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VERSE IN PLACE

SCOTT OWENS

The Exploration of Edges

I remember as a child expecting lines
on the ground separating North
Carolina from South, South Carolina
from Georgia, Greenwood County
from anywhere else. Often rivers
obliged, Catawba, Savannah, Saluda,
and one time in a place called Carowinds,
there it was, as I always expected
to see it, a broad, yellow stripe
saying, Here you are one place;
There you are somewhere else,
and of course I walked that line,
jumped from one side to the other,
stood with one foot on either side,
even lay across it, letting it slice
my body in two, head to the north,
everything below the waist more southerly,
but usually it was left to imagination.
There might be a sign—Now Leaving—
and then a thousand feet further—
Now Entering. I wondered how
they couldn't be on the same post
and thought I'd like to live
between the signs, not belonging
to anything except the earth.
Sometimes I'd close my eyes, picture
signs I'd seen on other roads and play
dot to dot in my mind, imagining
how the line was real enough
to split trees, slice mountains,
divide houses, loyalties, identities,
send neighbors to different schools,
create schizophrenics out of anything.
I wondered how I might change the line
by piling earth on top of it or how deep
I'd have to tunnel to get beneath it.
I came to know enough of atrophy
and erosion, tectonics and miscegenation,
to understand the necessity of neutral zones,
in places as thin as walls, in others,
off the tip of Argentina, for example,
where oceans meet, as wide as water
and always on the move.

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SCOTT OWENS is the author of 22 collections of poetry and recipient of awards from the Academy of American Poets, the Pushcart Prize Anthology, the Next Generation/Indie Lit Awards, the NC Writers Network, the NC Poetry Society, and the Poetry Society of SC. His poems have been featured on *The Writer's Almanac* eight times, and his articles about writing poetry have been used in *Poet's Market* four times. He has twice been nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award and to be NC Poet Laureate. Owens holds degrees from Ohio University, UNC Charlotte, and UNC Greensboro. He is Professor of Poetry at Lenoir Rhyne University, and former editor of *Wild Goose Poetry Review* and *Southern Poetry Review*. He owns and operates Taste Full Beans Coffeehouse and Gallery and coordinates Poetry Hickory in Hickory, NC.

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