

## DIVINE TIMING

Our priestly scientists  
disagree whether fire  
entered the world brought down  
from the sky or welled  
up out of the earth.

First red-stained white flowers  
decorate uplifted branches  
*Aesculus glabra*  
erect in blazing candelabras.

Then perfect white flowers  
cascade in many falls  
of sweet flame  
*Robinia pseudacacia*.

Finally Hesperis martronalis—  
escaped at dusk  
from the ladies' gardens—  
spreads a lavender bloom  
across the darkening  
forest floor.

Together, their odor sets  
the western world aflame.  
Blossoms in flame.

## THE YEAR OF NIL AND NIX

No live music  
No harvest dinner  
No intimacy  
    “don’t know you”  
No ash woods  
No public laughter  
No dancing in the streets  
No professional drama  
    (plenty personal)  
No interest in poetry  
    ’twas ever so  
Damned little joy  
No full-faced smile  
No Election Day dinner  
No turning back  
    the clock  
No celebration  
No condolences  
No family get-togethers  
No drinks at the bar  
No hugs  
    no embrace  
No silliness  
No religious service  
None of your business  
No singing together  
No live music  
No friends visiting  
None of the above  
No hope in the herd  
    you dog  
Are we in this  
    together?  
No hemlock groves  
Never to return  
Nothing to fear  
    but...  
Not now, no fear?  
No lack of fear  
No feeling  
    but fear.

## **CRANKY OLD MAN**

He's strolling by a row of little-leaf lindens  
planted between the Elks parking lot  
and Lafayette Street, his home town  
when a late October breeze gusts up,  
he's showered by gold coins but no,  
on closer look they are yellow leaves.

## DUSK ON THE YEAR'S LONGEST DAY

Hot in the afternoon hours  
while I napped in a chair on  
the sidewalk in front of Dalai Java,  
a cup of coffee on the chair's arm.  
This morning our large crew  
cleared brush from the walking trail,  
an old railbed running to Stanley.  
A young farmer's wife broke my slumber  
by asking if she had left me enough room.  
"For sleeping," I said, I don't need much."  
It turns out she is married to  
a grandchild of a farmer whose  
land I once surveyed in a thunderstorm.  
We laughed, and she was glad  
I survived to laugh at the memory.  
She had locked her phone in and herself  
out of her car, borrowed a phone inside  
to call her husband to bring the spare  
key from Geneva. When she left,  
I almost went back to sleep but  
thought home more comfortable.

Some relief in the coolness of evening,  
after a long day of leisure and work  
dancing the Toledo two-step with my sicklebar  
flinging it out and drawing it back  
following its two-cycle breathing, oily smoke,  
I am back at dusk reading the last few pages  
of the long biography of an American  
woman poet born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century  
whose talent was matched by her  
self-destructiveness. She played with  
matches. Pity does her no justice.

## 8 AM ALREADY STAINED

I've got a small stain down  
the crotch of my blue shorts,  
but it's not what you think  
though that's always a  
possibility.

No, it's maple syrup.

I already had two nice brown  
eggs broken in a bowl when  
French toast appeared to me  
in a vision. What is it Homer Simpson  
says? "Mmmmm." So  
a change of plans, instead  
of a bowl, a quart jar half-full  
of an egg, milk, ground cinnamon  
and real vanilla, capped down  
and briskly shaken, poured  
into a small pan over halves  
of the big rounds of Heidelberg  
"French Peasant" bread, sozzled  
around, fried in the big cast iron  
pan with butter, turned, deposited  
on my plate, buttered (again!)  
drenched in syrup and eaten  
with such gusto that the stain  
does not become apparent until  
I am washing the dishes.