Early Occult Memory Systems of the Lower Midwest

By B. H. Fairchild

In his fifth year the son, deep in the backseat of his father's Ford and the mysterium of time, holds time in memory with words, night, this night, on the way to a stalled rig south of Kiowa Creek where the plains wind stacks the skeletons of weeds on barbed-wire fences and rattles the battered DeKalb sign to make the child think of time in its passing, of death.

Cattle stare at flat-bed haulers gunning clumps of black smoke and lugging damaged drill pipe up the gullied, mud-hollowed road. Road, this road. Roustabouts shouting from the crow's nest float like Ascension angels on a ring of lights. Chokecherries gouge the purpled sky, cloud-swags running the moon under, and starlight rains across the Ford's blue hood. Blue, this blue.

Later, where black flies haunt the mud tank, the boy walks along the pipe rack dragging a stick across the hollow ends to make a kind of music, and the creek throbs with frog songs, locusts, the rasp of tree limbs blown and scattered. The great horse people, his father, these sounds, these shapes saved from time's dark creek as the car moves across the moving earth: world, this world.

B. H. Fairchild, “Early Occult Memory Systems of the Lower Midwest” from Early Occult Memory Systems of the Lower Midwest. Copyright © 2003 by B. H. Fairchild. Reprinted with the permission of W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. This selection may not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher.

B. H. Fairchild was born in Houston, Texas. Throughout high school and college he worked for his father, who was a lathe machinist. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Kansas, and earned his Ph.D. from the University of Tulsa. Many of his poems take place in the Midwest and contain a blue-collar sensibility. Fairchild's work has also been published in The New Yorker, and The Paris Review, as well as numerous other publications.

See More By This Poet