

LOOKING INTO THE CAVE

1

For a town boy the earth cellar
was a store of smells; dominant onions,
turnips under sand, sometimes
the sweet decay of an apple drifting by.
In the newly dug deep part
the earthworm-dank earth's
place to hide.

2

In a bunker under the Horwitz tanning company
twenty seven people lived fifteen months.
They had good ventilation, kerosene lamps,
and a way to the sewers through which someone
went out each week to buy food. Hela
gave birth to a boy there, her friends
covering her mouth. People worried
about the child crying, so it died.
The mother couldn't stop crying, but she learned
to keep herself quiet. The bunker
was cleaned out by an SS detail with dogs
in May 1944, three weeks before the Russians
came.

3

After the war we used to play
in concrete bunkers in Germany.
These stank of animals and shit,
but there was a chance of finding a foil
chocolate wrapper for my collection,
or an unfired cartridge
that you could work on
to get the powder out.

4

On this free and grassy hill
I saw the debris of excavation, then
a hole into the ground, widening
like a sunken tepee.
There was a ladder.
The old smell of the earth
came into me, so I had to go down.
Two steps down the ladder,
in the penetrant patch of sunlight

I saw my shadow cross
the frozen snakes on the floor.