

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