

ON A COLD DAY IN NEW ORLEANS

on a cold day in New Orleans, i can see clearly
beyond the swamps, the archipelagoes, the plumage
from the grey refineries, their flames, the dust
in the air, the quicklime in the Seventh Ward
foundations, the crumbling infrastructure, the dust
of that slow slip into the mud, the Mississippi
curled like a bicep around the shotguns and the cranes.

from the top of the Huey P. Long Memorial Bridge
(a funny idea) i can see clearly, am seeing
a bed for time to sleep in,
a reaching, an anxious weary eventual
graveyard for the parade day hats
and the souls who wore them like armor,
chainmail glitter, against flattening (but never
beads—those are for the tourists);

i can see clearly with the breath of winter
the death of lurid things, the draining of color,
the humid freeze
they have been warning me about.
i can see the crystals of the sun warm off
the muddy water,
restless in the shifting switchbacks
of current. i can see that it frosts here, too;
that the summer will end.

i can see clearly the sharp notes of jazz
louvered flat by the flat grey cold
and the old furrowed doors in the Quarter
closed for repairs; and i can see pelicans,
sometimes, flying home from whatever place,
and American things with French names. i can see
just one ibis on Napoleon Avenue.
just one, alone.

and all these things standing still and wary,
waiting, ears up, like a cat in glass, i can see clearly
with my own eyes, with their own slow haunting,
on this one cold morning.