I CAN'T HELP YOU

KATHERINE WESTERMANN

His hands are big and rough
They look like hands that ache
Tough hands, the hands of a maker
A maker of furniture
A maker of high concrete walls

Hands that hold bank statements
Crumpled, stained, torn on the corner
Statements that explain his grey hair
Statements that explain the tremor in his voice
As he says, "Por favor, por favor señorita"

But he must prove his need
Beyond the aching hands, and the heavy cough
His illness is not enough
To move the letters on the green sheet,
The fuzzy Xerox that says "Proof of citizenship
required..."

I volunteered to help people
But I turn this man away
This man with the hands of a carpenter
He cannot see the doctor
No, not today

The Provost's Literary Prize, established over twenty years ago, is an open competition in poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction. Any currently enrolled OSU undergraduate is eligible to submit work. Winners receive a $300 prize and on-campus publication. A committee of creative writing faculty presents finalists to the Provost, who selects each year's winner(s). For more detailed contest guidelines, please contact Prof. Scribner, Chair of the Provost's Literary Prize Committee, at keith.scribner@oregonstate.edu.