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## A SINGLE PROSELYTE

Long sunburnt hair matted to  
sweat on his cheeks He was  
yet walking at summers edge  
still going home somewhere  
before winter set in  
It was america but he was  
not an american though born in  
blood of this earth  
Prisons were everywhere  
In them he had seen his face a  
thousand times over seen  
headless bones of ancestors  
scattered over hillsides over  
stripmine dumps left by  
looters who sell even the  
fleshless skulls  
In sprawl of urban bars  
blueblack fleshfilled nights  
stirred with razor edges  
used on his own blood  
Short term prison for killing  
one of his own even though  
he pretended they were white  
He woke up that last morning  
lips puffed slivers of  
glass in his teeth hands  
too unsteady to grasp the  
tiny thorns of the beer bottle  
Gazing at the faceless body  
lying next to him wondering  
if he had been kissing on it

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Barney Bush holds a cross-disciplinary degree in the Fine Arts and English. He is the author of *Inherit the Blood* (NY, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1985), *Petroglyphs* (Greenfield Center, NY: Greenfield Review Press, 1982) and *My Horse and a Jukebox* (UCLA: American Indian Studies Center, 1979) and his work has appeared in the *Denver Quarterly*, the *Beloit Poetry Journal* and *Akwesasne Notes*.

he laughed at himself  
Survival was still with him  
even more when he sees bodies  
of those who lost it for  
whom dreams were not enough  
nor religion held together by  
witchcraft and white gods or  
elders who sip their bottles  
beside the drum

As he walks he shakes his  
head at whites who call earth  
a savage wilderness and their  
cities civilization whose  
infertile bodies infertile  
minds steal adopt native  
children send them to mental  
institutions when they cannot  
imitate when they cannot  
turn from their own blood

His head shakes until he feels  
his brains ready to explode  
when he hears white leaders  
condemning atrocities pleading  
for humanity with ears and  
hearts closed when his own make  
the same pleas to americas  
leaders

He stares at the golden rods and  
sweet william grandparents  
memory somehow attached searches  
back to when stone was made  
smooth to fit the hand

It is enough he thinks  
holding round stone from  
Old Town in his palm  
pinches out a bit of ancient  
tobacco

Hot hazy sky clouds with  
autumn wind Balsam limbs  
whine Shadowy figures  
circle the white drum sing

---

in presence of White Plumed  
Spirit seen by ones  
created from this earth  
He walks listens for  
voices of relatives listens for  
songs listens for  
thundering of hooves listens for  
wailing behind prison walls  
wailing of power hungry spirits  
spilling from carcasses of newly  
born  
He listens until he hears cracking  
of silence smells the  
bowels of earth and  
downpour of rain that causes the bear to  
stand upright.

**Barney Bush**