

# The Work of the Poet is to Name What is Holy

The work of the poet  
is to name what is holy:

the spring snow  
that hides unevenness  
but also records  
a dog walked at lunchtime,  
the hieroglyphs of birds,  
pawprints of a life  
tiny but resolute;

how, like Russian dolls,  
we nest in previous selves;

the lustrous itch  
that compels an oyster  
to forge a pearl,  
or a poet a verse;

the drawing on of evening  
belted at the waist;

snowfields of diamond dust;

the cozy monotony  
of our days, in which  
love appears with a holler;

the way a man's body  
has its own geography-  
cliffs, aqueducts, pumice fields,  
but a woman's is the jungle,  
hot, steamy, full of song;

the brain's curiosity shop  
filled with quaint mementos  
and shadowy antiques  
hidden away in drawers;

the plain geometry  
of you, me, and art -  
our angles at rest  
among shifting forms.

The work of the poet  
is to name what is holy,

and not to mind so much  
the pinch of words  
to cope with memories  
weak as falling buildings,

or render loss, love,  
and the penitentiary  
of worry where we live.

The work of the poet  
is to name what is holy,  
a task fit for eternity,  
or the small Eden of this hour.

--Diane Ackerman

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## Journal Prompts

- Name what is holy in your life. Make a list, or a list poem, as Diane Ackerman has done.
- Choose the central image from any stanza of this poem and write a journal entry extending it. For instance, what are the "previous selves" you have "nested" in "like Russian dolls"? Or, what is the "lustrous itch" within you?
- What is the role poetry plays in your life? What role would you like it to play? How can you bridge the gap between the two, if there is one?

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