

# The New Criterion

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## Apparition at Moss-Hanne

by Ernest Hilbert

Ospreys orbit here, ruling as lords  
Their drowned domains. We row watercourses  
Through miles of lily pads, hoards  
Of hemlock, spruce groves, and grim fortresses  
Of alder swamp. Millions of years flood  
This place, where salamanders slide in mud.  
Our Depression-era log cabin warms  
When we return in rain. When the storm passes  
We stir fire from damp wood. It squirms and thirsts  
In muggy air, struggles up and catches barks.  
The pit smokes. A winding helix of sparks  
Climbs when a wet log pops and bursts  
Its musty treasure of grubs to the furnace.  
Above, a colonnade of oak glows and forms  
Like candles on cathedral triforia.  
The flames are my phantasmagoria.  
Higher, a cloud, like a skull, with a grin  
Too mild to scare, masks the moon. It sheers  
Apart in light to frost, feather, fin—  
A thing that never slows and always nears.

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**Ernest Hilbert** is the author of *Storm Swimmer* (University of North Texas Press), selected by Rowan Ricardo Phillips as the winner of the 2022 Vassar Miller Prize in Poetry.

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