

BELONGING

(On "Ice Glare," 1933, a painting by Charles Burchfield)

"Ice Glare:" pictured in gray and black,
a mill and tenements
in pre-dawn Ashtabula. Once,
we'd beaten our plowshares to swords;
but now this leftover world was bleak,
and depression had stilled the mill.

All is dark but a single room:
a kitchen where a woman
at peace is filled with the sense of home;
or perhaps a workman awake
is refitting himself for his time and place.
And over all is spread
a glossy coat of glowing ice.

Though hungry, he couldn't work
in the common grind, called by his art.
But knowing evil is waste,
the artist drew the changing things,
found beauty in the least.

Much farther East, but towns like this
were whence my people came.
A restive, bookish girl of the place
knew torment finding a way
to live and grow to her full extent.
The mythic form for her
would be the angelic wife and mother
in "Death of a Salesman." We learned
that angels have no power to help;
they just stew in their own goodness.

But if you could stay a smooth-fitting part
in the mill town of love and work,
it would care for you and yours,
and you would have bread and praise.