

## ELIZABETH ANN SHIBLAQ

### *Stereopticon Ballet*

*In Marion, Ohio, 1885, my father's aunts  
wore stiff, white dresses while they played croquet.*

On a lawn greener than celluloid  
Aunt Frances, Aunt Wallace, Aunt Harriet and Aunt Cora  
become runaway bride dolls who waltz on invisible skates  
while their reticules sway like crepe paper bells from their wrists.  
I watch their skirts spread into milkweed puffs,  
their shirtwaists lengthen into peaks of whipped cream.  
Lilac talcum sifts from the baked alaska frocks,  
and the four hats billow, sails on a wedding cake ship,  
tangling Aunt Cora's hair loosely as Indian grass.

The aunts glide quietly, seriously, swing their Jane Austen mallets  
until fireflies mark the ping of the ball.

Eight o'clock.

Great Grandma taps a spoon on a lemonade glass,  
and the aunts arrange themselves on settees and straightbacked chairs,  
and sip like robins.

The young men arrive, leave their hats and gloves in the vestibule:  
Gib Jones, Ralph Waddell, Junior Ebersole and Warren G. Harding  
who pretends he is John Drew kissing Madame Modjeska  
on Grandfather's chocolate box.

Aunt Cora, who was brought up Episcopalian, hides a Cleveland button  
under a tablecloth, and tells him, "Mr. Harding,  
smoking is a most deleterious habit. Kindly  
remove your cigar from our gracious room  
onto the front porch."