

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