Who is the mysterious figure from the past in today’s sonnet, notable only for failure? The late Robert Siegel of South Berwick challenges us to see through the disparaging view of the man’s contemporaries, and to name him.

A Notable Failure

by Robert Siegel

He never went abroad to broaden him
and though he learned to read, he did not write
anything worth saving. Once, at a whim,
he scribbled something they hadn’t gotten right

in the sand and erased it. Few could know
whether to credit any of the vulgar rumors
surrounding his birth in a shed. There were low
whispers and a gap of thirty years.

Then more rumors trickled through the countryside
about the artisan’s son turned wonderworker:
probably a charlatan—blasphemer to be sure. Wide-eyed,
some claimed he raised the dead (and healed lepers!)
before the Romans nailed him—as they nailed all such—and the neighbors sniffed, “He didn’t come to much!”