Fleur-de-lis’, comprising over 800 poems. Passion became her forward movement.

Isaacson’s work *Hours From A Convent*, in prose-poetry, is a story that almost reads like a novel with insight and detail into the prayer life of a deeply spiritual lifestyle. She is a long-time friend of the nuns of Poor Clare, to whom the book is dedicated. They, as a community, have read her poetry before its publication, and are in full support of her endeavors. Their convent is located in Mission, on cemetery road, and is founded after the order of St. Clare of Assisi.

Isaacson speaks of Restorative Justice in her book, and she has trained in this field in both Mission and Abbotsford, becoming a Restorative Resolutions facilitator in Mission, and mentor in Abbotsford. She has served as a nutritionist at the Abbotsford Food bank, in addition to two other non-profits she works closely with. She has always worked as a volunteer to some measure in the community, whether visiting the elderly, working in the hospital, horse-walking at VTEA, graphic designing, playing piano, teaching, or working in the local art gallery.

Isaacson does readings frequently for her audiences. She draws from all walks of life to create and has herself walked a difficult road of reparation. In her books, she imparts forgiveness, humility, and justice. For what good is it to have the skills of non-violent communication and restorative justice if not to apply them first to your own life, and then help others? This is the essence of conflict resolution. And there is a conflict within every person that needs resolution, or it will become a conflict in society and in the community. The conflict occurs when we are no longer able to remain neutral. It was this neutrality she fostered by her patient observations of humanity, animals, and nature.

A great proponent of neutrality in our dealings and discussions with those in our constellation, Isaacson believed that in response to our inner conflict, we will collaborate with others, compromise, practice avoidance, or use force. She once said, "the real crux of rhetoric is that it employs charisma and persuasion to convince someone over to a side. This is part of the dogmatic way that democracy is founded. The House of Commons testifies to the use of continual rhetoric and debate. If we don't acknowledge that there are two different sides to every issue, particularly when someone strongly disagrees with our point of view, and engage in rhetorical use of words, we are somehow missing the mark of what it means to be human, intellectuals, and educated."

Isaacson would like to see more of the hard-won privilege of having words used appropriately for the basis of boundaries, balance, and justice being played out both in small conversations and significant advocacy, mediation, and law-making. This was one of the hopes Isaacson had in founding Holistic Vision International, an organization to provide advocacy and human rights in mental health. The neutrality that considers each person as equal and deserving, of having human rights, from a humanitarian standpoint, begins within, and is reflected without. Isaacson has said that "when it is reflected in the global community we will no longer be fragile."

The Emily Isaacson Institute, May 2013