

THE DECEIVING CLOAK OF ANDREW JACKSON

There were lots of counterfeit bills going around at the time. A rash of them being pumped out by real professionals. It was when I tried to pay for a meatloaf dinner at a Chuckwagon near the airport that I realized I was holding a bad twenty. The cashier had noticed something. She shook her head and pointed to the oval portrait of Andrew Jackson on back. "It's their idea of a clever little joke," she said. "In a real twenty, you only see one finger protruding from his cloak. The bad ones have two fingers protruding." The cops had told her. I stared at the bill. The exactness of the engraving process precluded a printing error. No, this was a deliberate attempt on the part of the counterfeiter to leave a personal stamp on his work, a sly little signature. Having no choice but to pay with a good bill, I now knew I had to get rid of the bad one somehow. The Gulf station across the street seemed the logical place, since it was run by halfwitted highschool kids who could barely count, much less examine currency with any sort of discrimination. Unloading it turned out to be child's play. The kid stuffed it in his shirt pocket without a glance. Nonetheless, as I drove away, I was tempted to go back and show him the two protruding fingers, even though it would have thrown him into confusion, and he would have been puzzled as to what to do.

LITTLE OLD LADIES

Safe for a minute, no passing in this zone,
Which suits me fine, not having the nerve
To go head to head against those scrap metal trucks
With death in their headlights, hell's high beams.
My headlights aren't that bright. My need
To get where I'm going isn't that great.
The man behind me wheels out, a blur of chrome
And spraying salt, infuriated, late
For a meeting with some maladjusted insurance adjusters.
Now the white stripe breaks into dashes
And everyone's pressured to make up for lost time.
One by one they whiz past, surprised
I'm not a little old lady. My young but cautious face.
I'm an insult to them. An insult to little old ladies.