

Frontier Tracking

Linda O'Neill

If I had known that my grand adventure west
by rail, by canal, and finally by stage would end
before I reached my thirtieth year...

If had known that I would move from school to school,
waking on frosted mornings to the cold and the gray,
tending to wood stoves and sick children...

Would I have answered – faint, yet pursuing – the call to teach?

What were my choices, I ask you?
I was an educated woman with a love of knowledge
and the need to do God's will...

so I followed the call across miles of bluestem and aster,
listening at night for the howl of wolves
and the echoes of Indian villages...

You may condemn or approve my feeble efforts;
you may admire or pity
my humble toil...

But I freely chose to cover the fresh tracks of the coyote
with my own laced boot prints, to leave my mark
on the prairie soil...

Whatever else is built or planted in this place,
whatever else is preserved or destroyed,
my prints are here...

Linda O'Neill is a professor emerita, College of Education, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois. As an associate professor, she taught undergraduate and graduate courses in philosophy of education, social foundations of



education, and educational policy. Her research interests include pragmatism, hermeneutics, and the philosophical analysis of educational law. She has published poetry and numerous articles. She is currently studying to become a certified naturalist in Kane County, Illinois. To discuss this poem, visit her at ljoneill@sbcglobal.net.