

King David

Jeff Friedman

Five hours a day,
 while tending the sheep,
 I practiced slinging stones
 at a grass spot
 marked on the trunk
 of a tree. The bark
 shattered. The sheep
 mulled through the field,
 their eyes rimmed red,
 like worried patriarchs.
 At night in my tent
 I didn't dream
 of the beautiful women
 who would one day
 become my lovers.
 I didn't dream of
 the enormous wealth
 I would capture from the Phillistines
 or the melodies I would pluck
 from the strings of my harp
 to chase away
 the evil spirits
 that plagued Saul.
 I dreamed of hurling a stone
 that would smash

the skull of a warrior
 and bring me glory.
 When I faced Goliath,
 I acted out a scene
 I had rehearsed in my mind
 a thousand times.
 The stone embedded itself
 in the giant's forehead
 like a final dark thought.
 I sliced off his head
 with his own sword
 and held it up
 for God to see.
 Only I, David,
 greatest king of Israel,
 understood his hunger
 for human sacrifice, the love
 in his murderous heart.



Jeff Friedman's poems have appeared in many literary magazines, including The American Poetry Review, Poetry, The Antioch Review, The Missouri Review, Kerem and New England Review. His first book, The Record-Breaking Heat Wave, was published by BkMk Press at University of Missouri-Kansas City.