

Rattlesnake

Riding shotgun with a stranger
through the Texas panhandle,
hung over, and wondering
what I was doing there—
nothing but mesquite and cactus
for miles around—my throat parched
with dust and too many cigarillos...
Suddenly a rattlesnake slithered across the road.
The stranger swerved his van
to hit it, but missed by a scale.
He chased the rattler
into a clump of sagebrush,
and blew its head off
with one blast from his revolver.
Then, grinning like a redneck,
he held it proudly in the air.
Ever eat snake? he said.

I grimaced when he
unsheathed his bowie knife
and severed the viper's rattle
for good luck.
The rattle looked old
and curiously vestigial,
like something that had died
before man learned to kill.

Len Gasparini