

## Two Poems by John Reibetanz

### Ashbourn Changes: The Bell Ringer

These great bells in their ringing rock the towers  
 That scarcely can contain them, and each village  
 Swells with the harmony of drifting sound.  
 We move to a precision in their changes:  
     An order comes before the echoes  
 And the heart holds it when all sound has passed.

This hour's new life consorts with hours passed  
 In older lives resounding with the tower's  
 Familiar music, and each cadence echoes  
 Memories in the houses of my village  
     As generations hear their changes  
 Grow part of a community of sound.

Labouring men grew silent at the sound  
 When bells tolled out the years of one who passed  
 Beyond green hopes of spring and winter's changes;  
 They ploughed and never sought to ask why towers  
     Should sing time's harrowing the village  
 And celebrate its grey harvest of echoes.

Yet April's joy in permutation echoes  
 As one with my heart's rhythm as I sound  
 Primary sequences that every village  
 Ringing man knows bring exultation past  
     The call of seasons—Eden towers  
 Over a body rocked by sharing changes,

And will not fall: no headlong nightmare changes  
 This elemental beat to fitful echoes  
 Or dims the repercussions of our towers.  
 Yet one thought shadows them: what if the sound  
     Which cradled action in our past  
 Should fail to carry meaning for the village?

Towers are singing trees, rooted in village  
 Harmonies, the bedrock beneath earth's changes.  
 Men will forget their foothold in the past,  
 Toss on the wind, and roar against its echoes;  
     But harmony grows where present sound  
 Takes root in time, as in the song of towers.

Let every village answer to the echoes  
 Rung by these changes as their climbing sound  
 Spires from the past like ivy round our towers.

## Roger Foster Recalls the Miller

His whole body was attuned to the breezes.  
 Wind shifting in the middle of the night  
 Woke him; he could even sense the tide  
 Turn on the coast, a dozen miles off.

A master sailor whose landlocked craft  
 Was all circles—the sweeps, the stones,  
 The tower itself—and his white wake  
 A stream of flour that coursed from the furrows.

The stream dried up on days the sails  
 Met nothing to wrestle with; only their crossed  
 Shadow moved through the afternoon  
 Slowly changing angles on the hillside.

Then, at evening, when the wind spoke up,  
And the fantail swung the sails in answer,  
He guided their whispers through the ripe silence  
Like a scythe, and brought the harvest home.

One night I heard the wind rise  
To a roar, and knew he'd need my help  
To keep a steady flow of grain  
Lest the dry runner be blown to bits.

That was a rum wind: it hissed  
Through the ash, and made thick beech boughs flap;  
As I neared the hilltop, coppiced oak  
Snapped like matches all around me.

Lightning flickered about the cap,  
And the swish of the sails drowned in thunder;  
Great clots of owls' nest and thatch, ripped  
From the miller's house, pitched to the ground.

I saw him through the small light  
Of a hurricane lantern—sweat streamed  
And made his face give back the light  
As I told him what the wind was doing.

He said, "They'd've done well to build  
The house round as the tower; we'll lose  
Our sails one of these days, like the ships,  
But wind nor wet won't get a hold on us."

We worked all night: the oak shafts  
Strained and groaned, but held, and the stones  
Roared as they crushed the flow of grain,  
Changing it, swelling the sacks with meal.

The storm blew itself out by morning.  
Pale patches of unweathered straw  
Where wind had sheared off seasoned thatch  
Left the house topped like a sick old man.

The air in the mill was half flour!  
Now I could hear us breathe it in,  
Our bodies tired, the wheels quiet  
Where we had captured something of the wind.

It's all quiet now, even  
The rats have quit the rotting timbers;  
The sails long gone, nothing to show  
Why someone once piled stone so high.

The wind blows over and around the tower,  
Beyond hurt or help. Most  
Of those its meal nourished are dead,  
And I am left with a useless craft.

Yet, who'd call my inheritance poor?  
He taught me how to live by taking  
Where taking and giving become one:  
Wind nor wet won't get a hold on that.