

iii.

a native californian, theresa
assures me she would love the midwest.
she says it's healthier there
and the people are happier there.

i tell her that the colorado
and the hudson rivers form
the borders of a continental loony-bin,
but she insists they're very happy there,

even her okie uncle
who sent his labrador retriever
away for four years at
a university for bird-dogs.

happy hour

i like to call my girl at five on thursdays
when she gets home from work
and meet her for the happy hour
at seaport village on the marina in seal beach.

our first stop is the steak house
for cut-rate harvey wallbangers, a primary
source of vitamin c. then, at the jolly roger,
double gin-and-tonics for a buck, and each half-hour

they roll out a steaming buffet
of chicken, shrimp, and cheeses.
later we wash down enchiladas at hungry jose's
with a couple of volcanic margaritas.

it's a pleasant ritual,
reminiscent of the free lunches of the depression,
and of cheap pub fare, but infinitely more edible
than many a sheepdip pie.

meanwhile the sailboats glide as wistfully
as forfeited ambitions,
and the waitresses move in-and-out
of onanistic half-worlds.

my students scorn the seaport village
as a capitalistic scheme, which it is,
and as an apotheosis of plastic,
which of course it is ...

but was there any chance it would remain
a stolid carapace for indigent fishermen,

or that small businesses would lease space for arts and crafts authentic as the vanished sea bass?

i wishy-washily will make the best of things:
tanqueray martinis, yachts beyond my means,
and women that may not be.
i will be happy at the happy hour.

across the river and into the bullpen

i.

after the midterm we were drinking
in the tavern and this one young man
who had missed a number of questions
kept going from table to table challenging

everyone to a chug-a-lug contest.
when all of us declined, he said,
"there's not a man among you,
not a drinker in the place."

we shrugged and sipped our beers,
while he threw back first one,
then two, then three, then four
straight eight-ounce mugs in rapid fire succession.

the next time i looked up, i could discern
him through the back door standing among
the tall goldenrod of the deserted lot, violently puking.
stetler and lindsay were holding his head.

ii.

later, another of the lads began to feel his oats.
he loudly announced that the real poets of our age
were the pop musicians, and that he knew more
about david bowie than i about plath or bukowski.

he was having trouble enunciating, however,
so he finally quit talking and began to get it on
with the girl sitting next to him. from time to
time, he'd leer my way to make sure

i was properly impressed with love among the
undergraduates. what he didn't realize was that
i'd fucked the same girl two years before, as had
half the male population west of the san gabriel river.

i had to run off to my seven o'clock class.
when i returned, the girl was there, but alone.