

# Fumbling *in the* Light



*Poems*

Sidney L. Hall Jr.

HOBBLEBUSH BOOKS  
Brookline, New Hampshire

Copyright © 2008 by Sidney Hall Jr.

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission from the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Some of these poems previously appeared in the following publications:

*Soundings East*: "The Union Bluff Hotel," *The Chattahoochie Review*: "Clock,"

*Slant*: "The Man Who Comes to Summer Cottage Doors," *California*

*Quarterly*: "The Woman from Moscow," *Knock #8*: "There is Nothing Wrong."

Composed in Adobe Jenson Pro at Hobblebush Books,  
Brookline, New Hampshire

Cover design by David Jonathan Ross

Printed in the United States of America

Publisher's Cataloging-In-Publication Data

(Prepared by The Donohue Group, Inc.)

Hall, Sidney L., 1951-

Fumbling in the light : poems / Sidney L. Hall Jr. — 1st ed.

p. ; cm.

ISBN: 978-0-9801672-2-1

1. Poetry, American—21st century. I. Title.

PS3558.A3745 F86 2008

811/.54

2008922761

*Published by:*

Hobblebush Books

17-A Old Milford Road

Brookline, New Hampshire 03033

[www.hobblebush.com](http://www.hobblebush.com)

*for Margaret, Anne-Marie and Nicholas*

Emotion is the chief source of all  
becoming-conscious. There can be  
no transforming of darkness into  
light and of apathy into movement  
without emotion.

— CARL JUNG

Do not leave my hand without light.

— MARC CHAGALL, INTERVIEW

# Contents

Foreword ix

## I 🍷 FUMBLING IN THE LIGHT

- Water, Earth, Fire and Air 3  
The Boys with the Fiddler Crabs 4  
Out of Rain 5  
Nine Questions about Geese 6  
There is Nothing Wrong . . . 7  
Children Chasing Dogs 8  
Clock 9  
Untitled 10  
Fumbling in the Light 11  
The Man Who Comes to Summer Cottage Doors 12  
Hale-Bopp 14  
Some Things are Impossible 15  
The Woman from Moscow 16  
We Have Polaris 17  
You Should Sit . . . 18  
Piling Seaweed 19  
Pleiades 20  
Journey to Long Point 21  
The Little Town 24

## II 🍷 THE MARGINAL WAY

- i. Funding the View 27  
ii. Walkers 28  
iii. Gulled 28  
iv. Happy Men in Pickup Trucks 29  
v. Scorners of Time 29  
vi. High Tide 30  
vii. The Black Butterflies 31  
viii. Wishing for a Woman 31  
ix. Lest You Think 32  
x. The Marginal Way 32  
xi. Colors of Stone 33

## III 🍷 THE GREAT NORTH WOODS

- The Great North Woods 37

## IV 🍷 NEAR NUBBLE LIGHT

- Old Man 49  
The Cormorant 50

Ocean	51
Near the Lighthouse	52
Bluff House	53
Current	54
Lightkeeper	56
The Union Bluff Hotel	57
The Lobsterman	58
Bell Buoy	59
Something about the Wind	60
House on Ocean Boulevard	61
Say You Are Near	62
What God	63
I'd Like You	64
Washing In	65
The Lobsterman in the Waterskiing Boat	66
Hopper	67
The Drama at Nubble Light	68
You, Poseidon	72
Houses	73
Seagull in the Morning	74
The Voices	75
But To Know What the Voices Are Saying	76
The Sparrows	77
Shorehuggers	78
Running in Sand	79

## V 🍷 THE POINT REYES POEMS

April 22, 2005	87
Cherries	88
In Muir Woods	89
McClures Beach	90
Moss-Covered Tree	91
Nibblers	92
The Redwoods	93
Rhymes	94
Spring	95
The Tree Children	96
The Yoke	97
Strawberries	98
Sunset	99

# Foreword

Goethe's famous dying phrase, "More light!" has been a puzzling inspiration to my life and to these poems. I have been trying for many years and in many places to understand the multiple kinds of light in the world and the multiple kinds of darkness, and the relationship of poetry to both. All of these poems reflect this theme in one way or another, if not explicitly. This is only another way of saying that the poems, like all of our lives, are part of our search for meaning.

Poetry has been my biggest passion in life. Another passion has been the art of typography and book design, and as a publisher and book designer I have produced hundreds of books, of all kinds, for others. I finally decided to put my passions together and design this book myself. For good reasons, this is not a common practice, and I avoided it as long as possible, but at last I decided to be honest about my passions and put both of them forth together. I hope that the reader will delight in the typography and design of this book as well as in the poems. As Robert Bringhurst demonstrated, these two passions arise from similar impulses. They are both *ποίησις*, a making.

Poetry and typography are both lifelong arts, and after many years of pursuing each of them, I realize I am still only at the beginning. I hope the reader will forgive me that, but I also hope the reader will find some new kinds of light here.

# The Boys with the Fiddler Crabs

The boys follow each other  
like one season following another,  
and I follow the boys,  
searching in sand while the tide  
sweeps out,  
pulling up fiddler crabs  
one after another.

They throw them into buckets,  
pieces of earth and  
pieces of light.

They file under a bridge  
and I still follow them.  
Behind me the girls look on  
from a distance.

# Out of Rain

The chickadees and the towhees  
come out to sit  
on the wet oak twigs  
and the dripping blueberry bushes,  
and shake their tails  
and move their tiny megaphone  
beaks as they always did.

My father died before we were ready.

I've planted potatoes.  
I hope the rain will end.



# Fumbling in the Light

There are many kinds of darkness,  
and many kinds of death,  
but poetry is not one of them.

*It is difficult to get the news from poems,*  
said Williams.

There are many ways of  
fumbling in the dark  
and dying.  
Someone is thinking of another way  
this very moment.

*The poetry of earth is never dead,*  
said Keats.

It is the only way we have of  
fumbling in the light.

# Strawberries

The strawberries are as  
delicious as fire.

With milk and honey  
they are like a lover,

mad, wild, foolish,  
full of glee,

spotted, smooth,  
sweet, a childish wine.

I bought them beside the road  
from a Vietnamese farmer.

I tasted one and then  
went back to his counter

and picked out two  
more baskets.

He ducked  
behind a wall

and quietly pulled  
two extra of his best strawberries

and placed them on top  
of my baskets

where I had to hold them on  
with my thumbs.