

Some obscure fact

by [Megan McDermott](#) in the [January 15, 2020](#) issue

At some medieval point, unicorns signaled incarnation,  
making whatever virgin lured one to her lap  
some sort of Mary. I had never heard of that,  
not through all of undergrad or three years  
of divinity school. I'd never witnessed  
a preacher employ unicorns as sermon metaphor  
or heard such a simile in prayer, embedded  
in some liturgy striving towards freshness.  
Instead I learned it in a café, from a book bought  
on vacation: *Hieronymus Bosch: Between  
Heaven and Hell*. Art reminds me: we lose  
symbols all the time. At a museum in Madrid,  
I stared at an infant Jesus squeezing Mary's breasts,  
her milk sprinkling onto purgatory's sinners—  
faith same in name encoded in images strange  
and unrelated to any belief I've ever had. Which  
of my meanings will expire without some obscure  
fact of history as frame? Is it only the name  
that lasts, pushing beyond all paradigms  
past and present? Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.