

A PRIMER, by Bob Hicok

I remember Michigan fondly as the place I go
to be in Michigan. The right hand of America
waving from maps or the left
pressing into clay a mold to take home
from kindergarten to Mother. I lived in Michigan
forty-three years. The state bird
is a chained factory gate. The state flower
is Lake Superior, which sounds egotistical
though it is merely cold and deep as truth.
A Midwesterner can use the word "truth,"
can sincerely use the word "sincere."
In truth the Midwest is not mid or west.
When I go back to Michigan I drive through Ohio.
There is off I-75 in Ohio a mosque, so life
goes corn corn corn mosque, I wave at Islam,
which we're not getting along with
on account of the Towers as I pass.
Then Ohio goes corn corn corn
billboard, goodbye, Islam. You never forget
how to be from Michigan when you're from Michigan.
It's like riding a bike of ice and fly fishing.
The Upper Peninsula is a spare state
in case Michigan goes flat. I live now
in Virginia, which has no backup plan
but is named the same as my mother,
I live in my mother again, which is creepy
but so is what the skin under my chin is doing,
suddenly there's a pouch like marsupials
are needed. The state joy is spring.
"Osiris, we beseech thee, rise and give us baseball"
is how we might sound were we Egyptian in April,
when February hasn't ended. February
is thirteen months long in Michigan.
We are a people who by February
want to kill the sky for being so gray
and angry at us. "What did we do?"
is the state motto. There's a day in May
when we're all tumblers, gymnastics
is everywhere, and daffodils are asked
by young men to be their wives. When a man elopes
with a daffodil, you know where he's from.
In this way I have given you a primer.
Let us all be from somewhere.
Let us tell each other everything we can.