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## on Jack Heflin

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Jack Heflin  
*The Map of Leaving*  
The Montana Reconnaissance Project  
Missoula, Montana  
1984  
\$5.00

Grappling with the paradoxical heart of experience, Heflin's poems engage the reader in a real world where the price of initiation for the seeker is never easy and involves losses that clear the way for hard-won victories of the spirit. In them, there is growth, an outward-turning knowledge that allows the reader to partake of the quest and share in the illumination. The perils met are expertly rendered, as in "The Hitchhiker," where what is loved, like a brother, the hitchhiker who is always leaving, can so easily be lost.

I glanced outside the passenger window  
where my reflection was mirrored. . . .  
The wind pushed hard against my door,  
dawn unmasked the prairie.  
My brother's swollen face  
loomed in the jimsonweed  
that bloomed along the highway.

The accessible language and fresh imagery bring to life the characters which share his landscapes and heartscapes. Heflin's experience balances what is terrifying with what is beautiful:

*Hold it,*  
he says. We turn our flashlights on the drunken blur  
of a child's foot webbed in mud and flint.  
And the dogs, suddenly come up unnoticed in the wind,  
let go howls ringed with a little of that silver  
we'll all find at the bottom of our graves.  
(from "The Treasure Of The Raccoons")

Heflin's imagery and language, the careful crafting, serve his strong sense of narrative. With the poet, the reader faces the baptisms. Balanced as an athlete who not only knows his sport but feels the lives of the players on the field, this is a poet whose work doesn't float off the page, isn't so painfully confessional that there is no room for the answering song of the reader. There is something to be learned from each game.

Some of my favorites are "The Sawmill," "Mules," and "The Sleepwalker." The final poem, "Good News," is a beautiful work, full of substance, of grace, as the celebration of spirit reaches a crescendo.