

American Sonnet

We do not speak like Petrarch or wear a hat like Spenser
And it is not fourteen lines
Like furrows in a small, carefully plowed field

But the picture postcard, a poem on vacation,
That forces us to sing our songs in little rooms
Or pour our sentiments into measuring cups.

We write on the back of a waterfall of lake,
Adding to the view a caption as conventional
As an Elizabethan woman's heliocentric eyes.

We locate an adjective for the weather.
We announce that we are having a wonderful time.
We express the wish that you were here

And hide the wish we were where you are,
Walking back from the mailbox, your head lowered
As you read and turn the thin message in your hands.

A slice of this place, a length of white beach,
A piazza or carved spires of a cathedral
Will pierce the familiar place where you remain,

And you will toss on the table this reversible display:
A few square inches of where we have strayed
And a compression of what we feel.