

THE HOUSE ON 15th S.W.

Cruelty and rain could be expected.  
Any season. The talk was often German  
and we cried at the death of strangers.  
Potatoes mattered and the neighbors who came  
to marvel at our garden. I never helped  
with the planting. I hid in woods these houses  
built on either side replaced. Ponds  
duplicated sky. I watched my face  
play out dreams of going north with clouds.

North surely was soft. North was death  
and women and the women soft. The tongue  
there was American and kind. Acres of women  
would applaud me as I danced, and acres  
of graves would dance when sun announced  
another cloud was dead. No grating scream  
to meals or gratuitous beatings,  
no crying, raging fists against closed doors,  
twisted years I knew were coming at me,  
hours alone in bars with honest mirrors,  
being fun with strangers, being liked  
so much the chance of jail was weak  
with laughter, and my certainty of failure  
mined by a tyrant for its pale perverted ore.

My pride in a few poems, my shame  
of a wasted life, no wife, no children,  
cancel out. I'm left neutral as this house,  
not caring to go in. Light would be soft  
and full, not harsh and dim remembered.  
The children, if there are children inside,  
would be normal, clean, not at all  
the soiled freaks I had counted on.