

MICHAEL PONTACOLONI

JACKALOPES

FIRST PLACE, WALLACE STEVENS POETRY CONTEST

I see jackalopes,
lean rabbits with pronghorn tines
sprouting from their craniums
perched upright and alert,
peering out across the desert,
over the crag and dry alluvium
and rows of shelves and lines
of customers in a gift shop.

I thought I saw one in its natural habitat
from the backseat of my father's Buick Roadmaster
while being driven through Glastonbury,
but my father said jackalopes make their home
out west, out in Montana and Wyoming
and Litchfield and Albany.
Besides, he said, a jackalope is faster,
much faster than that.

I must have seen a cottontail
with sticks tied to his ears,
or maybe they were held on with epoxy.
I knew I'd have to wait until a vacation
took me towards Helena or Cheyenne
where I could see one beneath the Rockies,
but by the time I made it out there,
nearly then a teenaged male,

I had learned what must occur between
man and woman, ungulate and rodent;
that the pronghorn must hover over
its mate or suffocate her with his greater size,
or the rabbit must pounce and claw at tights
to hang by his nails against his lover.
An impossible courtship, no doubt a joy to invent
for the deceitful taxidermist,
though my father tried to insist
that jackalopes are simply fast, too fast to be seen.