

Here in White Swan

For Peter Ludwin

Tecumseh, Simcoe, Mission Roads.
Sad thing is I'm in my element.
A headcount would tally
more strays than locals
if you'd bother to keep track.
Pinkeye. Cleft palates. Head lice.
Now's the dog whipping hour,
for not coming when called,
for barking or not barking.
Nothing's better than nothing.
No taverns, no stoplights for 20 miles.
Our laundromat sells Pepsi, gas and Bud.
Malt liquor speeds up the intersection
of distemper with disbelief.
There's a log cabin church on the way
to Hoptowit's logging camp.
Its pews full only once
when the town was on fire.
Smoke shacks. Hop kilns. Wheel lines.
No cash or missiles in these silos.
No babes in our corncribs.
If you stay, you will taste silage
and failure. *Per capita* checks
land in the tribe's new casino.
Everybody's cousins. Sort of.
No natives dancing in the grange hall.
No Whites in Shaker Church.
Home of the PowWow Rodeo.
Home of the Grange Xmas Bazaar.
Home of—well—home.
Mint oil. Flat beds. Cattle guards.
Grazing rights all depend
on brace posts and barbed wire.
Bumper crops of buffalo grass
and sagebrush foretell
foreclosure. Stubble fields.
Alkali flats. DDT.
When our lumberyard gave in,
the white swans left the millpond,
never to return.

ALLEN BRADEN