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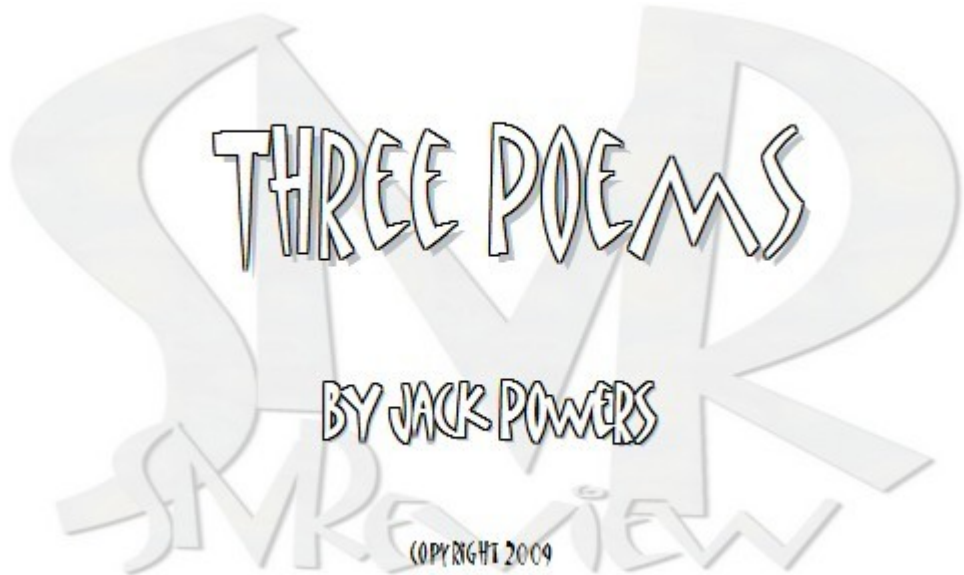
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## Perfectly Good Shoes

It started with a pair of desert boots I begged for seventh grade Christmas that arrived weeks after everyone stopped wearing them. I know. I was spoiled. A billion people in China were desert-bootless-- I didn't care. My mother started wearing them around the house, then for short trips to town.

Soon she added my discarded denim bell bottoms with red pinstripes, my leather belt with the dancing bears buckle. My teen years were haunted by mismatched versions of my old selves-- my mother's pale, smiling face perched on top. I tried hiding my old clothes at school, but she found them. I gave them to Goodwill

but she bought them. Even after I moved out, married, had children, I never knew what mishmash of my old tie-dyed T-shirts, disco shoes, madras shorts or wide-collared floral shirts would show up at Christmas or Fourth of July along with news of more successful classmates and clip ped obits of neighbors I never knew I'd known.

I soak my old clothes in gasoline now; burn them on the darkest night of the month while I strip naked and howl. For a moment I am free.

## After Dinner One August

We found the dinosaur bones in the swamp behind Alec's house. The first bones, they must have been forelegs, made great swords, clacking sharply with each collision, whistling when swung overhead.

The skull, almost intact and big enough for Alec to crawl inside, echoed to his chants *I am the dinosaur's brain* while Felix and I laughed. The ribs, after a little digging, rose out of the muck like a giant claw ringing sharply in the twilight when Felix banged them with the foreleg.

Alec rapped the skull with small stones and I blew into a horn-shaped skin (it must have been a claw). The moon rose and clouds blew off the black, black sky.

Alec bellowed and we hooted and cawed until Alec's mom yelled from atop the stone wall at the edge of his yard: *Hey!* and silence draped the night like a magician's cape. *How would you like it, she said if dinosaurs dug up your bones and started playing with them?* I thought

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if I threw the claw like a dagger, I could take out her-- but I lost my nerve. *Now*, she said, *start burying them*. *When I get back I want everything as it was*. She jumped off the wall, disappeared into the darkness and we went to work.

Hail began to rain on us, tinging off the bones, dinging off our heads. By the time we'd finished and rushed inside, a layer of mini white meteors covered everything. I moved that spring. When I drove back years later they were gone: Alec, the house, the swamp, the bones.

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## Bang (as in Big)

Cavers claim to know the ping and groan of Rock, the hundred names for black, claim to be the true ridge-walkers, clay waders, seasoned troglodites. They bicker with spelunkers, pristine compass clutchers blue-jeaned neophytes. They ridicule those Latinate dilettantes, ill-equipped tumblers, underground jaunters, wakening bats from afternoon batnaps.

But neither digs deep enough, these surface-dwelling posers separated by slivers of shadowed hours and gear pedigree. When I grab lamp and rope and slide down fissured rock, past stratified sand stone, lime stone, slate, through worm-holed stalactite caverns, gold-veined grottos, dark rivers of silt, past basalt and granite, I shed my headlamp, jungle boots, mud-caked coveralls.

Brow stretches as cerebellum shrinks; body hair sprouts; nails curl to claw. I grip rock as flesh, gnaw on petrified remains of prehistoric beasts, crawl down crevices of adamant and scoria to sub-subterranean terra-cotta sea where cool becomes radiant orange, darkness opens to molten core and I dive in, swimming web-fingered, lava-gilled until liquid thins to swirling gas.

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**Jack Powers** teaches writing, English, special education and math at Joel Barlow High School in Redding, CT. He is also co-director of Barlow's Writing Center. Powers has a BFA in Painting from Syracuse University, an MS in Special Education from Southern Connecticut State University, and MFAs in Fiction and in Poetry from Sarah Lawrence College. He has also studied writing with the Connecticut Writing Project - Fairfield and in writing groups, including one that has met for over twenty years. He has poems appearing or forthcoming in *Atlanta Review*, *The Ledge*, *Connecticut River Review* and *The Cortland Review*.