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POETRY BY THE PAGE

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BEACONS 4/14/76

(A POEM FOR, AMONG OTHER THINGS, DERBY DAY)

Too often in the mist of life
the beacons are not visible
so tonight I sought the waterfront
where moon and harbor light combined
in fundamental clarity.
Behind in warmth I left my child and wife
to walk down Derby Wharf, surrounded
by the sea.

At 11:01, by almanac, the tide
was at its peak: a twelve foot height,
the summit of the year.
Lacking mountains, I crave summits like
tonight
to take the measure of . . .
perhaps I mean mortality.

Crunching down the gravel path,
the sea on either side, I looked up
at the demon moon, creator of the tide.
Blinking ahead was Derby's light,
rhythmic in the night, its red beam
like an anchor to the full, round moon
which drew me inevitably to its height.

At wharf's end, I sat down,
the cold granite against my jeans;
I dipped my hand in water, tepid and serene.
Upon smooth swells, the moon's image rocked
hypnotically
while a dark patch on the other shore
defined the Waterside Cemetery.
Aha, I thought, here's where measure lies.

I sat and searched for visions and insights
and found none
so I stood up to return
and it was then I discovered the perfect angle
from which to view the moon:
At left, the steady, pulsing light,
illuminating a squat lighthouse in soft relief;
above, the shrouded moon, casting a spell
of disbelief.

I searched no more for visions.
I had found one, and prayed it would remain
as I had found it -- a frame of truth
fixed like an Ansel Adams photograph on my
brain.

O moon, your force is greater than I ever
felt before
but my heart is with the lighthouse.
I bow to lunar majesty but let me live on land.
I ask for nothing more.

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