

# Jesus of Walmart

Poems

Richard Broderick

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## All Present And Accounted For

Earth is the heaven of animals.  
It is only on earth they are fully  
present and no where else. (Even  
in your dreams, the wolf and  
the snake are no more than shadows  
of your projection.) No brown bear

ever waded the fall run, catching  
salmon, but wishing he were  
someplace else. No milk cow  
plans for the future or dreams  
of changing places with the sleek  
Jersey on the cover of this month's

*Dairy Digest.* Dogs do not fall  
into a brown study, cats have  
no second thoughts, the honey-  
bee gives it full attention  
to the hive or the flower.  
Horse and cattle may be driven

to distraction by biting flies  
(themselves a model of insistent  
presence), but in doing so they  
give themselves to madness  
without stint. That goat you saw  
while out driving in the country

wasn't really sullen; that was some  
feeling of your own you'd rather  
leave behind standing on a hillside  
glaring at the road. Yes,  
you have seen apes and lions  
looking bored, but that was

## Night Shift

Tonight your father returns to you as a woman,  
death freeing him to face in two directions.  
It's awkward for a little while:

his bony frame draped in crinoline,  
his mouth shining beneath lip gloss, the long  
silence he's endured making his voice rough,

pitched somewhere in the middle range,  
like an old-fashioned clock on the verge of striking.  
Now you can see the softness that was there all along

when he yielded to illness, in the maternal impulse  
behind the years you've spent nurturing his memory.  
If he picks you up bodily now as he used to do

when you were a boy, don't turn away.  
Don't resist. Let him plant a fatherly kiss.  
It's not just your dream anymore. It's also his.

## Upon Receiving My Brother's Ashes

Good-bye, brother. And hello. Our childhood  
died with you in that sealed Florida room  
where you exiled yourself, the shades  
drawn, your swollen heart burst at last,  
nothing in the refrigerator, the TV on.  
Now there's no one to ask  
the name of the neighbor boy's cousin  
who fell through the ice on Mirror Lake  
and drowned, or of the candy store  
out on the highway, or where we were the day  
we drank homemade root beer, then played  
pirate ship with other kids in a dusty barn.  
All I have of you now is this bronze box  
filled with ashes (not even a proper urn),  
the sweepings of your life. What would I  
find if I pried open its seal and peeked inside?  
Some powdery substance, gritty and fine,  
like the beach we used to play on, the sand  
so hot in the mid-day sun that even  
in the time it took us to run to the lake  
the soles of our feet would burn.



## Jesus of Walmart

They liked the radiant smile, his upbeat manner  
and so, despite a scanty work record—  
“Assistant carpenter, then three years  
wandering the hills”—they hired him  
as a greeter, the wages from his full-time,  
28-hour-a-week job not enough to cover  
the company’s health insurance. “Get sick  
around here and you just have to heal yourself,”  
muttered a disgruntled “associate,” a 50-ish mother  
whose crippled daughter got up the very  
next day and walked, everybody calling it  
a miracle, just like that special order  
of tee-shirts that sold for \$1.99 each.  
Now he wanders the aisles in a pair  
of plastic sandals made in China,  
reminding shoppers of special savings  
they’ll find if they only keep on searching,  
pointing out the counter where  
you can redeem coupons clipped from  
somebody’s discarded newspaper,  
consoling the single moms when they  
discover food-stamps can’t be used  
to buy the sugary cereal their fatherless  
kids clamor for each morning. In aisles  
lined with desolate frowns he smiles,  
asking weary late-night shoppers if he  
can help, talking softly, respectfully  
to those who have never known anything  
but contempt and the presumption  
of guilt. To the illegals sneaking in  
after a hard day of underpaid work,  
men named Jose, woman called Maria,  
he speaks in tongues they haven’t heard  
since leaving home in search of plenty.