

Perspective

AT FIRST SIGHT

Once made, this stolid mauve
powder would seem forever;
but people intent on repro-
duction fire up pots next door
or across the sea, and out
of the odd one crystallizes
another, the same, but for
a tell-tale (to X-rays) part
that twists a tad; in a tango
of attractions and absences
molecules nestle in a variant
pattern. Neat, but from here on,
the first won't be made; or so
it seems, the ur-makers once
patient hands grow limp—
has desire fled? In all flasks
the second precipitates. Who,
oh who, is to blame? Yes, lay it
to the other coming—as if
seed crystals flew the world.
But the first is the accident,
a small well in a chanced
landscape, a nicked knife edge,
the one parcel of phase space
never to be sampled again,
the vanishing polymorph...you.



Roald Hoffmann

Photo credit Dede Hatch

This poem owes much to an article by Jack D. Dunitz and Joel Bernstein in *Acc. Chem. Res.* **1995**, *28*, 193–200.