



Wattle¹

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¹During this April's COVID-19 pandemic stay-at-home order, I wattled a fence in the forest on our farm in Illinois and prayed and thought about how the holiness of God manifests in this bewildering time.

In my fence, which wends around an irregularly shaped garden near our house, there are fifty-seven rods—vertical fence posts each made from a single sampling two-inch-ish thick—and hundreds and hundreds of withies—horizontal, thumb-thick sticks (branches from the saplings) that get woven through the posts and stacked—some areas to three feet high, some to five feet high. The rods and withies are mostly ash maple (box elder) and black walnut, odds and ends cut from the overgrown mess of forest that has been advancing up the hill toward the house alarmingly quickly for the last decade (or so our neighbor says).

To make the fence, I chainsawed down the saplings and dragged them under arm in massive loads up the hill toward the house. Then I cut the rods and lopped the leftover branches into withies, hand-trimming each twig from every branch.

Some of the withies are smooth, with only a few nubs where I snipped off the little twigs one by one. Some are rougher, already-rough bark roughened even more with many clipped bits that make the wattle seem almost thorny. Some jut out at their twiggy end or bow awkwardly in the middle. Some are so hefty I could barely bend them around the rods—nearly rod-thick themselves; others were nearly wisps. Sometimes, their natural bents tensed against and with the rods that surrounded them, requiring all kinds of bicipital torque to set them in place. While weaving, every now and then you press down on the withies to tighten them up. Each withy (I learned by trial and error) had to engage four rods to stay in place. Some withies—the ones that didn't touch four rods, mostly—weren't set right the first time and blew out in the wind. New ones then needed to be put in, or old ones rearranged to close gaps.

The hope is that the withies will work with the rods to hold something in the uncertain ground with more than the strength of a single rod—to craft a fabric for holding. Yet—and this is important—they also let things through—the breath of wind, the essential bees. I suspect that the holes keep the fence from being blown down. Or at least that's the intent.

You could think of this essay as a fence, a wattle fence: rods straight and upright, with a great assortment of withies of all kinds entwined around them.

Probably, it totters. But anyhow, you could come in.

What is holiness, after all, but those fences which we build, which God builds in us, so that we may be protected from all that would harm us, and that we may try to protect ourselves from being harm. They are not to wall us off from the world, but to sanctify the world in which we live.

It is true that all this moral significance is contained in the word “holy” but it includes in addition—as even we cannot but feel—a clear overplus of meaning, and this it is now our task to isolate.²

Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*

*Hallowed be—how, no one can come in to the bramble of this forest—
honeysuckle and shark-toothed multiflora rose, bindweed and gooseberry,
creeping Charlie and garlic mustard—*

*Hallowed be—how, supposed to be that Minnesota was his way in to a
new start—to bounce out of the out of bounds was, in effect, to stay in line
on the good side—but how, he got laid off when they all had the COVID.*

Hallowed be—how, that word, “asylum,” might not mean that.

Spring is the mischief in me and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:³

Robert Frost, “Mending Wall”

*Hallowed be—how, but something slithered into their lungs’ hollows,
coils of thorny, serpentine something—*

*Hallowed be—how, it was hard to know what it was—with no clear defi-
nition, no tests in the Midwest—*

There is only one way to help another to an understanding of it. He must be guided and led on by consideration and discussion of the matter through the ways of his own mind, until he reach the point at which the numinous in him perforce begins to stir, to start into life and into consciousness. We can co-operate in this process.⁴

Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*

*Hallowed be—how, the unflagging advance of the thicket up the hill of the
yard—how, ash maple and basswood and black walnut and fleabane and
ragweed—how, the neighbor said it was so clear just seven years ago—*

*Hallowed be—how, the psychologist showed me the scores and said,
“Well, you don’t have ADHD”—how, but, I’m not sure I’ve had a clear
thought in months, let alone a clear sentence.*

²Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 5.

³Robert Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 34.

⁴Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 7.

Just get people thinking. About what a fence can or cannot do.⁵

Viewer comment on Ai Weiwei's NYC community art project,
Good Fences Make Good Neighbors

Hallowed be—how, if I could just get some space to think about it!

*Hallowed be—how, maybe, if I put a fence here, the ducks will stay out
and I can have one ordered, tidy space with some flowers—where it at
least looks neat.*

*Hallowed be—how, at evening chores, the fog in the pasture was white
enough that it seemed to delay rather than hasten the night's coming
on—how, the field felt like a snow globe in reverse, the snow outside,
and I was in the bubble, it moving with me—how, one feels in fog, pre-
served, bewildered, the tiny insulate globe itself a wide eye—surrounded
by whiteness around—how, just branches and dead grass and the white
of the edges of everything—*

Hallowed be—how, at evening chores, the fog in the
pasture was white enough that it seemed to delay rather
than hasten the night's coming on—how, the field felt like
a snow globe in reverse, the snow outside, and I was in
the bubble, it moving with me.

Why is light given to one who cannot see the way,
whom God has fenced in?

Job 3:23

Hallowed be—how, frequently asked questions order askers not answers—

*Hallowed be—how, he says, "This is what your Christians do"—but
mostly stays silent.*

Hallowed be—how, God, the college bubble used to be a joke!

*Hallowed be—how, I guess I wouldn't even know how to ask the question
anyway?*

He moves in darkness as it seems to me
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.⁶

Robert Frost, "Mending Wall"

⁵Nicholas Baume, *Ai Weiwei: Good Fences Make Good Neighbors* (New York: Public Art Fund, 2019), 160.

⁶Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, 34.

Hallowed be—how, it all feels dead in this woods—how, still the rope of wild grape vine around the branches—how, white and quiet even the sky, the desolate, salted road.

Hallowed be—how, a cough was just then not enough—how, it was so dry you couldn't expel anything.

Hallowed be—how, malaise makes its way—tendrilling, choking, poisoning before you know it.

Hallowed be—how, he told him he got shot that way before, another time by police, how, he said, "I just had COVID, man, I don't want to go back to that."

Hallowed be—how, we call him, the guy with all the posted no trespassing video surveillance no soliciting signs, the "scary neighbor"—he has a line of pines back of his piece—for a natural castling fort against our acreage—three years and we haven't met him yet—

Hallowed be—how, I know nothing about you lately, Lord—what I know and do is consume consume consume—and of course, Zoom.

He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."⁷

Robert Frost, "Mending Wall"

Hallowed be—how, we hear the scary neighbor's chainsaw cutting something down all March—how, his gun shoots what we hope during sleepless nights is not our sheep or dog or another person or himself—how, sometimes back there, behind that row of pines, in the Hidden Five acres, I sing in the poor pasture, find coyotes slinking off into the forest edge of the field—

Hallowed be—how, the notary came—how, I cleaned for hours—how, I bleached even our licenses—how, I hoped she wouldn't accept my offer of coffee just in case we might have something—how, I worried that she couldn't stay home—how, her race did not escape me—how, she said she figured it was all overblown—how, we tried above all not to cough—how, we needed that refinance pretty badly, but that's no excuse—

Hallowed be—how, it's always that way—what if they come before I'm finished tidying, and they always come before I'm finished—they'll know—how I've never forgiven my mother-in-law for not telling me that one time they were on the way until they were an hour from arriving even though she's forgiven me for far worse—how, but I can tidy until they come—how, right now, tidying—

⁷Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, 34.

Therefore come out from them,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch nothing unclean;
then I will welcome you

2 Corinthians 6:17

Hallowed be—how, that notary, she was the last non-family member to come into our home until the 4th of July.

Hallowed be—how, again the hours have gone—how, I haven't seen you at all—how, sometimes I like it that way.

Hallowed be—how, I sewed the masks wide —how, I ironed them, surrounded them with tiny, tidy white stitches—how, all you can see is eyes and their ambiguous crinkle—

Hallowed be—how, these hopes that we could keep from hurting each other—by cordoning ourselves off from others' very breath in a globe composed of wind.

Hallowed be—how, Julian walled herself into a hollow hazelnut amphitheater—how, she found boundary workable for trying to say.

Hallowed be—how, it didn't probably keep out the plague or, honestly, even let her escape—how, everyone knew where she was if they wanted her—and I guess they did want her—

... for you yourself warned us, saying "Set limits around the mountain and keep it holy."

Exodus 19:23

Hallowed be—how, a chainsaw requires desire so raw it's like anger, the blast of tearing pull—again, again, again—your arm in an action that doesn't accrete, doesn't progress, but must above all concentrate.

Hallowed be—how, it doesn't start the first time, ever. Or the second.

Hallowed be—how, each pull requires the same blast, precision, focus—or greater—that it requires more because starting with the second pull, the muscles begin to tire.

Hallowed be—how, whatever that was in the shoulder rips—how, the anger and sear—how, the swear—of the arm.

Hallowed be —how, the danger when it kicks up for good requires Robert Frost's "Out, out—"—requires a memory of your own death—but in advance, like for Hezekiah or something.

Hallowed be—how, his line “No one believed” that the boy’s pulse could dim that quickly after having his hand cut off is instructional⁸—how, your line must be a revision of it—how, it must be in fact “I believe; help my unbelief!”⁹—how, that you must believe you will, really will, die in short order that you may not die right now.

Hallowed be—how, chainsaws require that you know that you will stop when there is a near miss—how, you decide to halt when a large branch you’ve just sawed down knocks your helmet too hard—how, when you drop the saw—with the safety on, but still—how, when you trip almost, it works an alert that you had wearied more than you knew—how, you see then, again, that you almost died just there.

Hallowed be—how, at every stage you must know when to call it a day—that this is why days, in fact, are to be called—how, Genesis 1:5 proves it—

Hallowed be—how, the most important thing is to pay very close attention to what you are cutting down, and to what you are building.

Hallowed be—how, the most important thing is to pay very close attention to what you are cutting down, and to what you are building.

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

Wallace Stevens, “Anecdote of the Jar”¹⁰

Hallowed be—how, the saplings drag and tangle when I pull them up the hill—how, sweat and breath—how, body and heartpound—how, a real body just plods—and even that only if you’re white.

Hallowed be—but how, the rod in the fence post pounder is a clapper—how I lift the heavy pounder bell above my head again and again—nearly beyond my strength—its dip, when I let it down, is the resound.

Hallowed be—how, a portable fence for any given animal means “This is a green pasture”—

⁸Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, 137.

⁹Mark 9:24.

¹⁰Wallace Steven, *The Collected Poems*, New York: Vantage Books, 1954, p. 76.

Hallowed be—how, Ai Weiwei, when he made that show about refugees and fences in New York City finally just had to acknowledge it—how, “this work really comes out not from creativity but from regulations—like most of my work.”¹¹

Hallowed be—how, even Yahweh used a portable enclosure—how, they called it the tent of meeting—how, Moses wore a mask out of there to keep from hurting people—how, Joshua wouldn’t leave.

Hallowed be—how, you could also call it a frame—how, also a nest, which word occurred to me as I wattled it in, the ducks in their quack racket making their way all around.

The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
I have a goodly heritage.

Psalm 16:5–6

Hallowed be—how, a portable fence for animals, say, sheep, of course, does not mean freedom, except freedom from hurting the land, from sinking in their own waste—how, of course, that’s nothing to be sneezed at, really.

Hallowed be—how, a finger over the post’s rough bark slides like a pianist’s—how, like Huntley Brown’s—how, it slides con fuerza—how, with nothing so simple as ebullience—how, nor ease, though it may look like ease—how, nor grace under pressure—how, nor simply play—how, rather ample—how, his glissades nerve out, distinct over a whole orchestra—how, when he plays at a funeral—Rodney Sisco’s funeral—the resurrection is immanent—

Hallowed be—how, just then I noticed that—the post itself has leafed out—a bunch of them have—rooted down and lifted up—how, the post and the finger withies are making something new after being cut down.

Jesus, be a fence all around me every day.
Jesus, I want you to protect me as I travel on my way.
Jesus, be a fence all around me every day.
Jesus, I want you to protect me as I travel on my way.¹²

Sam Cooke, for *The Soul Stirrers*, 1961, quoted in August Wilson, *Fences*

Hallowed be—how, Pastor Tate said on Twitter recently that every breath you make is a victory you take away from the enemy.

¹¹ Ai Weiwei, *Good Fences Mark Good Neighbors*, New York: Public Art Fund, 2019, p. 32.

¹² August Wilson, *Fences* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 21.

Hallowed be—how, the internet has frustrated us so many times, Rhonda rebukes Satan at the beginning of every meeting we have.

Hallowed be—how, they think maybe new laws will help keep them from shooting them—

Hallowed be—how, the Lord is my keeper, the Lord who sings over me—how, the Lord is a mother hen, how, the Lord hems me in behind and before—how, I am afraid of my own sin, that it will hurt others—how, it will make them love me less—

Hallowed be—how, Tamir Rice—how, George Floyd—how, Philando Castile—how, Breonna Taylor—how, Michael Brown—how, Eric Garner—how, Trayvon Martin—

Hallowed be—how, are they just kindling?—how, are we bent into a fence?

So, the buffered identity of the disciplined individual moves in a constructed social space, where instrumental rationality is a key value, and time is pervasively secular. All of this makes up what I want to call “the immanent frame.”¹³

Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*

Hallowed be—how, Charlotte told me, in her five-year-old way, that God beeps inside her—how, she said, God is SO big that he can be with everyone at the same time—how, she said, God is real and she can prove it—how, but just then, when I was waiting for her answer with everything in me, she said, “And that’s the end of my sentence—” and left me alone on the screened-in porch.

Hallowed be—how, in deaths of migrants in border sectors statistics compiled by the US Border Patrol and arranged by fiscal year, “data may change based on new discovery of remains and possible dates determined by a medical examiner.”¹⁴

Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit.

John 10:1

Hallowed be—how, the very first time I touched an electric fence—walking the west coast of Ireland—how, I wanted to find some sort of short cut back, to give up—how, the wire where I touched it when I failed the hurdle blast-stung each striation—agonist/antagonist at once—how,

¹³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), 542.

¹⁴ United States Border Patrol, “U.S. Border Patrol Southwest Border Sectors Deaths by Fiscal Year,” U.S. Customs and Border Protection, accessed July 14, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/y57qmhby..>

my leg juttet out, an alien other—how, hamstrung, how, wrung, how, the ringing gong of it—how, I learned just then to use profanity—

Hallowed be—how, in the nineteenth-century records of the Illinois Horticultural Society, Mr. Weir said, of the Ash Leaf Maple, “It is not a tree we wish to see live”—¹⁵

Hallowed be—how, but still, I do the same thing—how, I can only feel all right in my fence’s tree-cutting if I think of them as “invasive species”—

Hallowed be—how, I as a citizen regret that the term “junk tree” is designated in the OED “American.”

One of the ideas that is expressed again and again by Native cultures is that their sacred ways are inseparable from the ordinary. Most evangelical Christians . . . have compartmentalized world views . . .¹⁶

Richard Twiss/Taoyate Obnajin (He Stands With His People)

Hallowed be—how, when our neighbor saw my withies wattled, flowers finally blooming—months after I’d littered the ground he patiently mows for me with twigs that chewed up his mower—how, he said, “You’ve made your own Eden—”

Hallowed be—how, when our neighbor saw my withies
wattled, flowers finally blooming—months after I’d
littered the ground he patiently mows for me with twigs
that chewed up his mower—how, he said, “You’ve made
your own Eden—

Hallowed be—how, I was just trying to make some order out of the chaos!

Hallowed be—how, he said, “If you had a lot of money, what I would do is clear out all of this”—how, his bad-shouldered arm swept across the front acres of advancing grove from which I’d drawn the fence wood—“here.”

Just in case my faith go,
I’ll live by my own, no
I’ll live by my own, no
I’ll live by my own¹⁷

The Weeknd, Kendrick Lamar, “Pray for Me”

¹⁵ *Transactions of the Illinois State Horticultural Society for 1865* (Chicago: Emery & Co, 1866), 40.

¹⁶ Richard Twiss, *One Church, Many Tribes: Following Jesus the Way God Made You* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2000), 90–91.

¹⁷ Lyrics written by Abel Abraham Tesfaye, Adam King Feeney, Kendrick Lamar, and Martin McKinney. Lyrics accessed in Nina Braca, “Here Are the Lyrics to ‘Pray for Me’ by Kendrick Lamar & The Weeknd,”

Hallowed be—how, soon my flexor carpi ulnaris twinged and burned at every twist of the wrist—at all of the thousands of squeaking ratchet action trimmer clips—at each grasp of a fence post to waggle and wrench it from the ground, at each strike of the hammer to pound it in again—how, then it was lifting the cast iron pan, too, or whisking hot fudge sauce, being jostled—how, I can't even consider going to the doctor or resting it—how, even a brace doesn't keep it from hurting.

Hallowed be—how, the thing about electric fence is that any animal must truly believe in the fence—how, all the magazines say it—how, an animal must respect the fence, or—how, it must be culled immediately—how, it's because it will keep getting out—how, it will be leading the flock or the herd away—how, if they try to escape, it can lead to “tragedy.”

Hallowed be—how, “culled” is a euphemism for “killed”—how, it's not a very good one.

Hallowed be—how, that system must assume some overabundance of animals—how, we have like eighteen sheep, what, are we going to just kill them?—how, and but who has access to processors like that?—how, and what processors can drop everything to cull your fence-agnostic animals into yes, smaller-than-end-of-season-target-sized-yet-still-delicious chops during a time of pandemic?

Hallowed be—how, apparently, we are a seeker-sensitive family farm?

Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from hurt and harm!

1 Chronicles 4:10

Hallowed be—how, 222 miles of border wall have been constructed on the Trump Wall, as of this writing—how, the website trumpwall.construction details the sections on a tidy table, with a header that says “work in progress, please be gentle”—

Hallowed be—how, the boy in “Out, out—” was doing the work when his hand did not refuse to shake with the chainsaw—how, even though a child, “he saw all spoiled.”¹⁸—how, you can't keep anything from “spilling,” cannot keep the life in him by holding a chainsawed arm like a jar, up like take this cup—how, every time I use the chainsaw I think of him—how, I build on his arm—

Hallowed be—how, your fence must be perfect—how, sheep netting is rarely perfect—how, no less you must make it perfect—how, you must

Billboard.com, February 12, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/y67je84m>.

¹⁸Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, 137.

walk it down again and again if there are branches and weeds, how, if the signal is weak—how, it could be anything or nothing—how, I found the whole flock out that afternoon, down by the barn—

Hallowed be—how, it was Father’s Day—how, I’d meant to give Josh a day off from the chores—how, but I had to call him when the sheep were out—

Hallowed be—how, we found the one sheep dead in the tangle—wrestled, twisted, wrenched, dragged down—the whole thing down and could not get free—how, we had to cut the fence apart in a dozen places to get him out—

Hallowed be—how, his name was Ignatius of Loyola—how, he was born the spring of 2020 in the same cohort as Julian, Thomas Merton, Gustavo Gutiérrez, and James Cone—how, his penultimate Sunday, we had snuggled for photos when I was out on a morning walk—how, I remarked knew him by the smallest margin of fawn coloring along the edges of his ears—how, and Josh dug the grave under the big tree—

Hallowed be—how, while Josh dug, I moved all the rest of the fences and pounded them in again amidst the thigh-high clover—how, each temporary fence post required thirteen pounds with the orange hammer, each strike hurting my wrecked arm.

Hallowed be—how, I brought the sheep in the fence again.

Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,
That wants it down.¹⁹

Robert Frost, “Mending Wall”

Hallowed be—how, but are you a good witch or a bad witch?

Hallowed be—how, we actually met the scary neighbor last week—how, because again, the fence didn’t keep the sheep in that forest—how, the man we couldn’t meet for three years of hot-crossed-buns or mental wishes in a direction, came to the front door to tell us the sheep (but he thought they were goats because of the breed) were out and visiting his yard—

Hallowed be, how, that one sheep, Spot, will follow you anywhere if you have a handful of Louise’s grain-free salmon-and-sweet-potato dog food, so it wasn’t that big a deal, really, to get them back in—how, plus Immortal Diamond and Johnny are always going to want a scratch—how, and sheep do follow—

¹⁹ Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, 34.

Hallowed be—how, Mike, the neighbor, talked to me for a half hour—how, how relieved he was that we weren’t going to develop the property—how, that we weren’t going to let chemicals leach into the pond—how, he designs massive machines for factories—how, he leaves the town alone and they leave him alone—how, he’s been burned before—how, the signs, though, the posted signs—how, they are not for us—how, that loaf of bread I gave him was the best he’d tasted in his entire life—

“Why do they make good neighbors? Isn’t it
Where there are cows?” But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I’d ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.²⁰

Robert Frost, “Mending Wall”

Hallowed be—how, there is no tension like the tension of needing to get a steer on a trailer when there is a rare, lucky appointment at the processer during a pandemic when you’re running low on burgers and especially when the steer in question is Three.

Hallowed be—how, there is no tension like the tension
of needing to get a steer on a trailer when there is a rare,
lucky appointment at the processer during a pandemic
when you’re running low on burgers and especially when
the steer in question is Three.

Hallowed be—how, the placement of movable fences in a pasture toward the loading of the steer on a trailer requires perfection in set-up, requires the steer to both believe the electric fence and be willing to step up onto a trailer or believe there are no other options—how, we’ve done it a bunch of times—how, but in a non-permanent set-up, well, it’s not easy—how, the set-up itself can take several hours, to create a funnel of fencing, a chute of precisely the minimum width—

Hallowed be—how, if you fail the first time, the cow is on to you.

Hallowed be—how, it was my third time that day—how, and Three was onto us right away, anyway, even before the first.

So in one sense it is true that living within this frame pushes us to the closed perspective. . . . However, I have been arguing all along that the actual experience

²⁰ Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, 34.

of living within Western modernity tends to awaken protest, resistances of various kinds.²¹

Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*

Hallowed be—how, I brought my guitar into the field—how, I sang hymns of comfort to Three—how, I called him by his Trinitarian name—how, I shared with him the songs that I want sung at my own funeral—how, each time he relented—how, he would be touched—how, he let me bat away the face flies that plague him.

Hallowed be—how, each time I prayed that you would help us get the cow onto the trailer—how, I reminded you, that if we didn't get the cow on the trailer, there would be no meat for the people—how, perhaps if you miraculously got the cow onto the trailer, then maybe when you revealed yourself, Josh would believe again that you loved the world—or loved him, anyway—

Hallowed be—how, it was said—maybe in The Odyssey—that the bulls jumped themselves onto the sacrificial fires when the god in question was Zeus—how, I would have loved the romance of that or of a gentle good night.

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Matthew 7:13–14

Hallowed be—how, maybe you don't work that way? How, maybe 1 Corinthians 13 suggests that giving one's body to be burned for the glory of the story—is maybe not what you're asking for?

Hallowed be—how, I couldn't think, even as I was moving the fence to that end—of any reason you should listen to my prayer and move Three toward his end—

Hallowed be—how, I would have liked to have had the moral authority to remind you (if you needed reminding), for example, that you work vindication and justice for all who are oppressed and should therefore do x or y just thing—how, but in this case, it was sort of hard to see my personal hopes as “just”—because how, Three's not going on the trailer would mostly just cost us and our customers food, would be a humiliation (rookie, hipster farmers)—but actually might be a sort of rescue of Three.

²¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 555.

Hallowed be—how, and besides how, lonely might Ramón be, too, without Three there with him to flick a tail at the flies on Ramón’s face—

Hallowed be—how, it dragged on for the whole thirsty day, moving fence, moving fence until the dark—how, it was like each time the mistake in the set-up was so tiny—this little gap, this small egress or moment of the fence was not convincing—and he would approach the trailer and veer.

Hallowed be—how, he didn’t believe the fence—this break or that bit or height or step of the fence—how, Three sought and found the weaknesses, staked his bovine freedom on each breach.

Hallowed be—how, we went to bed with an empty trailer.

Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory. Selah.

Psalm 24:9–10

Hallowed be—how, we got up grim before it was light—how, it was just like when you know you’re going to fail—but how, because you might not fail, you have to keep doing it anyway.

Hallowed be—how, it was our last chance—how, we moved the entire set-up to a different gate, a different part of the pasture—how, as if Three wouldn’t know anymore what we were doing with that trailer—how, we thought that perhaps we could align the gate itself with the chute, for more stability—how, then we might convince the steer that the barrier was inviolable—how, it took us so long to set up—to pound in fence posts for the cattle panel chute (how, we weren’t messing around)—to raise up the cattle panels, roping them and carabinering them so that the chute fence was tall as a person—to wire off, too, a third of the pasture, in a nonthreatening, gradual reduction of the field in a direction.

Hallowed be—how, we moved into the forest to roust them out—how, it was clear they’d not forgotten—how, I ran to the gate, to the trailer, ready to close the door—how, the steers, then, began a startled run down the chute—how, yes, it was working perfectly, and up came Three to the gate and I was going to swing the trailer door closed on him at last—how, I had it perfectly prepared with slippery half-hitches from camp—how, I had it untied to push closed—how, our proximately increased terror at their massive size dissolved into Josh’s desperation and my singing and our utter weariness—

*Hallowed be—how, then rose up the fierce will—Three in his thunder—
through the narrow chute.*

The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Isaiah 52:10

*Hallowed be—how, Three breached—how, not like a humpback
breaches—how, like Moby Dick breaches—how, he leaped like a bull off
the altar, over our perfectly posted fence gate—how, he brought down
whatever would compel him—how, he crash crushed the gate as he
leapt—how, crumpled the dream of tidy order, its shifting boundary lines
and false freedom for a season—how, he felled the straight gate in his
furious haste and emerged unfazed and unhurt—how, he arced into the
open field—tumbling full ecstatic, sublime as a bee for his full flower—*

*Hallowed be—how, promptly he nosed again at the hospitable, consider-
ate, expansive territory of grasses.*

*Hallowed be—how, Josh threw his hat into the field in the unnumbing
heat of the summer dawn, sat on the edge of the trailer, his head in
his hands—*

... the world becomes apprehensible as world, as cosmos, in the measure in which
it reveals itself as a sacred world.²²

Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*

*Hallowed be—how, Ramón and Three, placid as stilled waves under the
command of divinity, noticed the hat in the grass—sniff nibbled it for a
moment, nonplussed, then ambled their crazy way back to the forest to
sleep, whatever the day's heat might bring.*

*Hallowed be—how, Three and Ramón—Ramón and Three—flick flies
from each other's faces in the shade of the trees—how, maybe they sing to
each other, but they do not sing for me.*

We must once again endeavor, by adducing feelings akin to them for the purpose
of analogy or contrast, and by the use of metaphor and symbolic expressions, to
make the states of mind we are investigating ring out, as it were, of themselves.²³

Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*

*Hallowed be—how, a window is a fence—how, a blind is a fence—how, a
curtain is a fence—how, glasses are a fence—how, eyes are a fence—how,*

²² Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 64.

²³ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 12.

the whites of the eyes are a fence—how, a day is a fence—how, a dream is a fence—how, a flag is a fence—how, a family is a fence—how, a sentence is a fence, a jot is a fence, tittles withies—how, a sign is a fence—how, a body—how, a woman’s body is a fence—how, an egg is a fence—how, a cracked egg is a fence—how, a mask is a fence—how, that comment there is a fence—how, that rat cage round of pernicious thoughts spoken and unspoken is a fence—how, a pandemic is a fence—how, a metaphor is a fence—how, an amendment is a fence—how, a spire is a fence—how, desires are a fence—how, I just want one nice thing is a fence—how, a joke is a fence—how, a fence is a fence.

Hallowed be—how, a window is a fence—how, a blind is a fence—how, a curtain is a fence—how, glasses are a fence—how, eyes are a fence—how, the whites of the eyes are a fence—how, a day is a fence—how, a dream is a fence—how, a flag is a fence—how, a family is a fence.

God has no satisfaction in reducing Isaiah to a gibbering mound of flesh on the floor. Bringing him to the point of realizing that he cannot even exist in the presence of God is not the purpose of the vision. Rather, that horrible realization is designed to prepare Isaiah to receive the purifying fire on his lips, which is in turn designed to prepare him for his mission.²⁴

John Oswalt, *The Holy One of Israel*

Hallowed be—how, these leaning walls and tottering fences.

I should have been too glad, I see—
Too lifted—for the scant degree
Of Life’s penurious Round—
My little Circuit would have shamed
This new Circumference—have blamed—
The homelier time behind.²⁵

Emily Dickinson

Hallowed be—how, when that song by a ’90s Christian band came on late Friday night—how, two teenagers were coming back from Beaver Camp—how, they pulled over the car and danced in the headlights right in the middle of the road at field’s edge—because who else would be coming down Wright Street, late as it was—how, the fields slivered particular grass leaves around them in a full gleam of the silver light—how, summer

²⁴ John Oswalt, *The Holy One of Israel: Studies in the Book of Isaiah*, 107.

²⁵ Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Pomes of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown, 1961), 147.

in the Lord's presence—and they, not just the moon, were “shaving[s] that fell on the floor of a carpenter's shop,” were withies that would be.

Hallowed be—how, years later, when one of them tried that same worship dance in a rented living room, to a different tune—how, she slipped on the slick carpet—how, she broke her foot and missed the class on Go Tell It On the Mountain—how, she wore a hobble brace for weeks while it healed.

Still I kept waiting to see Jesus.²⁶

Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea*

Hallowed be—how, just as I was weeding out the wattled garden, that mushroom hunter came up the driveway to say hello—how, he told me he has asthma, other diseases, but if it was God's time for him to go, it was fine—

Hallowed be—how, no less friendly, though—how, hiding what morels he'd found on the farm, of course—how, no less did he give me a Dryad's Saddle from his bag—how, no less did he tell me how to cook its lemony sponge in butter—how, I did just that.

Hallowed be—how, it was the first stranger's face I'd seen in so long—the first whole body and face, his overalls, his pronounced limp—how, I see him glorious in that heat and light—how, the image of the Lord upon him—how, I believed him from within the fence—

And in this sodenly I saw the reed bloud rynnnyng downe from under the garlande, hote and freyshely, plentuously and lively, right as it was in the tyme that the garland of thornes was pressed on his blessed head. . . . And full greatly was I a stonned for wonder and marvayle that I had that he that is so reverent and so dreadfull will be some homely with a synnfull creature liveing in this wretched flesh.²⁷

Julian of Norwich, *Showings*

Hallowed be—how, when my son pulled the stabilizing fifty-eighth picket out for no reason—how, when he peeled the bark off the first post from some unfathomable, adolescent impulse, I cried—how, because why would you wreck someone's work like that—

Hallowed be—how, yes, I'm a little frail right now, who isn't, but how maybe it even seemed then that in order for you to show your arm, my own, tendons burning, would be broken.

²⁶ Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), 19.

²⁷ Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, ed. Denise N. Baker (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 8.

Saints are more human, not less. The true saint is not one who has become convinced that he himself is holy, but one who is overwhelmed by the realization that God and God alone, is holy. He is so awestruck with the reality of the divine holiness that he begins to see it everywhere. Eventually, he may be able to see it in himself too: but surely he will see it there last of all, because in himself he will continue to experience the nothingness, the pseudo reality of egoism and sin. Yet even in the darkness of our disposition to evil shines the presence and the mercy of the divine Saviour.²⁸

Thomas Merton, *Life and Holiness*

*Hallowed be—how, a fortnight later, he asked me what sandpaper did—
how, I said it smoothed out the dents and digs—*

*Hallowed be—how, I saw him later that day, through a window, and
he had snatched some sandpaper from a painting project I was working
on—how, he was scraping it up and down the half-skinned, raggedy post,
how, he did it as if secretly, scratching smooth, up and down, “sor-ry,”
“sor-ry,” “sor-ry.”*

One way to understand your own condition is to write something and spend a long time revising it. The errors, the hits and misses, the excess—erase them all. Now read what you have rewritten out loud in front of some other people.²⁹ They will hear something that you didn't say aloud. They will hear what was there before you began revising and even before the words were written down. You won't hear anything but the humming of your own vocal cords.³⁰

Fanny Howe, “Waters Wide” ⊕

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²⁸ Thomas Merton, *Life and Holiness* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1963), 23–24.

²⁹ I am grateful for the listening of Thomas Gardner, Joel Sheesley, and Rhonda Mawhood Lee.

³⁰ Fanny Howe, *The Winter Sun: Notes on a Vocation* (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf, 2009), 167.