**Up from Savagery**

Gary Lark

**I**

Every election I wait

for the gunshots,

the burning of witches,

the invasion of one neighborhood

by another.

Along with the scribbles

of the Magna Carta

we Europeans brought a brutality

we didn’t need to learn

from the pissed-off defenders

of the southern plains.

Serfs arrived—

draggled, blighted, dispossessed

looking for a way up,

dogma carried in their satchels,

a deep well of fear drained with fists,

heritage in cartridge belts.

They straggled and stole

valley by valley, farm by farm,

spilling measles and musket balls,

looking for a place to grow spuds

by a year-around creek.

**II**

Rattlesnake and coyote

keep watch

as the gold-silver-copper virus

devours the soul of the land.

Stones die. Stars no longer speak.

**III**

We gnaw at the earth,

at the trees and animals,

while in the shadows

crowds cheer public hangings,

parents beat their children.

We've not come far.

Instead of ancestors

we blame

a cloven-hoofed devil.

Each generation we scrub

our names, hoping

for a better outcome.

As the band tunes up

we enter the grange hall.

Notes and phrases

turn into runs of possibility.

There is a stowaway in the fiddle,

a song older than Europe

tucked behind the strings..

We enter the dance

with synapse and eye color,

hands formed to strangle

or caress. We choose

a partner out of the darkness

and join others turning,

turning.