On December 30, 1999, by the hood light of my range in a dark kitchen I eat pears my mother canned in 1992. The at-once tumble of all four digits has set the world on edge. What have I not done? I have not changed all my money for gold. I have not built a bomb shelter where tomorrow wife, daughters, dog and I could descend before, at midnight, the computers of the world lose a century and every record of my existence, before the jets over Greenland and Peoria forget there is a tomorrow and drop from the sky—along with their precious cargo of miniature malt whiskeys, tiny bags of peanuts, and pilgrims planning to be somewhere new by breakfast. Before the intelligent clocks forget all the protective treaties ever signed and launch their payloads of mutually assured destruction at the rooftops where tipsy revelers sip champagne and forget one another’s names, or why they wore this particular array of gaudy pointed hats.

I have neglected to stockpile potted meat and missile-shaped plastic bottles of water. I should, in fact, have saved these pears, and had, instead, one of the bananas on the counter, whose ridges this last full night before the millennium are darkening like the areolas of a woman near term. Instead I padded to the basement, loosened the golden ring, and popped the gummy seal. The bone-pale halves
slopped meekly into my bowl,  
a bit soft, perhaps, and browning  
at their fringes. The last person  
to touch them was my mother.  
She died in 1993. One year before  
her death she held these pears  
in her hand, peeled off their skin,  
and drew a practiced edge down  
their bellied-out middles to get at  
their hearts. These—veins, strings,  
and nut-like seeds—she sliced out too,  
and threw into a pan to feed her hens,  
then packed the pared halves into this jar.  
Standing at her stove she showered  
them with boiling water, then set on  
the canning lid to let them slowly steam.  
That cataclysm and ripening age teased  
the sugar from each resisting molecule  
of starch. And made them strangely  
satisfying: a dish whose water has a memory  
in this mostly dark house where  
the last full night before the millennium  
I have done nothing to prepare.