

# FRONT PORCH

## KEATS' SPARROW

Michael McGriff

Above my cold house at daybreak, you hang  
in a nest of thinning stars, navigate  
the pitch of the roof like November rain.  
Where's the invisible bridge you're building  
with your slow climbs, work songs, the blueprint  
of shadows you leave on the roof?  
Are there barometers, clocks, greased bearings  
whirring inside you? Are you hard-wired  
to the sun, its spun copper cables?  
What's engraved on your porcelain bones?

On the ground, like everything else, you're dust,  
feathers, bone carved by fits of wind.  
There's a burning coal fading in your throat  
you sing to life over and over.  
When I hear your voice outside my window  
I take a silent vow to work  
as you work, endlessly. Digging.  
As though you could tap your way  
through the mud to another sky  
where a lost brother flies underground.

**Michael McGriff** was born and raised in Coos Bay, Oregon. His poems and translations have appeared in *Poetry*, *FIELD*, *Crazyhorse*, *Northwest Review*, and elsewhere. His translation of Tomas Tranströmer's book *The Sorrow Gondola* will be published by Green Integer Books in 2008. He currently lives in San Francisco and attends Stanford University as a Stegner Fellow.

"I never had a front porch growing up, so have no memories of a front porch. In fact, I can only remember one time something of any significance happened to me on a front porch. In the summer of '98 I was living in Eugene, Oregon. I was trying to sell my '84 Volkswagen van for \$2,200. I was at my friends' house when these hippies came up to the front porch and said, 'who's selling that van.' I told them it was mine and that it ran okay. This couple was so high they tried to talk me down in price by saying, 'Okay, man, we've got cash in hand, and we're willing to give you \$2,400 for it right now. And a sack.' They gave me \$2,400 in twenties and an enormous sack of pot on the front porch. I hope they made it as far as they needed to."