

THREE POEMS BY HAROLD WHIT WILLIAMS

EARLY RECORDINGS VOL. 1

The first thing you notice
Is tape hiss,

A wavy analog breath
Building into cicada buzz.

Your Christian name
Displayed in spidery cursive

On a yellowed cassette cover.
A man mumbles, blue jays shriek.

A child's voice chimes in—
Deep South inflections,

Honeysuckle sweet
And pine sap dripping.

In this voice you hear
Church hymnal pages turn,

A merry-go-round squeak,
Summer downpours on a tin roof.

It responds to the man mumbles
With bird sounds and giggles.

You press rewind, play repeatedly,
Hearing the swish of corduroy.

CAUGHT BY THE INDIAN SUMMER TRAIN

I keep missing the exit for that hometown in my mind.
The borough in broken pieces
Scattered other side of the tracks.

They're waiting up for me, I know,
Fretting, hand wringing,
Frittering about the fried pie table.

That porch light with its congregation of moths.
That harvest moon like a Buddha
Atop yonder ridge.

The leftovers. The folded quilts.
Those sepia ghosts in their dollar store frames.
Evening deepening,

Sinking down to get comfortable.
A lone dogwood hunkering up against the house.
It leaves little flames flickering,

Its afterglow some sort of metaphor
For the fire we return to,
For the ashes sprinkled upon our slumbers.

PARTICIPATION TROPHY

For Dean Young

Such horrible advice I have received
And shall receive yet again.
Be all that you can be. Dance

Like no one's watching. Just do it.
Midnight in the cemetery, and
I'm painfully sober being all I can be.

You are all winners!
I shout to those cold wet headstones.
No one is watching

So I foxtrot past the graveyard,
Whistling. I just did it.
I came to inside this simulation.

It was whatever I set my mind to –
Work's drone, vacation's hassle,
The doctor's waiting room. Magazines.

People. Time. Life. I did
What I had to do, but mostly did not.
Nothing special about existing,

Even less about not-existing.
I don't know exactly how to end this,
But then it's not really up to me.

"Early Recordings Vol.1," "Caught by the Indian Summer Train," and "Participation Trophy" are from Harold Whit Williams' book *Harold Whit Williams: Selected Poems* (FutureCycle Press). They appear here with permission from the author.