

TOM BARDEN

toledo poem

*since you passed here yesterday
we have sold seven mobile homes*
—billboard sign in toledo

I
the sky
is stitched
with birds
as I step out on the frozen breakers
of Lake Erie
exploring past the last footprints
walking to Canada
I think of Joliet in 1669
paddling over the St. Clair
paddling down the Detroit
until his eyes opened
full of maps
on this
I poke the iceribs
think of the fish below
their surprise to hear me
tapping across their ceiling
there is a photo of the governor
on my folding map
he looks puzzled in his tie
he says
industry, business, welcome
I imagine him standing on the hillside
at Kent State
his arms outstretched
chanting industry business welcome

I fold him
back in my pocket
and look around
that shoreline is Ohio
to the left is Michigan
all Indian names
and all trapped
like the lakes, locked
look they freeze entirely over
you can jump on them
they say there is oil
under the soil under the fish
derricks will rise
out of these waters

jungle jims nobody plays on
signs— do not walk on this lake
shit, I wanted a sea
this is the edge of America too
the third coast
and it's just a lake
by a swamp
the water I live by
and do not understand
except you take Route 2, east
look for seagulls
and go home

II

So maybe you can tell me
if I say, baby
I like your company
where I can find this place
get me high
drive me around
tell me you own the town
the street names are your ancestors
there are factory strikes
and spark plug fortunes
at your family reunion
so maybe you can show me
how to live here
take me to a premiere
of the symphony
good movies
good jazz
where you go
what you do
I'll show you my sheets
my hot confusion
my dreams
in the huge pavillion
in the Wildwood Preserve
where the city fathers
will never find us
please baby
I need to know
make a strong case for here
for anywhere
for terrorism
Zionism

resistance
plain living
repose
tell me your dreams
what you would name the streets
if they really were yours
what you would name me if I were
what kind of street would I be
for you
why don't you have any secrets
what will your body mean to me later
what noise do you suppose the river makes
when the ice breaks up
and sends forty-ton blocks
crashing into the startled lake
in the spring

III

what is that seagull doing in the metropark
he seems so out of place
whitecap white among the maples
he looks like a senior citizen
in a government van
but he seems to make himself at home
he chips at straws he
hops across the bike trail
he picks at tree seeds
scratches
all untidy and unconcerned
he's seen the rolling ocean
been
stitched into the sky
he looks up
and hops into the air
of toledo
he doesn't care where he lives