



**deep enough to hold a city**

**poems and fragments, 2004-2013: volume two  
steven schroeder**



text and images ©2022 Steven Schroeder  
cover and interior design by Steven Schroeder

*deep enough to hold a city* is the second of a series of collections that draw on material from notebooks I kept between 2004 and 2013. I returned to that material in 2021 with Basho and haibun in mind, as well as the prosimetrum tradition that flourished in medieval Europe. Both play off a tension between poetry and prose, and, looking back, that is what I found myself doing during that decade, when I was dividing my time among Shenzhen, Chicago, and the Texas Panhandle – and spending considerable time on the road betwixt and between. Haibun and prosimetrum both call our attention to the fact that writing itself is a journey, a practice (as de Certeau recognized) akin to walking. That is how I think of this work – as a long walk that was and continues to be a practice of meditation.

All of the texts are from the second of ten notebooks and were drafted between September 2004 and April 2005. Some of the material has appeared previously in poetry collections I have published since 2006, but I have gone back to the original drafts to rethink and reconfigure what appears here. Almost all of the material in this second volume was composed while walking (or, sometimes, driving) and committed to writing during stops along the way (perchings in my flight, one might say, with William James and Richard Luecke in mind). That much of the material was composed while walking is important for the rhythm of both the poetry and the prose in the collection. It may be measured in breaths, steps, stops, and heartbeats – a reminder that this is the work of material bodies moving in space and time – the writer, the reader, the words on the page, and the ground beneath the feet of all three. That some of it was composed while driving makes for a different rhythm, but, still, three of the units of measurement (breaths, stops, heartbeats) are the same, and the writing is the work of material bodies moving – the writer, the reader, the words on the page, and the ground beneath the feet (and/or the wheels) of all three.

In this volume, I've used photographs that were taken in roughly the same time period during which the texts were composed. The photos were taken in China and the United States – in Shenzhen, Hong Kong, Macao, Chicago, Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, and New Mexico. Most were taken with a Mamiya/Sekor 35mm camera (with a 35-105mm zoom lens) that my father passed down to me in 1983 when he purchased a new Olympus. (The prominent lens and the fact that the camera was already an

antique by the time I first traveled to China made it an excellent ice breaker.) Each image occupies roughly half the page, with the other half devoted to text (including the space around and between words). In my mind, the images, like the text, are an inscription made in the process of studying the world by walking it.

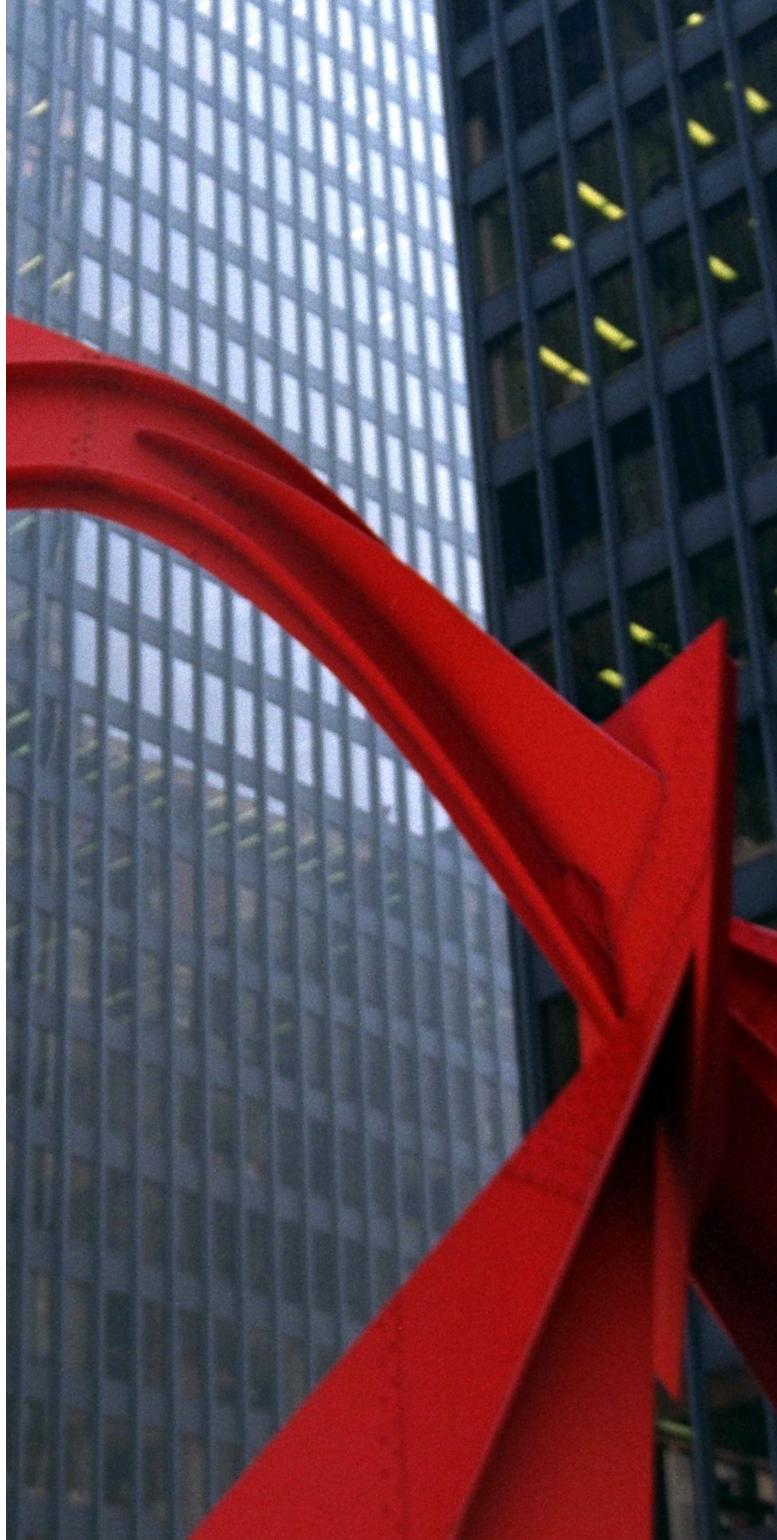
I look forward to joining you for a while *in medias res* as this long walk continues.

Chicago

February 2022



I  
at the speed of life



*Chicago and Hong Kong | 2 September 2004*

Two trees stripped bare  
by years and a thousand  
spring storms stand winter  
white at the end  
of summer among  
survivors still green.

They frame a pale moon  
shadowed blue that blends  
into morning sky.

Moonwhite cloud lines  
echo winter trees  
over leaves that have  
not yet begun  
to contemplate fall.

Just see this. Just see  
this. Just see this  
wholly new, and you  
will take off your shoes  
in the presence of God.





Politics is power, the body of power desire, desire the contour of obsession. The power of the whale was Ahab's desire: the whale could be contained, not the white white heat of desire. By the numbers, though, the mice have it. Ahabs make monsters of desire once in a hundred years, but every politician has a theory about how to catch a mouse. Deng turned to cats and took a line from Carl Perkins: black or white, woman or man, you'd better get it while you can. Dubyah, who is closeted in Deng's camp, would not dream of turning to a Mao of any color. Time was, he would have set his mind on traps: build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door. But who wants the world at their door? Now it is poison that does not know a cat from a mouse. We spread it with the passion of Ahab while every mouse on earth wonders what we see in them, and most every cat wishes the world would back off to make room for a nap.

*Hong Kong | 4 September 2004*

Crossing the footbridge into Kowloon Park, a little song that could be a call to prayer, then three notes punctuation, a full stop. Flamingo rises, walks on water with the aid of outstretched wings more suited to flight, settles back after six awkward steps into his element and grace. Swans mimic taiqi, join a conversation of gestures with elders in the park before the city rises. Women in gloves and gauze masks were up before the elders and the birds, cleaning away what was left of Friday night, sweeping yesterday off sidewalks laced with contrasts that reach the nose before the eyes – a burst of strong bleach, rotting fruit, breakfast cooking for early tourists and locals who will soon be hurrying to work. They will step over the occasional sleeper, dodge sidewalk tailors offering cut rate suits, miss the birdsong and the dance sufi spirited in the park by the mosque two blocks away.

Mist rises under a high fountain  
aided by air already full

and midday heat that draws a veil  
up from the surface

to soften the blow  
of a world that appears

harsh in full sun. Two birds who  
did not read the morning paper sing

gratitude above brooding  
for the cool breeze that stirs

over the surface of this water.



*Shenzhen | 5 September 2004*

That old Greek crank who said you cannot step in the same stream twice was right, of course. And the zealous disciple who did him one better by saying you cannot do it even once. But here I am in the same place, the same song, the same smiles. The world flows, Heraclitus, yes, it flows, but there is music in it, and we can always rest in its arms.

When a friend reminded me last night  
that a rose is a seal of the promise  
of Saint Therese's blessing,

I recalled rose petals scattered  
on the path by Guimiao Village and  
hoped they were signs of a hundred blessings,

not a single heart broken.

*Shenzhen | 6 September 2004*

Two hours into the haze that settled out of the last century over the beginning of this one and found all at once this morning, a cool breeze struggles over from the ocean and tunnels random paths for light that drips right through, backs up in streets that have no provision to drain such floods, mixes with factory ash to make mud that mucks up every step with what remains of the day before, seeps through skin, turns bones into solid impossibilities of ice, laughs at reason's puzzlement, slows the pace of the world starting here until its motion cannot be distinguished from the full stop of a granite mountain.

Leaves turn  
and drop yellow  
on red paving stone  
not for Fall but from the same  
foul stuff that turns air thick  
with spectacular sunsets  
in tropical heat.

The aesthetics of decay  
is a language of limits, a calculus  
inherent in our determination to avert our eyes  
from every trace of ugliness in death.

*Shenzhen | 7 September 2004*

When the air is still  
for a moment, the arc  
of the pale branch echoes

the arc of Nanshan's peak.  
Air stirs again, and  
branches dance

against the unmoved mountain.

Sea breeze catches its breath,  
and heat settles all at once,

rises when wind  
rises on shaky legs,

staggers off to a corner,  
waits for ocean to inhale again.

*Shenzhen | 8 September 2004*

The air is full of prose,  
and the weight of it  
makes my knees heavy.

There is scarcely enough poetry  
in it to breathe, so we choke down  
lungs full, hoping for a taste  
of what we need to live.

When it begins to fall,  
umbrellas fail

and the world is saturated  
with sticky gray syntax  
that obscures the sun.

Shenzhen | 9 September 2004

Cut branches piled high on sidewalks this morning have bicycles and pedestrians dodging cars in the street, and no one takes signals seriously. Two traffic cops fresh from raising the red flag in crisp uniforms blow whistles at random and gesture over a laissez-faire intersection that is going nowhere.

A single rose rises red  
on a straight green stem  
in the white planter  
beside my usual table.

Roses are traditionalists.  
This one has abandoned her Mao hat  
and uniform, but she stands straight and tall  
in Party, never bourgeois, red.



*Shenzhen | 10 September 2004*

Good cat bad cat, black cat white cat, it's the matter of the mouse that keeps me up at night. A hungry cat, not a good cat, does what it must to get the mouse. There is room and food for all three. Why not set aside good, bad, pass out bells, let the mouse live, let sleeping cats lie?

It is a rolling conversation  
on a busy street, father peddling  
in time with speech, daughter choosing  
to stand on the back of the bike, rising  
just to the level of his ear  
so they can hear  
each other  
over the noisy crowd  
through which they pass  
precisely at the speed of life.

*Shenzhen | 11 September 2004*

There has to be a still point on which this city turns, because it turns and turns and never stops turning. But not in the ten thousand blue-uniformed workers who stream into the street this morning when the shift changes at a factory on Gongli. Not in the fight that erupts over a traffic accident, threatens to make it serious. Perhaps in the swirls and eddies of conversation swept down the busy street, or in the rhythm of the women who sweep the square, always there before the city rises. Or in squadrons of dragonflies that hover near the edge of the balcony. Taiqi in the park, a little girl learning to walk who sits down hard by the sidewalk and laughs, the smile of a young boy holding his father on a morning bike ride. Ten thousand still points moving with a city circling, circling, making itself new in every moment.



*Shenzhen | 12 September 2004*

The little boy who burst into tears at the sight of a foreign face on the street corner last night was only giving voice to the universal shock of discovering there is an other. This would be altogether too much to bear if not for mother's embrace, soothing voices, smiling faces, a few words in human speech, assurances that this kind uncle will do no harm.

Contemplating in time of war  
the machinery by which demons  
are made and sometimes  
contained, I consider

ritual maintenance of textual  
irrelevance: make words objects  
of worship not places of encounter,

practice a politics with no place  
for compassion, give a face  
to evil that is nothing if not other.

Shenzhen | 13 September 2004

That long lizard who hurried across the sidewalk on tiptoe this morning looked familiar. He has a flat, I think, in Nanyou in a thick grove with a few bright red flowers. He habitually takes a brisk walk early and locals laugh that they can set their clocks by the old philosopher. He does not speak the language of the people who inhabit this place so he simply smiles and goes on walking when passersby stop him to say he looks like some ancestor who was heavier but had the same beard. He has been contemplating the world a long time with sharp, unblinking eyes, and his stories tunnel down, down deep as he can make his fingertips reach.

In Nanyou, the final blow:  
a new store, all chrome and ivory,  
called Idealism. I don't know

what it sells, but it is not Hegel.  
More likely more of the same *materialismus*  
that lines these streets with stuff  
to stave off emptiness.

*Macao | 14 September 2004*

Nothing is as visible on the ocean as on the plains, but it is not hard to see why travelers with experience of one and not the other see the unfamiliar new as an extension of the old. Peering at nothing all the way to a horizon that underlines a cloudless sky, I see an ocean of red sand embraced by ten thousand gentle waves of ocher.

A childhood in a language  
is necessary to write  
the poetry of it.

The eyes, the eyes,  
the eyes lay down a language  
of childhood under every world

for which they light the way,  
and there is no world for which they  
do not light the way. The eyes may see the sun

because there is something of the sun  
in them, but a childhood in a language  
sings the song that shines every sun.

*Macao | 15 September 2004*

A new city rises on a bamboo frame over old cities that clung close to earth and do not disappear even if they remain as old ghosts in shadows of the new which will soon be old and haunt whatever comes next. Incense burns in many doorways, and there is a whole bundle of it with a small shrine in a door across the street from McDonald's. One of the old ghosts lies beneath a primary school still going up, a university, and a casino. It sings Cantonese that shades into an old colonial tongue as it passes from a dusty walk to the street. Cantonese is at the bottom of it, a layer of Portuguese plastered over it with so many cracks your ears can see right through it. Putonghua and English are splashed on the surface, but they are seeping into the water table. Four big dogs lie on the sidewalk in the shade and don't even bark, because these intruders no longer appear strange.



Someone seems to have forgotten  
the guard dog when they  
abandoned this place. All skin  
and bones, she circles and circles in  
intense heat, trying to find a dog shaped  
place to rest. But there is so little  
dog shape left that there is no place  
for him in all this emptiness. Purple  
bindweed struggles to cover the garbage  
that washes up on the waterfront from  
casinos and other places humans  
have made out of our lonely circling  
here; but they cannot keep pace  
with the acceleration of our  
effluent. I pause at the temple  
at the bottom of the cliff to ask  
a bodhisattva of compassion  
to make a place for all the beings  
circling in loneliness, put my hands  
together and say thank you when the  
caretaker opens the gate at the top  
of the steps so I will not have to  
circle back and climb up another way.

Gambling economies, like oracles,  
betray extravagant faith in the profligacy  
of the universe, confidence that  
pennies are always raining  
from heaven falling on anyone lucky  
enough to wander under the right cloud,  
that, wherever they fall, they will  
finally swamp local drains,  
back up ankle deep waiting  
to be scooped up effortlessly,  
buckets at a time. The trick is  
not to be good but to have  
plenty of buckets ready and be there  
when the flood starts. Players know losing  
is a passing thing, a matter of wrong place  
wrong time, so they will do anything  
to stay in the game: the play's the thing,  
and this is the game masters play, banking on  
players staying as long as anyone wins  
any time, which they will take as a sign  
the flood has started in this place this time.  
No need to share the wealth, just  
keep the buckets at hand. Diviners  
know everything is passing, winning  
and losing, that every local sample  
contains the meaning of the whole  
waiting for someone who knows  
how to read it here read it now.

Macao | 16 September 2004

In the shadow of Saõ Paulo's façade, there is an unassuming temple with a shrine to Kun Iam. I pause for a breath of the soothing incense and nod to the goddess whose smile is not changed by passing occupations. A few steps away, a different incense, thick smoke from strong cigarettes preferred by the crowd in a small cafe that recalls, like Saõ Paulo, a time when Portuguese was putonghua. The language of choice is Cantonese now, or English where that fails. To honor Li Madou, I order Italian pizza, German beer for my ancestors. I listen to the music of two women who speak Portuguese at the next table and when three women speaking Cantonese pass, I wonder why anyone would want the whole world to sing the same song.

Ba Da saw that a single line  
can define a cat, a rock,  
a plum, a pine,  
a world

in four strokes.

*The master follows no rule  
but makes his own.* The line,  
the stroke, derivatives that flow  
live from the eye of the right brush.

The rule is in the living act,  
not outside bounding it.  
The rule of the master's  
line does not guide  
the brush. It is the  
ink that flows from it.



*Macao | 17 September 2004*

Four big dogs cross in front of my taxi, and the driver slams on the brakes. Only the fourth dog was in danger. The bumper is inches from his nose when the car stops. His comrades watch from the other side of the street, tongues hanging, smiling as if nothing extraordinary had happened. He stares at the wheel for a moment, unmoving, with the grim look left when dimly recognized mortality brushes by close, willing the thing gone. He takes two slow steps back, and the taxi hurries on.



II  
a garden unscripted



*Chicago | 20 September 2004*

they say  
Red Emma –

whose grave lies just  
beyond the limits  
of this city

in the company of  
anarchists so dangerous  
they could not even dead be

allowed to rest in a city  
remembered year after year  
almost everywhere

but here for putting into practice  
its conviction that the only  
good anarchist is

a dead anarchist – said  
voting is the opiate  
of the masses.

Anyone who has been  
with anyone dying  
slow in pain

knows an opiate  
is a thing to be desired,  
not mistaken for a cure. A sigh

is just a sigh. But blood crying  
from the ground calls  
for something

to kill the pain,  
a little spirit  
in a world

that lost its soul  
long ago. Do  
what you

will to ease the pain  
while the struggle continues  
in cities that work. But never forget

to share a poem now  
and again for Emma, whose  
heart and soul never let go, never will.



Chicago | 22 September 2004

All the talk is of politics. Last night, a few blocks beyond the northern fringe of the city, there was a loud consensus at a table in the corner that Dubyah is dangerous. Nothing surprising in this on the edge of lake front liberalism, but the conversation turned to Islam and opened a window on what if not torture is in America's heart. *Christians*, one voice intoned *want the whole world to be Christian and Catholics want the whole world to be Catholic but they don't launch a jihad like radical Muslims do.*

I waited for another voice to bring up Dubyah's crusade, but there was nothing but assent. I imagined liberal heads nodding in unison, felt a chill, thought back to the moment at which their conversation caught my ear. An authoritative male voice (the very one that separated Catholics from Christians and limited Islam to jihadists for whom all struggle is armed – no wonder Cat Stevens is diverted to Maine and returned to the UK where he cannot hurt us) was saying *I read an article about conservatives who set up a think tank and wrote an agenda I read this in an article it was headed by that young guy who was a senator from Georgia what's his name big name a few years ago just dropped out of sight set up a think tank I read this in an article baby faced guy looked real young what's his name.* Another voice says Sam Nunn. *No, no, darling of the Republicans, dropped out of sight set up a think tank I read this in an article.* Voice says Zell Miller. (Well, I thought, they do all look alike.) *No, no, big name.* Voice says Trent Lott. *No. Senator. Dropped out of sight. Set up a think tank. I read this in an article. Wrote an agenda. Right wing. George Bush read it, didn't think of his own. Just took this one. Guy dropped out of sight. Darling of the Republicans.* Voice says Newt Gingrich. *That's it. Newt Gingrich. (House, Senate, what's the difference?)*

No memory of Reagan, no  
memory of another Bush, no  
thought of the new Democrats,  
no name for that contract on  
America. Wrong place for the original

hit man. If liberals had a memory, would we have a Left?

Next day at the opposite edge of lake front liberalism, two guys drone on at the table next to mine. *His last speech on Iraq was excellent. I read John Edwards' book. He was a trial lawyer. Bush went in to Afghanistan and no one objected to that.* Another voice mumbles something about bad guys and talk turns to the Saudi royal family. I was surprised they didn't turn on Nader.

Wrong war. Wrong time. Wrong President.  
Wrong.  
And which who when would be right?



*Chicago | 23 September 2004*

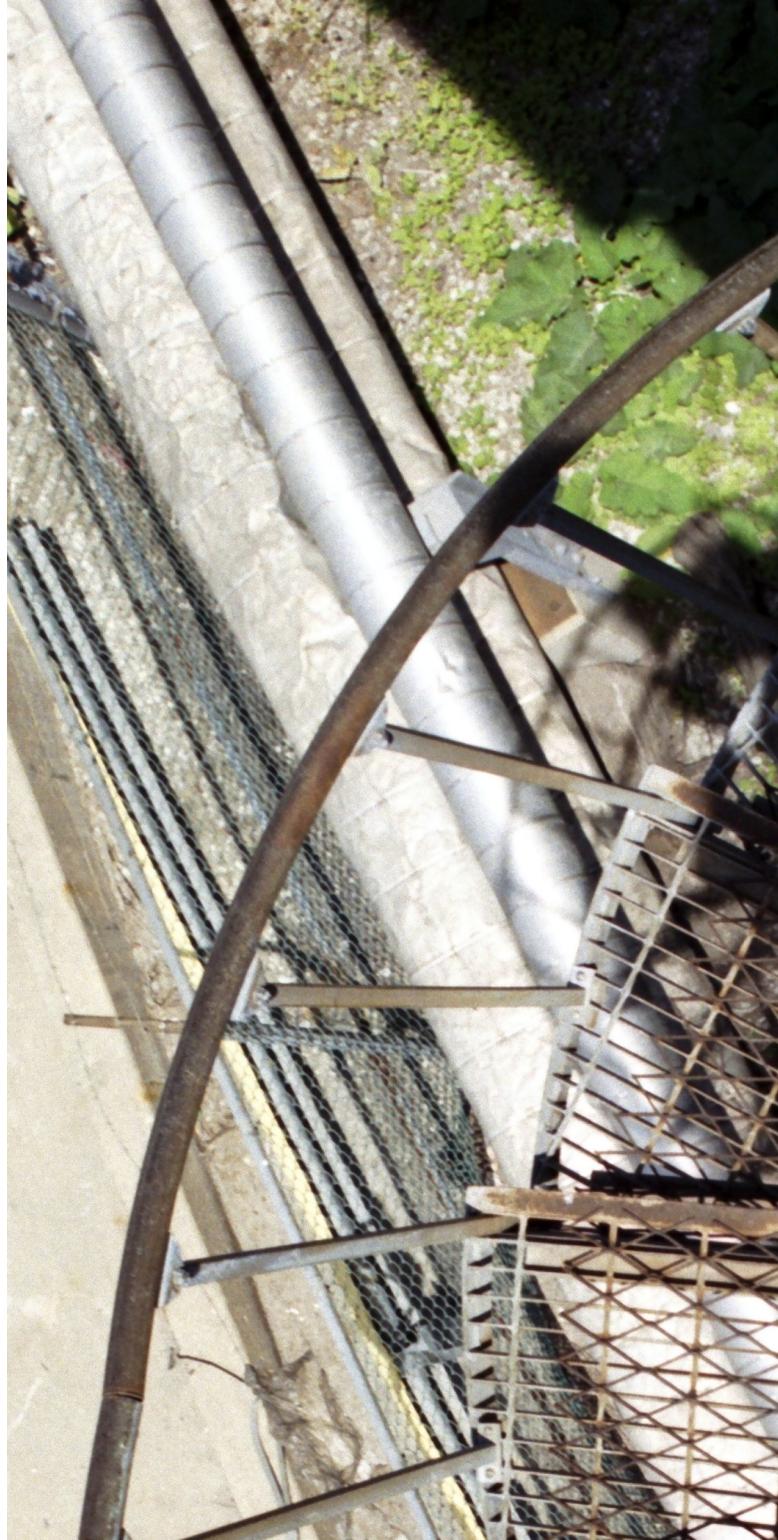
Half moon is painted on pastel  
blue sky with a single stroke  
of the same brush that made the  
clouds over which it rises, three  
lines pale with borrowed light  
that match the angle  
of a high branch, a circle  
interrupted by a shadow  
of sky pale above southeast horizon  
in the hours before sunset.



*Chicago | 24 September 2004*

Cold blue flame  
at day's extreme  
burns hotter when sun  
passes. Moon's mourning  
consumes memory. How can  
she recall tomorrow's dawn  
through the mist of every morning's  
singularity?

There is nothing  
for the white light of mourning  
save the last sunrise,  
which cannot come again.



*Chicago | 27 September 2004*

It's not the edge of the wind but the machination of squirrels that signals the approach of autumn. Yesterday, one stretched full length on a utility pole and dreamed of the cottonwood that stood there until it fell ill and had to be removed. In August sun that is still present on late September afternoons, he doubts the had to of it but cannot deny that it is gone. And this sunshine is nothing more than a moment's recollection of summer, gone too. Humans gather sins for days of atonement, seek out those they have wronged; but squirrel will not wait, and that old cottonwood was shredded long ago. No time to gather sins or ask forgiveness. Atonement will not see you through a winter in Chicago without a warm nest, a stash of nuts or mooncakes a remnant of trees to break the wind.

How can anyone be expected to think  
rationally about politics or any  
of the countless trivialities that clutter  
the world of coming into being  
and passing away when there  
is a picture of a lost cat  
tacked to every tree  
in the neighborhood  
and half of them contain  
the little girl he's lost, holding  
him on some occasion that calls for  
a snapshot with a gap toothed smile  
of bliss lost now for who knows how long?

And no matter what the sign says,  
nobody knows the name  
a cat will answer to  
but the cat.  
So how can you  
begin a proper search?

This sad state amplifies  
the tragic turns of countless  
leaves that do not grow brilliant until  
the moment before they fall to earth and die.  
So the world turns from autumn red and  
yellow to the rich brown of earth  
before leaves turn to it  
and every lost being  
is left to wander in winter blue.



*Chicago | 1 October 2004*

Moon expected a morning concert  
for National Day, so she took the best seat  
in the house early and waited in clear autumn air  
trailing jeweled hair on a soft breeze  
over a lake that stands still  
to admire her.

She does not know  
that she is the show tonight, and  
all those empty seats facing an empty  
stage in the park should be full of dazzled  
admirers leaning back like the water to watch.

But the crowd is on the other side of the world  
raising red flags for a fading revolution  
and the ceremony will be over  
before day breaks here.

*Chicago | 3 October 2004*

A momentary lapse, an instant  
in which Ganesha's image  
flashed from a sign  
on the street  
next to a place  
that promises Indian style  
Chinese cuisine, but no name came  
to mind, and I shuddered  
at the foot of an inarticulate  
sound, nothing more than  
the babbling ga in the presence of fate  
or fortune with which god's names  
begin, ga ga ga,  
and the awful absence  
contained in every beginning.



*Chicago | 5 October 2004*

Lost in a crowd of thoughts and autumn sunshine that leaves the world cold in fits and starts of shade discarded on this busy street by buildings far too self-absorbed to think about dispensing of it properly, the question and the flash of a silver band palmed out of sight between patches of opportunity come as two shocks, like sun in the gap behind dark glasses, like a refutation of the facile assertion that class does not exist in this place. I know that white is all one needs to look rich here, but I find it hard to imagine eyes through which I appear to be a man who wants to buy a Rolex.





*Chicago | 11 October 2004*

The security guard eyed me with suspicion when I walked into the lobby of the Michigan Avenue building where they were screening a documentary on Bukowski. My standing as a vagrant – a terrorist in the making – reached a new high when he saw me counting quarters and told me I would have to wait outside.

*Chicago | 15 October 2004*

Winter slips into the city with the undulating gate of a small green caterpillar you'd think could do no harm when you see it nibbling at the fringes of lush leaves in mid summer, so you turn and when you turn again half the leaves are gone and the rest, fading fast, are ready to drop and join their companions who have painted the walk yellow and paved the way for snow.

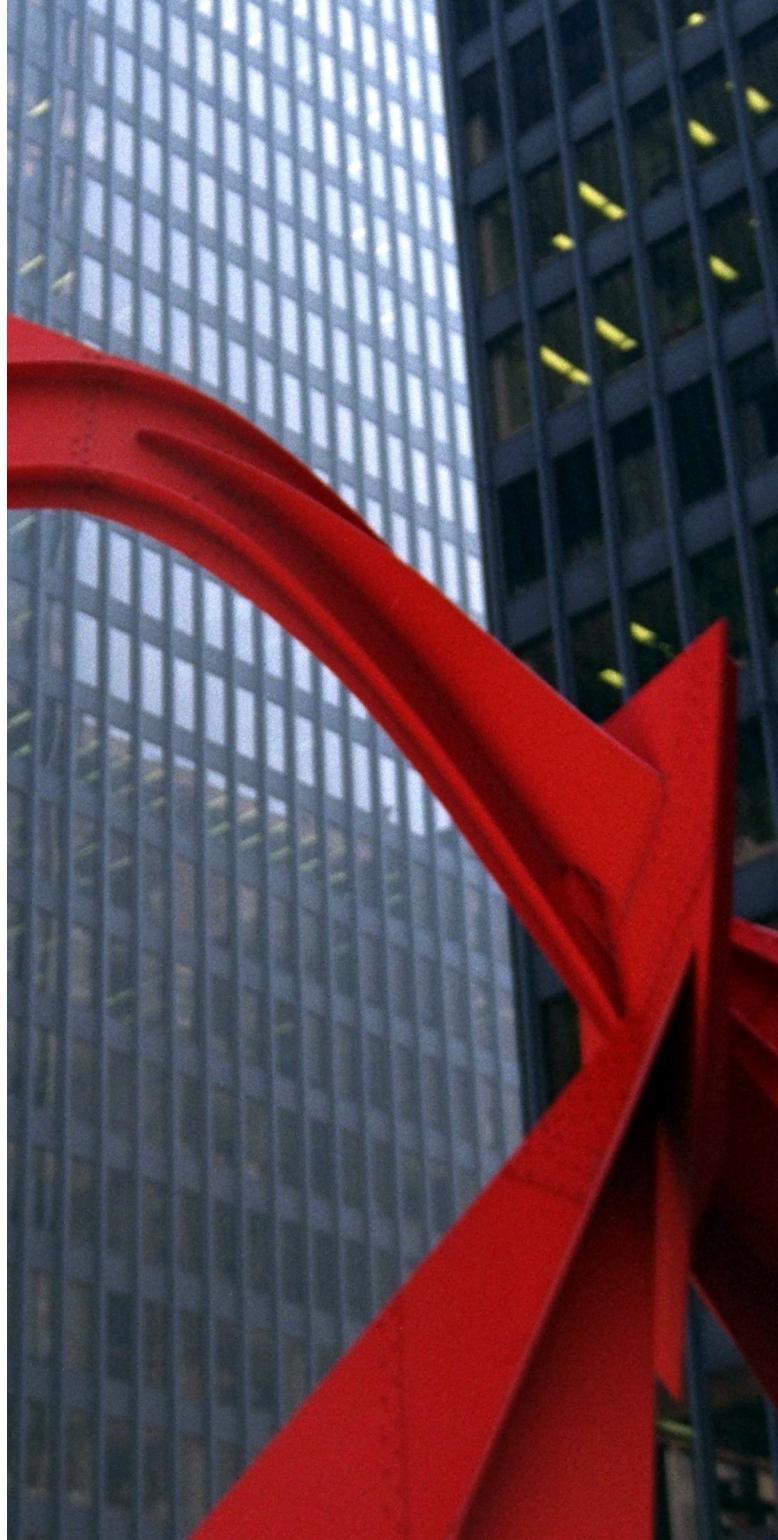
My granny used to come in dripping Wichita Falls heat, turn the only air conditioner in the house all the way up, go on about weeds and volunteers until time for her stories, when the garden was lost for a while in the background of operas that Puccini could have loved. This was my cue to follow the cat out into the Karo syrup air just far enough to find a shady spot where the ground below the grass was damp and did more good than that old evaporative cooler ever could if you carried your own stories with you where there was no television. We conspired with Johnson Grass, which was fine to chew on and made a soft bed if you tramped it down in a circle just a little wider than the one you would make if you curled up like a cat. The grass stood for this extra weight in exchange for sanctuary from Granny's formidable weeding. I'd lie back in it close to the cat, chew on the stalk, and contemplate a volunteer army of flowers unleashed like weeds to smash the rows of every militarist who could not abide a garden unscripted.



Every time I see some politician stand ramrod straight, salute the flag, and promise to make the world safe (from them, of course), I think the world would be a better place if they would stop making it for a thousand years or so safe and let the rest of us live in it. Here, we divide our politicians into those who served because it was an obligation in a war people insist on calling good, though it is hard to understand what was good about it other than its finally coming to an end; those who served because it was an obligation in a war almost everyone finally came to call bad, though for some this only means it was not big enough and (keep this quiet) we lost; those who volunteered because they thought this heroic even if the war was bad; and those who had other priorities at the time. Those who thought the war was wrong and so refused to fight it are not considered viable candidates. Liberals are allowed to say wrong war wrong place wrong time, though this is considered risky and has to be followed by reassurance that another war, a right one, is awaiting the arrival of our army.



III  
wildcatting



*Amarillo | 20 October 2004*

They always whispered amongst themselves that the ten thousandth enchanted strip mall in this place would send them all to an early grave. But still it surprised the press when a prairie dog town rose in an old cemetery where grave markers of prominent citizens tilted crazily or vanished altogether under mounds where sentinels stood and followed Mother Jones's advice to pray for the dead but fight like hell for the living. They stir this field of dry bones, wait out dry ice, smile at threats to bring in guns because they know the law will not allow discharge of firearms inside the city limits, rest secure that this place will not be paved no matter how nerves fray at rattled bones.





*Amarillo | 26 October 2004*

George W. Bush found Jesus in the coffee shop at the Holiday Inn in Midland, Texas back when they were both wildcatting out there. They say if you got lucky then you could make a killing in that place but I don't suppose Jesus was much interested; and Dubyah, who wasn't lucky, was at the end of his rope, the way those traveling evangelists like it. That may be why Jesus haunts dry places shading into deserts. He's not looking for oil or a decent cup of coffee. He's looking for lonely people whose desperation has ripped their hearts open. Sometimes, though, he finds one who takes the bait but sucks him in, cuts him up and puts him in the tackle box on ice beside special lures he saves for big fish in deep water.

Nothing stands here  
between the edge of the earth  
and the sun. After it burns

all day, it finally melts,  
runs down sky,  
dissolves in night.

*between Amarillo and Wichita Falls | 29 October 2004*

Playing peek-a-boo with a spooning moon at a picnic table on the west side of Vernon, Texas, nothing could be more obvious than that a celestial sea serpent is nibbling away at it in the dark. It starts out bright and clear, slips behind translucent clouds, disappears behind dark ones altogether for a minute before they break and it is there again with a bite missing. The official version is that earth's slow shadow cast by a star more than ninety million miles away moves across it, left to right, bottom to top; but anyone can see it is a round new potato that the serpent swimming alongside hidden by a bank of clouds is working down down slowly, until it's nothing but a bulge in the long serpent's belly stewing in digestive juices till it's gone and the only light this side of Vernon is starlight, bright enough when the clouds clear to see what's right before your eyes.

Woman behind the counter tells me it's happy hour at the Dairy Queen in Chillicothe; but she doesn't look all that happy, and I think her colleague with the mop would rather be somewhere else. I take my coffee black, expect to see lonely people leaning on bars drowning their sorrows in Blizzards, downing one soft drink after another until the pain goes with the memories and consciousness, close behind it, slips away to wait for morning when it will hammer away at the hangover wall that makes the world look like it is covered with marshmallows, sticky sweet clinging to every touch, unmoved. But there is nobody, nobody but me and two unhappy women working happy hour in a place with no spirits, in the Chillicothe Dairy Queen.

*on the road in the Texas Panhandle and Oklahoma | 1 November 2004*

This land was never lonely before it was  
occupied by weary travelers who'd see  
a solitary tumbleweed and think it was  
racing off to join a crowd. But it had  
lived lonely in a crowd waiting for this  
explosion of blue wind over yellow grass  
to break it free to race against the lines  
of trees that grow to lean into it. There is  
a universe between this ecstasy of solitude  
and loneliness. The land has always known it.  
Tumbleweeds know it in flashes of freedom  
between crowds. Weary travelers huddle against it  
and pity the tumbleweed, though they are the ones  
who know nothing but the cold in north wind.

On the edge of Wheeler County, sign warns  
God is at work, a signal, I suppose, to those  
who have his home phone number not to  
waste their time today, to the rest of us  
to be patient if we're put on hold  
when we call out of these depths.

Winter wind rolled down fast from  
Colorado mountains, slowed in  
Canadian breaks until the only sign  
November had crept across the Panhandle  
into Elk City was a gray sky  
that could hardly contain the sun.

IV  
flights of recollection



*Chicago | 3 November 2004*

Memories shadow the walk  
where maple leaves fell  
when cold wind shook them  
off branches winter dry in  
autumn, etched on gray  
surface by sun and rain  
alongside the names of two  
small boys who left them there  
with sticks before the concrete dried.  
Day after traces of bodies stopped  
in heat and light before they  
could escape, evidence  
of something green  
before winter wind.

*Chicago (with New England in mind) | 13 November 2004*

How do maple leaves  
decide in the moments  
before the Fall  
where to

fall between red and yellow  
when they will and brown  
like all the others who  
cover the earth  
below?

No dissertations on anthocyanins,  
the stability of tannins, or  
the distribution  
of carotins  
will convince me  
that this brilliance is blind.

Cottonwoods are  
of one mind, like aspens  
on Colorado mountains.  
But maples embrace  
rainbows, confident  
in New England rain that  
gold can never contain them.

*Chicago | 16 November 2004*

Before plunging into poetry,  
it was necessary to plunge  
the drain that backed up  
in the bathtub this morning  
to remind me that the ordinary  
is more than an old sewer or a new  
poem can contain. Take your eyes off it  
for too long, and you will be up to your knees  
without a prayer, without a poem, without a song.

A peony, pink refugee  
from winter traces  
that have settled deep  
into the end of fall, seeks  
sanctuary in a churchyard  
surrounded by a stone  
wall. She has the lean  
look of a woman driven  
from her home, stretches  
defiantly to scraps of light  
scattered by gray clouds,  
determined to wait out  
winter, rise again in spring.

Every new barbarity rides on a wave that propagates in every direction from every point in a perfect sphere collapsing; but the infinite gravity of its implosion cannot contain the dark light of depravity that dies in dying lines that will not stop until something stops it and nothing will. Gravity holds us heavier in passing time under the weight of dying light fallen, falling still. Another senseless death, another. Another life crushed under weight that crushes the life out of imagining. And, against it, my daughter speaks of Georgia peaches and pecan pie at Thanksgiving.



*Chicago (with Amarillo in mind) | 18 November 2004*

A single mention of the Perseids  
in an old man's poem recalls  
a cold clear plains night waiting  
with my father who'd fallen  
already to the cancer but stood  
with me in the cold long after  
everyone else was asleep  
to see in the end nothing.

And nothing is so rare  
as that which appears  
only in air cold clear

high enough to resist  
the bending of light by gravity.



*Chicago | 19 November 2004*

Every other tree is on the verge of tears after a good cry yesterday stripped almost all their leaves away. Bare branches are lined with teardrops ready to fall with the last yellow leaf, and even pines sigh under the gray weight of clouds. Wind far away on the north shore sends waves crashing against rocks here on the other side. Water leaps at the thought of a break in the clouds, captures all the sun there is in every drop suspended in the instant when a wave turns, waits to join another circling back to tell the wind it has found this land weeping under the weight of tears waiting to fall from branches stripped bare on this shore by a day of mourning for the dying of the light.

False familiarity  
of the voice on the phone,  
a little act of war.

a thousand birds sing  
a thousand songs,  
one for each bright red berry  
that remains on the bushes below them,

staggered because they know  
how much sadness can seep in  
through a single crack  
in the wall of sound.

They, not the sky,  
separate the sadness above  
from the sadness below

and the sound of their voices  
is the only space left in which to stand  
against what will come in the end.

*Chicago | 23 November 2004*

Violin leaps from intervals between  
trains at Washington – a single burst  
of Mendelssohn for passengers hurrying  
south past Chinatown to catch an eastbound  
bus at Garfield, and I suspect Adorno  
will have to be rewritten.

The whole concerto is contained  
in the train's short silence,  
though the last note  
does not sound

until it has been shattered  
a hundred times and the train  
has carried its hearer  
six stops south.



Chicago | 1 December 2004

*How do you know what the birds know?* I am not certain whether this is a methodological question or a question of fact, one of those challenges masquerading as a question, meaning really, *you can't possibly*. It would be easier if it were spoken so I could weigh with my ears what *you* carries and *know*. But it is an editor's query, left in the margin for the imagination of the eyes, light as light, not so substantial as solid ground. If it is a question of fact, an epistemological challenge, the editor has a point. In this postmodern malaise, who can? Nobody, certainly not the birds, knows, and they, like we, are condemned to hound dimly lit corridors outside even our own hands, trying to make out shadows and contain epistemological claims with no reason. But if it is a methodological question, the answer is ask – or be still and listen when they chatter endlessly about what they think they know as they will from every dry branch after fall has finished with them. They know nothing with more certainty than anyone else, and they repeat it in songs they sing to make the world whole no matter how shattering cold the wind.

*Chicago | 3 December 2004*

A cherry orchard one flight up plays  
to climbers willing to ascend higher  
than the main stage, higher even  
than the balcony. But roots  
reach down, entwine audiences  
below, tap loamy bodies lulled  
by lesser plays to doze  
through freedom's terror

see dead mother ghosts  
but not the ghosts  
of old oppressions  
dangle roots like  
water lilies floating  
on the surface of another play.

Every crystal fragment of the sax  
shattered when its music meets the train  
can be identified by the scar it leaves  
when you pick it up.



Regulars know this; they leave the pieces  
for the hired help, step gingerly over sharp edges,  
keep their hands in their pockets,

ears closed tight against broken glass, blood, eyes  
tuned to sound more easily contained.

The custom is  
not to drink the local water  
but to drink the local beer,  
imbibe the spirit of the place  
but steer clear of bacteria  
you have not known  
all your life.

So innkeepers supply  
displaced water shrouded  
in clear plastic  
antiseptic illusion to make  
us feel better while, spirit filled,  
we get acquainted with the bugs.

I met a man at the bar who turned me on to his two sisters who waited at Midway Airport for three hours in 1964 for the Beatles, she said to explain why she had not set foot outside the hotel since she arrived six hours before.

*Chicago | 5 December 2004*

Music is light  
to the eyes of the dead. The living,  
driven to distraction by melodies of light  
see music through glasses  
darkly, wait for death  
to sing eyes open.

Music is the light  
of the eyes of the dead,  
tuned, in the end, to its rainbow.

The living are driven to distraction  
by the sound of light, see  
by faint music darkly

mirrored, people who might be  
trees, wait for the miracle of death  
to sing eyes open.



*Chicago | 11 December 2004*

A sham Jason is comic relief between bull rides, not likely to fleece anyone but distraction enough to get cowboys over the fence and out of the arena before they're gored. He's guided a ship through peevish gods on treacherous water, so he knows how to keep one eye on an angry beast and one on a crowd torn between blood and a good laugh just short of it. Whatever he found he lost long ago, but he has not abandoned the quest. He still wants nothing more than to get out of this alive and rest in golden silence between acts.

*Chicago | 13 December 2004*

Purple kale lies low  
with cream and indigo  
against green spruce corpses

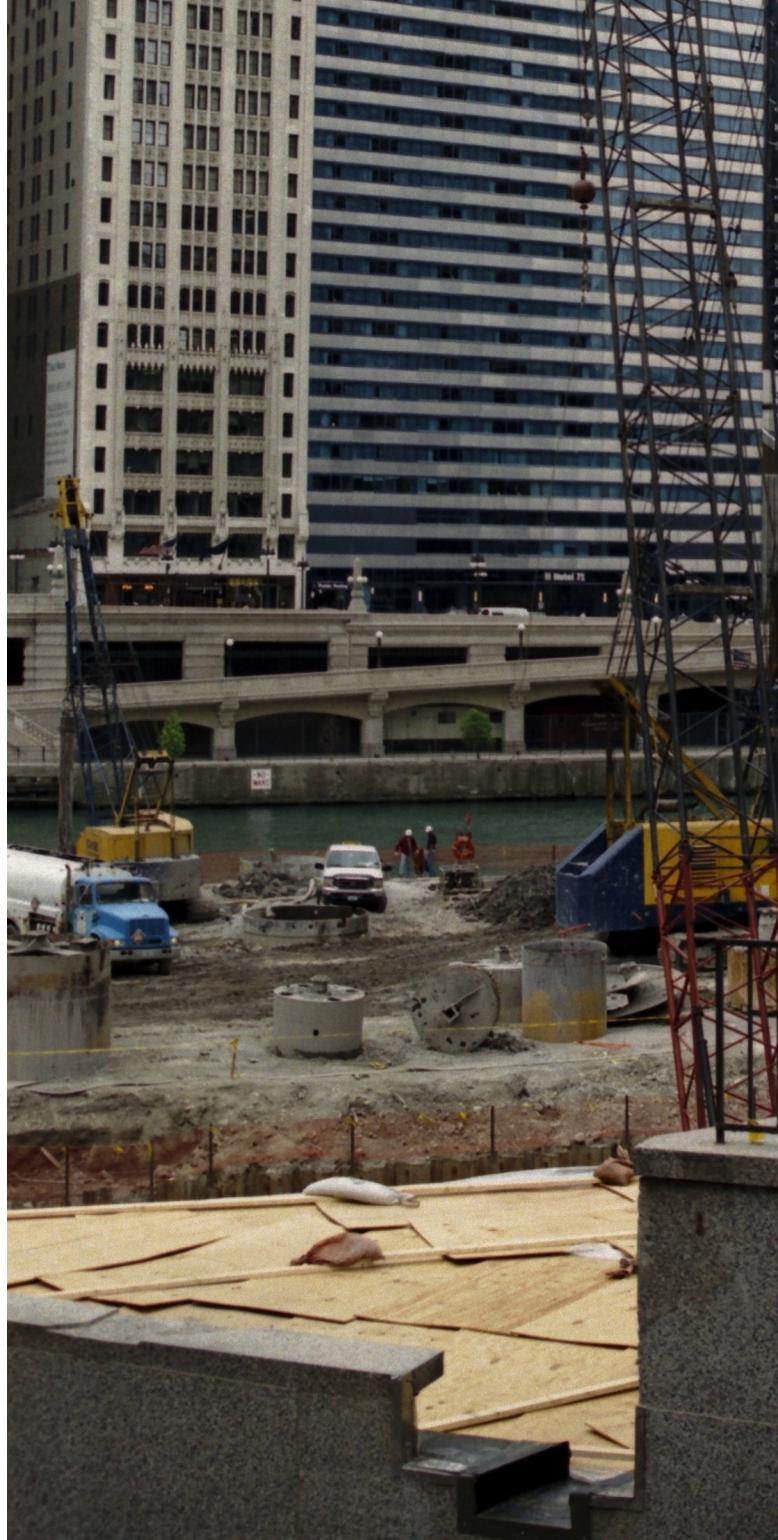
piled high in the square  
of a strip mall on  
the seventh day of Christmas,

a vision of Yggdrasil's revenge. Boniface  
long dead, evergreens hacked away for  
Saturnalia, and there is still an old oak

in the neighborhood with boughs  
that touch Paradise  
just beyond the limits of vision.

They say Mozart wrote improvisations  
for his sister Nannerl, who committed  
them to memory and repeated them  
in the shadow of her brother.

Father Leopold had something else in mind  
when she came of age to contain  
flights of recollection.



Another shadow, and her voice  
is nothing but an extra set of hands  
in a B flat piano concerto.

*Chicago | 15 December 2004*

Time deceives like these shadows  
of maple leaves etched on walks  
since Summer by Autumn  
decay before wind or some machine  
cleared them, traces of absence in light  
that has traded heat for the absolute  
lucidity of sun in sky blue.

But they  
look like fossils  
from a warm era now  
a million years  
gone.



*Chicago | 17 December 2004*

Crescent moon anchors  
over three chalk lines in blue  
sky, sun falling fast.



*Chicago | 18 December 2004*

Gray sky is not quite right for melancholy.  
It distracts, drives to distraction what  
needs the lucidity of sun bleached  
blue sky over sand broken by  
lines of prairie grass

on tiptoe waiting for wind or an eye  
like O'Keeffe's in a long coat narrowed  
over a slight smile, hat pulled down  
and flat to skyline at the end of vision.



*Chicago | 22 December 2004*

I don't suppose it matters who is  
in charge when the charge is  
sharing secrets with the enemy.

The question is who is enemy  
to a poet and what secret of interest  
to which State poetry can possibly contain.



*Chicago | 31 December 2004*

All the fall leaves have settled  
into winter brown and lie  
clenched around the cat and me,

speechless in sun shining through  
wind stripped trees. A Chinese flute  
drifts through the door over slack guqin,

and it could be spring. Not  
a funeral pyre to be seen,  
but the scene is haunted;

and I cannot settle  
with leaves in sun for thinking  
of a priest surrounded

by death who says the Lord is  
not fussy about funerals  
in times like these.

Polished glass at street level tempts the eye to see itself as another, a glance not a gaze to ascertain that nothing is awry. A mirrored wall doubles inside the room, and I am startled when I turn to avoid another approaching and discover my other self in spotless glass.

*Chicago | 5 January 2005*

Not silent, snow,  
or soft here.  
It has machines to slow

the city, and armies  
of conscripts to scrape  
metal on pavement

while drivers recall  
slowly what it is like  
to feel wheels slide on ice.

We meet winter in disguise  
here, though he knows us by eyes  
that undermine our incognito  
in the face of another who has  
caressed the contours of our face  
for years with fingers of snow  
so delicate they recall the whole  
from each fragment left unveiled  
and recorded the particularities of light  
in our eyes with wind's deep vision

*Chicago | 8 January 2005*

Windows of conversations left open,  
screen unrepaired, this sash has rotted  
through a century of rain, and it is  
only a matter of time until the glass  
drops out and anything that flies  
will be in as much as out.

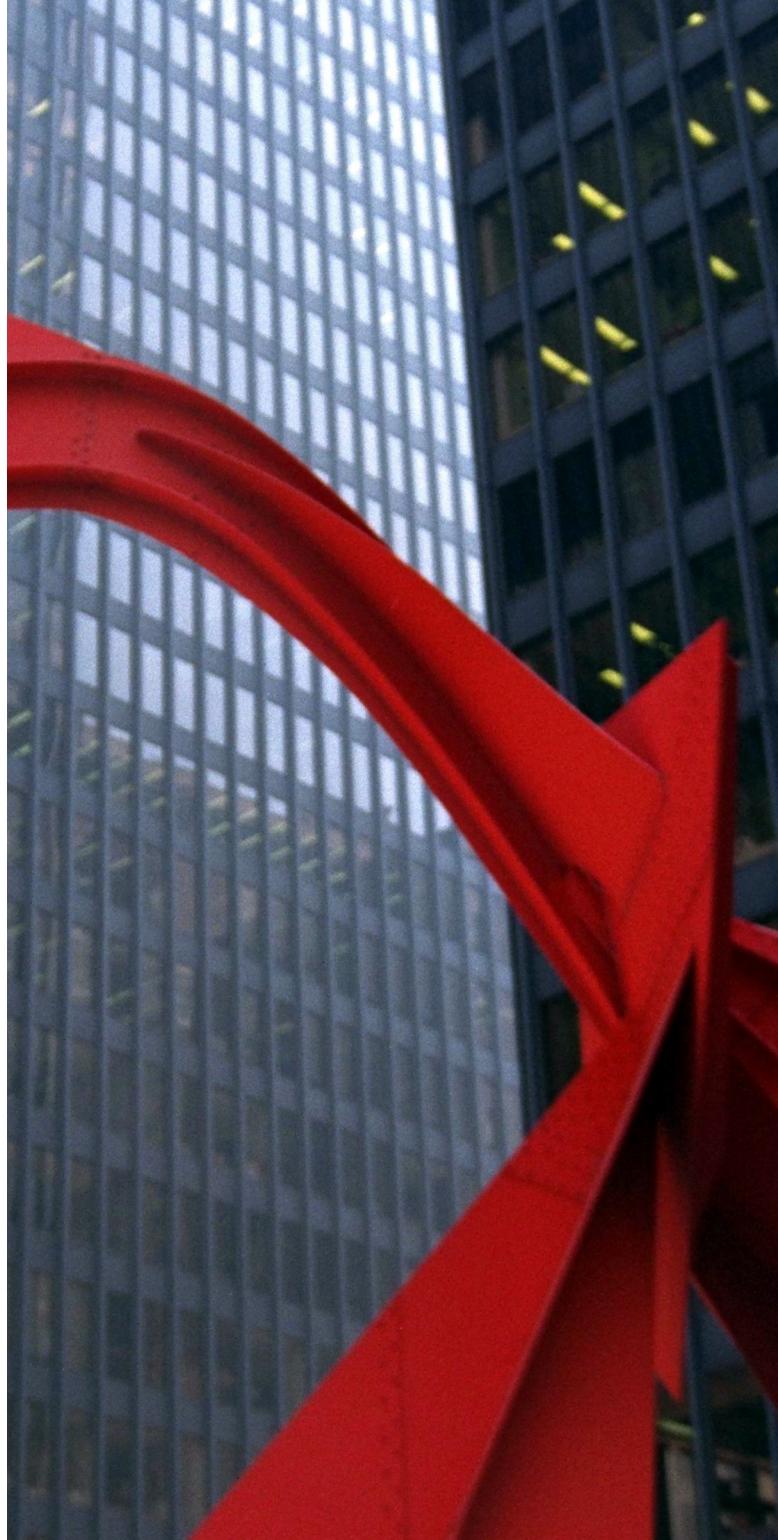
Uncontained conversation one would think  
would be at the point of bursting  
with exuberance, but this  
mundane beast is wallowing  
in everydayness taking in one  
passerby after another until there is  
no conversation that does not include you.  
You cannot be outside. You cannot be.

*Chicago | 15 January 2005*

Sky set to work at sunrise  
freezing light to the pure  
pale sliver of moon  
suspended solitary  
in an ocean of absence  
on the horizon of earth's turning.

light will thaw by morning,  
fall in snow powder,  
pull itself together  
to a pastel  
crescent swelling  
in the direction of a full moon

V  
no doubt this is America



*on the road to Alabama | 19 January 2005*

On the edge of Louisville, not far from the XXX adult store, there is a billboard: *One man, one woman, God's plan for the family*. I tried to slow and read the fine print, but there are no speed limits for evangelicals in Kentucky, so I had to give my full attention to staying out of their way at rush hour. Even so, I wondered whether Jacob got the word or Leah. Surely they were evangelicals, but I suppose they could have been grandfathered in. Seems that half the cars have bumper stickers that say WWJD, the other half just W. Probably not dress up and spend all day Sunday at the megachurch. There might be work for a carpenter here, but I'm pretty sure he'd burn the paycheck on dinner with a bunch of loose women if he didn't get arrested first for looking like a terrorist scouring the town for a place to buy wine on Sunday.

*on the road to Alabama | 20 January 2005*

In Tennessee, signs insist  
with equal intensity  
that Jesus lives and Elvis.

All fireworks sales  
are final, and you could win  
twenty six million.

Seeing all this on Janis  
Joplin's birthday could  
almost make a body believe

in resurrection  
which has more to do with hope  
than bodies breathing.

Sign says trust Jesus.  
Hawk sitting on a branch  
above it trusts eyes, wings,

wind to raise them,  
says nothing.

When a sign in Tennessee advises you to choose the Strait and narrow if you do not want to go to hell, it is quite possible the spelling is right. I don't know about narrow, but George sure as hell can sing. And he has a thing or two to say about a thing or two that matters – beer, broken hearts, Amarillo. I don't know if that means heaven, but I can see why they'd tell you to give it a shot.

Cross the Alabama line and there is a monument, a confederate flag in a cluster of flags, a sign to recall DeSoto's expedition, a photo of Werner von Braun, a Saturn IV rocket. There is no doubt this is America. A few miles further in, a sign tacked to a fence post says "Gay's fill up hell." I'm not sure what Gay's got, but if she can fill hell with it maybe it will make these folks less inclined to send the rest of us there.

*Mississippi | 21 January 2005*

Green pine fingers spread  
against straight brown trunks,  
just at the top

where they can brush  
blue sky in January.  
Birches stand as straight,

white on brown, stripped  
to a remnant of a few  
rusted leaves.

Deciduous trees  
know it is winter,  
without cold.

Some twist in and out  
of straight trunks in lighter shades  
of brown as though they

were the only ones  
who had ever felt the wind.  
Brush scrambles around their feet

with the squirrels who carry  
yellow secrets between them  
and the sky

to mix with blue  
and replenish  
green pine fingertips.

VI  
every music hesitates





*Chicago | 25 January 2005*

After three days, the city rises  
with sunshine, leaves  
empty tombs of melting ice,

what remains of a white shroud  
stained by struggles to escape  
it when it was solid.

They say the world is  
getting warmer, but it is  
never so cold as

when the dawn blanket  
of snow goes liquid in  
a conspiracy of sun

and greenhouse gases.  
It fears there will be no Thomas  
to thrust his doubting fingers

into the wound,  
and so it takes a form  
that will find fingers

through gloves, toes through shoes  
and thrust the wound upon them  
pure, cold, undeniably risen.



*Chicago | 27 January 2005*

Not a sannyasin,  
just an old man lost  
in a wilderness.

The conversation  
at the next table is  
in Russian

and I overhear nothing  
but the rhythm  
until someone

breaks into the chorus  
of "Sweet Home Alabama,"  
then back to elections in Ukraine.

In this wilderness  
meaning lies  
in rhythm, not words.

*Chicago | 29 January 2005*

The city sleeps here  
beneath two silences pierced  
by crows who live in sound,

who cannot breathe  
in its absence. Smaller birds  
cluster in webs of consciousness

that appear to us  
as trees, settle in critical  
masses that recall

how to sing with sunrise  
after cold nights. Icebergs  
in the lake seem simple

on the surface  
where eyes meet them,  
but they freeze

in underwater flocks  
of memories that touch us  
in instants of winter



wind that will not connect  
until death dissolves us.  
Human voices are few

outside at this hour. They  
join in time as the city  
comes awake.



*Stevens Point, Wisconsin | 3 February 2005*

Ten thousand times  
ten thousand was  
enough to convey  
a whole universe  
of things coming  
into being and  
passing away,  
but not enough  
to arm a people  
filled with fear of falling.

Dazed cattails rise  
through melting ice, blink  
at passersby in sun dazzle

off white snow. They've seen  
it all before, but this  
liquid river in Wisconsin

February still  
surprises them. They wonder  
if spring has come early

or if this thaw is  
a bit of a joke before  
the next blast of winter.

They'll talk it over  
while birds sing a warm afternoon  
in a stand of pines

by the river  
that barely notices  
the breeze.

But they will  
have their guard up  
when night falls,

stand and wait with  
the patience of many winters  
for the second coming of spring.

Between snows, secrets here are hard until  
the final thaw melts them and they dry up  
in the sun or slip unnoticed into  
the river. Every rabbit that was out  
this morning has left a record magnified  
by hours of melting since sunrise. And  
every track to river's edge was made by

a child unafraid to get her feet wet.  
I take them two at a time, but still snow  
melting seeps in to remind me winter  
has not finished yet; and every other step  
takes the shape of a walker who has not  
grown up and would rather see the river's  
edge than drive by dry on Main Street.



*Stevens Point, Wisconsin | 4 February 2005*

A thin sheet of ice  
on the walk by the bridge  
over the Plover river

can just bear my weight  
before sun breaks over pines  
in the morning.

A bird with two notes  
makes a song of them and silence,  
joined after a time

by another,  
a half step higher  
at some distance.

Dry oak leaves whisper  
something unintelligible  
each time the wind rises,

a presence under  
the silence of the song.  
When I walk back

with sun,  
ice cracks  
behind me.



Chicago | 4 February 2005

Not to hear sadness in every music  
when there is war (and human presence  
has been war as long as it has been)  
is a crime. The world goes on, the world goes  
on, the world goes on and on, but every music  
hesitates. It pauses not to mourn our dead  
but to mourn a human presence  
that cannot say “we”  
without murdering  
its brother.

*Human resources, main  
streaming, a river flows on  
the way institutions grow –  
or die when they no  
longer move.*

*People speak of now  
in words salvaged from  
the way they remember them.*

A power lunch, I suppose; then  
I hear *poetry* and speculation  
on which center is the center  
of literature in the city.

*I'm not writing poetry now  
because I have to spend my time  
in preparation.*

Professors of poetry, they agree  
that they know everyone in poetry;  
and what it is about, what it is  
about is networking now. I am

relieved when the one who said he was a chair  
turns to me and says *Are you...?* and I say *No*  
as he says *I thought you were somebody else.*  
Thinking *I am*, I say *No, no, nobody,*  
and he turns to the other and says  
*I'm buying you lunch.*



*Chicago | 9 February 2005*

Time was, passersby  
looked askance at walkers  
who talked out loud to no one

walking with them. Now  
everyone talks to no one  
there all the time, and

the walker saying nothing  
is the one suspected  
of attending to imaginaries.

Cellphones, watch alarms,  
bell on the elevator,  
punctuate poetry

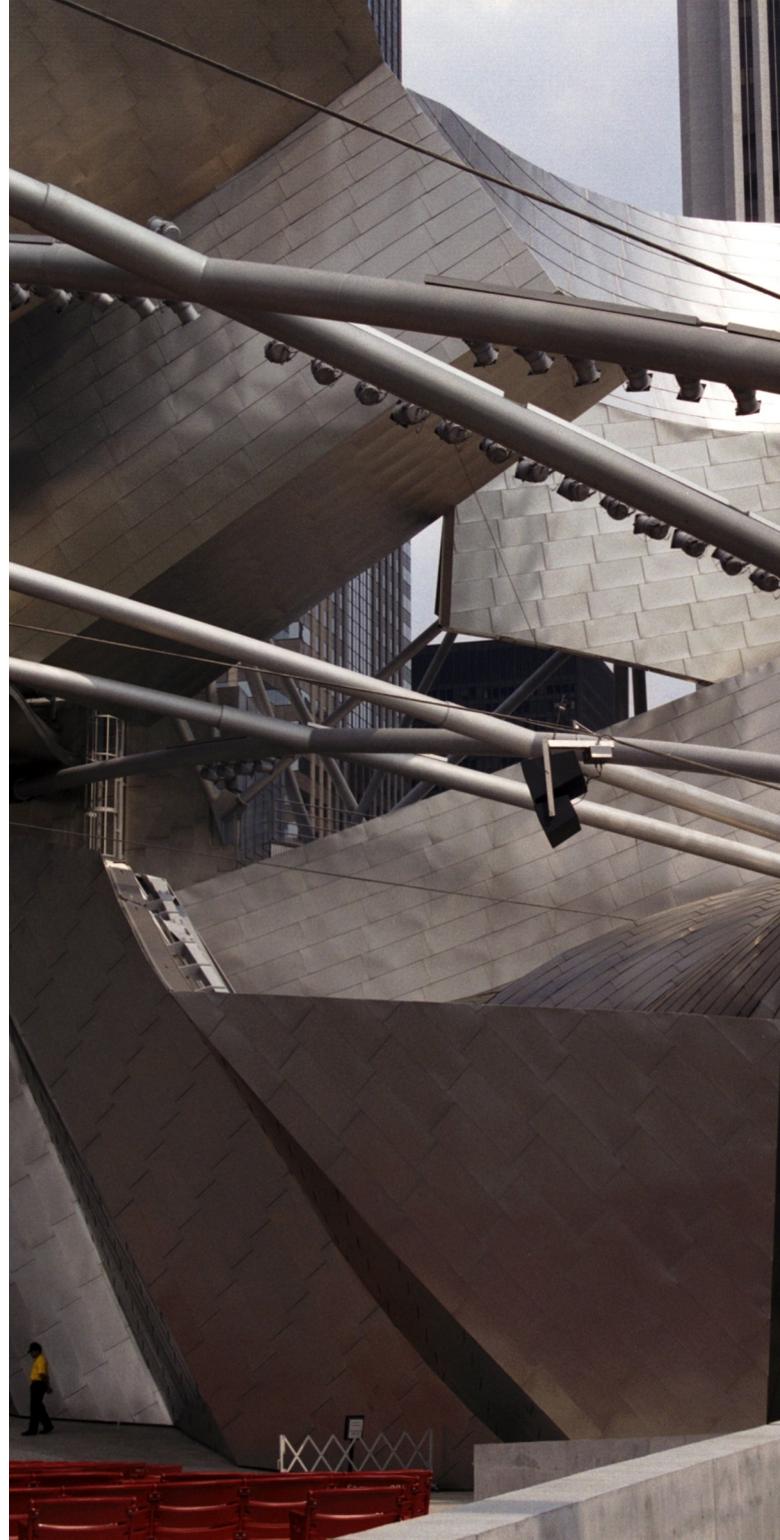
solemnly intoned  
in formal halls filled with  
students of poetry,

poets, passersby  
looking for warm places, who  
wonder how outside

influences affect the work,  
whether it contains stories,  
have they considered

other forms, and  
in the end do they know  
any jokes.

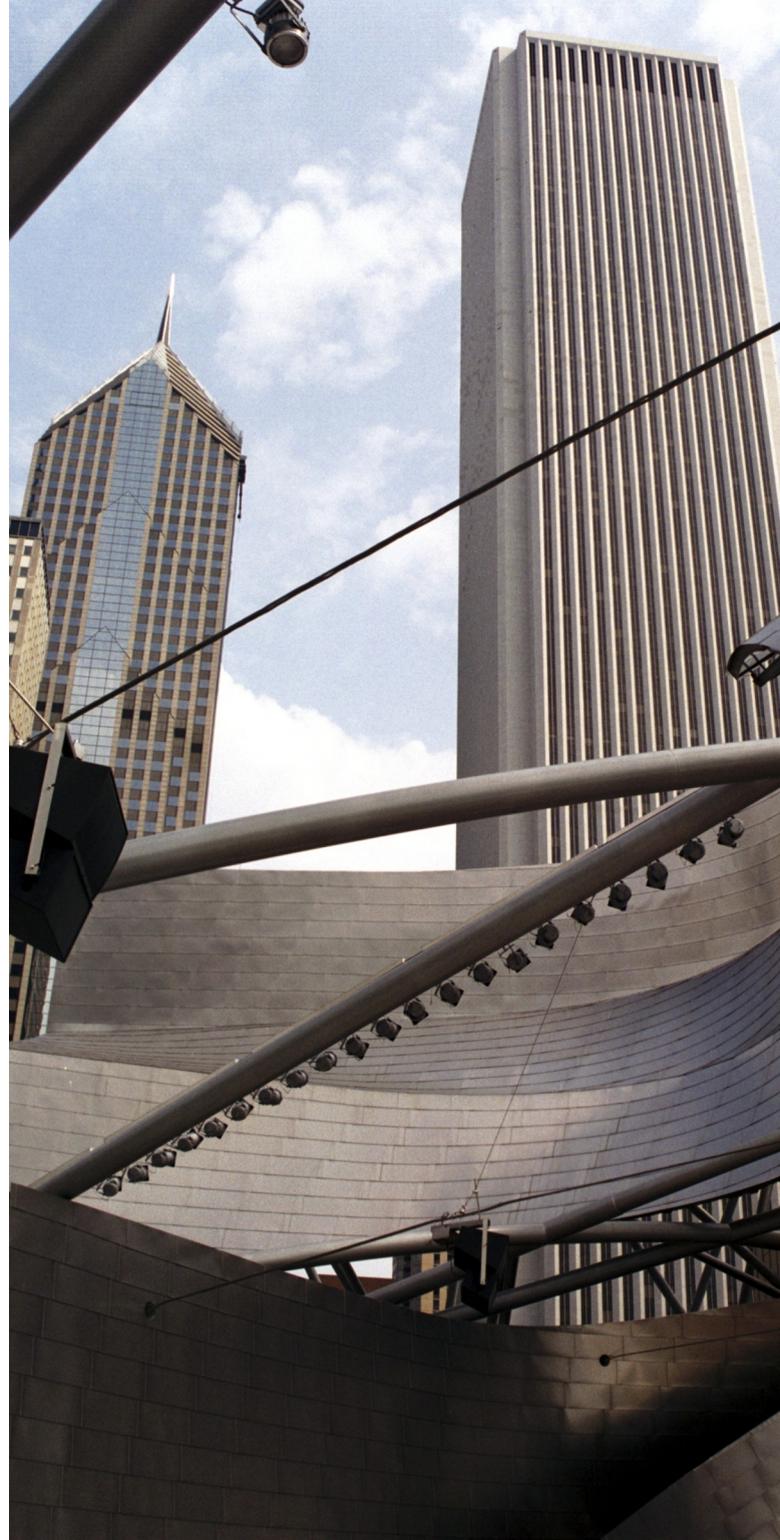
One, yes, and by the way,  
story, never contained,  
contains this.



*Chicago | 16 February 2005*

Written in silences that lie uneasy  
on edges between February sun  
lucid behind a young mother's stern  
warning in Russian to two children  
on foot about the dangers of dawdling  
in a street where drivers attend no more  
to signs than small creatures who have to  
make their way daily through traffic and  
the space of the poem's light filtered  
through old glass: stay close.

The third she has in hand. She would  
take them all in if she could contain  
danger that floods the place –  
a woman speaking  
the language of home  
under cover of light.



*Chicago | 17 February 2005*

Twelve fragments of jagged glass  
rest on rough stones between  
weatherdark iron rails, catch light  
between clouds, flash broken messages  
in an obscure code about what they used to be  
a window on before they were shattered here.

*Chicago | 22 February 2005*

Cardinal trilled assurance when sun broke  
on his branch this morning after a short  
snow shower that it was all a joke.

That graywhite slippery stuff we'd seen  
off and on for months was a children's prank,  
the kind you can buy in a can

at the novelty shop.

They've had their laugh.

It was spring all along.



*Chicago | 23 February 2005*

Skyline and sun rise  
on opposite sides  
of the lake. Buildings  
do not know they shine  
with the reflected  
light waves on the lake  
can't catch. Sun stretches,  
smiles, rises, prepares  
to tower over  
the tallest of them  
until moon arrives  
and buildings fall silent.

Someone's singing about Jesus  
at every stop, but he slips by  
unnoticed, at a loss  
in a place where priests  
have laid hands on more  
children than he can count,  
none of them more likely now  
than before to take up their beds  
and walk. He keeps his hands  
to himself, sinks silent

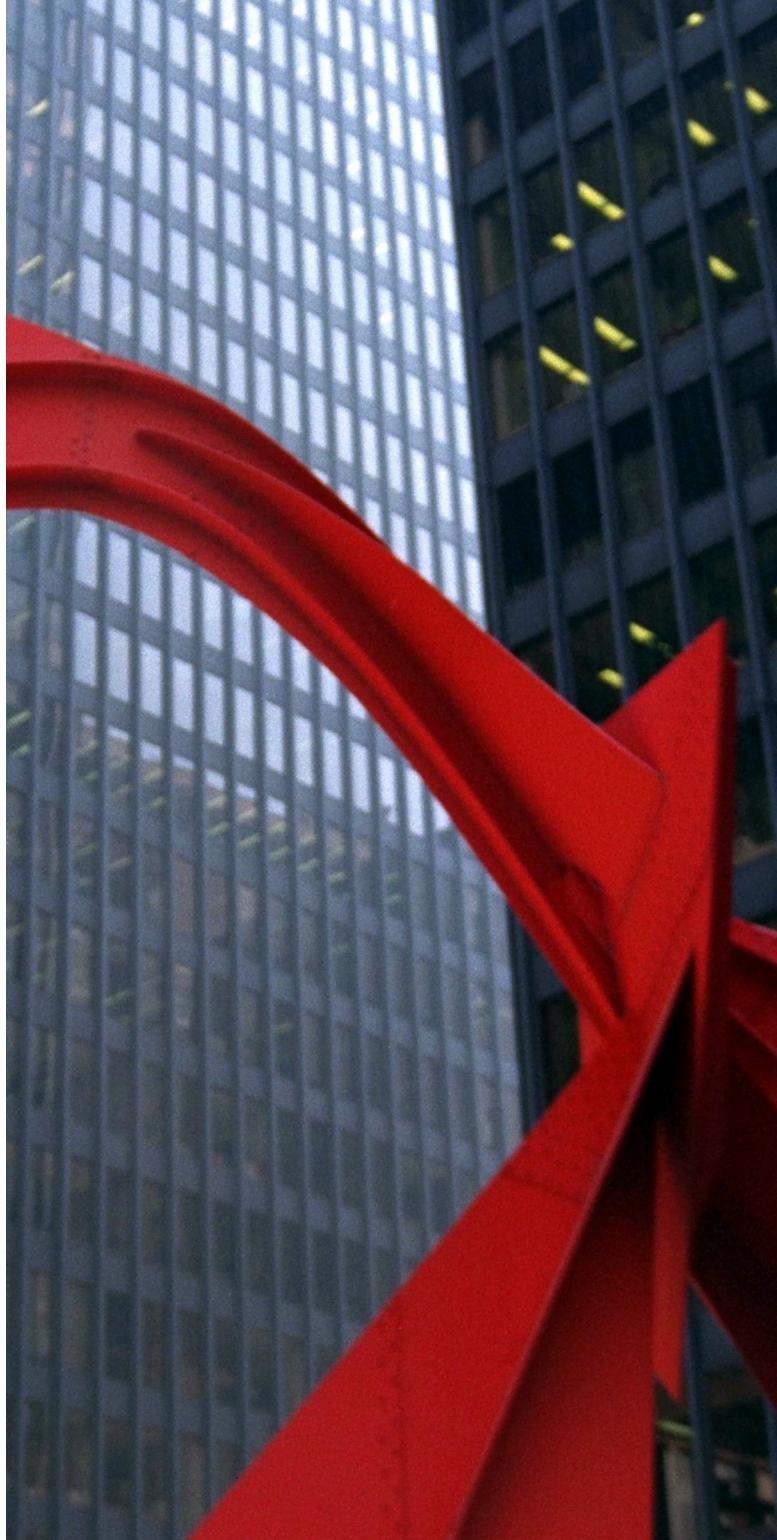
in the pain of a world waiting  
for him to come in glory.

Didn't he speak to them before  
about legions of angels? They  
will not come, and he will pass  
unnoticed as he always does  
until someone recognizes him  
and nails him to the nearest cross.

Moon is joined by half a dozen stars  
who have made their way to the city  
tonight to see if it is true that you  
can't see them here. They dream  
of invisibility, imagine the city  
is a magic ring that confers great power  
on the one who possesses it. Imagine  
their disappointment when someone  
looks up. They only know they  
have been seen and fade at sunrise  
still dreaming while dreamers below  
get down to work in a city where  
most nights you can see stars.



VII  
even in Texas



*San Angelo | 23 February 2005*

Clouds break somewhere over Oklahoma,  
where the only sign of human life is  
a patchwork quilt sewn of earth and water  
on plains that spread five miles below us.  
This is a season of black and brown  
waiting between gray lines and winter wheat  
that spreads and greens as we penetrate down  
into the heart of Texas where plains meet  
hills rolling with dry ribbon river beds  
to desert that lies in shadows cast  
by this dark cloud bank and dreams of floods  
but knows in its heart water won't last.  
This is a season of earth tones waiting  
hoping there soon will be reason to sing.

They've turned off every second street light downtown  
to compensate for the climate controlled mall on  
the edge of the city. No one walks down here  
at night anyway, but the nice bordello  
themed restaurant soldiers on, and the waitress  
promises they'll make the Texas version of chilaquiles  
without a trace of meat. It's as safe as Guangdong fare  
after I repeat my vow to the server, fritos take me  
back four decades, and she brings Shiner Bock

in a frosted mug. So I give it a shot. The place is empty. All the evangelicals are at Hooters toasting family values with Bud Lite and buffalo wings, so downtown small town America is for people like me when the sun goes down, even in Texas.



*San Angelo | 24 February 2005*

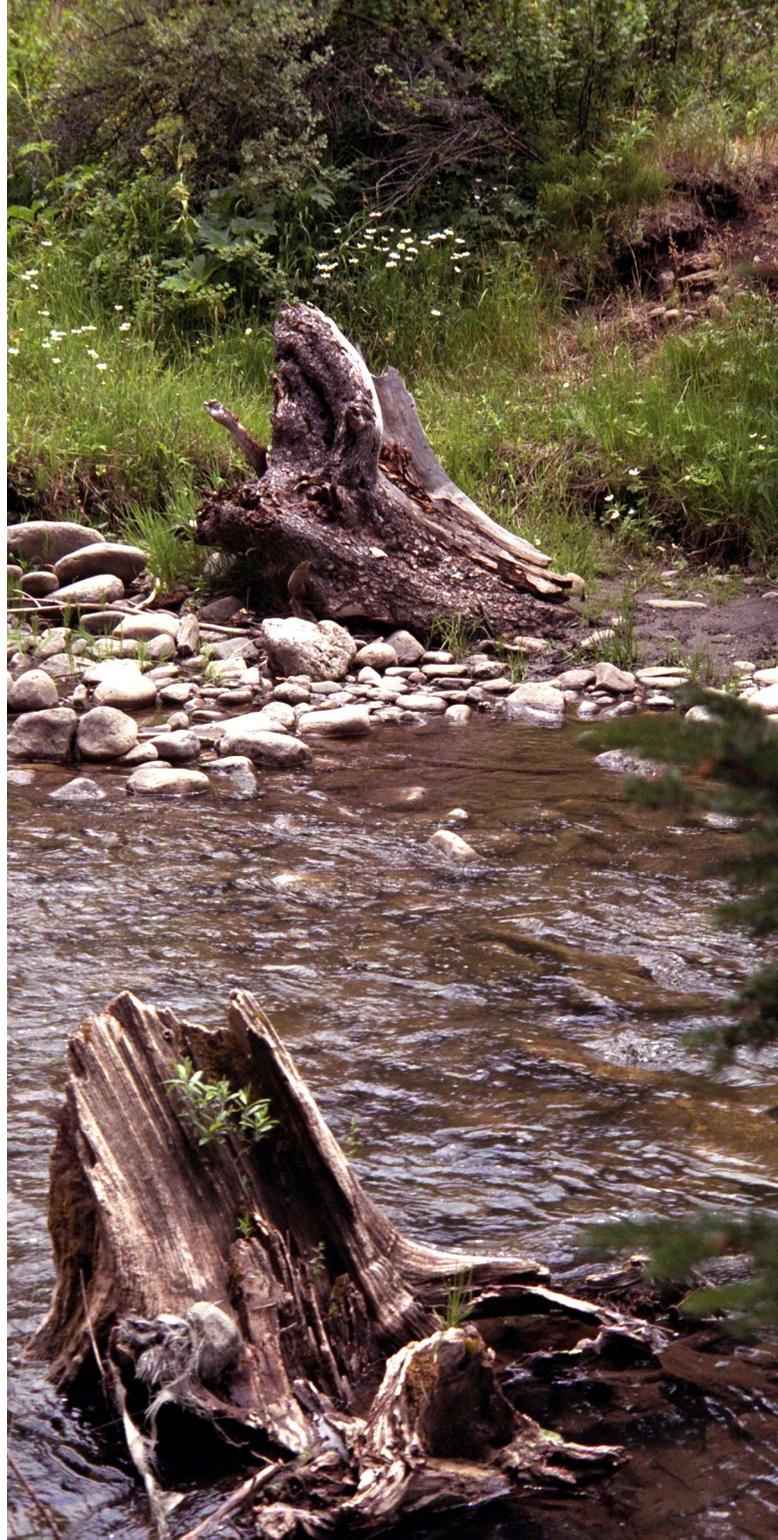
Beaver drifts with the current of the river  
as he angles toward the near shore,  
swims more deliberately  
when he sees me stop on the path to watch him.  
He goes under, and I do not see him again.  
Birds don't mind the rain, half-hearted  
as it is – and squirrels haven't slowed  
a step. One gives me the benefit of the doubt  
when I click my tongue squirrel like,  
but he scurries on up the tree  
once he discovers that I have nothing  
to give him other than a few words. The last time  
I walked on this river, it was almost dry;  
but now rain has filled it bank to bank,  
and I stop on the bridge to listen to it sing  
as it rushes over the dam and works its way down  
across West Texas dry land anxious to lap it up  
before it reaches the Gulf.

No story can contain  
this slow dismantling  
of words that holds us  
in fluid worlds we come  
to treat as solid ground.

But when they shift beneath  
our feet we cannot stop  
ourselves struggling for words  
no matter how many times  
we have been told it will  
hold us up if we lie and float,  
wait for someone to give us a hand.

On a rock halfway up the far bank,  
an old metal folding chair has waited  
all day for the fisherman who left it there.  
The smell of cedar burning writes a story  
for his absence. It is not freezing, but  
close enough for a fire here where there is  
no reason to brave the passing cold this late  
in February. Jonquils that bowed their heads  
in rain this morning are still at prayer tonight  
beside a bed of purple kale waiting for Spring.  
Charismatic Flags raise green heads high  
beside them, ready to burst into bloom when  
the spirit comes and they dream a new Jerusalem  
on the banks of the Concho, say *Come*.

Moon gazes down through cloud gauze  
at her face, bright in twice reflected  
light on the river, still in the sky,  
rippling on the water.



*on the road to Amarillo | 25 February 2005*

Rain falls too fast  
for startled earth  
to take it in. Surface  
hard as pavement  
forgets how to hold it,  
leaves us wading  
up to our ankles  
until it remembers  
where the river runs.

Flat red earth north of Big Spring reminded them of home, so they flashed over Lubbock in the fifties and landed there. But they never could get used to the gravity of the place having spent so much time in space and growing up accustomed to stepping light on the face of the planet. They built these ingenious water-powered machines to inscribe circles on the red surface as aids to navigation, and they must have eyes like ours, because they taught the humans there to make the circles green on red, high contrast for visibility at great distance and something to break

the monotony of a red field like the lines  
back home. You know how important these things  
were, because you wouldn't waste something like  
water running a run of the mill machine.



*Amarillo | 26 February 2005*

Two dozen daffodils rescued from a hail storm sag in a glass vase on my mother's kitchen counter. Daffodils are devout. They bow their heads even when their stems are straight in spring sun. This bunch contemplates the inevitability of death. Taken in, stems cut to rescue them from falling ice, they have lost their place and can do nothing now but wait until they have drooped beyond Mom's patience for brown edges on yellow petals in standing water.



*on the road to Austin | 27 February 2005*

A few miles west of the Turkey cut-off,  
the Prairie Dog Town fork of the Red River  
is a trickle on the edge of a red expanse  
that could be a memory or a promise  
but not the real presence of a body  
of water. Water is the absolute absence  
out of which the form of this place  
rises. There are signs everywhere  
that it is not here, though the Brazos  
denies it three times  
before I get to Abilene.



on the way to Chicago | 28 February 2005

On the flight from Austin, I trade tornado stories with a policeman from South Texas who used to be into poetry but not now. Somewhere over Missouri, I suppose, we turn to politics, and I bring up Jose Angel Gutierrez thinking of his *Gringo Manual*, but I think that is a time before his time in Crystal City. We talk about guns. I say using one is always a sign of failure, and he does not disagree; but this space like a foreign embassy is still Texas, so the transition from weather to guns to politics is seamless. I'd been talking with my mother the day before about how thirty years ago they didn't even have a ballot box for Republicans in our county. Times have changed, but not so much as labels. It's still a one party state. He asks if I've seen tornadoes, says he hasn't – but that's because he closed his eyes. Not a bad idea. I tell him my grandpa always wanted to be in his truck when a tornado hit, not because he thought he could outrun it but because it didn't take long to drive across. Thinking of typhoons, I said tornadoes are not wide; so he told the one about a storm twenty years ago that cut a path a mile wide. *What do you do about that?* he says. Grandpa would say drive fast. I say nothing.



VIII

nothing signified, a song



*Kowloon | 6 March 2005*

The confidence with which philosophers assert that animals who are not human possess no temporal sense astounds me. Unconvinced that temporal awareness is something one could possess, I offer myself to a local instance of it behind the mosque in Kowloon Park. A thousand birds in every tree make music of four notes, silence, and time. I have no time to offer, offer no notes though I might have them, add silence to the song, watch a young woman and an old man face the surface of a pond covered with paper flowers practice qigong to two rhythms dictated by their place in time. The old man stops first, sits, looks my way with a bird who has settled on the branch above me. We call and respond in silence like the birds in four notes; silences sung in three times combine over mirror water; a woman passes singing. Time holds me still in every sense when I put my pen aside. The qigong of the young woman goes on, the old man long gone. Time has me in the music.

You can see where a boat has been in a line on the surface of the water for some time after it has gone. Three quarters of the earth's surface is covered with traces of absence, evidence of unseen wind pierced now and again by peaks of invisible mountains, fragile craft ferrying fragile lives between islands that masquerade as solid ground.



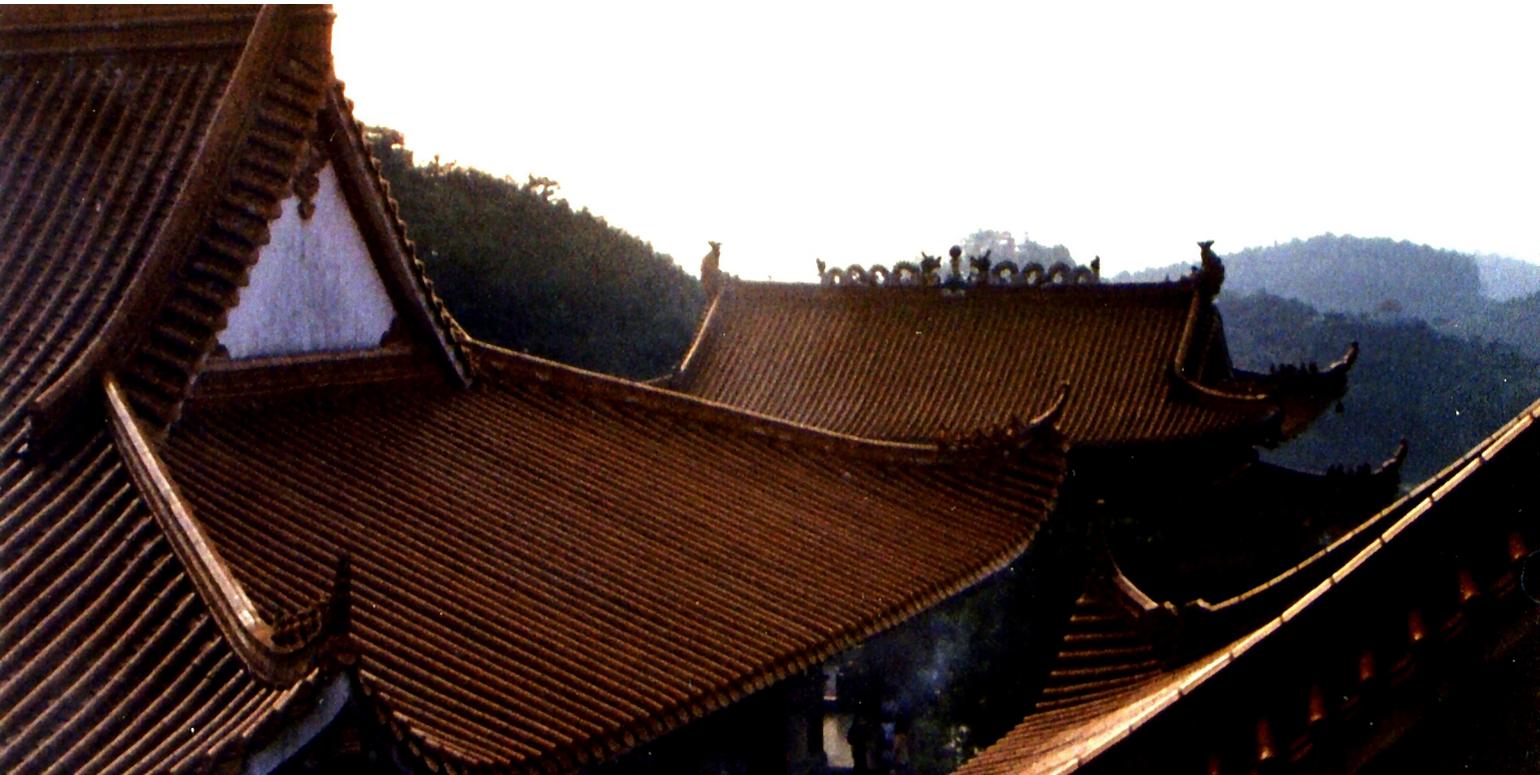
*Shenzhen | 8 March 2005*

Better eyes would know the next construction site by the gathering of outsiders in moments before it rises. The city grows in clusters of foreign bodies; floating city on an ocean deposits silt in deltas of forgetfulness. Eyes, sites of memory, move with it, determined to see it whole.



Shenzhen | 9 March 2005

A bird sings six note song at sunrise; leaves gather in dry clusters, whisper when morning breeze rises.  
An old woman swept there by the same wind raises a bowl when wealth passes no less wanting than  
she. Blind lead blind, need begs need, absence gathers in dry clusters, whispers a song composed of six  
notes, not whether wanting but what, and silence on silence.





*Shenzhen | 10 March 2005*

There is a song of six, another of five, one of three. The song of six begins at sunrise, then the song of five. And a song of silence joins the song of three beneath them. Women sweeping add lines across the music, short, sharp strokes, shadows that import depth to this work of two dimensions. Avian equation lies on the surface of a song, but its music opens deep enough to hold a city.

A Chinese student of economics said he had a theory of why we can't have peace. He drew two charts on the board, one a shamrock, one a curve approaching a limit labeled peace, said I, I, I, we are born with I and desire that is infinite, began to talk about Jesus, asked if I was a Christian. No, I said. No. Not now, not now, not anymore.

*Shenzhen | 11 March 2005*

Her spectral appearance signals my need,  
not hers. Coat dull in pedestrian sunshine,  
she is half blind from living in the light  
of perpetual bliss. An ancestral epicure,  
she accepts a stroke on the head as an  
act of obeisance, but nothing other than  
the choicest morsel from a human hand.  
Egg won't do. There will be fish in time.





*Shenzhen | 12 March 2005*

Tree by the footbridge is an orange galaxy burst from primordial green marked by constellations of asterisks waiting for another summer; but not today. Clouds so heavy they sink before rain can fall obscure low southern hills that pass as mountains by the harbor here. It is hard to tell if what is on the breeze is chill or rain so close to earth it lies on everything, leaves no place to fall.

Shenzhen | 13 March 2005

Wind is an historian of leaves, and these are timelines on paving stones where she spreads them spectrographically, assisted by acolytes with broad brooms. New green makes no sound underfoot, dries in a day to the sound of crickets under quick steps, goes yellow and red, grows brittle so you can hear days and days in the snap of every step before it settles into the sound of brown over broken lines that mark upheavals and ignore workers determined to smooth it all over with brick and mortar in cold rain that softens time's sound but never turns wind from the matter at hand.





*Shenzhen | 14 March 2005*

Weather has transported soldiers here to some northern frontier in long wool coats and fur trimmed hats fighting cold and boredom while armies in another war stream past on bicycles fashioned from iron meant to withstand broken pavement and collisions. The black-windowed black Lexus sweeping them aside in company with endless repetitions of a horn droning beneath the steady tabla of the engine's morning raga must contain some general ready to order them all to die with a wave of his hand. Cold has no place here and will be gone tomorrow, but boredom will not withdraw before it has driven every army of occupation to distraction.

*Shenzhen | 15 March 2005*

Gray stacked days deep –  
sun's memory cannot  
penetrate it.

Chill flashes from pavement  
with each soldier's step, rises  
in exhaust from ancient trucks

bright cars driven by  
wealth that doubles in  
frantic mitosis

intent on outpacing death.  
Thermometer lies  
that it is not so cold,

but people everywhere  
are huddling against blizzards  
and dreaming of fires.

Sun's memory can't penetrate,  
but birds see through  
gray, sing matins at sunrise.



*Shenzhen | 16 March 2005*

This city, fashioned from cinders of stars that fell when they became too tired to fly, was born old. She rises early, sits at the mirror for hours covering every blemish with layers of forgetfulness before she steps out on a street crowded with people too busy to notice, thick with clouds of obsession that are hard to swallow and make the air heavy as water in all weather. She catches sight of herself in a window on the street, sees cinders and a sparkle of stardust where damp memory has worn forgetfulness away.



Shenzhen | 17 March 2005

Nothing is missing  
on this path crowded  
with ten thousand things  
that could be water  
cutting a canyon  
in what it finds here,  
lines some future will admire  
as the work of a higher power,  
not knowing it is no more  
than what happens when  
one foot after another  
falls on solid rock.



*Shenzhen | 18 March 2005*

Tree near the gate spreads  
orchid lotus petals  
across the path

before sweepers arrive. Rise  
with the sun  
and the way is royal –

a chorus of birds,  
a carpet of flowers.

Frogs sing evensong  
in Russian style. Bass  
weaves a dark cathedral  
of damp night air.



*Shenzhen | 19 March 2005*

Welder scatters falling stars among paving stones that will be underfoot by morning. Men gather at sunrise to place them in meticulous patterns over a cushion of sand. They will settle in years under the weight of all that passes this way, and only the clearest eye will catch splinters of starlight under gray.





*Shenzhen | 20 March 2005*

An iron hook drops slowly from a height that will be ten stories when the building rises there, dangling from a crane that pivots steps from a busy sidewalk in remembrance of the fishermen who worked this place before it became land. No one looks up, thinks about the crushing weight over their heads. A weary woman and a weary man become part of the landscape between sidewalk and street, heads on knees, eyes emptied, a box between them that might contain all they own or all they have to sell. The walk has been made new in a week for the benefit of those with larger boxes who will scarcely walk on it but prefer red brick herringbone to worn gray paving stones below their windows. Watching the workers who put down the brick, I attend to the making of edges – straight curbs of gray tight against red triangle – and recall how my grandfather knew in his hands where to strike the brick and at what angle to break it in a clean line to fill space right up to the edge.

Shenzhen | 21 March 2005

March and a few sad leaves settle on waves of melancholy that sweep them over the walk in an arc to mirror the curve of every gaunt leaf, bleached, weary of wind and rain and toxic air, inexplicably dry in air so heavy with damp it seems we are living in a cloud. And every face is another leaf that has fallen on paradox grim with hope on gray days under moments of sun that must rest on the same wind. This is a young city busy with old eyes. It breathes short, shallow, aged breaths, gasps for air but fears the poison in it, cannot bear one more fit of coughing.



Shenzhen | 22 March 2005

*Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore.*

*Dorothy, from the Wizard of Oz*

Mantra printed a dozen times on the low wall that separates this walk from one construction site among thousands has the rhythm of a prayer wheel: *Om mane padme hum. Home is where the heart is.* Pilgrims chant it on the long journey to this shrine, praying for the means to buy a piece. No bodhisattva of compassion here, but two banks across the street, Walmart steps away, and no end in sight to the multiplication of money. Pilgrims circumambulate, bide their time, wait for magic to make them settlers. There's no place like home.

*Shenzhen | 23 March 2005*

Southern cities make spaces for nomads in spite of themselves. Where Nanhai meets Binhai, the overpass makes a roof, and a man sleeps flat on his back until some wandering messiah with a badge orders him to take up his bed and walk. Another lies fetal by the path in the shadow of a four star hotel, wearing his hard hat and covered with a black plastic bag. He will rise to work on another skyscraper, dream of living in it, but hope for corners where those uprooted can escape the rain and snatch a moment undisturbed – the same thing wealthy wanderers waiting to buy the place will pay for. They keep going higher while those washed up on the shore below hope for more than a shadow to cover them.

Place names here are all  
nan and hai and shan, but hai  
is filled with shan carried

on the backs of migrants  
with pick and shovel, and nanhai  
retreats before a city

floating south, a city  
that was a mountain, floating  
on a southern sea.

*Shenzhen | 24 March 2005*

Slow rain insists  
between trees while sun passes  
against gray curtains

that have clung to the city  
for days. Bai tou weng  
has come down to earth

for a moment after weeks  
of singing sunrise, and I greet him,  
one old man to another, with  
thanks for the music.

An old woman insistent as rain stands at my table, presses her bowl between me and the page I have been writing on. Without a thought, I wave her away. But she does not move, and I look up. Meeting her eyes, there is nothing to be done but to place a coin in the bowl and thank whatever gods are patient enough to wait time and again on my reluctant humanity.

On an edge of Zhongua, we talked about the maps people carry in their heads, and you said we are living after Babel. This city rising to the sky on land that was sea yesterday can understand that old Hebrew story despite the best efforts of a foreign god. Twice removed from the center, on an edge of an edge, after that god grew weary of our tower building and confused our language to stop our climbing. But weavers of words know how to fly and do not need a tower to live in sky. Put down the

bricks and mortar. Leave that old god's jealousy to simmer somewhere else. Let us weave words skyward.



*Shenzhen | 25 March 2005*

sound breathed day in day  
out becomes the texture  
of the page where sound  
is written, and you  
can hear the poison  
haze that gathers on  
the damp air of this  
southern coast. Horn  
blast as truck passes on  
Nanhai tastes bitter  
after sweet sunrise  
song of bulbuls, and  
sour red hibiscus  
mutters at the babble  
of sandals in its ear,  
so many yesterday  
they broke the split bamboo  
rail that edges the walk  
and rendered the line  
between path and border  
porous. Here and there,  
a flower crushed under  
strong steps leaves a stain  
of salty blood and  
the whole mess tastes like

medicine an old woman  
who has read your tongue  
mixed to cure you.



*Shenzhen | 26 March 2005*

Rain not worth the effort of an umbrella  
hangs for days between sun and gray sky  
that glows with its impatience but will not  
break, twists every page of the world with  
damp. Even the morning song of the birds  
wilts with waiting to dry when sun appears.

*Shenzhen | 27 March 2005*

When the temperature  
rises every stone rolls away  
from an empty tomb.

Warm, dark damp teems  
with life that will not be contained,  
asks every incredulous witness  
why they look for the living  
among the dead.



*Shenzhen | 28 March 2005*

Rises in sparks with steps on paving stone,  
rolls off traffic that doubles every day,  
settles with clouds that have taken up  
residence in low hills around the city.  
In faces set on one thing or another, gray  
between bright and dark softens everything  
it touches, melts hard lines until nothing  
seems close, smells of diesel that leaves you  
breathless longing for mountains.

Shenzhen | 29 March 2005

Trees like these doing handstands  
among hibiscus flowers  
must have been the models

for the first mu. Fingers in  
damp clay, they wiggle green toes  
two shades lighter than branches over

passersby who still wear shoes  
in spring. Their root skirts hang  
around their ears while they laugh  
and consider cartwheels.

No coded language of  
a secret society, no  
decoder ring for critics  
who drink their Ovaltine.  
Nothing more than an invitation  
in a common tongue: *look!*



*Shenzhen | 30 March 2005*

A northern monsoon  
has tampered with the weather  
in the south for weeks,

spilled liquid into it  
until it clusters in tiny  
drops on low hills,

illusion of chill  
on morning air.

Trees are showing signs  
of the strain of immortality.  
New leaves appear on branches  
that have not known winter,  
and the whole grows heavy  
without a moment's rest.

You can read it in the patterns  
left by those the wind has snatched,  
clusters of brown and yellow  
on green, with one flaming red  
crescent that insists  
on an autumn gesture

under a half moon  
scratched chalk white  
in the west this morning  
on a patch of blue.



*Shenzhen | 31 March 2005*

Devil at every crossroad  
tempts everyone who passes  
to think they're Robert Johnson.  
Some take the bait and  
sing the world blue.

Others only see devils  
everywhere, keep their fingers  
on the trigger, shoot first,  
ask questions later.

Sundrops cluster yellow on green leaves,  
gather toward falling but do not altogether  
fall, send scouts trailing down dark  
stems, recall yesterday's showers  
of sun under today's steady gray light.

*Shenzhen | 1 April 2005*

Silent supervisor of the city's making, old man walks slowly, hands clasped behind his back, stops at each site, gazes through an opening in the wall surrounding it, thinks it is not the way it would have been when, hesitates between wonder and contempt at the machinery and the young men operating it who look like children playing at construction with extravagant tinker toys, returns to his walk bent under the weight of a harder generation and well-worn dreams of China made new. Dog sits at a factory gate, tongue hanging from a smile that never fades, watches workers who have moved in from distant mountains to refurbish the park next door. They make miniatures to remember places they left. He is the memory of this place, never moves far from it, but the world moves and carries the line of his vision. Guards at hai shang shi jie run for cover when the rain starts; women who sweep the square there join them while beggars gather bowls and crutches, run for the canopy of the bus stop, nothing to do now but watch and wait. But nothing can out wait rain. This looks like a day of umbrellas.



*Shenzhen | 2 April 2005*

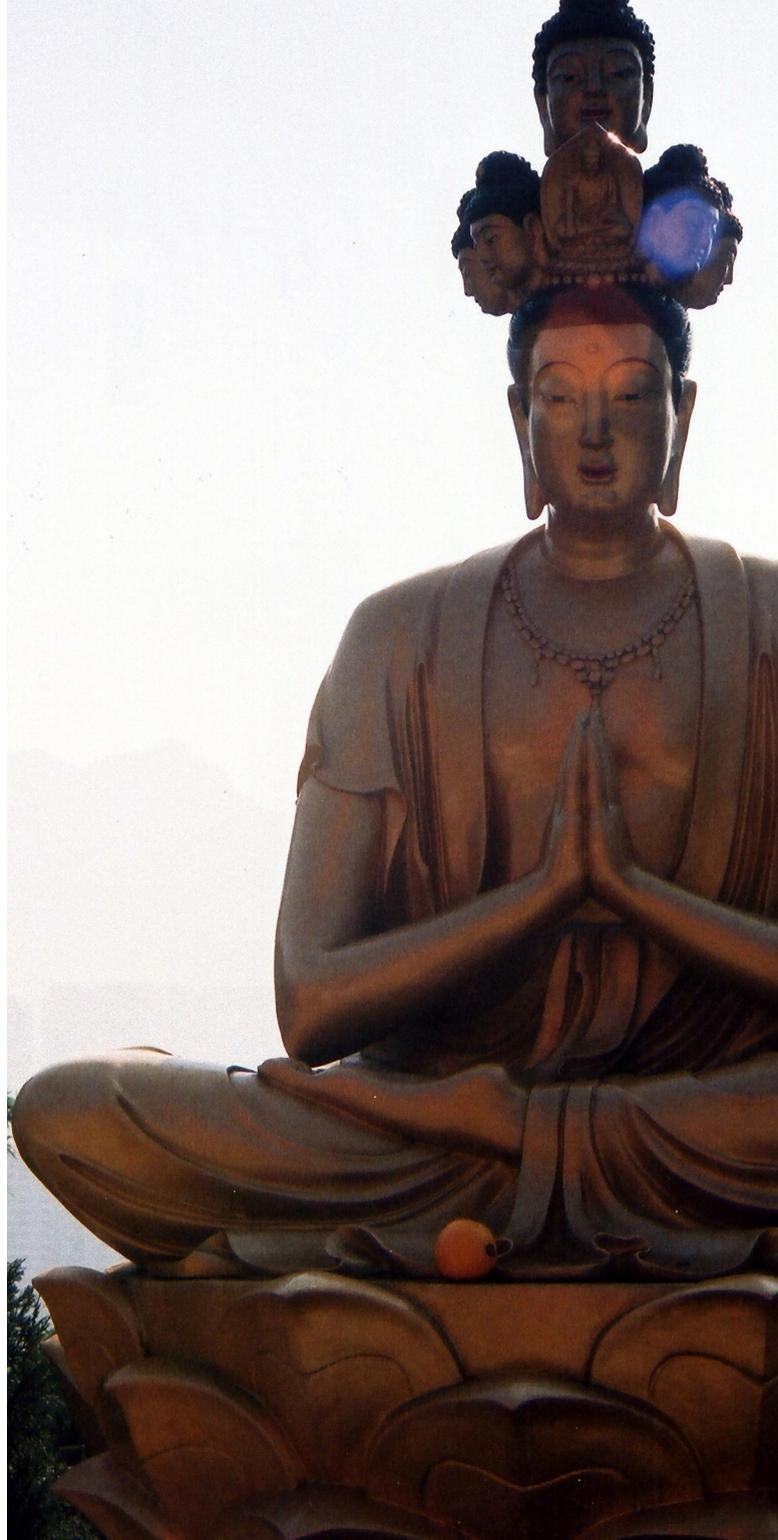
Walk is bright this morning in the wake of an absent orange eater who has scattered sun specks across gray stones among nicotine yellow cigarette butts, leaves in brown yellow red green, scraps of slick astrobrite brochures, a break in the clouds and a flurry of pink bougainvillea petals left by early morning rain.

It seems the Browning's dog has come to Shenzhen to shop. I met him on the footbridge this morning, carrying a blue plastic bag back from the market, limping a little as he does, but always smiling with his tail, following his nose like Marco Polo to take the world in dreamy southern light.

Nothing gives such pleasure  
rolled hard and sweet  
on the tongue  
to taste it  
from every angle.

A little boy repeats it  
a hundred times between stops  
on the bus: ya yayaya ya yayaya ya  
nothing signified, a song.

High places are brought low, not  
because some old god  
is jealous of what is  
worshiped there, but because  
they can be sold. Mountains  
are the leading export here.  
Highway unrolls to make way  
for impatient trucks that move rock  
to fill ocean. No need to climb Zion.  
It comes one stone at a time.



*Shenzhen | 3 April 2005*

Longing for a perfect lover, city is never satisfied, takes to rearranging furniture. Tear the mountain down; put a building there; fill the ocean in so we can walk on water. Scoop a lake out where you made the mountain flat. Bring truckloads of bricks for paths and falls in a park to make you think you could be in mountains. Widen this road to make room for more, put another there. Tear a building down, throw it in the ocean with mountains until ocean front fronts nothing but car parks and memories. Build a thousand Babels through speech confused by ten thousand gods. Fill the place with elsewhere; people it with elsewhere, spin it from smoke and mirrors, dream factories that make sunsets brilliant and, longing for a perfect lover, take to rearranging furniture all the way down, all the way down, until bodies bent and bent again grow frail, crumble into oceans with mountains longing for a perfect lover.

*Shenzhen | 4 April 2005*

Sun disc rounded by  
haze of desire that hovers  
over every city

when it is young rests  
orange on a breeze cooled by  
a memory of ocean

this morning, spreads as  
it rises mirrored in every  
window that faces east,

so there are a thousand sunrises  
above the western horizon  
and a bird to sing each one.

Red light embraces yellow at star rise  
Over night dark brown earth and ocher plains.  
Rest in the pale arc of the artist's eyes.

Plains bend light to nothing like the surprise  
Of walking into nowhere trails of forgotten rains.  
Red light embraces yellow at star rise.



A wisp of bright horizon lies  
Close over midnight marked by blue sky stains.  
Rest in the pale arc of the artist's eyes.

Canyon cut by an almost absent river lies  
Waiting for a flock of crows over what remains.  
Red light embraces yellow at star rise.

O'Keeffe sees nowhere slits with eyes  
Attuned to nothing, to dark clouds circling lonely trains.  
Rest in the pale arc of the artist's eyes.

It is all abstraction, pink clouds, black crosses that rise  
From here to Abiquiu, cottonwoods, the Shelton  
like a mountain over narrow New York plains  
Red light embraces yellow at star rise.  
Rest in the pale arc of the artist's eyes.

*Shenzhen | 5 April 2005*

Translucent rainbow wings  
signal a more delicate thing  
than this white-bellied beetle  
who flew onto my balcony  
to die. Wings lie flat against  
gray, still traces of iridescence.  
At the last moment, he turns  
his bright side to the world,  
and it lies in a corner like  
a moon reflecting sun.

Death's surprise prompts why,  
not where or when. Slow, it is  
similitude of knowing. Sudden,  
too perfect for a reflecting thing to bear.





*Shenzhen | 6 April 2005*

The walk is a gray stone grid laid by a thousand hands broken here and there by a crack where earth has settled or paused to take a breath. One that angles from this side to the other could be a memory of a southern tremor that swept the ocean over a coast that could have been this one, concrete meditation on death that escapes the notice of most passersby. A thin line of oil inscribes the wavering path of a bicycle slowed out of control some time by a staggering crowd. It takes earth breathing and memory to break stone, but a scrap of paper, a leaf on wind, a hat, a begging bowl can break the grid. Sweepers set to work before the sun to move them. Signs of human presence: rigid patterns broken at the drop of a hat, armies to fix in stone, control out of control on every edge.

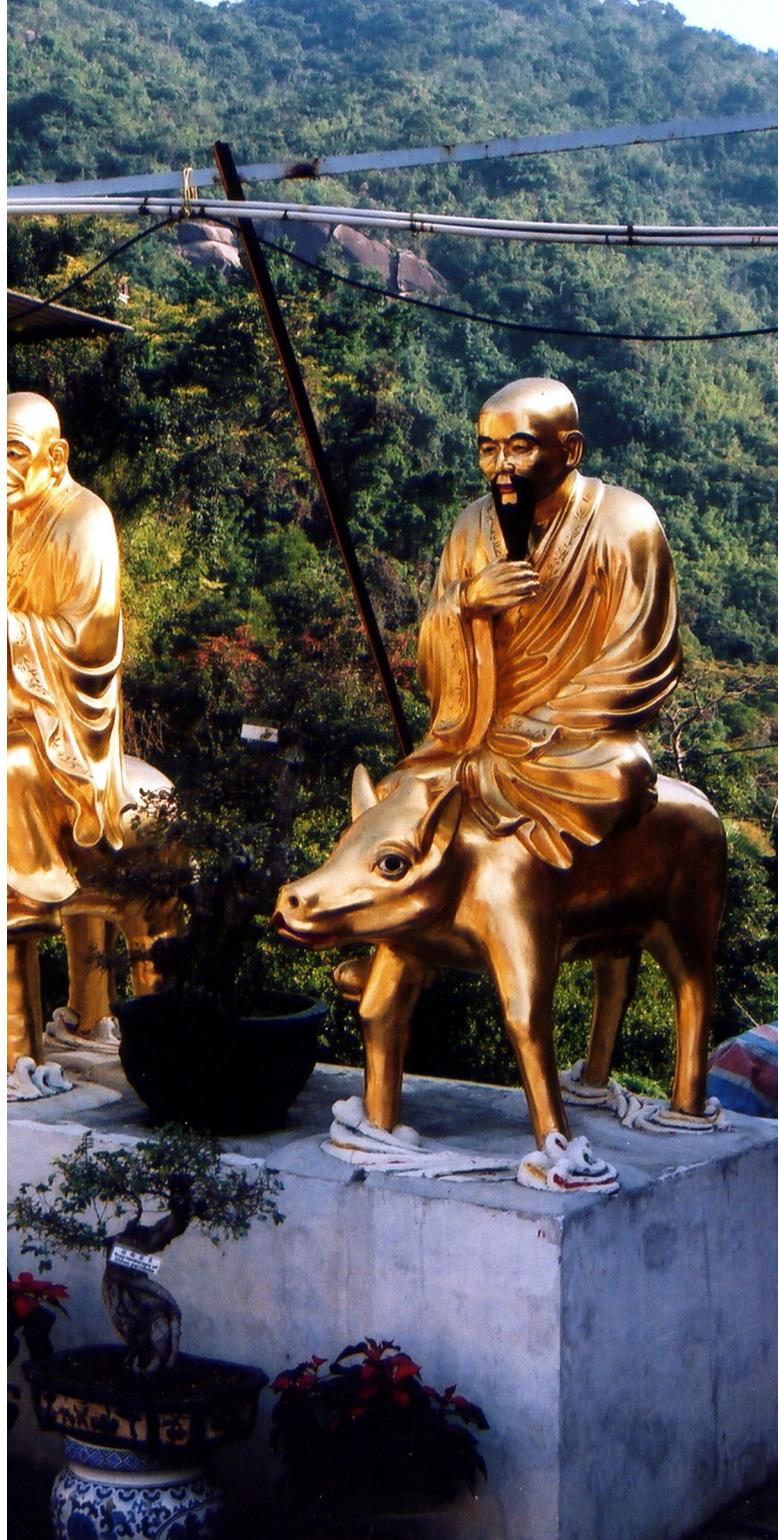
*Shenzhen | 7 April 2005*

Sign in Chinese warns that there are snakes on the mountain and the path is dangerous. I put my boots on in English and ignore it. My students, baffled by a thousand shriveled potato eyes watching a fight over the newspaper at dinner remind me that eyes are hard to translate, and the body follows.

You have labored most of the morning  
over words that are out of my hands,  
and there is nothing I can do  
when you say long sentences  
read beautifully but translate hard  
except say xie xie and think to myself  
that this goes without saying.  
Beauty is hard. The best  
we can hope for in words  
that dance between us  
is to taste them  
on a new tongue, rewritten  
fresh with diamond edges.

Staring at the rice I cannot finish,  
I can almost believe that farmers sweat the grains  
when they bend over hoes and work in water  
ankle deep, and I hope it is not wasted.

I wonder how many farmers  
contemplate poets sweating words  
bent over a page, sated,  
hope they are not wasted.



*Shenzhen | 8 April 2005*

Even over the sound of traffic, the sound of gathering desire, you can hear every revolution of some bicycle wheels as they make their way among walkers on this busy street. Even those well oiled scream at sudden stops. Most are so heavy they lurch on crooked paths while riders attend entirely to not falling. If socialism comes, they said before the fall in Chile, it comes on bicycle. When it comes, it comes like this.

Like getting lost to get surprised, setting off in a new direction, in a new city without a map, confident every walk will find its way in time and with it every walker. The page breaks the line not the poet written to the margin by the poem without a map making a way in time, making a body, a temple of a holy ghost, a sanctuary.

Shenzhen | 9 April 2005

Prose enough to fill an autumn  
fell last night from trees shaken by wind.  
Sweepers who rose with the sun and  
bei tou weng sing it brown yellow  
orange red to poetry on gray stone  
green grass earth the color of rust. When  
the arc of fallen prose curves across a line  
of sand between paving stones, it bends  
light star like, eyes see slant.

Overlooking locals everywhere, blind  
trailmakers miss crossroads, do not know  
when they deal with the devil, lose  
souls, trade without a thought.  
Reason enough to be wary of sublime  
emptiness in their accounts –  
not sublimity, accounting.  
The sublime is in the eyes, the devil in details –  
a blank on a form for the color of your eyes  
because no government can see them.



*Shenzhen and Hong Kong | 10 April 2005*

Berries spread sticky sweet  
across the walk with chalked  
graffiti in French to mark

a course finished; white on gray  
follows purple near black  
with a vehicle of decay.

On every corner someone is selling a copy watch or a tailored suit and my Western face is promising, though I haven't worn a watch in thirty years and have never owned a tailored suit. But here the face, not the clothes, make the man, so I have consumer potential. I am late, trying to weave through dense crowds to the ferry terminal. They say people are always in a hurry in Hong Kong, but to be in a hurry here is not easy.

Shenzhen | 11 April 2005

Walking on what used to be a shore, you say this was never an ocean, and I must reluctantly admit the accuracy (though not the truth) of this suspension of poetic license. The delta of a river only aspires to sea; but half the names are *hai* here, and the poets who chose them were planting little Europes, not a Mississippi on the South China Sea, though Deng's *shi jie* is full of Americans Texas-loud talking about oil and money. As for truth, what is found there is formed of common words. If enough poets whisper *ocean*, they may stop the mountain filling it.



*Shenzhen | 12 April 2005*

A cadre of hibiscus revolutionaries  
gather in the hedges along this  
busy street, lie low to creep  
beneath the iron fence  
set up to keep them  
away from masses  
moving at the speed of money.

Here and there  
a suicide flower throws  
herself into the crowd and  
detonates all the red she has  
strapped to her body. The crowd  
is shocked by the presence of useless beauty  
lying at the heart of their relentless desire.



*Shenzhen | 13 April 2005*

Sky settled gray heavy over morning  
hours before sunrise. Hibiscus  
flowers hang exhausted  
from holding it till  
it lightened and rose  
encouraged by birds who were  
up early looking for light and feasting

on fat worms washed to the surface  
by rain. People huddle against  
chill illusion while sun  
shines on the other side  
of clouds, makes gray glow,  
breaks it at intervals, but fails  
to convince it will stay.

*Shenzhen | 14 April 2005*

Know the world by a nose,  
fabric woven of give  
and take.

This morning, it is  
diesel at every  
intersection,

flash of a woman's perfume,  
garbage in the sun too long, incense  
burning in a temple or a loo, a factory upwind.

The cat who waits  
on the walk outside my door  
knows me, but she does not speak

until she smells my hand  
to see what I have given.

Living water is the nearest thing  
to silence. It does not cover sound  
but gathers it in a single voice  
where thought can rest or  
speech be written, not lost  
in the polyphony of the city's song.

Sound of pilings deep as the height  
of the building they are driven  
to hold is doubled by an echo  
off a wall to the west, joined in half  
a step by east, harmony of percussion  
in three parts; and the fourth is earth  
that moves beneath the pounding  
of the pile driver, slow vibration  
of a heavy string your feet hear,  
your ear can hardly place.

Linnaeus named it China Rose, not  
recognizing an immigrant in it,  
taken with its double red, more  
concerned with order than origin or  
itinerary. He was European and would  
never believe a name that arrived before him.



*Shenzhen | 15 April 2005*

In the intermittently Euclidian space  
of cities, parallel lines may intersect  
if you follow them far enough.

The only way to know  
is to follow one far enough.

Riemann's map is no better.  
The whole thing could go flat in  
time, and you would find yourself  
thinking  $n$  dimensions when  
you should be thinking two  
lost in lines that appear to be  
points, planes that appear to be  
lines, lines that lie side by side and  
do not think forever far enough.

Buddha knew it takes a self to be selfless, so he did not trust the thing. "Consider," he might have said, "the gene. It toils not, neither does it reap. It is no self, no desire, no suffering, no more than it is." Or he might have held a flower, silent. But the point is, the point is, the point is not the pointing, the moon. The gene is, the body becoming, mind out of body being desire leads nowhere but suffering. The gene, no self, desireless, survives.

Light scatters blue above rocks and I hope the romance of moon on ocean lives in this crowd of young lovers. But the moon is new, light is text on cellphones, not moon on ocean, not sun reflected twice in lover's eyes.





*Shenzhen | 16 April 2005*

For three days, this signal  
has been stuck on walk don't  
walk, green red at the same time.  
And this time, walkers do what it says: go  
don't go. Frozen in the moment between, it is  
an icon of a deity suspended, human, waiting.

*Shenzhen | 17 April 2005*

Mao's ghost cries  
at the window  
of a restaurant  
named Southwest.  
Even the Andy Warhol smile  
has vanished, so there's nothing to see;  
but, still, he knows the hatter's one way, the hare's the other,  
and we must be mad or we wouldn't have come here.

Lost in translation, memory escapes reason but not nets of words and images woven tight enough to catch meaning but pass insignificance. Who can recall an other's ancestors? How can they know if we have no recollection?

Memory remains, reason  
passes, we are inscribed  
by those before us.

*Shenzhen | 18 April 2005*

Over vodka and vareniky at a sidewalk cafe near Deng Xiaoping's landlocked flagship, we drift from Akhmatova to Ba Da Shan Ren without a word of Marx. I lean back to catch the moon between clouds, more than halfway back from new, full of promise.

Moon is cliché  
in cities of realism  
where a sigh is just a sigh,

but better to drown in  
twice reflected light, Li Bai,  
than live to claim a corner  
of a souldead world that  
cannot draw a breath  
without a machine

*Shenzhen (with the intersection of FM1065 and US 385 in Texas in mind) | 19 April 2005*

Eyes formed on a long plateau that rises north and west see this sudden elevation where the road ends in a transcontinental highway as mountain and choose north. Both ways lead to mountains in time, but a hill shaped like a saddle will do for now. It is a sign, an image of a mountain that stands north of the river and says home. But the river is dry; dry, the dry idea of a river runs west to east north of the image of a mountain, drifting south with the slope of the plateau, says home. Trees gather at the dry idea, pilgrims who worship the promise of rain on mountains elsewhere where the river rises; and they wait. Autumn, one leaf changes – a dash of yellow on a pale green page. The others turn to see, and the river's red is lined with gold. The dry idea of a red river grows cold, and blue north darkens with it until it grows so heavy it has to fall. A leaf changes; others turn; this follows the image of a mountain, the dry idea of a river. A yellow leaf and the image of a mountain contain the expectation of winter. But here, winter is contained in the infinite interval between turning and the last leaf.

The last leaf does not fall.

The image of the mountain remains  
when the remains of the mountain  
make homes where the river was.





Steven Schroeder is a poet and visual artist who lives and works in Chicago. More at [stevenschroeder.org](http://stevenschroeder.org).



**Memory remains, reason  
passes, we are inscribed  
by those before us.**

**[stevenschroeder.org](http://stevenschroeder.org)**