

A POEM'S ONLY DEADLINE IS PERFECTION

After you start to write it,
you belong to the poem.

Your time
becomes the poem's time,
which ranges anywhere
from now to who knows when.

You're like a sculptor working
with mallet, wedge and file
to help the sculpture waiting
in a bulk of rock emerge.

Like something born in hiding,
a poem lets itself be found
the more you fret and work
to free it of its flaws.

Even when the poem seems complete,
you're still not sure of a verb here,
an adjective there.

You squander
hours searching for alternatives
until they both occur to you
by chance while you're thinking
of something else entirely.

There's no timetable.

You pause
when the poem makes you pause.
You write when the poem makes
you write.

Precedent means nothing.
Even when you think it's done,
it's never done.

You tell yourself
you could have made it better,
but the time for bettering is over.

Being a poet means
you have to live with that.