

## Poems:

**"Casco Viejo, Panama," "Carretera Panamericana," "Oysterman," "Santa Librada,"  
"Path of the Quetzal"**

W.F. Lantry

**AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:** W.F. Lantry's (William F. Lantry ) poetry collections are *The Terraced Mountain* (Little Red Tree 2015), *The Structure of Desire* (Little Red Tree 2012) winner of a 2013 Nautilus Award in Poetry, *The Language of Birds* (Finishing Line 2011) and a forthcoming collection, *The Book of Maps*. He received his PhD in Literature and Creative Writing from the University of Houston. Honors include the National Hackney Literary Award in Poetry, CutBank Patricia Goedicke Prize, Crucible Editors' Poetry Prize, Lindberg Foundation International Poetry for Peace Prize (Israel), Comment Magazine Poetry Award (Canada), Paris/Atlantic Young Writers Award (France), Old Red Kimono Paris Lake Poetry Prize and Potomac Review Prize. His work has appeared widely online and in print in journals such as *Asian Cha*, *Gulf Coast* and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*. He currently works in Washington, DC. and is editor of *Peacock Journal*. These five poems come from a longer sequence inspired by an extended stay in the Republic of Panama.

**Casco Viejo, Panama**

The ancient architecture, hand built, stands  
as tribute to resilient workmanship:  
these balconies have held for centuries  
against earthquakes and daily thunderstorms,  
through lightning strikes and wars. Now a light breeze  
accompanies our steps as finches slip  
between wrought branches, always blossoming.

Nearby the church, we hear a woman sing  
and slip inside, drawn by her prised voice.  
A woman stands nearby the altar, gowned  
in white and rose, just as a circle forms:  
her friends singing as they gather around  
the joined couple. They laugh, embrace, rejoice  
through all the trials they've survived, and face

in coming times, here in this tranquil place.  
They seem to flow towards the open doors,  
and we flow with them, watching as sunlight  
touches her gown, resplendent, and transforms  
this long repeated scene to fresh delight  
as sweet chromatic singing overscores  
the joyous union of these fastened hands.

**Carretera Panamericana**

What kind of road would you, unfettered, choose  
to reach a place of transformation where  
the land and water merge, becoming one,  
becoming something else, a new domain  
eternal and refreshed, the forceful sun  
dissolving into plantain leaves, the air  
dynamic, filled with silent energy?

What route could lead us on to ecstasy?  
Who could imagine this? The fences made  
of living branches, pressed into the ground,  
the fenceposts rooted straight across the plain  
until the handmade thickets can surround  
entire fields with a colonnade  
fruitful and blossoming. And as the vines,

invited, show how vibrancy entwines  
even the smallest branch, and makes the whole  
a single force of viridescent light,  
we know the thunder, and the coming rain  
will mix with swirling winds and reunite  
both green and red into a single soul  
that blossoms, opening its jeweled hues.

**Oysterman**

I have so little in comparison  
to others, half my threadbare clothes are torn  
along the seams, twice or three times repaired,  
since of necessity I've learned to stitch  
the fabric tight by hand. Still, I've been spared  
the hunger to which other souls are born:  
I need so little and I have so much.

We clambered over rocks. We had to clutch  
handholds to keep our balance. Then we saw  
a man wearing rope sandals, in his hand  
a broken bladed knife. He probed a niche  
of stone, looking for something. He could stand  
unaided, as the waves struggled to draw,  
receding here, his legs back out to sea.

I can't say how he found the energy  
to fight both waves and hunger as he sought  
to prise the oysters from their place of stone.  
Balanced, he'd work a while, then would switch  
to his good hand, until the blade alone  
slipped underneath the shell, and he had caught  
all he required, and sang an orison.

**Santa Librada**

~ Patron of Las Tablas, Panama

Forget the tales of courage, and forget  
all you have heard: the legends of her life,  
her passing from this earth, for there is more  
and all is transformed here. Some men at sail,  
shipwrecked, were barely able to make shore  
but saved her statue amid all their strife  
and bore her with them as they fell to land.

They found a place of refuge and they planned  
to build a church, using the planks of wood  
from their wrecked ship. Her image disappeared,  
perhaps stolen, or lost within a gale,  
blown through this verdant shore where they had cleared  
the land for a foundation as they could.

But then, searching along the broken ground

within another distant field, they found  
her image, and so built their new church there.  
It still stands, and the town around it fills  
with pilgrims each July, who tell the tale  
with song and dancing. The procession spills  
into the decorated central square,  
their strong arms still bearing her statuette.

### Path of the Quetzal

The light here, prised mist, does not reflect  
on surfaces of ponds, the undersides  
of leaves: here things are simply as they are.

The correspondences of mountain air  
whose wind is motionless, a reservoir  
of energy, untroubled by the tides  
we knew so long ago when time was real,

echo within us. Silences reveal  
the greening voice of wings above our heads,  
although our vision can't substantiate  
the jeweled hints converging everywhere.  
We, in this peaceful stillness, contemplate  
the calm tranquility that overspreads  
this endless scene, where each thing becomes one:

a universal tapestry, earth-spun,  
a harmony of light, and air, and stone,  
bird wings and blossoms, even the sweet voice  
we heard within ourselves, clearly, aware  
in this place, of a passion to rejoice  
in rapturous devotion to these known  
convergences where all things intersect.