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Road Signs

Richard Latimer
Denison University

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Road Signs

White lines on the side of the road,
and the snow blurring their honest
love of distance over these hills, into
the horizon -- the towns blink,
grown from leveled earth
with some degree of permanence in mind;
the wrinkled little waves I cannot smooth.
For the last hour, my hands have held
the plastic dashboard, as though all
the spray paint in the world
couldn't lift these bridges from the ground.
And it's the church spires and the row houses,
but most of all, it's this key chain
with a picture of someone standing under a halo,
someone who looks like Jesus,
and picks my pocket as innocently
as the signs reflected against these windows.

BEER ICE LIVE BAIT. This, I imagine
is true. Someone put it there.
But the lines have melted into the ice,
and this road is a vanilla cream.
The tires, pasting down keep turning
somehow overlooking trucks jack-knifed
into cement medians, as real as
the man sitting behind the seat
of his bruised car. And he'll tell
his story over and over again
to people he feels he can trust.
But the snow falls faster,
and this landscape is lost -- eclipsed.
The lung-choked coal mines and the factories
filled with oil drums, Steel, and asbestos,
they're out there, but all I can see
is the occasional lull in travel
and the rusted out carcass
of a bus that's still on fire.

And everything, for a while, seems intact,
but curious, longing to take away
this meaning that implicates my coming here.
And so, mile after mile, we keep driving,
trying to melt away this feeling,
as though we could just shed our clothes
and rid ourselves of the girders;
that this automobile, passing
these sprawling fields tamed
by the featureless snow balances
us so evenly that we are sheltered,
drawn in and sealed tight together.
Yet our eyes search for something
to cling to, something we can close
into our hands, hold, and never forget.

Out in front of these eyes one lane
winds narrow in uneven dirt.
Pin oaks straddle our movement, surrounding
our vision. A blind spot
tethered by this regimented surge
that leads us past the posted speed limits
and crosswalks that are now so careless and infantile.
The seamless hum of this propulsion
eased with the rich air from a cracked window,
cleansing our souls as if in
rigid defiance of some law
we broke along the way.
Here, there are no lines. We glide
over this uninterrupted shadow
until the brake and the cessation
shed the numbness in our faces.
We can take the keys out of the ignition,
unlock doors, and disentangle
ourselves from these seat belts;
walk into an apple pie house
that smells of Crisco and chicken grease,
peer out through the curtains,
and comment on the garage light
that doesn't work and hasn't
been replaced for a year.

Richard Latimer