

# Beer, for my Gravediggers

*by* Morgan Atwood

That first cold sip of beer  
grave dust dry on your lips  
is a miracle  
payment for doing Gods work  
Heaving the soil onto the hallowed emptiness  
each shovelful echoing dully  
around the small shape inside the box  
The emptiness that used to be a man  
After that work, a cold beer is something holy  
The can sweating, you roll it's unopened coldness  
between dry hands and across your neck  
It's cheap beer, but cold  
you welcome that rushing hiss and the following  
long drink of chilly wetness washing away  
the parched, dust dry, cotton mouth  
of grave-digging in the desert sun

Filled, you look at the mound you've made, higher  
the volume of a box, than the surrounding earth  
The women place flowers, and the men stand leaning  
on shovel handles, and old men on their sons  
The honor guard quietly away, silver piping rippling  
glittering across their blues in the coming-noon sun  
as they slip off, duty done, strangers as they came  
Rough hands at your shoulder, grabbing, squeezing  
You smile, nod, shake hands and drink your beer  
A man, alive, standing among men  
in the little desert churchyard, tens of miles from a town  
Grave dust on your hands, covering your boots  
a promise

