

J. P. WHITE

## ELEGY FOR A BUCKEYE

I went all the way back to the beginning looking for a buckeye giant  
On a quiet street in Ohio but it was gone and so were the spiny,  
Gold brown husks containing the glossy nuts with circular eyes.  
I always kept a buckeye in my pocket for any luck but bad  
And rubbed its smooth finish hoping it would shiver me through  
My father's unhappiness with selling life insurance for Metropolitan.  
On the way home from school, I would listen to the husks cracking,  
The buckeyes falling for squirrels to lug off in their gaped mouths.  
Food for winter? Isn't that our first and last theme? If I had one  
Of those buckeyes, I could look into its varnished mahogany burl  
And see my father thumbing a buckeye like a miniature football,  
Then launching it for a touchdown, my grandparents in Rye Beach,  
Barefoot among the buckeyes for the beach and a last nude swim,  
My Blue Angel cousin who crashed his jet must have tendered more  
Than one in his hands and used it, like me, to steer by when he was  
Grounded, and even the coalman conductor on a tight scream clock  
Who I waved to every Friday from my bike might have glimpsed  
This beauty before he entered the steel mills in Toledo and Chicago,  
And thought for a moment he might lean against it some day  
And read a book, everyone I knew in Ohio now seedless and distant  
From the trees they planted to define them. My memory of all this  
Only as old as September and young when compared to the Shawnee  
Who named the tree after its nut flicking in a swale like a buck's eye.  
They are gone along with the Delaware and Miami and every other tribe  
That ever lived in Ohio where this tree once lived and laid out  
Its simple feast or do I have it wrong and the eye of the giant  
I climbed and loved still sees what is happening and holds on?