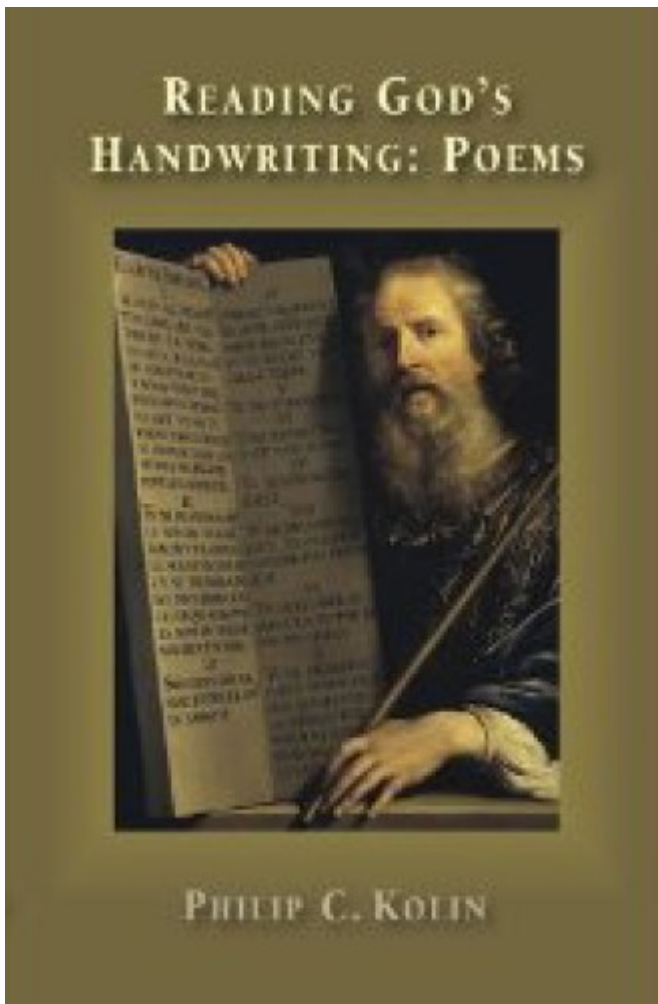


Poetry chronicle

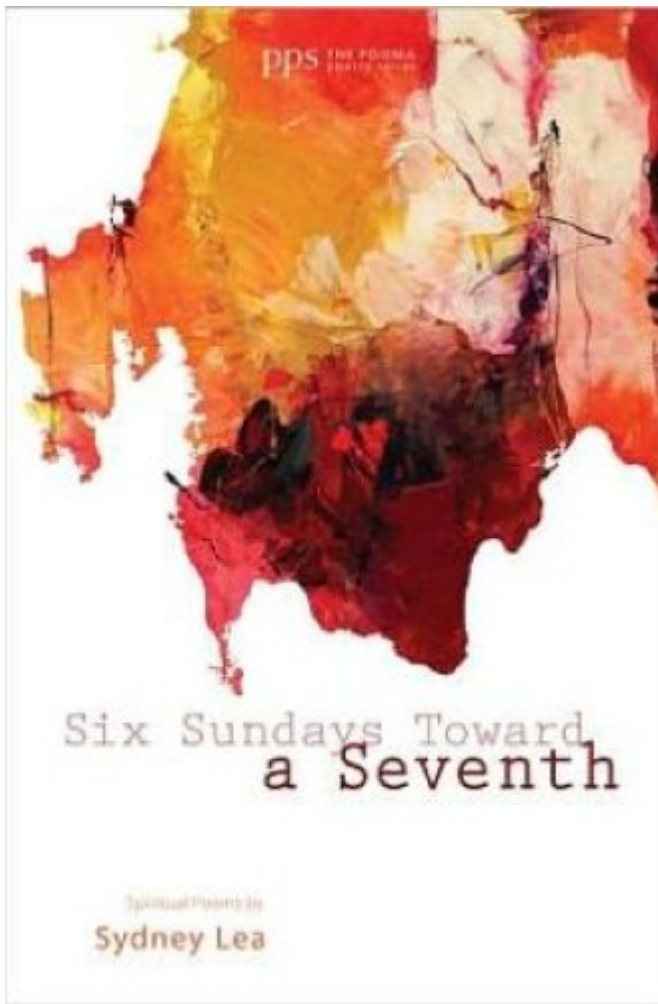
reviewed by [Jill Peláez Baumgaertner](#) in the [January 9, 2013](#) issue

In Review



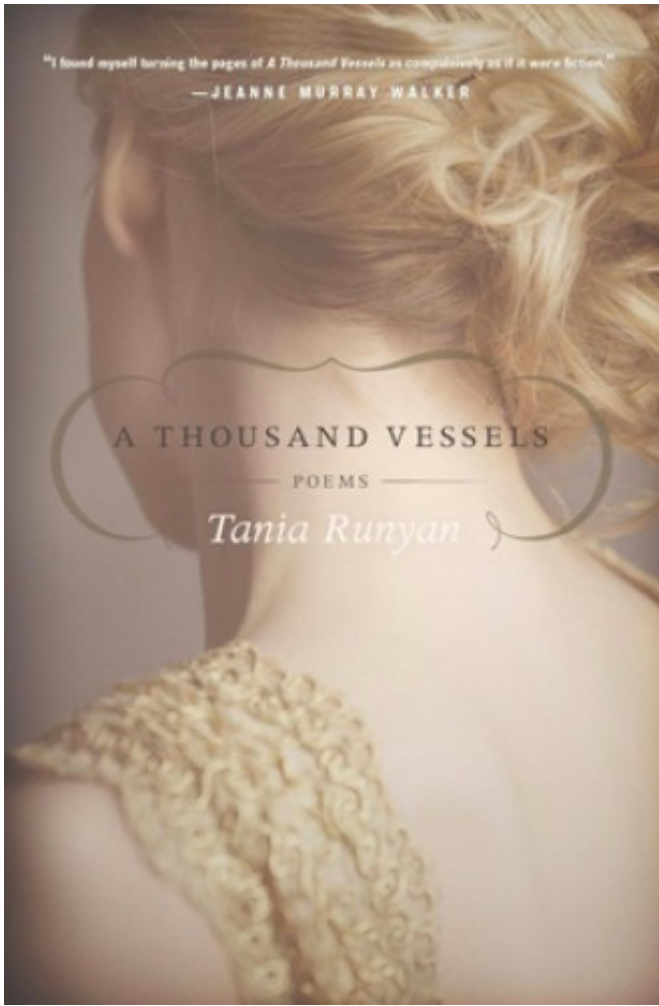
Reading God's Handwriting

By Philip C. Kolin
Kaufmann



Six Sundays Toward a Seventh

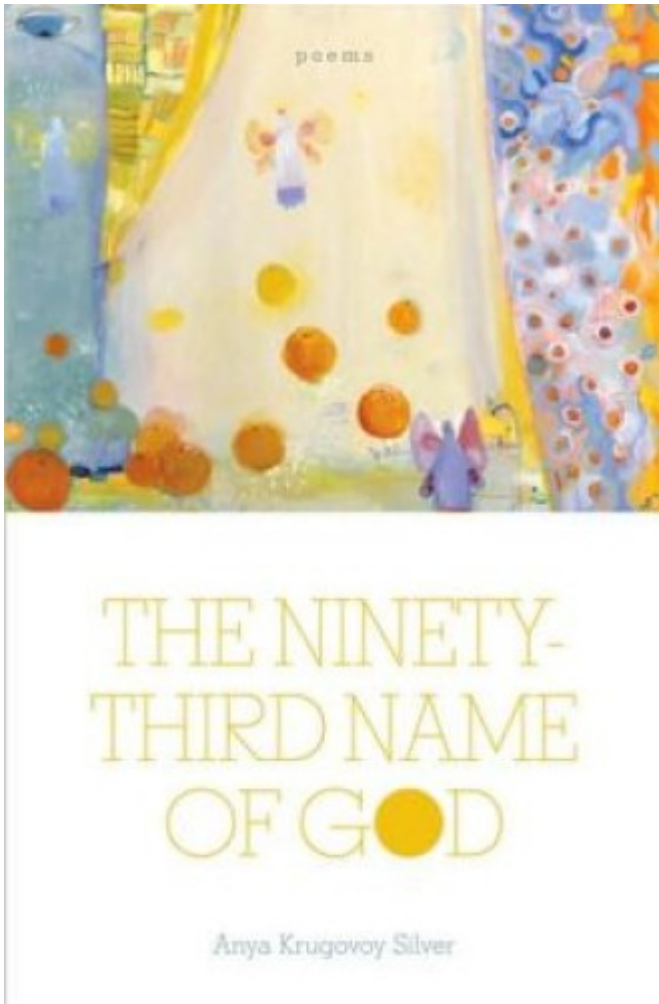
By Sydney Lea
Wipf & Stock



A Thousand Vessels

By Tania Runyan

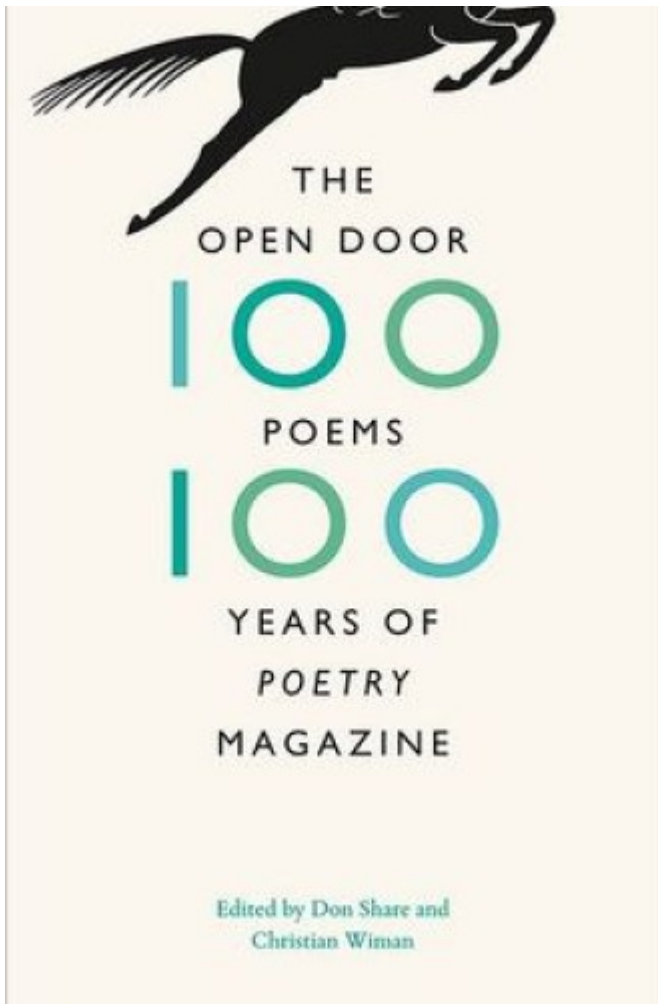
Wordfarm



The Ninety-Third Name of God

By Anya Krugovoy Silver

Louisiana State University Press



The Open Door

Edited by Don Share and Christian Wiman
University of Chicago Press

***Reading God's Handwriting: Poems*, by Philip C. Kolin**

A prolific literary critic, editor of the *Southern Quarterly*, and University Distinguished Professor at the University of Southern Mississippi, Philip C. Kolin is one of the growing tribe of very fine Christian poets whose work has often been sequestered in the limited venues of independent publishers. His newest collection is a beautifully printed, small hardcover volume that fits comfortably in the palm of the hand.

But these are not small or comfortable poems. Kolin takes on the most expansive of subjects: God's handwriting (or as he puts it in his preface, "God's hand writing") in scripture, history and nature. He draws fresh pictures of biblical figures such as

Joseph (“His staff grew lilies to woo her”); St. Anne (“She sat on my lap, / My Mater Dei, flesh / Of my flesh”); and Lazarus (“the third day is déjà vu for him”).

In a series of Advent poems Kolin identifies the waiting, the watching, the impatience and the need to stay awake during very sleepy times to attend to a king whose throne is a womb. In “Holy Communion” he describes the “pilgrimage of naked faces” and the way “an oratory of mouths waits for / The breath of infinity to fill them / With a new genealogy / As God places a pearl on each tongue.” He is able in “Genesis” to summarize the entire first book of the Bible in 15 lines with a catalog of images that captures its poetry, its main actors, its violence and its promise.

Kolin also ponders the deep narcissism of our sinful condition: “We are lost in the dense darkness of self / confusing the space of a coffin with / The size of a galaxy.” But he is not devoid of a sense of humor, which puts so much in perspective as he describes a Martha who kept a perfect house, joining the choir “To starch everyone’s voice / Into conformity with hers.” Irritated by too long a wait in line for communion, she finally gets the message when “God told her / He loved all those wrinkled / And sin-stained banquet of self / Others gave Him, and told her / To get cooking on hers.”

These remarkably varied poems will reward the casual browser, but they are more than random, occasional pieces. The reader who follows this book from beginning to end will find deep unities in a range of poems that are meant to communicate something larger than themselves.

***Vineyards: A Journal of Christian Poetry*, edited by Philip C. Kolin**

This new journal edited by Kolin has produced two volumes of strong poetry featuring such writers as Kelly Cherry, Luci Shaw, Jeff Gundy and Scott Cairns. The poems will encourage and intrigue anyone interested in the intersection of faith and poetry.

***Six Sundays Toward a Seventh*, by Sydney Lea**

Lea’s provocative poetry, which has appeared frequently in the *Christian Century*, never fails to grab readers by the collar and shake them out of complacency. He gets away with this because he always tells a compelling story, puts a new twist on a familiar situation and is just downright interesting. This collection of his work over 40 years presents his questions of faith and his struggles, always monumental, yet always leading to a point where the still small voice speaks.

A Thousand Vessels, by Tania Runyan

In these poems you will hear the voices of Eve, Ruth, Mary, Esther, Mary Magdalene and other women from scripture as you have never heard them before. Sarah thinks, “The world is dripping with stars / . . . and still not one / belongs to me.” Because of Jairus’s daughter, “You will watch the roadside / body of a deer / and wait for an ear to flutter.” The stunning particularity of image and language in poem after poem and the fresh descriptions of character and motive make this volume one you will not be able to keep—because you will want to give it to all your friends who care about poetry, women’s issues and scripture.

The Ninety-Third Name of God, by Anya Krugovoy Silver

Silver writes poems about the private and the public worlds of women—about breast cancer, mastectomy, the loss of a child, washing machines, the blush of a 14-year-old, a one-year-old discovering ice cream, and French toast. These poems know suffering and rail against God, they know mourning and the death of a friend, they celebrate and lament. God is a brooding presence throughout a collection that is full of both the knowledge of the cross and the joy of the reality beyond it.

The Open Door: 100 Poems, 100 Years of Poetry Magazine, edited by Don Share and Christian Wiman

A remarkable collection of a mere 100 poems, selected from the 40,000 poems that have been published over the 100 years of *Poetry*’s existence as a premier journal. Many of the giants—Eliot, Crane, Stevens, Rich, Plath, Auden, Pound, Levertov, Yeats—are here, but also included are gems by poets who are less familiar and less prolific. Wiman’s introduction is a welcome meditation on the difficulty of much modern poetry, and he touches on the ambivalent religious impulse that appears in so much of it.