

2018

Appalachian Vowels

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Recommended Citation

Wagenaar, Mark (2018) "Appalachian Vowels," *Birmingham Poetry Review*. Vol. 45, Article 100.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/bpr/vol45/iss2018/100>

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Mark Wagenaar

Appalachian Vowels

soften the day's glare a little,
long vowels soft as the footsteps
of the lost regiment said to walk these woods,
soft even through the teeth of a mechanic
with a plug of chaw in his cheek.

He breaks a branch from a dogwood
(in a soil that still gives up musket balls)
next to the empty puddle-shot parking lot,
while we shoot the shit

because the day's done
& the bill's settled. He's as many stitch-lines
on his hands & face as I do—

& in this we are kin, misspent or
well spent youth. No one knows his time,
or what's around the corner, & in this,
too, we are kin, hundred bones &
21 grams of soul, by one guess.

He scattered his father's ashes
last month upon one of the nameless hills
near here that hold generations—
just a little cloud on the air, he says.

Cloud that opens a hollow in us
where it rains for years,

it's the dead, not
the living, who demand the most.

We bear them as these Blue Ridge Mountains
surrounding this hole-in-the-wall garage
bear their dynamited ridges,

blue aura
still there though, here to the end
of time, blue shine, some trick of light

& isoprene walking the hills—
lost regiment, blue shades all the way
down to the Nantahala.
I don't know who'll be in the ascension,
but today the dust we are rises,
kicked up off a gravel road by a short box
three fields over,
 white shroud upon the air
like the shade who came forward from the shades
to greet Aeneas, *have you come at last...*