11-15-1999

Sophia Starling Sees Figures in the Snow

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Available at: https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol19/iss1/28
We had pushed the horses
through withers-high drifts all day,
hands numb with blue-brittle cold.
Mr. Sprockett cursed the snow
that could slide away in an instant;
the smashed carrion of our bodies
feasts for coyotes and crows.

Imperative I reach Denver
to meet the train for New York,
or forfeit my fare paid in advance,
and then the ship back to England.
We thrashed like trout in a creel—
dusk a deepening crimson: sure death
unless we found a shack, a ranch outpost.

Eyebrows sewed tight with frost,
I spied two trekkers plunge and rise;
faces pale as sails of abandoned ships.
They laboured under packs,
passed us without a word;
sky smudging into layers of ash,
wind spat stray flakes at my face.
Those two travelers had disappeared.

“Did you see?” I gasped.
He nodded, my impatience a flame.
“Do you know them?” I snapped.
“Us,” his voice barked like a shot,
“if we don’t find that cabin.”
Fear danced down my spine;
the sun was sinking like a ship.
Then I saw those walkers on a snow-bank,
the shack a dark square beside them.

“John!” I stabbed with a forefinger.
We urged the horses toward the shelter,
no one else in sight; no other footprints
tamped down the snow drifted
half-way up the one oil-skinned window.
I took those journeyers for a sign
I need not fret about consequences
if our bodies merged one last time.