

Chalk Marks on the Front Walk

Calendula by the curb an empty watering can

As I pull him across the lawn, the toddler
holds on to one side of his wagon
cups his balls with the other hand

Autumn wren on a telephone wire. A sliver
less of each day. What's next?

From a bird by the hydrant, 3 trills, the last 1 clipped.

—Susan Briante

[From *Utopia Minus* (Ahsahta, 2011). Used with the author's permission.]

The first line of Susan Briante's "Chalk Marks on the Front Walk" opens with the word "calendula," another name for the pot marigold. A familiar member of the daisy family, the calendula offers to the mind's eye an easily conjured bright yellow-gold-orange, while the word itself, a Latin derivative meaning "little calendar" or "little clock," offers to the semantic mind etymological nuance. The poem subtly tells us what it is right away! Each of its images is a measure of time, and, as the title suggests, these measures are both ephemeral and excitable, as much stays against the next as anticipations of it. I love this little calendar, the way it moves with ease through various forms of montage, leaping from the title into the symmetrical seven-syllable phrases quickly juxtaposed in the first line, and then on to the more cinematic enjambments of the central tercet's tenderly rendered narrative action. But I especially love how the final three lines shift and refocus their attention, and their tripartite structure – autumn wren/rhetorical commentary/birdsong – suggests a syllabically extrapolated haiku. Traditional haiku are intrinsically calendrical, and often use species and seasonal and bioregional details to both mark, dwell in, and meditate upon time. Briante ends her marvelous poem by presenting a state of mind captured by so many haiku masters. On the one hand, the awareness of time's passage: "A sliver/less of each day." On the other, the insistence on the song to be found in and made of the present: "3 trills, the last 1 clipped." Song's a little clock, too.

Your job is to write your own "little calendar" of a day wherever you live in July or August of 2020. It seems an especially good time to stop, take note of the season, and measure out a day in images and phrases. Time's passage has as of late been especially

tragic *and* especially hopeful. The pandemic has for many of us altered the basic experience of everyday time, the ongoing activism against police violence and racist inequity has collectively contested and reimagined monuments to historical time, and the climate crisis has removed some traditional markers of seasonal time and intensified others. Model your poem after Briante's in the sense that a) it may be no longer than seven lines, though b) its title must be a concrete visual image and at least six syllables long. The poem c) must rely almost entirely on the precise rendering of sensory details (visual images and sounds and actions), d) it can only use the pronoun "I" once, and e) it can contain no more than nine syllables of commentary or rhetoric.