

Seeing the Word

by [Sydney Lea](#) in the [May 2, 2006](#) issue

Isaiah saw the Word?

I look up from Writ and am at first just—interested.

How to see something spoken?

And yet one needs to think,

and perhaps I've done so, of Word as more than Speech.

I remember that the death

of beloved Uncle Peter

left me, who had adored him, unable to rid

my mouth of a clenching dryness.

It was hopeless cold, and I not alone,

I'd bet, in fear that our notions of redemption

would suddenly turn fiction,

betraying their comfortable weft

as of the exact material of the emperor's

famous clothes; that we'd make,

despite our self-regard,

fast plans to bulwark each other—and then forget them.

Or rather simply ignore them,

sensing that they'd gone useless. . . .

And it's true that we've all of us scrambled, and shuffled, and worried!

Money. Our kids' educations.

How they'll fare in the end.

The kids, that is. And yet, by service's end,

our "fictions" regathered themselves—

Jerusalem! Jerusalem! Jerusalem!—

as if Peter had risen, spoken,
even if by all measure he was silent,
his ashes down in that box

and the topsoil loaded upon it.
We could see he had spoken, and not in mere abstractions,
though abstractions there were:

Honesty. Decency. Humor.

Less those, though, than his ancient barn-red dory,
the one that he named “Sea Cow,”

which rode Champlain again,
and the *yuk-yuk-yuk* of his laughter (by the living God,
he did go *yuk-yuk-yuk!*)

sounding along the sandstone
walls, and, yes, though we shivered, though ashes lay silent,
we *heard* his handsome face

and the way till his 95th year
he spread his arms in love and welcome and grace
and died in a fitting peace.

His sounds glowed over the mountains
to westward, like soft huge garments we might pull over
ourselves before we found sleep.