

The Fable of Prairie Coal

(Spring cowpies placed in storage
cooked bowls of winter porridge)

When Great Grandpa was young piles called buffalo dung
were, to pioneers, worth more than gold.
Such a treasure, new found, freshly mined from the ground
would be hauled into town to be sold.

Folks could mix chips with loam to form bricks for a home,
or fill chinks, and line cellars and stalls.
Prairie boys on a fling rolled dung marbles in spring,
toting shooters in their overalls.

Farm girls mixed dung with hay to form pliable clay
that resembled brown biscuits 'n grass.
Such tasks were done outside where balls baked till sun-dried,
losing odorous liquids and gas.

With meat cleavers in hand,
farm wives often would stand
by the hour, chipping chunks of the stuff.
Piles were stacked on the floor
of the porch near the door,
at the ready if weather turned rough.

Briquettes hurled by a sling
brought in food on the wing,
like wild turkeys—or frogs on a bank.
Preferred premium type
was aged dung well past ripe,
since non-petrified kinds often stank.

Prairie coal turned to rock
before blizzards could lock
folks indoors like the fabled three bears
who endured nature's freeze
with both comfort and ease
as they supped by the stove in their chairs.