

Gayle Newby

The Parson Among the Heathen

Backcountry Carolina, 1700s

Mine to seek, a blessing, here in this opportune land,
I offer salvation of the high church kind., God
breathed words tumbling from my mouth like a shaft of
purifying fire, burning yet the vilest sin.

The women, how they tempt me!
Shifts pulled tight around their breast,
long Scots bodies rubbed shiny with oil,
I cast my eyes away from their harlot smiles.

The men! They fight and slander and backbite,
trading their souls for a pint of brew,
falling out trancelike, smitten by God,
shaming the feast of holy love.

Never mind.
I will see a reformation
in this vast and carnal land. Mountains will
fall, waters will spring in this desert,
I will say the rites of the dead, and marry the young.
I will not faint in the land of the living.

Gayle Newby has been published in *deComp*, *Gravel*, *The Hiram Poetry Review* and *Passagers Journal*. Her work is forthcoming in *The Santa Fe Literary Journal*, *After the Pause* and *Literary Orphans*. Gayle has worked as a teacher, librarian, and as a social worker. A longtime resident of Mississippi, she now lives in Utah.