

Lyle Tatum

NEW JERSEY

Who sings about New Jersey,
a state without personality,
warped by Philadelphia and New York City?
New Jersey, narrow band of asphalt and concrete,
air turned blue by fumes of autos rushing to
 New York and Boston
each northbound car matched by one for
 Baltimore or Washington.

Forget Water Gap, Wind Gap and those northern
 hills,
let them be an extension of Pennsylvania,
so PR men can call them mountains.
Write off the Jersey Pine Barrens,
nature's massive conservatory midst the crowd.
Leave the pines to wild flowers, deer and
 pickerel.

Splash from miles of sunny, sandy beach
while praising Maine's walk-in ice box.
Feast on asparagus, blueberries and red tomatoes
while you long for Colorado's naked rocks.
Ignore Batsto, Ong's Hat, Smithville, Mount
 Misery,
and hasten on to plastic Williamsburg.

Recall with pride those hardy settlers
who broke the sod of Iowa and Kansas,
while you scoff at cinder block and tarpaper,
home-built homes of South Jersey's present
 generation.
Reread those early critics of Leaves of Grass,
the ones who wrote, "It is not even poetry."

Tell me about the boardwalk honky tonks,
about Admiral Wilson Boulevard and the
 Pennsauken Mart.

Remind me of Union City, Newark, Camden and
 Hackensack.

Show me county jails crammed with the poor.
I know the mafia deals the cards,
and a thief is hanging on the cross.

But somewhere there must be a poet who will say,
"New Jersey, yes."