

Afternoon tea at the Castletroy Park Hotel

Feet planted side by side,
sensible oxfords and ankle socks;
she sits in the Conservatory
warming her hands on the pot of tea;
adding four packets of sugar to the big cup:
sweeten the boiled tea, savor the biscuit.

Twice each day she comes
from her single bed-sit two blocks away.
Hair neatly bobbed to the shoulder
held back by two barrettes.
Thin tan raincoat buttoned
top to bottom, twist of pale scarf,
keep out the chill.

When the Merry Pedlar Tavern
sets out its carvery lunch,
she is in line, juggling umbrella
and tray, coin purse--just enough
for an Irish-sized bowl of thick soup.
But she counts the coins twice
just to be sure, holding up the line.

No one complains. We see our mothers,
ourselves, juggling a tray, an umbrella,

counting out coins, keeping away
the chill with hot soup and company.

September 20, 2012--Anya Peterson Royce