

Sacrifice of a Rattlesnake
Joseph Langland

No one was looking, but the fat
Female rattlesnake had just curled on an edge of sun
Around the shade of a rock pile in the pasture.

Under her white white belly (down, keep down!),
Squares and ovals and triangles of brown-white and grey stones
Broke in irregular sharp patterns from her back.

Such shameful camouflage invests our dust.

Maybe the eye of God (but nothing else)
Was watching her wary slumbers by the springs
Where we played the daylong summer out,
Barefoot in overalls.

We shouted out of the grass
And Splashed up out of the springs,
Swishing over those rocks.
She rattled, and leapt, and struck.

Then everyone came running.
We pinned her head with a stick.
We bashed her body. We cracked her tail.
We squashed her head with rocks.
We tumbled the white eye of her body up
And slashed it with the knife-edge of our fear,

Only to see,
Descending from that wound,
Three Tiny snakes
Slipping in shadowed crevices of rocks
To Flick the old relentless eye of God.