

KEITH TAYLOR

*A Walk*

1.

... from that place in a hall in an old farmhouse,  
at the foot of a narrow stairway that rose  
up to darkness at the top—no one believes  
I can remember my first steps; *you heard it  
from your family*, they say, but I remember  
I was alone and no one saw the things I saw;  
*I know a man who remembers his own birth*,  
I say, who remembers pain when he was pushed  
into his life—and I pulled myself upright  
by that stairway, turned and walked, uncertainly  
of course, back to the living room and the light.

2.

... on New Year's Eve after I snuck out of church—  
the Watch Night Service where my family watched  
minutes crawl, sang hymns, and prayed until midnight—  
and outside in air so cold it hurt to breathe,  
air that rose up dense and smoky around me  
when I walked fast, faster over the snow  
crunching back at me, until I was running,  
exhilarated, until the twelve bells chimed  
and the drunk and godless yelled through their windows  
to the boy running by—*Happy New Year, kid!*—  
and all I wanted was to join the party.

3.

... alone from the East Station to the river,  
then west through courtyards and the palace gardens—  
and somewhere here among the fountains the sun  
finally broke through the trees, over the shops  
and hotels onto the first old man reading  
his morning paper on a bench wet with dew—  
to the Fields of Heaven and all the way up  
to the Place of the Star—and I understood,  
or thought I did for a minute, maybe two,  
the notion that the sun might need one of us  
each morning (and this morning it might be me)  
to bring it back over the crest with the power  
of our joy—and I returned to the river  
to stand in line before the sparkling tower.

4.

... in the Manistee National Forest  
on snowshoes, probably four feet on the ground  
already and more snow falling, and I lost  
direction out in the scrub oak and jack pine,  
then wandered for hours hearing only raven  
croaks and the deceptively close nuthatch calls,  
nasal and metallic, until I stumbled  
on a snowed-under fire-access two-track road  
I vaguely remembered and found my way back  
to my friends, their cabin, their woodstove and fire.