THE ALCHEMISTS TRIED

Now it's my turn. Flasks, mercury

won't do. So I climb over barbed

wire as it cuts; push on, listening

for the space of silence pass

after each step in dry rattler

land. I make meringues. Something

is at stake in sinking a shaft

to this fear of mine. Someone's hand

makes me leaf through every page

of the turn-of-the-century album,

color photographs of people drawn

and quartered in a dusty town

square, sullen crowds watching,

a different landscape out-of-focus

on each page. But the bodies, they

were meant to be clearly seen. Can

one eat crystals, the way shamans

did? Then would I forget? The shaft

sunk with risk, at its bottom a stone,

the work, cracking memory's slow arc.