ETHAN
LEWIS

TAKE FIVES

SHORT STUDIES
IN PENTAMETER

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In Memoriam, samBdavis,
Il miglior scrittore.

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FOREWORD

Ethan Lewis,
Poet Laureate of Hawthorne Place

Ethan Lewis, dubbed "Poet Laureate of Hawthorne Place," writes daily, stopped only perhaps by night time: "But then again, bed beckons: 'It is time. / You satisfied exigencies of rhyme.' " Doesn't he declare, "Pentameter helps pass the time"? Maybe it is a way for him to keep away, at least for a while, "our fate: to disappear"; and does he know how to cry for a departed friend: "Our loss: your gentle soul and kindest life." Ethan Lewis does not ignore what he owes to other poets before him, whom he cites: William Blake, William Shakespeare, Homer, Charles Baudelaire, Ezra Pound, Emily Dickinson, Robert Burns, John Wilmot, and so many others. Time is passing, but "rhymes sill limn the present century." Ethan Lewis admits "the objective subjectivity of time" and, as a lucid poet, plays with it. Love comes and goes, but, as a visionary, Ethan Lewis can state: "I presage a renaissance of love." Music inhabits his poems, and he celebrates many composers who have influenced him, from Sebastian Bach to Anton Bruckner, Charpentier to Corelli, Mendelssohn, with a deep knowledge and a bright kindness.

As a man living in Springfield, Ethan Lewis purposely writes poems about Chicago and O'Hare Airport, and about the whole state of Illinois. At times, they echo the Galesburg, Illinois poet Carl Sandburg's immortal poem, *Chicago*, and some of the most beautiful poems by Ethan Lewis' colleague and poet, and friend, Rosina

Neginsky, in her book of poems, *Juggler*. Days, months, seasons, flow with their cortege of light, tornado watch, and snow, trees' leaves and birds' feathers: "So sun and rain and time will have their way." The nature loving poet is not fooled, though, and is clearly conscious of all the degradations made by man to his beloved trees. Two words to shout his distress, "It stings," maybe not to say more prosaically that "it stinks." Even used, then abandoned, Christmas trees sadden him: "I'd like to think somewhere a sacred wood / Keeps evergreen those needled that had stood."

Ethan Lewis loves his cats, be they "at the window," or gone "elsewhere to explore," faithful and dignified companions of his daily life. He likes their sense of restrained humor, their definite search for freedom, no doubt a "strong argument that cats shall enter heaven." He respects and honors his parents, too. He shows with an economy of words how hard it is to watch them slowly vanish away, vanquished as they are by dementia coming with age: "What does she still remember?" As a God fearing, loving son, he feels allowed to pray the Lord for mercy: "Could we […] beg an amnesty from ills of age, / And just grow older simply, pain assuage?" Ethan Lewis is a melancholic and proud poet, who dares speak on behalf of his fellow human beings and does it magnificently. He certainly personifies what poetry is and what makes a poet; he says it loudly: "Enough. […]Even in Hyvee the muse might call us."

ALAIN SAINT-SAËNS
Poet and Literary Critic

MISCELLANY

A.M.

My pentameter antenna fails to detect
KPOE these days, though I suspect
The trouble's due to battery depletion—
Which would explain as well the incompletion
Of incipient airs that, darting in mind's ear,
Don't wane so much as simply disappear.
Yet rather than replace my double-A's
To charge this lyric radio malaise,
Perhaps it behooves that I shift to an electric
Source and channel measures more eclectic.
But habit likely hardens the resistor,
Such that I'll keep on tuning my transistor.

Sundry Morning

Dubbed Poet Laureate of Hawthorne Place,
The lyric pressure's on to keep apace.
And when she tells her students, "He writes poems,"
I fancy a prosodic Sherlock Holmes
Observing the quotidian to limn
A mystery that solves the ear and mind.
At times, I must concede, it feels a curse,
Compelled to daily cogitate a verse:
To frame mundane experience in rhyme;
Yet when occasion haps on the sublime
Ignoring invocation seems a crime.
(Besides, pentameter helps pass the time.)

Wynds

Sometimes on walks I take back alley ways.
The nether side of high rises betrays
An urban secrecy that whispers, *where*
In front an ordered chaos reigns, back here
In shadow, stray pedestrians can find
A brief asylum. Alleys ease the mind.
And then the concrete corridors lead out
To crowded squares of wariness and doubt.

Coy Comfort

To court the dream of world enough, and time,
I *won't* deign to decide which way to walk;
Responsibilities I'll briefly mock,
And like Marvell hypothesize in rhyme.
But like him, too, I can't escape the clock.
Regardless where, my footsteps merely mime
On ground his symbol soaring through the air
That eternized our fate: to disappear.

Cf. Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," ll. 1-4; 21-4.

Fearful Symmetry

First Pres' green stained glass and bright red door
Invite us in to learn what God is for.
But I can read the news on city streets,
And it's not good. A homeless man entreats
For change, with cup in hand. When William Blake
Composed *Songs of Experience* to slake
His thirst for right, he must have known
That, even in the chance wake of renown,
Impassioned remonstrations cast in verse
Could not prevent his London growing worse
For many. Each succeeding century
His rhymes still limn the present penury.

Cf. Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*; "The Tyger."

Black Hawk

Courage is unafraid to weep or pray;
Nor need one know to whom the prayer's addressed.
Moreover, let the tears fall where they may:
All authenticity of feeling's blessed.
The stalwart soul perennially quests
Toward ascertainment of a juster day—
Embrace of commonsense displacing outrage,
Prepared by what comprises acts of courage.

A Subtle Rite

Russillo's quartet squared its audience,
Though didn't seem to care, and nor did we.
A private concert, on the contrary,
Mark crooning "Cheek-to-Cheek" that we might dance
Alone together in the tiny hall—
No strobe, or sequins shearing from a ball;
Instead, a pale, sepia shade of light
Embracing six within a winter night,
Illumed the moment of a subtle rite.

Crop Up The Band

Here on the Plains we harvest wheat and wind.
The threshers in the sky emit no sound,
Whereas the mechanisms on the ground
Snick systematically, in syncopation
To the tuneless orchestration of John Deere;
The mills, to choreography of air.

For Jacqueline and Marcellus

The cala lily set beside the lamp
Converts the desk into an avenue.
Beneath their lights night's thoughts stroll with a view
To print the next day's doings with their stamp.
Nothing so grand as setting the world on fire,
Or penning manifestoes to the crowds,
Or shaking down loud thunder from dark clouds;
To craft a sonnet, all that I desire.

I dim the lamp, yet still the lily glows,
As though to signal sleep some hours away.
There's verse to turn; the cogitant must stay
Until he brings this etude to a close.
But then again, bed beckons, "It is time.
You satisfied exigencies of rhyme."