

Johnny Bond kept a pretty good eye on Gene Autry:
I just finished *Johnny Bond's Thirty Years on the*

Road with Gene Autry: Recollections: that's a
long time, from the '30s to 1956: I graduated

from Cleveland High School that year, named
The Most Outstanding Student: I'm still out,

standing with my mouth full of B's: Bond
wrote "Cimarron" and "I Wonder Where You

Are Tonight": he could have written about *the*
Singing Cowboy: instead Bond mostly writes about

what it's like to be in a car, bus, or plane with
Gene on the way to a gig or from one, the bottle

always present. Gene was famous, his horse,
Champion, too: rodeo ruled his life: sidekick

Bond got left holding the bag, trying to hide
the bottle, his biggest hit — "Ten Little Bottles" —

first lines: "A friend of mine gave me ten little
bottles / Of some special stuff that he brewed up his-self /

So I took it and hid it down in my basement / But
my wife found out about it and she told me to get

rid of it or else / And since I didn't like the way she
said 'or else' / I went down there and proceeded to

carry out her instructions” — last line? “I’ve got the
wifest little nice you ever saw in your [hiccup]

which I drank.” One ages with cheese — *cheez* —
look at old photos — that’s all I need to say — I’ll take Life — if

I could choose between Life and Art: you bump
into Art all the time: Art Langdon, Juicy’s and Basil’s

son, called his band Up Creek Revival. Art
never went far beyond the stage of Dixie Campground

Park, Angier, North Carolina. *Yesterday, all my troubles
seemed so far away*: I went down in my basement,

not to drink any stuff I had brewed up, but to
remove a file-cabinet I bought, 1968,

Madison, Wisconsin, where I went to be educated,
for there were no books in my home, just the

Bible and the Sears Catalogue and I believed in the
Word and the Trumpet of the Unknown, launching out

and aging with *it*, as if the Self were engaged to old
photographs and souvenirs, while Truth rose up to

say *You killed a snake, a baby snake under the
cabinet, holding, among other things, your notes*

*on Whitman, S. Anderson, Keats, Wordsworth, Shelley,
Faulkner, some pages with teardrops on them, still*

*scarves of notes you never finished, cherished
like the word cherry someone else usually gets to pick*

first. Age does something; forgiveness kicks in and
you see for the first time the self unshackled: Bonnie Lou

was really Sally Carson, a Kansas City singer-yodeler
whose photos executives saw before they heard her

croon “The Tennessee-Wig-Walk” on the Midwestern
Hayride. I think of Sally Tyree, the actual person

Ammons names Nelly Meyers in that poem which
sets him squarely in the New Hope Community,

outside Whiteville, North Carolina: I’m a redhead
like Archie: he *could* be my uncle, said so: we

favor; both know about poverty, tobacco, cotton,
corn, horn-worms, horney-heads, whistle-dicks,

hogs, jo-reets, and mules (see his “Silver”): neither of us
knows much about whaling: there’s always somebody

doing something else: Bill Bonjun sang mostly
whaling songs. Landlord, lift the drinking bowl for

Moby Dick: Margie Bowes doesn’t know much about
whaling either, but she sure can sail: the way to do

this is to slip up on the lyric from the backside,
keeping your voice pretty low: you’ll find time to lift

up the rafters; fool around the atmosphere; wear it
like a shirt over your casuals: you will be as much a part

of voices as your wrist-pulse: Bowes, Roxboro, North Carolina,
sang from the time she was knee-high to a fly in

sweet-milk: beckoned to Nashville, Tennessee,
1958, billed on the Pet Milk Talent Show. I could have

travelled such a road: my face might have been on the
popular screens of the ’50s and ’60s: Dick Clark’s

American Bandstand, Red Foley's Jubilee U.S.A.
A Bowes block-buster? "Big City": I don't

remember her "Poor Old Heartsick Me": the tone of that
title tastes like Irony cast as two Carter's Little

Liver Pills in a playlet called *Tard Blood*—"Tired,"
pronounced by locals like me, at one time, *tar-d*, as in

Maybe you got tar-d blood, which I gather to be
red-black fluid. I'm King of Bust-Out, the Little Boy

in the Shoe come out — Buster Brown — touting forms
and structures, troughs and strife. Walt's across

Long Island! Well, I drink a liquor capped from
one still worm.

Shelby Stephenson's *Family Matters: Homage to July, the Slave Girl* won the 2008 Bellday Poetry Prize, judged by Allen Grossman.