

One Afternoon

We walked Eskridge in history where
Dust now blanketed each once ordered store
Where mosaic patterns still led to the bank,
Continued in tan and green on white
To the teller, the bookkeeper cages,
The oak desk by the window.

In the café, every weathered soul
scanned our clothes as they sat
sipping coffee, iced tea,
stitching a needlepoint elephant,
puffing a cigarette exhaling
into air that dimmed above the table.
Only the young spoke in smiles.
Those old enough to marry or work
had caught life's tear
that drooped the corners of their mouths.

We drove west in the Flint Hills
saw one hundred shades of winter's brown
heard Mildred say to Harry:
I'm not going one step further. I don't care
about Oregon. The children are sick. We're staying here.
And Harry acquiesced far beyond
when winter's wind bit his northbound soul.

They cleared the land
took glacial stone by stone, built
fences four and a half feet high
--fences that now line a paved highway--
grew crops, froze fingers,
raised children, buried some,
sweated in hot winds,

Gazed at starred heavens...
Listened to silence...
Before they turned in for the night.

We drove home, the low sun to our side,
Came through the west door and lit our lamps for evening.