

Dianna MacKinnon Henning

To Nuance or Not to Nuance

I

The men I worked with at Folsom Prison
walk single line
down the knife of night,
their eyes averted,
their blue jeans and shirts
baggy as pajamas

They could be on their way
to chapel,
Bibles in their hands
and who knows what
in their back pockets

II

My drama instructor knows the poetry
of the body, each nuance a shift of expression
as he lifts the sloping shoulders of a prisoner,
teases the his mouth into a frown and asks he recite:

"... I could be bounded in a nut-shell and count
myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I
have bad dreams."

III

In my dream, I am a frog leaping into heaven,
a moth perched on my tongue—
cool lake water glistening
off the green which is my frogness

*O, Holy Father of leaping things
give me dominion over myself
Please bless these men who remain
chastised by public curse, by accusations*

IV
 I once thought trouble
 a blight on the spirit,
 but trouble is a shape-shifter;
 it smiles like an angel
 and dresses in shadowy garb,
 a shank hidden in its back pocket

V
 "Hamlet is like ballet,"
 the drama instructor says.
 "How so?" the prisoner actor asks.
 "It's all such delicate stuff."

Note: Italics in section II from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*