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On Slim Whitman and How Irony Entered the World

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On Slim Whitman and How Irony Entered the World

- The river only looked red on paper.
- The river only felt red from a distance.
- The river only sounded red in Spanish.

To sell more albums than the Beatles
as the infomercial asserted
seemed more curse than blessing,
but then so too did the shuffling
of shoes from the dance floor,
heard but not seen from the stage,
the yodel
yes yodel
that he refused to be defined by,
the pencil mustache that served its purpose,
but no more.

The crooner can't remember in which city
tonight's hotel is located,
reckoning only
the warmth on the pillow that might be Memphis,
simple irony to one
who shrugged off the blues.
The between-song repartee always swings around to
the obligatory anecdote about
having to bum an overnight bus ticket
just to record two songs
in a midtown Manhattan studio,
hyperbole that may have sounded better as the
ending to the second verse
of another unfinished song about heartache
than as the justification of the journey itself,
the *de rigueur* metaphysics
of the train's whistle.

Take for example the red of the sun,
a conceit in the bridge designed
to somehow make the inevitable parting more
palatable but less real.

Short of the river
nowhere ever really came to feel like home.

Christopher T. Keaveney

Christopher T. Keaveney teaches Japanese language and East Asian culture at Linfield College in Oregon and is the author of three books about Sino-Japanese cultural relations. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Columbia Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *The Minetta Review*, *Stolen Island*, *Faultline*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, and elsewhere, and he is the author of the collection *Your Eureka not Mined* (Broadstone Books, 2017).