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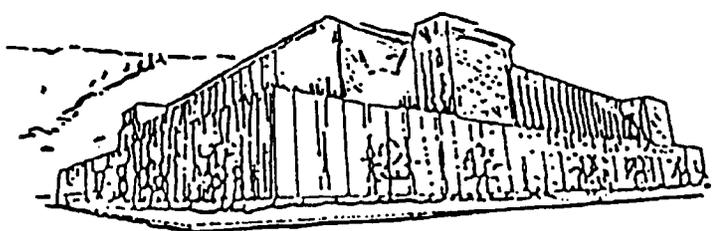
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Watch

by

Martha Sutro

B.A. Wesleyan University, 1987

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

1998

Approved by:



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Ice Seeming

Day in the light,
milk in the chill,
icicles in
disbanded night,
denying night
the swell of
cold or seams
of cold whose
edges cut

the daylight.
What figure is
standing? What figure
moves? Clicking
on stems, skin
of blue winters--
what opens
a mouth against
its warm chest?

Residual

Only a bridge that spans the channel
is still lit by the day.
Only a burnt rim left
above the mountain, blacker
heights up the gorges.
Dunes of rubble on the beaches
hold pockets of heat. Kelp withers
to tissue on rust, heat clings to iron,
to the boats hemmed close in Dog Bay.
I follow steep pines and
fireweed to the cove below town.

Lead surge of sea traces
to crest and escaping crest--
the bow of each boat
shines out against each island.

The pine hills collapse
behind me. A lit sliver
of stream runs through
a strait of ash, a glitter,
a tear, a line that glows red.

The chokecherry loses
its spotted leaves in August.

Round in the stones, the ragged
scraps of bottles. At a place
in the sand where a keel dug
a fissure, I find the nubbed shells
of crabs, the wasted fin of a blackcod.

Watch

A shirt blown full
in a western field.
A wind shirt.

A mountain, a horizon, a line
of wings in the distance. Mountain
at horizon in an arc.

A link in the the river
where mergansers light
the black current. Weeds.
A glass sleeve.

A dog riding a trail down
in a flume towards a city blurred
out of its grid. A rail
picked up from rust.

Shoelaces beside a shed
withered beneath a roof.
A jacket wrapped in leaves.

Dandelions caught
on the shore--discarded
tails in the shallows.

Rain storms unable
to find a pond. Grass
unable to break.

Signals from a kite lifting
as a blackbird calls, stammers--
calls.

Mother at Stove Point

Juggavine, perilous, closes off the pines
or the bay behind the pines. We could
tangle through them, draw ourselves
beyond the meal and pleasing ruin, clots
of wood the net devours.

Stand on the level floor. Stand on needles.
Which floor? The ditch and the ditch
keep the tar too straight and sweetly
narrow. No turn around.

Not her town. Not her peninsula.
Who can say what the bigger child
will do? He craves the wrinkle
already beginning in the spray.
All he hears is cicadas, a long
rushlike pull on the pines, abandoned.

And one crow on every limb. She
can't see the bay or the sand huts
at the end of the road. Still wants
a cut off engine. Wants the children
knit together--

Which floor? Two articulations--
one tide, one child closing out another.

Each Track

At the end of the road, hoofprints
appear, matched half-to-half
where they interrupted the ice,
where direction turned and
flat dusk took a deer inside.
There is the click. Not ice, not
the hoof, but the squeeze
of limbs overhead, twigs underfoot,
the joints just breaking or splintering
and the distortions of cold,
impeccable trunks of black, rose
sky, the vertical matter tipped above
the stream's dim murmur, the thin
endurance that has no care
for winter or temperature.

There is no triumph
of winter or temperature because
it pushes my hands to my stomach
or since the deer is startled into
sharper breath. The hooves.
The hard answer. The deer leaves
her print in a frenzy of
brittle energy, not for the darkness
that gathers the trees in a moment
and says nothing.

And the rime
crusting the surface shows the
raised, frail pitch around
each track.

In the Tenth Month

Clamour by clamour, iron to iron,
the pipes are interrupting my decision.

The hiss of steam has taken over
the third floor for decades, leaked
into the dream of the student, dripped
into recitals and murmurs
with the steadiness of rainfall.

I am paring the cucumber.
I have tossed the rind of the cantaloupe
to waste.

This is two paintings on the wall, one
rubbing the robe of a hilltop
to another, one
rubbing ochre to rose until rose light takes over--

What is written in the little books
is clear on certain seasons for bulbs,
clear on the borders in southern gardens--

this is the fourth call of the thrush, my
skinning the avacado, throwing
the pit to the birds, their broken accumulations
continuing past the window.

And the rapid scurry from below, the thin whine
of water measures the numerous leaks dripping
into my hallway. The room
goes still in a hissing division.

Each time the ochre and ultramarine
compete and darken

they fold in, they flex
and untry their arrangement.

I can hear rain anytime--

Rehearsal

In his mouth I find flint, a load of filings.
I find culverts, a thin dam, a *furrow*
a *rain*, a throat
scored evenly by undressed stone.

Choked debris settled in the corners
and a pulse in the distance runs away
like prairie clouds.

I find squalls thick enough
to toughen bands of rain. Damp curves
give way to swells in a current and
the nearest tips are riddled with holes
bit through by worms.

This time the stage is vaulted in pure blue.
He has designed a refrain. He wants to rehearse.
I stand in an opening offstage.

He asks "Where is comfort?" Comfort
on the patch of sawdust that lasts until summer
on the north side of the arbour. Or the comedy

of oak leaves in the gutter, the lifted stems swaying to and fro.

"A towel for the banister" he says. And a thicket
downstage. A brush for the drum
when he speaks.

Broken scaffolding floats dead on the floor.
He says it again:

Let it all come down.

He stands. I balance above him.

Triptych

1.

I felt a double bitterness the night
I watched the drive behind me: it was engorged in red
and folded in as tail lights pestered further on
with speed--and out the front, headlights,
white, reflected corky brush
and I was ten amongst the path of both.

Neither movement seemed to know or pull my eyes
to either place as petals did, printed and reprinted when
my mother gardened sometimes--consuming afternoons.

Later, she lay in half-sleep,
trying to say a word or two for me--small
reason for evening

but I let her go.

The zealous petals claimed her eyelids
and bleached the day against her hands and me.

2.

Green plastic dolphins figured in the photo--
my horoscope, a picture, yesterday. A
Marine was walking the other direction.

Tunisia, dolphins, his straight moving gait,
five paces through the grass. My secret is
holding the photo close and wondering
which butterfly will stop beside my book.

3.

The print will show exactly as it was,
even the light and captive snow in courtyards:
Tokyo, December, 1961--
red shadows down the shingles, muted bells
and thrush of starling wings beyond the touching
roofs.

Just as the mat and frame enclose
the print (but sighs and other traces creep
into the hall; rain begins to spin
on slate outside the autumn window here),
the print is purely held against
the combing, sifting, gathering-after that
Tokyo in that season anticipated.

I am hearing words, downstairs, piano
keys lightly jumbled--all the words we've heard
before. What was the beauty in the temple?
How did the roofs mix together
so that they were one?

In Motion

Peaked hedges, the lawn in green attention.
I lie on my back. One hand closes a switch of blue space.
One hand takes that shape.

A baseball, the tin whisper of a cricket--
corners of the yard scatter to an edge
where crabapples rot into spongy
clots of gold.

I count seven windows on the house,
an arch in the attic, two squares
by the door. The top
of the crabapple tree runs through sky--tree--sky.

Ardent ribbons of daylight founder against hedges,
the front steps, the chair leg. Tin foil
wrappers shift on the tea-table.

All the fingers fixing the tea-set.
Bright silver, loose steam, oranges,
spare figures of saucers and tea-spoons
in miniature forms, in tin foil, in the botched
segments of the home.
One hand in the thickest type-set.
One hand in the sky.

Entropy

Sunflowers hang their heads
in the slate light of the window--engorged,
old globes at the end of summer.
Not everything is unpacked.

Dim motions of roots and moth wings thrum
and push. Air off the street lifts, wanders out to trees.
Sheets form a dim terrain at the foot
of a bed. All still, the sycamores, machines,
rutted gravel at the edge of the park.

Late today I lean over molasses bread.
The sun gone. Crumbs, heavy with sweat,
condense against the sleeve and the black
knot of the loaf--

the scar deepens every night, sinks
to a twisted cleft. Underneath whitened creases,
the palm thickens.

Not everything is unpacked. Under the counter,
hard twists of newspaper stuff the hole where
the rat comes in. I take down the flowers and the floor
is covered in a shrewd, bright dust.

Not for Travel

Unbloomed white, the whale flank
in fitful sea foam. Irrevocable,
bits of the glacier dislodged, dispersant,
lifted on a current blindly nosing

up fjords and back. No place for boats,
--and not for travel, though odd spikes
on icebergs figure navigation, form

gunwales and holds and keep uniced
pools--water within water. You say
the chute of sky, close-hung, chokes
against the cliffs and silent threads

of waterfalls and flaws the farthest tracts
of sea, unseamed. Sea against sea loses
against the walls. Buoy to buoy is past--

fixed channels, markers, red and green
blinking in the mist. Now all is mostly
narrow, the course of unbeached shore,
white luminosity differing from white

unseen and cut, the non-white of sea bottom
nothing for the whale or the whale's distance
as it rises, sinks and empty land appears.

Lagoons are the only hidden chambers.
Five lagoons. One granite island. Radios
cannot reach us. Swell to swell, suspended
before the mouths, we hesitate--gain--lose

and find a single thread of current, lift
precipitous, fall and lift, pass
across each entrance.

Concessions

I hid the books with small print.
I hid most of the books.
I put charts on the wall, of islands
in a chain, of open terrains of sea,
only a shard of mainland at the corner.
I brought out paper and charcoal, sponges
and a wick. I brought out the oldest map
of the glacial cirque where we met and
where, rim by rim, the sky went blackly
to silence as we left.

My clothes are copies. Your clothes
are copies. Prompts to break the hesitations
of others, prompts for rainfall, even *prompt*
and allusions to water itself--all yours.

This evening, the pigeons in their hutch
scratched berries into stony heaps
and the cooing stammered gently
into my alley. Even from a height
I see smears of green on their necks,
the glint of beaks at the wire,
wire enmeshed in the trees.

I practice my stance. I practice
my gait. I return to the checkout with
pears, pints of milk, starter bulbs, an onion. I
practice the method of pulling out bills
in torn folds.

Again and again, I put my shoes in their order.
Left cold for weeks, the iron stands on the sill
where the moon catches it in a bright arc. I lay
sheets of newsprint on the open floor space.
I can trace your hand, trace your arms, the turns
at each joint tipped and almost wing-shaped.

Already Matter

And then the inside. I found out
what those in the basement
are saying. They are speaking as engines
do, with oiled pistons, four engines

at once, grinding chambers out of chambers.
They are speaking of decline, my coat,
my arms falling slack in the last
strands of winter. The figures

step, here and there, in the unquenching
hour that is already passing.

I have let the light in. I have paced
each room with the purpose
of a king, a carriage, gazed at the world
and them in hesitation, in willingness. Their
voices, their questions thrust

dusted wings, bits of voltage, vaulted,
up into my schedules. My tape is full.

I lie on linoleum and dream
of flight's cousin. Nothing out
my windows requires my speech.
Nothing went before these conversations

that have thatched over the serene planks
of daylight. Outside the tips
of plum blossoms are white-torched.
I can almost hear them, the voices,
gathered in preparation to think.

Monsoon

Is this the mud that we use? Are these
the ears of the rhinoceros? And this the tail?
Is it cooler? What gorge in the jungle is too
flooded this year? What engines can find us?
Is it dewing? Is it always dewing? Does a
human hand fit the rocks? What figures are deep
in the river? What figures are standing? What fall?
Are clouds covering the mountains? Do these coins
have flat edges? Do they fall in the shape of a crescent?
Do they fall with a sound? How old is this word?
This nation? How long will we be here,
burning our letters at this camp in the monsoon?

Clearing Out

Saturday. Morning in the juniper--
dead spores, sparrow-shaped, notch slivers in my gloves--
All day pulling thistles up by their extravagant
throats, pulling thistle and bamboo
to my shoulder, to the edge of the road. Every
sharp bundle to the bright corner of the lot
in piles, in torn ramparts.

There was a range in the kinds of winds we needed.
Wind potent with fronds; wind frail on dry tundra; wind
shifting course across lakes.
Heat dusted up from another quadrant
in rough circles, in effort. I cared for my fist,
the miniature slashes the flat grass had made.

We were not bound. I could not say
we were spent for one another.
I had methods of copying gestures:
my hands extended, my hands raised
as if for a torrent.

The current can pull these boulders from the riverbed.
High banks of clouds gathered and I found
these things: caverns of precise darkness
in the garden, thistles crumbling out
from the rocks. At dusk, the river flattens out the sky,
the same blue wash, almost joining.

Poem in Virginia

My father and I go out
in the lush, the colonial air.
Routed and pocked, the green morning
invades itself.

We are trying to find the ruin, red
basements clumped under redder soil.
Magpies leap to fenceposts, wet
grass follows behind us.
The throng of earth holds up
every patch of spring's decay--
dead log the juggavine will tangle,
torn ear of the bull.
Clay pots meet wing bones;
polished stems meet cedar bark
and seeds.

And the ruin stands
at Sabot Hill, arches open to sky.
Four walls of holes, washed brick
and a single elm long sheltered
by the south columns.

I seize upon the slick
roofs of barns and the slick horses.
They stand in alert facings,
then kick away at the sight
of the black umbrella.

Island Sea

Burrowed, then buried
still beneath the house
rungs, in slightly
loose and dampened
strings of sea-grass--
the shells we sleep on,
the crooked wormwood-
bittered and stung
shells of crayfish,
crabs, their ten-footed
triggers in unwintered
corners, familiar,
uncast by the grained
shades of wicker
and sea-wood.

Sea-pool, every
evening, a necessary
web-erected gull
and pipers span
the absent shore and
the youngest uncle
wades, gives shade
to a luster on his
chest. His skirt
lingers in the circles,
floats in four blooms
between the crags
of night mist, all
the warm-white ruptures
shriveled, relentless,
almost breaking

the privacy of the small
season. We set
cots like small dams
on the porch, wait
for the night and broken
sheen on a single
palm and the several
tones of surf to relent.
We sleep. The milk-
white grass goes
unsunned, follows us out--
split kinks of
light through planks,
shells a nobby dust,
some streaked
blue black, one
with a macula
dead center.

Prelude to Autumn

Coarse trails lead away to meadows,
to a pump house, to a mussel-bladed shore.
Red stars filter crookedly through limbs.

Bring pine beams.
Bring a tarp. Lines
at the lake shore fade black
to black, swallow to narrows
in the west.

Bring bones from the woodshed.
Grosbeaks disperse in the meadow
beyond the bog. Where they find seeds
they cluster in pairs, tear at the reeds
as with teeth.

Men and young boys pulled brush piles
apart and built brush fires. At the tip of
four pines sparks saturate the stars and
rub like small heats the smear
of the dark and the swell
of their voices.

Bring beams. Bring pinewater. Bring burns.
Douse the soft pits in vinegar and resin.

Feel slickness of face, of forehead.
Pull up sleeves, bring bare the elbows.
Bring hands, hot and brown, to the table.
Hold open the windows.

At the Capital

Stop here, I want to compare. The buildings, the tilted streetlamps.
We come out of the museum, a weekday evening.
First, put your hand on my arm. A man
on the steps leans on his umbrella. A siren, the sky
gunpowder and burnt red.

The river collapses on itself where ice
hugs the bridge pilings. Will a photograph
collect the yellow lines off the surface?
Show me your hands.

I feel the heat. Come near--wind
pulls on your shoulders, pulls on your hair
and the stiff broken grass.

The magazines in your house
are catalogued by country. One thing
I want is the noise to increase. I want the noise
in the distance to become more than paper,
more than air that separates bodies--spin
of wires and newsprint, water
filtering under the ice.

A knee and fragments of bark will appear
in the frame. The elderberry bushes are all frozen.
I cannot accept any changes, even one comma,
from the agreement. Low clouds erase the lights
of airplanes. They cannot see the bridge from
the windows.

Mother

Roses. I have three.
I picked them on the forward deck
where the bow keeps a loose measure
in foam. One rose past blooming.
One small bluish-peach.

She pulls the petals off.
They slip in the wind, trail
in gluey cups. In the last of the three
is a fish with a barnacled eye,
swimming.

We lean the rose, its few
petals remaining, over.
Water rushes out.
The black and nervous fish rushes out,
slaps on the ocean below,
joins other fish.

Oranges

We should cease. Cease sharing. Cease
the metal drum and carols. Cease the family.
The spaniel. The sister, child.
How many boxes of stained glass does it
take to make a wise man? Emptiness
on the high shelves. A hidden book
we should cherish, elephant chairs here and there.

If the sea came this far inland
we would stream, back and back. Waves.
How many? All of them.

A rim on the black surface. See how
they thread, the oranges, stem to stem, create
a great skirt for the tree. Clots of lint on the needle
keep the crowds bellowing *our clouded hills*
at a distance. Clots of ash keep shrunken
and blank the fire.

This particular season we call these
the fruits of our era. I have never wondered
why they came to be so green among us.
Orange upon orange. One here that is nearly
too bright.

It is not a walnut. Not a grape.
Take it up as if its halves were good enough
for gifts, as if it would glow sharply at noon
and never drip at the holes. Oranges
rot in bruised sponges, dangle funged, seeping
until the next season.

One End

I stand by the bamboo, on the patio,
my arches pressed to the stone.
I stand. Grackles burst the July hour apart.
My hands try to braid twine
into a bracelet, twine that will not adjust,
not lie in an arc. One end
dangles freely. I can only offer
my wrist, only clear out the twigs
that have shattered on slate.

I look up. It's 4 o'clock.
A crescent of yellow sticks to a roof.
Over the top of the neighborhood,
the rim of the afternoon gathers
in a quick beat.

The grackle in the bamboo flings its black wings
to the trees and creeps up the long sky,
the froth in its motion just beyond my feet
standing on flagstones, beyond twine
that unwinds, that slips to a looseness
and does not breathe.

Ivy clutches the rocks.
The birds pull their own disappearances
from the stand of bamboo.

Her Distance

Someone is leaving in a pink jacket, crossing the park.
At 3 p.m., someone is leaving, after the mild hours, after
she's left her room, the room with cups lined
straight on the sill, ivy dried in the pot.

Where the path crosses the park, where the jacket dwindles
out of sight--she is crossing the road, stopping on the curb.
She left her mother, her mother and the machines,
the bottles roped together in the cupboard, the petticoat
in a snare.

Someone is leaving. A car stops, a car goes--
movement, always movement. It's the only way to think.
The cigarette picked from the shirt pocket, the newspaper
torn on the sidewalk. She left her mother, who stands
at the sink washing celery,

who stands with her back to the window, where light falls
on a tin sheet and apples rot in the bowl.
The pads on her fingers are withered. She slices,
she washes, she discards. How calm she is.
Her apron rides in a wrinkle above her hip.
She won't be touched.

Two Canyons

Only two canyons here
in the most beaten and bright
hour. Snow on pinon. Snow
ribboning walls. A hog

with a shattering gait. Hawk
in a triad of shadows. I
come looking for the neighbor.
I come looking for Paul.

I tried to get away. Tried
one canyon, not a labyrinth.
Paul skims pale clay
from feathers, skips shards

of canyon rubble across powder.
In a whisper of sand, the widening
beat of the hog in a vestibule.
Paul is gone. I have tried

exiting up across cliff bands
then hurtling forward. I took
stiff moss from the cornstone,
stretched it. Left it upturned.

Paul is still ahead. I am scraping
for his figure in the crisp
snow-strips. Gently for his ear.
Gently for his kneepoint.

Gulf Stream

It was not drifting or drowned
how I wanted him. Only
coming up for air between phrases,
between segments of the journey.

Held together: four winters, charts
showing Old Harbor, a pair of islands
named for saints.

And him, is he lashing sets
of gillnets together? the steps
for stepping down out of the squall?

Rain fell when we swam. Rain fell
on the far shore and our bodies drifted
in pale forms beneath us.

Three Matches

Three matches and the bitter end of a stick.
A cowboy with his collie and his kid
on a swingset. It casts them through and thickly
through the dull morning--

Wednesday. A turn. A bid
for sky the young boy's feet already making.

Unexploded, time now. Still steep, encumbered
only by the open quadrant of spring.

Its own flowering is never numbered,
never as easy as the limit there--
man, dog and boy for whom several sections
of breeze are enough

above patches, bare
and exhausted, of dirt and for whom sleep
is measurable--a mask, reliable, unlit,
slow enough to cohere at a height. Heedless.

Not Only Brilliance

Not only brilliance leads to this decay--
the leaves are crowded thick in cul-de-sacs,
in mongrel alleys, shipping yards, the day
lit, damper stories underneath the racks

of rain. With everything here, everything
to lose, I hold apart the oriole
rhythms and the shattering yellow ringing
in the maple tops. I roll together, roll

the bowl of my body into autumn's body.
The equinox is breaking. The mustard
colored larch descends the clouded ridge down
stream. My hands, cupped enough in the granular

light of morning, shape a reliquary.
We always take this gully to the sea.

We always take this gully to the sea
down through uneven passages, down
ribboned banks and shadow-tangled streams.
I follow after you, the rim of you.

I follow after, not to tame or stay
or separate us from coasts, from round,
slick surfaces sliding beneath gray
boats.

Wind lifts and tremors, now still, now sound
and swallowed, dumb and numberless.

We'll string together little riches--
a pack of tools, the tanks and pipes we use
for spawning fish. Night to night and fitful
for their fresh and pressing beds, they
swarm and progress, swarm star-darkness.

Swarm and progress, swarm star-darkness--
we diminish in the pale of other
shallows. I wish I were out and gliding, fixed
in the frozen cathedral of winter ponds.

Have you seen me stretch out, span the arctic tip
to tip of the ardent windy view?
Have you taken me, embarked with me, gripped
me gripping to the blue railing? --Cruise
the ice-floes of the fragile sunsets. Skip
the archipelago and motor
further. We are going to the thinnest
rocks at sea, where skua is the only bird

of winter--where rings but not quite solid
rings converge, continue in a gentle friction.

Rings converge, continue in a gentle friction--
they change or cut the words I want to say:
Stay. Return. The farthest islands. I stare
a little, try to speak a little, split

the sharper edges off of leaning forward
for you, assume that I've made it into
the heavy, serious portion of your torso
and spoken there, loud enough, brave and soon.

I can wait to raise my arms in the shapes
of skyborn spreaders. The winds are easy here.
I take the ragged sea-rose, tear it, make
a ring around your silent domain, the merest

arc and arc. You have built your own figure.
You build and dazzle your own hemisphere.

You build and dazzle your own hemisphere,
send the blue and scattered corners to the gales
already breaking there. At dawn and all evening
you scan the radio for dim refrains
of voices reporting knots in every area.
Very few frequencies collect.
It's 5:05, a Friday. You can add
the sea level to your own amusement,
look at the slate-gray swelling in your eyes.

Limbs and heavy snows have fallen on the tight
and silent shore. Moonlight barely eases
through the canopy and gulls disperse--
you scan the radio for dim refrains.
Where you are absent, I emerge, remain.

Where you are absent, I emerge, remain
in motion, rolling farther, every angle
thrown to pit, to blacker pit, through gray terrains
of oceans passing--now and then the tangled
lengths of cords, sighs, the strain and close of iron.
I am the farthest forward in the bow.
Nothing can break, no measure of horizon
binds to lip of ocean, to waning spur, to crown.

A hundred times I submit to corners.
A hundred times I dream of loft at sea.

I've made a way through brittle nets and storm
curled lines. The light slips in to lee
and night moves by in whistles to the east.
The prow goes searing forward, my speed, my heat.

The prow goes searing forward, my speed, my heat,
my fable of the frailer ocean air.

I practice what I practiced, measurements
of certain shells, of shade turning to shade

on silent, ink-green surfaces.
When no one else is awake, I take custard

and limes to the window, expect the flood
of murrets to fly wildly against the glass.

Am I to repeat? More and more, I expect
the unstoppable, a turn in the currents,

my own dull panics at no evening weather.
Say the minutes have all disappeared

into one late and empty hour. Say
not only brilliance leads to this decay.

Coney Island Poem

Once silted, once bordered, the surf
pulls back its crest. Swimmers
too small for the sun
dip their arms
in the shallows preparing.

The day is nearly
a field of sheens,
a plaque for the unstripped sky.
A woman and her lover

step to the far edge
of the boardwalk. The skeleton
of a set rises behind them, its nubbed
pilings split by the shriveled chill in the air.

The woman does not see or feel what
enters her, a winter spider,
the crippled radiance off
the crown of the bather.
Freight steams out across glass

for another landfall. Tourists
leave for tighter avenues, a wheeling
herring flaps twice in an updraft and

the woman lets her palms brush
the railing, lets a strain push
through the boards.
What precision, what
long tearing fits like the
calm winter air in her cuffs, fits

to the sheath of hair down her back, to
the cowl of grids from above.

Every Sunday she loves
the disintegrating wake of swimmers,
the return of barrel-torsoed men up
the sand, chill stirring from the
flustered bellies. She loves only what
she never loved of the
lover, the hand grasping

two webbed market bags, slice
of wrist above the glove, tight gait and squint
at the sun on high structures,

--a glance always seeming to spread
over or through her. The day

is not a girth. The day can only
partly cover--uncover--the bitter
small sounds of sea-wood, the one side
of her lover already turning to the sun.

Loose North and Another

She hands me a glass with a flaw
in the bottom. A drink. A lip.
Chips deepened to blue.
A fissure in the clean line of a scar.
I wear a jumper with light chains
on the pocket. My arms lift
as a branch lifts and elms beyond
the kitchen upturn their tips
in the morning.

Morning. The earliest moments
of the season. We travel north
every Sunday. Ring-billed
gulls do not belong in prairie terrain.
They make inland mistakes, turn
for the lakes, verging
over-verging on descent every time
snow turns to wet mist and

highways cast the flat glow of noon
to the overfull sky. Impure white.
White. Off-yellow in the backs of clouds--
She and I choose the same pigment and
pigment sticks under our nails

My chest heaves in the heavy motion
of a train. So many pockets of warm air
to run through. An excess of warbler notes
in the frail mesh of hedges and empty
church yards. Air pulled out of us:
a gauze and the bleak push of a river.

Where do we begin listening? She is out
before light in new sandals on the clean earth,
trees ragged and seeded. Dampness, a throng
of stems. Rain in other valleys.

The slightest sweat runs down skin
below my ears. This woman hands me glass.
A hum rises in the outcast day. I feel veins,
fountains she and I saw in the last botanical garden.
She is slipping rosemary in my winter pockets as
a train puts a dark line across the plateau.

She hands me the chipped glass and I call it
by its wrong name; she hands me
gold-handled scissors. The same shade
of skin warms our temples and we walk
to a place where we see bands of movement--

chopped water flying between stumps, alders
just reddening on the far bank. Yellow boats
move into oncoming sun and unmatched birds
scatter every time they find a center.

Begonia

And then you appear. You come out of the field, towards
the old bicycle, towards the hot ocean. Your indigo skirt,

a hard speck on the highway, twists before lemon trucks,
twists in the sun that divides swirls

of bright dust. Families are living
all over this island, gathered in pockets

of singing or beading together the tangerine bags
that glitter. Their sandals are covered

in blue mineral dirt and fringes of ears
from corn packs the gutters. Light

off the water is fixed on your walking
and vanishes after in pinnacles, in pink diamond light.

Bees from the gutters
in broken green cadences skim
all the smooth leaves, all the chips in the sky--

Draining its long hours, the island is tired,
tired enough for your entrance. The dance

is starting as the azure descends.
Your skirt, it is shining against the wash of the sea.