

“The Y”

Unlike St. Peter who sank when he looked down,
this guy's bend, pumping like mad, intent on
keeping speed over the shifting ameobic shapes
he probably can't see. He's probably not
even thinking that besides the exercise bike,
the hard floor, there's another reality
pool water swirls on the plate glass.

But the gray-haired woman chuckling beside me
sees it-how he pedals yet gets no closer
to these eleven year olds lined up on the pool's
edge, their gently emerging torsos and thighs.
The guard eyes her collection of bags, and I'm
trying to imagine myself ten years from now
wandering in here Teusday before Thanksgiving
watching children I have no connection to.

Why would a woman do this? Why would she
get on a bus, let the road flatten everything
behind her, then step off somewhere in Maine,
one of those flat-roofed cinder block stations,
enter a coffee shop and ask for the Y?

My mother used to ask why I collected
such people. Why I had to think so much,
couldn't stick to my job, why I had to ride my bike
down to the piers to watch the water hypnotizing itself.
She'd imagine my indigent, or married to a used car
dealer who tampers with the mileage.

But maybe you can't roll back
anything, you can't undo what was done to you
and shouldn't even try. Maybe its all recycled

pool water, past and future at the same time,
and now is a shimmering lesson
some kids find hard to trust, while others
grow fluent as eels, expecting the water to love them.
Maybe we got worked up, Mother, over the wrong stuff.

Is it so unreasonable
to want to sit in this steamy balcony
watching the miraculous children
hesitate and lunge? I want to ask
what's in her bags-objects distilled from a dream
it is urgent to keep wherever she goes?

Etiquette tells me, be quiet.
But she's kind enough to shake her head and
make the joke with me, how the man pedals nowhere so fast,
while we lean on the bleachers' stiff resilience,
among the echoes of children immersed in their schooling,
little parables of survival.