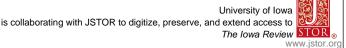
The Prisoner

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.