

*Michael Martone*

## **The Moon over Wapakoneta**

1.

There is the moon, full, over Wapakoneta, Ohio. Everybody I know has a sister or a brother, a cousin or an uncle living up there now. The moon is studded green in splotches, spots where the new atmospheres have stuck, mold on a marble.

2.

I'm drunk. I'm always drunk. Sitting in the dust of a field outside Wapakoneta, Ohio, I look up at the moon. The moon, obscured for a moment by a passing flock of migratory satellites flowing south in a dense black stream, has a halo pasted behind it. That meant something once, didn't it?

3.

When the moon is like it is now, hanging over Ohio, I come over to Wapakoneta from Indiana where I am from. I am legal in Ohio, and the near beer they can sell to minors is so near to the real thing it is the real thing. I told you I was drunk. The foam head of this beer glows white in the dull light like the white rubble of the moon bearing down from above. Over there, somewhere, is Indiana, a stone's throw away.

4.

Everybody I know has a brother or cousin or whoever on the moon, and I am using this pilsner for a telescope. Where is everybody? The

old craters are percolating. They've been busy as bees up there. Every night a new green explosion, another detonation of air. This is where I make myself belch.

## 5.

The reflection of the moon over Wapakoneta sinks into each flat black solar panel of this field where I sit, a stone swallowed by a pond. In the fields, the collectors pivot slowly, tracking even the paler light of the moon across the black sky. There's this buzz. Cicada? Crickets? No. voltage chirps, generated as the moon's weak light licks the sheets of glass.

## 6.

Let's power up my personal downlink. Where am I? — I ask by nudging the ergonomic toggle. Above me, but beneath the moon over Ohio, a satellite, then, perhaps, another peels away from its flock to answer my call. Let's leave it on. More satellites will cock their heads above my head, triangulating till the cows come home. But soft, the first report is in. Ohio, the dots spell out, Wapakoneta.

## 7.

What part of the moon is the backwater part? Maybe there, that green expanse inches from the edge where they are doing battle with the airless void generating atmosphere from some wrangling of biomass. Yeah, back there under the swirl of those new clouds, some kid after a hard day of — what? — making cheese, lies on his back and has a smoke consuming a mole of precious oxygen. He looks up at the earth through the whiffs of cloud and smoke and imagines some Podunk place where the slack-jawed inhabitants can't begin to imagine being pioneers, being heroes. There it is, Ohio.

## 8.

A pod of jalopies takes off from the pad of Mr. Entertainer's parking lot, racing back to Indiana where it's an hour earlier. The road is lined with Styrofoam crosses, white in the moonlight, and plastic flowers oxidized by the sunlight. X marks the spot where some hopped up Hoosiers goes airborne for a sec and then in a stupor remembers gravity and noses over into the ditch next to a field outside of Wapakoneta on the trailing edge of Ohio.

## 9.

They are launching their own satellites from the moon; a couple of dozen a day the paper says. Cheap in the negative gees. Gee. I look hard at the moon. I want to see the moons of the moon. The moon and its moons mooning me. In Ohio, I pull my pants down and moon the moon and its moons mooning me back. And then, I piss. I piss on the ground, my piss falling, falling to earth, falling to the earth lit up by the moon, my piss falling at the speed of light to the ground.

## 10.

I am on the move. I am moving. Drawn by the gravitational pull of Mr. Entertainer with its rings of neon, I am steering a course by the stars. Better check in. More of the little buzz bombs have taken up station above my head. Surprise! I am in Wapakoneta. I am in Wapakoneta, but I am moving. I am moving within the limits of Wapakoneta. I like to make all the numbers dance, the dots on the screen rearranging. X, Y, and Z, each axis scrolling, like snow in a snow dome. The solar panels in the field around me slowly track the moon as it moves through the night sky.

## 11.

Over there in Indiana, it's an hour earlier. Don't ask me why. You cross a road, State Line Road, and you step back in time. It can be done. Heading home, I get this gift, an extra hour to waste. But wait! I lost one someplace coming here. I shed it when I crossed the street, like sloughing skin. It must be somewhere, here at my feet. This pebble I nudge with my toe. Just what time is it? I consult my other wrist where the watch burbles, all its dials spinning, glowing softly, little moon. The laser beam it emits ricochets off my belt buckle, noses up to find its own string of satellites, bouncing around a bit, kicking the can, homing for home, an atomic clock on a mountain top out west to check in on each millisecond of the passing parade, then, in a blink, it finds its way back to me here, makes a little beep. Beep! Here's the report: Closing Time.

## 12.

Mr. Entertainer is not very entertaining. It's powering down before my eyes, each neon sign flickers, sputters in each dark window. The whole advertised universe collapsing in on the extinguished constellation of letters. How the hell did that happen. I had my eye on things, and the moon over Wapakoneta hasn't moved as far as I can tell. The rubble of the bar is illuminated now by that soft indifferent dusty light diffused through the dust kicked up by the departed cars. The slabs of its walls fall into blue shadow, its edges, then, drift into a nebulous fuzz, a cloud floating just above the ground.

## 13.

What time is it on the moon? It's noon there now. It's noon on the moon. From the stoop of the extinct bar, I consider the moon's midday that lasts for days, lunch everlasting, amen. They must get



drunk on the light. They must drink it up. They must have plenty to spare. The excess is spilling on me, pouring on me down here in Ohio, enough light for me, a heavenly body, to cast a shadow on the studded gravel galaxy of the empty parking lot, a kind of time piece myself, the armature of an impromptu moon dial, the time kicking off as my celestial outline creeps from one cold stone to the next.

## 14.

Cars on the road are racing back to Indiana. I hear them dribbling the sound of their horns in front of them, leaking the smear of radio static in the exhaust. I am looking for my clunker. It's around here someplace. According to my uplink, I am still in Wapakoneta. A slow night for the satellites, they have been lining up to affirm that consensus, a baker's dozen have been cooking up coordinates. I punch a button on my car key releasing the ultrasonic hounds hot on the magnetic signature of my piece of shit. The nearby solar panels pivot toward me sensing the valence of my reflection, hunger for the light I am emitting. Hark! Somewhere in the vast relative dark the yodel of a treed automobile. I must calculate the vectors for my approach.

## 15.

Later, in Indiana, which is now earlier, I will remember back to this time, this time that is happening now, as I navigate by means of sonic boom to the bleat of my Mother Ship supposedly fastened to the edge of some panel field out there somewhere in the dark. But the sound is reverberating, gone doppler, bouncing off the copse of antennae to the right, the bank of blooming TV dishes to the left. The night air has become acoustic, dampening the reports. I am getting mixed signals, and it seems my car is moving around me. That may be the case. Perhaps I left it in autopilot. It's nosing toward home this very minute, sniffing the buried wire, or, perhaps it's just playing games with me, its own guidance system on some feedback loop, as it orbits under the influence of an ancient cruising

pattern programmed long ago for the high school drag in Fort Wayne. My guardian satellites, whispering to each other, hover above my head, shaking theirs, "Lost, poor soul, in Ohio, in the holy city of Wapakoneta."

## 16.

Everybody I know has a sister or a brother, a mom or a dad setting up housekeeping in some low rent crater of the moon. I intercept postcards — low gain transmissions of the half earth in the black sky and a digital tweet eeping "Wish You Were Here!" — when I eavesdrop on the neighborhood's mail. On nights like this, with the moon radiating a whole spectrum of sunny missives, I want to broadcast a wide band of my own billet-doux banged out with a stick on any handy piece of corrugated steel in the ancient language of killing time.

## 17.

I fall into the ditch or what I think is the ditch. Flat on my back, I stare up at the moon, canvas, sailing above this pleasant seat, my bishopric, and find myself thinking of my kith and kin again and again. The starlight scope is in the car, I hear its honk still, a goose somewhere in the marsh night asking the tower for permission to land. If I had the goggles now, I could see where I've landed but would, more likely, be blinded by this moonlight boosted by the sensitive optics. Night would be day, and the moon over Wapakoneta would be more like the sun over Wapakoneta. I might see some real sun soon if I just close my unaided eyes for a bit and let the whole Ptolemaic contraption overhead wheel and deal.

## 18.

But the watch I wear is still turned on and on the lookout for pulses of light angling back this way from the fibrillating isotopes atop

Pikes Peak. The watch's microprinted works synthesize a "bleep" a second, a steady erosion to my will to doze. At the top of each hour, it drops a drip, and this absence more than the regular tolling pricks me to a semiconducted alertness. The solar panels at the lip of the ditch chirp their chirp, Wapakoneta's moon, a dilated pupil centered in each dark iris. And there's the car's snarled sound still hoping to be found. So much for silent night, holy night. Lo, a rocket off yonder rips the raw cloth of night.

## 19.

At the moment I open my eyes, and in the ditch with me is the big ol' moon its ownself half buried in the mud. Hold on there! There is the moon, the moon over Wapakoneta. It's there up above, where it should be. It's there over this other moon mired in the mud of Wapakoneta. My eyes adjust to the light. O! I'm not in the ditch but on the berm below the old moon museum, the building's geodesic concrete dome, teed up on a dimple in a hummock in Ohio, mocking the moon overhead. The real moon rises above the arching horizon of this fallen fake.

## 20.

Armstrong hailed from these Wapakonetish parts. Got drunk here on near beer, I suppose. Contemplated the strobing codes of lightning bugs down by the river. The river caught the moon's pale and silent reflection. Pitched a little woo too. Looked up at the moon, very same moon I spy with my little eye. First guy to go there. Got a pile of rocks marking the spot there. I've seen pictures. "Wish you were here!" Down here, they keep the moon rocks he brought back under glass in the hollowed out moon building before me. The school kids, on field trips, herd by the cases of rocks. The little rocks. The big rocks. Big deal! The kids have got a brother or sister, uncles and aunts, sweeping the dust together into neat piles upstairs. Here's to the first man on the moon from the last person on earth.

## 21.

The earth is slowing down. Friction as it twirls. When the moon untucks the oceans, makes the tides bulge, it's like holding your hand out the car window as you race toward Indiana, a drag against the cool night air, skidding to a halt. Long time coming. Every once in a while, they throw in a leap second or two to bring the world back up to speed. Another cipher of silence at the top of the hour to keep the whole thing in tune. One day the earth will creep to a crawl, and one side will always be facing the face of the moon always facing me. A slow spinning dance around the sun. My watch skips a beat. The silence stretches on and on.

## 22.

At twelve o'clock high, a huge flock of satellites floats in formation, veiling the moon. They are migrating north. The swallows returning to Capistrano. A new season? Reconnoitering to be done by morning? Who knows. My own orbiting dovecot coos to me still, homing, homing. You are in Ohio, in Wapakoneta, in Ohio. I release them just like that. The blank LCD goes white in the moonlight. They disperse, disappear, kids playing hide and seek in the dark.

## 23.

At my feet are rocks painted blue by the moon's light. I pick one up out of the dust and launch it into space at the moon hanging over Ohio. I lose sight of it, swallowed up in the intense glare I am aiming at. Sure thing! I've chucked it beyond the bounds of earth. It's slipped into space on the grease of its own inertia. But I hear its reentry, splashing into the ocean of solar panels yards away, the light we've all been staring at turning solid. I heave another sputnik into orbit, hoping to even up the gross mass of the planets which is all out of whack in this binary system. I'm a run of the mill vandal, my

slight buzz waning. But soft! A frog jumps into a pond. It makes that sound a frog makes when it jumps into a pond.

## 24.

Didn't I tell you? It is an hour earlier in Indiana. The moon over Wapakoneta is gaining on me here as I race along the section roads toward home, all of its imaginable phases caught by the thousands and thousands of black reflections in their tropic glass panels. The moon waxes on all the mirrored surfaces, silent, a skipping stone skipping. Yes, I'll catch it tonight as it sets, embrace it, a burned out pebble, in my empty backyard.