

Gale Acuff

## Good Animals

When I die I really start to live is  
what they teach me at Sunday School, I guess  
they *teach* me, they try, not that I've learned it  
yet but I guess I'll only know the truth  
of it, or anything else, when I die  
and see for myself what lies over yon  
-der, eternal life, I mean, and God and  
Jesus and the Holy Ghost and angels  
and Adam and Abraham and Moses  
and good dead folks I used to know, I'm just  
ten years old so there won't be many of  
those but maybe I'll meet *luminaries*,  
that's a good word, I mean folks who are dead  
and gone to Heaven but it was so long  
ago that I hardly knew 'em but I  
hope to run into a couple of pets,  
dogs and cats and birds and fish and hamsters  
and gerbils and white mice and a rabbit  
and maybe all good animals without  
sin who made it to Heaven so I can't

wait, I'd like to join them and besides that  
we've got a test in regular school next  
week and I don't feel like studying, I'd  
rather die and go on to the good stuff  
but that would mean *suicide* unless I'm  
lucky enough to be run over or  
murdered or pushed off a cliff but any  
-way at church they tell me just to hang on  
and read my Bible and participate like  
my soul depends on it and get saved and  
maybe join Boy Scouts or Future Farmers  
of America or 4H but live  
a clean life whatever else I do, then  
hope for the best and when I die enjoy

it in the Good Place and do nothing that  
will land me in the Bad.

I forgot Eve.

## Cabinet

*One day when I'm dead you'll be sorry I*  
say to myself in the mirror or its  
reflection anyway, maybe I will  
be, sorry that is, though I'm not sure why\  
yet, maybe I'll not have done all the things  
I wanted to do or did some or most  
of them, even, but not the one I should\  
have done and I'm only ten years old now  
so what do I know about the future  
much less the past - the past, well, we get that  
in school and as for time now, it's too much  
with me for me to judge it well, like my  
reflection, say, or my shadow, they're part  
of me but not substantial so I fear  
them, or is it me I fear? I had that

dream again last night, I in the mirror  
was moving differently from me standing  
in front and when the fluorescent light shone  
brighter than ever I saw its shadow  
or mine detach itself and move mirror  
-right, then return by mirror-left, and then  
I woke and sat upright in bed and said

to the darkness *This must mean something, I*  
*wonder what, if I fall asleep again*  
*I'll dream the truth.* Which I did. It's a lie.

## Mad

I'll die one day and leave me behind as  
a memory, I hope, maybe if folks  
remember me that will be the way for

me to stay alive, maybe the only,  
although at Sunday School they swear the soul

goes on forever in Heaven or Hell  
and Jesus died so that I could live  
the only life worth living, the one which  
comes after death but takes dying to get  
to, I'm only ten years old so maybe

that's why it doesn't make sense but only  
to grownups like my Sunday School teacher  
Miss Hooker and Preacher, they make a nice  
couple Mother says but they'd better get  
married before they're overcome by sin,

I don't know what Mother means unless she  
means making eyes and hugging and kissing,  
those are evil unless you're spliced, I guess,  
I'd ask Miss Hooker but Mother's warned me  
not to but anyway in the After

-life I get all my questions answered so  
I'll find out what living's for but I'll ask  
God and Jesus and the Holy Ghost if  
they have anything they want to ask *me*,  
after all, I'll have been alive and none

of them ever were save Jesus, of course,  
but that was long ago and maybe He  
has bad memories of it, He never  
came back like He promised, I want to share  
what I learned with the Trinity, maybe

it would do 'em some good, it couldn't hurt,  
but I might make 'em mad and if I make  
Heaven they might demote me, then I'd be  
stuck with Satan for eternity but  
I guess it beats being alone and I

wonder if he'll have questions for me but  
I'm sure I'll have a few for him, maybe  
Hell's where I belong, it may not be much  
of an eternal life but if I can  
hack it forever then it's more than I

can say for the Trinity but maybe  
 after a few million years they'll fish me  
 out and debrief me though maybe I won't  
 talk, they'll have to torture me. I can't wait  
 to help. Maybe it will make us closer.

## The Great Commandment

*I love Jesus* I tell Miss Hooker when  
 Sunday School is over but I don't tell her that  
 I love Him more because we've stopped talking  
 about Him and God and the Holy Ghost  
 and religion and saving our souls so  
 that we'll go to Heaven instead of Hell  
 and we go through this once a week and week  
 upon week so that we can make up for  
 six days of sin in fifty minutes but

I don't say *that*, either, I'm only 10  
 and thinking like a grownup thinks, which means  
 depressingly but I keep it to my  
 -self, I'll wait until I'm a teenager  
 and expected to gripe about things and  
 how grownups ruin them so I try to  
 get along until I'm old enough not  
 to and cause trouble and start wars, maybe,  
 or overthrow the government or smoke  
 filterless cigarettes and drink foreign  
 beer and stop shaving even though I've looked  
 forward to it since boyhood and if I  
 was a woman I'd stop wearing a bra  
 and I might just stop wearing one any

-way, and Miss Hooker said *Oh, that's fine, \_\_\_\_\_*  
*--love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and*  
*all thy soul and all thy mind* but then I  
 couldn't help a *not necessarily*  
*in that order* and laughing and she frowned,  
 Miss Hooker did, for just a moment, just  
 long enough to make for Eternity,

it's funny the way time works and how I  
 know that she'll go to Heaven when she kicks  
 and I'll go to Hell but if not then at  
 least we won't wind up in the same damn place.

## Commodious

One day when everybody's dead I'll be  
 alive in Heaven or Hell, I mean that  
 folks will be alive on earth but dead to  
 me because I'll be the dead one, I'll be  
 dead to them and this is what I declared  
 to Miss Hooker after Sunday School this  
 morning before I walked home but after  
 my classmates had all left so I sneaked back  
 in to get her alone, not to *get her*  
 as in *attack* but just to talk and not  
 have to share her and she wouldn't have to  
 share *me*, no one else in the classroom but  
 God, His presence anyway, I mean it  
*is* church-grounds and therefore likely sacred  
 and then there's the photo of Jesus be-  
 -hind Miss Hooker's desk--*picture* I mean, not  
 photo, no cameras back in the olden  
 time, not that Miss Hooker, she's 25,  
 could be interested in sharing much  
 with me, I'm 10, other than God, Jesus,  
 and the Holy Ghost, I confess that I love  
 her but to do something man-and-woman  
 about that, whatever that might mean, can't  
 happen until I'm older and I don't  
 even shave yet but one day, who knows, God  
 will bring us together, I mean when love's  
 not against the law at our ages now  
 and she'll be sitting on the commode, I  
 mean with the lid down to make a seat, and  
 watching me the way I watch Father shave  
 or Mother put on her face when the light's  
 bad in their bedroom and the light's brighter  
 here, I'll be razoring off last night's whiskers  
 and maybe she's got a cup or two of coffee,

one in each hand and every few seconds  
I reach over for mine and when she puts  
it in my hand, fingers in the handle  
I lift it and I've learned to lift it with  
-out spilling a single drop, and sip  
or maybe even gulp and sometimes I  
leave shaving cream foam on the lip or in  
the coffee itself but I'll drink it, when  
she's with me I'm not afraid, she even  
substitutes my cup for hers and she spoons  
out with her upside-down little fingers  
-nail the foam and wipes it on a towel and  
if you ask me where babies come from I  
would have to admit that I don't really  
know but if you ask me *how* they're made then  
I'd guess this way, it's good enough for me.

## I

got  
so  
damned  
angry

at my  
-self  
when I be

-came  
invisible  
that I

swore  
I'd never  
see

me

again

## As Seen on TV

After Sunday School I walk home the same way I walk to it but in reverse of course not that I mean that I was walking backwards but maybe I'll try that next week but anyway on the way about half-way that is I thought again of what I thought of before, I mean on the way here, I mean to Sunday School - seems that I took it away with me - of Miss Hooker, my teacher there and one day to be my wife and in reality not just in dreams and I have 'em, about us, together, married that is and doing every night what married people do, watching TV and holding hands and munching popcorn though not while holding hands but on the other hand maybe so, why not, adults do all kinds of crazy crap that kids can't do and get away with it but anyway when we run out of popcorn and are down to kernels that never got ripe, so to speak, I mean they never popped (I'm bad about not saying what I mean), then we're off to bed and that's where our children will happen in whatever ways they do, I'm only 10, what do I know about life much less birth, the way of coming into it, she'll show me will Miss Hooker, she's one Hell of a good teacher but anyway after Sunday School today I dropped down to one knee as seen on TV and proposed to her or was about to when suddenly she dropped to one of *hers*, it's bonier than I guessed it would be and before I could ask her to make me the happiest guy in the world she said *You read my mind* and *Let us pray* and before I could close my eyes she started into the Lord's Prayer so I joined in and after *Amen*-ing together we opened our eyes and there

we were, divorced and rising, rising to  
our feet and then she said *Gale, go home* so  
I tried. I'll never get married again.

## Trifocal

I don't know why I don't try harder not  
to sin the way I do, I'm only 10  
so I should live a Hell of a long time  
and I've got enough, time that is, to stop  
sinning and then ask God for forgiveness  
in Jesus' name and any other names  
I can come up with when the time comes to  
die. Miss Hooker says that He'll forgive me  
if I'm honest and sincere and she's my  
Sunday School teacher so I rest my case.  
But if I should die before I can beg  
to be forgiven she says I'll go to  
Hell and just get a glimpse of Heaven when  
my soul's standing at the Throne of Judgment  
where God's leafing through the Book of Life for  
my name. *If God's got to look in a book  
to remember who I am and what I've  
done or haven't done then how can He be  
God* is what I'd ask Miss Hooker but she  
might not like that and ex-com-mu-ni-cate  
me and we're not even Catholic, that's  
how much I'd rub her raw but I love her  
and want to marry her one day so I  
need to keep my yap closed until I say  
*I do* and I guess while we're married, too.  
So when I go to Heaven to be judged  
and if God's wearing glasses while He hunts  
down my name, bifocals or trifocals  
even, I guess I'll know that He knows not  
what He's doing, or if He knows He's lost  
some of His edge. Then Hell won't seem so bad  
because Satan will be sharper, I think  
he's a few eternities younger and  
so's Miss Hooker - 25. There it is.



I guess I don't try harder not to sin  
because my soul's always been sort of  
out of my hands anyway ever since  
Adam and Eve, if you call swiping fruit  
a sin. Maybe so. It depends what kind.

## About the Poet

Gale Acuff is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Modern Languages, Arab American University in Palestine. His poetry was published in *Ascent*, *Chiron Review*, *McNeese Review*, *Adirondack Review*, *Weber*, *Florida Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Arkansas Review*, *Poem*, *South Dakota Review*, and many other journals. He has authored three books of poetry: *Buffalo Nickel* (BrickHouse Press, 2004), *The Weight of the World* (BrickHouse, 2006), and *The Story of My Lives* (BrickHouse, 2008).