**Still life 1: Spring**

**Lines on John Milton’s “L’Allegro”**

As Spring. Into the plains, south of Abilene, north of Wichita,

Kansas prairieland, where May’s rain streams like wreathed

smiles and lark song flies in dappled skies, tallgrass wends

with prairie smoke, sweetbriar, clover, and blazing star. Bluestem

flowers white against the setting sun, exhaling in a throe, sizzling the

memory of winter, burrowing in fallow ground, dirt deep in milo fields.

Sheaves of wheat grow sun yellow amid red barns, their doors open

in heaving sighs. Dry seedlings sprout. Corn greens on husks, their amber

tassels trembling in Springtime’s freshening breezes. Amid the whistle

of swallow and sparrow, kingbird and warbler, the chug of tractors

scythe to plough furrows in pied daisies, uplifting the land from

its winter knell. The sky is blue and shaded with powder whiffs,

cloud shadows lazy upon the curvature of the earth. Hawks wheel,

their chests white against the cirrus striations, white as hope from a once dark

world. I’ve become the plains, their hillocks a maze of marvel, charmed

by the distance of distance. I’ve become Spring, as wind weaves

through a lone cottonwood’s quiet leaves, the nearest sounds

a windmill’s whisper, a cow’s lowing call of romance.

**Still life 2: Winter**

**lines on John Milton’s “Il Penseroso”**

As Winter. Along the Gulf coast,

between Bolivar and Beaumont, East Texas,

the sun, as black as an Ethiopian queen, has inhaled

in a sigh, and the memory of summer, an undertow,

darkens the murky sea, dredged in riptides.

The sky is leaden green with sea mist. Gray cloud cover

cowers with hopelessness. Gulls wheel and screech, shunning

folly’s noises, black against the gray clouds, commas punctuating

the sky in endless stammering, sentences without verbs.

A swarm of mosquitos whispers as thick as motes, as feverish

as mad dreams, hissing like tar steaming, their falsetto organs peal.

My chest heaves,

the air heavy with the scent of crab carapaces and

webs of strewn seaweed littering the sand’s darkest grains.

I’ve become the coast’s sullen roar. I’ve become pensive December.

My mouth tastes of salt, my fingernails, like waves breaking

on shore, claw and question submerging, to live beneath

the churning seas.