

2002

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Recommended Citation

Skeen, Anita (2002) "The Artist Travels the Kansas Turnpike, Wichita to Topeka, on Valentine's Day," *Grand Valley Review*. Vol. 25 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvr/vol25/iss1/10>

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The Artist Travels the Kansas Turnpike, Wichita to Topeka, on Valentine's Day

Like the lone cowboy in the western films of my childhood,
I ride into these Flint Hills, the false fronts
of spring rising both sides of the road. This is the month
that, last year, brought the big snow, but for two weeks
now we've worn no hats or gloves. A haze hangs over
these faded fields, the landscape on the verge
of birth. I am trailing a pick-up, yellow
as a lemon in the bright sunlight, and watch it roll
into the dips and valleys of this double highway,
a bouncing ball I am to follow and sing along with.
What comes to mind is Amazing Grace,
these plains remarkably empty and Biblically bare,
the Promised Land somewhere just out of sight.
The truck stays a good ways ahead, though I'm catching up,
and no cars appear in the oncoming lanes. I see
this whole countryside washed out, a sepia photograph
too long in the sun. I am stunned by the brightness of that truck,
a Chevy Chieftain, the only splotch of color for miles,
emitting vibrations throughout the terrain. The black
and white cows plodding around the gray pond
burst into purple and pink, the water they drink
the blue-green snorkeler's bay. The magic truck
sails on, and the flinty fossil rock
blooms in heather, alfalfa, goldenrod,
and sweetgrass. Trees tingle into blossom,
redbud and lilac. Ahead the windmills spin
kaleidoscopic tops, the red-tailed hawks
fan out their peacock plumes. Suddenly
the scene rolls back to silent film,
technicolor vanishing fast, as the yellow truck
turns off the exit at Admire.

Anita Skeen is the author of four volumes of poetry: The Resurrection of the Animals (MSU Press, 2002); Each Hand a Map (Naiad Press, Inc., 1986); and Portraits. These poems are reprinted with permission from Outside the Fold, Outside the Frame (MSU Press, 1999). Her poetry, short fiction, and essays have appeared in numerous literary magazines and anthologies.