

Diminution

Category: Poems

written by Howard Stein | March 25, 2011

Howard Stein

I have read volumes,
Written volumes,
Taught from volumes.
Now my words are fewer,
More long breaths between them.
I look up after committing
A single phrase to paper,
Linger a while,
Note the long shadows
On blackjack oak
In the late afternoon sun.
At times, I give up
Words altogether, listen
To the wind, watch
The winter wheat grow, savor
The taste of silence,
And give myself over
To the speech of the stars.

About the poet:

A psychoanalytic and medical anthropologist, Howard Stein is a professor in the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City, where he has taught for thirty-three years. A poet as well as a researcher and scholar, he has published six books of poetry, including [Seeing Rightly with the Heart](#), published in late 2010 by [Finishing Line Press](#). In 2006 he was nominated for Oklahoma Poet Laureate. He is currently working on a book of medically related poems to be titled *In the Shadow of Asclepius: Poems from American Medicine*.

About the poem:

"A core theme in much of American biomedicine is the notion of more: more lab tests, more imaging, more procedures, more medication, more documentation and so on. There is always one more thing to try in the quest to conquer infirmity, death and dread. My career in biomedicine has been little different: more lectures to family medicine residents, more curriculum development, more published articles, more conference presentations...All along, the land and the sky and the people of Oklahoma have impressed themselves on and into me. There is a world beyond our pressure-cooker. My poem teaches me not the old saw that less is more, but that less is often enough, even better. My poem is trying to teach me something—about living, sickness, death and the limits of words. It also reflects the delicious paradox that we often require words—even few words—to articulate the limits

of words!”

Poetry Editors:

Judy Schaefer and Johanna Shapiro