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Looking Beyond the Solstice

Stephen O. Taylor

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Looking Beyond
the Solstice

Stephen O. Taylor*

I
Time is space a Japanese
Print would enclose with seacoast
Or temple walls and furnish
With pine, peony or stone.

Time: springwork of the
Universe unwinding,
Silent water all unflowing;
Line nor circle answers: all a maze.

A hill grows toward the sky
Almost nothing in a day;
A pebble shifts an inch toward
The sea: Will I speak?

II
Advance and retreat of the
Year's armies confounded in
Self-combat: pawns fall bloody—
Red or bloodless, yellow-dry.

At night, the bitch cries at pups
Birth, forgetful of the
Moan she made at their begett-
Ing, or bitten nursing, or

*Mr. Taylor, a master's candidate in English at Brigham Young University, is an editorial intern for BYU Studies.
Without child to suckle,  
The moon watches burning, white,  
Or black, uncaring, falling back,  
Swells to greatness, only to be

Caught and by the sun devoured,  
Unless the sun forgetting  
Old perfidy feels the bite  
Of her dark mouth. Sharp tooth

Reasons well enough to make  
The soul feel pain, pierced by frost  
Or heat where the root joins the  
Body. Both burn the petal:

Resolution in ice or  
Flame with no delay for  
Contemplation at the poles  
Or in passage; passage is

Reason enough, mutation  
Is the form’s revelation.  
What can thought, faced with this, do?  
Run myths to earth; stop all the

Spinning drift of galaxies;  
Make motion be implied in  
Static essence, the seasons  
Be mandalic symbols mind

Can operate? Be content  
That thought does not fly south in  
Winter; but take more care lest  
The labyrinthine animism

Bound in tree and leaf should find  
All the world objectified  
In desert, unbind itself  
And build again its halls in

Man’s poor mind.
III

Higher peaks whitened to a line
Still above the hills near the valley,
Mist hides the highest:
All white, tree and earth and stone.

Brown scrub lowers
Rain-darkened beneath grey walls,
A dearth felt winter will fill;
Winter sits about us,

Mirthless, her line threatening grim
Fall for leaf and dust; limbs will
Lie shattered, trees learn to bear
Their loveless burdens, though now

The wine of rotting apples
Rests in skins the worms have claimed,
As if the days would wait for
Sour juice to mellow; bare

Trees await their harvest; un-
Prophetable birds flee south,
Unwilling to eye the slate
Waters for a resting place

Among the rushes. But dark
Blood-purple berries, holy
Ivy, oak, reddened by the fall frosts,
Give consent that soon

Falling snow be white:
Metaphor of birth.