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Poem by D. R. James



Ash Wednesday

The heat kicking in at precisely five a.m.
stirs the shirred glass chimes dangling over
the open vent, their fragile song reminding me
I am alone. Outside, where I know too-early

browns loom in the dark where constant white
should lighten this time of year—here, far
north of the end of Mardi Gras—one car
purrs by per hour. A semi ascending the hill,

up-shifting its dissonance across the cushion
of the dumb neighborhood, will turn left
at the next intersection, head east to open road
and merge with the world. This separateness

is indeed a dream, though priests today will call
the many to mourn whatever separates them
from God and from each other, then swipe soaked
ash across their foreheads in remembrance that

we're all just dust. Which is true, but in this
blue mood I prefer the Buddha's drop of dew
and picture its sole self temporarily resting
upon a palm leaf before a breeze shivers it

earthward or the desert sun draws it skyward—
in either case to mingle it by absorption
or by evaporation into the eternal system
of one. Which is really only a better way

of getting it wrong. Poor sentient drop, alive
in the thought it has ever left its sisters and brothers,
who in their own dreams manufacture fantastic
bubbles but imagine wry shadow, or lightning.

Art Information

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D. R. James has taught writing, literature, and peace-making at a small Midwestern college for 33 years, and lives and writes in the woods east of Saugatuck, Michigan. His poems and prose appear in various journals and anthologies; his most recent of seven poetry collections are [If God Were Gentle](#) [5] (Dos Madres Press) and the chapbooks [Split-Level](#) [6] and [Why War](#) [7] (both Finishing Line Press).

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