

Passing Cerberus

Cerberus, a mythological dog with three heads, guards the gates of the underworld and prevents the dead from leaving.

Straining like you, Father,
the angry dead against shackle and chain,
Cerberus glares from the rusty gate.
It raises your defiant step
to its hungry mouth,
in time prey of thinning hair
and sunken cheek,
black blood
on wilted leaf.

You, Father,
cheated like us all—
with clever coin
for hell's wide door—
clung too tightly to life
now thrown from
your shallow chest
and dim star.

You, heaving dog
and cunning con,
do not return
what my father—
all hot hunger,
luring blaze
and broken clock—
tossed so far
into the dark.