

## Spoken at the Stateline Texaco

Douglas S. Jones

Sparrow hawks crash into cyclone, feathers shooting like smoke over the shoulder. Plastic bags, beer cans, and cigarette boxes drift dead grass along the interstate. Four o'clock spreads over the windshield. The whole earth is late and you feel yourself reeling against its light. Your head will drift, even on the day-old swill you buy in Laramie. When your legs turn to water, push your feet down hard. This stretch will get you to the next rest stop, if you don't follow the passing antelope, those animals you've never seen before and want to tell your lover about, how they look African, how you were waiting for hyenas to come circling over the hills, snapping their jaws, dragging their slumped hips to the thin wire mesh stretched the width of Wyoming.

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# On the Morning of the Last Funeral of the Year

Douglas S. Jones

The kettle chokes on its water, boils out onto the range.

Steam catches the wrist. I swear through inexplicables:

toothed duck bones, run the faucet cold.

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In their nest, the nuthatches—their red mouths toward the sky, wait for anything to fall. Down-wrinkled necks, their eyes black and dumb. Even the birds know how to make a wreath, how to keep eggs thirty feet off the ground and warm.

At the frozen lakeshores of Canada, turtles begin their thaw. Stacked like tables, their blood begins again. First one, then another, and a foot working out of shell—back from the annual death.

My sweater has holes—screwdrivers and cigars. The cuff is a mangle of loose thread trailing my wrist.

I named it "Lucky," after the dog whose gray ticks we grew thick.

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While steam burns my wrist, whalers on television slit open their kill, cooling the body with arctic water. The heat of a slow heart can cook its casing to rib-marrow—

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My uncle lives in the desert, hates wind. He hates the false movement, the thin monsoon grasses, their quiet slapping about at the shores of the arroyo. He hates the tug at his clothes, how his chest feels under cotton, walking into wind. *It always makes a mess of things*. He has come for the casting of ashes.

Place your hand at the back of my knee—here, there is no warmth. Here, the ache of winter gathers and slams its thin limbs against each other.

Listen to them, below the kneecap, gnawing. I wear my sweater, wrap my leg in blankets and dream it into a dying whale's heart. Place your hand here, sew me up against oceans. Let me feel the drawing tight the threads of tendon. First one, then the other.

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# **The Bricksmiths of Calaveras County**

Douglas S. Jones

stack their loads in herringbone. They taste smoke. Dust rattles their throats.

The father opens a kiln of kidneys, kicks ash at his children—high fire wastes good bricks.

In a bronze fountain, meadowlarks splash their baths.

A girl, skeletal, crosses the yard. Her hips are still narrow enough to fit through a kiln's vent, her hands strong enough to build fish beneath the earth.

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# **Notes on Rising Sherman Hill Summit**

Douglas S. Jones

Again, the flatness of land has brought us talking for miles about drowning.

I don't like my mouth that full.

And you're right. Tractors sleep in the median: their scoops, their heavy tread glinting in wind.

The greasy shine of hydraulic joints stretched between yellow metal and rust.

In this air, the carburetor wheezes lean, its mixture of gas and breath trolling through the dashboard. Climbing 8,600 feet, we think

we'll coast the rest of the way like water. Like water, there is no turning east.

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# The Biologist and His Daughter, Electrofishing

Douglas S. Jones

You've asked why I must shock the river.

The surface of the river is a map, a fingerprint of earth. Like bones, the rocks will curve the water, give current to the shape.

Below, a school of cutthroat will lift, their stomachs shining scales like small white fires.

To read a river, settle like a leaf. You see where water rolls like Spanish Rs? Think, *if Ptolemy had laughed*...

Electrofishing turns the belly up, slows gills to sleeping breath. And in my dreams their bodies glow neon, the pop-whack of galaxies exploding. Open dams of light, their flood becomes another day.

I've said too much. Here, take my hand.

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#### **Asked**

Douglas S. Jones

Have you ever left flowers on the grave of a broken dish?

Of magpies and pollywogs, which would you crown to rule your cupboards?

Do you hear the mustachioed chorus sing when you open a jar of pickles?

Will the buttermilk of your eyes turn sour? Will you let your sockets run dry into the glass of your grandmother?

At night, in your bed, do you dream of manholes or mason jars?

Which do you fear more; the soul of an unused spoon, or a pile of broken feathers?

Do you have any hope for the avocados no one remembers to eat?

Is there no greater romance than the secret love between your tongue and your teeth?

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## **Empire of the Tongue**

Douglas S. Jones

I got caught mixing basils after wine and such—such a simple confusion—These leaves aren't persistent, The sweet and Genovese—pesto, roasted nuts and garlic, the smell of the dulled blade, the blood the blood on the cutting board.

Everything takes the place of something else: baseballs, cilantro, brothers. . .

and a wrinkle begins at the corner of the eye.

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Morning, and the eggs are hot in front of you. I've been wanting and wearing silk because the tartars, wrapped in the mouth-spun threads of insects, anticipated their own wounds. But we are new-world domestics—no horses, no steppes. A broken dish, a toilet brush.

I crossed the kitchen last night; Floodlights in the yard under another storm, its rain falling like airplanes through the dying citrus trees.

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The way is through burning fields, through this rainless season.

The way is a vine stretched across continents of impertinence, their waters divided not by mountains or tectonic shelves, but by desire and the hard weather of these walled-in farmlands.

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There are more reasons than heat that lead to perspiration. Yes, July and climbing, but also you, here in the car, on the interstate of incontinence—
I feel my spine driving east with you more than the lumbar burn of tying shoes.

We are mammal and mammal—meat, milk, brain, hair. But this is nothing to reduce like a vinegar. I want your bread, your rhubarb. This is the volta, the multi-layered cake; frosting alone savages the tooth.

We deal in wholes anyway, like avocados. I want the pit, the sprouting darkness of its bruise. I want the wrinkled skin, its silken wound brought to tongue.

Everything takes.