

## The Terracotta Army of Ch'in

*Over 7000 life-size terracotta soldiers, buried in massive pits, guard the grave of Ch'in Shih-huang-ti, the first emperor of China.*

Ch'in running fingertips along each rough-hewn plate  
found that even these could not ease the slip

to death, dragoons of defiance on the plains  
above each city soon to be conquered and enslaved,

not fast enough to hold the light that spilled  
into green mountains. What good any symbol

that has no weight? What good live forever  
if only in men's minds? Clay chariots, clay horses,

red earth held to the fire, aligned at the front  
of each plumed and tipped brigade,

7,000 life-size warriors and bowmen  
each modeled from some living soldier's face,

since only such detail, such individuation  
could approximate the necessary grace.

Two farmers finally find them in two thousand years  
while tunneling to make a well,

entombed in squared-off squadrons encircling Ch'in's sepulchre,  
the emperor's legions more or less complete,

though swords have rusted, paint is chipped from mouths,  
one decapitated sergeant fronts a toppled forward row.

Every careful braid on each cocked and sculpted head  
displays the calm indifference of a soldier

sketched at rest to any kind of metaphoric life.  
The Emperor is dead, now and forever,

but not those powdered bones strewn  
about the looted crypt, not gold goblets

nor imperial bric-a-brac. Shards of the first rank  
charioteers have been lovingly arranged on the wide museum tables,

broken-plated archers glued and set back in each row,  
each fine-wrought, smiling, puzzled peasant's face:

as these are re-assembled, the Emperor appears.