**In My Hands I See My Grandfather**

James K. Zimmerman

as I contemplate creases

blooming on the back

of my hand, veins like

branches deep in the grip

of winter, I remember his

wrinkles as sculpted sand,

clues left behind where waves

chose to dawdle and rush

or the hide of an elephant,

molted skin of a garter snake,

talons of a dying crow

when I was six or seven

I pretended in the map

of his veins the blue delta

of a rising river or the path

of a hillside stream, its name

carved in rivulets and cascades

his knuckles were eyes to me,

veins a nose, tendons tears,

streaks down the cheeks of time

angry scars marked the edge

of a flashing knife, wounds

of a never-spoken battle

and when he formed a fist

the profile told mountain

stories, the Catskills, Tetons,

and Adirondacks of his youth

in age spots and freckles

I looked for constellations –

Orion, Cassiopeia, the Ursas

he called them streetlamps,

keepers of his boyhood

the old neighborhood, his

mother calling him home

his gestures, with fingernails

about to crack, cuticles like

holding-water moons, retold

times of pain, kindness, joy

that crept in like a cat, unwilling

secrets we already knew

and weddings, deaths, forgiven

betrayals, dreams, a daughter,

a son, the flicker of a silent movie

when he patted my head or

stroked my chin, the smell

of eggs, rye toast, bacon,

love, and bay rum aftershave

the sloughing off of dying skin