

little america

at winnemucca  
we stop for gas  
the station truck  
out front  
is a car  
a 56 plymouth  
my dad had one  
a pink and black 56 dodge  
i think of elvis  
a kid in memphis  
purple shirts  
silk jackets  
with narrow lapels  
pink peggars  
tight at the ankles  
with a little pants belt  
in the back  
jerry lee in ferriday  
roy in wink  
buddy in lubbock  
juke joint boys  
pumping juice into black music

which elvis are we  
young passionate  
old decrepit  
which postage stamp  
of the king  
do we choose  
are we the kid  
who made rock and roll  
or vegas elvis  
big caped  
stomach fat  
dyed hairdo  
tired sweat

drugs  
and early death

thank god for sam phillips  
he didn't like the opry  
the safe music  
the percy faith orchestra  
he liked the music  
of the country  
of the people  
he knew confidence was everything  
and these boys  
who swapped religious guilt  
for rockabilly  
were america  
with a crazy hunger to be heard  
more than writers  
bigger than movie stars  
beyond poets  
there's no success  
like standing up there  
and playing that music

my dad telling me  
to turn that shit off  
words that ended an era  
dewey phillips  
spinning 45s in memphis  
wondering  
what to do with  
'that's all right momma'  
playing it over and over  
it wasn't black  
it wasn't white  
it was different  
60 years later  
kanye doesn't get it  
he doesn't get taylor

but he gets beyonce  
i get black music  
but they think  
mine is stolen  
john lennon got it right  
“before elvis  
there was nothing”  
sam phillips made it possible  
he could tell  
what somebody had  
when they came through the door  
it wasn't about reading music  
it was about reading souls

i got religion  
and phillips is the dalai lama  
the church  
702 union street  
memphis tennessee  
along with chuck berry  
and little richard  
the boys are the saints

each of us decides  
if money's the currency  
of free speech  
are we pat boone  
or are we elvis  
82 year old  
fashion photographer  
bill cunningham  
gets it right  
“you see if you don't take money  
they can't tell you  
what to do kid...  
money's the cheapest thing  
liberty freedom  
the most expensive”

she touches my shoulder  
rousing me  
to hang up the nozzle  
we slip into  
the high desert night