

Michael S. Harper, Song: I
Want a Witness (Pittsburgh:
University of Pittsburgh Press,
1972)

Kneading

She kneads the kernels, grains,
powder of the filled containers,
and makes the bread that fuses
my sons and the world of the house,
and the dust is a resin of her face,
and she is kneading again.

With a scar shaped like an anchor,
an inch-long break at the wrist
where she hammered the window jamb,
and the soft belly of my own furred
animals, these sons quiver in the shadows
of her dress, faced into the crevices
of her tenderness, and the kneading.

The two absent boys who linger in the bread
of the kneading hands, in the eyes
and ears of the mother, kneading,
go, back and forth, with their real
brothers, hitching themselves to these germs;
and their father chews the meat
that passes into their mouths,
these juices from kneading, these gums
torn with the teeth of death, the death
of those like them, living, and eating
this kneaded bread, their mother's
and their father's kneading, this meat.