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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

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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.

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### 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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