

Beemans Chewing Gum

James Ashbrook Perkins

So much gets lost
In the time we remember

Beemans Pepsin Chewing Gum
Bought by my mother
With the groceries at Schulte and Wisner's
Was handed out stick by stick
From the pack in her purse
As a reward in my youth
For particularly good behavior

Beemans is back
With Clove and Black Jack
The American Chicle Group
Absorbed in the sixties
By Warner-Lambert
Now touring again
Like an early rock combo
Seeking a market segment
Among those who were listening
The day the music died

I buy a pack at Jim Miller's store
Expecting to chew my way into my past

A stained-glass window
"Lo, I stand at the door and knock"
Right above our pew
In the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church
Sitting still through long sermons
Straight against the pew back
My legs dangling in the air
Until my feet go to sleep

Finally the minister blesses us all
With what I am sure is the voice of God
Mother gives me a smile and a stick of Beemans
And I walked with restrained haste
On tingling feet
From the strange light of the church
Into the clean straight light of the world

My mother died in April
I quit the church five years ago
I no longer work at being good
My feet are solidly on the ground
But I still like the taste of Beemans

Racquetball Meditation

James Ashbrook Perkins

I will engage him here—
That phantom adversary
Ezra Pound fenced
With his umbrella
Through Rapallo's streets—
In this large white rectangle
Where I have struggled
To avoid
His small black rectangle

Years of motion
To stay
Motion of years

Many opponents
Victories and defeats
But always one
My even match—
Like my shadow
Under these bright lights—
Mirroring my movement
Returning my shots

Years of motion
To slow
Motion of years

When he finally wins
Let it be here and quick—
My heart exploding.
Let me see
Through the red haze,
As I start my final dive
Into the blackness,
My last shot
Ticking the side wall
Then kissing the corner—
A perfect kill.