

Lamp

BY JOHN THOMAS YORK

WINNER OF THE 2011 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE

When he sold the Holsteins and took up trucking,
cheating, chasing a West Virginia woman,
Daddy had a mercury vapor lamp installed
beside our house: shingles glowed fluorescent,
a shadow blackened the north side,
while the light erased all but the brightest stars.

There was a night when I waited up for his return,
watched until the horizon turned red
and the lamp stuttered a final good-bye.

Tonight, fleeing the whitewash of city lights,
hungry for country dark, I stop the car
at a deserted farm and get out for a walk with a flashlight:

Spirits of mule and cow rustle through weeds under bare trees
I find ghosts in a corner of a boarded-up house.
They sit in a parlor full of straw, lumber,
discarded furniture – the old folks
waiting for the boy to come home from Florida, Nevada.

I look for my father, but he's still haunting the highways,
hoping to hitch a ride, never mind the destination.

I walk to a hilltop – to greet Orion, to find the Pleiades –
shivering, I turn two coins in my pocket, over and over,
two pennies, while a dog barks
faraway, riding Venus across the sky, or maybe circling a lamp
in the distance, a blue star beside a farmhouse.



The Covered Window, 2008 (digital photography) by Isaac Talley

Announcing his selection of **JOHN THOMAS YORK**'s "Lamp" for the first James Applewhite Poetry Prize, James Applewhite wrote that "certain poems let the reader come to them. They offer a truth to experience . . . they seem intuitively to make their seeing and feeling our own. We find them out, and feel enlarged by the new emotional territory they have created. 'Lamp' . . . is such a poem." John Thomas York read his winning poem at the Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming, held in Greenville, NC, 23 Sept. 2011. Hear this reading at www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLK0LRZ1Ejw, and read another of his poems (also a finalist in the Applewhite competition) in *NCLR Online* 2012 and in the Flashbacks section of this issue.

ISAAC TALLEY grew up in Oak Hill, NC. He earned his BFA in Studio Art at Barton College in Wilson, NC, and his MFA in Painting/Drawing at ECU. He has taught at ECU and Pitt Community College, and his work has appeared in numerous solo and group shows throughout North Carolina. His awards include the ECU School of Art and Design Director's Award in 2008 and Best in Show at the Schwa National Juried Exhibition at Emerge Gallery in Greenville, NC, in 2009. See more of his work at <http://isaactalley.com/home.html>.