

So Aloft

by [William Doreski](#) (January 2025)



Canada Geese in Spring (N.C. Wyeth, 1941)

So Aloft

Geese trouble themselves overhead,
polishing the air to a sheen.
Hunters will drop most of them
before they reach the brimming South.

I want to warn them that distance
resists their migratory zeal,
but they already know that.
Their formation sprawls at least

a hundred geese wide. They swerve
and veer, loosely chained together.
Their voices creak and clatter
as they scold the earthbound world.

I've never eaten goose, tame or wild.
But I taste the sky they've conquered—
a wisp of pearl, a tang of forest,
carbon emissions tart on the tongue.

Every autumn the geese unfold
their maps and charts to navigate
by dead reckoning a landscape
that's forever changing color

because its shadows won't stay still.
I'm a shadow of a shadow
and move with slow awkward gestures
no wild creature could endorse.

The sky drapes over me in folds
thick enough to make me wonder
if I could climb to goose-height
if I had the mettle to try.

So Much Leverage

Hour after hour rumples past
and sloughs into a distance
we don't know how to navigate.
As we stand in the driveway talking

with the propane delivery man
leaf-fall flusters down. The wind
argues in muttered phrases
that curdle in tossing maples.

You look as stoic as marble
while I want to run away and hide
in a city with a view of the sea
serving up enormous metaphors.

But my rusty old knees creak
and my angle of attack's uncertain.
I dip into the conversation
but lack the gusto required

to recap last week's football scores.
The hours stick to me like leeches,
each drawing only a little blood
but the aggregate slowly killing me.

You're as aware as me, but choose
to bury your debts in leaf-piles
piled on tarps you drag to the woods.
I wish I were so conversant,

but at least you notice the distance
and sometimes follow with your gaze
the Canada geese rowing overhead
enroute to the promised land.

Quantum Mechanics Applied

Combing through the dark matter
to determine where you've gone,
I revel in the slough of particles
tickling and teasing me all over.

Physicists disagree on the depth
and fact of this tingling mass,
its place and function in the cosmos.

But it feels like discarded lovers
lurking in the blind spots between
nebula throbbing in the space
slotted between brain and skull.
You entered it by rolling back

your eyes to look inside yourself.
A swami, rabbi, or village priest
encouraged you, rippling the pages
of an unreadable holy text.

No one thought you'd disappear
without leaving a trace of ash
or a damp spot on the sidewalk.
Dark matter, you'd explained,

accounts for most of the universe,
and you wanted to emboss it
with a brisk orgasmic expression
the entire creation would feel.

I don't. know if you succeeded,
but I feel a gasp of discovery
and glimpse a place more absolute
than the close of a coffin lid.

Lucent Trends

Does night turn us inside-out
so that we inhabit rooms
that don't occur in daylight?

The windows are painted black.
Lamplight is only an attitude
thickened like buckets of mud.

The moon frequently employs you

to take notes on its latest thoughts
and spike those pages on stars.

You never reveal its secrets,
but someday you might surprise me
by peeling away the shadows.

Around us the rural neighborhood
goes mad over lucent trends.
People with flashlights prowl for clues.

Stumbling around with nerves exposed,
we resemble gelatin creatures
from the bottom of the sea.

Coyotes howl after midnight.
Their voices of pure spun glass
rise to a pitch, then shatter.

We upholster ourselves in bedclothes,
but the dismal hours penetrate
and force us both to concede.

The Cry of an Embryo

Is that rasping noise a chainsaw
or the cry of an embryo
faced with its appalling future?
Sighing, the tough old sky leans
into the sound as if licking
a wound. My daily walk passes
through this piercing racket, the source
concealed by compacted forest

The November trees look strict
and old-fashioned. The leaf-fall
has abated, the mass of chloroplasts
already decaying in place

like me in my feckless retirement.
I presume that the embryo thinks
in evolutionary terms. Its face
is still faceless, its species unknown.

Why should it voice like a chainsaw?
To warn or threaten the forest?
A friendly dog arrives on its leash.
Its owner asks if I understand
that distant, distinct cacophony.
Yes, I reply, it's a creature
in its earliest development
about to anoint all three of us
as we stand here chill and chatting.

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William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is *Cloud Mountain* (2024). He has published three critical studies, including Robert Lowell's *Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.

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