

## THE PRISONER

You squat in a Roman prison, your only light  
the light from insect wings and the piss trails  
of vermin that shine at your feet. How thin  
you must be now. The stone walls are as closed  
to your prayers as your disciples' hearts.

Didn't you know better? Making dead souls walk  
was not divine. It was a nasty trick, a slap  
in the Elders' faces. This morning I woke, mouth  
locked with blood; you will be crucified.

Born from the feather of a God, they say, but I  
saw a face above me and they swear he's faceless.

When you were a youngster I saw you stone a bird  
to death with the neighborhood boys. Tired  
of the game, you blew the dust from its twisted  
wing and fingered the severed bone. You wept  
over that degraded body as no human could ever weep.  
I thought the bird must fly from your hands.

But as a child you knew better, knew right from  
wrong; you let what was dead remain that way.

## THE CONQUISTADORES

The sand slips like snow through the fingers  
of a Spanish army going home. In their helmets  
the waves are reflected, breaking against their skulls.  
They watch the restless ships chained like bulls  
to the sea's floor. Small boats row out  
to collect them. Men use their helmets to scoop off  
layers of shells while the wind dries their hair,  
crusted with sweat and hard weather. Others  
rehearse first words for a mother, a brother,  
a wife grown old. Each waits his turn  
for a place in the row boat while every quarter  
hour the whole army steps back

a few paces as the sea pushes their boots.  
Some drop to their knees, beat the water with their fists.

From this point each of them will go on, though going on  
from here can only mean going back—to a city,  
perhaps Salamanca, the square burnt dry,  
the windows high up flagged with laundry.  
Or to a house in a field—the old stumps are still  
in the yard, the fruit pits on the door step, the scraps  
of wool under the bed. But after so many years  
the quiet ones waiting inside are strange.

### VALLEJO IN THE MINES OF QUIVILCA

The *Cholo* breaks out of the mountain rock, a man,  
a hunk of stone, blasted, burned, a vein of metal,  
a vein of blood pumping across his forehead like a fuse.  
His right hand numb, though he still uses it on his wife.  
The Company has gone too far, he says, turned us  
into dogs and dogs won't dig ore the way a man should.  
At home his wife presses the plates onto the table,  
slowly, like printing a sign. There's a meeting tonight.  
With a shovel she digs up the nail box under the porch.  
It's my Uncle's gun, she says, as her husband runs the barrel  
over his lips like a salve. This time his wife won't stay home.

As the men walk, their black and soggy lungs swing  
like pendulums in their chests. And from way high up,  
looking down, the Yankee God of the Tungsten mines  
charts the miners' puny trails towards the campfires.

And the God sweats.