Go tell the children the mountain is trembling,

An earth-moving monster is eating its way

Through grapevines and shumate and wild laurel thickets

And even Sweet William has fallen prey.

Go tell the children their true love is dying,

The whippoorwill’s song no more shall they know;

Go tell the children to bow down in sorrow;

The fullness of mountains-of mountains must go!

Go tell the children to weep for the passing

Of redbuds and sarvis-a sight to be seen!

Tell them to hang down their heads in the sorrow

As they sing, “Green gravel, the grass is so green.”

The flowers of the fringe tree are blacker than midnight.

The blue fruit now lies on the crust of dead earth;

No more shall white flowers hang down like fringes;

O, Go tell the children that I weep at their birth!

Go tell the children that trailing arbutus

Lies in cold ashes of campfires once red,

That pipestem and spicebush now yield to the slaughter;

O, Go tell the children the mountain is dead!

Muriel Miller Dressler

(Appalachia, My Land, Morris Harvey College, 1973)

Things Have Changed

Things have changed.

I no longer know

where the hollows are,

babbling brooks nor mossy glens

where my childhood secrets are stored.

The pungent smell of coal rising from

mountain seams,

The perfume of wild honeysuckle

and mountain laurel blooms,

Chewing the sweetness of birch barks,

Tasting wild strawberries and persimmons

Quenching my thirst from a hidden spring

my lost elixir…

Tainted waters of iron and sulphur

bleed now orange-red

from abandoned mines.

Desolation flows down the mountain sides.

Sarah Cornett-Hagen

From “Coal Camp Child”

Goliath

(They Can’t Put It Back)

Down in the river valley ‘bout a mile from me

Where the crows no longer cry

There’s a great bit earth-moving monster machine

Stands ten stories high

The ground he can eat is a sight

Takes a hundred tons at a bite

He can dig up the grass

It’s a fact

But he can’t put it back

They come and tell me I got to move

Make way for that big machine

But I ain’t movin’ unless they kill me

Like they killed the fish in my stream

But look at that big machine go

Took that shady grove a long time to grow

He can rip it out with

One whack

But he can’t put it back

I never was one to carry signs

Picket with placards

Walk in lines

Maybe I’m behind the times!

You can bet your sweet life

They’re gonna hear from me

I ain’t gonna take it layin’ down

Cause I’m getting’ tired seein’ rocks that bleed

On the bare guts of the ground

I ain’t goin’ to sell my soul

So they can strip out another tiny vein of coal

I ain’t a-movin’ out of my tracks

Cause they can’t put it back

THEY CAN’T PUT IT BACK!

Billy Edd Wheeler

(Song of a Woods Colt, Droke House, 1969)