FOR NAOMI

To be a day less than one year old

means that you can take two steps

into sheer space, one more, forgetting

just how far it is to the furry

geese calling in the play-pen;

then a bounce up-and-down when you

realize that maybe you've let go

the only hand-hold in the universe.

Still there's time, for a half turn

to mother, a smile, on the way down.

To be a year old means to speak

in tongues, but softly, to yourself,

in the morning, when the deep summer's

light begins to come through the slats,

and you hear the garbage trucks, doors

slamming. To be exactly a year old

means to jump up and down in the crib

the moment you hear a bedroom sound.

To be a year and a day old means

that at night your mother can take

your father's photo and teach you

to say "Aba", and you can make such

a wonderful mess sucking on a peach,

and pull off your diaper, smiling

with the dark eyes that open souls,

the heart you once opened to Ruth

in the desert, your grandmother's,

teaching her children to tie a bow.