"This dream the world is having about itself...."
By Carolyne Wright

—William Stafford

won't let us go. The western sky gathers
its thunderclouds. It has no urgent need

of us. That summer in our late teens we
walked all evening through town—let's say Cheyenne—

we were sisters at the prairie's edge: I
who dreamed between sage-green pages, and you

a girl who feared you'd die in your twenties.
Both of us barefoot, wearing light summer

dresses from the Thirties, our mother's good
old days, when she still believed she could live

anywhere, before her generation
won the War and moved on through the Forties.

As we walked, a riderless tricycle
rolled out slowly from a carport, fathers

watered lawns along the subdivisions'
treeless streets. We walked past the last houses

and out of the Fifties, the Oregon
Trail opened beneath our feet like the dream

of a furrow turned over by plough blades
and watered by Sacajawea's tears.

What did the fathers think by then, dropping
their hoses without protest as we girls

disappeared into the Sixties? We walked
all night, skirting the hurricane-force winds

in our frontier dresses so that the weather
forecasts for the Seventies could come true,
the Arapahoe's final treaties for
the inland ranges could fulfill themselves
ahead of the building sprees. We walked on
but where was our mother by then? Your lungs
were filling with summer storms, and my eyes
blurred before unrefracted glacial lakes.
Limousines started out from country inns
at the center of town, they meant to drive
our grandparents deep into their eighties.
Our mother in her remodeled kitchen
whispered our names into her cordless phone
but before the Nineties were over, both
of you were gone. Mother's breath was shadow
but her heart beat strong all the way in to
the cloud wall. You carried your final thoughts
almost to the millennium's edge, where
the westward-leaning sky might have told us
our vocation: in open fields, we would
watch the trail deepen in brilliant shadow
and dream all the decades ahead of us.

In memory of my sister