

## Sestina for Old Dust Man

Old Dust Man, in your oiled leather skin  
deep-greased with mountain dirt and steeped in musk  
you never take it off

Old Dust Man, don't  
reveal what's underneath, such a secret  
would be too much for me to know. A stone  
kachina you wear rain clouds on your face

you sacred thing, inscrutable the face  
of mountain, lichens creep up rocky skin  
in crevices still damp with snowmelt. Stone  
has longer memory than I. The musk  
of spring exhales the sweet and sharp secret  
resin of rotted needle beds, but don't

be afraid; that resin breath is hale. Don't  
be afraid – Old Dust Man's mossy carved face  
has memorized the rock-snow-mud secret.  
That history is written in the skin  
of oiled leather. The rotted pine musk  
creeps up, from some pre-Cronus time, through stone.

Slippery melting snow, spidered with ice, stone  
spine of giants, glacial masses of earth don't  
sleep – they creep skyward, and the humus musk  
damp and fragrant crumbles from the rock face  
in the sun. Like battered oak roots your skin  
has no color proper, claims no secret.

Still, you look like you know something secret.  
Perched on a low brick wall, a sack of stone  
with your cardboard sign and your leather skin  
– how you find time to come to town, I don't  
know. Under the feathered hat, your brown face  
unworried, you breathe in the shady musk

of old pine and tulips in snow mud, musk  
of sweet ice cream on the warm bricks. Secret  
mountain thoughts, I see them still in your face  
like spider ice, orange lichen, moss on stone.  
It's just for show, the pocket change, you don't  
spend it; just for show, the leather root skin,

you don't wear it when you return to stone  
Your face is not a secret, just unknown  
The skin of time, the earthy musk of bone.