



# OMBSERVATIONS™ in THREE POEMS

--- EVERY SEPARATION IS A LINK. SIMONE WEIL

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## ABSTRACT

“Ombversations in Three Poems” may be best thought of as one longer poem, in three parts. The epigraph, “Every separation is a link.” (Simone Weil, Gravity and Grace) suggests their connectedness as poems or sections, and foreshadows the opportunities for connection, intrinsic to conflict. In the first, the political and the personal coalesce as organizational landscape or context from which our lives and work generate. Just as we are both shaped by and shape our environments, our organizational cultures, and discrete work units – so too does the broader world insert itself in and impact our practices. The second part comes consequent to processing reflection notes taken at the end of a weekend town-gown workshop and dialogue. The third, structurally signals the dualities and dissonances we navigate in our daily work and in particularly challenging circumstances. Our values, italicized flush with the right margin, scaffold the poem and our professional community.

## KEYWORDS

Ombuds, truth, hope. Dignity, justice, peace T

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## I. A SECOND SONG, UNSUNG

There is a sign cut from the corrugated cardboard  
of street cots that the houseless sleep upon  
with forty-five, the number, sharpied on the front  
and held aloft a faceless flock of protesters.  
They are Rumi's crowd of sorrows.

I welcome every pain, each indignation  
their features would convey: the dark, the shame, the malice.

This is the end of my beginning.

This reign of terror, will it too radiate then fade  
as circles do, on water. Through the leafless thicket,  
a dreamscape stands between stacked-stone columns  
where no pressboard for the unhung ones lies.  
Phalange. Talon. Tree limb.

These pillars rise where towers stood before.

To stand in the light of all passing darknesses  
I wished for us this winter and now lie wakened  
in the dark of my witching hour committing locutionary acts  
and other indecencies via flashlight-function then turn, face down,  
to assume the Hanged Man's position uninverted, yet sleepless still.  
Reliquaries, we humans, making holy all we carry.

I release myself and you of the sacred, the profane, each middling deed  
while I look sidewise to the wall for hints of dawn and inward, for the budding spring.

Is this the beginning of the end?

He tweets his spleen atop gilded thrones, within the whitewashed walls  
of a house, profaned, inured to hallowed process and the fundamentals of shared humanity.  
There is irreverent pomp. There are mobs united in monosyllabics and bloodlust.  
There is Cheeto dust, in the wind.

For those who live and hope to survive: Our Joan of Arc, unarmored.  
She sails seas, chides nations and their criminals with equanimity.  
For those who dared to do that which should not be done  
and to not do, that which decency compels,  
to flaunt and flout and flex their gaudy guilt  
and call it good – no better, best – Greta, girl, we look to you.

Faith was an angel with springy wings on the kitchen windowsill of our house,  
no more. The kids are grown. Sunflowers drop their seeds.  
There are splinters from that picket fence, small, fractured bones,  
and a general brokenness of heart, not spirit, that I carry  
leaving all that was unbearable for hope in a hotelish home, an urban nest, a space  
of necessary nascency, of between times and impermanence.



To retreat, revive, regenerate. You are a sorry John. She was no Abigail.  
And though no more a girl, it was fire I walked you through to you, to your renewal.

We've looked around the colosseum, every lecture hall, boutique, and church  
where narcissists and the undead meet in battle and to feast.  
I leave for ice cream. They are making do with gray meat and the scant hors-d'oeuvres  
left to them in the guest house. It is cornflower blue. My hunger now is smaller.

I have seen where you made ruins. Seen too the brave take to their knee.  
Seen aunties, uncles, crow kin, friends – felled. By cancers carved, uncut, metastasized.  
By stroke and accident, or age. By falcons. To be wizened is cold comfort.  
To have lived with youth's audacity makes one want not to go quietly.  
Still, I long for peace. That unfiltered thing, known in a moment's inhalation.  
Yeasty warm. Vanilla bean. Allspice. Cacao.

Crows pass in inky waves through the blue hour  
of their blotted reckoning. They caw-caw their invitation  
but do not stop while dropping trinkets to my outstretched hand (no wing).  
My murder is the flightless one. Truth-teller. Conscience. Lonely soul.  
And my gift to you, unfeathered kin, this one unsoaring, shining thing.



## II. IN DIALOGUE

These are moments, here, between us.  
Fragmented shards in peony and rose,  
vernal and mud-rust. Dust specks. Dust bowls.  
Heartbreaks stitched in blood and fear, beget  
a pulsing insularity. Connection emboldens truths.  
Vulnerability softens the edge of community.

Perspectives. Polaroids. Patterning.  
Patches. Piecework. Peace works.

Those who know the headiness of herbs,  
harvested and fresh-bled, enter in.  
Students, flushed by the night before,  
brimming hopeful with humanities  
and their uncertain futures, gather.  
Capacious space. Courageous place.  
Our circle lifts all voices. Each othered  
silenced-soul, dialogues across difference.

Simultaneity. Singularity. Suffusion.  
Salt. Sage. Sanctity.

We are unstrung pearls. Luminosities  
that skip and roll the worn linoleum,  
tread by those who came before.  
Heritable. Unheard. Ancestral. And the unseen.  
They made way for the *us* in the room.  
We walk warily.

There is this dance, a derring-do of flowers thrown mid-tango.  
Petals tossed into the whirl of regalia and flannel coats unworn,  
yet present still. Discernability is a concept for the privileged.  
Indignities mark the others' innards and betrayals, tattoo their livid flesh.  
Soft souls. We are inured to the prairie wind.  
Ruby-red. Jet-black.  
Two-Step. Hip-Hop. Twist.  
I enter mosh-pits with equanimity.

These hours spent, are of becoming,  
of birthing not implanted seed, but selves, in nascent  
solidarity. And senescence (unjust reward!)  
for calendared false measure  
comes consequent to the decades' obligations, parsed,  
and hollowed of vividity. Authenticity,  
entropy, and youth protest. They are means  
to disarray, and *do* as gardens will,  
when expectations give way to receptivity  
and hope blossoms in variant, unscripted bloom.



### III. KEEP CALM AND OMBUDS ON

Winter had its way with us.  
February's false spring came, thawing  
gentler hearts, coaxing hopeful buds  
to no bloom in this reign of terrors, manifest.

*I will act with honesty and integrity.*

We crawl. Hands and knees bloodied raw  
on *the sharp edges of all that is breaking*.  
Systems. Eggshells.  
Hearts. And oaths forsworn.

*I will promote fairness and support fair process.*

Time reveals all truths. Some, in short order.  
Culture change is a long game. Dignity. Agency. Remedy.  
You ask: "Where's the fun in this house of clowns?"  
Welcome to the funhouse. Tariff of Abominations, Redux. Autocracy, round two.

*I will remain non-judgmental, with empathy and respect for  
individual differences.*

Spring erupts in a powdered ooze of unearthly tones.  
A klieg light's on and the chess board is upended.  
Bishop. King. Her plea for mercy, scorned, and  
the light of justice is obscured, in an unbent arc.

*I will promote dignity, diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and belonging.*

My thoughts turn to the graphic edition of *On Tyranny*  
wondering if *tyrant* shares a root with *tyrannosaurus*  
and if a depiction of those unreaching arms will aid  
in the recalibration of the power-differentials at our tables.

*I will communicate accurate understanding through active listening.*

Looping into perpetuity, we carry on.  
Isoscelean toast-points with coffee, we power through a morning.  
An interpersonal dispute between colleagues at two. We breathe calm  
into a room, settling into the synthesis of what is *heard* and what is *felt*.

*I will promote individual empowerment, self-determination, and collaborative problem-solving.*



To apprehend all possibilities in the small space of one pause.  
To enter in and hold hope. We are facile, bending ways, not wills.  
To *enlarge the shadow of the future* – is to facilitate,  
wholly, with vulnerability. There is no room for self-promotion...

*And I will endeavor to be an accessible, trusted, and respected, voluntary informal resource.*

...or for ego. We are stewards. Of an office and its function.  
Of trusts. May we ground ourselves in these truths  
and affirm the multiplicity of others'. Perspectives and experiences.  
Data amplified. Voices magnified. Empowered. Lifted. By megaphone. By magic.



## AUTHOR BIO

**Deborah Dodge** was serendipitously introduced to ombudsing in 1996 when she was invited to begin practicing in the since shuttered Portland State University Campus Ombuds Office. She now serves as the Grinnell College Ombuds. Deborah co-chairs the IOA Eligibility Committee, is a Certified Organizational Ombuds Practitioner (CO-OP®), and earned certificates in Higher Education Law and Policy, and in Social Justice Mediation. In summer 2025, she will complete certification as a Dialogue Facilitator and intensive training in Peacemaking Circles led by Kay Pranis. Words and poetry enchant Deborah, who coined *Ombversations* (trademark registration underway) as her regular community blog title. ([dodge@grinnell.edu](mailto:dodge@grinnell.edu))