**Out of the Mouth of Mines**

*Southern Colorado*

Dick Altman

My pick-up – hanging off cliffs –

hundreds feet up shear canyon walls –

threads peaks dividing mining

towns Silverton and Ouray –

Disquieting, yet not nearly as much

as hundreds of abandoned mines

puncturing the landscape – familiar –

lone “bell towers” – marking dead

shafts – that continue to live zombie

afterlives – flooding endlessly

with rain water – then pouring

their toxic metallic wastes – whether

from iron or gold – down mountain --

into an impoundment – more often

into streams and rivers – One thing

to see photos of the gurgitation –

quite another to stand next to it –

to smell the swirling – rusty – orange –

stew – birthed from tailings created

over a hundred years ago – and ask

yourself how this liquid plague

remains free to destroy life – aquatic

and terrestrial – I stand – nose

and mouth covered – before

a holding pond – as the bleak soup

overflow its banks – marrying

its vile liquidous body with the innocent

clarity of a nearby stream – rape that

goes unpunished – rape of bank

and sediment – rape of law –

The unyielding unfairness leaves me

reeling with sadness – as if all of my

aegis were entrapped in the flow –

except these syllables – few and angry –

wrapping themselves around my heart