

MARK SANDERS

## The House on 19th Street

On summer nights, before sleep, the sweet smell  
of the alfalfa mill and the pungencies of the pig-lot  
covered the town like a coat you get used to wearing.  
Elms danced in any breeze, throwing  
their skinny arms about, twisting, clapping,  
while the orange-yellow moon of the corner street lamp cast long shadows.

The yard had its iris-perfume, the neighborhood  
its chanting, prayerful dogs,  
and at the fairground track, halfway across town,  
the stock cars growled their laps.

Round and round they buzzed, they zipped,  
like flies that flew through the rips in my window screen,  
making pass after pass at my ears.  
Even with the covers pulled over my head, the laps insisted.  
Now and then, as a truck grumbled sleepily down L Street,  
the windows shook their knocky-bones;  
the house snored like an old man,  
his head propped high upon his pillows,  
his wife—her hair rolled and netted, her fretting  
like the dripping of the bathroom faucet—nudging him quiet.

There was no need to count sheep,  
no bedtime stories to bore the eyelids down—only soft songs.  
I stayed awake to count minutes and measures by the multitude  
until all noises, all smells, all the sweltering sensations  
converged with the crickets' concerto.  
And the night dissolved, like a boyhood, into morning.

