

Todd Robinson

**Up at Four**

I spotted the scythe  
at half past mid-life  
the fifth of July  
in my same old skin  
and went to hear  
the dark rattled  
by tinnitus a hundred  
days of pandemic  
in the *annus horribilis*.  
I saw a kitchen light  
wake up next door:  
could be another poet  
drunk as Li Po  
scratching sad songs  
or grocery lists,  
rocking a child back  
into the better past.  
No, just the crack  
of dishes, the crash  
of scotch against ice,  
reminding me of all  
the ghosts in bedsheets  
twirling through our  
rooms. God, grant  
me the serenity  
to streak sober  
through strangers'  
gardens at dawn  
as thorns carve  
new vows on this  
body and blood  
grows more roses.

## Reading Melville in Omaha

The bright lilt of psalms against a backdrop  
of leaves, hammock swaying to bird-prattle,  
  
lives heaving all around. Bats in the chimney.  
A skull cloud over the skull-house. What do  
  
worms want in their oceans of dirt? Doldrums  
again: scratch SOS into burnt toast,  
  
praise the knife-point. He channeled a nation's  
boredom and wanting, God in mirror fog,  
  
sea shanties just another sidewalk chalk,  
writing with tendons and guilt of greed's lurch.  
  
Here, homeless sparrows at the hacked privet,  
sleepless feet under a scythe of moon, white  
  
noise over the neighbor kid's sandbox, dawn  
sprinklers whisking *Ishmael, Ishmael, Ishmael.*

