

Don Thompson

Sheep in January

Ewes grazing in winter pasture
up to their ears in brown alfalfa
quickly chewed down to the mud,
never satisfy their hunger.

They look worn out and weather beaten,
stained to the dismal grunge
of those old dust mops
we ought to throw away but don't.

Too obsessed even to notice
nursing lambs, always underfoot,
they ignore their bleats
and keep feeding themselves.

The Right Stuff

With a moon walker's delicate footfall,
as if only slightly heavier than air,
a hawk settles on a branch.

You can watch this process
over and over again as long as you live,
awestruck every time—

especially when the hawk pauses,
holding its wings half-folded
before tucking them away
with perfect, unruffled astronaut panache.

Animus

A cold, fricative wind hisses
under the eaves all night—
or is it in my head,
an articulate inner static?

Its language may be unknown,
but the tone is unmistakable:
In this wind I hear the malice
of a fallen angel.

Rising not from the far north,
but somewhere cerebral,
this wind must be whispering
the same lies I tell myself.

Rumors

Lately we've been hearing rumors
of snow, deep snow
accumulating up north—
packed into inaccessible crevices
and filling meadows to the brim.

Hard to accept in a parched land
where rain usually falls short
by a hundred miles
or comes down like hope deferred,
scant and half dust.

But last night it poured for hours,
cold, fierce and resolute.
And to see a white sheen
on the hills this morning
is enough to make anyone believe.

Don Thompson was born and raised in Bakersfield, California, and has lived in the southern San Joaquin Valley for most of his life. Currently the poet laureate of Kern County, he has been publishing poetry since the early sixties, including a dozen books and chapbooks. For more information and links to his publications, visit his website *San Joaquin Ink* (don-e-thompson.com).