

TELL ME AGAIN

by

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A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of English
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, AL

2011

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ABSTRACT

A collection of lyric poems.

DEDICATION

For Emily, who was there with me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues, friends, and faculty members at the University of Alabama, without whose support this manuscript would not have been possible. I am especially indebted to my thesis advisor Peter Streckfus, and to my committee members Joel Brouwer, Heather White, and Jolene Hubbs, who have so selflessly offered me their wisdom and support.

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Certain Vessels

The front porch, 8th St.

Autumn, and the air gone vacant,
and the leaves scrabble down the vacant streets,
and the shout, *don't touch it get back!*
(a snake?)
carries from two lots over to stand
right next to us as if spoken
right next to us.

And we fall for it. Clear rust. The grasses gone to seed.

We shut the windows, bring the nests out, boil water;
only to wake in the skin-damp
dark, the air a
gauze again.

End of the profligate. Yes. And all the signs.

But lingering, unreliable, given to swoon.

Should I not then
be able to trust what I sense?
My habit, my clean shift,
or what has anyway always been,

seems here a garment of sugar,
impending melt or crack, sky
gone tornadic, ground
waiting around to be rubbed
fallow.

Oh Trivia, where the road
goes three ways.

One speaks of being whole,
another of seeming so,
while the third
whirls unspeaking.

Only human (humming in her head),
she shows how to endure the stone
words of the absent.

She can go miles in a day and will.

Uprooted, she tells herself (essing now, bitter)
find a different river
be a snake
change.

Again and wherever she goes.

If I hook my finger
through your belt loop.

Loosed

from hard care,
if you sing the same song,
through my belt loop,

and we're still lost?

McFarland

Dome of gauze, backlit
by what moon? The burnt flesh
of what moon? A woman
in the liquor store where they'd
rearranged the bottles
muttered to herself
in her sunglasses
*try to hide my shit,
think I can't find it?*

Her face, all of her neck, burnt.
Her lips a smear.

I will not
always look this way.
No longer human,

the sky tonight retreats
to the blankets, to the open mouth
of a book where every answer
is abandoned, and falls asleep
to the grinding of its teeth.

The grain elevator, Northport

Was it you who walked ahead of me
sharing the beam of your flashlight?
Did you aim it at your feet, or behind you,
or did you walk behind me?

I have, insanely, begun to confuse
those words: you and I.
Tell me again what she said.
I'm only beginning to understand.

*We had to give up on certainty
to stay true to ourselves.*
Tomorrow,
different silo.

Whatever Breathes is Incomplete

I'm a map...how thin.

Being lost feels like being folded.

I've a photo of myself as a child, naked in the bathtub. I look like a steamboat pilot. I look like whatever I need to look like.

This one, that one, but all the time we're in a canebrake. That is also this, and neither you nor I nor anywhere gets to be the center.

Made of stone and water. Standing still moving away.

And I, too, would prefer a mountain-top. There the crow flies over, and I know from its shadow.

A man told me once that what God made length-wise, like roads or a wagon or a horse, he made to be always moving, and that what He made up-and-down-wise, like a house or a tree or a man, He made to stay put.

Maybe I live like a broken wagon on a muddy road. But the trouble I have isn't with *starting*.

I forgot to drink water. I got a headache. I was offered gloves, but I refused. Later, I looked at all the little cuts on my hands, thinking I'd finished.

I say it's like post-oak mud, when I don't know what that's like. I say it's like paddling upstream.

Near the bank, the current's slack. Strike a match, cup, puff, smoke. Until the current turns the craft, and you need to start paddling again.

Never folded, no. But always lost.

Do you grieve? Look at the river. And when you're done with grief, walk away like a river.

Whatever breathes is incomplete. A man told me that once.

And I, too, would like to be a natural song, passed along from rail yard to rail yard, and never sung the same.

Years ago, in another language, she sat
on the edge of someone else's bed, and the bed
collapsed. What she for so long had been
certain of blew then
into her open.

The desert grows a skin
to keep from blowing away
but I'm not the desert.

I didn't run barefoot from Acoma
to the river my trail isn't there.

Not there wherever I am now.
Bits of tooled bone clay coal.
My inheritance underground.

Made of what I've scarcely touched,
I'll dance with a snake in my mouth,
dance with a snake in my mouth
for rain.

My Name

Migrant's lament

When I came to the New World,
I had my picture made.

Black curtain, and the hole in the roof
faced north.

Now I hold my face,
mossed trunk, and the field
slopes, full of stones.

Me here on it with my proof
sent back and gone,

I turn up potatoes.
Not many.

Skyland and Rt. 69

Visitors despair. There's not much
to do but go to the movies.
And at the end of one, bleary eyed, emergent,
what are you then but pedestrian,
in the parking lot of all parking lots
adrift. All the stilletoed
fluorescences above you, all the flashed
tits of your town, while just beyond
and as if in reply, the bored
interstate whines?

Letter from Mt. Pleasant, 1859

It's difficult, throughout the 'Possum hunt,
to see the creature, no *critter*, no *varmint*.
We go on horses. The others walk beside us.
When we get to the melon patch, everyone takes his position.

It's difficult. Though the knots of pitch-pine
make brilliant flame. The approach of a sound toward me
followed by what looks like a white cat.
We came on horses. The others walked beside us.
The knots of pitch-pine made brilliant flame.
When we got to the melon patch, everyone took another position.

Then some half a dozen more scuttle past and the light
for an instant reveals their gray bodies but too briefly
to allow an aim. It's difficult. We ride horses.
We dismount. Creature, no *critter*, no *varmint*. Am I
really dead or just playing at it? Look at my tail.

Should it be limber and curled.
Should it be rigid and straight.

Montgomery Jail, 1888

This is a big world to go around on Stranger, believe me.
I've been to Helena Oxford Athens Rome Fort Worth Genoa Madrid Decatur
and as many more I never asked the name of.

-

I've been called so many names,
Jim Burrow Rube Burrow Jim Hankins Bill Jones,
it's got to where I don't really know my name.

-

I'll smile to make my face seem less heavy.
Tell me if you think my cheeks look sallow.

-

Rube Burrow is my big brother, Jim Burrow is my baby brother, we sleep near the fire.
The embers popping out land on our boots and burn holes.

-

I was in Birmingham to buy wool socks, then I got on the train.
I had never been on that part of a train before. I had a pair
of wool socks in my pocket, and want to know what you've done with them.

-

My name is Nelson I'm from Erath County Texas where my mama is.
We have some cows and I put some cotton down
and some millet and oats too. If you take me there I'll show you.

-

Rube Burrow is my baby brother. What he knows I showed him.

-

Ask the judge in Tarrant County does he remember the boy
from Alabama who stabbed another boy for teasing then
made leg-bail and has been fugitive ever since.

-

My name is Sam Bass I was born in the Montgomery Jail.

-

My name is cross-tie, lode-spike, mule. You don't believe me ask the bricks.

-

If you hadn't caught me he wouldn't have escaped.

-

Swamps. Swamps. You might start there.

-

In Texas there aren't so many swamps.
In Texas there's nowhere to hide from the sun.

-

Stranger don't think I'm a man who's slept in the mud.

-

I followed Rube to Texas. I left our sister Ann-Marie, and I followed Rube to Texas.

-

I had no horse and was afraid to steal one.

-

Rube is my brother where he is waiting for me.
Ann-Marie is my sister where I left her.
I walked the rest of the way.

-

When I told Rube about the boy I stabbed in Fort Worth for teasing
he couldn't tell if I was lying or truthing.

-

Rube is my big brother he sewed my boots.

-

Devils, Stranger, believe me
there's lots in this world but none
so bad as the hind end of a mule.

-

As long as the railroads tote money
is what Rube always said.
As long as the railroad's tote money.

-

If you hadn't caught her we wouldn't have escaped.

-

Rube Burrow is a coward. Jim Burrow is a coward. Sam Bass is a rat.
Every train I robbed, I robbed alone.

-

You say your watch was a wedding gift?
I don't want your watch you keep it.

-

I never been to Texas.

A History (Big Black Cloud All Day)

When I left here...I tried to do right. I struck a number of good jobs and just as I would get to doing well along would come some man and say: 'That's Steve Renfroe, he used to be sheriff of Sumter County.' And that would almost kill me. And I would go to drinking.

–Stephen S. Renfroe, Sumter County, 1885

Keep your mouth shut. Don't gamble your money or drink it away.
Save up, like a boiler. Keep your mouth shut.

When you've saved up, buy a white mule, call it a horse.
Lease a place on shares and cuss
the dirt like you own it.

Fuck, drink, forget
you ever worked this
kind of work to begin with.

He knew they'd want to hang him, so he ran.
He ran to the Alabama. He swam across.
He ran to the Warrior. He swam across.
He ran to the Bigbee.

On the far bank he figured far enough.

He said his name was Steve Renfroe,
and that he was a white horse.
*I said it so beautifully
they had to believe me.*

On the Sumter County Courthouse lawn,
beside the bored well,

beside the navel of your ruin,

stands a Chinaberry tree whose shade
no cow will seek,

whose branches hold no nests.

But this is not the tree they hanged you from,
and here, at the edge of town,
this is not the potter's field,
and this is not your unmarked grave.

War hero, deserter, charmer, husband, drunk, murderer, fugitive, charmer, drunk, planter, drunk, widower, charmer, husband, drunk, knight-rider, drunk, hero, murderer, martyr, drunk, sherriff, charmer, thief, charmer, drunk, prisoner, drunk, charmer, fugitive, hanged-man, ghost, drunk, at the end of a rope, drunk, the words in another man's mouth, at the end of a rope, for as long as he can remember.

Habit like a spavined joint. Habit trace galled.

Every day, around this time of day,

(man-child's itch to rhyme
help me remember help me forget)

the light stirrups. Habit horse. Habit syrup.

Cows with their backs turned to a big black cloud all day.
The geese don't fly over the house for nothing.
Sign for bad weather, at it all night,
fox, fugitive, if you want a house,
start digging.

*When I came back,
not even my wife would recognize me.*

No roof or rule, knight-rider,
save that if the horse trips.

And on your third day dry,
empty blackbird roost,
you'll feel weightless, loath, far.

No color to your lips, your boots
hang down around your ankles.

Roots again, ready to be ruled.

The cedar bucket. The gourd dipper.
Passed from hand to hand.
Passed from hand to hand.

In the trembling water, no stars, no moon.

When a man becomes the words in another man's mouth.
Clutch of sorghum in the mill-stone's mouth,
black syrup, Steve Renfroe, the waters
of the Sucarnatchie ripple when you're near.

Holder of white horses, white lightning, dry heave.
And your yard's unswept, and you're trampled.
Not a man anymore at all. Long black whip.
Upside down cup. No stars, no moon.

You can come along and hold the horses.
You can kneel and drink directly
from the waters of the Sucarnatchie.

Another History (At The Same Time)

Planter's lament

The ornery that is mule-teams, the weight of the ropes
tied from the dead trees to the mule-teams.

The canebreak that won't burn off and has to be plowed.
The plow catching in the roots.

Down in the slough, another steer needs to be shot.

The blades need sharpening, the litter needs suckling,
the dark is for going out to rut.

What I keep rots, flourishes. Keeper and kept. And in the roots,
in every slough and crossing, the devil chucks
so who will witness?

How quickly the cleared field grows over in weed.

Eufaula, AL

The highway is called Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Expressway,
and the bridge is called Jefferson Davis Memorial Overpass,
and there's a flag, big as an RV, dragging its pole down to the water
to fish for a fish with whiskers and fins that'll cut your finger.

“What do you use for bait?”

“I'll tell you what, all jokes aside, I take a hose out to the water meter,
lift the cover and start filling the hole,
then soon as them cockroaches come floating up
I scoop them out and put 'em in a jar.”

The locomotive *Widowmaker*
rattles down sweet-gum alley.
Turtles turn upside down.
Snakes leap into the air.

You meander.

This is what is meant by *like a river*.

When an oxbow bends so deep it separates.
Silted lake, you did this

and you failed to do this with the promise
of such fullness.

You are what is meant by *at the same time*,

and embark,
and do not abandon.

A star
polishing the river.
Or the river the star.
Or she's Venus

polished by the river
you'll never memorize
head to mouth.

Or else you're pilot for the umpteenth time,
past every wreck, reef, snag, shoal.

Blind moon polishing
her alligator back.

Moonshiner's lament

First my Jinny mule, I don't know how,
wheeled all the way around in her rigging,
and pop-eyed and crop-toothed thrust
her breast down over the plow-blade,

then my William mule, seeing this,
walked down to the river bank,
stuck his muzzle in the water,
and drank until his belly burst.

And that's how I come to be
alone up here, watching the river
jump her banks and seethe,

by now, clear up to the eaves whispering:
Sedition, sedition,
your copper pipe's corroded.

Erie, AL

1

He reads and fiddles around all day because it's raining.
He needs smokes so he drives to Greensboro.
He closes behind him the first gate, the second gate.

2

In Greensboro, on Beacon St.,
he can see right through the gaps,
missing teeth, a block over, to the back
of the Piggly-Wiggly, the flattened cardboard,
the grease dumpster, and further,
boys in pickups down the Tuscaloosa highway
pointing pistol-fingers out the window
as they pass, neither remembering
what was, nor seeing
what is there.

Bangbang.
Bangbang.

3

The rain won't stop and then it does.
He takes the tractor out
once the ground dries, and the harrows
turn up another headstone, another.
He splits garlic-cloves from their bulbs,
and stooping along the rows
tucks them back into the dirt.

One dead town
after another dead town
in the book of dead towns.
The rain won't start and then it does.

4

The farm journal
for October 28th, 1847, says
Rain. Rain.

And now it's almost deer season.
He can hear someone's warming up
across the river.

Highway Shoulder

The highway shoulder runs a rank and noxious ribbon. Fat on the runoff after rain, fat on the black grinds of cadmium and tin, coon and armadillo flesh blackened in the sun.

So fat it seems the tractor mowers
mow endlessly.

Dust of the abandoned ant-mounds announcing them.

Newbern, AL

This town is Sunday, bow-backed
barns all painted green,

and I'm passing through,
and I'm thirsty.

Maybe there's a store.
Maybe the people

who've left this town
come back, perforce to drift

come back. Only it's Sunday,
shuttered store.

But then I see a soda-pop
machine in under the porch

that maybe works so I pull over,
unbend from the car and

stiff walk around the building
hand in my pocket checking for coins

all the time not noticing anything
just hoping the machine's plugged in.

It is, and I choose Dr. Pepper,
and the heavy can clunks down.

When I stand up with it in my hand
he's standing there right next to me,

this man I must not have noticed
because I wasn't paying attention

but who's here now and who I can tell,
in an instant, isn't anything like me,

not young like me, not passing through,
his skin paper-tight, his clothes

like they want to fall off his body,
and he asks me wouldn't I

like to buy a brother a drink?
Palm the color of the bare

sweet-gum stand in the distance,
he takes the offered coins,

chooses Orange,
and the heavy can clunks down.

Skyland and Rt. 69

These aren't stucco walls, they're Styrofoam spray-brushed with latex and sand.
A boy got dunk and punched a hole.
Then went home.

Ferryman's lament

Where the river bends, the banks
are steeply cut or low
and prone to flooding.

Build your house on one,
plant your crops in the other,

and where the rope snapped,
stand and stare into the water.

15th and Oakwood

Planted all at once forty years ago,
the water oaks along my street
rot from the inside out.

The boom trucks, one after another,
extend their booms,
and as the limbs fall hollow
the air fills with spore.
No sound. The saws
drowning even themselves.

Hinton Place Sub-Division

Found a note on the ground, the red ground. It said: *Infested. Corrupt.*

Turned it over. A church in Moundville, not far down the road.

And I'd been there once. You too.
How the small-town eyes swerve after, all that heat
a vine from every shadow
sick and stretching for the light.

I'd been there once and might have stayed. And you.

Impatient as plowing after rain,
harrows polishing further
the hard-pan clay.

Yardboy's lament

The collards I planted gone.
The weeds I pulled grown back.

And what about that goose
that eats Bermuda grass.

And isn't this why people
keep dogs.

Muskrat, ground-hog, or gopher
flashes through the kudzu.

Whatever
digs these holes beneath the fence.

Rotten eggs, they say, to keep them off.
Hot-pepper paste.

And turn the ground once.
And burn it.

Gleaning

Field hand speaking directly into the microphone

Snake-bit. Lady, look at my foot.

I split a black chicken to wrap the wound in.
I buried it in a hole, poured some water in.

So what's my fruits?

Where we're at now, it's not like what they sing about.
Eggs aint poultries, grits aint groceries,
and Mona Lisa, Mona Lisa, man

we must've went too fast,
all wore down. Where we're at,
snake-bit, not a place at all,
not a fruit at all.

Photographer's lament

I don't want this one, mealy as the foreman's toothless mouth,
the cavity of its rot a black and lurid green.

Neither do I want this humped back, this knot of fire
in my humped back, like the molten heart of a mountain.

This basket of tomatoes isn't even a basket of tomatoes.
I don't ever want to bend over again.

These tomato plants, not bushes but vines across the sand.
This scarf, wrapped around my head so the sun

won't lay it's eggs in my hair.
And my beautiful hair.

Down one of these dirt roads
lie the open fields I'm looking for
but which?

The trees grow so close together.
Blackjack. Persimmon. Persimmon.

(And these last I know,
not because I saw the fruits or even got out of the car,
but because I saw them, a whole crowd
along the shoulder with their plastic sacks,
hunched in the grass, gleaning.)

The mockingbird flies at me screaming.
I throw up my hands!

The trucks down Lurleen bridge
come ratcheting their jake-brakes,
that mockingbird comes
ratcheting his jake-brake.

There's an impact-
wrench in his mouth.

O Crane,
I go unarmed!
Quit knocking
the wall back to plumb.

Bulldozer, quit driving in reverse.

You dropped a pebble
from your beak as you flew,
Listen!

It lands in a puddle.

The front porch, 104°

Only imagine you're a part of the mud-rock
under the cypress knees under the swamp.

That's not even that heavy.

80 million years, seep spring, sit still.

That's not even that long.

The fan on your front porch fans.
Everything you need to know about the world
on a day like this goes
rippling oil sheen down the mostly
empty highway.

In the steeps.

Light a match on my cheek.
Light a match on my cheek.
I'll not disguise myself.

Imbiber of the night,
wrap the rain around your shoulders.

Seep spring,
I'll drink from your forehead.

The heart is made of emerald
and will not last.

Ezekiel

*Dear Sir:
I wish I could Show you
our condition clearly,
but I am unable,
but I will try.*

–Convict Miner Ezekiel Archey to Alabama Prisons Inspector Robert Dawson, Jan. 18, 1884

Concrete-slab floor.
Concrete brick and mortar walls facing north.

A cold that seems a flame drawn
from the cold hard mouth
of the world...

from the rocky breasts
forever.

Ezekiel, the word
runs aground in my mouth.

Coal and slate are black rocks they drink the light.
Lamp-black drinks the light.
Your hands.

Cotton-seed oil is cheaper, burns dirty.
You learn not to look at your lunch
as you eat it.

Smoke-damp, stink-damp, low roof.
After sitting, you're stiff. Stooped
mules go by

in the dark.
They pull the cars you fill they
walk in their own shit their heads wrapped

because they don't need to see.

Uphill from Tracy City, Tennessee,
the ruins of beehive coke ovens
gape black.

Reflected in the pond, their shadow
lies indistinguishable from that of the slope behind,
and then higher (so then nearer in the water),
spreads the bruised sky.

You've not been here but have seen this,
Ezekiel, dressed in moss,
lichen, fallen leaves.
My fingers. My eyes.

The late-winter hardwoods knock, whisper,
or say nothing at all.
I listen, or I don't.
I misinterpret.

Black dust your locust. Your hickory. Your plague.

And you write with a rock
letters to other men's women.

Other men's wedge
words, blast-cap words.

Ezekiel, no
man is a hatchet.

Mark time with me, mark lies.

Outside they are unseeing you go unseen.

Apple soda. Apricot, peach,
banana soda. Lime soda.
Grapefruit, pineapple, pomegranate soda.

Watermelon soda. Vanilla,
tamarind, rhubarb soda. Elder-
flower soda. Lavender, saffron, juniper-

berry soda. Coffee soda.
Cocoa, ginger, boysenberry
soda. Any

of these on ice, Ezekiel,
I can have any of these
on ice.

I wake in my room on a morning in March,
the floors and walls cold.
I walk outside barefoot and stand on the rocks
in the sun.

Clover,
deep as a toothache,
pushes up for the first time.

Woodpecker begins knocking. Begins knocking,
then stops.
Calls his call like a penknife whittle.

I look,
but the sun is already high.

I squint.

Branches, knots of mistletoe, blinding sky.

Standing on the rocks in the sun.
March. You've gone.
Oh well, you'll be back.

By noon, the house warms,
stays warm all evening.

Coke ovens, dinky-cars,
dinky-lines, steam, smoke,
smoke, the wind turning, meat,
Ezekiel, the smell of it.

Someone bring me the dipper
if it's not dusk yet.

Dinky-line, dinky-line, dinky-line,
 (dreamt it was always supper time).
Prison-farm, prison-farm, prison-farm
 (dreamt I was where the women are).

Field of broom sedge, too-late, what month is it?
And where has all this yellow come from?

When they run away, Ezekiel, they run to the river.
The ground is softer there.
Their scent.

When they run away, Ezekiel, they dig a hole,
a kind of room. And rest awhile,
and mend their shoes.

Food there, water, Ezekiel, but what
for bait, for hook, for bucket?

White stone, black stone, and what remains
in the cracks of our hands.

Dirt

and invisible dirt. Impossible

dirt and dirt.

Unreturnable dirt.

Pie Wagon

All these skittle bumps, jowl-meat, are for you.

I'll shake the tree.

My little smoke-house, my little snout.

You can get fat, we can get fat.

From now on, every mile down.

Humus human, my little silt dirge,
my little sick-of-that-Boone's-Farm.

The dump's on fire for days. From now on,
no rocks, no views. Only the choked rows,
smokeless decay.

As if it were only a matter of avoiding the damp. Or when all is dredge, all pulp,
then of just being the damp yourself.

Swamp Queen: a kind of sour mash.

And you can always sweat it out, stripling.

Watch them all pass through.

Torn racks of cloud and the hole

you dug to spit in, both

earth-reeking, dog-

fennel. When it's cold out,

you can stay warm and spend all your time at it.

My little dung heap.

And when it's summer, my little cellar stone.

Inside the pie wagon blooms bright-hot-light, the smell of greasy fryings, dishwater.

She'll ask *What kind of pie?*

Eating pie.

Hill cradled. Hill laden.

She'll ask, *How many more is there?*

Names. Magnificent, grave Convictions. Failures.

How many heeled by what? Monody of river bend.

Boots in the mud. No difference. No answer. From now on,
everything'll be different. No hurry.

Staying cool and spending all our time at it. My little mulch.

My little shade cloth.

Word that pokes. Poke-green word.

Creak-along word. Word that luffs.

Or jelly-jawed, chubby-cheeked,
word that roots, word that leaks.

Notes

- p. 2 Trivia (Hecate) is the Greco-Roman goddess of the crossroads. I borrow the idea from Horacio Castillo
- p. 4 “Loosed from hard care” Sappho (Anne Carson’s translation)
- p. 5 “No longer human” Osamu Dazai (Donald Keene’s translation)
- p. 6 “I have, insanely...” B. Pasternak, to M. Tsvetayeva (Margaret Wittlin’s translation)
- p. 8 “What God made lengthwise...” W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*
- p. 9 “Whatever breathes is incomplete” Antonio Porchia, *Voces* (my translation)
- p. 12 “Made of what I’ve scarcely touched” Antonio Porchia, see also the photographs of Sumner W. Matteson in *Ancestors and Descendants: Ancient Southwestern America at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century*
- p. 16 An adaptation of an episode from Philip Henry Gosse, *Letters from Alabama*
- p. 17 See William Stanley Hoole, *Saga of Rube Burrow*
- p. 20 See William Warren Rogers and Ruth Pruitt, *Stephen S. Renfroe: Alabama’s Outlaw Sheriff*, and the interviews conducted by Ruben Pickens Tartt and reprinted in *Toting the Lead Row*
- p. 39 “Rain, rain” *Fear God and walk humbly : the agricultural journal of James Mallory, 1843-1877*
- p. 42 “Perforce to drift” W.H. Cash, *The Mind of the South*
- p. 47 “Small-town eyes” James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*
- p. 50 *Toting the Lead Row* and Titus Turner’s “All Around the World”
- p. 51 After a Dorthea Lange photograph, “Mexican migrant woman picking tomatoes, California, November 1938”
- p. 56 See Mary Ellen Curtin’s *Black prisoners and their world, Alabama, 1865-1900*
- p. 57 “Drawn from the cold hard mouth...” E. Bishop “At The Fishhouses”
- p. 67 The poems in “Pie Wagon” borrow language from W. Faulkner, T.S. Stribling, and the W.P.A Life Histories reprinted in *These Are Our Lives*. “Skittle bumps” is a vernacular term for tree-nuts.