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THE GRANITE LENS

By Dr. Sam Lackey

I first noticed how the tombstones reflected light
Like a lens
When we moved out to our place in the country
And passed a graveyard on the way to work and
Back each day—morning and night.
The stones would catch our lights and focus all
Our thoughts on Now.

How dry and clean is the road?
Will the tires hold in this turn
Off 54 and up Davis Road?
We ride continually on faith, yet
Why am I going so fast?
What is my hurry now?
The stones with neighbors' names flash brightly.
 Large and elaborate against the grass,
 Or small, with a heart, and the final facts of love.
For a lost child. . .
They focus mind and heart
Not on the future hidden in the crystal's glint
Not on the past, etched by the long blind rains
That make the sharpest letters soften
Into Nature's universal script.

The granite lens, the compound microscope of Time
Fixes my full awareness of the focal point
Where dim abstraction is eclipsed and fading images drift and fall.
There, smouldering before me, the future and the past converge,
The white hot melting point is reached.
Where life burns in the blood, lights up the eyes,
Brings every sense in finest tune,
And steels the sinuses and bones.

My bike, my young wife on the back, tops the hill with ease.
The low purr barely audible above the rushing wind.
The headlight cuts into the future twenty yards.
We top the second hill more slowly now, following the heavy pulse
Of a big bike a half block ahead.
My mind began to turn over the frequent thought that a bigger bike is
So much more solid on the road. . . especially when the 16-wheelers
Wash you almost onto the flying shore with their wake.
When slowly but with steady grace a glistening Thunderbird coming
Toward us turned.
Turned, as though the big bike wasn't there,
Turned as though somehow he didn't count.

We saw him rise, my young wife and I.
The big bike rider and his bike
Rose like dolphins from the waves
And hung somehow at the highest point
Nearly motionless
The Thunderbird had stopped
With only a shattered signal light and a glint
Of bumper across the center line.
But now there was no sea to swallow up her own
And as though betrayed,
The rider and the big bike turned and dove,
Breaking into twisted memories of
The sleek invulnerable swimmers they had been,
Five feet and half a thought ago.

Not long after lunch, I heard over the radio
That there was a wreck on Davis Road with injury.
The injured person was taken to the Emergency Room
Where it was necessary to remove his leg.
It is true, I had never seen a leg like his
When we slowly rolled by that morning. The crowd gathered
Quickly but through their legs I could see his leg
As we rolled slowly down the block.
At first, I was unsure of my perspective,
 the twisted way he was lying and all.
But in the end, it was all too clear.
 Like an ostrich,
The leg bent straight forward
At the knee.

Instinctively my hands went to my own knees,
I felt them move and lock under the unbroken skin
. . . without a trace of pain.
I thought of my young wife in a flurry of images
Singing from the touch of her skin to the stretch and
Power of her running in the fields.

Enough is enough.
Without a word we knew.
The lens had burned the image of the lost leg home.
We were just too awake that morning not to see,
We were just too alive that morning. . . not to fear,
And the granite and the concrete. . . far too dumb to care.

DR. SAM LACKEY, Assistant Professor of English and Philosophy, has twenty years of college teaching experience—seventeen at SOSU. For seven years, he was sponsor of CHAPBOOK and editor of the OKLAHOMA ENGLISH JOURNAL. His poems have been published in BROADSIDE, CHAPBOOK, ETERNAL ECHOES, MAELSTROM REVIEW, MUSCADINE, NIMROD, NORTHERN LIGHT, OBOE, PIVOT, WELLSPRING, WESTVIEW, AND WINDMILL.