



PROJECT MUSE®

Hammered Dulcimer

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Published by Utah State University Press

Williams, Lisa.

Hammered Dulcimer.

Logan: Utah State University Press, 1998.

Project MUSE., <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



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THE TENDERNESS

for Neil

A strong doe running with her young
is an unfathomable thing. In this late light
the trees form a craggy embrace
for her searching, and nothing's at rest.
Not the hill, not the fawn she defends,
not the pasture of clover and grass
but pursuance of movement itself
is her meaning—the absence of stone.
From embankment to thicket to lawn
that running must be her existence.
Sometimes she is splintered. Sometimes
her own child and its tenderness catches
on the adamant surface of flight—
We are lucky to come upon this
as we barrel headlong through the world
in our hard, narrow armor of self,
to come upon some kind of tenderness
turned, for a moment, to us.
Even if we stand defenseless
and certain to lose what we want,
we are lucky to notice her stop
in the grey morning mist, the sharp upward
incline to the heart of our forest,
this fleeting but palpable guest.