

Ginkgo poem by Howard Nemerov



The Consent

Late in November, on a single night
Not even near to freezing, the
ginkgo trees
That stand along the walk drop all
their leaves
In one consent, and neither to rain
nor to wind
But as though to time alone: the
golden and green
Leaves litter the lawn today, that
yesterday
Had spread aloft their fluttering fans
of light.

What signal from the stars? What
senses took it in?
What in those wooden motives so
decided
To strike their leaves, to down their
leaves,
Rebellion or surrender? and if this
Can happen thus, what race shall
be exempt?
What use to learn the lessons taught
by time,
If a star at any time may tell us:
Now.

*poem by Howard Nemerov
from "The Western Approaches" , 1975*



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The main library in the Washington University Libraries system in St. Louis - Missouri, USA - houses the Ginkgo Reading Room which looks out onto the Ginkgo Walk (photo left; [webcam here](#)) and features among others a portrait of Howard Nemerov over the fireplace. Howard Nemerov, Edward Mallinckrodt Distinguished University Professor Emeritus of English, loved Ginkgo trees and enjoyed the Ginkgo Walk and a hand-drafted copy of his poem 'The Consent', about the fall of Ginkgo leaves, is hung outside the entrance to the reading room.



Howard Nemerov (1920-1991), a native of New York City, was a widely published poet. In 1978 he received the National Book award and the Pulitzer prize for his Collected Poems (1977). He also wrote fiction and criticism. He was named Poet Laureate of the United States in 1988.

Nemerov wrote the poem 'The Consent' inspired by the sudden leafdrop of the Ginkgo (read more about this on my [Tree-page](#)).

Other poems about the Ginkgo:
 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: [click here](#).
 Elena Martín Vivaldi: [click here](#).
 Eve Merriam: [click here](#).

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