

SOUTHWEST DRY SPELL

Scorched. Singed. Nothing tongues can say
is brittle enough. The right word would craze
like old pottery, fall apart and turn to dust
before it hit the ground.

Cattle lying down may never get up.
Already they smoke with black flies,
ears and tails too limp to flick off the biters,
more after moisture than blood.

This gray-brown heatscape has stopped breathing.
It's been over a year since a creek ran through
the landscathe. Fine grit fills creases
in our faces, upturned, searching the glare

threatening to combust. The only shade is
between cows' ribs, outlining their misery
like prison bars they tried to pry open
to escape the jailer sun. Stilled windmills

are brands against its fiery setting, burnt
into submission, blades welded to silence.
But now, wind would be another enemy, sweeping
all worth from the surface maybe forever.

Lungs hurry to expel each breath. Forced
to draw another, they swell again on 107 degrees
until rolling thoughts of unresisted drowning
displace wisps of green breeze memories.

Our brains are full of blips,
short-circuited logic. Each synapse sputters,
sparking another non sequitur. We don't look
at each other. We buy imported water.

We add supplements to the last desiccated hay,
not for weight gain, just to give the cows strength
to beat their hearts. Knowing no one will buy them
or the land. Not even at the price of bone.

--First Place, 1998, POET'S ATTIC QUARTERLY