

JONATHAN YUNGKANS

Our Shadows Descend

a duplex after Conrad Aiken's "Senlin: A Biography" (1925)

Our shadows descend before us, long and blue.
Ghost-like, a cloud descends from twinkling ledges.

A cloud of ghosts descends, twinkling down ledges,
The rocks aflame with ice, the rose-blue sky

is ice, the rose-blue sky setting the rocks aflame
where the blue stream flows coldly among the meadows.

The meadows are cold. As a blue stream flows
in long straight lines, the star drops fall, one by one—

the long straight drops of ghosts like stars plummeting.
The clouds flow downward, slowly as grey glaciers—

the inexorable mass of grey glaciers. Large as clouds
through slanting mist, black rocks appear and glow.

Mist grows. Black rocks appear, slanting, and glow.
Our shadows descend before us, long and blue.

ABOUT THE POEM & AUTHOR

“Our Shadows Descend” incorporates words, phrases, and lines from “Senlin: A Biography” by Conrad Aiken (1925). About the poem and the process of composing it, Jonathan Yungkans writes:

In this poem, I followed a similar process as in “Forslin’s Jig,” reading Conrad Aiken’s poem line by line in reverse order and letting intuition have its way with overall logic and flow. This time, I also fell back on the poetic form of the duplex, which was created by Jericho Brown in 2018. In it, Brown combines aspects of the sonnet, ghazal, and blues poem: 14 lines of between 9 and 11 syllables each, arranged as couplets and with the second line of one couplet echoed in the opening line of the next. The first line of the poem is repeated at the close to bring the piece full-circle.

Jonathan Yungkans is the author of *Colors the Thorns Draw* (Desert Willow Press 2018) and *Beneath a Glazed Shimmer* (Tebot Bach 2021). His work has appeared in *Gleam*, *Synkroniciti*, *Panoply*, *High Shelf*, *MacQueen’s Quinterly*, and elsewhere. He lives in Whittier, California.

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