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THREE POEMS BY TIMOTHY HOUGHTON

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Percentages

A light's out
above the medicine cabinet

and winter coming—

it seems a small step
into the black-and-white

photo album my daughter grabs too often
from a livingroom shelf.

Naked and cold

I look at the mirror, the light uneven
on my face—

metal framing the shower stall,
metal circling

the watch face beside the sink—

a nurse could be nearby, ready to pat the skin,
his smile trying

to warm up, lighten
the implements in his hand—

. . . looking for a ripe flow.

Each year

the room where you've lived
where you'll continue living

loses numbers

(she points at the pictures
and wants me to tell her the colors)

and a greater portion of space goes unlit

in readiness.

Now It's Time

United #93

Maybe leaves turning red
lay ghostly

across a window in the plane, his vague thoughts
random and soaked

in normalcy—

when a few seconds
come pro forma

like words from the routine
lab test

that blow your assumptions to hell—slow,
unbelievable, this anxiety

a backwards ladder
to places never imagined:

the plastic wall around him
a blunt onset
from the neutral,

no longer holding
the warm white noise

of working engines...

—his will
disoriented, challenged

to assume the rootedness
of others,

a counter-conspiracy

of the humane—
so that he pushes forward into the paranoid turning of angles,

the tortured fantasy
he embraces
to kill,

as any
machine-driven fantasy

needs killing—to take back the world.

Fourth Floor: Two Firemen After the Collapse

World Trade Center

They couldn't hear

through screams

in the spiraling stairs,

through noise in their minds
—in their lungs—

seeking pattern
in the smoke--

the enormous collapse around them
that spared them

as luck mimics God. Looking up

they saw blue, a split second amazed
how they'd reached the top,

and then it hit -- this was all death:

the smoke-red souls
rising into sky, dust-covered souls

like tree limbs breaking and hitting dry dirt.

The smoke was a glue

and bound the souls and settled them
quickly in two worlds.

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Timothy Houghton's recent book, *Drop Light* (his fourth), appeared in 2005 from Orchises Press. Positive reviews of this book have appeared in such magazines as *Chelsea* and *The Literary Review*. He has received over 20 fellowships to work on his poetry from such organizations as Yaddo, Hawthornden Castle International Retreat, and The MacDowell Colony. His poems have appeared in over 50 national and international journals, including *Chelsea*, *Quarterly West*, *Malahat Review*, and *Stand*. For years he has led birdwatching hikes for Audubon.