

[Home](#)

[Summer 2009](#)

[Spring 2009](#)

[Autumn 2008](#)

[Summer 2008](#)

[Spring/Summer 2008](#)

[Winter/Spring 2008](#)

[Autumn 2007](#)

[Summer 2007](#)

[Spring 2007](#)

[Winter 2007](#)

[Autumn 2006](#)

[Summer 2006](#)

[Spring 2006](#)

[Winter 2006](#)

[Fall 2005](#)

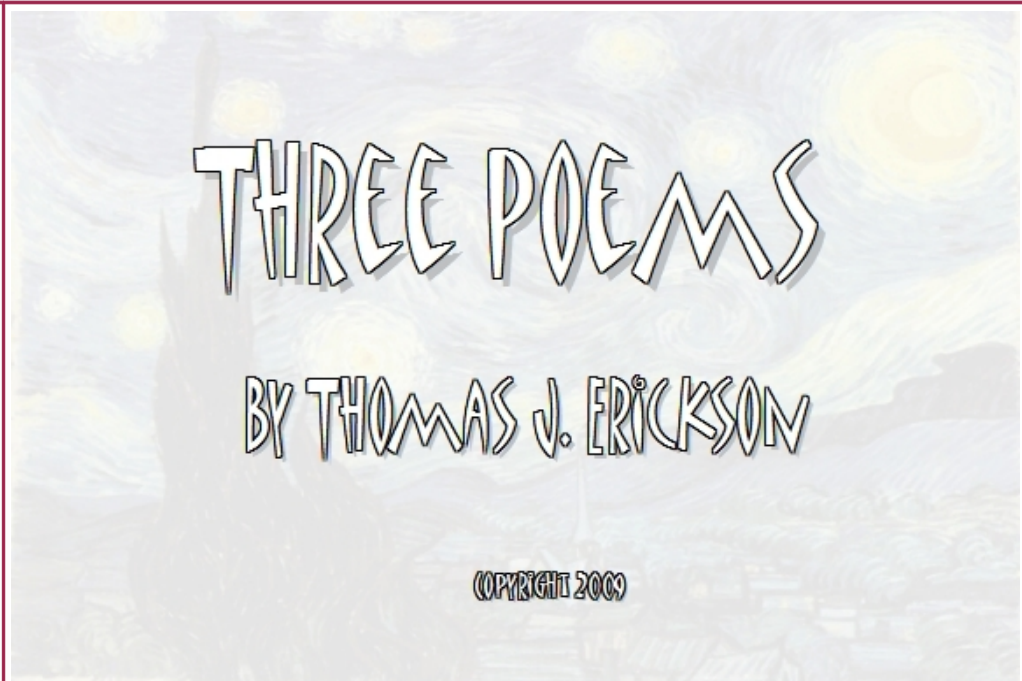
[Summer 2005](#)

[Editor's Note](#)

[Guidelines](#)

[SNR's Writers](#)

[Contact](#)



## The Octopus

Thaw a 3 pound octopus for a few hours in a couple of changes of cold water. Cut off the skinny tips of the tentacles (It's best to use a scissors.) and then cut the 8 tentacles from the head. Discard the head.

Put the octopus in a large pot of boiling water, cover and simmer for at least an hour until it is tender. Cut potatoes into half inch slices and cook with the octopus for another half an hour.

Drain. Put the potatoes on plates and top them with the octopus. Drizzle liberally with Spanish paprika, olive oil and sea salt.

Set the table, the one you inherited from your parents. Gather a bouquet of peonies from her garden as the centerpiece. Pour the wine. Imagine the tentacles reaching out toward the four directions, the four winds.

## The Nuptial Flight

Ninety-nine percent of all the billions of ants in the world are female. All the ants you see on the sidewalk or in your garden or in your kitchen are female. You may never ever see a male ant in your entire life (unless you dig up an ant colony—which I have done, by the way.) The female ants do all the work. They collect the food, build the nest, defend the colony, tend to the larvae. The sole task of the male ant is to inseminate the queen. When she arrives from her nuptial flight, the queen chooses a few of the six-legged bags of sperm. After making their deposit, they die. When winter comes, the remaining virgin boys are eaten by the ir industrious sisters. These things happen because it is their nature.

On the steps of the courthouse, I  
congratulate my client on her divorce  
and refer to her by her new last name.

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While she asks me out for a celebratory  
drink, underfoot, the female ants scurry  
about the sidewalk, the indolent males  
await their queen in languid repose, and  
the queen begins her nuptial flight.

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### To the East

To the East, there is a gray  
house where men roam the halls  
rubbing their hands and whispering  
through the white noise.

Outside the windows, young lovers  
walk the steps of the monuments,  
pitching roses in the rain.

In the marbled halls, the men proclaim  
in stentorian tones their accomplished  
missions, the words folding  
into the haze above the lights.

On the empty steps, the petals fade  
to black and turn to ash.

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**Thomas J. Erickson** has had poems appear in numerous publications  
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