



PROJECT MUSE®

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## Hammered Dulcimer

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<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/9345>

## RATTLESNAKE

What I remember is a cabin  
deep in the woods,  
the pure cold air my lungs drank,  
and that the earth  
was unusually hard, packed tightly  
under a thin layer of leaves.

We ate dinner, and I remember  
what a child would:  
mere flickers, bursts of laughter.  
Later, from a window  
I heard rustling, harsh words.  
You led me to the yard. A snake's head  
oozed onto the dirt.  
Its blank eyes glinted.  
One end and then the other  
of the body flexed and whipped  
in a twisting rhythm  
that dislodged leaves and stones.

When the writhing stopped  
you grabbed the snake  
and carried it to the kitchen.  
After curving a knife along  
its quiet belly, you pulled back the skin.  
I felt if I looked long enough  
I could read what was sprawled there,  
tangled and glistening.  
Then you tugged the heart  
from its nest of arteries and veins  
and handed it, still beating, to me.

It was firm and vivid red;  
cool, but the pulse sent heat  
into my palm. I walked outside  
to watch the heart pump  
in the eerie sheen of moonlight.

And that's what I have left:  
the warm, dull throbbing of a heart  
held carefully on my open hand  
before I let it fall.