

County Lines

by Gray Campbell

“In 1993, HIV infection became the most common cause of death among persons aged 25-44 years [in America].” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Update: mortality attributable to HIV infection among persons aged 25-44 years—United States, 1994,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 1996 Feb 16; 45 (6), 121-5.)



**I can smell a bigot
from across a county.**

**On the streets or in a cell
their eyes bulge**

**like the eyes of corpses
caught in nooses...**

**I recall those eyes
each time I curse—**

**praying that all who curse me
are cursed too.**



**There were only two hospitals
in our county.**

**The first of them rejected me.
The second I abandoned.**

**So like an idiot wandering
in a garden of lost paths**

**I traced my way through iron orchards
east of town.**

**Lead-like light seeped through the streets,
buildings rotted in the sun.**

I believed in a god of nature

till I started sleeping under bridges.



**Ask my old neighbors:
I'm not clean enough to spit on.**

**Ask the hospitals:
I'm too foul to sequester.**

**Ask the cops:
I'd contaminate the jails.**

**Still, fanatics
from Washington to Wichita say:
Burn him.**

**So I've saved them the trouble.
Here is my body, a bag full of ashes.**

**Now they can do no more
than the wind.**