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Thursday, August 26, 2010 **The Steeple**

*Literary Review*, Madison; Winter 1997; Kevin Clark

**Volume:** 40  
**Issue:** 2  
**Start Page:** 279-280  
**ISSN:** 00244589  
**Subject Terms:** Poetry  
**Abstract:**  
*A poem is presented.*

**Full Text:**

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This tall woods with its summer-thick air embraces the old church here at the lazy end of our street. Sundays I watch the elderly Protestants, a few good and troubled friends, smile and limp into the plain white building with the green pentagonal steeple, their arms clutching hello to each other, their almost forgotten sins webbed like fine branches over the patch of sky. The Taylors wave to me. On my porch across the cul-de-sac, I read the sports page and book review and sip coffee, pausing to muse on the occasional delirious cooing of my four-year-old under the thistled berry bushes. He believes in the unmediated earth before him, the hidden, darker dirt he spoons down to, the sow bug he touches softly into a ball, the last secret unpicked blood-red prize he saves off the vine. Yesterday, my mother's letter in its frail restraint implores me to give her grandson the same Christian surety I'd had, the pure saving friendship of Jesus Christ, that which my father-dead twenty-five years-carried in his heart and she always in hers. Some days I too want to feel the Word in the wind, touch the Lord's flesh in the dirt. But as always, I have nothing more than either wind or dirt-and the sweet, unmeaningful scent.

Unblemished beneath a sun hat, my wife plants verbena along the driveway. her spade uplifting the soil, her passion that these live blooms paint the air all summer. Faintly Episcopal. she finds my faithlessness an endearing wound. The green blades, the blue petals. the willing loam, all form in her hands a shape. I think. nothing mystical, just her own plenary trust that whatever's unseen deserves no worry. Once dubious, I'm now thankful for her gardener's faith, especially mornings such as this when I know soon we have to prepare our son for the questions without answer. His grandmother, old neighbors, his friends, they all tell him of their mystic kingdom. Irrepressible, their knife-sharp steeple peals in the divided air its song of psalms and heaven, its ascending unearthly idea. Before he is lifted up from the vanishing soil into the airy edges of their numerologies, before he loses the first scent of vines and duff, my wife sketches in the prosaic dirt a picture of the moon and the soft blades, the insects and the ripe berries. And I listen quietly from my chair, her lyric, unchanted words breaking like revelations across his face.

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