From your father you learned a peasant’s faith in work, that merciful decades with a forgiving wife means time is a plea bargain between beggars and angels, that auto shops and stray dogs attend them all in this town with two truck stops to blunt what fails on main street, a new gypsum plant men hope displaces shuttered cotton gins that laden haulers could reach from four exits off an interstate that signals how empty your town really is, how cattle guards are here for nothing but ghost herds.

Respite from it all comes with county fairs – corridors of colored lights to dazzle the dust, amusement rides to spin townies into gritty air, barkers daring passersby to pitch balls or rings into thin spaces; candy apples, funnel cakes, anything deep-fried and impaled on sticks you’re led to believe can be had nowhere else, and always the bright signs in gothic letters for sights ‘never seen outside tent flaps’ – ‘Bizarre and Exotic Creatures,’ all the caged freaks you could ever imagine.