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Poetry: Passing Game

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Passing Game

Going backward
All of me and some
Of my friends are forming a shell . . .

James Dickey, “In the Pocket”

Fading back, fading, not
looking downfield yet
he knows his audibles have re-drawn
the routes faintly chalked in the minds
of his three receivers, that already
they sprint past their called
down-and-outs toward flags he knows
will be open when he pivots
plants and throws behind a line
ideally cupped to shed stunting tackles
and when the ball spirals up,
floats toward the cradling arms
of the man alone in the end zone,
it draws twenty years of pain
from his sprung shoulder.

Under this blaze of lights the odor
of earth rides through him, lime
burns like a drug in his nose
and it is finally clear, perfect.
The crowd routinely leaps to its feet
but is soundless. No whistles blow
as he turns his back on the officials,
trots to his huddled friends whose faces
like the scoreboard clock say, “Go.”
Then he calls the play he knows
he will change at the line and does,
certain there will be no conversion
no defense, only passing, passing
as he drops back, fades.

Photo by David Wilson

Don Johnson, former associate editor of the Bridgewater Review, left Bridgewater to assume the position of English Department chairman at East Tennessee State University. As associate editor of the Review Don was instrumental in developing the magazine during those early days when so much had to be done. But Don was more than just an associate editor. At Bridgewater he was a recognized poet and scholar, a friend to countless students, a singer of country songs and a fine former quarterback. He will be missed both on and off the field. We at the Review wish Don and his family happiness and good fortune.