Two Poems

Miroslav Holub

Institute for Clinical and Experimental Medicine

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.claremont.edu/hmnj

Part of the Mathematics Commons, and the Poetry Commons

Recommended Citation


Available at: http://scholarship.claremont.edu/hmnj/vol1/iss2/9

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Claremont at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Humanistic Mathematics Network Journal by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.
Two poems by a modern scientist-poet exemplify a play of wit and insight not easily held within disciplinary bounds.

Two Poems

Miroslav Holub
translated by Jarmila and Ian Milner

Brief Thoughts on the Theory of Relativity

Albert Einstein, discussing—
(knowledge is discovering what to say)—discussing with Paul Valéry,
was asked:

Mr. Einstein, what do you do
with your thoughts? Write them down immediately they come to you? Or wait till evening? Or morning?

Albert Einstein responded:
Monsieur Valéry, in our craft thoughts are so rare that when you have one you certainly won't forget it

Even a year after.

A. White (Ed.). *New Directions for Teaching and Learning: Interdisciplinary Teaching*, no. 8.
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, December 1981
Brief Thoughts on Exactness

Fish
move exactly there and exactly then,
just as
birds have their inbuilt exact measure of time and place.

But mankind,
deprived of instinct, is aided
by scientific research, the essence of which
this story shows.

A certain soldier
had to fire a gun every evening exactly at six.
He did it like a soldier. When his exactness
was checked, he stated:

I follow
an absolutely precise chronometer in the shop window
of the clockmaker downtown. Every day at seventeen
forty-five I set my watch by it and
proceed up the hill where the gun stands ready.
At seventeen fifty-nine exactly I reach the gun
and exactly at eighteen hours I fire.

It was found
that this method of firing was absolutely exact.
There was only the chronometer to be checked.
The clockmaker downtown was asked about its exactness.

Oh, said the clockmaker,
this instrument is one of the most exact. Imagine,
for years a gun has been fired here at six exactly.
And every day I look at the chronometer
and it always shows exactly six.

So much for exactness.
And the fish move in the waters and the heavens are filled
with the murmur of wings, while

The chronometers tick and the guns thunder.

Miroslav Holub is chief research immunologist of the Institute for Clinical
and Experimental Medicine in Prague. He has published thirteen
books of poetry and four books of prose and essays. During spring 1979,
Holub was guest writer-in-residence at Oberlin College.