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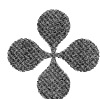
EAT &  
*Remember*



POEMS BY CARL LINDNER

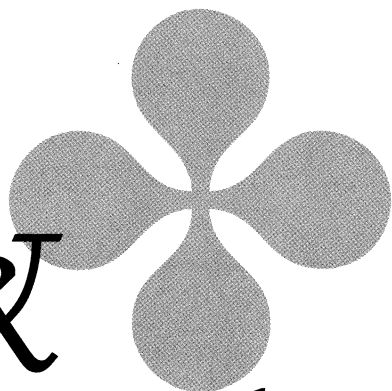
CARL LINDNER is Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside where he has been teaching courses in American literature, creative writing (poetry) and composition since 1969. He has won several teaching awards. He has also been recognized for his poetry by the Wisconsin Arts Board, which awarded him a fellowship in 1981, and by his university, which honored him with an award for Creative Activity in 1996. He has published two chapbooks of poetry (*Vampire* and *The Only Game*), one full-length collection (*Shooting Baskets in a Dark Gymnasium*), with another in press (*Angling into Light*), and approximately two hundred poems in various literary journals. Among his greatest blessings are his two children, Jennifer and Peter. At present, he lives in Racine with his cat Jesse James.

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EAT &



*Remember*

POEMS BY  
CARL LINDNER

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These poems have previously appeared in the following journals: *The Iowa Review* ("Raining Fire"); *Slant* ("Squirrels," "Baffle," "Flute," "Coyote"); *Four Quarters* ("The Administrator and the Back Burner Stove"); *The South Carolina Review* ("Signs"); *Aura/Literary Arts Review* ("Dancing with the Beast"); *Northeast* ("Fireflies at Night"); *The Cream City Review* ("Snake"); *The Florida Review* ("Three Horses in a Field"); *The Black Fly Review* ("The Tree Sweeper"); *The Madison Review* ("Jesus at McDonald's," "Toe Story," "Jesus Addresses the University Faculty"); *Poetry* ("Outside Activities"); and *South Dakota Review* ("The Blind Electrician").

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*For Max and Ruth Lindner  
with love.*

## *Raining Fire*

From the roof ledge  
six flights up  
I could see  
down to where  
a man was staggering.  
He was all alone  
with me. The light  
was fading as he wove  
among the sidewalk squares  
and a thread in me unraveled.  
I could not rein  
my adolescence in.  
“He’s drunk, he’s drunk,”  
I sang and opened  
high above his head  
a box of kitchen matches.  
“Diamond” said the label  
and my heart, hard  
and faceted, flung  
off the dying light.  
Lucifer that night,  
out of my own  
matchless darkness  
down I rained a flood  
of splinters, red-  
tipped with phosphorus.  
How they crackled  
on cement,  
all two hundred  
bursting into bloom.  
Even at that height  
and swallowed up  
in my unholy glee,  
I saw him flinch,  
start from his reverie

on that floor of sudden flame,  
that night I felt another's  
radiant fear, both of us  
branded, that night I howled  
and fell from grace like a star.

## *Toe Story*

My left foot  
has no pinky toe.

The other four  
stick out like thumbs

and hold a colloquy,  
a toe caucus

about the lost child.  
They tell each other

“Les is more”—  
no one believes it.

The other foot’s toes  
twitch and tap

with visions  
of dancing all

night long, a career  
in terpsichore.

Thrumming merrily away,  
they have neither

clue nor care  
there’s room to spare

in every other shoe  
and sneaker I wear,

or that each time  
my left foot feels

the kiss of air,  
it longs to bury

itself  
in the dark earth.

## *Squirrels*

Squirrels are scampering  
through my body's branches,  
building their nests  
in the hollows of my bones.

When my father held  
out his hand, holding  
the peanut in its shell,  
down they came  
from trees, slipping  
through bushes, scrambling  
over benches,  
then, a tug  
and bits of shell  
flying out in a spray.

Father, I've come  
home to your shy smile  
and pale blue eyes,  
to the veined  
hands in your lap,  
and to bankbooks  
squirreled away,  
buried in drawers  
that close with a clasp.  
Your life was a ledger.  
You kept  
a strict accounting.  
In my piggy bank  
you dropped  
nickels, dimes,  
and said  
"I play it safe."

And then I saw  
squirrels again  
doing their tightrope trick  
on telephone wires,  
watched them scabble  
round the trunk  
of the backyard elm.  
Faster they circled  
like the seasons  
and I tried to tell  
my son my daughter  
how I never saw  
a squirrel unbury a nut.

And now, after  
stepping off  
the ledge of marriage,  
after sliding  
down the stories  
of a tall building,  
here I am  
to tell your hands  
as they struggle  
up to my face,  
winter, too, is near,  
I have stored  
some nuts away  
and I am still  
your son.

*The Blind Electrician*

I'm shocked until  
his hand, outstretched,

connects with mine,  
loosing a flow of words

alternating and direct.  
He's not at all circuitous,

this man who tells  
by touch the livest wires.

From the start,  
the energy he sends

makes him worth  
every cent he charges,

the high  
cost of any union.

Always on the move,  
he wets his blackened

fingertips  
to feel what's current,

what is not. When he is  
low, electricity

picks him up.  
Behind the dark

sockets he knows  
there is a source



and how to find it.  
His smile is a beacon,

the bright light  
of a father telling

a son what it means  
to be grounded.

Sorcerer, conductor,  
he's positively thrilled

to keep the power going,  
knowing not to let it

gather in one place  
too long.

## *Academic Matters*

### *1. The Administrator and the Back Burner Stove*

It was a stove  
unlike all others,  
dozens of burners  
and all in back,  
so far back  
we couldn't even see them,  
could only take  
the cook's word  
they were even there  
and what was cooking on them,  
skillets and pots and kettles  
all going merrily, a whole  
banquet at once, delights  
beyond belief, enough  
to make us lick  
our lips, enough  
to make our palates water.  
He was preparing a feast.  
He was cooking  
all the time on this  
one-of-a-kind stove.  
Even as we slept,  
he kept cooking  
on those burners in back,  
cooking up one thing  
after another for us  
who kept getting hungrier  
to see and taste  
what he would dish up  
for us when the time came.  
Whenever we asked him "When?"  
he smiled "Not yet" and hurried  
off to his soups and stews.

He said a lot  
of things, brandishing  
ladles and spoons, sharpening  
knives, bustling about  
under his high, white, puffy hat.

## 2. *Outside Activities*

*“As mandated in UWS 8.025, all faculty and academic staff  
must file a report on their outside activities.”*

*—Vice Chancellor*

Every day, religiously,  
I change my underwear.

When I leave my house,  
I always lose my way.

I no longer pay  
attention to the news.

When my cat meows,  
I listen to the syllables.

On my back, I study  
the language of clouds,

the wheel of jay,  
the swoop of cardinal.

At the close of light,  
I wrap myself

in the blanket of night.  
I pray the blackness

finds in me good company.  
Morning showers me with gold.

Less and less I count  
the change in my pockets.

More and more I grow  
rich from these activities.

### 3. *Jesus Addresses the University Faculty*

Colleagues, you are  
textbook cases,

but not hopeless.  
Let go your notes.

Perish the thought  
of tenure and title.

Breathing is tenure.  
For title, your name.

Man does not live  
by resumes alone.

How many flutters  
in a blackbird's wing?

Who taught the oriole  
to sing? Behold

this universe, this  
university, and open

yourself like a book  
you can't wait to begin.

Take yourself as source,  
a bibliography of one,

and savor every word.  
Any word can be

a savior. Read  
between the lines

your possibilities,  
and note how school

derives from shul.  
The world's a synogogue,

the holiest of classrooms,  
its teacher your skin,

your blood, your bone.  
Let your words be

academic no longer.  
Govern your life

no longer by degrees.  
There is life beyond

the Ph.D.,  
and he that opens

heart and eye  
shall never die.

Colleagues,  
you have more

faculties than you know.

## *Signs*

My thighs are gone.  
In their place,  
these sausages.

I call my woman  
who sings  
“I only have thighs for you.”  
I hang up.

I tell a friend  
who says her neck  
is missing.

I call the police  
who suspect  
it's the start  
of a thigh-napping  
epidemic.  
They tell me  
I must wait  
forty-eight hours  
before I can file  
a missing thighs report.  
They hang up on me.

I take out  
an ad  
in the local paper,  
offering money  
no questions asked.  
The bill comes  
to an arm and a leg.

Deep down, I know  
who is doing this.  
And he's sure  
to get  
away with it.



*Fireflies at Night*

reading lamps  
for very short  
stories

revelers joy  
riding till dawn

Johnny-one-notes  
in a dark theater

gypsy  
fires

light-  
houses

lanterns  
on  
caboozes

hello  
the glow  
the letting go

## *Snake*

Take me home with  
you. Take me.

Give me the chance,  
I will unhinge

your life,  
open it

like a jaw.  
From me, you

will learn to please  
yourself. I will

teach you how  
to make a circle,

wrap yourself  
around the world.

Touch my skin—  
I will let you in

on a secret, how  
to slip out of it

like a gown  
and start again,

wearing your  
skin like water.

## *Baffle*

The plastic squirrel-guard is silver-gray, a bowl, nearly half a ball, hung inverted just above the feeder. I have hopes this one will work.

Morning brings a squirrel, brownish-gray and young and bright as the sun. Bouncing on the way to his usual breakfast, he shinnies up the pole of hunter-green, hops onto the cross-bar and looks down, attempts the downward curving baffle, slips and falls to earth, legs outstretched to catch the air, tail flying like a plume. Again and again, he picks himself up to climb, to tightrope, carefully letting himself down a different way each time. Fourteen times he fails, falls. I go about my morning chores. Minutes later there he is wrapped around the feeder, one paw dipping into the black sunflower seed. How did he do it? Does it really matter? I shoo him away, more baffled than ever as I smile and hum a song I haven't heard in years although the squirrel-guard will have to go.

### *Three Horses in a Field*

“Neighbors,” he said,  
making me whinny  
and shake my head.  
They browsed among  
the pasture grass  
like children in a library.  
And then, across the open  
field, the light-  
brown mare, white  
streak down her nose,  
cantered over to where  
we stood, and took  
the sugar cubes  
and then a handful  
of long grass.  
The long jaws  
worked away  
as she swung  
her head with those  
dark brown eyes  
you could fall in  
love with. Even  
when she swallowed  
down the last, she  
never looked away,  
just kept up  
that swinging  
side to side.  
Then she nodded  
up and down as if  
there were no doubts  
in that neighborhood.

## *The Tree Sweeper*

Bent by snow still  
falling, the young  
pine called him out.

He took a broom  
to sweep away  
the white. Minutes

drifted down.

He went on  
to the spruce. All

that morning saw him  
brush the needles,  
dusting off the crowns,

giving the slender  
trunks a shake.  
As he worked, only

he could tell how,  
over and over, he  
lifted like a branch.

With every pass  
of the broom, he kept  
singing "evergreen"

to himself, low,  
the way a snowflake  
hums as it falls.

*Dancing with the Beast*

Let your heart be a drum,  
your windpipe a flute.

Go down on all fours,  
your head swaying,

hips like a flag,  
rump jutting

like an invitation.  
Look at the face

before you, all  
whiskers, wild eyes

and teeth. Such teeth!  
White, long and sharp.

And so many! Without  
taking your eyes

from the black  
lips drawn back,

rise. Hand  
to paw, muzzle

to cheek, it makes  
no difference who leads

or where the music  
goes, not when

your nostrils flare,  
flooding with

the scent of groin.

White

melody fills

the saucers of your eyes

as the two

of you

snarl and snap

in perfect time,

drawing blood

and loving it.

## *Flute*

Passed through fire  
so the blond bamboo is black,  
this shakuhachi flute.

Note after note  
vibrates  
the bones of my ears,  
resonates me back  
to other players:  
men squatting in caves  
around fires, men  
alone on mountaintops,  
their backs against  
boulders, their feet  
dangling over the edges  
of cliffs, men  
reclining in meadows,  
shepherding their flocks.

The wind blows everywhere—  
through the branches  
fluttering their leaves,  
through the tall grass  
and the long eye-  
lashes of women.

I would learn  
what women know—  
how to open  
and invite.

I would be  
the wind, passing  
over, through,  
women crying  
in the throes of melody.



*Jesus at McDonald's*

You deserve a break,  
a little fast  
food for the soul:

God is  
a Big Mac,  
sizzling, juicy, dark.

God is fries,  
golden, crisp,  
hot and salty.

Catsup is the blood  
of God, thick  
and red.

God is the cook,  
sweating in the kitchen  
hot as hell.

God is the mouse  
scurrying along  
the baseboard.

The mouse tail,  
the mouse whiskers,  
droppings, all God.

God is the cashier  
checking out the girls.  
He looks and looks.

Their nipples wink  
back at Him. All  
nipples are His eyes.

Consumer, God  
is you. Now,  
*Ess und gedenk.*

(“Ess und gedenk” is Yiddish for “Eat and remember.”)

## *Coyote*

Old Man Coyote ran  
through wind, night, rain,  
and the flashing lightning  
couldn't keep up  
with his loping stride

some say, running under sun,  
Coyote left his shadow in the dust,  
some say the first time he got hungry  
wasn't nothing 'round but his shadow  
so he snapped it up  
with his grinning jaws,  
devoured his only company  
and that's why he's alone

Coyote, thirsty, licked the dew  
off the grass for miles  
and now it's called Death Valley

and Coyote ran,  
horny as a hop-toad,  
would have done a snake  
it if had hips, smiled  
that Coyote smile, said  
What the Hell and found  
a snake, Coyote could  
plug a nickel  
if he had to

one morning when the sun came up  
Coyote stole some red out of the sky  
and painted his asshole, saying  
Now I'm prettier than ever  
coming and going

Coyote, dumpster-diving,  
found a pizza box with scraps  
and gulped them down,  
chewed them on the way down  
you might say,  
cardboard and all  
and threw up on himself

it's a long haul between meals  
when you're Coyote, so he  
ran and ran, sniffing the clouds  
and pissing on the move  
and where the drops fell  
a line of weeds sprang up,  
Coyote blazing his own trail,  
and nothing could catch him  
his feet were flames

Coyote-Cain,  
Coyote-Jew  
always on the move  
the Flying Coyote

Coyote lose his hide  
in a poker game  
Coyote always looking  
to fill his hand,  
fill his belly,  
fill a hole,  
feel flush again

Wolf don't eat shit  
Bear don't eat shit  
Coyote eat shit  
if he got to  
before moving on

Name-Giver,  
Law-Maker,  
Ball-Breaker

Coyote dance on quicksand,  
walk on water if he got to,  
Coyote-toes licking asphalt  
easy as dirt and grass

some say Coyote got no shadow  
cause he cut his baggage loose  
to fly on four lean legs  
Coyote doesn't fight himself  
Coyote just goes on

and when he dies  
Coyote comes back  
younger than before  
you can bet on that

on yeah, bet on that





EAT AND REMEMBER

by Carl Lindner

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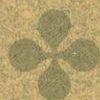
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