

Three Poems · *Patrick O'Leary*

KUDZU

*"(Kood zoo) n. a fast growing climbing
vine of China & Japan, now
widespread in the southern U.S. . . ."*

You saw Atlanta's rampant topless bars;
you did not notice it. But one day like
a cobweb in your face, it's everywhere.
The great creeping Kudzu. Oblivious
to gravity it takes both stoop & wall,
festooning drooping phonelines like tattered
forgotten laundry. Upwardly mobile
Kudzu, mongoose of the South, FDR's
final solution to soil erosion.
Imported from the Orient, it has
politely cornered the market. It plods
relentless to inevitable green
victory, like a silent flood, like
Sherman's March, like a Faulkner sentence that
doesn't know when to quit, like a suffragette
parade: it may be pretty, it's not nice.
It overstays its welcome, oversteps
its station; it cuddles perfect strangers
& clings to any kindness. It has no
reservations. Given an inch it'll
take a yard. Kudzu. To uproot it would
denude the red heartsoil of Dixieland—
it would require a Constitutional
Amendment. It would spur the rap of gavel,
the drawl of endless tangents, the cornpone
filibuster of bureaucrats. But Kudzu
won't bow out; it will prevail. For it creeps
along like a coma, like acne, like

an interminable joke, like a fad
that defies predictable lifespan.
It grows & grows like a rumor,
gathering nuance like a legging
gathers burrs. Forget the meek, UFOs,
ignore the trickle of wetbacks, invading
swarms of killer bees. Beware, instead, the
great, long-suffering, ant-strong, enduring
patience of Kudzu. It wants not to pillage;
it wants to be your neighbor. At dawn it does
the plant equivalent of jumping jacks.
At dusk it hums the glories of the Root.
At night it dreams a budding rhapsody
of Historical Determinism.
One day in Wisconsin you will be safe
on your patio, barbecuing steaks,
armed with a spatula, the grind of mowers
mulching tidy sod, the distant not quite
harmless laughter of children, the whispers
of underground sprinkler systems. You'll think:
I am alive. You'll feel: blessed. You will
revel in the boner in your bermudas.
But as you smell the pungent smoke & flip
the sizzling T-bone & stroke your cartoon
apron, you'll chance to see a shimmering lip
of green sprawling over your picket fence.
Funny. You've never seen it before. "Honey,"
you'll call. "Comere & take a look at this."
It looks . . . so pretty. It looks . . . resolute.
It does not look like revenge.