Stubbornness

James C. Schaap

Dordt College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege

Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol40/iss2/13

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.
Stubbornness

James Calvin Schaap

This is the way it’s told. The day before, the county told the farmer they’d be by the next day to take down that gaunt old cottonwood. “It’s too close to the road,” they told him. “We’re paving it soon, and that thing has to come down.”

“You’re not touching that tree,” the farmer said.

The county came back the next morning with a mighty chain saw, but farmer was there, waiting for them, a shotgun cradled in his arms.

So it’s still here, right where it was. See it? Run out there yourself; take the blacktop out of town west, maybe ten miles, just south of Lebanon, where this scraggly old cottonwood still arches triumphant over the pavement, hearty and defiant as the tough-guy farmer who’s himself long gone.

They’re all immigrants here, all of these trees planted on what once was an endless sea of tall-grass prairie.

Iconic as windmills, maybe more so—symbols of ourselves; wind-beaten, bedraggled, skeletal—some an infernal chaos of waywardness.
Here on the emerald edge of the plains, they're no more ancient than we are, no more native than wooden shoes. For more than a century now, they've lived with us and we with them, neighbors and friends, stubborn as sin, gorgeous as grace.

Come spring, some help us see what's straight and what isn't. But then we measure ourselves by their reach. They grace our lives with their comely brokenness. They show us what beauty is and isn't; sometimes before them we stand in sheer awe, sometimes in sadness, sometimes in both.

They are our stories.

Good Calvinists may claim stubbornness is sin, but there's a time for everything, says the preacher: "a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance. A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones."

Maybe even a time for a shotgun.

James Schaap

Photographs by James Schaap