

Ellen Steinbaum

The man who was swallowed by a whale

off Cape Cod was more tasted than swallowed,
taken into the mouth but not drawn down
into the cavernous bulk
 where Jonah,
 so legend goes, spent three days and
 three nights after being flung from the boat
 on the way to Tarshish

not swallowed, but scooped up, sucked into
the hot wet terrifying dark, rank and airless
like a quick glimpse of hell
 not like Geppetto gulped down
 or Pinocchio after him, though they were
 both fiction or James Bartley (who was real)
 in the late 1890s found alive in the stomach
 of a dead harpooned whale

but this time in less than a minute spat out
like a hair, bit of eggshell—it must have felt
like an eternity but less than a minute
 not enough time to think of a gourd or of
 Nineveh or other great cities where there were
 six score thousand persons atoning for sin
 and also much cattle

Ellen Steinbaum is the author of four poetry collections and a one-person play. Her work has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize and is included in several anthologies including *The Widows' Handbook* and Garrison Keillor's *Good Poems American Places*. An award-winning journalist and former Boston Globe columnist, she writes a blog, "Reading and Writing and the Occasional Recipe" which can be found at her web site, ellensteinbaum.com.