

## Geodic Poet

Since the flamen dialis was not supposed  
To spend a single night away from his bed, and since  
The poet likes to keep tradition, he arrives at the site

Wrapped in his surrogate bedsheet like a toga'ed Roman  
Or a brisk ghost in its crackling aura. One book  
Opens another, one grotto leads to another, he has made

Fast friends with the speleologists who are  
Retired miners, and astronomers in reverse; they will open  
New grottoes for him, the baby; on this miraculous day

They have opened five, one after the other,  
With picks gently through the walls of each, the poet  
Quivering in his sheet, his hair electrical, holding up

His lantern, the miners taciturn, hacking  
At the quartz-back of the just-discovered cavern, then standing back,  
The poet creeping through the ragged crystal hole and calling

'It is another grotto!' as a shining smell  
Diffuses out, all smile, surrounded by scintillae. It was like  
Excavating a giant bunch of frozen grapes

Whose juice had crystallised, chamber upon chamber  
Packed with millennial crystals, and with an odour  
Of chalk and alcohol which had distilled

And lain there undisturbed a billion years;  
The poet should take first breath, in case of poison.

Peter Redgrove

(from *Dressed as a Tarot Pack* (Taxus, 1990))