



126
934
THS



This is to certify that the
thesis entitled

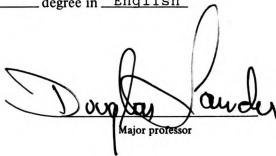
Inside and Out

presented by

Laura Therese Stemle

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

M.A. degree in English


Major professor

Date May '87



RETURNING MATERIALS:

Place in book drop to
remove this checkout from
your record. FINES will
be charged if book is
returned after the date
stamped below.

--	--	--

INSIDE AND OUT

By

Laura Therese Stemle

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

1987

ABSTRACT
INSIDE AND OUT

By
Laura Therese Stemle

Inside and Out is a collection of poetry written over the course of my graduate study at Michigan State University. Like many writers, my work comes from experience. Writing makes this experience understandable to me and to others. It is why I write and why I share my writing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Professor Douglas Lawder for his quick response to my request for help in the completion of this thesis project. It is not easy working under deadline pressures, and I appreciate his support and cooperation.

Thanks to the Skaldic Society. Their every other Wednesday input was invaluable.

And thanks to the one who made it all right to write again.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SWEET DREAMS ARE MADE OF STEEL	1
ROUGH DRAFT	2
EAVES DROPPING	3
BLACK AND WHITE AND RED	4
ENTROPY	5
BARNEY CLARK AND HIS "MAGICAL HEART"	6
READ ALL ABOUT IT	7
TAKING THE FLOOR	8
THE FLU	9
JOINT ACCOUNT	10
A.K.A. NITROUS OXIDE	11
INANIMATE OBJECTIONS	12
DAM	13
GIVE AND TAKE	14
LAST CHAIR	15
ECON	16
IN PROCESS	17
EVIDENCE OF ERROR	18
THE RUB	19
BARRIER FREE CONSTRUCTION	20
SUBSTITUTE	21

CONDUCT	22
C.O.D.	23
LEAVING IT ALONE	24
APPLY WITHIN	26
PASSING THE TIME	27
SPRING	28
TURNING IT OVER	29
HOOKED	30
CONSOLATION	31
COLD FRONT	32
CURB SERVICE	33
BURNED	34
GROUNDING	35
POLE TO POLE	36
TO THE LETTER	37
HE NEVER TOUCHED ME MUCH	38
FAMILY TREE	39
FAMILY TIE	40
ERIE	41
STONE'S THROW	42
AT LAKE MICHIGAN	43
EVEN IN THE SHADE	44

WISH YOU WERE HERE	45
FREE READING	46
SPARKS	47
SUN SIGN	48
BY-PRODUCTS	49
INTERIOR DECORATING	50
BECAUSE WE MOVED	51
GOING, BUT NOT GONE	52
EQUILIBRIUM	53
SCENIC TURNOUT	54
OVERHEAD	55
IN THE AIR	56

SWEET DREAMS ARE MADE OF STEEL

In the dark
She listens

At the end of the street
The train
Fits dent of wheels to curve of rails
With a whistle
It blasts by the platform
Moving
Fas-ster fa-ster faster faster fasterfasterfasterfaster
Stroking
Leaving
Sound wake

In the dark
She remembers
And repeats

`I think I can I think I can IthinkIcan IthinkIcan IthinkIcanIthinkIcan`

ROUGH DRAFT

Along my back my mother runs
Her hands
Open palms, flat, firm
Taking the rough away
Like water rushing over
The stones of my spine

Along the beach he walks
Collecting stones
Holding them in the well of
His palm
Turning them over
Checking for imperfection
Following fault lines
Completing them with the
Ends of his fingers
Placing them deep in his pockets
Protection until it's time to
Return

Along my mother's back I run
My hands
Open palms, flat, firm
Taking the rough away
Like water rushing over
The stones of her spine

Along the beach he walks
Replacing stones
To be struck by the sun
And turned into stars

EAVES DROPPING

The driveway words
 Of neighbors to parting guests
 Winded
 Climb
 Piton bud
 To
 Piton bud
 Of the forsythia beneath an open
 Window
 And reach summit ears

I would like to close the window
 So their words would
 Hit and bounce
 Hit and bounce
 Rappeling
 To
 The sill
 To
 The siding
 To
 The soil

But it is the first day of spring
 And they are the first to bloom

BLACK AND WHITE AND RED

I unwrap apples winterized in newsprint
They appear rested and well-red
I take one and
Settle down in a soft-covered chair
To read the late winter news

ENTROPY

The cover of my dictionary has come off
 170,000 words (it's the abridged edition)
 Lie naked in my hands

On leaves
 They drop
 Front and back
 Forty together

The litter of language

A to abacus	B-17 to baby	cab to cable
Zulu to zzz	Ypsilanti to yurt	x-ray to xyster

Covers

Dab to dog	each to earl	fabaceous to face-saving
Write to wyvern	vulcanize to vying	uvea to Uzbek

My floor

Gab to gadwall	haberdasher to hack	Iambic to Icarian
Tyre to tzar	syrupy to syzygy	Rx to ryot

My feet

Jab to jack-o'-lantern	Kaaba to kaleidoscope	macabre to Macedonian
Quiver to quotient	pyrocatechol to pyxis	oxytocic to ozonosphere

And I am left holding

Liquefaction to lists

BARNEY CLARK AND HIS "MAGICAL HEART"

They played Salt Lake City a hundred days straight

Wired for sound, that heart beat with the best
It was plastic and perfect and never did rest

With Barney in bed, they did two shows a day
At six and eleven they went on display

In minute detail, networks gave their reviews
And showed all the highlights on each evenings' news

But the body grew tired of this daily grind
And wanted to stop, if they didn't mind

The organs all failed in domino style
They just couldn't go on, after a while

Barney grew still, conceding defeat
But his heart went right on, not skipping a beat

So they pulled out the plug one early spring night
And broke up the act and turned out the light

They played Salt Lake City a hundred days straight

READ ALL ABOUT IT

I read the morning paper
Ink slides from its pages to
My finger pads

I rub hard with clean thumbs
But cannot rid the oily black

I rub harder with a linen napkin
To no effect

I stare at ten black points
And worry the ink is seeping to
My system where it will
Set in my organs
And give me a deadline

I hurry to the kitchen sink
And soap my hands with
Slick white liquid

I rub in and out of water
And dry on cloth towel

I stare at the faint grey tips
On my fresh pink fingers

I sigh and smile
Knowing I will not make
Tomorrow morning's headlines

TAKING THE FLOOR

My feet
Bare on the fallow floor
Fill the grooves between the planks
With the balance of ball and heel
And
Replace their memory
Of ripened green carpet
With
That of
The blank planes and furrows
Of earth-stained hardwood

THE FLU

I have been captured

They bring me to a room
I wait discovery

They ask no questions

With rubber hoses they beat my legs, back, arms
My muscles throb to the rhythm

They want no answers

With steel-toed shoes they kick my stomach
I draw in my limbs
I tighten my body into a fist
I labor to form each word to ask,
"What do you want?"

They take no questions

With microwaves they bombard me
My molecules shake and go red in the face
I bake from the inside out
I am done before the bell rings

They give no answers

They bring me to a cell
I wait recovery

They turn, walk away, and find who's next

JOINT ACCOUNT

I wait in the office hours for the doctor

The clock is stuck at XI to XII
Post-sixties patients are winding down and out

The nurse emerges and points to the room

I sit and stare at the color photograph of California

Ruddy trunks of sequoia stand by
Mastadon grey rocks and
Tusks of ivory waterfall

The doctor emerges and points to the table

I lie and stare at the stippled ceiling

He lifts my aching left limb and
Twist and turns and pushes and punches

I hobble to X-ray

I sit and wait and change

The technician emerges and points to the machine

I lie
On the table
On my back
On my side

The rays shoot through me to the plate

We are exposed
We have been in the dark
We see the light at five o'clock

It is bursitis
I am only twenty-six

A.K.A. NITROUS OXIDE

A mask of amber cups my face
The line is open
Like a Breatharian, I consume
Gas enters to numb
It sits in my ears, humming

The dentist enters, mumbling
His words exit m&ms

"Mmopen, please."

My mind has long since disengaged
The message is delivered as fast as an unzipped letter

He starts the standard conversation
I hear out of the corner of my ear

"Mmhow mmold mmare mmyou mmnow?"

The gas starts playing a kazoo
Words drop out of sentences like marathon runners hitting "the wall"

"Mmdo mmgo mmschool?"

He is a Reader's Digest interrogator

"Mm job?"

Finally, his words become a mantra

"MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM?"

I reply,

"ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ

INANIMATE OBJECTIONS

On the second floor
 Of the local museum
 At the top of thirty-six stone steps
 Are
 The bones of a bull elephant

Strung by guy wires
 They hang
 Head and shoulders above
 The floor

They hang
 Twenty years from the Kenyan kill and
 A thousand pounds from cranium to coccyx

They hang
 Not impossibly white like
 Those of a sun-cleaned veldtian graveyard
 But
 Dully greyed and stained at the joints like
 Bursas leaked 10-W-40 lubricant

They hang
 Poised for inaction

They are decidedly dead

But
 What if

A bit of tissue
 Remained moist in that massive skull
 And
 Some cells
 Residing in the marrow still
 With the key to copying
 Mass produce

They'd fill cavities to capacity and
 Send red running its course

And
 The bull would rise from
 The dread and shake and snap its tethers and
 Head for the plains

DAM

The beavers are on display
Behind planes of plexiglass
They
Break aqua surface tension
Make the approach with javelin limbs
Toss each in turn on the pile
And begin again
Life in a tableau

GIVE AND TAKE

CAT --

When I lie in your favorite place
By the rye brown arm of the couch
Under the 100 watt warmth of the lamp
You come with pressured paws to
Knead and settle on my stomach
Until one of us rises

LAST CHAIR

Winded air let into a clarinet
Filling and unfilling holes
Wanting upscale aerie ranges
Only to play deep-burrow notes
With my tin fingers

ECON

In code
The professor writes:
The Fed .00017 1982 bx-abx-bbx
On the blackboard
And
We do not wonder why
The economy and half the class
Are failing

IN PROCESS

Chalk in hand,
The scientist taps out the mechanics of
His theory on a wall-length piece of slate

He goes about filling blank to blank space
To get from upper-left-hand question
To lower-right-hand answer

And when done, sits and stares and rocks
Back and forth
Back and forth
Catching the rhythm of
A temporary truth

EVIDENCE OF ERROR

Hands touch to type, but fingers stutter
A correction tab slips between sheet and key
One step back and one step forward
Type lifts off to join a knot of letters
To unmade words

THE RUB

Grade One fat blue pencil

A one-speed bicycle, its
Balloon tires track the page

No eraser to correct
ERROR ERROR ERROR

Dead wood on wood
Wet "Pink Pearl" finger pad
Rub

The mistake
Radiates from the center
Turns dark and
Becomes a black hole

Answers fall in
Perfection is not a given at seven

BARRIER FREE CONSTRUCTION

Nouns verbs and complements
 Jumble twist and spill
 In my mind

Momentarily caught they
 Escape
 Before they can be
 Gathered like
 Ripe fall apples
 And placed in
 A safe tan basket

They fly
 Free
 Until slowly they tire

I catch my breath
 And scurry about
 With nimble fingers
 To capture them

Now they sit
 In
 Descending
 Order
 To be picked
 Off
 One
 By
 One
 And put into
 The
 Blanks
 Of
 The First Hour Verb Test

SUBSTITUTE

I set key to lock and twist
Turn cool knob
And slip into the opened
Classroom

I finger
The lines of grain in her desk and chair
The letters of her lesson plan
The seating chart that boxes and labels
Her class

I untangle cotton cord
Tug to turn panels parallel
And sunlight shoots through the opened
Window blind

Rays finger
The lines of wooden desks and chairs
The cut-out letters of projects
The map of South America that nearly touches the floor with
Tierra del Fuego

Partners in the coup
At 8:30
We take over the 6th grade

CONDUCT

We sit in backseat dark
Heat lightning flashes on the horizon
We place wintergreen Lifesavers on bottom teeth
And strike with top
We spit sparks, laugh, and repeat the performance
To the end of the roll

We stand in bedrooms dark
Light flicks on then off
We slip between cloud sheets
Static lightning skitters, crackles, and
Stops
We close our eyes
And sleep
To electric dreams

C.O.D.

With my mail order
The UPS man comes

In a truck the color of pumpernickel
He pulls curb-side
But blocks the street

He exits in matching uniform
The shade of toasted whole wheat
He bears a box
Bun brown
To my door
Without incident

Once his truck was taken, though
By hotdog sisters wearing
Only yellow mustard
Gaudy
Domestic
Yellow

He glances from me to his truck to me
A little worried
I let him in
I have to sign his sheet, you know
Besides,
It's lunch time

"Would you like a sandwich?"
"Ham on rye?"
"Dijon?"

LEAVING IT ALONE

A leaf has followed me since September

It has hovered
Whisked by the wind of my opening front door
To lift and land at my feet

I paid it no mind

There are several leaves in a cluster by the sidewalk
Brown and faded, they cling to a corner

Once they were soft and pliable
Red and bending with waxy protection
They stained the porch with their "wet paint" look

But I did not clear them away or
Get a rag and turpentine to clean up after them

I left them to their own devices

When they turned to the sun and lost
The remainder of their sugared juices,
They took to the corner and kept to themselves

I did not touch them with the tips of my broom head
For they would break and crumble and tangle in the straws
And I would have two things to clean

I let them be

Now it is April
And they are still there

They track into my place on the bottoms of my rubber-soled shoes
Often they make it up the seventeen steps of the narrow flight
To land in my living room

There I pick them off the carpet and
Deposit them in a basket filled with
Left-over writing -- papers torn and wrinkled by hands
And imperfect words

The other day,
I picked a leaf from the pile and carried it home

I set it on my table and
Let it be

Today I take it up and write:

The leaf is like land

With contours, it has the inlets and bays of coastal Michigan
Here is Traverse, there is Saginaw

It is a basin that holds the dark marks of age and cities
That mass along the rivers
Rivers that lead radially to surrounding lakes

The leaf is like an aging map

Ready for protection
It needs hiding from the yellowing light

I put it between sheets of clear vinyl
And touch it only through the barrier

I let it be

APPLY WITHIN

A young woman sits
On a curb
In front of a sign
That says
"Waitperson Needed"

Practicing

PASSING THE TIME

On this quiet Saturday
Floodplain trees stand on thin thoroughbred legs
While two men like scarlet leaves run
The bank

Of a slow moving river

SPRING

The child
Rests in
The open
Elbow of
The tree

Her empty
Basket is
Light on
The limb

Her hollow
Flute is
Light on
The wind

The river
Below
Rolls like
A printing
Press to
Carry the
News
Downstream

TURNING IT OVER

A leaf in a tree
Green now, due to spring

Growing from the end of a
Thin new limb,
Stem attached,
Firmly and smoothly, with
Barely a hint of the
Separation to come

Flutters in the breeze
And points in
Every direction to balance itself

And watches over the river
That moves faster and faster
Below

HOOKED

The leaves are fish on stringer limbs
Wind exposes their silver underside
They thrash about sucking dry air
That cannot sustain them

CONSOLATION

The skylight
Opens to
The night

Space is
Filled with
Constant
Motion

Companions
Travel in
Turn

They circle
Each other
Like
Binary stars

They look
But
Cannot touch

COLD FRONT

The
City snowplow
Makes a
Midnight run

With concave steel
It
Scrapes and scoops
To kick
Snow in
The face
Of the curb

It
Moves on
Leaving tracks
Of Mastadon
Molars
For morning
Sun to
Preserve in
A glaze
Of ice

CURB SERVICE

The black and white note
Lies waiting
In the gutter
Covered with
Old leaves and fresh water
It reads

SMILE
PLEASE

BURNED

In blue afternoon
Sitting in sun
Waiting for
Olympic torchbearer

Fifteen minutes
Then

Thirty minutes
Then

Forty-five minutes
Then
Lights lights lights
Red blue red blue
Circles rotating
Black and white police car
Red fire chief car
Then

Sixty minutes
Then
The boy
So young
So small
With red-faced effort
Carrying gold-trimmed torch with faint yellow flame
Then
Cars trucks
Official official official
Then

At home in blue evening
Sitting in white light
Feel red of cheeks spread
Touched by the fire

GROUNDED

The course I chart leaves me
On a spit of sand
I rock port to starboard to slip off center
And set sail to catch portable breeze
To no effect

I must wait for high tide
to take me where my calculations won't

POLE TO POLE

Streetlights rise over the
Hill like the forelegs of
A connect-the-dots
Spider

Its eyes open
And close with a
Succession of passing
Cars

With mandibles of
Night it sucks a meal
Of buzzing electrons
Until there is light

TO THE LETTER

Birds nest in B and D of
Sears
ROEBUCK AND CO.

They put brown shocks on bent tube stalks
And wait for the chlorophyll light
To green evening

HE NEVER TOUCHED ME MUCH

I must have been five or six
Exactly
On my winter birthday
We ate breakfast out
Soft boiled eggs went yellow all over my plate

He would
Tousle my towhead hair

At Montgomery Ward's
I chose the sled
Tan slats with red runners

I would
Climb the north face of his chair
To reach summit lap

At North Hawkins Park
I sat on my sled
Vertical back and horizontal legs
A capital L

At the edge
He joined me

Double letters
Repeated down the clean white page of the hill

Ninety words a minute

Faster than I ever went alone
All that white
Rushing
To my feet
To my eyes

Able to speak but one word at the end:

"Again."

FAMILY TREE

Long thin
Pods of
Catalpa
Ripen
In
Southern
Air

Free of
Smooth
Wood box
They are
Seasoned
Cigars

They fall
Smokeless
In the
Indiana
Sunlight

FAMILY TIE

We are two and three of a filial four

My brother walks ahead
I am three years behind

He is Eric, Racker, Goober, or Six
I am the sister that follows his apostrophe s

Eric is a magnet
Waiting for metal

I am a bur
Waiting for fabric

Eric's electric mind makes mathematical connections
My neurons hold a cease-fire

Eric charts a course and runs with size 13s
To finish first

I go my own way, but he draws me back
All my paths circle back to his

I follow his cold tracks
Our ends meet and he is off again

So am I

ERIE

We walk the shore
In clean white sweatshirts

Fish breathe in waste water and
Expire
On the beach
They are left to dry

Wind carries the scent of the dead
Off the lake
Off the land

We stop
And dig in the sand 'till we hit oil
It soils our sweatshirts--front and sleeves

We walk the shore

And leave the dead unburied

STONE'S THROW

Land is paved with cobblestone leaves
Wet by sheets of mica rain

River grouting connects
Slick tile banks

I see through prescription glass
And skip a rock
Going, going, gone

AT LAKE MICHIGAN

On shore
Gary raises factory plants
In air tinted grey like sun-sensing lenses

In waves
A boy chooses rocks with tweezer fingers
He drops seeds to pull-top can

Stone and steel to grow again

EVEN IN THE SHADE

Their wool tight next to their skin,
Curls cut, but uncontrolled,
The sheep breathe heavily in the barn

Though there is shade and breeze,
They sigh as if giving in to the old saying,
"It's not the heat, its the humidity."

Outside, a man wearing white on white
Shirt and pants, hoses down the barn
With a steady blast of high-pressured white water

Preparing for summer painting,
To reflect rays back to the sun,
He washes the narrow eaves and panels

And
I sit catching a western breeze,
And the prevailing mist

WISH YOU WERE HERE

On the way to Long Island
Saw cemetery
So many tombstones
So close together
People buried standing up
Dead on their feet

FREE READING

Asterisk stars footnote night text
And set in the underworld to make the notation

SPARKS

Orange wedge coals spit seeds
To
Root in evening sky
And
Grow to ripened stars

SUN SIGN

The sun passes through the twelve
Each in turn takes possession

The orb of power nests in cupped hand
A month of reign begins

Edicts spring forth
They are carried by light messengers

Scribes print daily
The cryptic words
Of dead and dying stars

BY-PRODUCTS

Leaves
Rendered red by
Falling sun

And
Tallow smooth by
Falling rain

Light
On wicks of grass
Bent by both

INTERIOR DECORATING

In my room

Mother
 Painted moon, stars, and planets
 In black ceiling sky and
 Papered with road maps to point out the way

Dendrite roads branch thin red and link
 Altair to Akron and Salem to Saturn

In my bed

I
 Survey by night light's glow and
 Follow a route with unaided eyes
 To orbit in darkness and
 Fly to the sun

BECAUSE WE MOVED

Billy Sock
Wears hand-me-down socks on too small feet
And
Sits with crossed legs across a circle from me

Susan Roach
Walks with me to her house for lunch
Matching in our navy school uniforms
And
We
Walk back to school for a Halloween party
A plump bumble bee and a whisker-thin cat

Michael Laden
Wears
Freckles, glasses, and green on St. Patrick's Day
And
Stands atop a bank of the frozen moat of the ice rink
And speaks a bridge of words for me to skate under

Forever

They are six
And
If they remember
So am I

GOING, BUT NOT GONE

Waves of light and sound

Ding ding ding ding ding ding ding
The music plays 'till he enters the
Treasure House and
Puts his keys on the hook

Captain Kangaroo wears a navy uniform with
Roomy pocket pouches

Waves of light and sound travel

Then he changed
He came in to a snappy sweet song

Captain Kangaroo wears a crimson jacket
Like your grandfather on Sunday

And children no longer know
How he got his name

Waves of light and sound travel from earth

Now he is off the air
Replaced by a morning anchorman
In a down-to-business suit

Waves of light and sound travel from earth to space

And there
The music plays
'Till the keys are on the hook

EQUILIBRIUM

Hunter has a lot of foot
The farrier says
Grasping the horse's hind leg
He lifts and cocks it to a bony wing
Guiding the shank
Taut between
His two-by-four arms
He flexes to expose rotting meat
Packed in shell hollow
Gently he prys and picks it
Clean like a dentist
To reach the white tongue of frog
Quick against the hoof
He takes a file to the wall
And rasp rasp rasps
To bring it back to the rest

SCENIC TURNOUT

Elephants half-moon
The water hole

Black mud splatters
Their grey canvas
Like a two-tone
Pollock painting

Their ears are great
Maps of India
And their feet
Steel-belted radials
Flat against the earth

Together they rest and
Move along unpaved
Highways

OVERHEAD

The
Line of grey
Sky moves
Like an
Aerial
Ticker tape

Paper flakes
Are released

They drop
Like 1929
Businessmen
To honor
The end
Of the
Fall

IN THE AIR

Papers in the fireplace burn to black
Cinders edged with spots of orange ember
Flutter like monarch butterflies

Migrating up the flue, they travel
Out and over monotone snowfields

And seek a north wind to take them
To light on the branches of
South-bound trees

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES



3 1293 03175 4173