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## Two Poems

Miroslav Holub

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*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.

### 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.*