

*The*  
**Incomplete  
Reichenau Sonnets**

---

Joshua Jennings



Freiburg | Los Angeles

— A Digital Imprint of —



ShortWorks Poetry Issue, February 2014  
Copyright © 2014 by ShortWorks.

A Project of Urbandale Studios Inc.  
Freiburg, Germany | Los Angeles, USA

[www.shortworks.co](http://www.shortworks.co)

# ShortWorks Poetry Issue, February 2014

## Editor's Note

Reichenau, meaning “reiche Aue,” or “rich meadow,” is a small, clement island in Lake Constance and was home to monastic culture and learning from the Medieval period until 1803 when the monasteries were secularized, a time spanning an impressive one thousand years. Today, the monasteries are silent, the libraries are empty, and Reichenau is better known as a quiet tourist attraction. But it is a fitting place for juxtaposing the sacred, heroic world, presented in the following ShortWork of Joshua Jennings, “The Incomplete Reichenau Sonnets,” with the profane, technical world of our foreseeable future. Reading these poems in this future context, when the written word may be nothing more than a collection of information to be indexed and searched, one is reminded that language handled only as data and impersonally processed becomes dehumanized, and with it, our ability to describe, and more importantly, *imagine* our world.

The following collection of poems offers a counterpoint to our current cultural condition and suggests that perhaps in the midst of our technical advancements, we are entering a new Dark Age in which our future hope for safeguarding our culture, and ultimately our humanity, will be through ardent, individual efforts like those of the anonymous monks of Reichenau.

## Sonnet I

*How Reichenau<sup>1</sup> is created. Saint Pirmin's<sup>2</sup> arrival at Reichenau on a boat. After driving his stave into the muddy shore Pirmin miraculously expels the snakes and vermin, cleansing the island for a new world. The abbey he founds will become an intellectual haven for future monks.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Reichenau is a small, temperate island in the Untersee of Lake Constance.

<sup>2</sup> 8th-century missionary bishop of the Upper Rhine region, founder of the Reichenau Island c. 724, perhaps at the request of Charles Martel, grandfather of Charlemagne.

## I. Arrival at Reichenau Island

There the Rhein<sup>3</sup>, fed by alpine ice and snows,  
Spread westerly into a mighty sea,  
In whose swirling flood a wild isle arose<sup>4</sup>  
With swampy weeds barren of field and tree,  
With snake and toad burrowed in muddy scree,  
Until Pirmin's barge cut its turbid shoal—  
From his planted staff, pest and plague did flee,  
From that sterile mire's misery he would cull  
The lily and the rose, the melon full  
With summer's torpid heat, the sage and mint  
Whose redolence future monks would lull,  
Who would pace garden paths as sun set, spent,  
Night that lay her veil over furrowed loam—  
Oh brave island, future poetry's home.



---

<sup>3</sup> German name for the Rhine River.

The Rhine begins in the Swiss Alps and drains into Lake Constance from and then flows between Switzerland, Germany and France and eventually into the North Sea in the Netherlands. An important river in Central Europe similar to the Danube, whose source begins only a few hundred miles from the Rhine.

<sup>4</sup> The author recalls the creation myth of Reichenau. This subject, with strong emphasis on the creation in Genesis, runs through Sonnets 1-6. Sonnet 1 would then be from Genesis 1:2, "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep."

## Sonnet II

*Pirmin is called upon, by God, to form this new world. On a slight rise in the land, he builds a wall; its four corners match the cardinal directions. This physically manifested moral compass is compared to a ship on the open sea carrying the costly cargo of human souls.*

## II. Draining the island and building the foundations

You had come to the wilderness to tame,  
Dared to tread the ooze of the surging deep  
And o'er its natural depravity reign;  
Taught its waters their westward course to keep  
From which emerged a firm land's mossy streak<sup>5</sup>.  
Upon that crown of earth you drew four marks,  
Joined cardinal points in a stone wall's upsweep,  
Holy Compass mortared in that bulwark,  
Soon to hold souls safe, like the true drawn bark  
Running upon the sharp winds of the north,  
Knowing whither its desired waymark  
And holding faith in its passage henceforth—  
Over the formless deep you set walls bold,  
Gave Restraint, Courage, Justice, Prudence hold.



---

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1:9 “Let the waters below the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry land appear.”

To enjoy more of this ShortWork, please visit our website and purchase it in various formats.

[www.shortworks.co](http://www.shortworks.co)

*The*  
**Incomplete  
Reichenau Sonnets**

---

Joshua Jennings



Freiburg | Los Angeles