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Where We Live

POETRY BY

Don Thompson



PARALLEL PRESS

A PARALLEL PRESS CHAPBOOK

Where We Live

Poetry by
Don Thompson



PARALLEL PRESS 2009

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Nor chiefly that you may go where you will,
But in the rush of everything to waste,
That you may have the power of standing still.

—*Robert Frost*

Each of us builds our own internal California, so
in a sense there are as many variations as there are
Californians. Any of us raised here can base our version
of the state upon actual places and experiences.

—*Gerald Haslam*

Courage, a friend tells me, requires me to grow up and
leave, to get a better job elsewhere; cowardice, he said,
is to stay put, possumlike, as the world goes on by. But
at least my credentials as a San Joaquin Valley loyalist are
unimpeachable, and thus my lament over its destruction
is genuine.

—*Victor Davis Hanson*

To abstract the mind from all local emotion would be
impossible, if it were endeavoured, and would be foolish,
if it were possible.

—*Samuel Johnson*

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Afterthoughts: A Foreword

The air has never been good here. Even the Yokut women pounding acorns in their mortars complained about the haze. Fur trappers and scouts such as Jed Smith, who passed through after surviving an ambush in the Mojave Desert, were glad to climb the Tehachapis and clear out. Travelers in the years after the Civil War complained, too, as they crawled north and south through the wetlands they'd soon drain to create some of the richest farmland on the planet. Today our air is among the worst in the nation.

So you'd think Angelinos would have a little empathy for us; instead, we've always been their stock joke. Johnny Carson showed us no mercy for thirty years. And anytime a TV scriptwriter needs to send characters somewhere unspeakable, somewhere swarming with trailer trash, Philistines, truck drivers, and cowboys, he sends them here: a little over a hundred miles north on Interstate 5.

To be fair, the boot doesn't fit all that badly. And we—that is, the *locals*, not the corporate immigrants or cost-of-living commuters who actually drive to L.A. every day, if you can imagine that—we know who we are, and we're not ashamed of it. Many of our families arrived here as chaff, blown west out of the Dust Bowl. My dad was seventeen and running from Kansas farm life, from his own father who considered sons to be unpaid field hands. He had a buck in his jeans and a girl—ah, the real reason for coming!—out west somewhere whose family had been reduced to following the fruit harvest until her dad got on with Standard Oil on Signal Hill. Mom attended three high schools in her senior year, scrambling to make up units and graduate.

So it isn't such a surprise that in time we became Nashville West, home of Merle Haggard and Buck Owens and dozens of real-deal country singers, musicians, and songwriters. It's in the blood. When I was barely old enough to remember it, Mom and Dad would stuff me into the Chevy along with whoever was partying that night, and

we'd head to the outskirts of town for the Pumpkin Center Barn Dance where many famous names were first announced.

When I became a teen, I rebelled, of course, and slipped over a farther edge of town to the Bamboo Room, where I listened to guys in high-drape slacks, pointed-toe Italian shoes, and chrome sunglasses who had dark skin and names that never became famous. They did, however, play their horns with panache, quoting such authorities as Lester Young and Charlie Parker. Another local sound.

Even if we can match the national average of SUVs on the road, our hearts belong to pick-up trucks. Diesel tractors, the Macks, and those wonderful, luxurious Kenworth T2000s, still park along perfectly respectable residential streets when their drivers can sneak home for a day or two. And even if there is a growing wine-and-cheese contingent, the old saloons like Trout's are still open, if no longer quite so smoke-filled, and the nouveau country nightclubs are packed out with young folks in Stetsons and tight Wranglers.

With all this said, there remains one quality that best characterizes us, one attribute by which you can always identify a native: *the desire to escape*. Everyone I grew up with is long gone to fame, fortune, failed marriages, madness or the good life—but gone! I'm not.

I think of myself as a scruffy coyote loping across his turf, half-alert because that's all it takes to find sustenance when you know your place so well—and, by the grace of God, the place still sustains you. But there's always the chance, if you live like that, you won't see the grim reaper's big rig coming. Whatever. I can bury my bones here knowing that I was, at least, native fauna—an indigenous coyote and not an exotic red fox (one of our many dogs actually flushed Reynard from a ditch bank once). And I can rest in peace knowing that my dust and the dust of the San Joaquin are the same dust. And it all blows through these poems.

I

Plain Living

The Jar

1.

The sun's coming home from Vegas
broke again, down to its last smudged coppers
and watered cocktail pinks:
all regret and no redemption.
It won't have enough light left
to pay off the deepest shadows.

2.

The grass on our side of the hills
is still in the green—
at least for another dry week or so.
Each blade holds in its roots
the first raindrop it ever gathered
like a penny clutched in a baby's fist.

3.

I lie here in the dark, half awake
while light sleeps in its copper veins,
undisturbed—unless someone throws the switch.
Traces of copper in the blood seep
into my troubled thoughts
and add their two cents' worth.

4.

Because they eat holes in my pockets,
I keep pennies in a jar
like moths and let them accrue slowly
until, set free all at once,
they could put out fire
with the dust from their copper wings.

Listening to Wild Dogs at Buena Vista Lake

Praise for antelope,
vanished,
for Tule elk staring like a refugee
through chain link—

for condor, *Isbi* of all birds,
last of a tribe;
for sparrow in its black hood,
little executioner
splitting the seed skull;
and for quail,
huddled beneath dry brush,
who asks a delicate black question—

praise for coyote,
for wolf rare as a feral child,
for cougar, wildcat,
saber tooth deep in the tar pits
and still howling—

for the anonymous dead,
those unknown soldiers
bewildered by headlights—

and above all,
praise for stuffed creatures:
behind their eyes
is a secret chamber, warm and dark,
where I nurture my untamed thoughts.

Mortar

Among the lost artifacts, lost or stolen,
include one substantial mortar
worn as smooth as river rock
in much less time
by rough little hands pounding acorns.
Squash-yellow stone, it was heavier
than some of the stubby women
who must have left it behind every spring
when they trekked to the hills
and found it when they came back down
to winter camp... unmolested
for a thousand years.

Someone plowing not far from here
turned it up two generations ago,
and you could always find it
near the leaning pine
under the overgrown shrubbery,
ignored until I wrestled it out
last summer and put it on display.
Mistake. Now it's gone,
snatched by an activist
with ten percent indigenous blood,
hauled off by a drunk in a pick-up
to grace his back porch,
or by the thatch-headed brothers next door,
just because. Who knows?

But that primal kitchen utensil
is out there somewhere,
not really lost and nobody's property,
still occupying its allotted space and time
with millenniums to go before it finally cracks,
crumbling into gravel and then sand—
long after we've all gone
where those transient acorn eaters went.

Yard Work

My leaf blower lifted the blackbird—
wings still spread, weightless,
floating on the loud, electric wind
almost as if it were alive.

Three or four times it flew,
but fell again, sideslipped down
like a kite with no string,
so I gave up.... I had work to do,

and when the dust I raised
had settled in that other world
under the rose bushes, the ants
came back to finish theirs.

Parsons Ranch (1987)

1. Well Water

A mile off, the hostage river moves on
and on toward exile in L.A.
Here we have good water rising
from black earth,
more than enough for the fields
to sip all night from moonlit ditches.
Cotton never hurries, never worries,
and I have watched it grow three months high.
Uprooted, out of work, I haul the hours by hand
from a well deeper than any other.

2. Hired Hands

“Everything we came so far to harvest
has been gathered in by others.
Stubble welcomes us—
and bales solid as tombstones
instead of the warm, familiar sheaves
we hoped to embrace for the last time.
We have become obsolete,
each with his own scythe
like a question mark in his hand.”

3. Elk Hills

They're best at night, blackest black,
the silt of darkness settled to earth.
From Belridge to Tupman, oilfield lights
burn like the campfires of an ancient army
laying siege to my sleep.

At noon, everything is vague.
A dream haze obscures the lion-colored hills,
reduced by predatory dust to ribs and fur.
I look away from them at noon.

But evening and morning, I feed on their light,
viscid sweet comfort, like Samson tasting
honey from the carcass of his kill.

4. Old Roses

Other rose bushes loiter along the chain link,
but outside our bedroom, nubbed and gnarled
as if pruned by a Civil War surgeon,
the last survivor
from my wife's grandfather's garden,
refuses to quit. All of its years
and every affliction go into each flower,
yielding petals thicker than artichokes'
and more yellow than those incendiary orioles
feasting this summer in our plum tree.
Like wisdom, or the hands of a working man,
its essence can't be faked—
a fragrance aged in the roots,
rich and so weighted with glory,
it's almost too much for the night air
to lift through our open window.

Plain Living (1974)

Just to be where I am,
to become the place:
Joshua Tree shouting hallelujah
or potted cactus on a patio.

Maybe my bones yearn for exposure,
which is their kind of fame,
to arrange their dry thoughts on the sand
somewhere east of Mojave,

and the water containing itself for my sake
may want to flow again:
gravity calls like an old love song.
Let it go.

I do brood sometimes:
Bear Mountain is always there
at the back of my mind
as it should be.

To the north, highways run straight
though not quite endless,
suited to the needs
of adolescents escaping hometowns

and truckers, wide-eyed on bennies,
snarled in their lives of unpaid child support
and 4 A.M. waitresses
older than all the small talk.

I grew up listening to highways whine at night,
counted the gears shifting instead of sheep.
I wanted out, too.
No more.

It's spring again
and the trees teach me to draw green breath;
in August, I'll learn to endure,
and Tule fogs always bring humility,

forcing a general slowness
that weeds out the impulsive ones
who have no patience for plain living.
Then spring again.

What else is there, anywhere?
Though the hills have been stripped for decades,
they're not bored, not boring.
The light will never be finished with them.

And in an age without wildflowers,
we can offer each other our eyes.

Down Here

1.

Hefty and elegant, the geese
pass by like the idle rich
traveling to their southern estates
more than a century ago.
Listen. Gossip never bores them.

Down here the sparrows don't notice,
busy with the seed we toss
under the overgrown pyracantha
where they live all winter, bickering
endlessly without rancor.

2.

White pigeons circle above the stadium,
get their bearings and disappear.
Only one takes off the wrong way,
following a child's lost balloon
rather than its heart.

Down here the sparrows don't notice,
working the crowd for scraps.
They'll still be here when we're gone,
following our own lost balloons.
Wherever they are, they're home.

3.

Sometimes we want to escape
our drab lives. We dream
of green fire, hummingbird sparks,
butterflies rising like smoke
above Costa Rica.

Down here the sparrows don't notice.
They feed until dark
and then put their hunger to sleep
until the light comes back.
No dreams. It's a good life.

At Red Rock Canyon

Petroglyphs catch the first light,
trapping it in spirals
the color of root blood.

Beneath the painted ledge,
shelter from a wind that never stops
gnawing on sandstone:

it's the last place
to get hot,
a cistern filled with morning

where stick-figure antelope
come to drink and to leap
with the nameless dancing man.

Soledad Mission

This is peace: afternoon sunlight
laid over us like an altar cloth
with geraniums stitched into the frayed edges.
More flowers smolder in censers under the eaves.

Sanctuary and gift shop locked down,
the volunteer ladies have gone home
to say grace at dinner tables
illuminated by the floodlights of the state prison.

Lawn and flowerbeds, a wooden cross: yes, this is peace.
But the Holy Ghost swirls in the dust out back
in that unreconstructed Gethsemane
where Fr. Sarria, the last solitary padre,
learned to pray.

But nothing worked. Crops failed.
Reprobates whined over the slim pickings.
Adobe fell to the soft onslaught of fog,
and converts withered. The last of them
found Sarria starved at the altar
and bore him south through the hills
to thriving San Antonio de Padua
where earlier today
we watched a priest in his undershirt, retired,
snub tourist nuns for a ball game on the tube.

Now, while dead twigs tick against the sundial,
we stay an extra hour without knowing why—
unless somehow, Sarria is still here,
not haunting, but sharing with us the solitude
in which God dealt with him,
wind and word, slicing to the bone.

Lights Out

I sit here at my desk tonight,
just sit, and watch a frantic moth
slap against the lampshade.
Sometimes it feels good to give up.

In a few minutes, maybe,
before turning out the lights,
I'll put down my pen to catch it
and take it to the window.

Then let sleep come on its own,
in no hurry, while thoughts
flutter like a moth in cupped hands
until I let them go.

Epigrams from the San Joaquin Valley

Nuance is French nonsense;
we like things black and white—
oil and cotton.

Wetlands are really swamps—
not chaos, of course,
but a rank, predatory order.
We prefer furrows, straight and narrow,
alive with working water.

If you remember poppies and lupines
packed tight from here to Tehachapi,
you must be indigenous...
and endangered.

Only those who come in
through the door of August heat
can look out through the window
of Tule fog.

Three things we can't do:
uproot oak trees like clumps of crab grass;
turn coyotes into lap dogs;
live in L.A.

Though some call us shallow,
we live deep in an ancient sea.
Miocene ghosts swim through the dust
above us and far above them,
stars glitter on the surface.

Flatlands with no skyline
except a few silos:
we can see as far as we look
and learn to take the long view.

Abandoned grapevines along the fence,
Snarled in their own freedom,
yield sparse, bitter fruit.
Prune your thoughts to the nub.

Cut a farmer, he bleeds water
and binds the wound
with borrowed money.

Women with hoes, so patient,
who walk the fields with heads bowed
as if searching, remind us
that we've all lost something.

Among the fountains of Europe,
none compare with deep well water
surging from a stand pipe
anywhere in the San Joaquin.

Some scud like clouds,
escaping to the north or south;
others stay put, their hearts
dug in like boulders on the hills.

Interstate 5 offers us four lanes
border to border, but only the back roads
take us where we need to go.

Where We Live

Nocturnal creatures must teach their young
to be heard and not seen.
Coyotes yip to the east of us
and to the west, frogs beat their drums.

Somewhere to the south, a bird calls—
two thin, falling syllables
in a language we'll never know,
except for rough translations into loneliness.

Where we live, you have to listen hard
through cricket static to hear yourself think.
I like that. For once,
everything human has to shut up and sit still.

You can't even hear the traffic on I5,
only a few miles to the northeast,
where big rigs drift by like ghosts with lanterns
trapped in a long, dark hallway.

II

Tumbleweeds

Tumbleweeds

1. Up Early, Brooding

Light comes all the way
from the sun to touch a snail
on a blade of grass.
The snail moves. The day begins.
I forget what worried me.

2. On a Cold Afternoon

Even an old dog
knows where the scant sunlight is
while I sit freezing
my knuckles to write poems.
I'll go and scratch his warm ears.

3. Last Light at Wheeler Ridge

A flock of blackbirds
dipped into the evening
brushes its dark ink
across irrigated fields.
One stroke. Two more. It is night.

4. Walking Home

Where the cold begins,
owls ask the silence its name.
Someone walking home
can think only of darkness.
He does not hear the answer.

5. Sunday Morning

Trees slip into fog
and vanish—like light falling
into a black hole,
gone forever. We sleep late,
dreaming to keep the world real.

6. Late March

Pounding rain all night
so hard it kept me awake,
nervous. This morning,
pale leaves cover sycamores
that were still bare yesterday.

7. Red Tail

Solitary hawk,
at ease in the emptiness:
nothing holds him up
and nothing will bring him down.
Silent. With no need for song.

8. Abandoned Ranch

No exhausted wind
can make a home in these hills.
And yet tumbleweeds,
trapped by barbed wire, cannot leave.
How foolish to think we're free.

9. Driving through Sanger in August

Grapes heaped in a bin
glistening through a fine spray:
faded emeralds.
I can live another year
with just this to remember.

10. Vista Point on I5

It's an old postcard
landscape, frayed at the edges,
the date blurred by haze.
And no one can read the words
scrawled on the back of the sky.

11. Breckenridge Mountain

Above smog and heat
thirty miles as the hawk flies,
the twisted road ends.
We camp near Yokut mortars,
a few hundred years from home.

12. Deer Season at Cedar Creek

Hours before dawn,
the hiss of Coleman lanterns:
fluorescent red vests,
flies stirring on the carcass
of someone's small, gut-shot buck.

13. Tobias Meadow

Four pines, one boulder
precisely where they must be,
floating on marsh grass
in this sunlight on this ridge
at this moment in this life.

14. Talk

What is there to say,
our words rubbed smooth as old coins
earned by ancestors?
Yet we talk, talk forever,
voices clinking like loose change.

15. Almost There

Trust in an old road.
Where it ends, keep moving on—
farther than wind goes.
When even the sky turns back,
take heart. You are almost there.

III

Looking For Ravens

Eclipse

If some morning, a crack opens
in the sun, don't look up
to guess how much light we've lost already.

And don't try to make small talk, as usual;
your words will come out too honest
on street corners like dim confessionals.

If you must speak to your neighbors,
whisper, "Watch your step,"
and keep moving—cautiously.

Shadows can be dangerous, hiding
those dry, abandoned wells of old wrongs
anyone could fall into and be trapped.

But don't panic.... Remember this:
There has always been enough light
to last until dark. So far.

What You Need

Sometimes it comes too late
like smoke from a cold hearth—
not smoke, not really,
but ashes blown beyond belief.

Sometimes it comes too soon,
a warm morning early in spring:
you fight to crack your cocoon open
and then freeze by nightfall.

Or you wait, sitting in the dark
until the porch light burns out,
until the stars give up,
but what you need never comes.

Full Moon

Something's odd about the moon tonight:
a flat spot on one side as if worn
by the thumb of God....
And that's oddly comforting.
To think that He still cares for us
enough to fret,
to sit brooding on His footstool
with the moon in His hand
like a worry bead,
rubbing it down to nothing.

Drought

Awake, I still hear the rain falling.
It's not a dream. The sky glares,
suffused with dry light.

It's even louder downstairs,
splattering against dusty windows.
I go outside to look:

silent sheep, almost sleepwalking.
A wise collie keeps her yap shut
and lets them drift along like clouds.

I close my eyes and listen
to their hooves pelting the road,
more like rain than the rain.

Cotton Country

for Chris

Someone is always talking drought:

“Unless we get rain, and soon....”

Someone like me. Then it rains.

I look across the wet, black fields

a month before planting

and think the harvest may be good after all.

It's cold this morning, still cloudy,

and that's good, too, because

cotton depends on snow in the high sierras.

In August, when fields are white

and drought a bad habit,

I'll hold my hand in the cool ditch water

remembering how it all fits together—

someone like you and someone like me.

And Love?

If rainfall, freeze, and thaw really do
turn granite slabs into handfuls of gravel,
what chance does flesh have?
And love? What chance does love have
against the slow dripping of time
that leaches everything down to bedrock?

It's like this: All the old clichés
begin to come true. The knees go first;
I wake up with my bones aching
and go to bed heart sore.
I still get my feelings hurt and then get over it.

And even when I've been broken into pieces
small enough to wash away in the next storm,
I won't call it quits. I'll be here
to put my arms around the ones I love.
And I'll hold my own.

Mackerel Sky

My scout handbook told me it meant rain;
and though it has rained
in the past, inherently dry half century,
I can't recall clouds like a washboard,
like warm buttermilk or surf—
riffles stuttering across blue sand.
Not around here.

Our rain comes without much warning:
a few mare's tails on the wind, a quick raid,
and it's gone.
We have no weather lore, no sign
except sunset slowly burning itself out
like an inaccessible grass fire...
and who can interpret that?

Blackbirds gossip on the lawn. They tell all,
but don't publish a tabloid for us.
We know nothing.
The clouds will remain noncommittal,
and the hawk perched on the telephone pole,
aloof but not hostile,
will keep the secrets entrusted to him.

Winter Fields at Night

When frost glistens along the furrows
like a cash crop abandoned last fall
when the price collapsed,
we know another year has gone under.

Ask the ruined entrepreneur: money
is just the way he keeps score.
He is confident and undaunted,
and so is the moon

that loses a fortune in light each month
and makes it all back again.
But tonight, watching it rise,
my eyes cloud like cold breath.

Normal with age, says the ophthalmologist,
who sees two or three new cases a day,
but irreversible...
unlike winter and the waning moon.

Now I must become miserly,
earning interest on the few hours I set aside
from working to pay bills that accumulate
even on a dead man's desk;

must learn late in life not to waste it,
though I've been profligate on a fixed income,
tossing away whole years
like loose change to a panhandler.

Freeze Warning

The sun isn't what it used to be.
Weak and cold, it rises
long after the sheep are up
nibbling dead grass as if it were green.
I don't think the frost on their backs
will melt before noon.

Maybe fog makes everything simpler.
There's no ice on the road,
and the world is reduced to manageable scale—
miles to inches, stress to mild uneasiness.
Coyotes walk home hungry in the fog,
and we cut our speed to a lope.

Tomorrow will be worse,
the sun rising with even less conviction.
We'll have to slow down.
On such days, an invisible discontent
like a thin glaze of ice
can send us sliding out of control.

Egrets

Mostly the white egret eats
and eats the way we think, endlessly
jabbing at hunches
that never reach a conclusion.

He keeps his head down and so do we,
sweating over burger grills,
over cubicle sludge, stuck widgets,
or the cheap paper I'm scribbling on

while the mind persists in its bug drudgery.
All around the white egret, all around us,
quick yellow moths by the thousands
flicker like intuition, unnoticed.

Raven v. Hawk

The hawk comes down to earth
only to feed; the raven, however,
almost earthbound by choice,
flies because he can
and it makes more sense than hopping—
which he'd do happily, if it came to that.

Neither hawk nor dove nor ravenous
(that's just bad PR), he takes no guff
and yet is not easily offended...
or frightened. When cars close in,
the raven walks away from road kill,
nonchalant but never insolent.

The hawk soars, undisputed in the air,
looking down his hooked beak at us;
he referees. The raven plays
linebacker in the crow league,
a tough, feet-in-the-mud grubber,
who has learned to live with a bad call.

Looking for Ravens

Crows are common, commonplace,
loitering on the roadside
hot after the same old tidbits like gossips.
Crows are loud in flight, swooping
bats with their mute buttons turned off;
or too quiet, glittering in the sun
like shards of a huge black mirror
that once reflected the whole human race.
Crows are everywhere—like us.

But I keep looking for ravens,
friendly, fatter than barnyard hens,
and maybe the real angels—messengers
of hope and hang-tough cheerfulness
who always show up when I'm glum.
Or worse.

Those thieving crows want every coin
laid out on the dresser at night,
every dream, and every last secret I keep.
But ravens provide,
flying through the heart's foul weather
To bring me what I need.

Dry Creek

The dry creek has somewhere to go;
preoccupied with emptiness,
it's almost too busy
to be bothered with mere water.

Birdsong, cottonwood chatter,
lizards skittering across rocks,
inaudible hiss of high, thin clouds—
nothing disturbs it.

Not even a flash flood
or snow melting in the mountains
could alter its course. The dry creek
has drawn its line in the sand.

Homecoming

Out in the hills east of town
a wind no one remembers
has come home tonight
to find nothing changed.

One generation of grass
is like another, and if
the stones have lost anything,
it's imperceptible.

This wind has run errands
for all sorts of weather,
shuffled the paperwork of autumn,
and spun out of control

with the profligate dust.
It has suffered humid fevers
and lived to choke on sand;
it has learned to flay clouds.

All of this in my lifetime
while I've been blown
from joy to grief and back,
from paycheck to paycheck,

knowing some of the ills
grass is heir to,
as well as its green pleasures,
and the slow osmosis of love.

Tonight I lie here and listen
to the wind howl its name,
insisting that I admire
its raw nerve, its wanderlust.

But I'm too tired and need
a dark, deeper place to go.
I sink my fingers into sleep
like roots, and I hold on.

Edward Thomas, Homer, Rain

Who knows how long it takes a raindrop
to make it home from the mud to the clouds.
Those charts in the textbooks with arrows
flowing clockwise, uninterrupted,
don't tell the whole story
anymore than dotted lines on a map
show us the travels of Odysseus.

This is the epic of rain:
not reincarnation, not purgatory,
but something like a thousand years
waiting in line at Disneyland
just to leap from a cloud
and free fall, bursting with joy
against stone or leaf.

Who's to say the rain on my window
didn't thin the blood of a poet
somewhere in France at Easter, 1917.
And who's to say one drop
didn't splash on Homer's tongue
when he lifted his face,
tasting what he'd never see.

Friends

How can you look at those granite slabs
half-buried in the hillsides,
mica refusing everything the sun has to offer,
and not sense their heavy sorrow
for us? Just dumb rocks,
unchiseled, less alert than the watchmen
who doze on Easter Island,
far less sensitive than the Pieta,
and yet—such good friends,
always there, who seem to know
that flesh and stone both turn to dust.

Beyond Granite Station

Hiking alone in early spring,
thirty years ago,
I came upon a bull—
an old, half-rusted Hereford.

His hard look put lead in my feet.
I stood still, aging
until I was older than I am now.
Then he looked away....

And fear turned to love
as I watched him
chew sweet grass to a paste
and gulp it down. Life is good.



Don Thompson began publishing poetry in the early sixties, including several chapbooks over the years. He and his wife, Chris, live on her family's cotton farm in the southern San Joaquin Valley. He is a native of the region, and his work reflects the landscape he has lived in most of his life. For many years, he has driven the back roads to a nearby prison, where he teaches.

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