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DÉNOUEMENT ASCENDING

by

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Section I

Tableau  
for Jenny and Laura

It's spring and all that clung  
to us in winter--the quilts, our clothes,  
our lovers--has changed with the weather.  
We sit in the backyard  
pared down, watching  
the shrubs and trees fill out,  
give us privacy. The stubble  
of new grass shows more promise  
than we do, but the sun helps, glazing  
over our anxious skin, giving us  
the glamorous tinge we need to lapse  
into the embrace of summer--warm air  
wrapping around us as we whisper  
of the young men passing by.  
Our bareness, so exactly  
who we are, never changes.  
Each spring we face what's left--  
white flesh, the residue of cold  
nights in our joints, the unveiling  
of our posture--a blur of hope  
no matter what.

(continued)

We slumber on the lawn,  
make nests of our dreams,  
keep ourselves quiet enough  
to let the birds fly close,  
hear how loud their wings can be.

## Supper

It's how the old man  
eats his food, his mouth  
cautiously knowing  
nothing else, receives  
his food like a clumsy lover;  
his only intimate life.

But still there are wishes,  
a slight movement of flight  
in quick shifts of his fork  
upon the plate,  
arranging his meal  
as if each portion  
will surprise him.

"I could waltz across Texas with you"  
for T.R.

Of course I'm excited  
when you ask me to move  
the desert in three-four time.  
It may be jerky, brambles  
sticking to our clothes,  
but our feet toughen with each measure  
sweeping us further and smoother;  
nothing can stop this momentum,  
not even the burn  
from our grasping turns,  
the dizzy air of sun, or our panic  
for a polka that wants to run past rhythm.  
Air lifts, assumes our voices,  
lost in steps, in the beveling  
of our words, syllables curve  
skyward from our pivoting bodies.  
The slope of our phrases gives  
shoulders to the moon;  
and there we balance  
the moon with our thoughts,  
luminous, gliding horizontally, not knowing  
when the prairie will end.



Walk in Late Fall  
(for Diana Khoury, 1958-1983)

Flowers have stiffened to relics,  
air cloisters beneath  
the arch of stone grey trees;  
I step slowly through.  
It's here, at the time  
before hard-edged shadows  
are scattered by snow  
when often I imagine you,  
your bruised body stark,  
marrow evaporating, still forcing  
your fingers to draw a forest  
minutely exposing a final bird.  
There was nothing  
of your tragedy in your sketch  
of the goat-footed man you sent me,  
his head flung  
back with a flute, hair  
twined with petals and sky.

(continued)

The marvel of your secrecy--  
it leaves me stunned,  
even to think  
that I could've had an impression  
on your dying, or that anyone could know  
what they're not.  
Here, where my breath is an ether  
numbing all motion around me,  
is where I would kneel,  
give you my bones.

a handful of twigs  
for J. Hancock

I should write of other things;  
I keep hearing you read  
your haikus, a handful of twigs  
you gave to the lake,  
the simple wood of the words  
will float...  
resting our bodies,  
two unheard sounds on a blanket  
listening to each other,  
overwhelmed with the extremities  
of water, two aimless fish,  
scales reciting  
the dryness of shore  
until we're evenly passed  
between the sun and water,  
feeling the spread of sail  
and your words,  
small boats lingering.

Soon after finishing college and getting married from Hattiesburg they moved with her fifteen cats to Jackson. Their monogrammed gifts, their matching sets of table fare were tightly paraded into their peeling shotgun house. For Ann this was just a stop until New York. She didn't mind the roaches skating down her silver serving bowls. It was a place to practice diction in spite of the odds. But soon her husband's fascination veered to major appliances, dwelled in talk of better neighborhoods. That summer their suppers, charmed by the smell of a litter box, soon stopped. Fanned by her cats Ann flung herself loose on the couch with a coke, a cigarette. The cats skidded across kitchen counters shattering glasses and crusted stacks of plates, licking and pawing silverware behind the stove while Ann read, patiently allowing her hair to stick, her cats to rave in the heat until soon nothing matched.

(continued)

When one day the cats  
shit on the train  
of her wedding gown  
we knew it wouldn't be long;  
a short domestic spree  
for her cats in Jackson, Mississippi.

Forgetting a friend  
for Clem

Of course it's more  
than our sleepless chatter I remember  
sitting early mornings, limp and drifting  
in the Café du Monde, New Orleans, watching  
the sun crack over the river, the startle  
of a warm day.  
The sleek still freighters,  
black dreams in water,  
remind me of that night I'd caught  
in your dark gaze a burst  
jagged and quick like fire,  
the danger vanishing as I sank  
chilled in your embrace, closing  
my eyes to cut the glance from your face.  
And in our waking-to-sleep moments,  
the café rousing, we watched those dark bodies  
slowly glide out of harbor.

\*

For seven years I followed you  
out my back door...  
Atlanta, Indiana,  
wherever you dumped a six-pack,  
spawned a few friends.

(continued)

Your songs of affliction, your unsold art  
inviting me cross-country, I always  
stopped in. Whatever my arms caught  
I accepted.

Once in hyperbole  
we lifted mattresses to the roof,  
stalked the sky naked. We spoke invincibly  
of survival at bars, once talking so long  
we carved lofty stories in the doors.

\*

Now through the dark body of the phone  
your voice leaves each word  
far away from where you are.  
You say things change, and only my breath  
responds, sensing your static return  
to New Orleans, your giving in to home.  
I stutter about dance,  
the hard solo I do, trying  
not to remember that jagged glance,  
that weapon, your soul; only wanting  
to recall the water, those mornings  
we sat on the edge of the water, allowing  
our shoulders to stretch back, opening  
our ribs, pouring out to the waves below  
all we ever had to offer.

## Mirage

Just when I think  
there's nothing left  
suddenly there is motion in the desert  
before me--arms like scarves  
signal me over out of the sun,  
under a tent strewn with pillows,  
plates of fruit and wing. As I stare  
at the billowing walls I'm grabbed  
to embrace a cold metal chest,  
a man in armor who doesn't speak  
but stretches his tongue out beyond  
the grid of his helmet licking  
each crevice, each turn my body takes.

Unable to peek outside  
I ask if this is still the desert,  
has the sand turned to gravel,  
have the dunes become mountains?  
Am I lucky  
to be here?

(continued)



He drapes me in white silk,  
and I float from cushion to cushion  
afraid to know where I am.  
The billows become halls,  
a continuous sway of space  
where I wander, always the clatter  
of his steps close by. I'm allowed to touch  
nothing but him, feel nothing but him,  
his silver hands, the chalice  
from which I must drink.

Hymn #28  
for Marty

Let's sit together  
on your couch.  
I will begin  
by baring one breast  
for your pleasure.  
We will listen to the radio news,  
comment while fondling each other  
how extreme events seem to be.  
It's not that the world  
isn't nice, or that we  
don't enjoy each other,  
but we could be changed  
forever. There is a danger  
in allowing heaven  
to enter our bodies.  
The angels might squeeze  
our kidneys in their ecstasy,  
the saints in glorious rhythm  
could march too heavy down our spines,  
clouds would eventually seep  
into our muscles, saturate our minds.

(continued)

We might find ourselves  
so full of heaven  
we couldn't sing,  
or even stand to praise  
the day we were born.

For Jim Roper

The ground not too hard yet,  
the shovel kicked and scooped  
a place for your hands  
to lift him into.

The shot nothing more  
than a quick cut in the sky,  
the old dog already  
lying down, unable to stand  
but still watching for the sudden  
flock of birds to catch his eye.

Pausing to glance up,  
your eyes continue  
his search. It's your way  
of beginning again.

A Sense of Touch  
for Ann

I.

We grew like damp crystals  
in the summers of Mississippi,  
in the wild arms of honeysuckle  
we bedded deeper each day.

The mud consumed us  
moved us in the slow golden hair  
of the rivers, the sun's rhythm  
in the forest, of heat  
waving from pavement.

It was hard to untie  
our dreams from the ribbons  
that kept our flesh wet  
and sinking.

Always we listened  
to the early evening  
drift of harps.  
Our eyes like gifts  
we were constantly ripe,  
captured at the edge of the porch,  
sweet shadows  
blowing in our ears  
the subtle darkness.

(continued)

II.

Half the days in Utah  
we would sit drinking coffee  
pouring out  
all our warm illusions,  
a sense of touch.

Your cough  
shook the snow  
as we smoked and walked against the wind,  
barely surviving  
the search for jobs,  
the nervous businessmen,  
their eyes like ants  
all over us,  
the snowing turning  
us white  
we dragged ourselves  
like bundles of beggar's clothes.  
The cold hands of buildings  
wouldn't feed us.

(continued)

We felt extravagant at night,  
leaving bars drunk  
and loving  
the close bonds made  
by lovers who passed between us.

## III.

Look at us now,  
we have a history.  
Across the country  
you live in a bottle of snow,  
your eyelashes frozen, your body blank  
from believing you will be fulfilled,  
your pale shape fired  
like a furnace,  
suddenly blasted with joy.

Each day I begin to dance  
I must locate  
another limb, trying to attach it,  
to force the muscle to brace  
me higher than before.  
Each day I awake  
dismembered.

(continued)

When you call we press ourselves  
back against the skull,  
the rough hug of bone  
reviving our voices.



Section II

## Meditation

In winter waking, star-prints  
left on windows, you breathe  
slowly, dress quickly,  
quietly leave your cabin, walking  
into the forest as into a den  
of crystals, columns, and sky,  
where each step tells  
how you're feeling,  
the pressure the snow takes  
beneath you, a sharp  
yet gentle echo of reply;  
the snow is full of light  
and brings you past  
what you think is a morning  
walk, to a sensation  
infinite as a prism,  
a clarity of warmth  
for all you know of the world,  
for anyone whose effect  
you remember, while the white  
branches tumble above,  
and every color possible  
hitting, finds your heart.

## Improvisation

For a moment there is no plot--  
a porch, a guitar,  
the warm day.  
The neighborhood is still  
and ready for the risk  
of an unknown intrusion  
swinging through  
its doors, breaking windows,  
turning homes inside  
out, everything rolling  
exposed on the ground;  
and then the neighbors catch  
themselves giving up  
what they love best  
to keep things moving,  
pushing away the familiar  
table and chair, tumbling clothes  
into the wind with joy,  
arms stretched  
with nothing to hold  
they laugh and spin around the trees,  
yelling, "this is where we live,  
this is where we live!"

The Atchafalaya Basin, Louisiana  
July, 1986

The boat nudges us  
through the idle marsh. Then quickly  
the sky billows ahead--Jenny and I clench  
steel bars each side of the pilot's seat  
while the air boat blazes.  
Our bodies smash and dodge the sudden  
clumps of swamp, the whole boat slashing  
a zig-zag path, then buzzing circles  
through lilies, our backs bracing the sweep.  
When we stop, debris must be dug  
from the boat, insects buried in the grass.  
We brush ourselves off,  
mud on our faces, grass in our teeth,  
and we smile at the carnival  
we've made of the swamp,  
how we've dared to ride its heart in the heat.

(continued)

Hushed after such plunder, our cut and bruised  
arms and legs loiter in the sweaty  
air, the musky smells swinging  
like incense from low-bending  
trees, until we feel the writhing  
flicking from behind dense leaves,  
from beneath brown water.

Slowing down, we duck  
and push away the overgrowth;  
always ahead of the boat  
what could be  
big muddy hands just under  
the water, pulling  
branches and debris down  
into small, quick whirlpools.

We are tempted  
to dip our fingers in  
just to see.

## Riding the Greyhound

Voices in the back  
brag instead of dream.  
I can't sleep,  
it's too hot, even for winter.  
No comfort in the stare of the dark window,  
fidgeting, not fitting  
my legs in one place, while around me  
others have cramped themselves  
for the night in wary positions;  
I sit as if being watched  
for a wrong move.

An old man, worried  
he's forgotten,  
slowly scuffles his way  
to the front, asking the driver  
for a ticket, the driver assuring him  
he has a ticket--all the way to Oregon,  
but the old man keeps asking for help,  
for another ticket to stay on the bus;  
somehow he doesn't believe  
he will be able to go on.

Arrival at Firenze  
Christmas, 1981

All day I couldn't stop,  
archways kept pulling me  
to another plaza, another sweep of stone  
before a church embracing relics--  
the gilded pillow  
under St. John the Baptist's finger--  
indifferent to the cold I kept drifting,  
looping under domes until I found  
stairs that twisted sharply  
to leave me arcing over the city.  
Almost tumbling in my descent,  
quick decisions pushed me  
dazed through narrow streets  
across bridges; I flourished  
through palace grounds and skimmed  
their precious floors, grew dizzy  
looking up at the marble bodies, surrounded  
their smooth enunciation of limbs  
with my small steps.  
Tired, lulled near a fountain,  
in a moment startled and turning  
I regarded the enormous movement  
of pigeons in the plaza,  
a flight so close to hands.

## Last Light

the "Widow" Combs in Appalachia

In a scarf sustaining  
a wafer of face, color pinched  
from her eyes, the old woman  
wishes to be the rock  
she's crouched on, to be the unnoticed  
land, where her fingers  
have dug and groomed all her life,  
where she has many places to rest,  
the ground an eternity beneath her.  
She knows loud razored machines will arrive,  
hack her acres apart, steel gullets  
will eat her trees to their spines, gorge down  
deep beyond water, leaving holes  
for hell to drop in.

\*

But she raises herself, stands  
before their hulking shovels  
by the roots of her muscles,  
demanding their retreat, standing  
long hours with a crippled stick,  
then lying down before them.

(continued)



She shivers and whispers  
to the dirt, rolling slightly  
side to side, enough to curve  
herself in the earth, cupping her hands  
as if rain were falling right to them.

\*

Summoned, the sheriff, his men  
arrive and cleave her from the mountain,  
pick her up like a rock,  
lifting her from each end  
down the road, rudely silent  
while she sinks in cold air.  
She has lost the sense of her bones  
and cannot feel their grip,  
cannot feel the knot of the scarf  
rubbing dirt under her chin.  
In the wind her body flutters,  
buckles like a sagging angel.

## City Park

My dog seeks  
this brave square of land  
everyday. While he jousts  
and counters the multitude of smells  
I follow, swinging  
the banner of his leash.  
Only a schnauzer would offer  
the imperative to any dog  
he meets. I am careful  
to restrain his chivalry.  
In this mystical place  
of picnics and sports we rove,  
fiercely questing the right  
moment to drop honor  
onto the ground.

In memory of a doctor

And so, beyond the destruction of  
their lives no further harm was  
done to them; and in particular,  
they did not have to suffer  
especially long, either in body or  
soul.

--German prosecutor Münzberg

Not too heavy for the hooks,  
twenty scarred children were pumped  
with morphine and hung,  
necks snapped, their bodies stripped  
down, apathetic as clothes  
flung over chairs or beds.  
They were burned, vanished  
in the shuffle at the end of the war.  
The only evidence--snapshots  
of their scars where lymph glands  
were uprooted and skin was scratched  
with bacteria. In each one their heads  
drooped, eyes lost in shadow,  
as if they used to be children  
but now were frail mannequins  
modeling their own demise.

(continued)

Destruction becomes  
a futile term, the apocalypse  
even more absurd. The SS doctor was surely  
efficient in his transformation  
of their lives, in his practical  
rendering of life the same as death.  
In memory of this doctor I cannot  
pretend insight, or inoculate myself  
with pity for his utility of vision,  
in which anyone's suffering  
can be lifted, not  
as in the pieta, but lifted  
far away from embracing arms,  
from the cry of a mother  
for a child.

## Rain Forest

We grew up there.  
But now it's more foreign  
than the moon,  
more than a snapshot  
of paradise, this deepest  
tangle of plant, animal  
and insect, holding  
our two halves together.  
We don't understand  
how all that thronging  
and layered intertwining could be  
so quiet; how all that moves  
is embellished, the nocturnal reptiles  
flying, the strong-jawed fish,  
the metallic sheen of butterflies,  
the jewel-like birds that match  
the vegetation; and how the rain  
which hits hard the top  
of the tall foliage, sifts  
through the maze of leaves  
branching into a fine mist  
all the way down to soak  
the dark forest floor,

(continued)

where orchids multiply  
collect like fruit.

This is not our vision,  
not a place for our hideaway  
plantations, our cattle farms,  
our fear of losing ground.

We shouldn't be afraid  
to simply walk the forest's  
damp surface, each step  
consciously small, trying  
to discover how  
we could ever come back.

Running with the mountains

Watch for snakes;

they love to bake in the sun.

So you run, the valley so perfectly  
posed, your eyes grazing  
the asphalt for anything coiled,  
long or lazy while you listen  
for the roar of trucks or jeeps  
until a car sneaks up and you jump  
fearing you've landed on a rattler,  
but your breathing keeps  
control as you recover stride  
and springing forward the whole road  
empties for you, your body stretching  
to all that's ahead: the fields of cattle  
and fence clustered around  
barns and homes, the space between  
each giving them a place  
you won't forget, how they all  
move or stay together--the cows,  
the fence, the wind, the homes,  
and to one side, how the mountains  
never stop.

Return of the light  
December, 1985

Here in the hospital the glare  
of sun above the mountains is welcomed.  
I do not shield my eyes. I imagine  
how the many friends in the nearby  
mountain valley where my parents live  
have gathered, lifting  
my sick mother with their arms  
overhead towards the clouds, then throwing  
her up to the light,  
catching her  
just in time to throw her  
up again. No one tires,  
their palms resilient as souls  
tossing her up  
until her body clear as light  
no longer aches, until her pain has dropped  
from her like rusted shells  
to the ground, trampled  
beneath the people propelled  
by their own nimbleness and her weightless  
descending, until all arms in unison  
gently let her down.

(continued)



Section III

She looks around brushing her gown  
and mingles with her friends,  
her head briskly turning  
the blue from her eyes more alive  
now than when  
she first felt love.

Two men toast before dinner

Dad offers Earl a slug

of bourbon. They both shift

their weight from one foot to the next,

as if affirming where they are,

their wives desperate with cancer.

His cowboy shirt holding

in his guts, Earl spews out

he's alcoholic, but don't tell her

I'm drinking--her head's full

of lumps. Earl drains out

more about his family, his daughter's

black boyfriend, the color of your shoes,

looking at my father's feet. My father laughs,

suddenly forgetting about his wife,

the weariness of watching

the spoon lift to her mouth,

and remembers world war II when blacks

were niggers in their own battalion,

ignored except to play softball-Earl coughs

for another drink. Dad quietly

gives more, the two men toast

the evening, Earl saying he doesn't care,

the man's nice to my daughter,

(continued)

my father, pushing his shoulders back,  
well, their blood's as red as our's.

Their eyes slowly circle out  
trying to define the horizon,  
discover why a winter evening  
is so warm.

## Corresponding

This winter you write me  
telling me of your father's bad  
heart, how much you watch  
him sleeping. I reply, telling  
of my mother's cancer,  
how the distance from her  
gives me nightmares of feeling  
her shaking, the doctor  
unable with his needle to find  
her liver--at least you're home  
to see how sore his breathing is.  
Two weeks later you assure me  
home is no better,  
how seeing him everyday is a constant  
budget towards death, how each morning  
you must find a new way to brighten  
his room; how the flowers suffocate.

The more the illness comes, the less  
there is to say. I'm traveling  
home more; you hardly leave the house.  
But the letters  
keep arriving. I stack them by the phone.

(continued)

Thin and weightless  
they lie like bodies stacked  
tightly, but more compressed,  
frail as lungs  
collapsed.

At my mother's side

If ever I could be a dark figure  
in the middle of the night, I was then,  
running across

the empty street, darting  
through the street lamps' rigid  
skirts of light to meet  
the hospital coldly before me, worse  
than any shadow from behind.

I rushed in panting  
before the elevator, just in time  
slipping past the doors.

Bloated and barely breathing,  
you lay cloaked with secrets,  
your eyes already closed.

At first I stood, then sat by you, walked  
the hall slowly, the sickness  
from each room intensely quiet,  
yet clicking. The nurse gave  
a signal. I held your hand  
as it turned blue, refused  
to wipe the red foam from your mouth,

(continued)

kept kissing your forehead  
as if I had the right  
to offer blessing.

Finally I receded from the room,  
out into the morning,  
feeling guilty at what  
had been stolen in the night,  
what would be stolen again.



When something deep leaves you  
(for Dorothy Martin, 1922-1986)

Balancing high on the ladder,  
my arms repeatedly  
reaching for the fruit, I fill  
myself with mulberries. Even misshapen  
berries are appealing. I linger  
for the small clump of plumb buds  
to fall and hit me,  
splash me in a flurry of leaves  
jostling with birds. The air is warm  
and gentle like a story told to comfort,  
not like the story of no one knowing  
how my mother first got sick,  
something had left her and kept leaving.

I eat more berries--my fingers are splotched  
dark red, juice stains my tongue,  
the tiny losses filling  
my soul--I close my eyes  
and wait for nothing  
to reply. But my lips respond  
by luring what is deep  
to rise, the reverse of rain

(continued)

in a whisper; unspoken  
words for my mother quietly  
refill the tree.

The words cling  
in ripe clusters. Tender elocutions  
scrawl along the limbs,  
crowd the leaves; birds peck  
at the new sweet fruit that sounds  
in their throats as they fly. I listen  
to all I've ever wished  
my mother to hear.

The space between branches  
echoing to a shimmer in my ears.  
As I open my eyes I lean  
against the trunk, press  
close to the bark, the heart  
of all that circles  
and continues.

Hard Scrabble Pass  
Custer County, Colorado

Nosing up the pass in the foggy  
October chill, I expect the road  
to be slippery, the rock gray,  
my mother's house as still  
as when she died. But as I round  
the first sudden curve  
the slabs of mountainside push  
orange and red from their crevices,  
smudge blue where rock  
juts out from shadow;  
the aspen leaves as gold  
as the air is wet.  
Even the green is lush  
like mink around the bright  
cold streams. My urge to move,  
to sway among the trees and colors  
is given over to the car  
as it slowly swings up the pass.

(continued)

Then tilting with the road  
breathlessly the car  
plunges into the valley,  
the glide down to Westcliffe  
time enough to settle  
all doubts about the journey,  
to know it's never  
hard to be here, in the lilt  
of a valley that carries me  
so vibrantly from land to house,  
from night to day.

Section IV

## The Comfort of Chaos

The afternoon mail suddenly  
exploded with four more  
bills I'd forgotten; already  
the rent was being smuggled  
for food, and just this morning  
the stove refused to light, the car to move.  
When everyday events break  
scattering at my touch, when all  
practical matter shoots forth  
in pellets, then converges to the fine  
point of destitution,  
I duck, climb  
to the attic room, the corners  
snug with books and snags  
of thread and dust.  
Here I can roam with no money, no car,  
just the risk of words  
drives me careening  
through mounds of paper.

(continued)

I smile, nestle in my debris,  
the fortunes of my desk,  
at times clean  
my typewriter keys,  
only to increase the quality  
of my comfort.

Note from a dancer

Diving behind our skin we forget  
most people pay nothing  
to move, but sometimes we feel odd  
just walking, aware of the length of our spine,  
how much we mend and replace muscle  
with thought. When dancing we value  
how our motion utters certainties  
most people don't speak.

Our necks are costly  
in the time it takes to circle  
out the sleep of winter mornings.  
We rehearse for insights;  
our backs must be open, always expanding  
to what we can't see;  
our shoulders willingly must confirm  
the constant voyage of our arms.  
Even the space around us  
becomes irreplaceable  
the instant we begin to move.

But last night we performed in a restaurant,  
dancing too close to tables.

We did it for exposure,  
the customers smiling, their eyes pricing  
dance as cheap, dirt cheap.



## Black Place III

from a painting by Georgia O'Keeffe

Slowing my fall, this hard  
earth. I chisel, press myself towards the opening.  
Then curled like a first I skid past rock, my skin slipping  
almost too quickly, when in a moment  
suspended I drift  
down through dust-packed  
air to the desert below.  
Then the quiet landing,  
shadowless, the small light from my eyes  
useless. I unbend, stumble  
tight and grey, wade  
with dim legs through sand  
towards a moment which dissolves  
and a place of no expectations,  
inhaling a light I've never known.  
Where birds slip through clouds,  
I continue their decline--  
where wings fall to haze,  
then darkness, there is a place  
I know how to fall to,  
where white falls through  
and the lily opens, petals thundering  
as I drop down the damp black stem.

The Art Barge  
Moutauk, Long Island

Roof slanted  
like the slope of a wave,  
it's more an ark waiting  
for a gust in the water.  
The old wooden hull perches  
quietly on the shore.  
From a distance I notice  
how its chipped white paint  
and uneven shape fit  
the beach so well, weathered  
like the littered shells and rocks.  
But as I stroll the decks,  
peering in, the silent rooms rowed  
with easels and mud-smearred tables  
seem ready for a change in the weather.  
If I'm still enough I'll feel the rumble  
of footsteps, the people quickly  
filling the rooms, their fingers  
and eyes hard at work in the light, aided  
by the rhythm of water beside them.

(continued)

Their gestures whirling, each dip for paint,  
each pat on clay would arc  
like the cluster of arms from the dancers  
gliding, their torsos tuned  
to the musicians roaming the aisles.  
None would mind borrowing  
in such reverie. One back  
might turn for a curve  
in sound, or for a spiral whip of paint.  
Words in silence might become colors;  
dialogue, an epiphany of light,  
the air a gauze so sheer  
the smallest flecks of sand on the floor  
wouldn't be hidden but openly  
charged with beauty. The rising storm  
would not distract them, the dark sky  
unable to bruise their focus. Even when  
the ocean bashed against the barge  
they would know they were safe in the ribs  
of the ark. They would float and sway  
as long as it took to finish  
their work, to bring life back,  
an offer gently pressed,  
from flesh to earth to vision.

## Dénouement

A bird is in the house,  
a sheer white curtain filled  
with beating feathers.  
Standing hushed I almost hear  
the bird's heart as loud as mine.  
With neither music nor color  
the sparrow has me caught  
and flinching, a harmony  
of numbness, the deep rip of wings  
constant in the air.  
I lunge towards the tangle  
of curtain and bird, pull  
the cloth back, the bird blinking  
away in a frenzy, blind to the walls.  
My hands direct him towards the door,  
the touch of my fingers so  
unlike the numberless branches.  
How delicate the disappearance  
beyond the backyard,  
as if the sparrow were spun  
quickly to glass.  
Slumped on the steps  
for awhile I still sense  
the dénouement ascending.

## Critical Afterward

Blake taught us that the chief inlets of the soul are the five senses. Certainly the chief inlet of poetry is through the ear. A poem must be felt to be understood, and before it can be felt it must be heard. Poets listen for their poems, and we, as readers, must listen in turn. If we listen hard enough, who knows?--we too may break into dance, perhaps for grief, perhaps for joy. (Kunitz, p. 52)

What better response could I have from a reader of my poetry, than to "Break into dance." Since my poetry primarily relies on the kinetic impulse, both in its imagery and sound, so that it can be felt by the reader, the art of dance has been an obvious influence on my work. For it is through movement that the abstract and concrete are wedded in my poetry, both literally and figuratively. The physicality of movement in my metaphors gives many of my poems their reason to keep going, or as Barbara Herrnstein Smith might say, these metaphors give my poems their structure. My extensive involvement in dance has fed me as a poet. My poetry derives from my experiences that have shaped how I perceive the world. Dance not only has informed my imagery, but also has informed the content of my work. For, as Louis Simpson declares, "The art of poetry consists in discovering the themes that are proper to oneself" (Simpson, p. 18).

Since my poetry is highly imagistic, and based on a process that is nonrational and suggestive, I would place

most of my work in the lyric tradition. Jonathan Holden, in his book Style and Authenticity in Postmodern Poetry, describes the contemporary form of a lyric poem as follows: "it will often be in the present tense, in the 'lyric' radical of presentation, with the speaker talking or musing to himself or herself; its prosody will be flexible; its overall shape will probably be rather plastic, and its diction unstudied, a rhetoric of artful spontaneity" (Holden, p. 23). All of my poems are in the present tense, and most of them are based on my musings. The few poems that verge on being narrative, such as "Last Light" about the Widow Combs, are so highly imagistic that the poem relies not so much on voice or story for its emotional impact, as on its images themselves. The prosody of each poem depends on the kind of action or movement the poem is conveying. Line-endings and stanza breaks are usually dictated by the movement depicted in my metaphors. Just as dance can surprise with the spontaneity of an unexpected gesture arising from a common move, so does the language in my poetry attempt to surprise with an unexpected leap or turn from the common expectations of words. I agree with Stanley Kunitz that each metaphor is a gesture that contributes to the action of a poem (Kunitz, p. 107). For me this works both literally and figuratively. Holden further talks of the "subverbal subject matter" of a lyric poem, meaning that which the images suggest. Here again,

the movement shaping my metaphors strongly influences how this "subverbal subject matter" in my poetry is felt by the reader--it is felt primarily kinaesthetically.

Before looking closer at my poetry, I will briefly explain why this collection is divided into four sections. These sections are based on the dominant concern in my poetry for the process of loss or leaving. Each section deals with the different insights and awarenesses brought about by such a process. As the title of this collection suggests, the *dénouement* is the unraveling of a story or event after the climax, but it is paradoxically in this moment of unraveling, of letting go, that the moment of insight, of transcendence can happen. Section I primarily deals with relationships, and my reflections upon the sense of loss and change in relationships that can be both fulfilling as well as saddening. In section II the poems are more concerned with place--a place in time as well as space. Again, the sense of loss, or losing of place is endemic to most of these poems. All of the poems in section III evolve from my mother's illness and death. Throughout these three sections, many of the poems based on personal experience echo Wordsworth's notion of "spots of time." These moments of trauma recalled are especially evident in sections I and III. Poems such as "Forgetting a friend," and "A Sense of Touch" in the beginning section recollect the impact of certain friendships emotionally and

spiritually. The poems in section III present an emotional progression of my coming to terms with my mother's loss. In section IV, I focus on my notions about the aesthetic experience, and how important change and loss is in creating such heightened moments.

\*\*\*

The poems I've chosen to discuss are exemplary of certain strategies that pervade my work. The first poem is built on an extended metaphor, as quite a few of my poems are. In "Return of the light," the controlling image is one of friends throwing my mother up to the light and the clouds, thus healing her pain and bringing her more life. It is at once a prayer and a gesture of gratitude to my parents' many friends. I began writing the poem at the hospital during my mother's initial stay there during the Christmas holidays. While visiting there I had read an article about the word "Christmas," discovering its early intention to mean "return of the light." While looking one afternoon out the hospital window in my mother's room filled with flowers and cards, and staring firmly at the sun glaring above the mountains, I began this poem with the meaning of the word "Christmas" fresh in my mind.

The poem uplifts the reader through an identification with the physicality of tossing or being tossed up to the light repeatedly, with the line-endings provoking and



Return of the light  
December, 1985

Here in the hospital the glare  
~~through the window~~ of the sun  
above the mountains is welcomed.  
I do not shield my eyes. I <sup>think</sup> ~~think~~ <sup>imagine</sup>  
how the people in the <sup>nearby</sup> mountain valley  
where my parents live have gathered,  
lifting my sick mother with their arms  
overhead towards the clouds, then throwing  
her up to the light,  
catching her  
just in time to throw  
her up again. No one tires,  
their palms resilient as souls  
tossing her up ~~again and again~~  
until her body clear as light  
no longer aches, until her pain has <sup>dropped</sup>  
~~from her like rusted shells~~  
~~has dropped from her~~  
~~like rusted shells to the ground.~~  
~~trampled~~ beneath the people propelled  
~~the sun~~, their focus up  
upon my mother until all arms in unison  
gently let her down.  
She looks around brushing  
her gown and mingles with her friends,  
more alive now than when  
she first found love.

then over by  
rainbow, of  
young to  
the weight  
if her descent  
descending  
descent

Mary E. Martin

Here in the hospital the glare  
 of sun above the mountains is welcomed.  
 I do not shield my eyes. I imagine  
 how the many friends in the nearby  
 mountain valley where my parents live  
 have gathered, lifting  
 my sick mother with their arms  
 overhead towards the clouds, then throwing  
 her up to the light,  
 catching her  
 just in time to throw <sup>↑</sup>  
 her up again. ~~No one tires,~~  
 their palms resilient as souls  
 tossing her up  
 until her body clear as light  
 no longer aches, until her pain has dropped  
 from her like rusted shells  
 to the ground, trampled  
 beneath the people propelled  
 by their own nimbleness and her weightless  
 descending, ~~their focus up~~  
~~upon my mother~~ until all arms in unison  
 gently let her down.  
 She looks around brushing  
 her gown and mingles with her friends,  
~~more alive now than when~~ her head briskly turning,  
~~she first found love.~~ ~~the blue of her eyes those days~~  
 now than ~~when~~ <sup>she</sup> first found love.

Mary E. Martin

Return of the light  
December, 1985

Here in the hospital the glare  
of sun above the mountains is welcomed.  
I do not shield my eyes. I imagine  
how the many friends in the nearby  
mountain valley where my parents live  
have gathered, lifting  
my sick mother with their arms  
overhead towards the clouds, then throwing  
her up to the light,  
catching her  
just in time to throw her  
up again. No one tires,  
their palms resilient as souls  
tossing her up  
until her body clear as light  
no longer aches, until her pain has dropped  
from her like rusted shells  
to the ground, trampled  
beneath the people propelled  
by their own nimbleness and her weightless  
descending, until all arms in unison  
gently let her down.  
She looks around brushing her gown  
and mingles with her friends,  
her head briskly turning,  
the blue from her eyes more alive  
now than when  
she first felt love.

Mary E. Martin  
303 North 14th  
Manhattan, Kansas 66502

re-inforcing this kind of action. In the first version (A1), the line-endings aren't quite right to move the reader through the experience. Some words near the beginning needed to be removed, because they impeded the flow of the poem. Near the end of the action of tossing my mother up, an image was added to show the transformation of such an action in both the friends and my mother. The friends in this image become nimble, and my mother becomes weightless in her descending. Thus, the process of rejuvenation is more clearly suggested in this addition. In draft two (A2), I have pruned the lines so that they move and are full of air, especially the first six lines. Many of the lines end in either a verb, or an "ing" form of a verb, thereby emphasizing the action of the metaphor. The repeated sound of the letter L throughout the poem, as well as in the ending words of many lines, also helps to create this airy, uplifting feeling. In A2 I have also added more vividness to the concluding image of my mother walking among her friends with renewed life. With "her head briskly turning," the suggestion of elevated emotions and joy is brought through another movement image. The language throughout does not consist of many long, Latinate words, but the words are chosen to reinforce through sound the action of the metaphor, the smoothness of the transformation. In this poem, as in others, the action of

the extended metaphor dictates the momentum and shape of the poem, which includes its word choice and line-endings.

In another poem, entitled "I could waltz across Texas with you," the extended metaphor is based on the momentum of a waltz. The idea and title were taken from a country-western song about a love affair. The poem begins with an invitation to waltz across the Texas Panhandle, and moves into an abstract extension of the height of the love affair, where the words of the two lovers waltzing become gestures that project out and "give shoulders to the moon," thus enabling the lovers to "balance the moon with our thoughts." Through this movement-metaphor the exhilaration of a love affair is portrayed. It is the energy of the dancing that pushes through the lines, as seen in the following excerpt:

nothing can stop this momentum,  
not even the burn  
from our grasping turns,  
the dizzy air of sun, or our panic  
for a polka that wants to run past rhythm.

The lines end in a hesitation that lend to the building of frenzy culminating in the last longer line, suggesting a movement close to being out of control. There are rhymes employed--burn/turns, and sun/run--not to be imposing, but to heighten the physical sensation, the musicality of a waltz turn almost out of control.

Not all the poems based on movement metaphors are so breath-taking. The mundane action of eating becomes the most significant moment for an old man in "Supper." In this poem the man "receives/ his food like a clumsy lover," and it ends with him:

arranging his meal  
as if each portion  
will surprise him.

The poem illustrates the complete loneliness people can allow themselves, especially when older. The last lines are spare, as is the rest of the poem, its focus on the desperate singularity of the action of eating. Its heightened moment occurs when there is "a slight movement of flight/ in quick shifts of his fork." This sparseness of the lines emphasizes the attitude the old man has about life, the frailness of his motions to exist.

"Mirage" is another poem built on an extended metaphor, but the metaphor is not based on movement. The poem is more like an allegory about a woman being trapped in a patriarchal world--the knight confining her in his tent. Although the poem plays off a scene repeated in medieval romances, the metaphor is conveyed mainly through images of movement perception. The woman once in the tent is grabbed, embraced, and licked by the knight. She ends up wandering within the tent, where "the billows become halls,/ a continuous sway of space." Whether my poems have

a movement theme for their structure or not, most of them rely heavily on movement images to carry them through.

In another poem, "Running with the mountains," the subject is obviously about the act of running. The last half of the poem depicts clearly what a runner would perceive of the environment while she is running:

and springing forward the whole road  
empties for you, your body stretching  
to all that's ahead: the fields of cattle  
and fence clustered around  
barns and homes, the space between  
each giving them a place  
you won't forget, how they all  
move or stay together--the cows,  
the fence, the wind, the homes,  
and to one side, how the mountains  
never stop.

Here the line endings attempt to coincide with how the eye scans a landscape when running. The reader should feel the spontaneity and surge of that meditative state of observation while running. The catalogue of words near the end evokes the vastness of the valley, and leads up to the omnipresent mass, the mountains that appear to the runner to be moving with her.

The second poem (B) chosen to show in progress, follows a strategy similar to some others in this

And so, beyond the destruction of their lives no further harm was done to them; and in particular, they did not have to suffer especially long, either in body or soul. -German prosecutor, Münzberg

Not too heavy for the hooks,  
twenty scarred children, ~~were~~  
pumped with morphine and hung,  
necks snapped, their bodies stripped  
down, apathetic as clothes  
flung over chairs or beds.

Who would have wanted to see  
them this way? I've ~~only~~  
~~imagined~~ them just before  
they're burned, ~~vanished~~  
in the shuffle at the end of the war.  
The only evidence--snapshots  
of their scars where lymph glands  
were uprooted, skin scratched  
with bacteria. In each one their heads  
~~split~~ ~~forward~~, eyes lost in shadow,  
frail ~~straw-colored~~, too white  
to be real - as if they used to be children  
but now were frail ~~straw-colored~~,  
too white to be real  
modeling their own ~~straw~~ demise.

The SS doctor was surely  
capable in his rendering  
efficiency to his transformation  
of their lives; ~~but with purpose~~  
~~just as bright or~~  
efficient surely, how then does he look  
to the... ~~side~~

In order to  
prevent the  
loss of their  
lives, they  
were... ~~just~~





And so, beyond the destruction of their lives no further harm was done to them; and in particular, they did not have to suffer especially long, either in body or soul.

--German prosecutor Münzberg

Not too heavy for the hooks,  
 twenty scerred children were pumped  
 with morphine and hung,  
 necks snapped, their bodies stripped  
 down, apethetic as clothes  
 flung over chairs or beds.  
 They were burned, vanished  
 in the shuffle at the end of the war.  
 The only evidence--snapshots  
 of their scers where lymph glands  
 were uprooted, and skin was scratched  
 with bacteria. In each one their heads  
 drooped, eyes lost in shadow,  
 as if they used to be children *multi?*  
 but now were frail mannequine  
 modeling their own demise.

*Michelle Scott  
 1776-1616*

The SS doctor was surely  
 efficient in his transformation  
 of their lives, in his practical  
 rendering of life the same as death.  
 Destruction becomes  
 a futile term, the apocelypse  
 even more absurd. In memory  
 of this doctor I cannot presume  
 to imagine insight, to conjure up  
 pity for his utility of vision,  
*in which?*  
where anyone's suffering  
 can be lifted, not  
 as in the pietè, but lifted  
 far away from embracing arms,  
 from the cry of a mother  
 for a child.

*May Martin*

In ~~bitter~~ memory of a doctor

68

And so, beyond the destruction of their lives no further harm was done to them; and in particular, they did not have to suffer especially long, either in body or soul.

Not too heavy for the hooks,  
twenty scarred children were pumped  
with morphine and hung,  
necks snapped. their bodies stripped  
down, apathetic as clothes  
flung over chairs or beds.  
They were burned, vanished  
in the shuffle at the end of the war.  
The only evidence--snapshots  
of their scars where lymph glands  
were uprooted and skin was scratched  
with bacteria. In each one their heads  
drooped, eyes lost in shadow,  
as if they used to be children  
but now were frail mannequins  
modeling their own demise.

Destruction becomes  
a futile term, the apocalypse  
even more absurd. The SS doctor was surely  
efficient in his transformation  
of their lives, in his practical  
rendering of life the same as death.  
In memory of this doctor I cannot  
~~insure~~ insight, ~~cannot~~ inoculate myself  
myself with pity for his utility of vision,  
in which anyone's suffering  
can be lifted, not  
as in the pietà, but lifted  
far away from embracing arms,  
~~from the touch of a mother of a child.~~

from the cry of a mother  
for a child.

Mary E. Martin

collection. Again, movement-images pervade these poems also. My idea for "In memory of a doctor" was spawned at a party where I overheard the opening quote to the poem in a discussion. Soon after I found the book from which the quote was taken--The Murders at Bullenhuser Damm. The quote struck me as so incredible, that I was compelled to write a response. After reading and thinking about what happened to those children during the war, my first stanza began as a way to present the horror of their treatment, and to emphasize how ludicrous the statement by the German prosecutor was. As I proceed to sketch this opening, the image of their death, and their attitudes towards it, is what stuck with me. The description is very matter-of-fact. In the first draft (B1), this description is broken up into two stanzas, along with intrusive comments from the narrator. But this kind of intrusion is too sentimental, so by draft two the first stanza deals only with the images of the children. In draft two (B3), the line endings are broken in the first stanza to heighten the violent, abrupt action involved in their deaths. Ending the second line with "pumped," hits the reader with the directness of abuse to these children, as does the repetition of the sharp "s" sounds in line four in the verbs "snapped" and "stripped." Even in death, the movement of their bodies is carried through in the image of their bodies being "apathetic as clothes/ flung over chairs

or beds." In version two the stanza then continues to describe the fate of the children, the final image of their snapshots illustrating how unmotivated they were to continue living after the experimentation. In the last part of this stanza, the lines don't end with strong verbs, but rather, the verbs initiate the lines, thereby making the lines softer on impact than the lines at the beginning of the stanza. This softening is to replicate the children's waning physical and mental strength as seen in the snapshots. The language in this stanza is not long and complicated. Most of the words are direct and Germanic-based, thereby adding to the over-all effect of straightforwardness and abruptness.

The second stanza became my intrusion and comment on what the doctor had done. I began immediately with longer, Latinate words. As can be seen in my scribbling in the first draft, I was attempting to discover the attitude my rhetoric would take by playing off the incredible statement made by Prosecutor Munzberg. I decided to keep this connection to the opening quote clearer when I switched the opening of the second stanza from "The SS doctor..." to "Destruction becomes..." in the third revision (B3). After draft three I also decided to keep the ending with the image of a mother crying for a child. The image of the cry echoes a deeper sense of futility and despair. In this stanza the line endings are designed to heighten the ironic

statements being made. The last six lines are shorter, and place emphasis on the word "lift," in order that the feeling of "anyone's suffering" can be distanced as well as being despaired about, and to bring out the incongruity of such a situation.

This strategy of making comments in the last part of a poem, on a situation presented in the first part of a poem, is similar to other works in this collection. In "Rain Forest," after describing how lush and vital the environment is in such a place--and without breaking into another stanza--I comment on how people should protect, and not be afraid of this important ecological landscape. "This is not our vision,/ not a place for our hideaway/ plantations..." begins this straightforward advice to not meddle, or change such an environment. I open it out in the end, as I did in "In memory of a doctor," with a physical action that sends the reader beyond the commentary:

We shouldn't be afraid  
 to simply walk the forest's  
 damp surface, each step  
 consciously small, trying  
 to discover how  
 we could ever come back.

The language in this last part of the poem is simpler, compared to the more ornate and exotic description in the

first part. This change signals the address to the reader concerning this environmental dilemma. In the first section the language and line breaks evoke the rich interaction of life, and in part of this description I try to capture the sense of rain falling through this dense forest, so the reader can physically sense the rain's movement:

and how the rain  
 which hits hard the top  
 of the tall foliage, sifts  
 through the maze of leaves  
 branching into a fine mist  
 all the way down to soak  
 the dark forest floor  
 where orchids multiply  
 collect like fruit.

The repetition of "h" and "t" sounds at the beginning of this segment gives a hardness like rain's initial contact, and as it "sifts" down, the sounds soften to a preponderance of "s," "f," and "m" sounds.

But in another poem using the strategy of description/response, the language in the commentary stays as lyrical as the language in the first part. The beginning of "Tableau" describes spring for three women, with the second half commenting more precisely on the effect spring has on the women. The language continues to

be equally evocative all the way through. The line endings promote the flow and sense of languishing and of the season's idleness, for example:

but the sun helps, glazing  
 over our anxious skin, giving us  
 the glamorous tinge we need to lapse  
 into the embrace of summer--warm air  
 wrapping around us as we whisper  
 of the young men passing by.

The repetition of "g," "s," and "w" sounds is intended to add to the sensual, languorous mood of the poem. The poem is body focused. After commenting on how spring always brings hope, no matter what, the physical action of slumbering sends the reader off at the end of this poem into a dreamy state:

We slumber on the lawn,  
 make nests of our dreams,  
 keep ourselves quiet enough  
 to let the birds fly close,  
 hear how loud their wings can be.

Even though the strategy of these last three poems is based on description/reaction, movement-images still dominate, and also help to shape the poem's language and line endings. The final images, especially, rely on a gesture or action to open the poems out beyond the message or comment being made.



The last poem I've chosen to show in drafts is also based on an extended metaphor. This poem is an example of how certain ideas from the Romantic poets, especially Blake and Coleridge, have influenced my perceptions about art and spirituality. This poem is also based on movement-images, images of a community of artists, all their motions in harmony with each other. The poem argues that this orchestration creates a spiritual enlightenment, as well as a beauty which, through the metaphor of the ark, will be what saves or perpetuates the world. Blake believed that the imagination was man's saviour, and Coleridge believed that art, religion, and philosophy comprised the highest exercise of the human spirit. Even Wordsworth is part of the influence in this poem, with his belief in the positive change poetry could have on the community of man.

Last summer I first saw in Montauk, Long Island, the actual Art Barge (which the poem describes), where classes in painting and sculpture were being offered. A friend and I stopped to walk its decks, stare out at the water. No one was around, the rooms were empty, and my imagination was delighted to begin filling in what this barge could be. In the first draft of "The Art Barge" (C1), the idea of movement as the element of harmonizing the different artists is there, but not fully realized. Also early on, my focus on describing the barge as it is now is still as important as the vision of what it could be. Later the

# The Art Barge Montauk, Long Island

It's roof slanted  
 like the slope of a wave,  
 the old wooden hull quietly  
 perches on the shore--two levels,  
 one for canvas, the other for clay,  
 a deck ~~where students~~ <sup>where students</sup> smoke  
 and chat, stare out  
 over the rail waiting  
 for a sudden turn in the water.  
 From a distance the two of us notice  
 how its chipped white paint  
 and uneven shape fit  
 the beach so well, weathered  
 like the littered shells and rocks  
 As we stroll the decks,  
 peering in, the silent rooms rowed  
 with easels and mud-smears tables  
 seem like the deep inside  
 of a secret seed <sup>to grow</sup> ~~to grow~~ *strange Deck*  
 Soon the rooms ~~will~~ <sup>will</sup> be filled  
 with people, having chosen how to endure  
 as we have chosen, their eyes and fingers  
 hard at work in the light, aided  
 by the rhythm of water beside them.  
 Their gestures whirling with precision,  
 each dip for paint, each pat  
 on clay could mesmerize  
 a magician, the air a ganze so sheer  
 nothing seems hidden but openly  
 charged with beauty. The rising storm  
 would be no distraction, the bruised sky  
~~unable to~~ <sup>unable to</sup> weaken their focus. Even when  
 the ocean bashed against the barge/they know  
 they would be safe in the ribs  
 of the ark. They would float and sway  
 as long as it took to finish  
 their work, to bring life back  
 to the land beyond the shore.

l

not able



to push this imag  
 ahead to the land  
 to touch land again  
 not just for what  
 they've created, but  
 to touch land again  
 w/ more than reason to offer

not movement from a vision



It's roof slanted  
like the slope of a wave,  
the old wooden hull quietly  
perches on the shore--two levels,  
one for canvas, the other for clay,  
a deck surrounding each one  
where students surely smoke  
and chat, stare out  
over the railing waiting  
for a gust in the water.  
From a distance the two of us  
notice how its chipped white paint  
and uneven shape fit  
the beach so well, weathered  
like the littered rocks and shells.  
As we stroll the decks,  
peering in, the silent rooms rowed  
with easels and mud-smeared tables  
seem like the deep insides  
of a secret seeded to grow.

Soon people would fill the rooms,  
having chosen how to endure  
as we have chosen, their fingers and eyes  
hard at work in the light, aided  
by the rhythm of water beside them.  
Their gestures whirling in precision,  
each dip for paint, each pat  
on clay come mesmérise  
a magician; the air seizes so sheer  
nothing seems hidden but openly  
charged with beauty. The rising storm  
would not distract, the bruised sky  
unable to weaken their focus. Even when  
the ocean besches against the barge  
they know they would be safe in the ribs  
of the ark. They would float and sway  
as long as it took to finish  
their work, to bring life back,  
not just with what  
they've created, but to touch  
the land again as if the meeting  
between feet and sand  
were signatures of spirit,  
~~each line a conscious monument~~  
~~not to be forgotten.~~

As promised gently placed  
an offering of vision  
between flesh and water  
between vision and effort.

Between Fingers

an offering of vision  
between flesh and water  
between vision and effort.

The Art Barge  
Montauk, Long Island

From a distance the two of us  
notice how its chipped white paint  
and uneven shape fit  
the beach so well, weathered  
like the littered rocks and shells.  
Its roof slanted  
like the slope of a wave,  
the old wooden hull quietly  
perches on the shore--two levels,  
one for canvas, the other for clay,  
a deck surrounding each one  
where students surely smoke  
and chat, stare out  
over the rail waiting  
for a gust in the water.  
As we stroll the decks,  
peering in, the silent rooms rowed  
with easels and mud-smear'd tables  
seem like the deep insides  
of a secret seeded to grow.

Soon people would fill the rooms,  
having chosen how to endure  
as we have chosen, their fingers and eyes  
hard at work in the light, aided  
by the rhythm of water beside them.  
Their gestures whirling in precision,  
each dip for paint, each pat  
on clay could mesmerize  
a magician; the air a gauze so sheer  
nothing seems hidden but openly  
charged with beauty. The rising storm  
would not distract, nor the bruised sky  
able to weaken their focus. Even when  
the ocean bashes against the barge  
they know they would be safe in the ribs  
of the ark. They would float and sway  
as long as it took to finish  
their work, to bring life back,  
~~not just with what~~  
they've created, but to touch  
the land again as if the meeting  
between feet and sand  
were signatures of spirit,  
an offering gently pressed  
from flesh to earth to vision.

Mary E. Martin

The Art Barge  
Monteuk, Long Island

It's more an ark waiting  
for a gust in the water,  
roof slanted  
like the slope of a wave.  
The old wooden hull perches  
quietly on the shore.  
From a distance I notice  
how its chipped white paint  
and uneven shape fit  
the beach so well, ~~was a head~~  
like the littered rocks and shells.  
But as I stroll the ~~down~~  
peering in, the silent rooms rowed  
with easels and mud-smeared tables  
seem ready for a change in the weather.

I can almost feel the rumble  
of footsteps, slumped foreheads  
long waiting  
to meet here, surge yeastine  
on the decks  
They would quickly fill the rooms,

Soon people will fill the rooms,  
their fingers and eyes  
hard at work in the light, aided  
by the rhythms of water beside them.  
Their gestures whirling in precision,  
each dip for paint, each pat  
on clay ~~could~~ ~~the~~ ~~cluster~~ ~~of~~ ~~arms~~  
from the dancers gliding, their torsos tuned  
to the musicians roaming the aisles.  
None would mind borrowing  
in such reverie. One back  
turning for a curve  
in sound, or for a spiral whip of paint.  
When silent, words would become colors;  
dialogue, an epiphany of light,  
the air a gauze so sheer  
nothing ~~seemed~~ hidden but openly  
charged with beauty. The rising storm  
would not distract, the dark sky  
would be unable to bruise their focus. Even when  
the ocean bashed against the barge  
they would know they're safe in the ribs  
of the ark. They would float and away  
as long as it took to finish  
their work, to bring life back,  
an offer gently pressed,  
from flesh to earth to vision.

could see  
the  
lines

Mary E. Martin

The Art Barge  
Montauk, Long Island

Roof slanted  
 like the slope of a wave,  
 it's more an ark waiting  
 for a gust in the water.  
 The old wooden hull perches  
 quietly on the shore.  
 From a distance I notice  
 how its chipped white paint  
 and uneven shape fit  
 the beach so well, weathered  
 like the littered shells and rocks.  
 But as I stroll the decks,  
 peering in, the silent rooms rowed  
 with easels and mud-smear'd tables  
 seem ready for a change in the weather.  
 I can almost feel the rumble  
 of footsteps, glimpse the people,  
 long-waiting to meet here, surge past me  
 on the decks. They would quickly fill  
 the rooms, their fingers and eyes  
 hard at work in the light, aided  
 by the rhythm of water beside them.  
 Their gestures whirling in precision,  
 each dip for paint, each bat  
 of clay could arc like the cluster of arms  
 from the dancers gliding, their torsos tuned  
 to the musicians roaming the aisles.  
 None would mind borrowing  
 in such reverie. One back  
 might turn for a curve  
 in sound, or for a spiral whip of paint.  
 Words in silence might become colors;  
 dialogue, an epiphany of light,  
 the air a gauze so sheer  
 the smallest flecks of sand on the floor  
 wouldn't be hidden but openly  
 charged with beauty. The rising storm  
 would not distract them, the dark sky  
 would be unable to bruise their focus. Even when  
 the ocean bashed against the barge  
 they would know they were safe in the ribs  
 of the ark. They would float and sway  
 as long as it took to finish  
 their work, to bring life back,  
 an offer gently pressed,  
 from flesh to earth to vision.

Mary E. Martin



focus shifts to the vision as the center of the poem. And of course, the ending was still in the making, but my impulse was to use movement as a primary source for imagery in bringing about a metaphor for new life. As noted in my scribbling, "each movement stemming from a vision," movement is what comes from vision. In draft two (C2) the stanza break occurs between the description of the barge as it was when I saw it, and the vision of what I see it becoming. But my leap between the two is awkward. The ending is becoming more defined, still focusing on the physical gesture of stepping back onto the earth after the flood. The vital harmonizing being made by the movement between the artists in the second stanza is still not depicted fully. The problem begins with the magician image in that stanza and its connotations that take the reader away from the image of community building between the artists. By draft three (C3) the opening has been switched around, so the poem initiates with how the two of us first noticed the barge. But this switch flattens out the opening, and doesn't move the reader quickly enough into the poem.

I've pared down the opening description in draft four (C4), switching the lines again to provide a more provocative opening. I've also eliminated the "we" of the previous versions, finding it unnecessary to what the poem



is about. The word-choice and line-endings emphasize how this awkward structure has adapted to its surroundings:

how its chipped white paint and uneven shape fit  
the beach so well, weathered

like the littered shells and rocks.

The harsh, short sounds of "chipped white paint" smooth out in the next three lines to re-inforce how the barge interacts with the beach. This picture of its awkwardness fitting into its surroundings is used as a contrast to the life and flow it will cradle in the vision. I've also begun sketching out a better transition into the vision in C4, again, with a sense of feeling the physical movement of the artists coming together, their steps rushing on the deck. I've also erased the magician image, and brought in more movement-images to show how these people will inspire each other when working together. These reveries have also been extended into a spiritual illumination as well, with "words would become colors;/ dialogue, an epiphany of light." The ending now contains an abstraction of movement, "from flesh to earth to vision."

I've also detailed more of the vision in draft five (C5), by elaborating more on the image of what is charged with beauty. I've made sure the conditional tense is used throughout the vision sequence, because the vision is a fabrication. But the whole shape of the poem still feels too thick, too heavy. And I'm still not satisfied with the

transition into the vision. In draft six (C6) I have altered and shortened the transition somewhat, and shortened a few of the lines a little farther down in the second stanza. There may be more pruning necessary before the poem is where I want it to be, but for now, it is finished.

The ending of this poem clearly shows how the intended movement of the metaphor is reflected in the rhythm and line-endings. The motion of the boat in the waves is mimicked by the dominance of iambic feet:

Even when  
 the ocean bashed against the barge  
 they would know they were safe in the ribs  
 of the ark. They would float and sway  
 as long as it took to finish  
 their work, to bring life back  
 an offer gently pressed,  
 from flesh to earth to vision.

Here the safety of a rocking motion is echoed by an iambic rhythm, helping to establish this vision as secure and nurturing. The last line connects, through an implied gesture of touching, flesh and vision (spiritual enlightenment).

"Dénouement" is another poem which owes its inspiration to the Romantic poets, and in particular, Keats. The poem stems from the incident of a sparrow being

caught in a house, but as I began writing about it, I was reminded of Keats' nightingale. This bird "with neither music nor color"--unlike Keats' nightingale singing in nature--"has me caught" in a moment of abandonment to the unexpected experience. The bird could be the startling swell of awareness from the unconscious. On the physical level, the bird "has me caught/ and flinching, a harmony of numbness." The experience has initially seized me from being aware of anything else, and I physically and mentally become a medium for what will happen. Thus the movement in this meeting with the bird promotes the metaphor on both a literal and figurative level. "My hands direct" the bird out the door, as I do take initiative to understand the experience.

This pattern of movement promoting insight is a constant in most of my poems. Movement gives structure to my poems, dictates the prosody. No matter what strategy I have employed, movement underlies and carries through my poems. Working from the "gut" is how I see it. And as the last lines of "Denouement" suggest, it is at the moment when the gesture is rising, about to be completed, that awareness catches the breath:

How delicate the disappearance  
beyond the backyard,  
as if the sparrow were spun  
quickly to glass.  
Slumped on the steps  
for awhile I still sense  
the dénouement ascending.

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DENOUEMENT ASCENDING

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

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## ABSTRACT

Denouement Ascending begins with a collection of thirty-two poems divided into four sections, each one dealing with the different insights and awarenesses brought about in the process of loss or leaving. As the title suggests, the denouement is the unraveling of a story or event after the climax, but it is paradoxically in this moment of unraveling, of letting go, that the moment of insight, the moment of transcendence can happen. Each section explores the loss brought about from different situations: Section I centers on relationships; Section II focuses on place; my mother's illness and death are the subject of Section III; Section IV is concerned with the aesthetic experience. In the Critical Afterword I begin by explaining what kind of poetry I write -- lyric poetry. I then talk about how the prosody of my poetry relies on the kind of action or movement each poem depicts. Most of the images in my work are felt by the reader kinaesthetically. The three poems chosen for close discussion illustrate certain strategies which I employ often in my work. Each poem is shown in stages of revision to reveal how I work towards a "finished" poem. The first poem I discuss, "Return of the light," exemplifies a strategy I use often, the extended movement metaphor. I then explain how I evolved the metaphor, and how the action of the metaphor dictates the momentum and shape of the poem. The second strategy is evident in "In memory of a doctor." While

movement still dominates the poem, the strategy of this piece consists of the last part of the poem commenting on a situation presented in the first part of the poem. The last poem I talk in detail about, "The Art Barge," is also built on an extended metaphor. Based on influences from Blake, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, this poem uses movement as a vehicle to create its vision, as a vehicle to show harmony among various artists, and how this harmony will create the future. Concluding, I emphasize how movement gives structure, and promotes insight in most of my poems. The last lines of "Denouement" are quoted to illustrate how through movement, awareness can catch the breath.