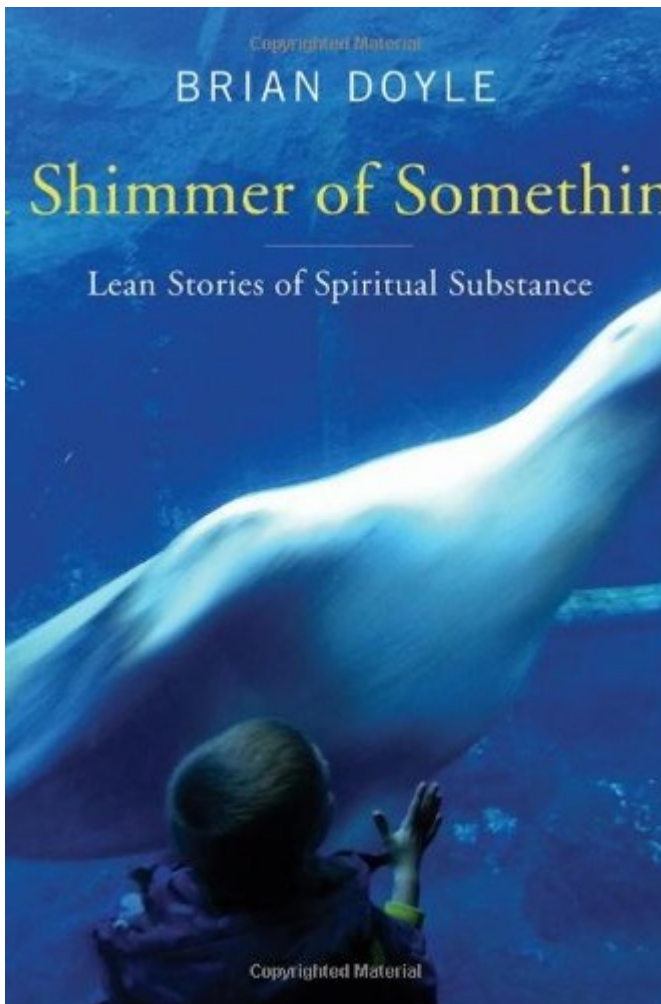


Jill Peláez Baumgaertner's Christmas list

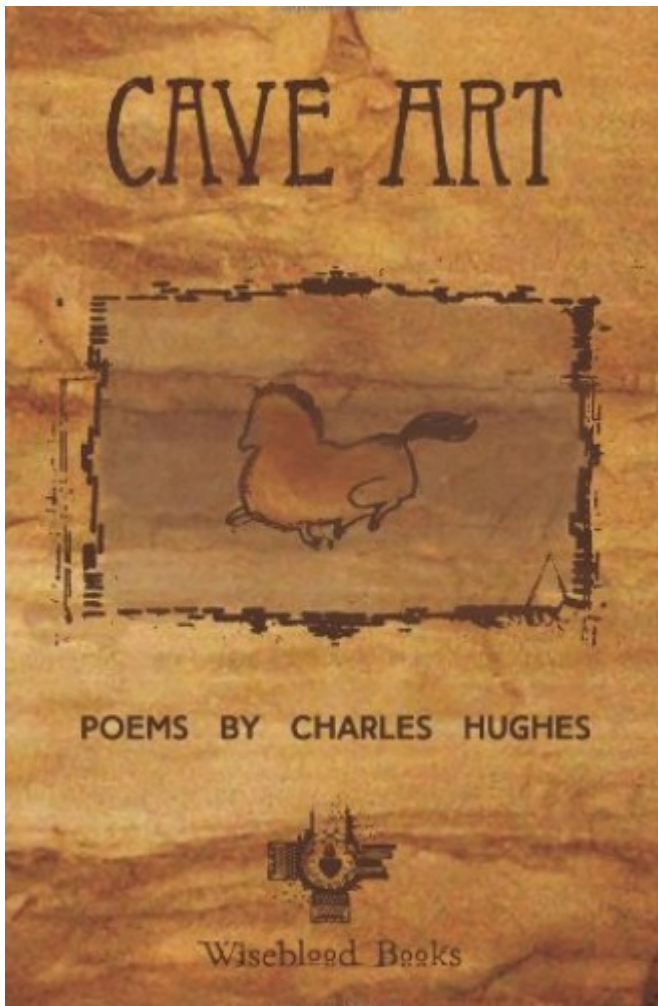
by [Jill Peláez Baumgaertner](#) in the [December 10, 2014](#) issue

## In Review



### **A Shimmer of Something**

by Brian Doyle  
Liturgical Press



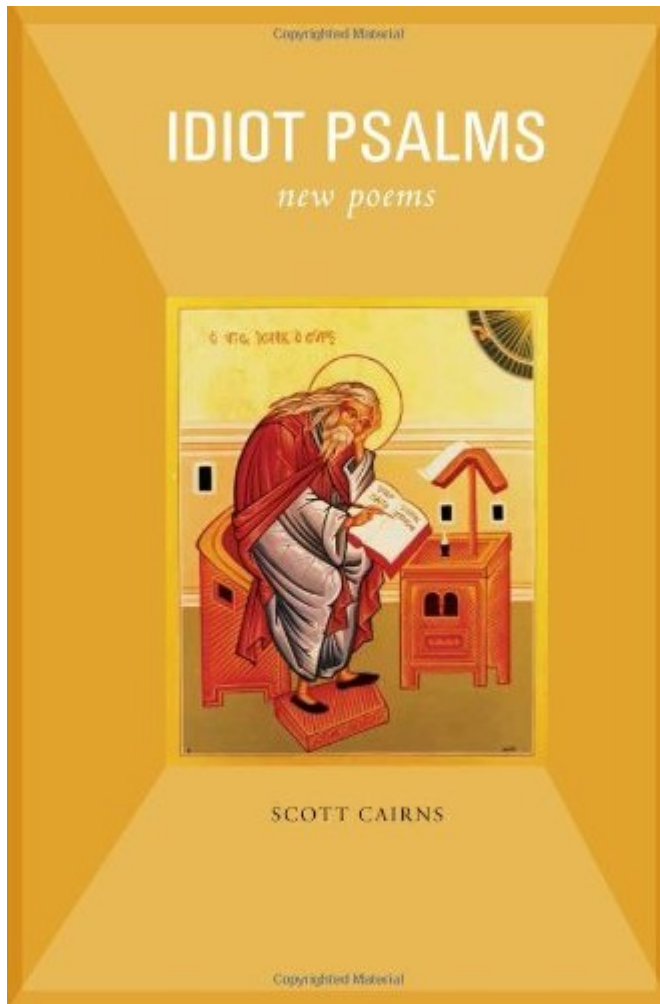
## **Cave Art**

by Charles Hughes  
Wiseblood



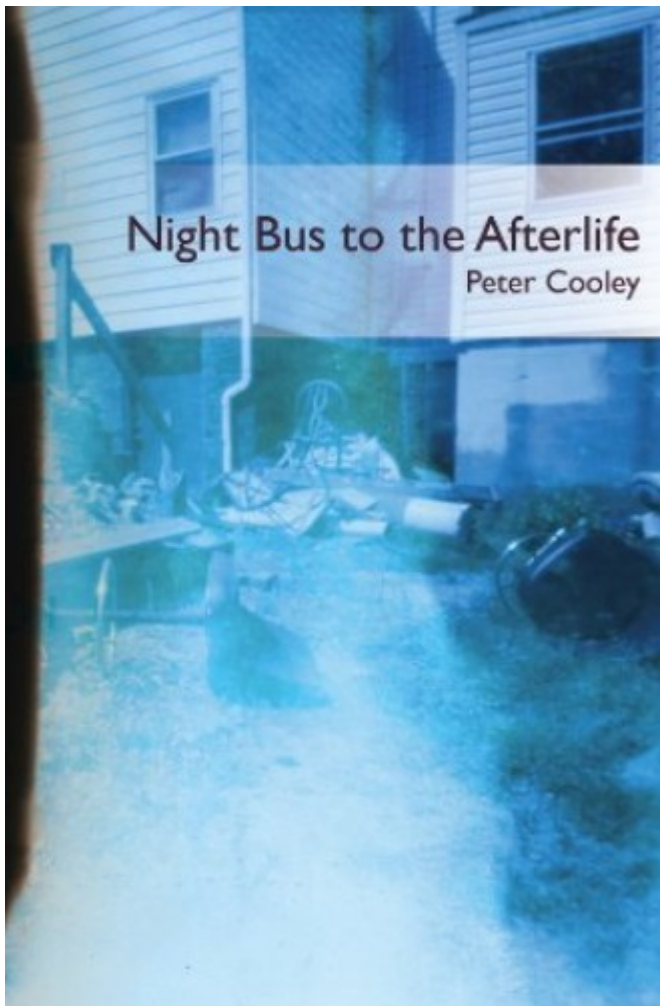
## **Second Sky**

by Tania Runyan  
Cascade



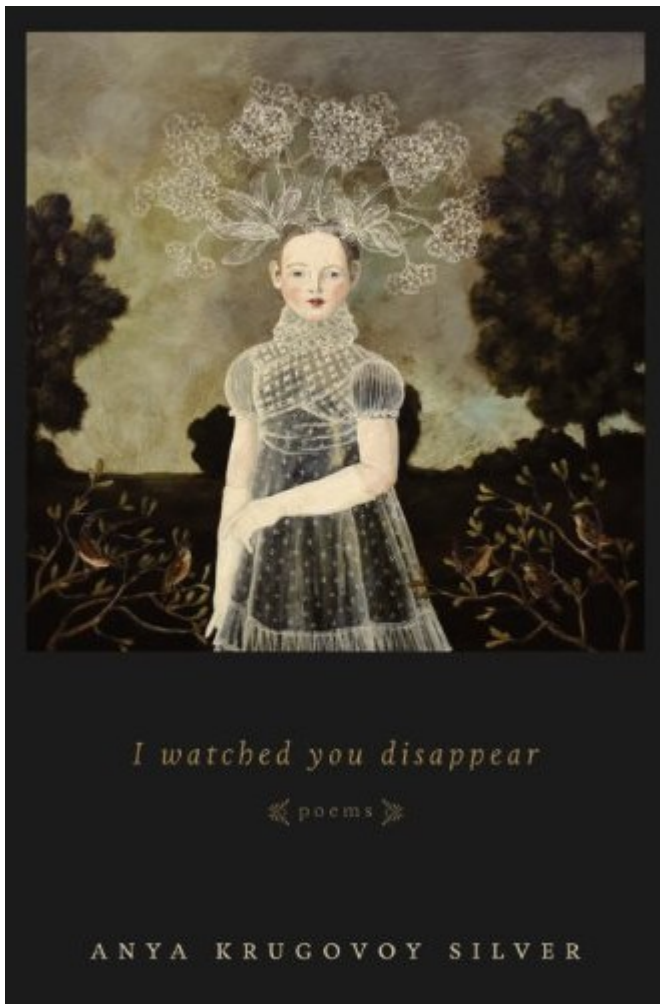
## **Idiot Psalms**

by Scott Cairns  
Paraclete



## **Night Bus to the Afterlife**

by Peter Cooley  
Carnegie Mellon



## **I Watched You Disappear**

by Anya Krugovoy Silver  
Louisiana State University Press

### ***To give***

I will be giving Brian Doyle's *A Shimmer of Something: Lean Stories of Spiritual Substance* to several friends. Doyle, editor of *Portland Magazine* and author of many books, is also a poet popular with *Century* readers. His "box poems" are rectangular prose poems on subjects as varied as "Mrs. Job," "What a Father Thinks While Driving His Daughter, Age Seventeen, to Rehab," and "Choosing a Baseball Bat." Doyle is a storyteller who points out the mystery of what appears to be the ordinary.

I'll also be giving *Cave Art*, the first book by a retired Chicago attorney, Charles Hughes. His poems are clear and vibrant jewels. Subject matter includes Hughes's memory of a professor reading John Donne's "Valediction Forbidding Mourning" to

college freshmen, the joys of fishing, and an elderly man keeping vigil over his dying wife. All of these poems breathe empathy and love, more so than any collection I've read in recent years.

Several of Tania Runyan's poems first appeared in the *Century*. Runyan is the best of a new crop of poets who are taking on the difficult task of writing about faith in a secular age. In *Second Sky*, she anchors bold meditations in Paul's words and shows how God's grace infuses the mundane. Runyan's poems are not what you'd expect in a volume that ends with a scripture reference index. They question, push the scriptural texts to the limit, struggle, and finally reveal the holy in the ordinary.

### ***To receive***

I'd love to receive Scott Cairns's *Idiot Psalms*. Cairns channels both Dostoevsky and the psalmists in this fine collection. With an epigraph from *The Idiot* and a nod to Prince Myshkin, Cairns embraces the problems and delight of the realization that words "are not exact" and that "God [may be] only dimly apprehended." The psalms are of lament, repentance, and irritation at God's silence. They are sometimes ironic in tone: "You may be entertained to hear how much we find to say / about so little." Finally, however, they opt for mystery and deal with the reality that "all that is explicable / is somewhat less than interesting."

A second book on my wish list is *Night Bus to the Afterlife*, by Peter Cooley, a professor at Tulane and a witness to the devastation of Katrina. He writes of "the world of after-flood." He seeks reasons, lessons, from Christ. What does resurrection mean, he asks, at a time like this? Cooley adopts a Whitmanesque pose, addressing readers who will read his words after his death, after he has stood in line, "slipping on" his body in the resurrection. Rooted in the terrain of the fallen world, these poems reach toward immortality.

In *I Watched You Disappear*, Anya Krugovoy Silver writes of the close bonds between breast cancer patients (she is a survivor), including the shared loneliness, separation, and distance that are inevitable for anyone facing death. Silver is forthright in describing God's response to a dying friend "with a sobbing of strings. / I can't understand what He's saying." They are occasionally angry and sometimes puzzled, yet these are not bleak poems. I can't get enough of them.