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Winter Geese [Poem]

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WINTER GEESE (Poem)

To the memory of Thomas G. Bergin

The changes of evening
come steadfast as birds
scraping the lake
in the darkness downwind.
A dim chill of light
tilts from the curve of water,
traces a black wave
of geese that lifts past
branches beyond our reach.
Winter comes this way
each year with the birds,
settling across the trees
and hard grass of the late
November hills as the season
turns toward the year's
darkness and softens
the sky to the colors
of weathered wood swollen
with the textures of wind.
Behind the dark windows
of this house,
tuned to the slide
of weather and not sure
of what it is we wait for
in all these long nights
of wind that whistles
through the cracks
of the chimney and repeats
the names of things
that we once were
softly, like some secret
hidden from itself,
I watched as night rippled
toward land in slow circles,
unravelling across the dark
fields to strings of cold rain,
and cried myself to sleep,
remembering in this music
of weather and wind
the empty places and
the dead silence of things
that pass like the circles
made by rain on still water
to the edges of shadows and dreams.
Now, as a thin layer
of frost coats rocks
stung with cold and stains
the roof and walls stitched
with the faint spume
of first light, I listen

in this ebb of time
between sleep and waking
to the whispers
of bitterness and sweet grief
in the folds of the wind,
shaking off again
the deep solitude of night
and the wearying press
of the painful emptiness
of this changing season
that even my remorse
at death could never fill.
Outside, incandescent as ice
in the first blue touch
of sunlight, the wild birds
trill the clear water
to a muffled familiar sound.
One rises effortlessly
on white wings through
the misting lake grass
and hangs like slow smoke
on the horizon, circling home
to the white hills
in this half-light
like an unexpected sign
of hope plain against
the promised clearing
of this winter's dawn.

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By Jonas Zdanys