

MICHAEL PACEY

NIGHT WALKS

“June 11, 1851: The sense of hearing is wonderfully assisted.... I seem to be nearer to the origin of things. The woods are about as destitute of inhabitants at night as the street.... You catch yourself walking merely.... You are no longer in place.

June 26, 1852: Every sentence should contain some twilight or night.

April 1, 1860: I occasionally awake in the night simply to let fall ripe a statement which I had never consciously considered before, and as surprising and novel and agreeable to me as anything can be.”

—Henry David Thoreau

He loved walking at night
because the moon's borrowed light
is more appropriate
to reflection, meditation
than sunlight; truth shines
in cold lunar silver
more than in the day's hot gold.

Because walking at night—our eyes
half-shut, heads bowed
as in prayer—we bump into things
not noticed before.

Raising our eyes to the sky
much more frequently at night,
we see the moon gravitating
towards Earth, and Earth
reciprocally towards her,
beneath the cycling constellations.

Because walking at night
we're conscious of a tide
in our thought; a marine influence.
An ocean within us
overwhelms the dry land.

Because it's timeless—our sense
of history, our chronicles,
never include the night—
it owns a pure antiquity.
There is less of us, our concerns
on this side of the world.

He loved walking at night
because our senses are sharper,
more alert then:
we hear bells, the whip-poor-will,
the nighthawk, someone playing a flute,
so clearly; voices of berry-pickers
coming home from Bear Gardens.
We smell sweetbriar, wild grapes,
the huckleberry bush; taste
the sea, its salt, in the air.
Sense our body, legs, and feet
much more pungently—stripped
of the distraction of distant views.

Even though vision's diminished,
paths shine in the moonbeams,
water becomes a mirror, glows
with an inner light—
like a photograph's negative.

Because at night we're truly alone—
thoughts undisturbed
by the chatter of quotidian cares.
He loved walking at night because

lunacy's a cold enchantment
beside the torrid sun's fever.
Because all is simple
as bread and water; moonlight's
a cup of water to a thirsty man.

Most of all, he loved walking
at night because sides of him,
hidden and dormant in sunlight,
wakened at night, like the owl,
and had their day.