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Editor's Note

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Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

This issue is dedicated to two poets: Mark Strand and Craig Arnold. As a first-time editor of a literary journal, I could not be more thrilled to bring you two previously unpublished poems by these tremendously talented and respected artists. However, as simply a person who has been trying to write poems for many years, I would like to briefly address the impact these poets have had on my own life.

I first encountered Craig Arnold's work through a podcast from the Poetry Foundation. It was 2009. Craig had recently disappeared in Japan while hiking a volcano, and the podcast episode was a tribute to his life and work. As the poem "Asunder" was read aloud, I distinctly remember the impact that poem had. I was entirely taken over by language in a way I had no idea was possible. It was in that moment that I realized the powerful vehicle for empathy poetry can be. It was as if my own experience was being uttered back to me in a visceral, palpable, utterly real way. The idea that someone else had felt something similar to what I had felt, and could render it so precisely and distinctly, was a moment of revelation.

I ordered Craig's collection, *Made Flesh*, immediately and connected as powerfully with each poem in that slim volume as I had with "Asunder." I read this collection obsessively, and within a month or two I had memorized most of it. The poems in this collection contain the kind of sophisticated sounds, vivid images, and explosive lyrical moments that accomplish that impossible act of rendering human experience on the page. Reading *Made Flesh* was my first experience with contemporary poetry, and it is because of that collection that I decided to try to write poems of my own. I knew that if poetry could have the power to make someone feel less alone in the

world, it was an enterprise and endeavor I needed to be a part of. I never met Craig Arnold, yet his poetry had a tremendous impact on my life, and I am very honored to be able to publish one of his poems in this issue.

Unlike Craig Arnold, I did meet Mark Strand. Three years after discovering *Made Flesh*, I had transferred to BYU and was devoting myself to becoming a poet. At the time, however, I was particularly pessimistic about my writing. I had come to the conclusion that the immense amount of effort I was investing in writing poetry had amounted to nothing, and that my poems were not very good at all. When I flew to Tennessee to attend Sewanee Writers' Conference, I bleakly imagined it would be my last hurrah in the literary world, and that afterward I'd probably give up altogether. Cue Mark Strand.

Mark was the faculty member at Sewanee who was assigned to give me feedback on my work. It is an understatement to say that Mark was a rock star at the conference. Mark Strand was a rock star in the poetry *world*. And there I was, meant to get feedback on my "poetry" from this icon. In spite of his status, Mark was one of the most disarmingly warm and charming people I have ever met. When we met to discuss my poems, I was taken aback by his support of my work. He took me seriously as a poet, and urged me to continue writing.

In one of our conversations, he told me, "Lauren, your poems are sexy." I knew this was supposed to be a compliment, but I struggled to see it that way. I admitted it was something I was worried about. He seemed baffled by this, and asked why.

I answered honestly. "Isn't it kind of a taboo thing? To write sexy poems?"

He lit up with his trademark wry grin. "Only in Provo."

Throughout the ten-day conference, Mark approached me multiple times to urge me to keep writing what he called my “wild poems.” On the last day of the conference, he gave me his email address and said to keep in touch, and to keep writing. We kept an intermittent correspondence after the conference, sending poems back and forth, and he never failed to keep encouraging me. When I began working on this journal, I asked him if I could publish one of the poems he sent me. He graciously agreed. About a month later, I received news that he had passed away.

Mark Strand was a brilliant man and a gifted artist. Among numerous equally impressive achievements, he won a Pulitzer, taught at Columbia, and was regarded as one of the best poets of his generation. And yet, he took the time to be a friend and mentor to me, a person who could do very little in return and to whom he owed nothing at all. All this to say: Mark was not only an accomplished artist, he was a deeply generous and kind human being, and it is a personal joy to include him in *Inscape*.

This issue is a very personal one to me. It includes work that I feel is important, meaningful, and most of all, deserves a place in the world. So please, read & enjoy.

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