

## **Selected Lives**

### **Autobiography**

He told the story like eating soup,  
hot soup that steamed boiling  
fresh from the stove, and we watched,  
listened as he blew languid on each word  
to cool it for our consumption.

“You’ve lived such an interesting life,”  
I said, I hovered in my admiration, waiting  
for him to continue. But he stopped,  
told me my life was just as interesting  
and smiled knowingly.

He went back to his soup. I hung  
on his words waiting for resolution.  
Paris, stolen kiss, the graveyard,  
the subway, the walk, the loss and escape  
from commitment. By the end,  
I was full. I knew the meat was in the telling.

## **Fishing with Teddy**

The man could not keep quiet as he cast his line,  
pulled it back in, and cast it again without regard for finesse.  
Teddy said, "I don't understand why the damned fish  
don't like my bait." I didn't tell him they never had a chance to see it.  
I offered to bring beer, but Teddy brought whisky—  
"there's no point in half-assing it." It being getting drunk.  
I imagine for Teddy fishing was a mythical romp of triumph  
over the small brained swimmer, ending with a feast of his foe.  
There was no waiting. Teddy didn't wait. For ten minutes he yo-yoed  
his line in the water, never letting it rest. He asked "Are there  
fish in this river? I don't think they're there." And he fidgeted:  
crossed his legs, stood up, sat down, stretched an arm, formed a fist.  
When he put down his rod, I knew there was trouble.  
He went between the trees and broke off a branch the size of a bat.  
I ducked as he took a few swings and argued when he stripped his pants.  
He waded in like a hungry bear, and finally was still. Five minutes.  
I jumped when the splash came, I hadn't seen him move,  
but Teddy swung away and the fish flopped on the bank  
beside me, a wounded enemy brought low.  
"Gut it, let's eat." Teddy commanded. I complied.

## Ten Miles Away

We ate more than our stomachs could handle  
that night as we sat with my Dad's friends  
I'd only just met, but the pots still over flowed with meats.  
The sausage and bratwursts, the steaks and lamb  
tenderloin, the pork chops all remained. The fried  
potatoes, the creamed corn, long skinny beans, and  
bits of carrot, we couldn't finish. But they smiled  
as I fell out of my chair, too heavy for legs.  
And we rested outside, on the porch, the nylon chairs  
sagging. I gazed at the fields without end until  
the clear Kansas night fell. And they told me  
the land was so flat you never knew the horizon,  
that my eyes would break before I saw the end.  
And there was a storm that night, but we were dry,  
watching lightning spring from the sky ten miles away,  
soundlessly illuminating the clouds in the dark.

## **I dreamt I died in Montparnasse**

I dreamt I died in Montparnasse,  
a careening moped to the skull.  
People rushed around my body  
and I watched them in third person.

I was abstract, a spirit, a specter  
wandering in my death, the streets  
around were filled with life, and I felt  
apart. Then my vision blurred  
and I saw other beings, great hordes  
of ghosts and ghouls about the town  
strolling through the living.

The artists and musicians of Paris past  
romped about, gathered together again.  
In the spaces they were most alive  
they returned to in their death.

Outside of Henry Tanner's house they  
beat against the gate, the lines of pilgrims  
returned for comments on their work.  
They huddled in the sunny shadows,  
burdened with translucent canvases  
clutched to keep from drifting.

The Bobino raged with crowds while  
Josephine waved from a car outside.  
She'd returned in her prime, showered  
in illusionary ticker tape parade.  
It poured from the sky and floated  
down through shades of past and present.

At the St. Louis Bar that night, phantom  
jazz twined with modern pop, though  
neither heard the other. The bar was packed  
with dead on living, both dancing non-stop.  
The air kinetic, emotions of both groups  
went rushing like a flood. They moved  
as though their souls depended on the joy  
they'd felt in their warm blood.

## John

You lay in the field, liquor in hand,  
dead with brandy for blood.  
You were hard to see in the two foot weeds,  
Why couldn't you have died courteous?  
The kids who stepped on you didn't flinch,  
except for the new kid  
from Connecticut. He looked on  
as the neighbor kids rummaged  
in your pockets. Thank him  
that you were picked up at all.  
When the morgue man came,  
he saw fourteen dollars:  
you were his dinner with a coke.  
He called you John, and apologized  
for the bumpy ride.  
On the icy tray they laid you flat,  
struggled with your arms,  
then left you in the freezer bank  
for someone else to claim.  
Go on, wait in the closet for no one.