

ical to the point of reversal). For the moment, I'd like to assert that, Northerner though I am, my notion of Eden hinges on neither weather nor temperature. For that matter, I'd just as soon discard its dwellers, and eternity as well. At the risk of being charged with depravity, I confess that this notion is purely visual, has more to do with Claude than the creed, and exists only in approximations. As these go, this city is the closest. Since I'm not entitled to make a true comparison, I can permit myself to be restrictive.

I say this here and now to save the reader disillusionment. I am not a moral man (though I try to keep my conscience in balance) or a sage; I am neither an aesthete nor a philosopher. I am but a nervous man, by circumstance and by my own deeds; but I am observant. As my beloved Akutagawa Ryunosuke once said, I have no principles; all I've got is nerves. What follows, therefore, has to do with the eye rather than with convictions, including those as to

how to run a narrative. One's eye precedes one's pen, and I resolve not to let my pen lie about its position. Having risked the charge of depravity, I won't wince at that of superficiality either. Surfaces—which is what the eye registers first—are often more telling than their contents, which are provisional by definition, except, of course, in the afterlife. Scanning this city's face for seventeen winters, I should by now be capable of pulling a credible Poussin-like job: of painting this place's likeness, if not at four seasons, then at four times of day.

That's my ambition. If I get sidetracked, it is because being sidetracked is literally a matter of course here and echoes water. What lies ahead, in other words, may amount not to a story but to the flow of muddy water "at the wrong time of year." At times it looks blue, at times gray or brown; invariably it is cold and not potable. The reason I am engaged in straining it is that it contains reflections, among them my own.