Land of Lincoln

*Thats* where Lyle Wilson went, wearing his Mariners

baseball cap. In 1979 he was drinking tequila by a paper shack

near Bothell, Washington, when he got killed by a car

that didn't stop. The driver drove right into the Reagan revolution,

leaving Lyle Wilson, a boy who was no longer human,

to escape like smoke wafting out of a stovepipe hat. The afterlife

is bare as Illinois: the Land of Lincoln, south of Chicago,

where farms flatten to grey as if a spray of ash has fallen.

I'm loathe to drive through, even with the windows rolled up,

but I did it once, en route to St. Louis. The towns were not true towns:

just Burger Kings, and houses with their doors nailed shut.

No wrestling teams were practicing in the dark and windowless gyms.

In the Land of Lincoln, everything turns into him: he's a tow truck,

a tire store, a bank, a school, a canister of logs, and a national park.

There is no heartland except in the heart: it is a single

apple, the red start of two or three trees. It is not Illinois,

where the prairie root systems are uprooted. Is it weird to lust

after the dead? Sometimes I picture Lyle, luminous in his skin.

I wait for his pulse until it beats in my wrist. In American Gothic novels

the heroines aren't really afraid of ghosts. No, they're afraid of ironing:

the board, the sheets and pillowcases, the flatness, the Midwestern

flatness.

S o r b y

*9*