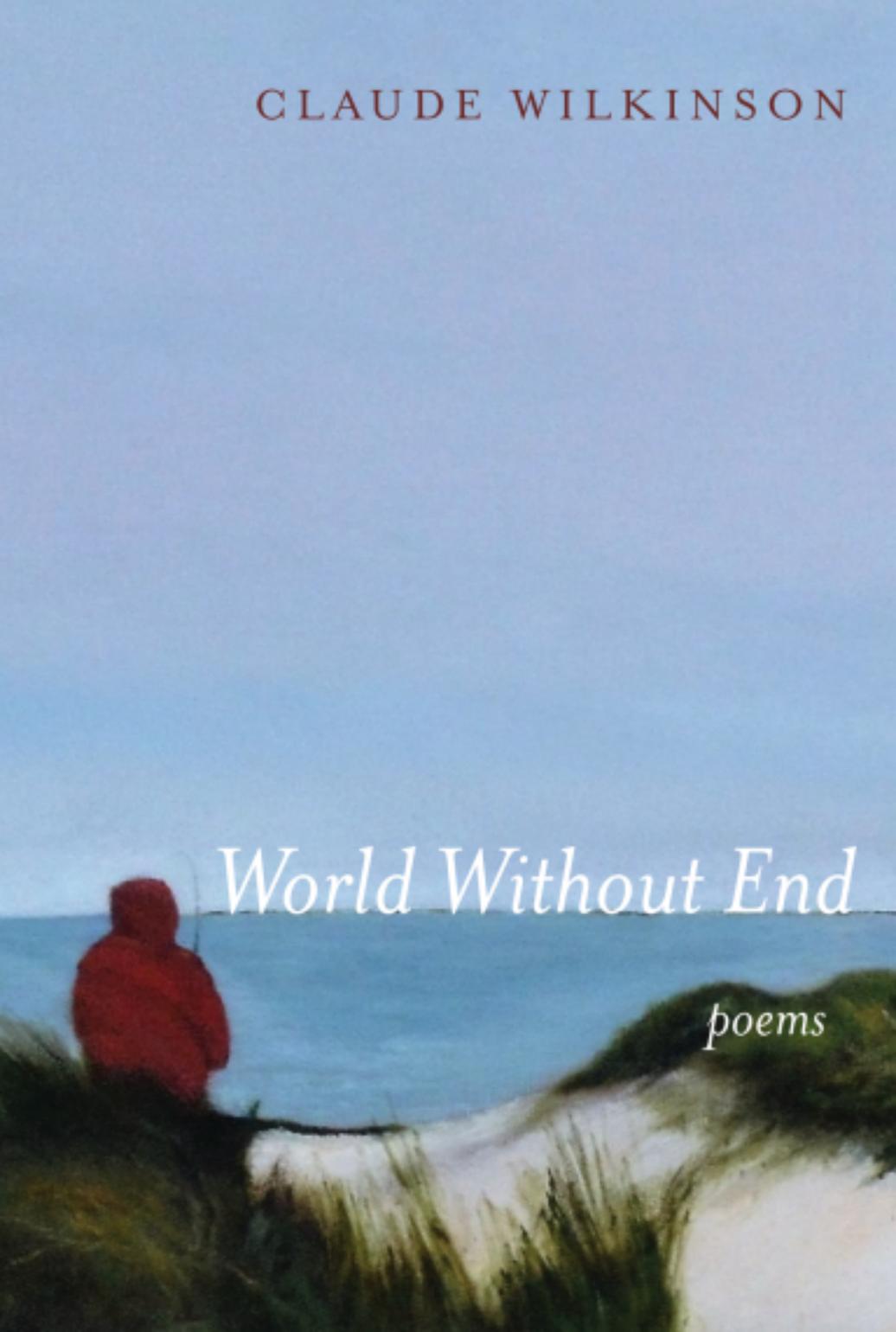


CLAUDE WILKINSON

*World Without End*

*poems*



# World Without End

WORLD WITHOUT END

Poems

Copyright © 2020 Claude Wilkinson. All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in critical publications or reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from the publisher. Write: Permissions, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3, Eugene, OR 97401.

Slant

An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers

199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3

Eugene, OR 97401

[www.wipfandstock.com](http://www.wipfandstock.com)

PAPERBACK ISBN: 978-1-5326-9956-6

HARDCOVER ISBN: 978-1-5326-9957-3

EBOOK ISBN: 978-1-5326-9958-0

*Cataloguing-in-Publication data:*

---

Names: Wilkinson, Claude.

Title: World without end : poems / Claude Wilkinson.

Description: Eugene, OR: Slant, 2020.

Identifiers: ISBN 978-1-5326-9956-6 (paperback) | ISBN 978-1-5326-9957-3 (hardcover) | ISBN 978-1-5326-9958-0 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: American poetry | Poets, American | POETRY—American—African American | American poetry—21st century

Classification: PS3573.I44183 W675 2020 (print) | PS3573.I44183 (ebook)

---

Manufactured in the U.S.A.

02/20/20

# Contents

## I

- Among Other Things, My Father Teaches Me How to Mow Grass | 2  
Four-leaf Clovers in Bibles | 3  
A Flight of Doves for Sherley Guy | 5  
Auspice | 7  
Eclipse | 8  
Heaven and Earth | 11  
Salvia | 13  
Lenten | 15  
Remembering My Mother Cleaning Fish | 17  
Snow | 18

## II

- Covenant | 22  
A Fledgling Ornithologist Attempts to Explain the Difference  
between Birds and Angels | 23  
Praise | 25  
Watching a Rosarian Prune Canes | 27  
Sunday Morning Wildflowers | 29  
Driving Home While Thinking of a Sermon I Had Just Heard  
on How God Even Looks After All the Animals Too When  
a Butterfly Collides with My Car's Windshield | 31  
Prophecy | 33  
Psalm | 35

## III

- In the Beginning, Audubon | 38

Theodore Dreiser Watches a Lobster Kill a Squid  
in an Aquarium | 39

Rumiesque Perhaps | 40

Walter Anderson Regrets Killing  
a Sea Turtle | 41

Theories on How Venus de Milo  
Lost Her Arms | 43

Vincent's Flowers | 44

#### IV

Weed | 54

Wasps | 56

A Guide for Listening to Mockingbirds | 57

The Love Life of Moss | 59

Flower Moon | 60

Internecine | 61

Destroying Angel | 63

Duet | 64

Dragonflies Hunting | 65

Live Bait | 66

Cottonmouth | 68

Montego Bay | 69

The Goliath Bird-Eating Spider | 71

The Mud Dauber and the Moth | 72

A Hunter with a 23½-Pound Wild Turkey Heads  
toward His Boat Near Big Island on the Mississippi River | 74

Deer Crossing | 75

Thusness | 77

Forecast | 78

Revelation | 79

Winter Field White with Snow Geese | 81

World Without End | 83

*Acknowledgments* | 85

**I**

## AMONG OTHER THINGS, MY FATHER TEACHES ME HOW TO MOW GRASS

Of course, there would be further nuggets,  
such as keeping my hands at ten and two o'clock  
around the Polara's big steering wheel,  
that girls could easily get pregnant,  
but first, it was his way to steady a lawn mower  
with a foot on top before snatching the starter rope,  
as I now imagine Nimrod might have taught his son  
how to draw a bow. Never mind Mississippi heat—  
anytime after the dew had dried and grass  
was over two inches tall, a yard was fit to be cut.  
And if, for any reason, it wasn't finished before dusk,  
I could still go on under light of our rural moon  
as long as I held to his simple rules:  
whether you are a child too close to your world,  
merely trust the brilliant lizard  
will skitter to safety; don't get distracted  
by a mist of whiteflies who burst up before you  
like petals off windblown violets;  
and though you see them with complete adoration,  
expect even grounded lightning bugs  
to fend for themselves; last, yet above all else,  
after making that first straight pass, be sure  
the mower's inside wheels roll in your outside track  
so the side discharge blows clippings away  
from the part you've already cut, which I  
then tried to take as a kind of blessed assurance  
that everything in this life, if done  
just right, should somehow fall in place.

## FOUR-LEAF CLOVERS IN BIBLES

As with teacakes and cloudlike meringues,  
in this too, my mother was expert.  
Under a net of evening shade  
from our two huge walnut trees,  
she would sit on her old wrought-iron chair  
in the hush just after supper swatting sweat bees  
and pointing me in the right direction.

Among scents of wild allium  
and waves of green deception,  
I groped from cold to closer  
to there at my sweeping palm  
where were clustered three or more  
of the magic charms she had seen  
at least six feet away.

A whole minute might go by  
as she twirled them between  
her index finger and thumb  
as if checking genuineness  
before sending me for her Bible  
with the white leather cover  
and luminous Sacré-Coeur  
stung with a ring of thorns  
above its table of contents.

Somewhere after the Fall  
but before the Resurrection, her favor  
ripened from emerald to golden  
in columns like verses themselves  
amid Job's patience or Solomon's wisdom.

The first leaf, they say, bears hope;  
the second, ironically, faith;  
the third leaf is for love,  
and a fourth holds the luck.  
When there's a fifth, even a sixth,  
they are paths to money and fame.  
And if ever a seventh, the finder  
can count on a long life as well.

Though our chances at nature's lottery  
are figured to be only one  
in ten thousand, or half those odds,  
if you believe the optimists.

Still, they were hunted then harbored  
in Bibles of other women  
in the community too, as they had been  
by their mothers and so on,  
perhaps for happier marriages,  
better children, or a bountiful garden.

On occasion, when I spot their fortunes now  
while spraying anthills or weeding the lawn,  
I sometimes imagine an endless line  
of all the saintly others, like my mother,  
halt from worn-out knees,  
taken in their dances with cancer,  
going one by one through Heaven's  
narrow gate, their winning bets below  
perfectly hedged and pressed.

## A FLIGHT OF DOVES FOR SHERLEY GUY

Beautiful clichés declare

you're still with us in each rustling breeze,  
in "the swift, uplifting rush of quiet birds

in circling flight," that we should  
look for you now in rainbows  
instead of sweating over a hot stove

to feed the Sunday multitudes,  
that God called you this time  
rather than another community family

needing your help with one  
of their sick, that you've found rest  
at last from peddling your produce

for a cache of bosom money  
O donor of silver dollars through generations  
of adoring children, rest even for you, O patron saint

of suspending your widow's work  
and offering any of at least five leftover desserts  
to every visitor who dropped by,

that your reticent mirth  
when remembering a gluttonous cousin  
or some wisp of gossip, which you were usually

too good to tell, from now on will only be  
available as "the diamond glint on snow"  
and in "gentle autumn rain." But back to the birds

circling in flight, as did a trinity  
of milk-white doves as well as one dyed pink  
to symbolize your neophyte soul.

Meant to be the last of a fitting eulogy,  
the doves spiral higher and higher, faster,  
slower, then faster again when you've caught up

with the veteran angels,  
while I surely hear you chuckle and say,  
"I know that ain't me, I ain't never moved that fast,"

as over a distant curtain of redbuds  
in bloom, the band of wings dip from  
flawless blue sky, their ugliness astonishing.

## AUSPICE

On just another day when  
I already felt like shit,  
through the gray drizzle, I saw  
on my neighbor's magnolia  
some glad little warbler  
choosing the wife of his dreams,  
plying her favors with a constant nectar  
of insects until I thought of two girls—  
either of whom maybe I should've married—  
one of them long dead  
and the other one now dying.

Yet there was the tide of vetch  
that I had let take the yard again  
this spring, and also my fears  
of any number of other things  
over which we might've quarreled  
to no end, such as my forgetting  
to bring flowers home often enough,  
her calling my poems "cute,"  
or I wanting us to fly  
to Cape Cod for the summer,  
but she preferring Pine Bluff.

## ECLIPSE

I

Among the sheer oversimplifications  
are tools used as proofs,  
such as marbles, a flashlight,  
and different-sized balls, so that  
each brightness that was let be  
to rule day and night can be had  
from most five-and-dimes.

Credits are dredged up  
for everything surrounding it—  
first, for the ancient Chaldeans,  
who, despite biblical tales of ineptness  
at discerning Nebuchadnezzar's dream,  
somehow apprehended enough  
of the mystery of the heavens  
to learn the saros, or repetition  
of eclipses' occurrence.

Celebrity is bandied about,  
Einstein being mentioned  
for particulars to do with gravity,  
and Olaus Roemer, who  
while gazing at Jupiter's obscuring,  
claimed the proximate speed of light.

Almost as if an apology, we're told  
that they were once, *once* mind you,  
thought to be miracles, possibly similar  
to a late summer meadow's

pulsing fireflies or the pod of bluest whales  
breaching an ocean's constant thunder.

There's no room now for musing  
on some brief dalliance  
between Diana and Apollo,  
since our astronomers  
have become so precise.  
Yet even after  
hard science explanations,  
what remains is still  
always called "beautiful," always  
"the beautiful corona."

2

But what could any of this mean  
when a cousin has been lost  
just a few days before, with whom  
I played stickball as a kid  
and was bound with  
in the same middle age.

Compared to throngs of those awaiting  
their phenomenon of cosmic luck,  
while for others, this wondrous death  
and resurrection of the sun, few gathered  
at a highway funeral home  
to witness what it's like  
when a man who was conceived  
and was born, lived, worked,  
and married, who had children  
and grandchildren of his own,

who was both diagnosed  
and treated with a sort of poison,  
and was then at last,

in a moment, wholly  
overtaken and overshadowed  
by his small disease.