ZHIVAGO IN CHICAGO

by

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A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This is a collection of poems.
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Buildings Go

Back when I lived at the far edge of the city, where the earth seemed permanent and less pliable, I invited David over for lunch. But he reported to my old address, just as I had several times during that first month after the initial move. By then I’d been three weeks installed at the new place a half-mile south, but driving home from the third shift, I too would find myself veering onto the old route, forgetting how all my possessions were waiting elsewhere, boxed. Eventually we would eat our lunch and laugh over the mix-up—David pulling up to my old street to find my building gone, vanished, as if into the thinnest air of some uninhabitable elevation. Later he would describe how it shook him to find 5056 had been displaced entirely. Even the razed rubble—clusters of bricks still holding onto each other in the cold as if to make awkward fists against whatever force brought them down—had been carried off in smart company trucks, leaving behind only the footprint of the building’s foundation: a crater cut out in right angles, amputated sewage pipes jutting out into newborn birdbaths. Nothing but that was left, he said, the lean shadows of the neighbor buildings, 55 and 57, hanging over the void that had been revealed between them, the street missing a front tooth. Though the building was gone, he still jabbed at his horn and waited the usual interval, even staring at the approximate spot my second floor window had previously inhabited, where the mini-blinds would wink at the sound of the horn moments before I’d emerge. He stayed for a minute to be sure he saw what he saw, how absent I felt.
I.

GROUNDWORK
Oakland on Fire

Oakland is on fire because the people needed something to show them both obedience and mercy. Tokyo is a slow steady burn for a master throwing pots big as the capital, a kiln of city limits and sky. The road to the Haifa airport runs east with jet fuel while a dropped match sprints after. Flaming tongues anoint the heads of Memorial Day parade watchers in Topeka. Sick blood cells cloud a toddler’s brain in Nairobi. The smoke of burnt medicine leaves passes a mosquito net. Californians spit accelerants of fast-talk as a windy brushfire gets carried away with itself. In Stalingrad the statues are lava pumped through the veins of city streets. In Sao Paulo they are talking flint and tinder to each other under a pile of dry leaves. In Genoa the youth are tiny sparks born each time two stones click together. The tycoons who own Dubai dig spiked heels into a mountain of oily rags and clamber up the crags until consumed. Chicago’s sparked kindling goes up at nightfall. All across the city the houses are courteous cigarettes lighting themselves from the adjacent ends of each other. The sun stubs itself into an ashbin skyline. Up from the miasma a bird escapes, in a trance, nonstop to Phoenix.
Nonstop to Phoenix

We are the cabin cleaners. 
The flights check in

rolling into their gates, 
and we’re standing by, quiet,

outside the aircraft’s still sealed door. 
Before our SWAT team of janitors

gets the signal 
all passengers and crew must exit the mess—

plastic wrappers 
and bent *Sky Malls*

strewn in the aisles, 
puke or soiled Pampers

ditched under the seats, 
a first-class habit.

We are an hourly wage 
wishing for the weather to turn

gray and ground the flights. 
An Econoline van

zips us across the tarmac 
between jobs,

our finished planes taking off 
all around us.

The day I just up and walked 
off the job

was the day I had the idea 
to stowaway

on one of the big 767s 
headed west.

You say it that way 
“head west.”
I saw myself looking down
at the vans and laughing

until I vomited
under my stolen window seat.

The mess I’d leave
up in business class—

forget it, fuck it,
move on with my own damn life.
Zhivago in Chicago

1. Uprisings

Like children
our small thoughts wrestle
the whole drive home
giving each other
matching rug burns.
Streetlights brood tonight
like gibbets over gallows,
their stretched necks peering over
eight lanes of highway in falling snow.

“The dim cars are slow headaches to each other.”

The tape deck radio
speaks news of uprisings.
A growing war
is growing sleepy.
I ask him to make sense
of our respective trajectories,
to fashion the resolution
poem from these raw hunks
of cold and dark and night.

The artist must form understanding
from the forms of the elemental.
I place these in his hands.

“You have read too many novels.”
2. **Plaza**

Streetlights wear swollen X-mas wreaths.

And where is Lara?—maybe walking alone buttoned-up to the neck. This is how the hopscotch of time insists upon the protagonist heart, blindfolds and spins it in a game meant for children. Now he is walking the city searching through a crowdedness of background characters, a subplot that ends up nowhere. Twilight bustles, and he has come to séance the past from December’s colored lights—those winter fireflies scrambled amid downtown’s bare branches and buildings. He says, “Once, we resolved that in a city such as this we might steal away together. This five o’clock swarm of commuters can’t slow us down.”
Finally it gets to the good part. They huddled at the bottom margin of the calendar, the almost last page of the novel. When nothing came—no terrors, no Armageddon—it was an almost shame.

The ball dropped on operating systems carrying on, and soon enough the city would fall back on every old fatal flaw. But both characters refused to allow the other to change. “Swear?”

Swear. Don’t ever change, kid.” They had come to drink in the spectacle swatting flurries from their beer cups making the thousands of other faces mean less. They whispered dialog, and their words by the night were blown into next year’s plot. Then the eleventh hour peeled off into the first of the next calendar.

Sequins of snow and confetti fell—drops of transience that settled their paradox in her hair.
A Picture of the Property

The woodwork has worn with the moldings through decades of soirees to a faded pallor.

* 

Ambiance is moisture and must jaundicing the wallpaper.

* 

The stability of real estate has had its portrait hung on the wall.

* 

The floors creak with the hardwood sounds of living things moving in & out.

* 

The picture of the property is displayed prominently for the open house.

You are supposed to imagine yourself living inside, owning the place free and clear.
Meltdown

A cloud of emissions noise
rises from the highway.
The cars aimed at the airport
are jammed. The roadside sellers
are the first to startle
at an incoming sonic boom’s
misdirection—a big plane overhead
descending in its final approach.
The drivers in their cars also jump
at the shrieking blowback
of what sounds to them like a missile.
One woman in a silver sedan
grabs for the shock in her chest.
Spring has fallen on us now
after winter has finally relented
beneath months of lower Manhattan’s
eyearly snow, the gray matter settled,
sifted, and cleared, the particles inhaled.

Today the piled up tension
felt carted off our backs until
a plane’s sudden sounding off
scared the routine out of everyone.
Today is the first day of spring:
so begins the meltdown of road ice;
so begins the meltdown
of unknown unknowns,
which we believe
are like tomorrow’s weather,
swirling someplace distant
but always, somehow, encroaching.

Our faces betray our nerves—
another pent up noise
happening to us, the vibrato ripple effect
that just rode up our spines
a moment ago. On the highway
everyone has an engine
to their name. The sellers
call out their prices, their figures undulating
in a blur on the other side of exhaust.

Traffic awakens to a roll. The sellers turn
to face the generation of cars
behind this one, offering lilacs and oranges
to those merging on
the on-ramp, shaking fists
of flag-colored, five-dollar roses.
Local Paparazzi

The white spy box
stationed atop a lamppost

pulses a blue light,
advertising its surveillance

with the same loud flicker
that sirens by on the roofs

of police cruisers.
The kid I grew up with,
still loose on the street
when I visit, aches to defy it.

He will strike his crime,
he says, when the cooler shadows

of the sun gone down
conceal his face.

Everywhere he goes
he’s hounded by the paparazzi

of good security. The gray cameras
perched in the liquor store,

though, are not plugged
into anything, and he knows it:

“That’s called deterrent,”
he says, by way of educating me—

because someone gone
long as I

needs to be schooled.
In the suburbs,

the street cameras
are for traffic, for catching

white teenagers
who can’t stop running
red lights, who think
they’ve gotten away with something

until one day
when a citation arrives

in the mail. They commute
to the city

every night, craving
the hooded cover

of the intersection’s
cornered dealers—

where a white spy box
records the street,

and the cars pass
through toward

the safety
of their oblivion.
Groundwork

The table legs
grow pencil tips
and dig in
to the hardwood
floor boards.
I lift its dead weight

thrusting over
and over my head.
The ceiling

perforates.
This building
I live in

aerates—
a shoebox
before the eclipse.
Musée de Creation

...Into the red/Eye, the cauldron of morning.
—Plath, “Ariel”

In the garden
of the plastic replica
and fake taxidermy,

the serpent’s eyes
follow the human form.
How do you know

that this is not his Paradiso?
He presides, wrapped
around The Tree,

and his red eyes
follow you
even into the restroom—

infrared eyes, skimming
your flesh, deciding
when each warm body

ought to be finished
with whatever
it’s been doing—

the red eye, too,
over the faucet,
laying the law down

on water. The red eyes
are the only ones
watching us watching

the plastic garden.
We are the afternoon crowd
coming from the Cretaceous area;

and we are herds
of offspring,
field-tripping,

leaving grasping fingerprints
on the interactive touchscreens
of Eden—our greasy

fossil record. We are posing
for the flash photo;
our eyes are burning.
The Dwellers

In a moment, cumulus ships will be drifting
on the blue note sky, stirring with what they’re heavy
to express. The coming squall is a melancholy name
painted across each gray hull. The last time such a rainstorm
shook down this city, we dwellers propped up
our biggest stereo speakers in our streetside windows
and spun our music till the generators let it fade.

We have been bombed out by an oppressive climate system,
and even though to keep inside would be to play this one safe,
when it begins we come out to dance again—
and we are gyrating with the grounded birds,
who are likewise bathing in the footsteps of the parked cars.
Those cars, that are not any of ours, are frozen scared, audience.

The scattered sticks and leaves stick to the windowpanes
like snails hugging
an aquarium’s shape.

The dew-point atmosphere
shakes more droplets

from her skirt,
and this supple fog a foot

off the ground cloaks
all our best moves,

keeping safe our most well
advertised secret.
Solstice Sky Above Tenement

Before the eclipse,
   children, we must leave this
   the flame of our city
   and drive out
   into the brush
   of its outskirts—
   a foreign darkness
   you have not learned
   the shape of. Behind us
   will be left millions of bulbs
   of candlepower—
   the corona
   of the city at night.
   Between us
   and that light,
   we will count the miles—
   and the truth of that expanse
   will fade the heat of home
   behind us.
   I will take you to a hill
   in the suburbs, free
   from crowded angers, and there
   we will sit alongside the other escapees.
   When it appears over us,
   you will witness
   not so much a vision
   as the kidnapping of one—
   a theft—
   and kids,
   recall the moon
our pavement lives
    have known:

soon its shadow will invade—
    as the smoke of burning tar

that steals our mornings—
    as it becomes total.

And for the interval
    of one night’s earthly rotation—

the universe
    will have sunk

the only navigation
    we’ve ever required.
Syllogism for Cinéma Vérité

The body is a real thing that falls.

Consciousness is the lightning bug of being for which the body is a jar.

When it’s loosed on screen the credits lift it away.
II.

THE RAZING
Roberto, You are a Builder of Houses

Roberto, you are a builder of houses that are too big for you. The likes of your wife and kind. When you set the drywall into place, when the edges are flush and taped and painted over in boring, inartistic strokes, lunch is taken. A sky does not mean freedom in all texts. Today the sky means only this literal ninety-degree heat that oppresses the job site—not the fleeting freedom of a five-gallon bucket of cigarette butts and sand, not eating lunch and smoking the second half of a put-off cigarette on company time—but the cold representation, the work of returning to a scaffold, installing a brand new ceiling’s Sistine blankness.
Subject: Statement

Existential Context?

Subject left his residence at nine a.m. but claims “a nebulous sense of foreboding” upon waking that morning. Use of the word “Limbo” when asked age and occupation.

How does Subject characterize the moment?

Subject insists upon figurative leaps and simile—e.g., “The green SUV shot forth from the mouth of the alley furious as the guns on an American tank.” When subject’s car crossed the SUV’s path the impact was at the rear driver’s-side wheel, spinning subject’s car in the direction it had already been traveling “like a dealt card across green felt.” Asked directly, Did his car, after impact, strike any parked cars, Subject says, “…the parked cars lined up on either side of the one-way street, and in my memory I see it not as mid-morning but as night, the dark that tells the headlights to click on—landing lights on an urban runway. I was lucky.”

Where had Subject intended to drive?

Subject’s sig. other had been three days installed at Local Hospital’s psychiatric ward. Subject: “They were watching her. It was not due to me. The car was hers.”
How does Subject describe the weather?

Subject of his own free will
and clear mind claims
the cold was appropriate—
no snow or ice, just clean winter air.
No snow— just salt stains
“like poltergeists” on the concrete.
Good Evening

The attendees expected to come have come, sweeping totes and Gene Kelly umbrellas beneath their chairs. All is aimed at the lectern. Pencils and recording devices are clicked to the ready. The hour has struck itself, but where, then, is our speaker, our vicarious love, our mainest attraction? To whom shall we address our hopeful glances? We have straightened our collars to look presentable. You can play a record while we wait, fine, but we got that at home. Beg our patience?—we’re here for the man of the hour, even if this engagement is merely “academic.” We came here for the tweed vibes of his baritone, to be in the room with him, the pressed creases of black slacks and his pasty figure within them. We purposely didn’t examine the author photo just so we could play this game. Why doesn’t someone scamper out to the parking lot to make sure he gets in alright? Is it still raining? Bring him in with a crowd of other random beards and let us pick him out. Give us the chance.
Hired Hands

There are other kinds of work besides
the obvious brute force it takes
to move large stones from place to geologic place,
or the muscle it takes to dig ditches
in the worst heat you’ve ever been paid to endure.
Today I say my work when I mean my art,
but it is not with my entire body
that I bring these words into being, just the thinnest
parts of my hands, the kind of work that sits
at a desk. At fifteen, we knew smoother ways
to make fifty dollars a-piece,
but we’d been nominated for the job
because we were strong and unoccupied.
We would make ourselves useful.
We were promised real work
by the only man we knew who wore a suit
everyday, a man who needed two strong backs
to help move his property
from old apartment to new. Just loading
and unloading the Ryder truck, he promised,
nothing else. Our fathers, in their greased overalls,
approved. There was no woman
in Ian Kalman’s life, just stuff—
the sharp corners and dead weight
of all he’d accumulated by himself, piece
by kitschy piece. All day up and down
the elevators and stairs we laughed
at his baldness, his diminutiveness,
the pathetic way the back of his button-down
dress shirt held the frantic pools of sweat
his soft body was so unaccustomed
to letting go. His strength
was nothing next to ours because
all we did everyday, all summer,
was best each other at sports
until one of our parents needed help
with something heavy and would pay.
Otherwise we fought each other, stole,
and figured out how to get certain girls standing nearby
to notice what our bodies could do. Ian’s idea
of conversation was to point out
which items we carried for him were older
than us: an armoire, a headboard,
we didn’t care. We were the athletes.
Ian had a desk job. Even though he was decades older, we were the ones capable of holding everything he possessed in our arms and hurling it elsewhere. We did most of the heavy lifting while Ian took whatever small item felt lighter than his daily briefcase: We asked our fathers, Why. Because, they said, he was paying us. He was paying us.
Spring Outbreak

Dandelion spores
are chaperoning mucous droplets
across the collegiate quad.
Pageant winners dress
in fire engine pantsuits
steering prospectives on walking tours.

They are here to sample
our sick air, sniff the dorms.

The breathing of cities has grown
heavier and more labored across time.

Kids eject their bodies
from the swings
as sneezes. Sounds of real birds
correspond with the chirping

of the punk rock girl’s ring tone.
All that is beneath the ambient sound

are more ambient sounds,
the buzzing voices of mosquitoes

in their casual zipping person
to person.
A Background Character Cut Out in Ice Sculpture

A newborn’s clarity
is in your eyes.

But be warned—
the universe is a death trap,

and when wild apes
swing out of nowhere
to attack even
the kindest of berry pickers,

and tsunamis show up,
arcing the eyebrow

of your horizon—
don’t fret;

it’s nothing to do
with you,

or your motives.
This is only action,

rising. So, stock character,
before the denouement
eats you alive,
you should realize that this sweat

you broke out in the moment
you were hatched

will pull straight down
your face, torso, and legs,

and arrive
at your shaky feet.

Wipe your shoes
on this Welcome.
Memo

Let the welted backs of the captured be brought forth.
Let them think they’ve heard the single engines of compassion circling overhead,
then confiscate their flares and smoke.
Let the legs of their language be broken in our boorish mouths.
Let their witnesses rise to take oaths. The verdict will come from a faceless jurist,
and when the sentences cross his lips, have the guards carry the captured
off the map.
Let the document that this is be denied.
From the Desk of Your Ghostwriter

You began as mice begin the first day of a six-week experiment. The table that spread before you spread nonsense that you soon enough would make sense of. You rode an adjectival childhood forward from there. They told you to do X, and you refused. You knew. I will tell you how the cold water in your cold water flat was so unbearably cold, and you will remember it that way. You say “dirt” when you say “poor,” but I need to hear the details of what you did that New Year’s Eve when the electricity went out for the whole neighborhood and no one, not even mother, was able to find you (or perhaps I do not). Three un-accounted-for years are to be left to me. You say you found love and it was X and Y but I command the words, see? Look at this old photograph. Think hard on the faces. Listen and I will tell you exactly what’s going on.
**First Spar**

If it had been a sock-hop,  
she’d have been sitting in the corner  
of the gymnasium with her girlfriends  
pretending not to notice Mario  
pretending not to notice her—  
and there, with her hands folded in her lap,  
maybe he eventually gets the balls  
to saunter over and ask for a dance.  
But the trainer told her  
this is not a fucking dance, his last bit  
of corner wisdom before sending her out.  
“He wants to make you look  
like a woman”: the trainer jabbed these words  
into her chest as if to obviate its existence  
with the emphatic language of manliness.  
As a trainer he fancied himself  
a pep-talk, and he’d found that most  
of bringing fighters along is little more  
than imploring them to remember.  
So his final instruction to her  
was to remember their bag work:  
he’d shown her how a speed-bag,  
when worked properly (watch me) should sound  
like turrets being swallowed and spit  
by a machine gun, swallowed and spit,  
swallowed and spit, all one motion,  
one fluid address to the opposition’s weak spot,  
the broad side of the chin called  
the knockout button. The noise  
comes grumbling from the bag, filling the gym  
with a steady *bomp-bomp-bomp*,  
*bomp-bomp-bomp, bomp-bomp-bomp*  
in which even the puncher  
can’t tell the sound of hands hitting the bag  
from the sound of the bag hitting  
the wooden apparatus to which it’s mounted.  
Working the bag, the head and shoulders  
of the fighter are reared back slightly  
to make room for the business of the hands, reared back  
as if it were a foul smell the bag were emitting  
that caused the violence.  
He had shown her how the trick  
was not to punch but to always be preparing  
to punch, to always be holding
the pear-shaped balloon
in suspended animation before one’s face.
The road work, the bag work, the weights—
and the first spar in which everything culminates.
He said: remember the bag work.
He said: Mario will try to back you up,
so be lateral, your back always
to the center of the ring. He will try to catch you
reaching in, so stay in your stance. And hug,
he said, if you get into trouble,
hug him. She played her part.
She said what the fighter never forgets
to say. She said: I know, I know.
On the road to the gulf

whole notes of farmhouses
perform longer and longer rests
between sightings.
Radio stations
jockey for position
in the air between counties
and across a small sign—
You Have Just Broken the Plane
of Louisiana.
We are the map’s word problem.

There will be X number
of minutes before the horizon
introduces the next silo.
The lost dog
standing on the shoulder
has been chased
from home’s side of the fence
by an open gate’s seduction,
by the smell of the official state trees
on the roadside,
and he licks our fuel
burning by his face, then nothing—
the low groan of zero traffic.
Then the thunderstorm’s riddle:

a telephone pole
collapsed in the road, dead
by lightning.
Its crashing happened way out here
in the countryside,
beyond any human earshot’s
chance of hearing the lines
go dead, the voices

being cut like tall grass.
A day later,

when the storm leaves the city,
we follow, tracking back up

the same spine of interstate
to see the same dog’s dead body

hung from the yellow lines.
Sometimes we beg for mirages—

for the strict pointillism of the asphalt
to fool us into seeing water lilies

or haystaxx. But when has it ever?
The eyes are always at least half-correct.

You drive by close enough
to see the viscera framing

the body, the last warm reds
and purples to smell before Baton Rouge.
Demolition Suite

1.

The neon lights
have gone aerialist,
leaping up from the Vegas strip
to die high-powered deaths
as celebratory fireworks
for the end
of the old Frontier Hotel.
This is the modest spectacle
before the bigger show.
In the video
fans of fire and noise
cheer on their team;
the camera jostles
without a tripod
and blurring colors
against the sky’s straight-face
suggest *The Starry Night*,
absinthe. A pause
after the fireworks end—
one can hear
the voices of the crowd
begin to soften
in the footage, then the small
detonations begin,
symmetrically, taking out
the lower windows
in a wave that pushes
upward,
a strategic orchestration
that dazzles as safely
as the fireworks.
The videographer tells his companion
how the experts know
to first blow out
the inside walls
and floors
and that’s what we’re watching
now. As the detonations
begin to come in more rapid clusters,
so does the applause—
as when a singer arrives
at the last few bars
of a national anthem.
The outer walls begin to quiver,
and the hotel does not collapse
so much as it agrees with us,
melts, disappears
the way the wicked witch
went out—a slow liquefying
into her own footprints;
poor darling, the unlucky
complexion of a misunderstood sister—
the broom, the smoke, the cackle,
all part of the act.
2.

(Failed Implosion)

This is the age
of second chances,

second careers
and half-thought-out

comebacks. Everyone
lives long enough for

what the weblink calls
an epic fail. So

the hard-hatted experts
didn’t lay enough TNT,

they admitted.
A miscalculation.

The tall & wide building
is ugly, an old & dirty shoebox

stood upright; it had been
some kind of factory

that got bought out.
The voice counts down from ten.

The building’s pressure points
begin to spit debris,

and the factory
drops to its knees—

and stays that way.
The machinists—

having gotten the memo—evacuated
months prior.
3.

(Witness Account)

The columns
smoldered side by side,

and folks without air
checked out

of the upper floors.
Witness says,

“I could see them jump
from the Holland Tunnel.”

We were thankful
for their anonymity,

at least. You don’t see
how anything

hits the ground
because of the soot

and smoke
that’s kicked up

when two large erasers
get clapped together—

“That’s what I saw,
almost exactly.”
Here are the teeth
in the skyline’s key.

Viewed from the pier,
the structures
have little to say
to each other, the way

the mute apartment building
in which I grew up

said nothing to the identical
apartment building

that stood next to it.
Did a copy of us

live there? I wanted
to know. Stupidly,

I kept lookout
for him,

planned to beat
him up,

watched for whoever
went in or out

that looked familiar.
As a young son

trusted with the run
of the place

till my folks
came home from work,

I’d been warned
not to touch

the stove. A fire
let loose
could quickly
burn up

the whole building,
they said,

and our twin
might go up

in smoke, too—
and you’ll kill them, us,

everybody—
then you’ll never know, son.
5.

The correspondent
tells her cameraman
to pan up
so the viewers can see

how the Predator drones
cannot be seen

from the ground.
They’re designed that way,

and the remote pilot
can sip bitter coffee

in Nevada
while he acts on

some intelligence—
this target, which lives

in that hut.
In Nevada

the blast
is not audible

on the monitor, which comes in
in black & white,

which is all one needs
to observe the burn

of the hut, the success
of the targeted strike.
In Haskell Wexler’s *Medium Cool,*

the actors are interacting

with real cops and crowds.

It’s gotten to the point where

I’m a good person when faced with a common dramatic scenario.

I helped the rude man who needed to eat because I put the dollar in his hand and said nothing about it, told him to say nothing about it.

When the elderly diner collapsed in cardiac arrest, I inquired, and I stood under the awning outside and waved my arms so the ambulance knew where to stop.

But when the news vans
arrived to record
my neighbor’s

house on fire, I strove
to look more upset

than I was.
I wrote evocatively

about how
I stood there,

shaking my head,
articulating real tears.
Out Front

As the eyelid of another sunset falls over,

here you come,
cresting the hill of our block,

looking only to kill time,
cool off

in air-conditioning,
or people-watch

from behind the cell bars
of fire escape,

like I hate to do.
I recognize the walk—

you, up our street,
the just-got-off-work alacrity

of the whole heat-
waving city

in 5 o’clock exhalation.
Here—

in the yawning
pale light

of swarthy dusk
and early-bird city crickets,

the late buses
and trains that brought

each of us home—
now, in this light—

these are the socks
you thought to buy me?
The Razing

Flying above the topography
I am a higher body
looking down on the temples

of all lower bodies fixed
on a spun globe.
I am that kind of floating anesthetized

patients report.
With my satellite eyes I snap
the godliest pictures

of pinpoint existence.
Those claiming to have come back
say the feeling is one of air,

you having exhaled your self
then rising up with that
same air to look down from homelessness

at the body who for years
housed you, but all we have is the science.
From up here I am snapping

the Robert Taylor public
housing complex at its supernova.
The building blown out

by controlled fireworks and I
am the most distanced photojournalist
to record the razing.

The beamed down message says, Click here
to zoom in on the pixilated
bulldozer bossing around concrete and steel,

a friendless car grazing a grey lunar field.
The Jurist of Earthquakes

What comes before you is a hands-bound island case in which the people are grabbing at the prospect of being heard. There is no advocate who can show how the people’s clothes strung on lines tree to tree are in any respect relevant to these proceedings, or to the central matter at issue on which you must rule. Brute forces are shifting and grumbling in their layers below, awaiting this result. Even impartial fingers stretch out at different lengths. The plea is waved off. You lack the authority to compel seismic fate to anything more than its own cruelty. Disaster will set itself on some and yet not others, on occupying forces and on those who dance during thunderstorms. So the gavel smacks. The event comes and goes, and the ocean skulks away, withdrawing itself from the shore. They ask will it return: You don’t make law.
NOTES

“Zhivago in Chicago,” is inspired, pretty much in equal parts, by Boris Pasternak’s novel *Doctor Zhivago* and David Lean’s equally majestic film adaptation of 1965.

“Musée de Creation” takes its cue from Sylvia Plath’s poem “Ariel.” The ending of which (“…Into the red/Eye, the cauldron of morning.”) makes me simultaneously shiver and swoon. Also, the last line of “Musée” is an homage-in-the-form-of-poetic-theft to W.H. Auden’s “O What is that Sound,” which ends with the famous lines, “Their feet are heavy on the floor./And their eyes are burning.”

In “Good Evening,” the line “…our speaker,/our vicarious love,/our mainest attraction?” sounds a lot like the beginning of Alan Michael Parker’s poem, “Whoosh” (“My friend, my love, my onliest affliction.”). I admire the poet and the poem, so I’m happy to admit mimicking the music of that line, which begins Parker’s book *Love Song with Motor Vehicles.*