



Michael Lee Johnson

Skinny Indiana Boy

by Michael Lee Johnson

With a heart once as big as Texas
or Alberta where he came from,

the draft resister tries to erase
the memory of his sordid past;

coming out of the Rockies,
down over the slate, out of self-imposed exile,

he leaves the northland shaking his bandaged fists at the prairie sky.

He was robbed of his own conviction
by a war that ended, others forgot,

there was nothing left to die for, to wait for,
no more signs to carry in the dark
only the chill of the northern winter left
to remind him of what he once felt,
once talked about.

The night looked long in his deep green eyes
robbing his faint life away.

The scream of loneliness has turned
his innards inside out to pity.
Non-religious except for those
weakened moments, empty nights,
vacant lots, he leaves behind lightless
ten years of those silent wars
without refuge.

He no longer speaks with bullets bleeding
from his mouth, he no longer searches
the quiet whispers that echo in the pines.

Now he is at home near the land of Indiana lakes
where in his childhood he created the vision for his now dead dream,
content to say nothing radical anymore-
just glad to be alive.
-1981-

If I Were Young Again **by Michael Lee Johnson**

Piecemeal summer dies:

Long winter spreads its blanket again.

For ten years I have lived in exile,
locked in this rickety cabin, shoulders
jostled up against the open Alberta sky.

If I were young again, I'd sing of the coolness of high
mountain snow flowers, the sprinkle of night glow-blue
meadows;

I would dream and stretch slim fingers into the distant nowhere,
yawn slowly over endless prairie miles.

The grassland is where in summer silence grows;
in the evening eagles spread their wings
dripping like warm honey.

If I were young again, I'd eat pine cones, food of birds,
share meals with wild wolves;
I'd have as much dessert as I wanted,

Edmonton Streets

by Michael Lee Johnson

Dec. 23rd,
alone,
40 below zero,

he died a cold
winter death

on 105th Street
near North

Saskatchewan River.

In his steel casket
buried beneath

rooted frozen earth,
squirms the

lifeless breathing
of winter.

reach out into blue sky, lick the clouds off my fingers.
But I'm not young anymore and my thoughts tormented

are raw, overworked, sharpened with misery
from torture of war and childhood.

Inside the rush of summer winds,
outside the air beaten dim with snow.

Coffee Time, Fuller's Restaurant

by Michael Lee Johnson

Edmonton, Alberta
June 29th, 1980, three o'clock A.M.

And I'm getting older by the minute.
Thinking about it makes me tired.

Outside traffic crawls slowly over
slippery pavement like inebriated turtles.

Inside, at the coffee counter, I flirt with a waitress –
fresh young fruit from Montreal.

She insists on calling me Vincent Price
and speaking French in Alberta.

I'm trying to read *Periods of the Moon,*
by Irving Layton, selecting the human

condition, repetition, and insomnia as
my main themes.

Next to me, a street gypsy drooping
over the counter beside me, pulling

scraps of dog-eared aged newsprint
from a doggie bag. She stares

squint-eyed at a picture of John F. Kennedy
for two hours, manages to laugh

an incredible 29 times, sorry, 30 times, 31.
Counting makes me tired,

makes me take notice of this gypsy
and disapprove.