

et al.: Oakwood



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# **oakwood**

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## CONTRIBUTORS

JIM BARNES, part Choctaw and ex-Oregonian lumberjack, is co-author of *Carriers of the Dream Wheel* (Harper & Row, 1975). Poems of his recently appeared in Lucien Stryk's *Heartland II: Poets of the Midwest*.

GLEN BARTON is a Veterans representative at SDSU, and lives in Sioux Falls.

PAUL BLAKELY teaches at Drake University in the Education Department.

MICHAEL BOER is a student at SDSU.

ROBERT CANTER is a student at SDSU.

CARLA CARLSON is a student at SDSU.

SIV CEDERING FOX has published her poems widely in magazines such as *New York Quarterly*, *Crazy Horse*, and *The Quarterly Review of Literature*.

DOUG COCKRELL is living in Redfield, South Dakota. He has a B.A. degree in English from SDSU.

PAT COLLINS' story, "The White Bull," won first prize in this year's English Department Creative Writing Contest. He is a pre-law student at SDSU.

R. P. DICKEY's fourth book, *Concise Dictionary of Lead River, M.*, was published recently. A textbook, *The Basic Stuff of Poetry*, was published by Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co. His poems have appeared widely in America.

DAN DOMENCH is now living in California. He has published his fiction in a number of magazines.

DAVE ETTER is a well-known American poet. His work has appeared in a great many magazines, and he is the author of a number of books.

AL FOGEL lives in Miami, Florida. He had poems in *oakwood I*, and other poems of his are starting to appear in several magazines around the country.

RICHARD FROST has published two books with Ohio University Press: *Getting Drunk With The Birds and Circus Villains*.

ALBERT GOLDBARTH'S book of poems, *January Thirty First* (Doubleday) was nominated for the National Book Award. His poems are appearing frequently in magazines and anthologies.

RAFAEL JESUS GONZALEZ is professor of literature, Interdisciplinary Studies, and Mexican Studies at Laney College, Oakland, California.

ANDREW GROSSBARDT'S poems have appeared in *Poetry Now*, *Mississippi Review*, *New Letters* as well as other periodicals. He edits *The Chariton Review*.

BETTE HASS is a student at SDSU.

MARGARET HASSE, from Vermillion, S. D., works for the South Dakota Arts Council in its Poets-in-the-Schools Program. Her poems are beginning to appear in magazines with some frequency.

PHIL HEY teaches at Briar Cliff College in Sioux City. One of his books of poems is *IN PLAIN SIGHT*. His poems and essays have appeared frequently in American periodicals.

SHIRLEY INGALLS is a former SDSU student. She had a poem in the first issue of oakwood.

MARY MCANNALLY-KNIGHT is a journalist and a poet, and is married to the poet Etheridge Knight. Her articles, reviews, and poems have appeared in *American Report*, *New Letters*, as well as other magazines.

WILLIAM MEISSNER, a teacher of creative writing at St. Cloud State in Minnesota, has had many poems published in magazines and anthologies. Two years ago he received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

KELLY JOHN MERNAUGH is a student at SDSU.

RODNEY NELSON has had poems published in such magazines as *North Country Anvil*, *Georgia Review*, *Nimrod* and *South Dakota Review*.

KATHLEEN NORRIS recently moved from New York City to Lemmon, South Dakota. She works part-time for Leaves of Grass, Inc., a family farm corporation. Her poems have appeared in many American periodicals and anthologies.

JAY S. PAUL has published poems in *Southern Poetry Review*, *The Windless Orchard*, and *Dog-Soldier*. His chapbook, *Going Home in Flood Time*, was published by Prickly Pear Press in 1975.

PETE REYNOLDS is a student at SDSU.

NORMAN H. RUSSELL is 1/8 Cherokee, and has had hundreds of poems published throughout America. He is Dean of Math and Science at Central State University in Edmond, Oklahoma.

DAVID SCHLOSS has published a book of poems called *The Beloved with The Ashland Poetry Press*. Poems of his have been accepted recently by *First Issue*, *Paris Review*, and *Poetry* (Chicago).

GEORGE WEST is an associate professor of English at SDSU.

J. D. WHITNEY has published four books with Elizabeth Press, the latest called *sd*.

PETER WILD'S *New and Selected Poems* was published in 1973 by New Rivers Press. A more recent book of his poems is *The Cloning*, published in 1974 by Doubleday.

L. L. ZEIGER teaches and writes in New York and is just starting to be published in a number of magazines.









## THE WHITE BULL

The old Dodge pickup pulling an equally ancient Airstream trailer pulled off onto the grass at the Prescott Rodeo Grounds and stopped. When the driver shut it off the truck couldn't stop dieseling, coughing and smoking. The driver slammed it into gear and popped the clutch, putting it out of its misery. He stepped out into the sun.

Waylon Bryan was forty-one years old. With his brown, gap-toothed, leathery face and coarse cracked hands he looked ten years older. The smell of whiskey diffused from his face, and from his hand drooped a Bull Durham cigarette. He wore a grimy straw cowboy hat, faded plaid shirt with imitation pearl inlaid snaps, baggy boot-cut Levis, and a pair of soft leather cowboy boots with the toes curled upwards as if he spent all his time crouching on the balls of his feet. He walked around the trailer and toward the grandstand with a rolling but unrhythmic gait that spoke of past fractures.

From her seat inside the pickup his daughter Molly watched him go, hating him. Her eyes never left his back as he hobbled across the grass and up onto the gravel drive leading to the grandstand. He seemed oblivious to the stream of cars flowing by him, most carrying people from the city, come out in the dust and sun in their white cowboy hats to enjoy the big Fourth of July rodeo. As this was the third, a day filled mostly with preliminary events, there would be even more of them out tomorrow when the well-known cowboys would compete in the big events. The final and largest attraction of tomorrow would be the bullriding, and that, Molly knew, was what her father had come for.

As soon as he was out of sight she burst from the pickup, slamming the door behind her, and ran to the back of the trailer. Glancing around her, she opened the door, made the big step inside and quickly closed it.

The interior of the trailer smelled of stale smoke, saddle leather, and dust. The woodwork was stained and beaten, as were the seats and bunk mattresses. Molly had never realized just how awful it really was until last night in Flagstaff. Ignoring it all now, she walked deliberately, almost fearfully, to the small sink. She crouched before it and opened the door of the wooden cupboard below. Her hand reached inside and up.

There it was. She trembled with relief as she removed the brown leather bag and opened it. It was all there, the eighty-nine dollars she had amassed in a period of a little less than two years. She had gotten the money by taking it from her father's pockets when he came home drunk. He could never remember how much he spent when he went on a bender, which was often, so Molly had extracted a dollar here, a dollar there, which he never missed. But she lived in constant fear that he would find it and demand to know where it came from.

Molly carefully restored the bag to its hiding place, closed the cupboard door, and stood up, facing herself in the mirror. In it she saw a somewhat unremarkable face; quite pretty, but by no means beautiful. Tastefully applied makeup would have made her quite striking, accenting her soft brown eyes and lending some femininity to her slightly boyish features, but she wore none. At sixteen, when some girls go to great excesses in the application of the type

of makeup one sees on the face of a badly bruised corpse, Molly had no such inclinations. Her hair, not fully blonde or fully brown but a sort of sunbleached non-color like an old fencepost, was cut short and blunt for easy care. The round shape of her face made her body appear a bit too plump, which it was not.

Her body, if too anything, was too fully matured for a girl of her age and temperament. It could best be described as buxom; but her hips were not proportionally as buxom as the rest of her, and her legs were slim and well-formed. She didn't know what to do with this body; she certainly didn't flaunt it as another girl might have, and what she wore—cowboy shirt, blue jeans, boots—did not especially flatter it. And it made her the object of much whispering, snickering, and sometimes outright advances from the young men she met traveling the rodeo circuit with her father. This attention scared her a little; she wasn't emotionally equipped to handle it. The advances she either avoided or quickly squelched.

Except one.

Nottnatshe'd done anything she could be sorry for; Jerry Tillotson did not seem to be the kind of boy who would take advantage of her inexperience or her obvious liking for him, and he hadn't. But she had gone out with him, the only real date she'd ever had. They went to the drive-in on the east side of Flagstaff and saw *American Graffiti*. Jerry had a six-pack of beer and they watched the movie, drank beer and ate popcorn in Jerry's father's Buick. Jerry said he didn't drink much. Molly was glad of that, because her father drank enough for all three of them, and she told Jerry so. He just put his arm around her shoulder and leaned over and kissed her. She kissed him back, and they kissed a lot more after that.

Jerry was eighteen and a good kisser. At least Molly thought so, but she didn't have a whole lot of others to compare him with. At any rate, he was a gentleman who one day would take over his father's ranch outside Flagstaff, inherit the whole thing, and always have money, and never have to ride bulls for anything but the thrill of it, and never live in a stinking old trailer. In fact he said he had his own little house right now near his parents' that was all his own. Molly had known he was a gentleman from the moment she first saw him at the Flagstaff rodeo; he seemed different from all the filthy, loudmouthed young cowboys she was used to seeing. She had only known him two days, but she figured she must be in love with him.

"Well hello, little girl," Waylon's voice rolled at her from the open door of the trailer. She had not even heard him open the door and she panicked for a moment trying to remember if she'd rehidden the money. She almost made the mistake of lunging down for it, but she checked herself in time. Trying to calm herself, she turned to her father, but didn't look at him.

"Hullo."

Waylon dragged himself painfully into the trailer, casting a long sideways look at Molly, who was trying to busy herself by straightening the covers on her bunk. He plopped onto the old bench at the folddown table and heaved a ragged sigh. From his shirt pocket he pulled an old wrinkled Marlboro pack and tapped one of his hand-rolled Bull Durhams into his palm. He found a kitchen match, struck it on the bottom of the table, lit up, and smoked half the cigarette before speaking.

"I'm riding Starcrost tomorrow." Waylon watched Molly's face closely for any sign of emotion, but it showed none. She turned from her bunk, still not looking at him, and began rummaging in a low cupboard for something for their dinner. Her aloofness drained all his anger at her and excitement at the prospect of riding Starcrost from him, leaving only a dull disappointment.

Starcrost was a pure white bull who, in a year on the rodeo circuit, had built up not a little fame among rodeo cowboys and fans. He had never been successfully ridden. He was not an exceptionally big bull at about 1400

pounds, but he was cat-quick and had a habit of trying to kick and stomp fallen cowboys, a few of which had been badly injured by him. He was known as a feisty bull.

Waylon had been grimly determined to ride him ever since the white bull first made himself a name on the circuit, but he had never had the chance. Cowboys obtain their mounts for a given rodeo by casting lots, and up to that third of July Waylon's number had not come up. After a riderless year on the circuit, Starcrost would lend considerable fame and prestige to the first man to ride him. Waylon wanted to be that man. He was quite old for a rodeo cowboy. He felt that he could still ride as well as the younger men, but the fact was that he was barely winning enough money to keep him in food, whiskey, and gas for the pickup. There was a \$1000 prize offered by Starcrost's owners to his first successful rider, over and above that offered by the promoters of the rodeo at which the ride occurred, plus the fame and prestige that might offer a way into an easier and more lucrative line of work, related in some way to the rodeo business. Even Waylon had to admit that he couldn't ride bulls for the rest of his life.

Annoyed and uneasy at Molly's extended silence (she had not spoken at all on the trip from Flagstaff to Prescott that morning, either) Waylon reached behind him into a small bottom cupboard and drew out a full quart bottle of cheap whiskey, broke the seal and took a long pull. At this Molly's eyes finally fixed on him, watching the stubby throat as it swallowed. When he had set down the bottle, Waylon was taken aback to see her staring intently at him. He waited for her to speak, which she did after staring at him for another few seconds.

"Is that stuff gonna help you beat Starcrost like it helped you beat all the others?" she spat.

Ignoring the sarcasm, maybe because it was such a relief to hear her say anything at all, Waylon said, "It ain't for Starcrost I took that drink. It's for you. What's got into you, girl? You ain't said a word to your old dad for better'n a day now—last night, all the way from Flagstaff this mornin', and now. And now! Molly, you know what this ride means to me—"

"Means to *you* is right!"

"Means to us. If I can ride Starcrost we can quit followin' him. We'll have something, Molly! We can settle down, get a real place to live instead of this old trailer, just like when your mother was alive. Honey, I know this is no life for you. You've been real good about it till now, but you won't have to put up with it any more. You can go back to school if you want to. All it takes is this ride."

"All it takes! All it takes! It's always been 'all it takes' or 'just this one' or 'you'll see, Molly'. Well I'm tired of listening, tired of hoping, tired of watching you make a fool of yourself out in the ring and damn near getting killed, and then making a drunken fool of yourself at night. You'll always be a fool, a drunken fool cowboy waiting for his big ride! You've been prayin' and sweatin', hopin' nobody else would ride that white bull until you got your chance. Well what makes you think you can ride him when nobody else can? It's just your stupid, stupid dream, and what'll you have when it's gone?"

Molly caught her breath. Her face was purple and her features were raging. She was ready for a fight, but she didn't get it.

"I'll have you, Molly," Waylon said quietly and without assurance. He looked at the table.

Suddenly Molly pitied him, but she had gone too far to stop. "Don't bet on it," she choked, and threw herself on her bunk, sobbing. Waylon sat still for quite some time. Finally he rose and left the trailer to sit in the stands with the white-hatted city people and watch the preliminary events. On the way he stopped at the pickup and took his hip flask from the glove compartment.

He returned very late that night, stumbling and belching, threw his clothes on the floor and collapsed into his bunk. Molly, still wide awake, waited five



minutes and then got up and took a dollar from his pants pocket. It was the only bill he had. She put it in her leather sack, hid the sack, and crawled back into her bunk. Near dawn she fell asleep.

"And now folks, Starcrost is waiting impatiently in chute number two. And here comes the man who's going to try to stay on that mean white back for eight full seconds—Waylon Bryan!" Waylon warred to acknowledge the cheers and applause that pushed him to chute number two. But when he got to the chute he found he was too weak to climb it; he couldn't get even halfway to the top. Two cowboys matter-of-factly pushed him up onto the wall of the chute. He sat for a moment studying the white back, perfectly still below him, beckoning him to mount it. He slid off the fence and onto the animal as the roar of the crowd washed over him. It began to sound, inexplicably, like laughter.

"Daddy."

Waylon looked. Sitting near him on the chute was Molly. Here to wish me luck, Waylon thought, just before she gave him a mighty shove and he slid flailing off the smooth back. As he passed below the animal he looked up and was amazed to see a huge udder. They had put him on an old milk cow! The mocking laughter, led by Molly's raucous voice, trailed him as he fell through the ground, down, down, falling...

Waylon awoke with a violent start. His body was drenched in sweat and his tongue was swollen and parched and tasted like ashes. He rose and got a drink of water, turned and looked at the sleeping Molly. She seemed so peaceful now; Waylon hoped she would sleep off her rage the way he had slept off his drunkenness.

It was still early, but Waylon was nervous, so he got dressed and prepared to go sit with the white-hats until that evening when his time came. He wondered if Molly would come to wish him luck. Maybe then he could tell her that he really did love her and that he had done the best he could for her, even if it wasn't enough, and that this really would be his last ride. He swore not to take a drink on this, his longest day.

When Molly awoke the sun was high in the morning sky. Before moving she looked for her father. Satisfied that he had gone, she rose quickly and dressed. In the long hours of the night she had reached the conclusion that she could no longer stay with her father. She was tired of having nothing, tired of travelling, tired of wandering after an old man's dream that was about to end. And as much as her father disgusted her, he was still her father, and she couldn't bear to see his dream end, couldn't bear to see him hang his head and say how sorry he was, how his big ride was coming soon.

She left no note, no message. She took only her leather sack with the ninety dollars slung on a string around her neck and below her right arm, under her shirt, and a duffel bag containing her few clothes. She left the trailer and walked out the way they had come in, heading for downtown Prescott and the bus depot. She would get on the first bus for Flagstaff. Maybe she could get a job. Jerry Tillotson would help her, she was sure. He could help her find a place to stay and they could be together all the time. She hoped that someday, maybe even soon, they could get married. They were old enough, she figured, and he had plenty of money. Everything would be great then, she decided.

Jerry Tillotson's Ford pickup pulled into the Prescott Rodeo Grounds just after noon on the Fourth of July. He was feeling good and was eager to see what was purported to be one of the largest and best rodeos of the summer season. He was itching to ride in a real rodeo, but his father was dead-set against it. And his father always held Jerry's inheritance on a string, dangling it before him and threatening to snatch it away the moment Jerry rode his first bull for money. No son of his was going to traipse all over the countryside riding those damn bulls and risking his fool neck, whether he wanted to or not. But still Jerry itched. He wondered how much longer the threat of being cut off without a penny would keep him from the bulls.

He parked his pickup, finished the beer he had been drinking and threw the empty can under the seat. The sun was high and hot as he stepped out of the truck, locked his door and began walking toward the grandstand. When he was nearly there he spied the Dodge and the old Airstream that he had seen before. That's right, he thought, Molly Bryan's old man was riding here today. Molly Bryan. A sweet kid. Ridiculously naive, but cute. And what a body! He hadn't touched it though; she seemed the kind of girl you had to take your time with to get anywhere. He wouldn't mind taking her out again.

With this thought in mind he approached the Airstream and cautiously knocked at the door. When there was no answer he opened it and looked inside. Nobody. Oh well, maybe he would see her in the stands. So he went to sit in the sun, settle down with a cold beer, and watch a good rodeo.

By the time the lights over the ring were turned on that evening Jerry was in a high state of excitement, as was the entire crowd. The bullriding, finally, was next. As the tension mounted Jerry wondered who the lucky cowboy was who was to have the next chance at the white bull, Starcros. The other bulls and riders made their appearances in unbearable slowness. Then, at last:

"Ladies and gentlemen, the moment you've all been waiting for is here, because in chute number four we've got none other but Starcros just awaitin'! And he is going to be ridden—for awhile anyway—(here the white-hats chuckled knowingly) by a cowboy who I'm sure is familiar to all of you who follow this great rodeo action through the season, a cowboy who's been around a long time and certainly deserves this chance at the white bull. Folks, a real cowboy, Waylon Bryan!"

The crowd cheered mightily, if a little sympathetically, and Jerry was flabbergasted. He had forgotten all about Molly and her old man. He strained to see him enter the chute.

Waylon at the time was standing, grim and still, near the chute. When his name was called the realization struck him that Molly was not coming to wish him luck as she always did. God, why isn't she here, he wondered. Did she think he could make this ride alone? He scanned the crowd for her face, but it was dark up there and there were thousands of people and he knew it was hopeless. He caught himself trembling and longed for a drink. Numbly he began climbing the chute.

He hadn't looked at the bull at all that day; he felt it was bad luck. Now as his head rose above the last plank he stared down at the snorting, pawing thing and was paralyzed with fear for an instant. Then he was helped onto Starcros's slick white back. He wrapped the rope around his left hand once. He was afraid he was going to throw up. The bull was a writhing, vicious engine of energy beneath him, and he longed to see Molly's face watching wide-eyed from the side of the chute. But he felt her shove and heard her haunting laughter and grew empty.

"All set?" The words were like a thunderclap.

"Let 'im go." The gate swung open and the bull and Waylon vaulted into the ring, alone together, oblivious to the screaming crowd above them.

When the gate was opened, Jerry Tillotson and all the white hats rose as one person. Starcros gleamed under the lights, leaping, bucking, pirouetting gracefully under the hated burden on his back. The cowboy's legs flapped up and down like broken wings, his hat flew off, and his right fist was held high. As each second passed his situation became more precarious as the beast became increasingly enraged. Madly the bull whirled, danced and flew, defying all natural laws, obeying only those instincts which had been bred purposefully into him.

The official timer's stopwatch read 6.1 seconds as Waylon left the bull's back, flying crazily headfirst into space. From the stands it appeared as though he might land once again on the bull and continue his ride, but Starcros slipped from under him and he landed hard on his right shoulder.

From then on the scene was one of slow motion dance; but the dancers were dancing not with each other, but alone. The rodeo clowns were rushing over to try to distract the bull as it turned away from the fallen rider and its hindquarters rose high above the dust. Waylon was rising to his feet, forgetting in his anger and his shame to stay low and roll away. His hatless head rose and the airborne hooves lashed out to meet it squarely on the temple. The force of the blow knocked Waylon off his feet and backwards into the air as the clowns flitted frantically before the raging bull. Waylon's body turned in midair and he landed face down and was still.

## Siv Cedering Fox

# A LETTER

When I was ten, I found an air pistol by the road. I brought it home and gave it to my father. He used to hunt moose and hare, wild turkeys and ducks. He was used to guns. He held this small weapon up... and fired. The pistol exploded. Some parts of the pistol hit him between the eyes. He covered his face and cried: "My eyes, my eyes! I don't want to be blind."

And he was not blinded. I remember him resting on a couch, while I peeled an orange and gave him, section by section.

I have been thinking about blindness, lately, of Homer and Teireses and Borges, of seeing inward as compared to seeing outward. Of eyes that have turned white ... and now your letter comes, and in it words about your temporary blindness.

Friend, what can I do but tell you about my father? I remember a day, one summer, on an island in the river. The sun was warm. We had been swimming. My father told me to lie still, to close my eyes and listen, to see how many sounds I could hear ... and then to name them.

I wanted to run in the wind, draw blue-prints in the red sand, jump into the water, catch a log and ride it ... any action, but my father told me to lie still, to close my eyes and listen: the sound of water lapping, someone rowing, the wind in the willow behind us, a dog barking, swallows, bumblebees, a frog, the song as a lark was climbing ... And as I lay there, with my eyes closed, I learned to see, to really see. All the world around me entered my vision. I could put it all together, image by image. I could name the images.

I peel this orange for you. Taste. Section by section.



## PEACE WITH HONOR

"There ain't going to be no more oil wells" said one of the old men to another. "Not around here at any rate."

"Um," replied the other, noncommittally.

The bar was filled with the sounds of country music about people sitting in bars listening to country music.

The first old man sucked on his bottle of beer. "You want oil now, you gotta go to the ocean for it. That's where they're getting it now. The ocean."

"Umm."

"When I first came to these fields, why, the oil wells were set so close together you couldn't hardly walk between them sideways."

"Now, you take the big war," said the second old man. "Now that was some war. That was really some war. Yes sir. That was really some war. I was there from beginning to end on three different fronts. Yes sir. Three different fronts."

"What was that you said?" asked the first old man, killing his beer and holding the empty bottle up to examine it in the dim light.

"Beginning to end."

"I don't know," said the first. "I guess they could drill a few more around here, but I don't know that it would do much good."

"Um."

"I mean, things just ain't the way they once was. I mean, the way it used to be was, a man would go out there and he would just drill. Then if he didn't get a gusher, why he would just go out there and he would just drill himself a gusher. I mean, things just ain't the way they once was."

A red neon sign behind the bar, which had begun to flicker, proclaimed, "It'll Do Bar." Both men had to close their eyes against a sudden blast of white light which disturbed the dimly lit barroom as the door opened and a city policeman came in. They were the only ones to pay any attention to him as he walked among the tables making his regular afternoon inspection.

"Hello, Officer Patterson," said the second old man, as Patterson neared their table. "How are you today?"

"Well, hello Joe! What's up?," he asked, sitting down with the two old men. He looked at the other old man, who had begun to scowl at his empty beer bottle when the officer had arrived at the table. "How are you, Pete?," he asked, but the old man just stared at his bottle.

"So, tell me Joe," he asked, "what's new in the war today?"

"Not much, Officer. It's just about the same every day. Just no damn good. Now you take our war. Now that was some war. I ought to know, I was there from beginning to end on three different fronts."

"Um," said the other old man. "You want to bring us another beer over here," he said to the waitress as she walked by.

"What would you do different, Joe?" asked Patterson. "How should they win the war?"

"Well, in the first place," replied the old man, "we never should have got out of there in the first place. We should put everybody back in there again and just beat the bloody hell out of those damn communists."

"If we couldn't do it in, what was it-seven-eight-years, what makes you think we could do it now?"

"First thing you have to do is get rid of all them damn socialists in Washington that wouldn't let us win the war in the first place." The old man stopped to see if either of his listeners wanted to interject anything at this point. Buck Owens was singing about tear drops running off his face. "That's the first thing you got to do."

"Well, it's been nice seeing you boys again," said Patterson as he looked at his watch. "I've got to make my rounds, you know."

"Good talking to you, Officer Patterson," said Joe, as Patterson strolled away from the table one hand quickly flicking down to touch his pistol. Light flooded the dark room again as he opened the door to leave.

As soon as he was gone, Pete turned on Joe, his eyes showing intense anger. "Now why'd you want to go making a fool of yourself like that, talking to that young cop. He don't care anything about what you think about anything. He just makes fun out of you. You're just an old fool is all you are."

"Um." replied Joe.

Patterson was running behind. He hadn't had time to stop and talk to those two old men, but had enjoyed it none the less. He still had one more bar to check and several more small shops. Luckily, they were all on the same block, and the other bar was right across the street. That was where he was headed now. He liked this one a lot better. It wasn't so dark inside and was frequented more by young people.

Inside, he went through the same routine as with all the other bars on his rounds. He stopped inside the door to let his eyes adjust to the indoor light. In his business, it didn't pay to be taken by surprise.

Most of the late afternoon drinkers were watching the baseball game on the television. The Astros were being beaten again, this time by the Padres.

A battle was going on between the television and the juke box, which played rock as opposed to country. He much preferred the rock, although he had grown up with country.

"Hey, Patterson!" he heard a familiar voice shout from a table on the other side of the room. "What's happenin'?" It was a friend from his boyhood, with whom he had served in Viet Nam.

"John," he answered, "Where have you been? I haven't seen you in months!"

"I don't know, man. I've just kind of been laying low, you know. I've really kind of been on kind of a bumner with everything in Viet Nam and all."

"I know what you mean," replied Patterson.

"I haven't really been going out much," said John. "The reason I'm here tonight is to kind of get my spirits up. We're having a poker game in the back after while. Do you want to play? When do you get off?"

"In about an hour," answered Patterson. "I think I might just drop in at that." This put Patterson into a somewhat reflective mood. It always did when he was about to break the law. Before he had joined the force, it had never occurred to him that cops ever broke the law, although many things that he and almost everyone else did were against the law, strictly speaking. But now he exceeded the speed limit, gambled, got drunk in public and at times arrested others for doing those very things. It was something he had learned to live with.

"My first wife was a real knockout," Joe stated flatly but somewhat drunkenly across the table to Pete. He leaned forward away from the back of his chair with his elbows on the table, just barely raising his voice above the din of the country-western juke box.

"Is that so?" Pete slurred back belligerently.

"That's right, by God. She was a real knockout. You would have loved her!"

"I probably would have, too!" Pete laughed back in Joe's face.

"Why, you old fool!" Joe threw back angrily. "If you were half the man you thought you were you wouldn't be sitting here with me."

To that, Pete took a long slow pull on his bottle of beer. He replaced the bottle on its pasteboard coaster and slowly turned the bottle and coaster together, one revolution. "You don't know what I've got to do," he said. "There's lots of things I could do if I wanted to."

"Then why aren't you doing them?" Joe jumped on him immediately.

"Because I'm too tired." Pete responded slowly. "I have to rest up tonight, so just let me alone and drink your beer."

"You been resting up for fifteen years that I know of," said Joe. "What are you resting up for?" He paused, but Pete was staring toward the other side of the room and didn't say anything in return. "Whatever it is, it's probably too late!" Joe finished him off proudly.

"Um." said Pete as he took up his bottle of beer for a good long drink.

Patterson finished checking the back door of the last shop on his beat, and headed for the pickup point from which he would be taken to the station house. It was completely dark.

He had been sorry to hear that the latest news of the war had distressed John so much. It had bothered him too, hearing of places he had fought for being regained by the VC, but not that much. He considered it a waste, but didn't take it very personally.

John had always been that way though. He let things bother him that didn't really bother other people that much. It had almost gotten him killed once when he had become despondent over the first loss of a friend in combat. It had made him slow about getting under cover when first fired upon. After a few more had been killed, though, he had become callous and had gotten over it.

Patterson was glad to see that John was trying to shake it now. Maybe he was getting callous again. Maybe his old war wounds would heal up now.

"Yeah," said John, "I think I could get into a little poker. What about you?"

"Damn right," said his friend. "Sounds good to me."

"We'll get started pretty soon," said John. "As soon as the others get here."

"Who else is going to be here?"

"Oh, just Patterson and a couple of other guys."

"What," asked the other. "You mean Patterson the cop?"

"Yes Patterson the cop. So what if he's a cop?" asked John. "What difference does that make?"

"In case you haven't looked lately," said the friend, "gambling is still illegal in this town. Patterson's a cop, and cops bust people for doing things that are illegal! Do you see what I mean?"

"Hey! Take it easy," said John. "Patterson's an old friend of mine. We grew up on the same block."

"Oh, yeah?"

"We were in Nam together. Relax! Patterson's OK."

"Hey! Alright!" said John. "Come on in, man! What's up?"

"They got a new stripper at Sammie's next door," said the newcomer. "You guys want to come and take a look?" The other two women looked doubtful. "I mean she's really a ..., she's really something!. You'd better come and take a look."

"I don't know," said John. "There's still a couple more guys who are supposed to show up here."

"We'll leave word we're next door. Alright?"

"Maybe we should," said the other man.



"Come on!" said the newcomer. "Her act's about to start."

Just then, Patterson arrived. "Hey, what's going on?" he asked, seeing all three men standing in the middle of the floor.

"Patterson." John greeted him for the second time in an hour. "It looks like we're all going next door to catch the new stripper at Sammie's."

"Alright," said Patterson, ready for a good time after a hard eight hour day on his feet. "Let's go!"

"But they just don't make baseball players like they used to any more," said Pete.

"Yeah!" agreed Joe, "They damn sure don't. They damn sure don't."

"Now you take Babe Ruth," said Pete. "Now that was one hell of a man."

"He sure as hell was," said Joe. "He sure as hell was."

"Now you take Lou Gehrig; they just don't make them like that any more," said Pete.

But Joe wasn't listening. He was standing up with his fists on the table as he leaned forward to stare at a knot of people on the other side of the room.

"What's going on?" asked Pete, turning around in his chair, then standing up to get a better view.

"Look out!" said Joe, menacingly. "You're in my way!"

Pete moved, but only to go to the other side of the room where everyone else had already congregated. Joe hurried after him and arrived at the crowd first.

"It's just a shuffleboard match." Pete stated flatly, coming up behind Joe. "Let's go find someplace else to drink."

"Who's winning," Joe asked one of the onlookers in front of him.

"I don't know," answered the man. "I can't see a thing."

"Come on," said Pete, "let's go find someplace else to drink."

Joe was now on the other side of the circle of people as those at one end all took in a breath in unison, then a few cheers went up. Joe circled the table twice, looking for an opening, then approaching Pete, said, "Let's go someplace else. You can't even drink a beer in peace around here."

"OK," said Pete. "Where do you want to go?"

"I don't know," said Joe. "Let's just go."

When they got outside, it was completely dark. Pete followed Joe as Joe was drawn toward the music and flashing lights that proclaimed, "Exotic Dancers." Both men walked up to the billboard and began inspecting the pictures of the girls.

"They're all new ones!" exclaimed Pete. "We've never seen any of these before!"

"I think I might have seen a couple of them before." said Joe. "Just because you haven't seen any of them before doesn't mean I haven't!"

Pete didn't answer, but continued to peruse the pictures. The music kept coming from inside the building, and occasionally voices could be heard laughing and shouting above the popular tunes to which the exotic dancers were dancing.

Pete looked up and put his finger on one of the pictures. "I've seen this one before!" he proclaimed, turning to look at Joe, seeing nothing but a closing black glass door as Joe entered leaving Pete alone in the flashing light and muted music and laughter.

"Old fool," said Pete to the door and the pictures. "What do you think you're going to do in there?"

Patterson was getting really drunk. He hadn't had this much beer to drink in he didn't remember how long. He didn't usually pour them down like this,

but he always kept up with the others. You didn't have much choice when everybody got into buying rounds. For some reason, all of them were just drinking more tonight.

Since he was getting so much drunker than usual, his emotions were getting all messed up. He kept looking at the stripper on the stage, and he wanted to jump up there and join her for a dance. But he also wanted to maintain his dignity in front of his friends.

Both things were important to him. It was important to maintain in front of your friends, but it was important to do strange things and really enjoy yourself from time to time. Damn! He hadn't jumped up and danced with a stripper since the night before he had been shipped out of Da Nang. Now that had been one hell of a night!

Just then, he saw old Joe walk in all by himself. Patterson couldn't understand that. He had never seen Joe without Pete. They were inseparable. But then he saw Pete bringing up the rear. That was fairly typical.

He thought about going over to say hello to them, but decided against it. He didn't think they especially cared that much about him, even though Joe always seemed to. It was probably just because he was a cop. He was used to that sort of thing. They probably wouldn't even recognize him out of uniform.

The stripper was now dancing to "Black Water" by the Doobie Brothers. She looked kind of awkward; it wasn't a very good song to strip to.

"Hey, Patterson," said John. "What do you think about that, huh?"

"Alright!" said Patterson. "Alright!"

"Hey, you guys! What the Hell's going on?" It was one of their friends who was supposed to be in the card game. "What the hell happened to the game?"

"We got sidetracked." said John. "What do you think about what we got sidetracked with?"

"Did you guys hear the news?" asked the newcomer, ignoring John's question.

"What news?" asked Patterson. "I haven't listened to any news all day."

"Me either," put in John. "What is it?"

"It's Viet Nam!" said the new man. "The South Vietnamese went into full retreat today! They're losing South Viet Nam!"

All the men were quiet at the table, looking at each other. Patterson was trying to clear his clogged brain so he could fully comprehend what he had just heard. He didn't have any great love for the country of South Viet Nam, but God, he thought, we lost so much over there. So many people left so many legs and so many lives over there.

"They got outmanuvered and just broke and ran," explained the other man, more calmly now than before.

Patterson took a large gulp of his beer, then another, as the stripper continued to dance to what had now changed to old fashioned strip music. She gyrated and paced the stage, teasing the audience with hints and promises of things never to come.

Yelling, screaming as loudly as he could, Patterson jumped to his feet throwing his bottle of beer to the floor. The music still played, but it was the only sound in the bar. The stripper, half naked, stared at Patterson from the stage as did everyone else from their chairs.

"Damn you lousy gooks!" screamed Patterson. "How in the hell could you just run?" he asked, but the only answer came in the form of the musical bumps and grinds from the juke box.

John and two of the others jumped up and started leading Patterson toward the door. "Come on," said John. "Let's get you some air, Patterson! You'll be OK as soon as we get you some air."

"Damn you!" roared Patterson, as he tried to throw the three men off.

They got him out of the door, followed by their other friends and most of the people in the bar, and leaned him against the building beside the pictures

of the strippers. Patterson sucked in the fresh air. It cleared his head some, but it also made him feel dizzy. His friends relaxed their hold on him and stepped back, remaining on their guard.

"What do you think of your friend, now?" Pete asked Joe in the back of the crowd. "What do you think about your good cop Patterson, now?"

"I have to go talk to him," said Joe. "He needs someone older to talk to. He started making his way slowly through the knot of onlookers.

"Are you feeling better now?" asked John.

"Good for nothing Gooks!" Patterson was whispering, his head down and his eyes tightly shut.

"Patterson," said Joe. "Don't take it so hard, boy, it doesn't matter."

Patterson opened his eyes when he heard Joe's voice, but all he could see was a blur.

"You kids never fought that one right in the first place," said Joe. "You'll do better next time."

"What?" asked Patterson. "What!"

"I know," said Joe. "I fought in the big one on three different fronts."

"Shut up!" screamed Patterson. "I don't want to hear that shit any more!"

"And we won it." Joe explained slowly. "I know!"

Patterson didn't say anything this time. He had his eyes closed once again, with his head bowed, his friends standing ready to pin his arms again.

"Get out of here old man," said John.

Joe ignored him. "You can't expect other people to win your wars for you," he said. "You've got to just get in there and kill everything that don't look like you and get the hell out again."

"Get away from him!" warned John.

"Otherwise there just ain't no reason to go in and fight in the first place." Joe explained calmly to Patterson, but also to the others now. They were all watching him silently.

Patterson looked up and opened his mouth as if to say something, but nothing came out. His throat felt dry, and he reached over and took a bottle of beer from one of his friends.

"But there just ain't no reason to feel bad about it!" Joe added quickly.

"No?" asked Patterson.

"No." Joe answered. "You really will do better next time."

The wisdom of what Joe had been saying was becoming apparent to Patterson. The old man seemed to know what he was talking about.

"Maybe you're right," Patterson said slowly. It was all coming into focus for him now. "We really will do better next time, won't we?"

## FRONTIER TRAILER COURT

I told her I'd come right home after work and I didn't. It's not my fault they let me off early. I had plenty of time for a drink. I stopped off at the Rock. Pete tends down there in the afternoons and Gunner was there losing at pool and they got that double bubble cocktail hour and the time just flew. Before I knew it I was late and in trouble. I couldn't call 'cause our phone is disconnected. I knew she was gonna be madder than hell, so I said to myself; screw it. If I'm gonna get the crap I might as well have another drink. Besides, just about then I had 4 of Gunner's bucks in my pocket and he wasn't gonna let me leave a winner. I was thinking that if I won a couple more I'd have enough to buy her a plant from the supermarket. I hadn't eaten all day and I guess I was getting dizzy from the scotch 'cause the next thing I know old big Gunner slaps me on the back to congratulate me for making a three bumper call shot and since that son of a bitch don't know his own strength, I go flying forward and slip and fall face down on the wire stand that holds the pool cues. I got this big gash right across my forehead. Blood spurts out all over and I can't see. I stood up as best I could and of course now my uniform is all covered with pool chalk, and beer, and whatever the hell else is on the floor of the Rock. Everyone comes running over 'cause they think I'm dying what with all that blood everywhere. Gunner keeps saying over and over how sorry he is but that don't help 'cause my eyes are burning and I'm mad. Pete comes out from behind the bar with some paper towels and kinda cleans up the wound. He sets me down on a stool and has me drink this tumbler of whiskey to relieve my pain and settle me down 'cause when I saw my face in the bar mirror what with that bloody gash going right through my eyebrows I swore and waved my arms and scared the women. I didn't care how I looked too much it's just that I thought about what Valerie was gonna do to me. I'm 2 hours late and now my face is uglier up and she is such a hard woman I know she'll have no mercy on me because of a cut I got in a god damn bar. I thought of lying to her and saying how I got jumped at work or something but you know how small this damn town is. I kept cursing to myself over and over and Gunner's got his arm on my shoulder saying here let me take a look at that. As if the clumsy dog is a doctor or something. I drank the whiskey down and felt a little better at least my eyes weren't stinging but screwball Gunner keeps apologizing so much I just can't take it. I tell him it's all right and then try to finish our pool game but I can barely focus and you know I can't forget about the cut 'cause Gunner is bringing it up and like saying hey it's looking better. As if the slash is healing before his very eyes. I finished the game as quick as I could and told him I had to get back to my wife. I got in the company car and drove toward home. I kinda had a story ready for Val, I was planning to tell her the truth, that is that I got this cut in a bar, but I was gonna bend the time a little, I don't think anyone knew exactly what time I got cut, I'd play on her sympathy. I'd tell her I couldn't hardly drive. I got this cut, it took me two hours to drive home. It would take drama to convince her but I've pulled it off before, she's really gullible. So I figured now that I've got my story down and since Jilly's is right on the way home I'll stop for a pain killer. I pulled into Jilly's back parking lot so my car wouldn't be noticed, and I went inside. Well shit, if there wasn't some guy from Georgia in there who had just finalized his divorce and he was buying free drinks. I couldn't pass that up, nothing tastes better than a free drink. I remembered I hadn't eaten and that was a damn good reason to buy one of those beer sausages they got rotating in a glass case



behind the bar. I bought three and laughed to myself about how bad Gunner felt about cutting me and here I am just down the street eating beer weiners I bought with his hard earned money. I took off my overcoat and went back to the bar for another free drink. Well I must've looked worse than I thought because the bartender won't smile back when I smile at him. I give him the benefit of the doubt and figure he's real busy, and new here. I sat in one of those padded booths and Shirley walked over and asked what happened to your face, and I frown which hurts, and tell her I got jumped and next thing I know she's hugging me and rubbing my leg and asking me to stick around. I tell her it's just part of my job. I'm beginning to relax and wave a waiter down and ask for a drink. The waiter shakes his head and tells me the 'tender cut me off. I look down the bar and there's that bastard bartender staring at Shirley. I don't know what he thought, maybe he thought I stole this rent-a-cop uniform. I didn't live to be this old to have some college kid bartender tell me I've had too much to drink. I'm a security guard, I tell the guy I'm bonded, what the hell's wrong with you? He sneers and calls a bunch of waiters and cleanup men over to him. I could see these fools were gonna throw me out bodily. Heave ho my ass, I yelled at their huddle, you go ahead and try it! I must've looked like something 'cause these guys are really scared. They don't do nothing, they just stand around like they're waiting for someone and of course it dawns on me who they're waiting for. These modern bars all got little buttons and secretly you push them and the whole police force shows up. I grabbed my coat and was making it to the door when they arrived. I acted nonchalant, told the cop at the door excuse me, and tried to get past him but no go, the punks are all pointing at me and this cop he winks at Shirley and grabs my arm and I'm out the door. I expected the worse but I wasn't gonna take any shit. I wasn't gonna let some rookie slap my hands like a baby, so I told him, look I didn't do nothing. What happened to your face, he asked, maybe we ought to have that looked at. I get the picture, these guys aren't out to arrest me. They're impressed by my uniform and so I say an accident at work. And of course it occurs to me that this is the perfect alibi. I'll go to the hospital yeah and I'll have a nurse there call a neighbor and the neighbor tell Val that there's been an accident, he's at the hospital, but don't worry he's all right. Man I figure these cops are angels. They drive me to the hospital and the whole time the young cop is making small talk and such which is real nice of him 'cause I'm feeling embarrassed about being thrown out of Jilly's. I guess I was depressed and drunker than I thought 'cause when they lead me into the emergency room and those bright lights hit my eyes, I stumbled and fell into the young cop who catches me and says are you all right? Which is a very simple question but I can't think right and I answer sure but I've got this cut on my face, and they both start laughing and I feel like fifty cents. Then I wait about an hour before the nurse even gets my name and the doctor is some young intern who is half asleep and rubs pink shit on my face that burns like hell and gives me some pills to stop infection he said, but I don't know about that 'cause these pills are huge gray capsules not like anything I've ever seen before so I kinda suspected all along that doc didn't know what he was doing 'cause here I am smelling like booze and this sleepy jerk is giving me horse tranquilizers or something. I take two and drink some minty green water and sure enough they're not even through bandaging me when those pills sink deep in my stomach and my eyes like close and all I want to do is sleep. Now don't drive anywhere this fat nurse tells me and sure I think like maybe I'm gonna go to a ballgame with my head cut to shit and full of pills. Now by this time the cops are really bored and I don't blame them, hospitals are for sick people and these guys would rather be cruising in their car bullshitting so they get real insulting with me like telling me to hurry up and be polite and watch my language and shit like that. Then just as we're leaving I remember Val and I tell them to call my wife but we don't have a phone, you have to call a neighbor, but I can't remember her name, you can maybe look it up so she can tell Val 'cause she's got to know. The doctor says something like tranquilizers cause incoherency and he winks at me and the cops and I'd liked to walk through him like a screen door because now it's

almost midnight and the only reason I came here was for the excuse and if Val isn't told of my coming she's never gonna believe me and I can't begin to explain because like I told you before I can't talk, so now what happened to my alibi and I know for she's called the Rock to see if I was there and Peie will do the best he can to cover for me like saying he hasn't seen me all day which is what he says when anyone's wife calls but if one of the ladies answer the phone the truth will be told and that ain't gonna help me. The cops want to know where I live so I do the best I can and I lie! I tell them Charm Apartments which is a complex right above the trailer court I live in because I still cannot bring myself to face Val. I know that if they drop me off at Charm I can walk in the lobby door and they'll leave. If they delivered me to my door Val would say something great like, my drunk husband always rides home with cops, saves cab fare doesn't it dear? Which is really dangerous because only luck and my uniform has stopped these guys from checking on me, and I may or may not have a warrant out see 'cause of that old ford I drive has like hundreds and hundreds of parking tickets, and that's another thing, if they check the license on that old junker they'll find that there is no legal owner just that friend of mine Jay who found it in a field in Texas and got it running and left it here and god only knows where he's been or what he's done with that car, so I say Charm Apartments and the cops nod their heads and say something into the radio. They drive up to the lobby door and moustached cop smoking some cheap cigar that's making me want to throw up says, can you make it? Sure I told the guy and fumble my hands up and down the door panel looking for a handle and the old guy laughs and says, police cars don't have handles in the backseat. He got out and opened my door, making fun of me by bowing a little at the waist, that prick. I walked up the stairs real slow and turned and waved them off. They sped away like they were real busy which is bull 'cause nothing ever happens in this screwed up little town. Well I must've misjudged the distance between Charm and Frontier 'cause it seemed like I walked for days, I was staggering back and forth across that gravel road and the cars that passed me went real slow like checking me out, a guy can't even walk home in this town without everybody craning their god damn necks. And the headlights of the cars would blind me and leave pink and blue lines hanging in the air like I don't know what that jerk of an intern gave me but it was strong, so strong that just as I neared my trailer I tripped on some kid's tricycle and fell into this little drainage ditch. There I am laying on my sore back in this ditch with my feet stuck up in the air only about ten steps across the street from my house and I can't move, I just can't make my muscles do anything and I'm falling asleep. But I hear glass breaking and I don't need anyone to tell me what's going on 'cause it's coming from my trailer and it's Val throwing shit out the windows, end tables and chairs, and she's swearing like to raise hell and I can't move, and I figure maybe it's better if I just lay here and watch because that bitch could kill me. Then I see that the back of the trailer is glowing with an orange light and I just can't believe it but I know in my heart she'd do it and I summon every bit of strength I got to get up but I can't stop that horrible woman has set fire to my trailer. The smoke is white and suddenly the whole back end's going like a bon fire and Val turns on the porch light and she's got everything she owns, which ain't much, packed into one of my suitcases and she jumps into the old ford, starts it and swears and turns the old bomb slowly around and you know right then I just stopped caring if I ever saw her again or if I spent another day in this shit town and the headlights of the turning car lit up my feet and I couldn't help but admire the fine western stitching on my boots.



William Meissner



## SWEET TIME: WORKING A POEM (after "Old Men Working Concrete")

I hadn't written in a long time, and despaired of ever writing again. But the concern at the moment was not writing. My friend Bill needed help with his garage floor. He'd had a heart attack so his friends helped out: George, Al, and me (the only one under 60). All retired but me; all working with their hands all life long, but me. We did it, we finished more than Bill hoped we would. He was proud of the floor; deeply moved by friends happy to do so much for him. So was I.

So the poem was not begun, in a sense: it was there complete in the experience, needing not so much invention as transcription. Or so it felt, and still does. There are few things more beautiful than old men working. They don't have to; it becomes a point of honor to show the mastery of years of working with hands. What if the hands are not so steady? Supernal patience wins out, the joy of being with the thing worked, of seeing oneself reflected in the work. And of knowing that the work will outlast you, if you do well; and being happy about that too.

The poem did not write itself. It demanded a kind of faithfulness to the experience, a sense of working in language somehow like the sense of working with concrete. Only enough to make it firm and level; unspectacular; strong, without decoration. From first word to completion, perhaps twenty lines of description were eliminated; the poem ended up less colorful and less narrative than when it began (which was by a rapid dumping onto the page of all associative materials, images, names, etc., roughly in the order in which they had been noticed).

But how is the sense of the poem the sense of the experience? I knew (want to say, anyone would know) that  
won't be rushed; will take  
their own sweet time.

has to be the first two lines. Young men sweat and curse under work; old men retired savor it. Something perhaps to keep, lovingly, from thinking how much is past and how little left; but in any case, savor. Time is sweet when you feel the purpose in your hands again. As time should be sweet and purposeful in the movings of this poem. There is no specific prosody behind this poem; it seeks the motions inherent in the experience. There is a coherence in the way sounds occur in my writing, a subdued but constant repetition and near-repetition; but no more planned or preordained than the phrases of a good jazzman, I hope. Thus I do not directly believe that "the sound must seem an echo to the sense." There is a sense of rhythm larger than any body of sounds one could use mimetically (and thus nothing of "slap and scrape of trowel" or "rough wash of mixer"). In its place, a kind of cadencing, that is, ways to keep the words flowing, or modulate or stop their flow — ways the sounds, phrases, lines, grammar show the ear how to hear, the mouth how to speak. In a poem it should be immediately obvious to a sympathetic oral reader. At the end, for example, everything conspires to end. Anticlimax in ideas. Short sentences of flat sounds. Full pauses.



But never these aside from some sort of immediate concern with the thing said, as if it were the most ordinary prose. I like poems which at once (1) offer an experience which is the words, and (2) indicate an experience of value independent of any poem whatever. But poems are not consequences of judgment. One experience calls another experience into being, and the latter is a poem. Richard Palmer (*Hermeneutics*, Northwestern U. Press, 1969) says that truth is "The dynamic emergence of being into the light of manifestness." All language, all craft, goes to make the experience manifest; not only the experience of working concrete, or of old men, but of seeing, of finding all this to be fascinating. I would be a Whitmanlike observer, knowing that observing itself is real experience.

And who to read it? Anyone, I hope; but mostly, a reader no respecter of cultural fashion. I seek to be neither old nor new in style or subject, but to work finally from my own sense of style and experience. I don't know that other poets are either interested or impressed. Readers who like poems such as this one seem to be a little more willingly innocent than most poets or scholars. A reader would have to at least be open to the possibility that old men working concrete are beautiful, that unspectacular style can be most appropriate and good. And that many poems now written are a kind of vitiated, obscure mush in both senses of language and experience; and that I will not let mine be, regardless. I am honored that David Evans and E. V. Griffith like some of my poems such as this one. I would love to hear from someone who can't stand the poem.

Or from someone who wanted to know what it "means." I would rather write a good clear poem than a bad one which could be analyzed all day. (Agreed: there are great poems which could be analyzed all day. But analysis never improved any poem.) In short, I can hardly bring myself to believe that a paraphrase is either needed or valuable, that it would be significantly more clear or understandable than the original. If one is needed, consult a book on how to finish concrete.

Do not consult a book on how to finish poems, however. I have tried very hard to study both technique and poetics so that I could put all away, and write each time as if I had never written before. I see this poem as similar in theme and technique to several others (Midwest life and language; sorry, both coasts, if I haven't entertained you); perhaps slightly better than some. How should I know that? But judgments like these are always retrospective, somehow not lived.

Still. All poetics is a Procrustes bed. If a poem is good, it is more than anything like, more than anything said about it: almost too much of experience to be as mere as words. And yet, miraculously, it is.

See also: comments with my poems in *New Voices in American Poetry*, and "Letter to Any Young Poet," *Oakwood, 1*; English Dept., South Dakota State University, Brookings 57006.

## OLD MEN WORKING CONCRETE

won't be rushed; will take  
their own sweet time.  
Now and then, will stop  
for snuff (reaching in  
the pocket where the circle  
of can has worn a circle  
in the cloth); and then  
get back to work, mix mud  
and fill and walk that barrow  
back and back and back.  
Soon enough the slab end  
takes shape. The one man  
on his knees with a float  
checks it with his eye  
stopping time and again  
to run his striker saw-wise  
and level across the tip.  
Soon enough it gets long;  
smoothed with broad swings  
of trowel, it gets long.  
Finally they stop the mixer.  
One trowels out the last space,  
one works the edger.  
Done, they stand back.  
They take one more look.  
It's good. Yes sir, it's good.  
They talk. They dip snuff.  
They are happy.

Kelly John Mernaugh

## CENTER RING STAR

He had his roommate, now, and before it had been his mother. Grange was never around anyone who took him seriously, actually.

He had a teacher who once told him he was brilliant, and he remembered how she started to cry after telling him. She said that she was vaguely familiar with those severe depressions he must get.

It was then, he thought, that he became conscious of condescension.

Grange was always carrying arguments on inside his head. He was certain everyone did. He felt moored by these arguments and only occasionally could he loosen himself from them.

That morning he tried telling Bill how his heart was *pounding* when he awoke. He told how he was utterly paralyzed by what might happen when he died. He slipped into the familiar arguments he'd used before, only this time it was so vivid. If there was a God, how would He judge people with no cause? You know, nothing they believed strongly enough to be martyred for? How would He judge someone who had taken an easier road in life? And on. He resolved to the fact that no matter what, God would see that if everyone lacked inhibitions they would all be saints. It seemed to be a passable ending to the argument. Then came the sight of a pure sunrise through the window, and how even the civilization in the city meshed with such stark comliness. It was both emotional and unemotional at the same time. Bill shrugged and said sure, but why worry?

And then Bill turned some music on, like Grange's mother had always done. He started humming with the song. He was always humming, while Grange could tolerate it for only a few minutes a day, preferring silence.

"Can you turn that off for once?" his voice rose; perturbed.

"What's that?" Grange knew Bill heard.

"I said I don't want to listen to that stuff." Grange was stunned by his own voice and embarrassed by the flush of his face. He felt more persistent than angry, now.

"If it bothers you I'll turn it off. I just try and get along." Bill finished and Grange looked down at his book. The print reddened and the page took on a sickly flesh color. He knew Bill was watching him. Grange refused to look back.

"I'm sorry, I'm tired of listening to all that mindless stuff all the time. It's repetitious and monotonous," said Grange.

Bill answered. "It's not mindless; it's sort of an experiment in emotion, I think. You know?"

"No, I don't know. And I don't care."

Bill said, "I don't think you mean that, you're not that stupid."

Grange, floundering, wanting to leave the room, stood, looked at Bill, then got a towel and went to take a shower.

Later, when he'd finished, he didn't say a word; merely put his books in his attache case, and stepped to the library.

In the library with his books stacked in an even pyramid, Grange rested back in the wooden chair. So much of his life seemed just a noisy tossle. It was competition and more unwanted rivalry; it loomed pressing against him. He feared that it was almost in defense that he felt above it, and it became peaceful. And here in the library or any place he could work, there was only sound and no noise. He could stop listening to sound anytime he wanted, like an old mechanic deaf to engine noise. Here was neutrality, a place his work

could excel at without worrying about interference. There was nothing harsh about sound here: a dropped book had empty volume, no tone; footsteps metallicly clicked away; voices whispered quiet and unnaturally even, easy to blot out. Yes, it was here that he found reclamation and revival. But, he had to study now, and couldn't take time to daydream.

It was later that she walked by and smiled at him.

He'd never imagined it. There was so much intrusion that no place was silent.

It was abrupt. His work was avoided in thinking about her. He wanted to go talk to her. Maybe get to know her. But no, he didn't know what. He didn't feel he could talk to her.

Grange glanced sideways. He could see her sitting at the desk softly sorting books. She would place them down one corner first, then lift the rest down to make a sound that was no more expectant than heard. There she was, in the corner of periphery; he tried looking back to his books, but his chest froze too much to complete the turn.

It seemed incredible. He glanced at her again. She impressed in his memory. Her face was closely tomboy, and her eyes seemed wide.

Then Grange saw his ridiculousness meeting her: awkward hand gestures he didn't quite control; the way he avoided looking at people. He couldn't.

His eyes closed and he fled over ideas. He felt he was sinking and riding over instable waves. Once he thought he was sinking into himself, sinking so deeply that he might never get out. His body shuddered; he felt reaching out was his only chance, and inside the emptiness he somehow, impossibly, found a way out. Not the way he'd entered, from above, but out the side. His head jerked, and his eyelids opened. He was looking at a column of sunlight which rested its base around himself and shot away. He blinked dumbly and shaded his eyes until the brightness wore off.

He sat breathing in shallow breaths until he felt calmness return.

He gathered himself.

She'd persistently worked on the mislaid books at her desk. Grange couldn't imagine how long he'd waited.

Finally, he thought he would leave. He put the books away and picked up his briefcase as he went towards the stairway. The walls had their icy blue color, the floor its cool marble, and there she was handling absolutely limp books. His feet shuffled as he leaned to go talk to her, but his legs kept parallel railroading tracks. She looked to smile at him, but he looked down too quickly and walked down the stairwell out the door.

---

Christ it had been that kind of day. Impatience. What he'd heard in class seemed to travel everywhere about him, tangent to what he was thinking. It left distaste in him, and he felt out of place.

For a while that morning, it had become very cloudy, and it looked like rain. From the smallness of barometric changes the people around Grange reacted to the difference. They became vibrant and began talking about the weather as though it was vital. He didn't join in, rather he remained to his own thoughts.

The talk subdued as the teacher began. He talked and motioned as he walked along the windows, pushing them half-shut. He was going on about the assignment and how it related to today's world and so on. The class didn't know how close it came to a quiz; but maybe next time, he said in afterthought.

He'd thought about her. Grange really wondered. His eyes were outside more than towards the class. Outside the wind was blowing leaves swirling in outrageous crescents, chasing then hooking off (a buttonhook). Or there were the piles being blown into peaks, which were dashed into cartwheeling walls which went into crescents again. They moved in manic motion. At one time the



leaves had been on trees, and worked to magically keep food traveling and pulsing through the fibers. Then coldness had caused chemicals to overcome the chlorophyll's color, and the leaves fell. Then the wind took them over in a final dancing spree, and soon snow would bury them in gutters to be swept away later. But for now the delicate brunette patterns became wisps of hair blown across her face. The rustling became louder and the suggestion was of innocence; a fist formed by a bunch of leaves had opened into a hand which invited Grange even more. From the ability to bring life from the inanimate of sugars and gasses and minerals, they'd died and in their death they were calling. Grange saw that he wasn't looking at her at all, but investing himself in a game. A gaping hole of awareness opened which could draw nothing in it, for there was nothing to fill the gap. Before, there had been the knowable, the definite. There had been sensation and little more.

"Grange?"

"Huh?"

"The name please?" Eisenberg looked at Grange with a disciplinary face.

"Um, I don't know. Matisse?"

"That's not bad. You're only a century off. You mentioned an artist and not an author. That's really not too bad an answer considering you were dreaming who-knows-where-again." He could hear some of the people in the class snickering.

---

That night, Bill told Grange he was going downtown with him.

"I don't know Bill. I don't feel like anything. "You never do. C'mon get showered and try not to look like someone worked you over with a cattle prod."

"I don't think it's going to work. I'll stand around and get bored like always."

"C'mon," Bill ordered.

"I feel dopey now."

"And that's the way you look, too, but don't think you're getting out of going." Bill's back was turned to Grange.

"Hell." It was made to sound resigned, but fooled neither. "Can you give me time to take a shower? How are we going to dress?"

"You don't have to wear anything special. Hurry up."

Grange left the room and was back shortly and dressed quickly.

Bill said, "Grange, not like that. You're not going to a Bar Mitzvah or your first communion. You're going downtown."

"Well," said Grange, "how does this look?" He reached into his closet and pulled out a knit shirt.

"That's perfect. They'll go wild over you."

"Don't kid me, how does it look?"

"I swear, it's perfect."

"Okay okay, I'll put it on," he said, finally seeing how impatient Bill was.

They left in Bill's car, speeding most of the way downtown. It was a fast trip, and soon they were nosing into bars long enough to have a beer, nothing fancy. Inside were the crowds loud and waving, trying to be overheard over the bands or jukeboxes. The bars would change, but there would always be the bartenders: some students, others older and receiving more sedated orders. The older ones had little expression on their faces, and would reach to take a puff on a cigarette, no matter how busy. But the young bartenders either looked like dead fish or talked and talked or had inane comments thrown at them. Grange felt uneasy in these places, but Bill paid no attention.

They started to get a bit limber. They'd gone into one bar where some girl in a black leather coat came over to talk to Bill. Her boyfriend seemed anxious, and she had to give the guy a threatening look before he minded his business. Then she and Bill started again like nothing had interfered. Her boyfriend had an extremely large head which constantly made subtle movements right and

leftwards, as though he were thinking that he had better be the only one that talks to her. Grange couldn't believe the girl and Bill talked another fifteen minutes; he was certain she had done it intentionally. Bill started laughing when they left.

"Let's go, kid," said Bill.

"I think we've had enough."

"Naw, I want to see a couple more places and then that's it."

"All right." Grange thought it was probably the drinks that made him say that. He was certain Bill would get into trouble. He should have made him go home.

The next place they went into was very nice. It was more of a restaurant than a bar, done in an antique fashion, like yesterday's styles.

It was Grange's turn to buy, and while Bill said he was going to find a table, Grange bought. Bill raised his arm so he was easy to see. Grange moved through the people, and when he sat down he saw he was sitting across from the girl in the library.

Bill said, "Nancy, this is my roommate, Grange."

"Hi," she said in a smile.

Grange said hello.

Bill was compulsively talking, and was talking about everything. He mentioned he'd heard Nancy was working somewhere on campus. "What at, exactly?"

Grange had to. "Let me guess, first." He paused. "Oh, let's see. The library?"

Bill's eyebrows dipped quickly. He didn't know what.

"You guessed," she said smiling.

"How'd you think of that?" asked Bill.

"I don't know. I just guessed," said Grange. Bill looked at him with a half grin that he still didn't know.

All three sipped their drinks. Nancy sipped water left from a small meal she'd had before they'd sat down. Grange felt uneasy that he was drinking.

Bill signalled a waitress over and Nancy joined them in a drink. Bill paid.

"How often do you work in the library?" Grange asked.

Nancy said, "On weekday mornings."

Just talking to her Grange could begin to feel a serene simplification radiating from her. Things seemed clear where before they hadn't.

Grange felt things were different until Bill said he was going to leave.

"To tell you the truth, I'm about ready to go back to the room.

Were you going to stay here, Grange?"

Grange didn't know why but he didn't feel he liked her now as much as he did before, and he felt an inward pull he wanted to defy, but he didn't. "I think I'm ready to go myself," he said quietly.

Bill looked at him, then at Nancy and said, "I guess we'll both be going. Are you ready to leave, Grange?"

"I guess."

They stood, then said goodbye; the whole atmosphere hurt. He tried to think it was nothing, but knew it was. He didn't like anything about the room, as they left.

They'd gone in silence, then Bill asked Grange how come he became so quiet. "I think she liked you, and you did nothing."

"I don't know. She was all right I guess. I mean, I wasn't crazy about her."

"I don't know about you, Grange," said Bill.

Bill didn't say anything for a minute, but when he spoke, it came out angry.

"You're so worried about yourself you're never going to do anything for anybody. You never take a chance."

He looked at Grange and Grange looked back.

"Well I hope you choke on yourself," said Bill. He walked back towards downtown.



Grange pivoted and walked his own way, feeling very much to himself. His hand raised to the bridge of his nose and pinched near the corners of his eyes in a the way of the fatigued.

The night was everywhere. It was in the interstices of branches, it surrounded the horizons and formed around everything.

When he noticed all the stars in the sky there was a slight shifting. Where before he'd relied so heavily on himself for illumination, there had always been the crystalline blinking of stars. There had always been others he had not quite perceived.

The heaviness of vanity lifted off him—it wasn't for long, but he'd felt light for once. He smiled about the day. He would go talk to her tomorrow.



Albert Goldbarth  
*Two Poems*

## WHAT WE KNOW

Morning.  
The mother earth, that  
old personification, turns me  
with her again. What  
I want, what I love, is to enter

someplace far enough in the new day  
to be beyond myself. This is  
the weight of the cock in my hand  
above the bowl. It will get there  
at any cost.

The knowledge it wants  
this morning is massive, is one  
brown smile: a seed-pod. Is  
her rub of thigh on thigh  
when walking: the tongue  
could be a flame there.

No wonder.  
The rose, she's blooming.  
The dawn, she's pink.'  
The old true  
personifications. Ah,

what do we know,  
we men? Our lives

pass Life  
with the friction that soap  
slips over a woman's  
wet, bathed  
breast.

It's morning. The earth  
turns into sun. And below us

the nipple rises, now soft, now tautened.

## The Love

Like asking how many splinters  
make the old wood church, we'll never know  
till the wrecking.

Kevin Woster



R.P. Dickey

## INDIANS

The truth is they're like anybody else,  
despite our racial romanticism or theirs.  
Oh this one'll insist on his Indian-ness  
so we'll lay a quarter or half on him  
on the Taos plaza, and that vocal committee  
up in Dakota so we'll give them back some land  
their forefathers grabbed from another tribe or from animals.

We call it ours, they call it theirs,  
and we both should know what we're full of.  
Know what I mean? The question is, which  
Indian are you talking about? That's the traditional  
bitch, and unsentimental as hell's going to be  
if we don't massacre our collectivistic self-deception  
and find out about, say,

say, Augustine Bad Shoes  
out at the Taos Pueblo or Ben Black Elk  
who just died up in Keystone, South Dakota,  
after "bullshitting tourists," as he told me,  
for nearly thirty years at Rushmore  
under the big funny faces of four presidents.

Big historical defeats come in cycles  
or something similar, despite the Iroquois  
League of Five Nations of around 1570 or  
the United Nations of 1945; those other defeats,  
simple, daily, a series of them we all know about.  
That's what we have in common. Come on, come on.

From my cut-rate Scotch and cluttered study  
I type up and xerox a Vita, a data-sheet,  
bunch of glory statistics leaving out failures,  
mail it around trying to get readings, to show off;  
ol' Ben drove up there to Rushmore every day  
from his Schlitz in cans and one-room tarpaper shack—  
buck and a half for Kodaking him in his feathers,  
three with your kid posing at his side.

Mary McAnally-Knight

## THE WOMAN THE LIGHTNING LIT UP

Jo told me once  
about  
a woman she knows  
Who went outside to collect  
her clothes  
before the rain  
And lightning came  
along  
the clothesline  
And lit that woman up.  
Jo saw  
her bones aflame  
like a red neon skeleton  
frozen to the spot.  
Her hair's the only thing  
that burned.  
No other effect.  
Except her 10-year-old daughter  
ran away  
that very night.

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George A. West  
*Two Poems*

## NORTH

Up on these high north plains  
the ancient east-west symbol  
is not enough.  
Here, things are ruled  
by the north.  
Winds may be warm from the south,  
but there will be clouds  
on some northern horizon.  
Here, my father lies buried  
facing East;  
yet it is the north sun  
that makes summer;  
and only twice each year  
does it lie down directly west.  
Still, then I'm drawn  
relentlessly,  
to walk toward the sunset,  
though it blinds me.

## ICE HOUSES

In the north,  
ice houses once were filled in winter;  
and small children  
crept deep inside in summer  
to smell damp sawdust,  
and feel the winter cold.

Andrew Grossbardt

## POEM

there are women like this everywhere  
i go among them  
the sweet taste of ruin in my mouth

and from my boots  
a certain dust  
like salt  
stains the earth's pale skin

it has not always been this way



Al Fogel  
*Two Poems*

## THE KITE

one day  
my kite got tangled up  
in a palm tree.

I jerked & pulled  
but the string snapped.

I stood watching as it  
fluttered in the wind—  
tail flapping—  
trying to work free.

that night  
I prayed for a wind-gust  
to release it.

the next day  
when I woke up  
it was pouring.

when it eased to a drizzle  
I got dressed  
and hopped on my bike.

I got there  
just in time  
to wave it good-bye  
as it took off

headed for the rainbow

# INSIDE A CAN OF SARDINES, OR THE COMING OF THE POPULATION EXPLOSION

accidentally I touched her  
the bus was packed full  
I couldn't help myself

I bumped into her she let  
out an angry grunt  
and let me have it with her pocketbook.

while backin' off I stepped on her toes  
she let out a scream before I  
could gain back my balance I

jammed into a little old lady  
who pushed me with samson's strength  
into a boney old fogey

who must have thought he was  
havin' the last attack  
the way his body trembled

and he let me have it with his lips.  
I was archin' sideways  
when his shove landed me on the

lap of the pretty young thing  
who let out a noise

like you make when you're gettin' raped  
by a psycho I shot up

grabbed hold of the man for leverage  
and was welcomed by a fist

that sent my false teeth to flying.  
this was gettin' dangerous, I thought,

as I spun for the last time  
grabbin' hold of my knife:

"keep your distance," I shouted  
"keep your distance!"

and I sliced the air as a warnin'

Jay S. Paul

## CLOCK THE SUMMER

Appear the moment the first  
plum loosens. Make  
a basket catch. Stamp

have done have done have done

on jars. A sweet thickness  
setting on windows, the season  
hazes over you, a hard seal.

Rodney Nelson

## COMING OUT

To say nothing for a year  
Is to live in a sealed room  
Where recollections move  
Like moths in the dumb air;  
But now the April moon  
Is nearly full, and a wind  
Smelling of the warm land  
Has found a hole and come in.  
The women I have met,  
The highways I have taken,  
All return, escaping  
Time with their movement,  
And stand in front of me  
As if it had just occurred,  
As if it had happened under  
A moon and wind like these.  
There's change and there isn't change,  
What isn't is commonplace:  
The light of a woman's face  
Or a stone where the roads branch.  
The present, going on  
All through my year of silence,  
Has kept its plain, lost language  
And I can speak again.



Norman H. Russell  
*Two Poems*

## the white dog is blind

the small white dog is blind  
he runs he stops cocking his head  
his nose moves  
to find me  
he runs to bump against my leg

young bear says a blind dog  
should be killed should be eaten  
young bear looks  
at the white dog  
he laughs at the white dogs blindness

no one will kill the white dog  
the white dog will be my friend  
he has a nose for eyes  
he has ears for eyes  
he will run beside my leg all his life.

## to the home

my brother squats in the smoke  
his face is black as the night  
he scrapes the log with his knife  
sweat bursts from his arms

it is a long work  
the deer that i killed grows old  
in the day and in the night we work  
and the tree becomes a canoe

then we drag it over the stones  
the little way to the water  
and watch to see that it floats  
it is a fine canoe

before the sun rises again  
we shall take the meat that is left  
our arrows and our knives  
and follow the moon to the home.

Betty Hass

## THE SNOW GEESE

The snow geese  
Drifted above us  
In abundant formations.

We saw them  
Resting in the fields  
Covering the earth  
With their white bellies.

They rose  
And flew onward  
Beating the Southern sky  
Behind them.

Peter Wild

## THE FORESTER

Sitting on the porch  
he worries about meetings  
consuming chicken coops in seconds,  
burning through newspapers in restaurants,  
the fires that at night  
leap like robbers from hilltop to hilltop.  
out cruising, in the trees there it is, worms  
clustered in webs along branches.  
working in the kitchen as the sun slips,  
the steps on gravel threatening the rows  
of seedlings innocent as simple sentences.  
week nights he spends the late hours  
out in the stable oiling the two-wheeled  
carriage that in paroxysm he pushes out to spray  
the litmus, moonlight creeping over the moss  
forest on cliffs. but on Saturdays,  
full of joy at last, works in the garden  
among the erupting cabbages, as his old dog named Edd  
crouches in the pickup snarling  
at sounds and smells, cataracts  
closing over his eyes like glaciers.

Doug Cockrell

## SPIDER

Running over fairyland under shoes,  
spider strides reduce the room:  
scissor-steps pivot its hairy jaws

across the blocked cloud-patterned floor;

with the expression of a walrus, dumb  
in plain chambers, air moves hollow  
through its tubes. Colorless blood fans  
over the leaves of its book lungs, and  
what it hears quivers the quills of hair.

Through a turret, eight simple eyes scan  
the blindside of eyes' edge  
as if it were crosshairs on a web. Fear lies

where the spider usually goes. Behind silk  
drapes, the mate in her nest is clattering  
separate but equally indifferent to stale air,  
deserted corners, nightcrawlers, and the dark...

Their animal love is in the claw  
jamming through a slit in soft body walls,  
where the female spins and retches her balls—  
the rest of the body is a bulb.

Rafael Jesus Gonzalez

## SOLOMON'S OCTOBER

Sick of love  
apples cannot make me well.  
Once the leaves have ripened scarlet  
on the boughs and the birds winged  
their scribblings toward the south,  
no prayer can crack the secret alphabet  
of all that we remembered to forget.

Sharp are the curves of apples in this light;  
their braille unlocks the veins  
which spill their juice  
more clear and acrid than the apples' blood.

I see the leaves in ecstasy of death now hatch  
colors spawned by time in a decaying hoard  
of days collected green in careful youth  
and in their fevered riot try to catch  
from the colloquial language of the Lord  
some allophonic truth.

Paul Blakely

## MEETING

In a lane a little nearer the side of the pool  
than yours each time I turn my face  
for breath I hear  
the measured splash  
of your kick  
and pull

How far how far the lap until  
our faces turn together

we each suck one deep rush of air  
then there is only the churning  
churning of the water  
as troughs and waves in our wakes  
uneasy collide  
and foam and dip



L. L. Zeiger

## KATIE

What shall we make of old Katie,  
of her noises,  
of her mad eyes  
darting through lace curtains  
in a house full of strangers?

Out of the pier glass  
the knight gallops toward her  
on the black charger.

Cormorants from a whirling sea  
crash through the window panes  
to gnaw at her white hair.

The floor boards push  
at her dirty feet and  
hurl her at whispering walls.

What shall we do with poor Katie,  
keening like a banshee,  
frightening the children,  
up there alone  
locked in to her self?

Margaret Hasse  
*Two Poems*

## WHEN WINTER STAYS TOO LONG

The wind pushes from the west  
across the bare white Easter prairie.  
Near the rest stop  
by the Minnesota-South Dakota state line,  
the cars shake and the barbwire fence wavers  
to the south beyond the clutch of buildings.

The wind races everything,  
outrunning the freeways and flat land,  
the prairie's loneliness,  
the madness of the plainswomen,  
dark-haired and old.

The land darkens, too,  
with the shadow of clouds.  
The barren stretch is the motif of life.  
It is hungry,  
nothing grows well;  
it is tricky,  
the sky rains ice balls.

The automobiles skulk  
like kicked animals.  
People hunch toward the building,  
their cattle-breath moist and steamy.

A white sheet of paper is sucked  
out the open door of a car.  
It tumbles east toward the seam of sky  
and plains where there appears a line  
of Conestoga wagons, frozen in space.

The wind sways the wagons  
until the travelers are sick,  
blinding their eyes out in the white  
and losing the paper, a speck,  
swallowed by the white mouth in the landscape.

## THE OWL

In the warm night,  
my body wet from swimming,  
the thick hank of my hair  
dripping on my shoulders,  
blouse sticking to thin blades,  
eyes cloudy with chlorine,  
blurring car lights into stars,  
I sleepwalk through  
thick cicada song.

Dark trees fade to let me by.  
The black tar road  
holds a path,  
moon-white,  
dipped in magic.

Something brushes my hair  
with the tip of wings.  
A ghost bird, an owl.  
Has it waited in the dark  
all my life to touch me,  
eyes that hang in its head like magnets?

The owl left a wing feather in my hair  
for the youngness and warmth of my skin.  
Does the night have a body for growing up in?

The feather has pulled  
the light of the moon,  
and I stumble home, foot beyond foot,  
my face flushed hot  
with the fever-beacon of the feather.

Sometimes it is too hard  
to pass down  
the dark road of summer.

William Meissner

## 1960. THROWING SNOWBALLS AT CARS

### I.

None of us want to see accidents,  
or anyone hurt. Just to thrill  
as our snowballs  
rise cleanly into orbit,  
then explode on continents, on windshields.  
It's the precision  
of joyous sore arms, this science  
of shouting "hit" that draws our bare hands  
down to the moist snow again.

If we miss, the snowball  
is halved on the pavement,  
crumbling like a world shattered  
into confetti and ice water.

But we keep throwing.  
We throw snowballs  
because we want to know the terror:  
the hiss of brake lights, the throb  
of police cars in our temples,  
even the threat of drivers' fists  
collapsing our faces into smears  
and the bruises spreading,  
staining our cheeks like spilled ink on school desks.  
We throw snowballs  
because we want our legs  
to know danger forever, running full speed  
while alleys melt and shift  
beneath our feet like inner tubes losing air.



## II.

After years, making new snowballs  
becomes less easy. They seem to swell,  
take on the weight  
of something too heavy and menacing for snow:  
small boulders, gravestones.  
And trying to raise them even chest-high  
becomes a labor, like lifting  
the weight of a thousand winters.

Until a ten-wheeled semi-truck  
shakes its strength down into the blacktop,  
then up through the snowbank we stand on. Passion  
fills us with its airhose.  
We feel the buzzing climbing our ankles  
to our knees, to our shoulders, arms,  
the joints of our fingers  
as if earthquakes had always belonged there.

We bend, hoist snowballs.  
Now. Push them into the air  
with every muscle.

We bend, we hoist again.

Harry Kohn  
*Two Poems*

## WHITE: A LITANY

White is the salt lace  
    around thawed sidewalks,  
White is the space the stars  
    move in.  
White is a bone cane,  
White separates the words of this  
    poem and make it coherent,  
White is the moth eaten blanket  
    of winter.  
White is the cave of the city  
    before you enter.  
White islands float in my beer.  
White is the absence of all color  
    in pigment, and the presence  
    of all color in light.

## THE SUN, THE MOON, THE STARS

The sun handles my face  
like a beggar handles a penny.  
The way I handle my life,  
without thought or caution.

The moon hangs like a pearl  
on the black woman of night.  
I howl and gently pass  
around her.

The stars are underdeveloped  
countrys, they pause in the dark  
and cover naked lovers.

Carla Carlson

## IN PASSING

On my way to college  
I saw  
an orange rolling  
down  
a pink road.

Kevin Woster



Jim Barnes  
*Three Poems*

## THE CAVE ON CAVANAUGH MOUNTAIN

The wind tells you by its blue moan  
across the cave's dark mouth  
at dawn

how it is to be above the ground.  
The glyphs inside the cave  
step around

the walls like hunters stalking buffalo.  
The only direction  
you know

to go is after the thrown spear,  
the sickle moon, the masked air,  
the running deer.

The puzzle that you read always reads  
the same: the hunt is cracking stone  
and needs.

The pointed chase runs always into dark:  
the beast leaps into itself, the downed man  
forgets to bark.



## FOUR CHOCTAW SONGS

### 1. Choctaw Death Song i

When I pass,  
this prairie  
will hold  
my tracks  
as long  
as the wind  
sleeps.

### 2. Choctaw Death Song ii

I ride  
the wind  
to another corner  
of the sky.

### 3. Choctaw Hunting Song

Wolf eats  
the wind:  
his skin  
will keep  
me warm.

### 4. Choctaw Eagle Dance Song

Eagle feathers  
talk to me:  
they say,  
touch us to your lips  
and know the way  
we knew the wind.

## Portrait of Robert Creeley

Sitting there  
in wrinkled  
workshirt  
and jeans  
on the edge  
of the table  
right hand  
on left knee  
left hand  
closed, loose  
by left hip  
right foot  
braced against  
the floor  
hair black  
against black  
eyes straight  
ahead and  
slightly up  
one in shadow  
Roman nose  
mustache  
lips  
lightly parted  
goatee  
devil ears  
knowing  
dark raven  
and whiskey  
glass  
before him.

Kevin Woster







Richard Frost

## THE FARMER

He felt his field grow hot,  
saw the ground rise, puff at first  
like a toy engine, then inflate  
until, everything sliding down it,  
it muscled into snow and a halo,  
his house in the sky. He backed off  
to someone's land, wondering  
where to plow, where to lie down.

Remembering the surface that was a map  
cracking, sloping until it was out of reach  
between dark villages, he whittled a cane  
and started up, traversing, slipping in the dust,  
imagining a peak like a broken bottle.  
He was alone, then he had a mountain.  
With every turn he saw his blurred tracks  
only so far, and a cloud following.

In a cold pause he thought he heard machines  
boom in their vaults, an echo overhead,  
promise of sulphur from a torn rim.  
He scrambled in the cinders like a crab.  
At the top he found his land new,  
a furnace under him. And a shaft  
gathered in itself a miracle  
and sent him tumbling skyward like an ash.



Kathleen Norris

## THE MIDDLE OF THE WORLD

The night is cloudy  
A man with a lot on his mind,  
A naked woman  
Sit in the middle of a field, in the middle of the world.  
It is quiet there.

He is like a horse  
Making friendly gestures,  
His body unexpectedly silky.  
Shuddering fast, he reaches up inside her  
Rocking her  
Two thousand miles from the sea.

He shivers, half-clothed.  
He will work cattle tomorrow  
If the weather holds.  
She is naked, creamy.

They give back  
The waters of the air  
And the moon, descending,  
Measures out their time  
Going far  
Into the night, their faces  
And their lives; this night  
And the world, unfinished.

Shirley Ingalls

## LAST NIGHT

I talked  
with  
a drunk

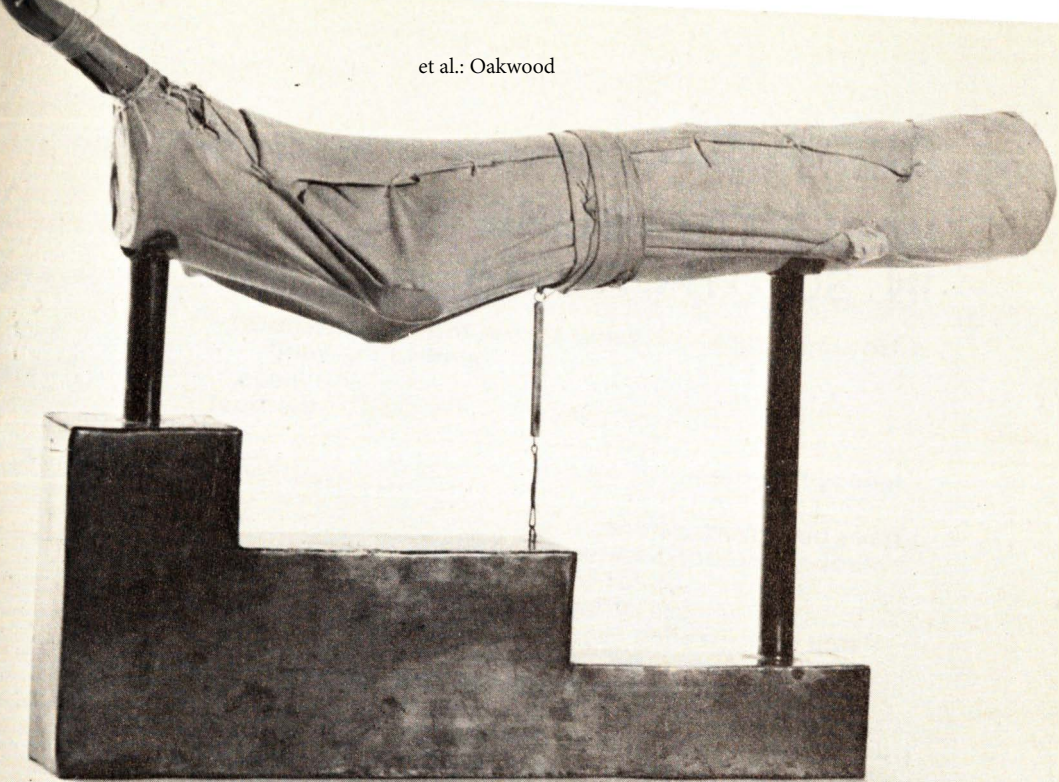
He spoke  
profound  
truths

He asked  
my opinion

And  
I replied  
with  
equally astounding  
revelations

This morning  
The words  
are  
gone.

The truths  
of the world  
Are lost  
between  
midnight and dawn.



Don Boyd

Robert Canter

## POEMA

Mi querida:  
Tus ojos verdes  
y tu pelo rubio,  
ma han dejado.

## POEM

My love:  
Your green eyes  
and your blonde hair,  
have left me.

Pete Reynolds

## WHILE TRAVELING IN SOUTH DAKOTA

A November grey will blow across the late afternoon,  
tainting the wind  
the faces  
the dust

I feel as I fly past.

I have been here before,  
sought among dead-earth mounds  
for treasure flecks,  
bits of bead and bone;  
that swift-fleeting legacy of ones before  
buried once,  
stripped again by the winter storms.

I pulverize the grey dust of their bones  
part their spirit wind  
and wonder how they felt of November  
as I fly past.



Michael Boer

## THE PHOTOGRAPHER

He stood in his short-sleeved shirt  
In his left hand  
the leather case  
Right hand in his pocket  
The camera from Dresden  
hung on his chest  
by a slender cylindrical chain.  
He would set the case  
on the station wagon's fender  
and study a chart  
printed on a little paper  
that folded like a map.

When the pictures came back  
He could show you two different Christmasses  
And a semi going down  
a mountain road  
superimposed on Mt. Rushmore  
And he'd say "I  
don't know why  
that cheap film  
always comes out  
blue like that."

David Schloss

## AN AFTER DINNER WALK

At first he followed retreating footsteps  
Down his most mundane and regular ways,  
Descending into a darkness suspended  
Above him as the sun went weakly down  
Beyond his reach, drifting, shivering under  
A fine rain he could sense only by touch.

Neighborhood after misty neighborhood,  
There were bare houses with unlit porches,  
Attached garages, tidy fenced-in yards—  
And unpaved streets with unfinished sidewalks,  
New construction, foundations laid out  
In squares, like great holes in the darkness.

Then all thought failed him, attempts at caring  
For a world he was unable to alter:  
Disillusionment wore him slowly down,  
With long strokes over his dry syllables,  
His best of intentions, his words which were  
Like garbled directions from a stranger.

So he wandered, abandoning himself,  
Leaving all he knew behind, at last  
To stand wet and helpless at a crossing,  
A train passing before him on the mudflats,  
Pools of reflective water lying low  
Beneath the rain on either side of the road.

And when the long rumbling train passed on,  
Gradually shifting across the low plain,  
It formed its own stretched-out horizon:  
“Great Mid-Western” slowly sinking, then gone—  
And then he entered the emptiness  
It had left, returning to darkness again.

Dave Etter  
*Two Poems*

## INDIANA

I stand on the windy front porch  
and smoke an old brown pipe.  
My hands are cold, and my feet, too.  
I say goodbye to the porch swing,  
where we sat evenings, holding hands,  
and watched many an old-gold sundown,  
and heard the birds chatter in the trees.  
Inside, my wife is moving about,  
seeing she didn't forget a single thing.  
Finally we squeeze into the packed car,  
take a last look at the yellow frame house  
we rented for more than a year,  
saying we don't want to leave,  
saying we shall return soon  
to this southern Indiana town,  
but both of us knowing it won't be so,  
that we are only kidding ourselves.  
Then she shouts, "The Indian corn!  
We just can't leave that there."  
And she goes back to get it,  
where it hangs like a museum headdress  
from the empty black mailbox.  
She is crying a little when she places  
the red, gold, and purple ears  
between us on the front seat.  
I know how miserable she feels.  
I know how miserable I feel.

## HARVEST DUST

The carnival rays of the sun  
illuminated the dust clouds  
that rose behind a blue combine  
harvesting forty-two acres  
of good Illinois soybeans.  
I stood there quietly,  
the evening breeze around my head,  
watching the dust thicken,  
seeing emeralds and red tapestries,  
seeing golden showers of rain.  
Then the sun dropped behind  
the last stretch of prairie,  
and once again the dust  
became no more than dust  
in the cool and farm-dark air.

William Meissner









J. D. Whitney

## EPITAPH

He kept a  
nice  
lawn



ICE CREAM

ADD