

## American Reformation

Devised as a cure for  
 alcoholism, Dr. Sylvester  
 Graham's crackers skirled  
 out of vats of whole-wheat  
 flour and strap molasses  
 as a nostrum for multitudes  
 starved for the sugar lost  
 when the whiskey was,  
 an exit which meant  
 the insulin-producing  
 mechanisms shut down, feeding  
 delirium to the brain.

To fend off hallucinations,  
 to calm the shaking heart,  
 was simply a matter  
 of packing the mouth —  
 stopping the glottis  
 with the sawdusty and sweet  
 package until the tongue  
 swelled for water or milk,  
 the elixirs of childhood.  
 To engender thirst — then  
 slake it with nostalgia —  
 was the Pennsylvania Temperance

Society's genius, and more  
 infernally effective than  
 the loose clothing, hard  
 mattresses and vegetarianism  
 advocated by the other  
 salvationists. For while

their measures treated the  
external man, this arrowed  
straight to the soul. This  
was the food of life, and  
a journeying — the bolus  
breaking back into starch,

into sugar, back through  
the long polypeptide chain  
of enzymes into the finally  
indivisible glucose,  
only one configuration away  
from the lactose it  
resembles — a sham mother's  
milk which made it possible  
to believe in starting  
over again. A century later,  
we're still addicted to  
the idea of a reconstituted

past. The early winter  
dark becomes a schoolroom,  
and in it the radiator-  
warmed milk and graham  
crackers arranged on waxed  
paper in a design  
to make tolerable  
the endless minutes before  
the vapor lights come on  
and buses arrive  
in the four o'clock dusk  
to take us home.