

SOUTH OF HEIL, NORTH DAKOTA,
POPULATION 24

Daniel Zinkand

The lichen-green rattlesnake lies in the sun
on a road going somewhere
out in nowhere
ivory underbelly stained brown
by tar seeping through
sun-warmed asphalt.

Ya can't kill a rattler
just by driving over it
Ya just can't do it
says Arndt
clutching the F600
into third
as we climb Haffner's Hill.

My aw-come-on face
breaking through
a wraith of cigarette smoke and August dust
dies
as Arndt yanks open the glovebox
revealing rattles nestled by .22 shells
and bounty-killed gopher tails.
I finger an obsidian-colored rattle
button for each year says Arndt.

When I see a snake
Arndt says
I back up a ways
step on the gas

and hit the brakes as I cross the snake.

Red-black flesh lies smeared
on the road
waiting for crows
coming from somewhere
out in nowhere
North Dakota.