First job. In tight black shorts
and a white bowling shirt, red lipstick
and bouncing pony tail, I present
each overflowing tray as if it were a banquet.
I'm sixteen and college-bound,
this job's temporary as the summer sun,
but right now, it's the boundaries of my life.
After the first few nights of mixed orders
and missing cars, the work goes easily.
I take out the silver trays and hook them to the windows,
inhale the mingled smells of seared meat patties,
salty ketchup, rich sweet malts.
The lure of grease drifts through the thick night air.
And it's always summer at Patty's Charcoal Drive-in—
carloads of blonde-and-tan girls
pull up next to red convertibles,
boys in black tee shirts and slick hair.
Everyone knows what they want.
And I wait on them, hoping for tips,
loose pieces of silver
flung carelessly as the stars.
Doo-wop music streams from the jukebox
and each night repeats itself,
faithful as a steady date.
Towards 10 P.M., traffic dwindles.
We police the lot, pick up wrappers.
The dark pours down, sticky as Coke,
but the light from the kitchen
gleams like a beacon.
A breeze comes up, chasing papers
in the far corners of the darkened lot,
as if suddenly a cold wind had started to blow
straight at me from the future—
I read that in a Doris Lessing book—
but right now, purse fat with tips
the moon sitting like a cheeseburger on a flat black grill,
this is enough.
Your order please.