

This is the first part of a series of essays COLA has permission to reprint from Fenton's Folly by local author and poet Richard Sederstrom.

Richard Fenton Sederstrom was raised and lives in the North Woods of Minnesota and the Sonoran Desert of Arizona. Sederstrom is the author of four books of poetry, notably *Folly, a Book of Last Summers*, Fentons' Folly being the battered cabin his family has lived in since 1946, and most recently *Eumaeus Tends*, based on the few lines of *The Odyssey* that are axial to our understanding of the power of love. Retired from all respectable pursuits, he still visits classrooms, where "I teach out of confusion, and into it, the way teaching should be done, the way poetry should be done, the way life is always done."



## Fentons' Folly Speaks for Herself

*Would it be worth anyone's while if I were to explain why I have written in verse what is supposed to be history? Probably not, so I will assert that between poets and historians, we got here first, and besides, no one has ever thought to regard us as factually dependable. That is handy for us all. We let our imaginations roll fairly free among the facts; the good news is that our readers have the same freedom. Take freedom and enjoy as you will. Perhaps the first poem will help explain what I mean . . . or then maybe the second, or the third, or . . . While you have a bit of time, and, face it, most of us have plenty of time if we wish to learn how not to hurry. We had better have time, or the hurry will get to us ahead of our time. So . . .*

How to Read the Poems:

Easing the Light

When you flick on the light, you flick on the light only.  
You don't think, don't need to.  
But thinking is control, you know, which  
You lose in the unthought flick of the switch  
To the silent, masterly surge of blind lightning.

With a candle, even a brief stub, maybe only  
A stub from the neglected rear of a kitchen drawer,  
You control the light, control all that the light controls.  
Your hand controls the light-defying wind,  
While you illuminate the secret map of your palm.

With the oil lamp you accept the laws of control  
That come from having to buy the oil,  
Having to bring home the oil along the paved road,  
The oil-paved road going back to gravel  
In the gentle imprecise control of memory.

But when you have shut the door,  
Have allowed the outside to darken, have lighted your will,  
Then you fill the lamp in the resin-scented,  
Fire-scented old kitchen, your grandparents' maybe  
Or theirs. You trim the wick.

You light the lamp.  
You adjust the wick for the light correctly controlled  
To the brightness and the dimness you need  
to control time to the needs of your soul,  
And you open the book to light the poem.

*But why all this language about poetry when I ought to focus on our house, Fentons' Folly, and its inmates? Because The Folly has been my inspiration for a good part of my work as a writer and as a person for almost seven decades, and the inspiration for a whole book. I mention this partly out of ego I suppose, but mostly to lead to the question: To what does your own home on the lake inspire you? Certainly it needn't be poetry, or any art, but something important to you and something important that you want, no, need to leave behind.*

### The Poem as Ears, a Duet

*for Jim Wenzel, tutor of old to my eyes and ears*

After you have finished  
With the contrariness of my recent poems,  
And I know that of all people you will,

You may ask again what is the use of poetry,  
And I hope you do.

*I was over there picking raspberries again —  
But there aren't so many over there this year —  
When I looked toward a little rise  
And saw two of the biggest ears I have ever seen!  
Because I have a new answer for you,  
And this time it comes from your own eyes:*

*I couldn't help looking at those two ears  
Because they were so big!  
Then their heads rose above the undergrowth  
And showed them to be two fawns, still spotted.*

A poem may be as awkward  
Looking as the ridiculous ears  
On the popped-up heads of the two fawns you saw,  
To remind us again how real the startling moment was then,

How real the startling moment is again  
In the fragile magic of words,  
How real the startling promise of the fawns,  
Their ears, the words,

And the real, *real* promise of that grace of being,  
Summoned to return to your own eyes  
And our ears again and again.

*But I still can't get over how huge  
those two pair of ears were when I first saw them.  
The ears must have to grow fast for their survival  
Just like our ears, the ones that hear inside  
For our survival.*