

## **Digging**

by Eric Ellis

When I still dug holes in the yard with my hands  
hoping I could get to China,  
I was afraid to go to Hell.  
The hole I dug was enjambed  
between the garage and a tall, wooden fence.  
A girl who dug with me said,  
“If you’re bad, you go to H-E-double-hockey-sticks.”  
“Hell?” I said, but she lifted  
a finger to my lips and shushed the sin from my mouth.  
Almost a whole two feet deep,  
the soil at the bottom became moist and cool.  
How could there be a Hell under this?  
I had no knowledge of tectonics or cores,  
magma or pedology.  
I had only this hole in the ground,  
this black-wood fence which loomed over me as though bearing  
down,  
and this sweet-mouthed girl who never missed Sunday school.  
What did I know of Hell?  
When her parents discovered our plans  
to reach China by the end of the summer,  
I reluctantly undid my fruitless labor.  
Scooping the dirt back in—  
my nonarthritic hands, delicate and void of wrinkles—  
I wondered if Satan was sad  
Or if God was happy  
That I was refilling the hole.