



2017

Time Spiral

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Recommended Citation

Bille, Finn (2017) "Time Spiral," *The Bridge*: Vol. 40 : No. 2 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/thebridge/vol40/iss2/6>

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Time Spiral

By Finn Bille

—In the fortress-church of Bjernede on Sjælland, Denmark

I set my foot on granite
in the twilight of the stairwell.
Left hand, right hand grope in vain
for purchase on old stone and grout.

I span from wall to wall across
these narrow steps that rise,
twist, curve from sight into the past:
A thousand years ago

when masons' chisels split
and hewed to square, round
scattered boulders gathered
out of fields and pastures.

Up step by step I rise
to spiral back into medieval gloom.
Up, out from this dark curve I lean
into a day-lit niche.

Here, framed in iron, leaded panes
show gravestones, fences, gravel paths.
I breathe out heavy air held back in dread,
my fear-flushed cheek against cold rock.

Waves in hand-blown glass distort
a team of horses plowing rich dark soil,
an oxcart trundling down the lane.
I breathe again in time-warped gasps.

A thousand years of pressure on my chest,
I stumble down. Soft hands fend off
rough walls for balance in retreat
until I stagger out into fresh air,

fall, dazed, on grass outside the church.
where fields bloom green past rocky walls
while crows, caw-calling, flap onto the belfry
and settle on the window ledge.

Salt of ancestors disturbs my tongue
when I lick my bloodied hands.



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