

PETER MURPHY

ANTIQUE LOVERS

Framed by clock and owl and anchor  
he fingers dust in chests of drawers.  
Prickled by mildew and rank air  
he will not stay to hear the hour.

Draped in musquash she pokes at skirts  
prods a boot and sniffs a glove.  
Her hands crush through a rotten bra  
as she peers into another's past.

He looks at her as through a room.  
Passers-by intrude in shadows  
knifing the scarcely transparent glass.  
A dentist's set of teeth snaps shut.

Rattily scratching at a fox stole  
she paws at itches behind her ears,  
wondering at the person there.  
Grandma would have burnt this place.

Trying a snuff-box he snorts in tears  
afraid of what's gone up his nose.  
Avoiding ridicule in her eyes  
he fiddles with Melanesian figurines.

Forced by incongruity to specify desires  
they counterfeit their past together.  
Lacking the pomposity of walking-stick and pince-nez  
he bites his nails, she licks her lips.

Frame by frame the subtle dealer  
has tied these dying things together.  
Persons bereft of authenticity  
come to buy and pay to stare.