

### 3.10 Soft Compulsion (2009)

It came upon us not at night,  
with that old familiar  
wakening to a whitened world,  
but in the afternoon – the harbingers  
of sky and wind conspired  
to tell us it would come:  
small scouts meandered aimless on the wind,  
and then the army came in flecks,  
then droves, sailing in  
on curved trajectories,  
these messengers from Muscovy,  
cohorts from the northern wastes,  
imbued with other-worldliness.

This other world we'd half-forgot  
evokes an old vocabulary  
of drifts and blanket sounds, muffled words and  
echoed children's cries, and promise  
of icicles to come. Sea-gulls scream and wheel  
above the river's frozen face. The trees  
with outstretched arms accumulate  
their joyous burdens, proudly etch  
themselves against the yellow bruised sky.

But more than this,  
some greater mystery is here,  
a soft compulsion - at first  
a simple invitation, - beguiles us, takes  
us child-like by the hand,  
escorts us through the unopened gate  
into the hidden garden, where every shape  
adorned, arrayed in utmost finery,  
awaits our entry, benignly  
watches our advance, and offers us  
to share the endless moment.

But, here's the paradox, if we  
are unprepared, not wise enough, to lay aside  
our own imperatives, our self-made plans,  
we find compulsion turns to power:  
our will is overwhelmed, we lose the choice  
to surrender or resist. The snow's great majesty  
declares itself, the offered moment's lost.

Barge Walk - February 2009