

# Air casts a long shadow

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### 🔊 Audio

Listen to Dr. Burton read this poem.

[NPub.org/jc04xk](https://www.npub.org/jc04xk)

“He’s not who he used to be,”  
His wife told me  
Over embarrassment and tears.

I drained the spinal fluid,  
Injected the air,  
And heard his low-pitched moan.

“It’ll be over soon,”  
I chanted,  
Referring only to  
The pain of the present.

Too much air  
Was hardly a diagnosis,  
Yet said it all.

The man’s x-rays were blighted by  
Gray–black smudges of decay,  
His brain’s grooves impassable moats  
Where narrow alleyways once  
Encouraged the foot traffic of ideas.

The air dissipated.  
He stopped writhing.  
His wife took him home.

I still hear his remaining memories  
Whimpering in their cellular beds,  
And see bits of thought stranded on tiny islands,  
As the darkness spreads.

The pneumoencephalogram required  
A special brand of negative calculation,  
A computation of what was left  
After you account for the shadows.

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