

April 2019

Five Poems (Poet and Critic)

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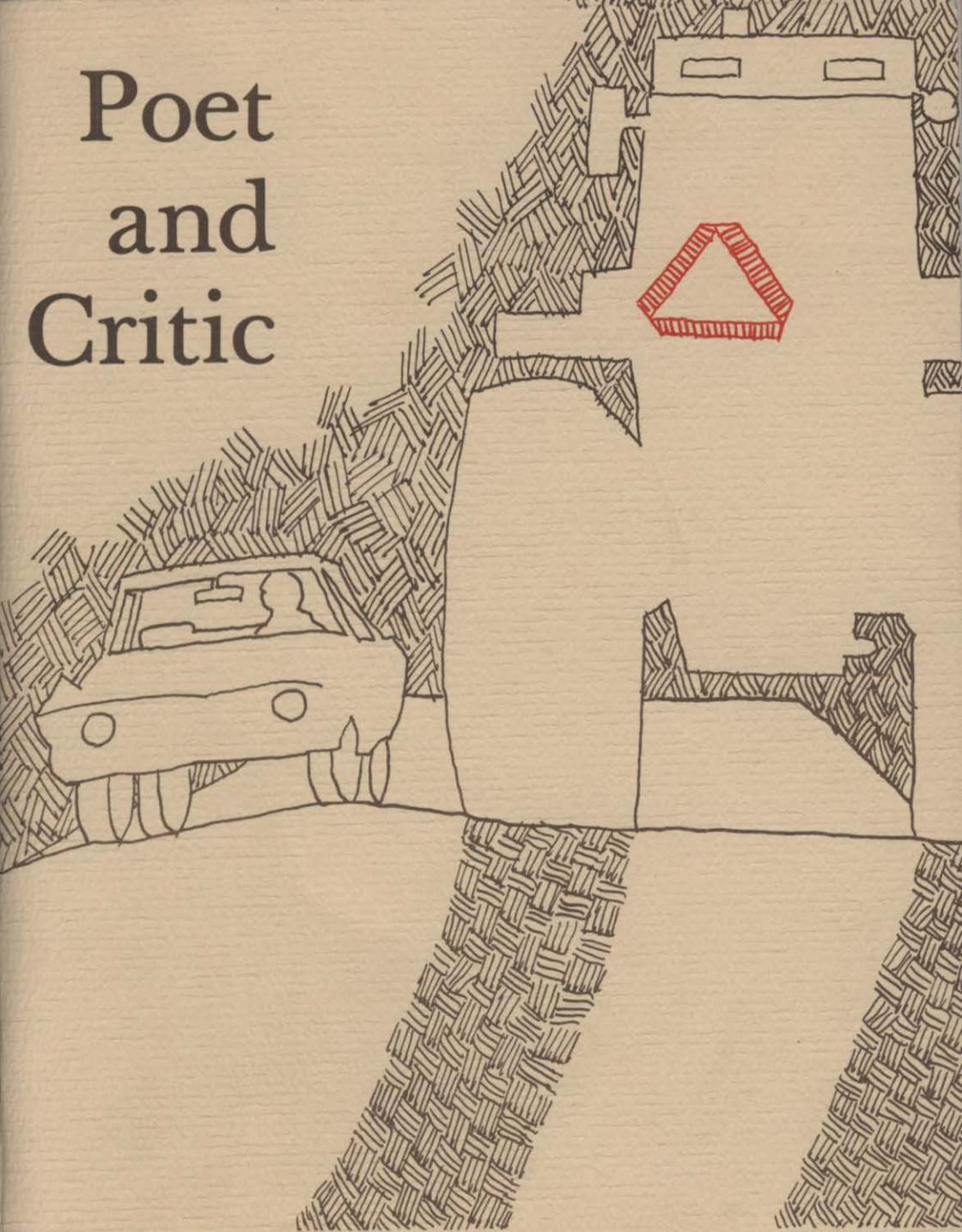
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Poet and Critic

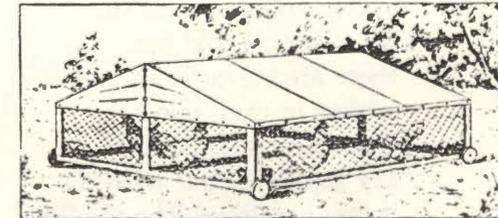


JAMES HEARST

TAKING THE BULL TO WATER

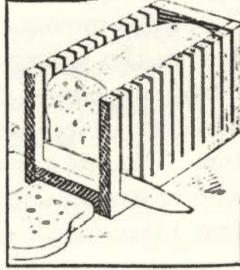
The herd bull leaves his stall
to do his duty by his wives
(as some men do not) and goes
with me twice a day to the
tank for water. Tight curls
of hair pack the wide space
between his eyes which seem
to regard me with an amiable
but stupid stare. But his
polished horns warn me to
have the beast in him respect
the beast in me. I crowd his neck
behind the horns to untie
his halter rope, then snap
the leading stick to the ring
in his nose. He accepts my gestures
without protest and follows me
with heavy steps. I walk backward
all the way, facing him, the
halter rope over my shoulder
the leading stick in both hands.
If he would hook at me I have him
where it hurts, the ring he wears
in a tender nose. At the tank
I climb up on a post,
unsnap the stick while he
sucks up water. He looks up
drops dripping from his muzzle.
I throw a half hitch around
the gate post until I snap
the stick in his ring. We
return, paired as before, he advances,
I retreat one step at a time.
Our moment comes when I must

lift my foot high enough to
clear the barn door sill and
not trip and fall. I can't read
his shaggy thoughts but he knows
as well as I this movement counts.
I feel his muscles gather and
a push from his bowed neck.
I jerk the stick to let him know
I feel him. (We lost a neighbor
once who missed this step.)
We enter, I stand aside not to be
caught between him and the manger.
I tie the rope, unsnap the stick,
pat his back. He's relaxed now too
and munches hay. I play the game
my way, he gets a drink, I keep my skin,
to date we have not changed the rules,
he waits the day of an exception.



A Movable Chicken Coop may be Pushed about the
Lawn So That the Grass will be Eaten
Off Uniformly

JAMES HEARST



NOT THE LAST GOODBYE

Hat askew, coat open,
purse on one arm, car keys
in hand, she scans the
grocery list and bumps
into the door. She backs up,
kicks it open, steams into
the garage. I hear the car
grumble, cough, then roar.
The hand of the kitchen
clock zip zips from second
to second, and the morning
grows. I retreat to my study,
open and shut drawers, hear
the house empty itself of
voices and rush and stir.
Be careful, I told her,
there are bastards abroad
witless in cars, mind the
cross streets. I did not
say goodbye. But what if
it was goodbye? The thought
so skewered me I did not turn
a page until she returned.

JAMES HEARST

NOT REALLY A QUARREL

Granted we slept well and
ate breakfast together,
the sky has not lost color
nor the sun its light,
birds seem busy at their
feeding and indoors the rooms
keep order, no failure
of light or heat, faucets
do not leak and no real quarrel
worked up a storm. But some
insistence on your side
made you scrub the sink
with sudden vigor and I
skimmed the paper without
reading the news. Trapped in
a disagreement we could not
define, we simmered in a
half angry, half apologetic mood.
After all these years together
it is still hard for one of
us to say, I was mistaken.

V

JAMES HEARST

THE WEED CUTTER

Earth soaked by a thunderstorm
excused us from fieldwork on a
hot muggy June morning. Time
to cut weeds in the fence rows.
"Son of a bitch," I said, weary
with sixteen years. Corn taller
than my head kept off the breeze,
gnats swarmed over my sweaty
face. I hung my shirt on a
fence post, whetstone in my
hip pocket to sharpen the scythe,
a jug of drinking water hidden
under grass to keep it cool.
Large hemp stalks tough as leather
I named for people I disliked
and whacked away. The neighbor's
stupid cows stared at me across
the fence where the blade of
my scythe caught and nearly tore
my arms loose. Who would want
to be a farmer and work his ass off
on a day like this? Resentment
poured into my muscle but a nap
in the shadowy cornfield never
tempted me. As in a game
to win I swung the scythe and
conscience heavy with father's
orders kept the score.

V

JAMES HEARST

BALANCE SHEET

From my father's family I inherit
a long face and a need for facts,
on my mother's side a delight in
tales where the hero slays the dragon.
The mirror repeats my age and shows
the wrinkles of my discontent.
I am tangled in webs of habit.
I eat an apple each day, dress up
on Sunday, make love at full moon,
share as much as I borrow, brush
my teeth before I read the headlines,
drink my coffee black with toast.
My files bulge with notes from
committee meetings, I keep a
running account of my expenses.
This stencil for living stamps my work
but I move with purpose. No one
on either side of the family
ever made a journey just to see
the sights.



Effective Method of Burning Stumps: An Injection of Saltpeter Enables the Fire to Creep to the Ends of the Roots, Until They are All Consumed