

# BEESWAX and other poems

By Gale Acuff

*Poetry Editor Hezekiah writes:*

*For every boy who was ever ten years old, feeling outnumbered by the 'Trinity:' how could you not fall in love with a Sunday school teacher named Miss Hooker? 'Satan's rotten because he's sad and lonely and deeply in love.' Adam and Eve: messing with everybody's immortality—religiosity colliding with pubescence. If you are clever enough to live in the present, there are lots of moments here: Burying a pet: 'With that dirt God could make another dog.' (I went to school with a boy named Job Boyle; he's still on the dole. Parents can be cruel.) /'Dangling on the cross'/ '[Angels] got red hair and green eyes and freckles.' Read on, it gets even better; I'm running out of room. If Huck Finn had been a televangelist, I would have tuned in. (HOTS! Spacing is author's own.) HS*

## Beeswax

*Yes, Jesus loves me--He damn well better  
I holler at Preacher after church and  
Sunday School in the parking lot, I mean  
we were standing in the parking lot, not  
that that's where we hold church and Sunday School  
and then I ran off toward my house, my  
folks sleep late on weekends so it's just me or  
is that I to face off with God and not  
just God but Jesus and the Holy Ghost,  
they're the *Trinity* so it's 3 against  
yours truly, plus Preacher plus Miss Hooker  
(by my counting that ciphers 5-to-1)  
my Sunday School teacher and for ten years  
old I'm good but I'm not *that* good and they've  
got the Bible to back 'em up I guess  
and all I've got's my ignorance but I  
ought to be proud about something besides  
my clip-on bow tie and Thom McAns and  
spanking new underwear, if it was light  
or is that *were* would I let it so shine  
before men or hide it in a haystack,  
when is proud *too* proud and what happened be-  
-tween me and Preacher is that I caught him  
with his eyes on Miss Hooker, I mean her  
ankles, they're mighty sound ones, too, they hold  
her right up straight even when she's sitting  
down and anyway I like her, too, that's  
a miracle in and of itself, she's  
old, 25, but she'll outgrow it, ha  
ha, and then I'll kind of catch up, so I  
told Preacher after class that Miss Hooker's *some**

*kind of pretty, ain't she*, and he blushed and told me to mind my own *beeswax*, I guess he saw me seeing him see Miss Hooker, studying her is what he was doing and predicting the future, too, so he thinks, but that's what predictions are, just wishes, and so I gave him Hell in the parking lot like I guess Satan gave God but I have a theory, Satan's rotten because he's sad and lonely and deeply in love.

--Gale Acuff

In Sunday School this morning I winked at Miss Hooker, my teacher, while she was on about Jesus and some woman who was going to be stoned but he stopped the folks who had their rocks at the ready and then told the lot of 'em that whoever had no sin should fling the first one and then they

backed off and sneaked away and Jesus turned and told her *Now where are your accusers* but not in English, of course, anyway He added *Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more* or something like that and to tell the truth I wish I could have

followed her for the rest of her days just to see how her life panned out, it would make a Hell of a Hollywood movie, instead what we get is more Jesus 'til He was crucified, then rose, then ascended and then in the next book or six Paul goes ape

on Him and that's *Christianity* and after class Miss Hooker took me aside and thanked me for the wink but said I shouldn't be suggestive with a lady that way and wait at least until I'm grown to try it and watch myself even then, if I'm standing too close to her I might get slapped and hard and if I died right then

I'd wake up dead in Hell and all because  
I didn't know how to treat a lady  
so I apologized and Miss Hooker  
accepted that but halfway on my walk  
home I wanted to turn around and run  
back and thump her upside her head though not  
with a stone but a Good Book. *Her* Good Book.

--Gale Acuff

### **Do You Solemnly Swear?**

When I die it will be like being born  
but in reverse is what I learned at Sun  
-day School today so I don't need to be  
afraid, death's natural even if God  
made us not to die but Adam and Eve

crossed Him up kind of though that, too, was meant  
to be is what I'm taught, that's *religion*  
for you, it doesn't make a lick of sense  
but what can you do but complain about  
the truth yet do nothing about it though  
sometimes I want to ask Miss Hooker if  
the truth she teaches is *really* the truth,  
the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but, but

something stops me, I think it's that I'd make  
her sad and someday when I'm grown I might  
want to ask her for a date, what the Hell,  
even marry her though she'll be an old  
woman, she's 25 now, that's fifteen years  
and that's my magic number, my favorite  
one and at the same time the one I most  
hate but that's life, even what you love you

lose or it will lose you, like your life, now  
you have it but one day and forever  
you won't, you'll be born like I say, only  
die but if Miss Hooker's going to then  
so will I, it's that or never see her  
again. Otherwise, I won't give an inch.

--Gale Acuff

### Anniversary

A year ago today I buried my  
dog and now I'm out behind the garden  
to see if I can find his grave, which I  
never marked because it marked itself when  
I finished it, all that clean dirt piled on  
to make it a mound because he'd displaced  
some of it, about one dog's-worth, with his  
body. It was like setting him on top,  
in a way, even though he was beneath.  
If I find my dog's grave, then I'll find *him*.  
With that dirt God could make another dog,  
or maybe half a little boy--I'm just  
10 and small for my age and at 5 I  
didn't weigh much more than Caesar. He was  
famous, the real Caesar, I mean. The man,  
I mean. The big one, I mean. I can't find

the grave. All the grass back here looks the same.  
I'll get over that, I guess. It's more like  
he's run away than dead. I wonder  
if there's really a Heaven, like they say  
at church, and if he's in it and if I'll  
go and if we'll see each other up there,  
if Heaven's *up*. I'm pretty sure Hell's *down*  
and they're kind of opposite so that makes  
sense. If there's a God He wouldn't send him  
to Hell but I can't say the same for me  
--they say that plenty of people go there.  
He got run over on the highway. I

was asleep but I thought I heard a thump

and a yelp and maybe a whine but  
went back to sleep, as if I had ever  
been awake. The next morning I saw him  
on the road and I rescued him, or his  
body, and buried him on an empty  
stomach all by myself--Father wasn't  
even up yet, or Mother. I started  
digging and got to enjoying it and  
I could've buried three dogs in that hole.  
Then I cried but that was alright because  
nobody saw me, unless there's a God,

or Caesar himself, if a soul has eyes,  
and if he has one, a soul, I mean. Then  
I went into the house and washed my hands

*(continued; no stanza break)*

and went into the kitchen for a bowl  
of cereal and sat down with Father  
and Mother and they asked me what I'd been  
doing and I started crying again  
and had to blow my nose in my napkin  
then had to get a clean one and said, I  
had to bury Caesar because he's dead.  
*Oh, I'm so sorry,* Mother said. *Me, too,*  
said Father. Yeah, I said. Do you believe  
in God, I asked them. *Why not,* said Mother.  
*Sure, I guess,* said Father. *Do you believe,*  
they asked. Yes, I say, but not when I think  
about Him. *Ah,* they say together, like

Adam and Eve. Now how do I know that?

--Gale Acuff

## Plenty

Monday through Saturday, no Miss Hooker  
but come Sunday I'm happiness again  
because she's my Sunday School teacher and  
I see her once more, in front of the room  
and telling us a good Bible story,  
David and Goliath maybe, or Job  
and all those boils all over him, and then  
there's Moses and what he did to free his  
people. I'm only 10. Will I ever  
free anybody or raise somebody  
from the dead? I guess not. It's enough to  
learn from the things that I can never do.  
Maybe that's as close as I'll ever come  
to being a hero but maybe it's  
plenty. Maybe that's what it means to be  
mature. Miss Hooker is. She's 25  
and that's pretty old. I'd like to have her  
for my wife someday but she'll have to wait  
and never marry anybody else  
until I'm old enough for her, 16  
or 18 maybe, to her 31  
or 33--that's how old Jesus was when  
He died but then of course He rose again,  
at least that's what the story says. I say  
that's probably good enough so if He  
didn't truly then I don't really care,  
it seems enough that we get together  
and talk about what's-what one hour a week,  
on the day when God, they say, rested from  
creating everything. I'm one of His  
creations, I guess. Mother and Father

helped somehow--I don't know the skinny but  
I expect that Miss Hooker will teach me,

say on our honeymoon, and I'm a good  
student, at least when I take notes and get  
enough sleep the night before, no ice cream  
or candy. In regular school I miss  
God and on Saturdays I just goof off.  
Miss Hooker says that God's with me always,  
Jesus dying on the Cross saw to that  
and it hurt like heck but no pain, no gain.  
If I studied harder I'd make good grades  
but I'm not strong enough yet on Sundays  
I sing my lungs out to the sweet old songs.  
Miss Hooker smiles at me. *You've got a good*

*(continued; no stanza break)*

*voice*, she said to me after class last week.  
*You sound inspired*, she added. That might mean  
that when I die I'm going to Heaven.  
I guess she ought to know. She's got red hair  
and green eyes and freckles. So do angels  
I bet. I may never get to Heaven  
but if I go to Hell God will be on  
my mind. That might ease the heat a little.  
But I put in my time at Sunday School  
so I hope that counts for something. Maybe  
God will give me an A for effort or  
at least a passing grade so I can move  
on--*up* I mean--to the City of God.  
Miss Hooker says there's no suffering there.  
I think she means she won't have so many  
freckles. I say you can't have too many.  
Job bore all those boils but look at him now.

--Gale Acuff

## **Grappling**

Miss Hooker's my Sunday School teacher and I'd like to make sweet love to her but I don't know how and maybe I'm too young to know, I'm only 10 to her 25 so she probably does but if not then I can teach her once I learn or if she knows then she can show me but it's a sin to make love if you're not married, I think. After Sunday School next week I could ask, ask Miss Hooker I mean--I asked Mother yesterday in the kitchen and she dropped

a bowl into the soapy water she was washing with and Father was drying and he got suds in his eyes and that's as close as I've ever come to seeing him or any other grown man cry, except for Jimmy Swaggart but that was only TV and Father was watching with me and started laughing. Mother left the room but before she did she said she wouldn't come back unless Father changed the channel

so he went out to fetch her back but they went into their bedroom and never came out so I changed the channel to wrestling and watched Jimmy Snuka go up against Ole Anderson. It was a good match but Nature Boy Ric Flair interfered so Ole got disqualified. I wanted to go to their bedroom, my folks' I mean,

and knock and ask them if they were alright  
in there and offer my services as  
a referee. *No blows below the belt.*  
*No foreign objects. Best two out of three.*  
*Pinfalls count anywhere in the building.*  
After a while I put myself to bed  
and lay there in the dark with Miss Hooker  
on my mind and all I can figure is

kissing's key in making love, and hugging  
too, and probably being naked, at  
night, like wrestlers almost are but don't love  
each other, but then again maybe they  
do, maybe fighting's another way to  
show it, and there are good guys and bad guys

*(continued; no stanza break)*

so I wonder which my folks are, and which  
Miss Hooker and I will be when we get  
in *the squared circle*, that's wrestling-talk for  
*the ring* and a way of saying *the bed*  
even though mine's shaped like a rectangle  
and is softer and there aren't any ropes  
but when I was a kid I had a crib  
with rails so I wouldn't hit the floor when  
I forgot where I was and was sleeping  
and dreaming. I guess that we'll have babies  
if we can swing them. How much do they cost?

--Gale Acuff

## **Divine Comedy**

I love Miss Hooker. I'd marry her if  
I was older or she was younger but  
I'm 10 to her 25 so each night  
I pray that God will change the numbers so  
that next morning we'll wake up the same sum  
and goofy about each other and then  
I'll go to her house, wherever it is  
(I guess God will map it out in my head)  
and knock on her door or maybe she'll be  
waiting on her porch, if she has one, for  
me, and then we'll shake hands and then we'll hug  
and then we'll kiss and maybe more than once  
and with all our lips to boot. We have four.  
And we'll close our eyes or they'll close themselves  
without us really thinking about it  
and I won't peek, I won't even try, like  
I do in Sunday School when she has me  
stand up and bow my head and close my eyes  
and lead us all in the Lord's Prayer. I  
spy her there in her chair and with her eyes  
closed and head bowed as if she's asleep or  
even dead and I imagine I kiss her  
and wake her. I'm a kind of Prince Charming,  
maybe. But sometimes I forget the words  
and stumble during the prayer, I mean  
with my brain, it trips over my tongue, so  
I have to close my eyes and concentrate  
on God and Jesus and that other world

where They live, and the only way we know  
it is to pray and sing and talk about

the good old stories of the Bible, which is why Miss Hooker is our teacher, to keep us out of Hell, at least for as long as we're still in her class. And of course we want to go to Heaven one day, I mean when we die because that's the only way, no one gets in there alive, that's for sure, but if we can put up with being dead for just a short time then we get eternal life, forever, that is if we rate and don't get sent to Hell instead and the Lake of Everlasting Fire. I learned to swim last summer but that won't help me there, not that I expect to go but you never know. The thing to do, Miss Hooker says, is

*(continued; no stanza break)*

never sin at all but of course we will, she says, because we're in a *fallen state*, no thanks to Adam and Eve, and so we have to try hard not to sin and not to want to sin and when we sin we must pray to God in Jesus' name to forgive us. We'd better not die in sin, either, she warns, which means don't die sinning because then we'll be too late to be forgiven. Whew. She sure knows her stuff and it would be a shame if after all she's done for me I wind up in Hell anyway. I hate

to disappoint her so if we married then maybe we could get in together, sort of like a package deal or two for the price of one. If God doesn't give us a miracle, or me one anyway, and make us both the same age tomorrow, then I'll just wait until I'm old enough, 16 say, and all grown up, to ask her for her hand, and all the rest of her, too. She'll be 31 and that's not young but I don't care even though odds are she'll die before me and leave me lonely until I die, too, and go to be with her, if I haven't sinned too much since she left me, of course. But if I've been a good man then I'll meet her up in Heaven and, damn, will we have a reunion. Holy cow. If we have hands we'll shake them and if arms we'll hug each other and if lips we'll kiss them. If there's a way to get closer than that

I'd sure like to know what it is. I guess  
I'll find out. But if we never marry  
and I happen to get into Heaven  
anyway I'll be sure to seek her out,  
if I have eyes to see and ears to hear.

--Gale Acuff

### Honeymoon

I have parents and they love me and my  
dog loves me and I guess Jesus loves me,  
that's what the song says--why would a song lie?  
--and God and maybe the Holy Ghost, Who  
-ever that is, exactly, but I need  
more, more love, or love of a different kind,  
the kind I could get from Miss Hooker, my  
Sunday School teacher and a damn good one  
and a real beauty, too, red hair and green  
eyes and more freckles than I've ever seen  
on any one face before, let alone  
her neck and arms and legs, if it's no sin  
to say so--I can't help but notice them.  
Last night I dreamt I married Miss Hooker  
and on our honeymoon I asked her what  
she wanted to do, anything at all,  
and she said, I'll do anything you want  
to do, Honey, so I said, Okay, let's  
play checkers for a while, then watch TV  
because the Braves are on, and read comic  
books. Then we can have pizza rolls and  
french fries and maybe ice cream for dessert,  
Neopolitan because we're married  
and that's special, and then we can play cards.  
Well, alright Honey, she says--you know just  
how to treat a woman. I think I blushed  
because I wanted her to be satisfied.  
So we had a busy night and we both  
won at checkers and cards, even-Steven,  
and didn't bother to break the tie or  
pretend we were in the championship

like I do with guys because we're married  
now and to each other so equally,  
I mean Miss Hooker and I, not my pals  
and I. And the Braves even won their game,  
though it took extra innings. And then

it was time for bed and we were pretty  
sleepy after all that fun and we saw  
each other naked and she's got freckles  
everywhere and I told her so and  
this time Miss Hooker was the one who blushed.  
Then we put on our pajamas and crawled  
into bed and kissed a couple of times  
like we meant it, which we do--did, I mean  
--and shook hands and rolled over, then out

*(continued; no stanza break)*

of nowhere I heard a voice asking, Do  
you want to make a baby, and it was  
Miss Hooker's voice but it sounded kind of  
husky, kind of deep and growly, so I  
said, Well, just what do you want me to do?  
Then I woke and it was time for Sunday  
School so I still don't see how you make them,  
babies I mean, but I was pretty close,  
in bed with a woman and the lights off  
and our teeth brushed but come to think of it  
we forgot to say the Lord's Prayer before  
we fell asleep and maybe that's what does  
it, that or a secret one for after.  
If I dream it again I'll remember  
and when I'm all grown up, I'm only 10,  
and I still don't know the secret then I'll  
ask it on my wedding night. Then Bingo.

--Gale Acuff

## Exodus

In Sunday School today Miss Hooker said  
*Let my people go!* Or Moses said that  
to Pharoah, not to me. But then again  
maybe I have some, people I mean, I  
keep as slaves but not real slaves but slaves all  
the same. I have to think about that one.  
And I don't live in a pyramid or  
wherever Mr. Pharoah lived. I live  
in a little white frame house about one  
mile from church so I walk here and of course  
back again. It's a kind of *exodus*,  
unless that's one of those new foreign cars.  
I forget. And I sleep in the attic.  
Maybe that's a kind of upper room.  
I'd like to try a manger out to see  
what that sleeps like but I'm ten years old so  
it might be a little small for me but  
just right for Jesus, even though He was  
--or is--a kind of king, even bigger  
than old Pharaoh but a little later  
in history. I'm not stupid--so what  
if I failed the second grade. Not by much,  
I'm proud to say. It's not false pride, either.  
But the only slaves I think I own are  
my dog and goldfish but I treat them right.  
They're free to come and go as they please--well,  
not the goldfish, they would drown in the air.  
And my dog doesn't seem to want to leave.  
Good boy. But I do have parents, Father  
and Mother, I mean. Father goes to work.  
He's a geography teacher so we're

poor. Mother stays at home but still works hard.  
She works hard for Father and me and he  
works hard for us and maybe I don't work  
as hard for them as they do for me but  
that's natural, I guess, and I'm a lot  
smaller and not so educated and  
I don't drive or shave. Not that Mother does,  
shave I mean, unless you count her legs. She  
has two, last time I checked. Ha ha. Maybe  
I do own slaves, then. I hadn't thought much  
about it. I don't have much to think with  
yet. One day I'll have more. Then they'll be free,  
Father and Mother. I'll let my people

*(continued; stanza break)*

go, but by leaving them. I'll graduate  
and get a job and get married and have  
babies and be *their* slave. That's what you call  
justice. I'm going to pay for my crimes.  
I just hope that I don't go to Hell but  
if I do and I should see that Pharaoh  
I hope he doesn't laugh at me. Too much.  
Anyway he drowned and now he's in hot  
water again in the flames of Hell or  
something like that. If he laughs at me I'll  
point that out, that God made him all wet, then  
turned up the heat. If he says back, *You're here,*  
*too,* I'll say, *Well, yeah, but I'm proud to be.*  
*So there.* And that he let my people go.

--Gale Acuff

**THE POET SPEAKS:** *In things seemingly ordinary there exists enough – perhaps – of everything; the work (and it is “work”) of the poet is to seek it, recognize it, and articulate it contextually so as to clarify and entertain (not that clarification is greater than entertainment). No exaggerating is necessary to the realization that common matters are excellent enough in themselves but sometimes require help in the revealing, one which is not the product of the imagination (I mean what was once called fancy) but the facilitation thereof. The work becomes less frustrating when one reads other poets (and other writers of all kinds) to learn not just what they've learned but how they've learned it, their means to the ongoing-end. I think that my work has been influenced (inescapably) by Wordsworth, Whitman, and Frost, but also the rhythms found in good prose, especially fiction and the personal essay – oh, by any good writing, and (ha ha!) by bad as well. Poetry is a way of urging the world to introduce the oneself to oneself. Such is shyness.*

**BIO:** *I have had poetry published in Ascent, Chiron Review, McNeese Review, Adirondack Review, Weber, Florida Review, South Carolina Review, Carolina Quarterly, Arkansas Review, Poem, South Dakota Review,*

*and many other journals. I have authored three books of poetry: Buffalo Nickel (BrickHouse Press, 2004), The Weight of the World (BrickHouse, 2006), and The Story of My Lives (BrickHouse, 2008). I have taught university English in the US, China and the Palestinian West Bank.*