

ON THE STREET

Each day you pass this woman
sitting on the sidewalk.
She is pressed against the building.
She is wrapped as for a funeral pyre;
shawls wound around her.
Only her face looks out of this cowl
and her hands, ready to turn palms up,
if you are not hardened to her.
If you allow yourself to look closer,
you see her, as though adjusting
a microscope. Her skin comes into focus.
It is layered like fallen leaves;
blue around the lips and blotched
with ochre and brown.
The flume of the avenue sweeps
as in a monsoon; a patterned commerce
of debris. If you hesitate,
you are sucked into a chalice
of saints and miracles; the body's
unexpected lush response
to all you have hidden from yourself.

SORTING IT OUT

Falsely soft, infinitely far,
the chlorophyll machine.
Each socket knocked by a photon
from the mother star.
It's the trees and their green flesh.
Listen, our fingers feel the hiss.
The great blue whale
picks up the sonar.

This obsession with invisible things.

But the concrete with its gray crumbling smile
is like a factual male.

Drive your car into me, it suggests;
I'm no bloody vagina.

The concrete stretches for miles;
the turrets with guns in position.

AT THE MUSEUM, 1938

In the native bird exhibit, the whip-poor-will, stuffed with sawdust and arsenic, hides among arranged dried leaves in order to instruct you. Nearby, a Navajo rug, the design a complex ideograph, a sacred message; a man-spirit in mirror image. However, it is without annotation, the legend meaningless; reduced to artifact. Now I am looking at a photograph; Kill Spotted Horses' ceremonial face in a cheap frame. In a matching frame, Blue Wing, her dark eyes set toward the mountains. Ropes of significant beads hang from her. Gently the round cheeks turn away. On the winding stairs, the old oak railing was crafted into ornate spools. Every newel post is carved. And here in a glass case, as if in a logical progression, is the tiny skeleton of a kiwi. Outside, the great elms along the streets in Urbana, their green arched cathedral canopies; the continuous singing of birds among their breathing branches.

SPECULATION

A girl we didn't actually know
won a contest we never heard of
and fifty pairs of new shoes.
We each had one pair of shoes
and two skirts and two blouses.
We were in high school, my sister and I.
We washed and ironed our clothes