Interpreters needed

At night the poets listen to frogs
who cannonade louder, hoarser, mimic
what the planet

may say next. It turns, turns.

The trees strain and bend – the wells
murmur, go drier. All the oceans clench
their silvery fish

so the fish can’t fling themselves
onto the banks to join us. As usual the birds keep
their flickering

shorthand in the sky a secret.
Nothing can spell out the darknesses
we half memorize.

Poets are too superstitious

to question the frogs’ oracle-like rhythms for answers. In the daylight
we’d like to ask

if the planet can think out loud
for us in brash bold syllables. At night
when the moon

goes pale we cover our ears,
hunch down like frogs shutting out frogs.
We won’t even

peer like they do out of the corners

of our squeezing eyes.

-- P. Hurshell, Seattle. WA.
For the tourist at the death camp outside of Krakow

In this room they let you try
to watch an oven door open very wide. Squint
or peek: beyond is still inside
whether you’ve got the guts to look at it
or not. You think even the oven’s
fire-flakes have flickered out a long time ago
so what can be left but ashes, you’re
sort of braced for ashes only they’re
gone, swept out by the handymen-
guards and then dumped some place practical
like a ditch or a pasture, a river,
whatever was roomy in the old days when space
was lost. The oven’s neat inside.
Somebody tries to keep it quite shiny. You think
maybe beyond reflects.

Beyond: it hunches behind the door
as quiet as if it’s been expecting you (hello)
and even wondering what took you
so long. It seems to swell slightly the way silence
does when it almost breathes, silence
like squished sky expanding -- once a door
usually shut gets swung open
by the guide. You can hear the door, kept
well-oiled. No scritches. Just
beyond lifting itself. Preening a little.

Outside a breeze lifts some dust
in your face and you can’t help wondering
if it could possibly still hold part of
-- but the tour’s long and you’re probably tired --
a sliver. Piece of ankle bone …
old grit anyway. It hurts your eyes now you
and beyond have met.

-- P. Hurshell, Seattle. WA.