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**FROG VOICES**

*For Philip McCracken*

The swamp is silent.

Dawn's slow voltage  
reaches wild  
currant, & each twig,  
each slim living rheostat  
feeds light to the blossoms.

Then one by one open the gold  
& green-flecked eyes of the frogs.

Over the distant Bering Sea,  
over resting  
bowhead whales & sea birds at roost,  
a missile punctures the brilliance  
of morning sky.

Shivering ponds of swamp water  
harbor a grim reflection  
as the projectile descends its chilling arc.

Suddenly the frogs begin.  
Their voices rise,  
feathery trebles, croaks & trills  
all weaving a shield  
of sound.

When the missile explodes  
the blinding egg of fire is enclosed  
by singing, then is repelled  
into cold space  
beyond the range  
of song.

**James Bertolino**

## THREE POEMS

## Lament

In a crook of pine  
she sits, puffed  
with old apologies.  
Something like,  
I'm sorry," pause,  
"Why me?"

Close by, in pairs  
cabbage butterflies  
do tricks,  
spiral up or zigzag  
through the air  
like limericks.

But the dove sits  
talking to herself.  
The sound—  
a blue flute  
or the lingering throb  
of a wound—

leaves and returns  
all day to the grey  
cage of her chest.  
She stays  
perched, as if  
on a nest

of empty eggs.  
She fills  
with whines.  
The weight of her song  
keeps her  
steady in the pine.

**June Birds**

Almost everyday now it happens—  
that splat against glass.

Seen from outside, these large  
windows of my stucco house  
float a mirage of trees and sky

like rooms mirrored to repeat themselves.  
How they repeat themselves!  
Since sunup, a party line of old news

ricochets, tree to tree. Now one  
sounds his single song from the elm;  
distant pines are a choir of mimicry.

Like lovers constantly needing  
to reassure each other, themselves,  
they give to get back.

Only the pitch, the emphasis alters,  
as in: "I *love* you"; "I love *you*."  
Any phrase, repeated enough,

is a small death. Undressed  
and jeweled in white, I find them  
silent in bushes, in beds,

or sometimes, on the cement steps,  
only dazed and leaking  
burgundy under the belly.

Daft by the berries' wine, June days  
they sail blind. Lured by the bird  
that blooms on a pane of glass,

like the body's echo  
soaring back into itself,  
they break whole on impact.

Loving you is like that.

**How They Use Me**

I listen when they talk  
about me. My name  
flies into their speech,  
their dreams.

They say I am blind,  
call the man led  
by a dog's eyes  
my name.

Darkness or glare  
cannot blind me.  
I send my eyes out  
as a song  
that sings back.  
I send my song out  
like hands that touch  
the shape and the place  
of things.

I have watched them  
stumble in the dark  
woods at night.  
When I fly past  
they call me  
black moth,  
black leaf.

And the man lost  
in the dark maze  
of his thoughts,  
the man who living  
with stones becomes stone,  
has my name.

I swoop and sail  
through winding caves;

I know my way.

Because they don't  
know me, they say  
I am many things:

across screens,  
wings that blacken  
a full moon;  
a cape and teeth.

Women hold their white  
necks in sleep, afraid  
of wanting me.

I tangle in the loose  
hair of their dreams.

I am not their dreams.  
I am not their words.  
I am what I am.

They need a name  
for the darkness.  
They take mine.

**Jane Ellen Glasser**

## **VERNICHTUNG**

*For L.E.*

I was thinking how bored I had become  
With most of my writing  
And with much of other people's writing  
Thinking how even what I write well I seldom live.

Michelina lived  
For ten months inside Buchenwald.

She told me many sufferings. But she also told

How warm the ovens were at night:  
 How she tried to walk near them.  
 How she licked greasy smoke from her skin,  
 And how it eased her hunger.  
 How she welcomed the flames from the chimneys:  
 A dependable light for her steps after dark.

It is true that she was very young  
 And could not understand  
 What was happening to her.

She said she wiped her nose always on the same sleeve  
 An inch above the cuff so that her uniform might not be  
 Oversoiled; so that she would not lose all self-respect;  
 So she could garner, even here, some pride.

She said they pulled her from the cattle cars  
 And gave her with her uniform  
 A dead prisoner's shoes. Real leather and laces.  
 her family in Charleroi was poor.  
 She remembers herself happier at that moment  
 Than she had ever been or could be  
 And wonders what it is  
 She has become.

Is this where it begins? "*After the hints of what the  
 poets meant  
 But could not quite say?*" To know the pleasures of  
 Auschwitz?  
 To know in Hell the unencumbered joys of vanity  
 and lust?  
 To read *Abandon Hope* above the gate and also know  
 There is no hope in Heaven?  
 And is there poetry in Heaven, then?  
 As there is on this earth: pleasure in Buchenwald?  
 This is where it begins.

Michel J. Englebort

**TWO POEMS**

**If I had sorted out all the quietness**

Would I have known an animal was  
stalking me? Though all the vast

Snow gave no hint of a nuance of  
dark or shadow. The vast stillness

Of the air no aura of odour alien or  
—what was it?

An avalanche was suddenly roaring  
I was untouched, my eyes

batting away skirls of snow

**There were other places we had**

Cleared out—of soft fern or clawing  
brambles. Lain there a time or two

Going back, how strange we found them  
foreign as it were—though unforgot

If we went deeper (we did go deeper)  
we found what we could never tame

Clawing wildly even as before the cave  
of human dawn. Your blood came soon

When the moon was high. You were  
pensive, finally in a rage. You broke

The thatched cage of the captive eaglet  
you cried angrily, we

would never tame

**TWO POEMS****Purgatory Pit**

a vertical cave  
sunk in a timbered mountainside  
so deep we could say a prayer in the time  
it takes a rope to find the bottom

that summer day we backed over the edge  
looking for a map of inner space  
or a painting of a reindeer with an arrow in his neck  
or the knowledge of what binds people together  
besides rope

rappelling down and down  
past the mossline and the daylight  
past the shelves of schist layered in humus  
booming waterfall spraying mist on our clothes

overhead the mouth looked like an azure moon  
painted with green leaves  
drops of water floating in a sunbeam  
suddenly slashed my upturned face

we jumped on the wet gravel and shone the lights around:  
two eyes glowed from a hole under a log.  
a porcupine bristling shrank further into his hole.  
broken quills marked the spot where he fell.

passing him at a safe distance  
we balanced on a ledge that hangs out over this  
toilet-bowl pit  
leaped over the hopper thru another waterflag  
dropped into a womb full of dripstone sculpture:  
mare's mane, mushrooms, petrified bananas,  
perfect cups worn in the stone one drop at a time.

all the silent history that flows in caves  
while shipload of invaders dislodge tribes from the hills,  
build and abandon towns,  
vein the land with roads that the woods reclaim,  
waves of grandfathers dissolving again and again in the  
ground  
while a thin layer of lime extends the stalactite's reach.

no revelations here:  
we kept crawling thru jagged auricles  
until we came up against the solid spine of the mountain;  
beyond a fissure in the rock vertebrae  
this underground river crashed and churned thru  
unreachable canals;  
the only thing left to do was go back the way we came,  
a luxury the porcupine did not enjoy.

he watched us return thru the veil of the falls  
and hook onto the rope  
a brief dream of lights and voices  
rising toward the daylight  
where he used to sun himself on logs  
then even the rope was gone.

May i die as well as he did  
without pity or hope  
in a hole beyond my comprehension  
close to a network of underground streams  
and a message of broken quills  
preserved somewhere at the bottom of the sky.

**Morris Cave**

I thought of doing this cave alone  
But i would have died there.  
Three of us climbed the weed-grown stair  
From the creekbed to the valley rim  
And gazed out at the ridge across the gulf:  
A vast stone ship plowing thru dim  
Wraiths of mist; and we, standing on the edge  
Of its foam-foliage wake—the self  
Froths much too fast among these silent waves  
To know the shore toward which that mountain moves.

This is the place we started from:  
Trees perched high on the polished crags,  
Moss-lipped falls fanning thru gray space  
To a cattail mere, holes where the bats fly  
When the sun goes down. Quarry long forgotten.  
Climbed we then the boulders, opened gear,  
Slid we into the cave mouth one by one  
Feet first, on our backs, the stone  
Cold as the grave and ribbed like a cat's throat.  
I, the reluctant leader, wished me out.

Lights on, using hands and knees,  
Crawling thru crushed mud and gravel  
Washed loose by the slow centuries  
From giant marble layers—grovel  
Among jagged villi, tunnel going down,  
Belly-slither over boulders, bruised elbows  
Going down squeezed around sharp cornices  
(How would it be to suffocate or drown)  
Breath came fast and heavy, water flowed  
How far . . . something in the ceiling glowed.

One by one we wriggled into a room  
Squat on our hams to rest. The headlamp  
Like a memory of sun. We passed a beam

Along cracks in the damp walls, little drops  
Leaking down my back. Strange kiva,  
The groundhole exit hardly big enough  
For an elf: hand front, lie flat, wild impulse  
To scream or laugh, enter a streambed,  
Twist and crawl yards over smooth-worn pebbles  
Clutched in the fist. I could not lift my head.

The wet floor slanted upward, running miles  
Under the land. In this hollow place  
I lay on the marble slab and could almost stand,  
My feet in the streambed, ceiling on my face.  
A rock septum barred the way:  
Crawl up the slab and down the other side  
Committing ourselves totally to faith  
The exit will not be sealed in a slide;  
Time slowed to the stalactite's pace,  
The sky was distant as a dinosaur's death.

Came we then to the chamber  
Filled with water, stagnant, icy cold,  
The river of fear; crawl in and sink  
And freeze balls and belly, soak hair,  
Drink mud and surge and slither like a worm  
In the mountain's labyrinthine bowel,  
Find the crevice, plumb thru it and emerge  
Chattering and foul. An otter could do it.  
We sat like monkeys blind and deaf and dumb  
Not any less eager to embrace the tomb.

Testing the depth, Kyle sealed his clothes  
In a plastic bag; and three times he tried  
and still this side of the tunnel rose  
Blinking and gasping from the chill.  
I was content to lag, until i saw  
Their light-beams shine beyond the ceiling's lip.  
Further delay was conspicuous. No thinking;  
Strip and pass the clothes-bags under the pool,  
Go for it, take the plunge, submerge and claw  
The rocks and whooping struggle thru the maw.

We took the next caverns in the nude  
Dragging our bags behind us, lights front,  
Skin scraping over harsh stone  
Mud-men, elementals, eyelashes glued  
Together by dirt, marsh-matted, grunt  
For speech, ceiling-drips shivering spine,  
The age-old rock impressed us, drawing blood,  
Slow lover, intimately cold,  
Unknowing of flesh; open shafts beneath  
Our scrambling feet; grit between our teeth.

A chute slid us down to a coffin-size  
Choke hole. We cut the lights and listened  
To the waterfall beyond. The sound awoke  
Measureless distance, utter darkness, the eyes  
Drifted nowhere and the ears grew wise.  
Caves multiplied in all their mythic modes,  
Orpheus, Odysseus, the ice-age artist who  
Conjured his antlered master from the antipodes—  
We yielded, breathless, buried in the true  
Unyielding *mater*—and pulled each other through.

Joyful and terrified. Then stood and wedged  
Past portals; then: a huge cathedral flume,  
The coffers lost in darkness, archways ledged  
Like water-worn fragments of a broken stair,  
Boulders strewn about beast-like in the gloom  
Casting bizarre shadows everywhere.  
The walls were a honeycomb of caves,  
The giant halls tilted off the level plane.  
A dreamscape terminus of cliffs and chasms  
Vibrant with the purling of the stream.

We clung to the stone ladders and ascended  
Like filthy angels toward the uplifted apse  
When clambering over a shaft one-handed  
I fumbled my light, watched it helpless clatter  
Down the gulf, bouncing off the scarps,

The beam swallowed by inconceivable night.  
Craig chimneyed to the bottom of the pit  
While i crouched on my shelf, as if engraved.  
He found it still shining, like an ad  
For Dante flashlights. I knew i would be saved.

Following the stream we came to the brink  
Of a deep canyon, where the water gushed  
In darkness to a hidden lake. We sank  
On the slippery floor, enraptured, hushed;  
I tied my lantern to my wrist. I gazed  
Into fissures between beds of tilted rock  
Where one could enter and be fossilized,  
Clefts on all sides, bottomless and black,  
And marble runneled from beneath, like snow,  
Full of crannies we will never know.

And always, darkness and water and stone  
Reticulated endlessly,  
Stone hallowed into darkness by water,  
Boundless, like the caverns of the sky.  
We retreat from that sound, we human souls  
Webbed together by curiosity  
And common need, and common limits, found  
By each of us alone. Retrace the holes  
Toward day, heads down, hands outstretched, we creep  
Like God emerging from the hills of sleep.

The trees were green, the quarry speckled white,  
The moss intense and subtle, the cattails full  
Of rippling color. Stalks waved and a flight  
Of birds played in the mist, and the waterfall  
Opened to the clean air. We bathed in the spray.  
We dressed in warm clothes and picked our way  
Among the slabs, the secrets of the earth  
Already mute within us, overgrown  
By weeds of mirth. The ridge moved afar  
Behind moving clouds. We descended to the car.

Stephen T. Butterfield

## SOUR GRAPES

*"We shall not be using the enclosed manuscript. Thank you, however, for giving us the opportunity to consider it."*

The Beloit Poetry Journal

I never wanted  
my poems  
published in your crummy magazine  
anyway. I didn't sit waiting  
for the mail all day. Hell no.  
It's Saturday:  
college football on t.v., some boxing.  
I didn't even know  
the mail was here 'til 6:00  
when I checked for the newspaper;  
I even read the comics  
and started dinner  
before I opened your damned letter.  
And last January  
when it was too cold to go out  
my car was broke,  
I tried reading your journal  
(My Aunt Gerrie gave it to me  
as a gag gift) and I didn't like  
or understand  
any of the junk you printed.  
I didn't even finish it;  
I got bored and watched t.v.  
I wouldn't tell anyone  
even if you did accept my poems.  
And who would know? Nobody  
reads your worthless rag.  
I only know three people  
who've even heard of it:

an old woman in Utica  
who'll be dead by next year  
and two drunks  
who smell like State Street  
and only write Christmas verse  
and haiku about their pets.  
Really, the joke's on you.  
I found those stamps  
on old wedding invitations  
I never R.S.V.P.'d on  
and I stole the envelopes from work.  
I didn't even type the damn poems;  
didn't waste any of my time.  
I told my wife I'd take her to the movies  
if she typed them for me  
and then I didn't even take her.  
I didn't even take  
the letter to the post office; just left it  
in my box and let the mailman do the work.  
What do you editor guys  
do for a living?  
You can't possibly make money  
printing lesbian poems.  
I got a real job,  
make 21K a year, own a Buick,  
wear \$70 shoes.  
I bet poetry editors wear sandals  
(the ones with tire tread bottoms).  
I didn't want your free copy  
either. No room.  
My bookshelves are too crowded  
even for your skinny book.  
Plus, I never would've read it.  
Too junky. I read Neruda in the john.  
And a free copy  
isn't worth anything.

Buy beer with one.  
Try jamming it in the coin slot,  
pull the knob under your brand  
and wait for cigarettes. It doesn't work.  
I could've gotten cash  
for my poems (my neighbor's cousin  
works across the street from The New Yorker),  
but I felt sorry for you guys.

Please consider these.

David M. Michalak

## SUBMITTING

1.

I am on the beach beside you.  
The hot sun coats us  
in a rich brown lacquer, as the waves  
turn white, curling at the soft edge  
of the shore. The rhythmic slapping  
pulls tenderly at the core  
of our stomachs. If we grazed against  
these waves could we  
turn inside out? We rise and fall;  
skirting along the border  
where the concrete ends and the sea begins.

Sequins of sweat bead on our chests  
and thighs. The wind passes over  
and over dropping grains of sand  
on us, a cragged mosaic.  
As the last sea gull flies into the deepening  
sky, we melt into the sand, leaving  
our blanket and clothing behind.  
When the sun breaks and the reds  
and purples seep into the clouds  
the ocean is boldest.

## 2.

My dream is of night. Lights  
spark along the water and extinguish.  
Boats moan like dark women dragging  
their heavy bodies. The moon  
is a chunk of cracked ice  
and slowly melts toward dawn.  
We are undressing. The moist air  
makes our clothing stick. Careful  
against shells we crouch down  
and shed like snakes; our new skin  
glistens beneath the rich sky.  
I have several names for you: Laurel,  
Sparrow, Lavender. How gentle!  
Brushing the cold sand  
from our thighs we watch the supple  
waves lap at the shore. Beside us  
the pier groans deep into the night's  
velvet throat. Your eyes darken with love  
or pain; all the names we forget and remember.  
Sand crabs scurry and go out  
like small flames. I can taste the salt  
on their hard red backs. Hands entwined,  
we walk evenly into the ocean's  
black mouth, lapping and swallowing.

Susan Pinkwater

**TWO POEMS from *HAWKER***

**Gyp, My Loving Big Black Pig: An Acrostic Poem**

Gyp goes with me everywhere:

You'll find him in church on a Sunday

Pillowed upon clean straw, to the east of the altar

Muffling his whiffles, reserving grunts of pleasure,

Yeasty eructations, for the noisier hymns and carols.

Lively and contented, wiggling his quirky tail

Over the coombes and vallies, he trots behind the

Vicar as he visits his parishioners—

In house, in cot, in glebe and pasture,

Never once despoiling a humble hearth-stone.

Glad to be sociable, he jiggles his globular testes.

Brushing a floppy ear means he wants a good scratching.

In storm, in sun, the elements ne'er dissuade him:

Gloriously he wallows in the finest muck-holes

Believing he's in Paradise, awash in tarry ichor.

Later I must scrub him and oil his hide with suet.

After that we'll take our tea with good Dorothy Dinglett.

Coarse he is outside 'tis true, but within he's all refinement.

Know, ye cynics, and be warned: and model your own  
deportment

Pig-wise, Gyp-wise. You'll surely feel an improvement

In manners as well as morals. And when you next  
devour pork

Grant a special whiff of thanks to Black Gyp and his tribe.

**Tamar River Cornish Pie**

Dorothy Dinglett's oven entrance  
is like a vast church door:  
rye loaves emerge, and barley  
buns and sweet oat cakes.  
Last of all, upon the board,  
steams a magnificent pie,  
a hillock of brown dough  
reeking like a small volcano  
with vented savory puffs of vapor.

"Wait," says Dorothy Dinglett.  
"We'll open it up anon."

When the dish is broken  
we are astounded at the tumble  
of oysters, conger-eels, and pilchards  
mixed piece-meal  
in clotted cream and butter  
seasoned with garlick, salt, and spices.

Old Satan himself, they say  
would never cross the Tamar  
for fear he would be cast  
beneath a savory Cornish crust.

**Robert Peters**

## ROM

*(After Jan Yoors's memoir, The Gypsies)*

*for Tim Correll*  
Te avel angla tute.

I.

To now shut  
my mouth and muffle  
the moan rumbling up  
my throat so my body  
bursts into a hum homing  
outward, so I tremble  
with my own silence.

And if in the wish  
of that silence someone  
else is laughing, someone else  
tossing a picked bone  
into the snow, chipping off  
the beefscraps blackened  
on hatchets, balancing  
a spoonful of peas  
for the doves, if silence is  
a fogswept breath without meaning  
blame the nightfall that lets  
snow whitewash around us  
the old lies  
lied into truth.

I would sleep if I could.

I would make a home  
in silence freezing  
to punctuate the grope  
that I breathe  
and am bled by slowly.

2.

Over the snowed hill  
sloping westward a locust grove  
froze darker and thickened  
in the bloodlike dusklight  
softened by fog while, overcast,  
the night locked in.  
We were cold and made camp.  
We found ourselves lost there.  
We were curling hovels  
into the tick and downing  
Vodka stolen in town  
knowing nowhere in particular  
is somewhere to go, is cold enough  
to burn our hope in.

And when you came to me  
from the river with water  
in a bucket and moonlight  
trapped in the ice  
floating on the water  
and the echo of horsehooves  
still rippling in circles  
under the ice I called you near  
and your name came out  
of my mouth in a cloud  
that rose slowly and turned  
into your body.

You opened your shirt.  
You opened the home  
clothes lock into the heat  
our bodies keep hidden  
beneath pockets  
and your breasts in silhouette  
on the canvas tarp

were dark enough to gather  
the little bit of light  
that our bodies burned  
into the moment.

## 3.

Some still sawing  
a heavy sleep in half  
because their humble dreams  
were too awkward whole.

Some were running back  
bareass from the river, almost blue,  
some shaking out shirts, gathering  
spoons, spilling soup on ashes,  
some girls ladling  
a leaky bucket of milk  
discovered poppyseeds spotting  
a slight sweep of snow  
and a crone with a black kerchief  
covering her nose  
bent over supposing them an omen.

They weren't.  
The tip of a black braid  
dipped into a ladle. The number  
tattooed on a hand  
curled around the mouth  
screaming something about time  
being dust, about dust being  
stolen by a hunchback  
from ruins, the number on a hand  
once crushed between a boot  
and the snow

waved us forward over  
road moguls at campside  
and iced puddles and over the Nowhere

our home is dragged out of  
like a dead ghost  
exhumed from a monument  
of Plato, forward  
with horse snorts in chorus  
and the creak of wood-freeze  
and the crunch and squeak  
of hardpack underwheel  
hastened with each shake  
of the rein, each whipcrack.

our teams reeled beneath  
snowed trees arcing  
a tunnel of the road, through wheatfarms,  
women plucking hens  
in a roadside barn, nettles stewed  
in flour browned in goosefat  
chewed slowly on the threshold  
of a stone house edging  
the remains of a grove  
and through woodsmoke  
lost in the shadows of clouds  
and through the linear  
pulse and hope of becoming  
what by nightfall  
no one has become.

## 4.

To stand on the edge  
of a darkening pond, to lean  
into the dream of a home  
on the freezing fringes  
of a pond whose darkness  
a dim star pocks, whose darkness  
the lie the moon is  
whitens.

If these mutely solemn trees  
want to creep back  
beneath the black surface  
of the pond that doesn't  
concern me now.

I cannot gather stillness  
enough to move my mouth,  
and yet this dreariness mopes  
up the nooserope hanging  
my heart, and leaves my body  
the only thing trembling.

Not even the tufts  
of black birds stuffed  
into the night where  
bared tops of trees  
tore wounds, not the mouse or the owl  
or the frozen sun rising  
over houses with stone chimneys  
lipping thin seeps of smoke,  
with everyone dreaming  
except Jesus Christ, who couldn't even  
die without his body.

I think life loves  
living the lie of  
becoming.

And I think the breath just  
barely out of my mouth  
will drift with the fogpatch  
gathering on a slight  
draft of light that bled through  
a seam on the horizon.

Frank Graziano

## WISPS

She sits at the window looking at webs,  
a room full of jewels.

If she could slip through those strands  
without breaking the shiny beads—

on the other side  
she'd do wonderful things: Say *silk*  
and it would spin from her mouth,  
say *wing* and she'd fly. Oh *friend*,  
*flower, father!*

The door opens. He walks in.  
Fingers move through her hair,  
down her back—

When her mother calls  
she doesn't understand  
*supper, hurry, wash.*

\*

She just chalks on a board,  
lines weaving round and round  
till a pattern takes hold,  
tiny face in a maze—

He was rubbing between her legs,  
saying *Hush, hush*  
though she didn't make a sound.

That night she ran  
till the sheet held her in knots.  
Her hair was so tangled the next morning  
her mother cut it.

She remembers the wisps falling  
down her neck, her back,  
that fine net of shivers  
dropping over her body.

**BETWEEN HILLS**

The old Ford flew over Crematory Hill,  
stunned mole, groundhog and rabbit,  
crushed teasel and Queen Anne's lace.

The liquor-sweet freedom of the evening  
drained out of the man behind the wheel  
struck sober by his own blood.

The hill was pathless and high.  
He rose out of the wreck staggering,  
as prostrate to the incline as a holy man.

I met his world the first time  
near wooded hills whose grounds held  
the winter's moisture all summer.

Juice from tomatoes broken on dry dirt  
and the cool skin of newly dug potatoes:  
the good seemed to come from down under.

A coal miner rests on white satin.  
His hair is black, eyes closed,  
cheeks blushed as red as when he lived.

They called him a good-time Charlie.  
On payday he'd look at his check and say  
to the other miners, "When's payday?"

A once-over at the hospital, then jail.  
I've listened to the story so often  
I can hear the door's clang echo down the hall  
where only the sound went free,  
the aftermath of a tolling bell  
floating above the trees like a soul.

Sometimes I slept between him and my mother.  
I sucked my thumb and fondled the chenille.  
Their breathing slowed almost to a stop.

They say he hung himself with his belt  
in the jail cell and I want to know.  
And was it love, cowardice or hate?

What difference can a dead man make?  
A spaghetti dinner with the miners.  
Just an innocent Friday night drunk.

"I've disgraced my family" a cell-mate  
heard him say over and over that day.  
Was it as dark as the mines in there,

or did a window above his head let in  
too much light on the gloom and guilt?  
Black-faced miners rise on the shaft at sunset.

I've never seen inside a coal mine.  
At Mammoth Cave they gave us hard hats  
with lights and I tried to imagine:

under the earth the devils of the Bible  
swarm like the letters on the page  
as the believer goes blind with fatigue.

Black shiny coal and the pick-axes  
pounding through the cold corridors.  
Lunch underground among rumbling walls.

Danger in every unusual noise, death.  
It is night all day but for the single beam  
darting from their heads like a large eye.

My mother felt the first pains of birth  
walking with a friend up Bessie Ann Hill.  
Led back down she had me in the old iron bed.

He walked up alone to the descending hours.  
Iron bars, a bed hung on the wall like a shelf—  
humpty-dumpty ready to jump and no last words.

If the king's horses and men couldn't hear,  
then grace hovering with no face in the cell  
surely heard a prayer, a final song.

He used to play the guitar in the front room,  
sang songs about peace and green valleys.  
In the same room miners sat up all night  
with lamps glowing gold in the corners.  
The open coffin resembled a treasure chest  
of crossed hands and cloud-white sheen.

She lay in the iron bed in shock this time.  
We kids were scattered with friends here  
and there like debris from an explosion.

Death had its way and it hardly shows.  
We flourish like grass on a grave.  
What difference can a dead man make?

A black-faced miner rises at sunset.  
The survivors wait at the supper table  
and never say grace over the empty plate.

Barbara McInturff Wuest





No Indian  
could move this way, on grease,  
and fast as garfish over crushed old shell.  
This Model A, flat-out, will peak  
at fifty-five, and even more,  
if this land weren't  
so damn flat.

### *III. Off-Shore.*

Coastal shell-mounds are shaved  
flat. Sealed off by mud-flats, out  
in the bays, they rise  
low-profile, off-limits now by law.  
Out there, the dead sit solid  
in their shell-lined wells:  
the dead jaw looped over kneebones  
pensive as huge knuckles propped under chins,  
their wholly tight arrangement  
foetal in its upright grave.  
Thighbones are clean, erect,  
tucked under trees and short brown pampas grass.

### *IV. Newborns.*

Only the grown  
dead squat in shell. Caloosa knew  
the child too fresh from earth  
should not be buried, should  
scatter its sweetness in grasses—  
open to the air that  
breathes.

### *V. Winter Solstice*

After a child's death, what  
slow expiation? Under knee-high grass  
this low mound, horse-shoe oval, loops  
to our right, forever held fee simple.

Seven hundred seasons of rain  
have slowed its crest to a simple swell  
of turf and creepers thin  
as rawhide thongs. To our left  
the wood rails buckle up hill  
to the temple-mound: a winding  
corduroy road of shell steps under  
oak-boles, rough as a wolf's head, gray  
shag in dens of solid leaf.

Mosquitoes clamber our boots as we climb  
the last high mound. You hold my wrist  
as if your palm could shape my blood,  
could shift the past up forward, future,  
where an oil of new atonement gathers  
clear as any choice. Our lives could  
change.

On the last high point of the temple-mound  
trees leap for sunlight; ripe vines  
wrap their highest limbs, as ladies  
might dance in a bright pavilion, lifted arms  
and hands linked sudden on the chosen  
man.

North of us, the burial shell  
loops on. Under our boots the worshippers  
slow chant a vein of solid sand; our loss  
is a lump raised up in dark; our bright  
arms link the crest of solstice: still  
one day could change our lives.

A. McA. Miller



After,  
I slip up  
the sandy incline,  
touch the ribs  
of the bridge,  
feel a car  
hum over:

it could be grandmother  
passing,  
the long way home.

Carol Mahler

### POEM CHAIN

I see you've kept some careful records,  
Calling the grubs hardly  
syllables at all; but a meal  
for the starling.

And she, for all her squabbles,  
a pure morsel for the owl,  
who feeds the soft eyes  
to her young

as they nest in blood in the old church spire.  
Your notes are thorough: in time a woman  
(could that be you?) snares and plucks  
and stews the owl.

She lifts a spoon to a man's lips.  
An eye is floating there like a split  
doubloon. Could we stop now?  
You smile. I sip.

Edward McCrorie

**THE SQUIRREL ON THE LIMB**

She'd go just so far  
then the limb would pitch;  
she'd run back  
to where the trunk  
comes to three great arms;  
Run! she'd run so fast  
then stop as if some thought  
had got caught,  
take quick breaths  
before she could go on  
to the lash of branch, the thin part  
where she'd look down  
and the earth would rush at her;  
she'd start  
go back  
start  
go back  
go again, halfway, the pause,  
wind pushing that plain brown fur  
straight out from her small wild body  
always always  
the same limb, the same risk,  
then back to the niche  
that makes her so wild.

**Rebecca Roberts**