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Robert Daseler

Signs and Symbols

An unrepentant love of living brings
With it a restless inchoate desire
To winkle out shy secrets from brief things.
A certain kind of person will inquire
About the hour that a shadow stretches
Across a wall, and he or she is wont
To poke a stick into a heap of ashes
As other more impatient people don't.
Each hour of our lives must bear a weight
Of soft significance unrecognized
Or misinterpreted or just ignored
By all the busy world, which doesn't wait
To see the tangled skeins reorganized
Or listen for the fateful whispered word.

A Crop Duster

A bi-plane tying ribbons in the air
Above a field in California sprays
Dark furrowed ground seemingly unaware
Of the stillness of the hour, now ablaze
In horizontal light, an evening flood
Of shadows spread across the earth like gauze.
That's how the pilot earns his livelihood,
Playing games with gravity's obdurate laws:
He stands his antique aircraft on its wing
And lets it almost stall before he swoops
Downward on the earth as everything
Is focused in his plunge, and he turns loops
Above the dusty vegetables to climb
A tethered distance into the sublime.

Robert Daseler's full-length plays, *Dragon Lady* and *Alekhine's Defense*, have been staged by South Coast Repertory in Costa Mesa, California. The University of Evansville published a collection of his sonnets, *Levering Avenue*, and his essays, short stories, and poems have appeared in numerous journals. (Please note that "A Crop Duster" first appeared in *Poem*.) Daseler writes: "'I wrote 'A Crop Duster' prior to 2009, when I moved to Paris for a year. Before that I had been working at the state library in Sacramento and commuting back and forth from Davis, which is about fifteen miles west of the state capital. The highway between Davis and Sacramento runs over a causeway that crosses a large flood plain, which is mostly farmland, and it is possible most months of the year to see crop dusters swinging back and forth over the fields of grain. It's actually a lovely sight. . . . The crop dusters were almost all bi-planes, not so much different from those that flew over France during the Great War. I suppose bi-planes are easier to handle at comparatively slow speeds, and they are probably more maneuverable, too. Once, while driving with my sons in the vicinity of Gilroy--this would have been circa 1999--we stopped, when, out of the west came a propeller-driven airplane that, as we watched, began to climb precipitately, straight up. At the peak of its climb, it suddenly stopped, and then it fell, rolling wing over wing. We thought that it would crash nearby, but, seemingly just a few feet from the ground, it pulled out of its hapless fall and climbed again. It did this two or three times, much to our amazement, and then it flew back to San Jose, or wherever it had come from."