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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.