

Lines Begun in Dejection · *Vern Rutsala*

*Hard on the land wears the strong sea
and empty grows every bed.
—John Berryman*

Tonight I feel dejection around me
like the bad air in a room
after a forced apology.

The house carries it—old sighs, bad fish,
the silly song you fall for
every time, sentimentality washing over you

like wind from the stockyards.
Believe me, it's here
and tonight I seem to wear it—

my shirt out at the elbow, my left shoe
nearly worn through.
“Seedy” is another word for it—

one drink away from the winos
I see passed-out by the river every day.
Looking at the paper, seeking distraction,

I even read the business page and see
those smug faces, so and so moved up
the ladder, another transferred

to Mars. I look like them a little—
add haircut and tie—and even long for
that smugness tonight, to be District Manager

of vowels! But the world grows empty
and the strong sea is too far away
yet the old rage remains,

and has been honored day by day,
is being honored now as I dredge this swamp
of apology and old cigars, this landscape

of eggshells and winos. So, Dejection,
you didn't expect this turn of events did you,
you sonofabitch?

I honor the old rage now as it returns
and snakeskin failure suddenly peels away,
pulled off like cellophane from a cheap cigar.