

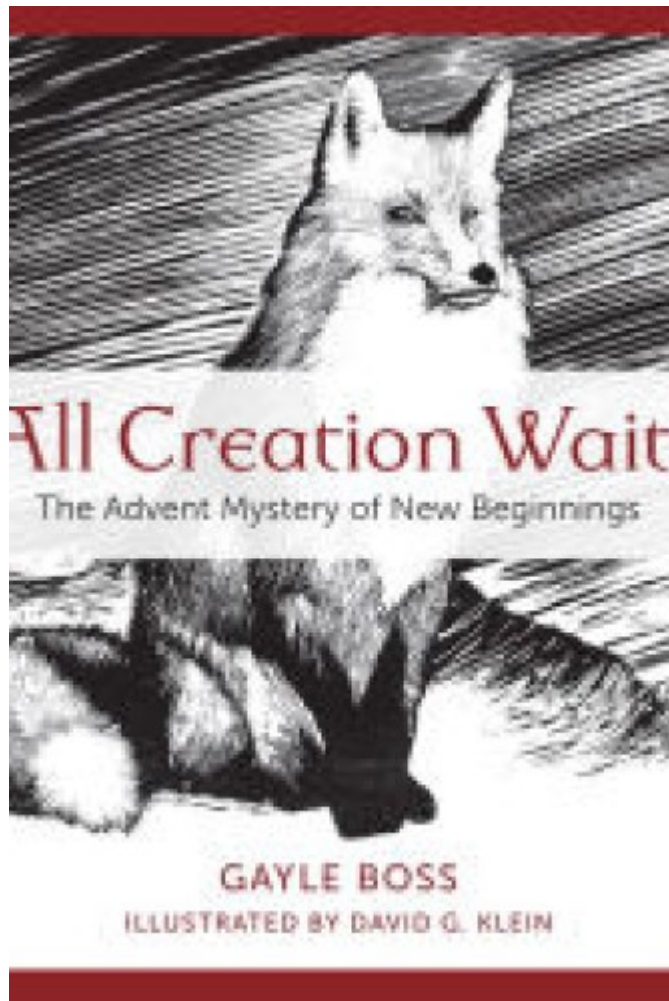
While we wait

It's Advent. What are we waiting for?

By [Elizabeth Palmer](#)

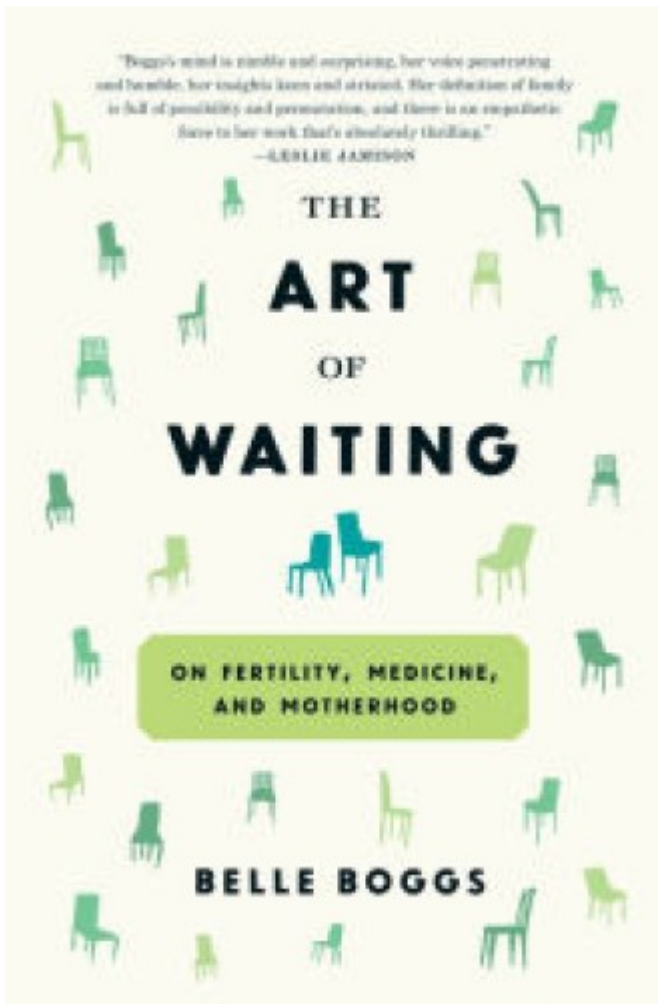
December 5, 2016

In Review



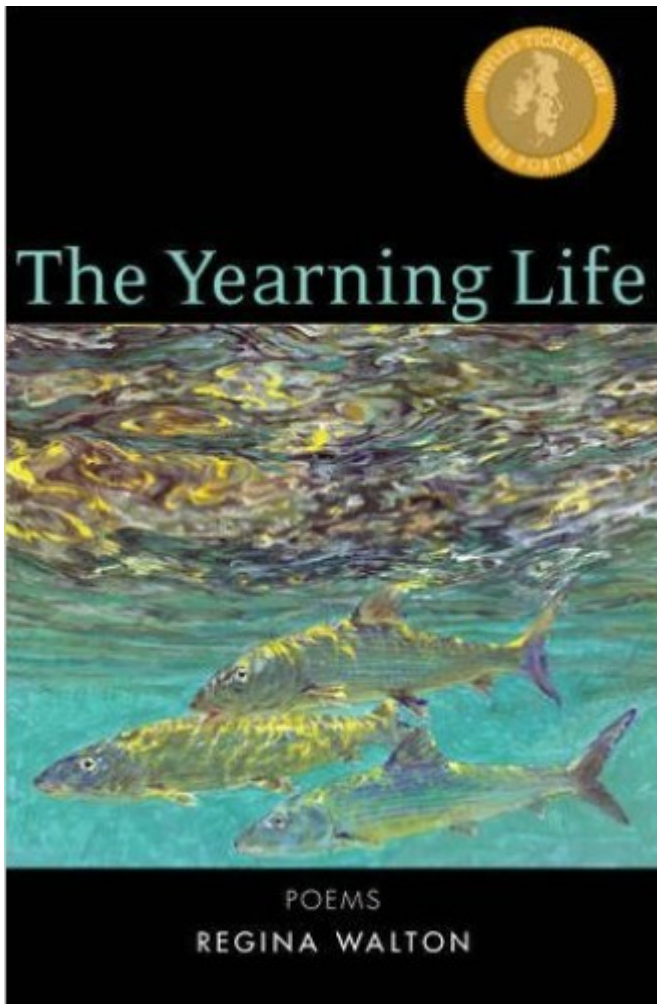
All Creation Waits

By Gayle Boss; illustrated by David G. Klein
Paraclete Press



The Art of Waiting

By Belle Boggs
Graywolf Press



The Yearning Life

By Regina Walton
Paraclete Press

In Paraclete Press's new Advent devotional book, David G. Klein's elegant black-and-white woodcut illustrations and Gayle Boss's vivid prose descriptions of the winter habits of 24 animals native to Michigan are gentle lessons in biology. Lactic acid pools in the bloodstream of a painted turtle, a porcupine's gut digests wood, and hibernating little brown bats "slow their resting hearts from four hundred beats per minute to twenty." These meditations are brief enough to hold the interest of a child and detailed enough to expand an adult's knowledge of the animal world.

The animals are, of course, a metaphor for faith. To be awake in the world during Advent is to sense loss, to know the weight of expectation. The final meditation explores the meaning of a God who became incarnate "as a child at home among

animals” for the sake of a creation that still waits. This baby was born to “show people a way out of their small pinched lives, a way to abandon themselves to the ever-present, unstoppable current of Love that carries all things to radiant wholeness.” The animals in winter and the newborn in the manger point to a hidden extravagance that exists within our own tangible fragility.

Advent's emphasis on waiting for the birth of a newborn who was conceived miraculously may be comforting for someone who struggles with infertility. But it's just as likely to be painful. Belle Boggs describes herself as not religious and she likely doesn't celebrate Advent—but she knows about the pain of waiting. After her online article about infertility, “[The Art of Waiting](#),” went viral, she expanded it into a book of the same title. She depicts the fraught waiting that afflicts up to one in eight Americans: the long wait to conceive and give birth that is associated with infertility. For those who wait in such a way, there are no guarantees. “We are all terrifyingly beholden to risk and fear and luck,” she admits.

Navigating the ethics of infertility treatment in relation to money, race, biology, and health care legislation, Boggs filters her own experiences through larger moral questions:

What if all the money spent on international adoption went toward development in those countries? . . . What if the money spent on domestic adoption went to education and food and housing for birth mothers? . . . What if all the money spent on IVF went toward health care for the poor? Could I fund instead someone else's more direly needed reproductive care?

Boggs grapples deeply with these questions. Meanwhile, she persisted in her infertility treatments—and gave birth to a daughter in November 2013. The arc of her narrative may not be entirely comfortable for those who still wait to conceive. But they'll at least be reminded that they're not alone in their discomfort.

Regina Walton is an Episcopal priest who has an M.Div. from Harvard and a Ph.D. in religion and literature from Boston University. She's also the poet who won the 2016 [Phyllis Tickle Prize in Poetry](#). The poetry in Walton's first published volume is steeped in scripture and deeply theological. Some of it is funny; some of it is wrenching. Much of it is about waiting.

In one poem, she writes about a hermit priest named van Ruusbroec, who divided the work of the soul into three movements: the active life, the contemplative life, and in between the two, “the Yearning Life / Where you rest in constant restlessness.” In another poem, explaining her inordinate need to visit shrines, churches, and abbeys while on vacation, she writes:

But it's not validity I'm after,
It is expectation—
To recover a few calcified droplets of the longing
That once flowed like sap,
To witness whatever I can
Of the believing life manifest:
The concentrated playing out
Of hope in resurrection . . .

Walton's meditations on the seven O Antiphons ponder what it means to call Jesus a key, a root, wisdom, a dayspring, a king, and Lord. She isn't afraid to name God in unconventional ways: “Base of creation, vessel of remembrance.” The volume ends with a plea that's also a statement of faith. “Come Emmanuel: you who ate and wept and walked. . . . / Given, you cannot be unspoken.”