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On Planning a Daily Poetry Class Schedule for the Last Third of the Semester

David Schelhaas

I'm in my office on this bright, windy March day
but my eyes keep glancing out my window at the shadows
of the giant maple that are waving at me, beckoning toward
my yard, littered with the debris of winter, and my garden where the soil
needs to be tilled for lettuce and radishes and peas—the age-old
tension between pleasure and duty.

Let's see, what should we do on the week you get back from spring break?
We could spend a day talking about “turning the line” and enjambment,
but what if the wind is coming out of the North at gale force that day?
Shouldn't we all march outside, stick our heads into the wind and walk a
fresh-ploughed field due north till it turns us back toward home?
And if on the same day that you are scheduled to read your sonnets aloud in class
the air is so sweet you think you're sipping honeysuckle when you breathe
and so soft that you want to pet it before you inhale it,
should we be sitting stiff in our gleaming Formica desks,
our ears alert for broken meter or false rhyme?

The rest of the school year sits before us like a haiku
—seventeen days like seventeen syllables,
each one vital but each one subject to shifts and changes
at an instant's notice as we play with the materials at hand.
So let it be a liquid haiku that we make of these last seventeen days.
And may five of those syllables be these oldest, dearest friends of poets everywhere:

May we rub our hands and arms across the deep grooved bark of old cottonwoods,
savor the green juices of newborn grasses,
listen to the wind fretting last fall's cattails,
inhale odor of red maple buds as we walk across parking lots,
catch each darting shaft of gold as finches paint the sky.
And may our eyes gush tears from spring's brisk winds
as we grieve for all the signs of new life that go unnoticed,
the wind telling the sweet old saga of freshly turned soil,
the creek singing the minnow's silver scales.