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## Distance Learning

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*Distance Learning*

They answered an ad,  
FINISH SCHOOL BY CORRESPONDENCE,  
so now I'm making six bucks an hour  
teaching Practical English  
to Benjy the Seventh Day Adventist who sells  
*The Watchtower* in front of Dunkin' Donuts;  
and to Annabella the third generation  
contortionist in a one-ring circus;  
and to Tim from Nome whose stick dance  
makes fish rush to the surface of the sea.  
Our textbook, revised in 1956,  
calls English a "tool" as if it could conk Satan  
over the head as he slunk out of Dunkin' Donuts.  
Its rules are iron-clad, a chain of I's before E's  
not bendable like the bones in a young body,  
not sprung from monks and slaves and thieves.  
I'm required to teach the text straight,  
as if on a cold night outside Nome  
an Athabaskan could smoke  
salmon with wood from a grammar tree.  
My students are remote as astrophysics:  
stars and particle waves, the phenomenon  
of light traveling over distance,  
constructed from equations I can't trace  
although our textbook ventures that someday  
Americans will send a man into space.