

2014

Wish

Joe Wilkins
Linfield College, jwilkins@linfield.edu

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Wilkins, Joe, "Wish" (2014). *Faculty Publications*. Published Version. Submission 20.
https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/englfac_pubs/20

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JOE WILKINS**Wish**

From the great meaty boils of wintering burrows
rattlers stir, shudder, & unspool. Stunned blind
they slip & essingly spill
down yellow hills, forked tongues
tasting the gravel road's good heat—
& there, on blue quartz, on schist,
on the cat's eyes of agates & the rocked remains
of ancient, oceanic brethren, they coil
into thick, rippling rings, wedge heads
roosting on the ooze-furled thrones of snakebellies.
A whole road of them. Curled here,
curled there, waiting for the blood
to hiss & rise, the body's whip to willingly
unloop & lick a strike. They wait & praise
the face of the sun, the white fact of it
like some child's warm, enormous,
still-good god. Oh, I'd drive like the devil,
fast & swervy, popping snakes
beneath my tires. I could feel each small thump
thwunk up through my spine—
in the rearview then a dusty ribbon
of red-pocked road. It was as easy
as a wish, a prayer. The way—
hands on the black wheel, foot mashed
to the rust-bitten floorboard—I prayed the sky
might stumble, the rain fall, & the river fill
to the goddamn brim. That my mother
might love the living like she did the dead. Oh,
all that was a long time ago. I have prayed
those wishes down. Today, I hold
my son close, as we kneel in lashings
of rusty grass, watch a quick, dappled snake
slip into this other river. ■