

JOEL BROUWER

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***“Red Thunder Cloud, 76, Dies, and Catawba Tongue with Him”***

*The New York Times, January 14, 1996*

Near the end a Harvard linguist drove out  
to record as much as the old man could  
remember, but the stroke had mown clean whole

acres of his brain. Mostly the tape says  
*tanty, tanty*. He wanted to see his dog.  
Who, since his master's passing, holds the world

supply of Catawba vocabulary  
between his lank ears, and has been passed on  
himself, to a nephew in Georgia. No one

remembers the name Red Thunder Cloud gave  
the mutt. The nephew calls him Jack, as in  
Daniels. So now Jack bounds among the pines,

treeing raccoons and running down rabbits,  
calling them, under his breath, by their true  
names. He probably never knew, and we

will never know, the words for arrowroot,  
pin oak, and smallpox. But shouldn't he—  
shouldn't we all?—understand the *lingua franca*

of heel, beg, and come? Night's fallen and still  
the old man's nephew calls from his back porch  
into the chill vacancies between the trees.