Epicycles

from the dawn of civilization

even the greatest of minds believed

that we were the centre of all creation

that the sun was a ball of fire that burned

just above our doorstep

that the moon was its sister but a few leagues away

these things were simple

but when the planets moved in the heavens

their motion was complex

and hard to explain

first men thought the planets were living beings

picking their own careful path

eventually they were understood to be worlds

which circled our own

the learned men of Europe

beginning the worship of science

went to fabulous lengths

to make the theory of our centrality

— the core of our belief —

right and real

to explain the retrograde motions of the planets

they employed the Ptolemaic conviction

of the epicycle

the planets’ orbits were circles

on the circumference of a circle

but this did not make predictions

any more accurate

so the astronomers sat down

and added epicycles to the epicycles

without much success

the adding of epicycles continued

for hundreds of years

epicycles upon epicycles upon epicycles

until calculations proved impossible

and still it didn’t work

finally came Copernicus

who told us that the planets

did not revolve around the earth

but around the sun

the theory of epicycles became obsolete overnight

the theory that had stood

for 13 centuries

that had taken hundreds of men

working for hundreds of thousands of hours

and that was an absolute truth

of religion and culture

was a house of cards in a breeze

a tower built high on a foundation of mud

still, the scientists and leaders of men fought

the ancients could not be wrong

the house of cards could be saved

the tower reinforced

all that work redeemed

Kepler came and refined the Copernican notion

began the building of a new tower

a tower founded on the concrete

of empiricism and rationality

Copernicus and Kepler were right

everyone else in the world was wrong

and the wrongness was an anchor

tied to the foot of humanity

as I walk between the towers of the city

i keep my boots on

and an eye to the roofs of the buildings around me