

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?

Compliments of the Center for Journal
Therapy, www.journaltherapy.com

