Spring 1978

Mother and Henry

Tim Barnes
MOTHER AND HENRY

1
There is the hillside
and the yellow grass,
the stream, almost dry,
and the dusty road,
mother and her lover Henry.

We are on an old road in California,
west of San Juan Batista, west
of the memory of stagecoaches
rolling toward Monterey. Horses
and shotguns. City slickers
in silk hats. A trail of dust
disappearing for miles and miles.

Black Bart.

Dave and me stick our feet
in the creek, eat a sandwich
and listen for hoof beats.

Mother and Henry talk
under an oak,
and hold each other's hands.

2
There is the road
through Carmel Valley
and there are the vultures.

Henry is out of the car
and flapping his arms.
There is the deer
dead in the road.

Mother lights a cigarette
and turns to us.

“They have bald heads.”

3
Every Sunday that summer
we went somewhere.

I remember blood
on Jesus’ face
in the Mission Carmel,

a big wave in Big Sur,
mother running up
in her pink swim suit,

sand in my teeth, on my tongue.

4
We are on the coast road
again, driving to Nepenthe.

There are the cliffs
and the surf’s thin line,

the ocean, blue
and breaking,

way below. I
am terrified.