

EDITH SPEERS

## THE BOTTOM LINE

the long road home  
takes you from legend and legerdemain  
to ledger book  
from slide rule to silicon chip  
from fingers and toes  
to electronic spreadsheet  
from bead click abacus to mouse click computer  
where reconciliation means  
not the egalitarian equal sign  
uniting left and right  
not the shake hands and be friends after a fight  
but the balance achieved by numbers  
where money has been earned and spent  
in a year whose beginning and end  
has nothing to do with the seasons  
nothing to do with myth or tradition or reason  
where no drunken party  
makes you kiss at midnight  
or fills the street  
with dancing dragons and firecrackers  
nor makes you face the first day  
of the next year of your life  
with a hangover and a list of good intentions  
but is an arbitrary invention  
by tax lawyers and accountants  
an invisible demarcation  
between what has been and what is not yet  
a sentry-boxed and barricaded border-line  
between the fact of what is past  
and the foggy future

of all those acts and transactions  
that are kept track of by the red and the black  
the numbers that are no longer abstract  
when branded by the magic signs  
that mean money  
the dollars and cents  
the pounds shillings and pence  
that have to make sense  
the way nothing in nature ever does  
the order that ethics and morals  
would never attempt  
must be met once a year and be stamped  
and signed by someone who routinely pre-empt  
the role all religions assign only to god  
the judgment that looks at your life  
as nothing but the net effect  
of what has come in and what has gone out  
the simple result of getting and spending  
each year has its audit and ending