James Doyle
Looking Forward
To the Twentieth Century

Horses and carriages stir up the beach
until the waves take them down. I tip
my top hat and flick my tails back
to brine’s lovely new tide. Wheels,
hooves, jellyfish. The boardwalk sign
is clear. Seaweed much too rabid—No
Bathing Today. But 1900 is resplendent
in its high collar, hard to see over, so
people keep jumping in. Something optimistic
about salt, scouring the old cataracts,
surging somewhere. And they do. The sand
a little queasy under all the tripods
that snap impromptu farewell pictures.
Populations rush out to sea waving, ride
the snorting riptide as it bucks them
right over the edge of the flat world.

Look at that inspiring curve out there!
Who’s next? Who’s next? The crowd
along the beach bulges forward
like a new horizon. No one wants
to be left behind when it sinks.
I shrug and take my place in line.