
Derek JG Williams

Keeping Time

—silver scales flash, scalloped
fish on the darting, diving wrist.

The wife receives it, gift for birthing
her first child, something to pass

down. She straps the face to her wrist,
the child to her hip. He looks

out, looks up, cries out.

—gash of red, gar feeding
in the river, the red wine alligator

strap of the watch I wear while
teaching students iambic pentameter.

Oh shit I say, like my friend Tara
taught me. *Oh shit*, they say

back with one voice.

—I had a friend
whose father hit her when she

was young. He wore his watch
when he did it. She told me

she forgave him. And she
wore it too when I held

her hand at his wake.

—broken, my father's watch
in the accident that tried

to take him. A truck struck
the driver side of his compact car,

left him rattled: his bones.
It crunched on them,

made brunch of him. Hot
plate bacon sizzling in the red

car he lay dazed-in.

—clinging watch, it glows gold
like bad memories. Bandaged

knuckles, the emergency
waiting room, no rush

to stitch the split.

—the egg splinters, cracks,
moments ebb, the yacht sets sail,

no wind: vanishing, a streak
left on a window caught

by light, illuminated, diluted
by time. I try to tell it

like I remember, but that
won't make it true. I know where

I would put it, if I found it,
the truth. But I don't know how

I would keep it.

—embracing the wrist, no ticking
holds the modern face igniting

in the sun, a sundial, dialed-in,
up to eleven, but it's half past

and I've got a lunch to keep.
On behalf of this baffling, yodeling

list, I allow the phantoms their passage.
My friends are waiting, and they

always know the time.

