

Gnomons · *Richard Wilbur*

In April, thirteen centuries ago,
Bede cast his cassocked shadow on the ground
Of Jarrow and, proceeding heel-to-toe,
Measured to where a head that could contain
The lore of Christendom had darkly lain,
And thereby, for that place and season, found
That a man's shade, at the third hour from dawn,
Stretches eleven feet upon the lawn.

This morning, with his tables in my hand,
Adapting them as near as I can gauge,
Foot after foot, on Massachusetts land,
I pace through April sunlight toward a wall
On which he knew my shadow's end would fall
Whatever other dark might plague the age,
And, warmed by the fidelity of time,
Make with his sun-ringed head a dusky rhyme.