

## Author Commentary

The Grand River (“the one I grew up running/around—or it around me”) loops east and west in this ribbon-like fashion around the township south of Lansing, Michigan, where I was raised. Near there, the Grand branches off into the Red Cedar, which branches off into Sycamore Creek, which branches into...you get the idea. The one river, which is really Lake Michigan, ends up surrounding the town. In that area, I have a hard time figuring out which body of water I’m walking along except for in a few, well-worn places. Of course, it’s all one body; that’s the heart of the difficulty. A good problem to have.

The situation might be analogous to city life, only instead of rivers there are people. Writing “Elegy With a Chorus Singing Al Green” was partly a game of locating myself within the sea of Chicagoans. As a result of returning to graduate school, I had recently relocated to Chicago, and I was reeling for a sense of community and connection. I found a good helping of it at my night job, in a bar where “everyone in the room, regulars and all,” occasionally, mysteriously synthesizes. Of course, the Reverend Al Green will do that to people.

I was also reading a lot of William Carlos Williams and thinking about his experiments with “the variable foot”—the line, which “unfolds into three descending and indented parts,” upon which he had hoped to adapt Western poetic traditions to the music of the speech he heard in Paterson, New Jersey, a town that—at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—I imagine to resemble, in spirit and industrial workforce, the Lansing of a few decades later.

Finally, in writing “Elegy With Chorus Singing Al Green,” I was following Larry Levis, trying to extend the poem’s music to repeating motifs (like cicadas) and phrases (like “cart and parcels”), as well as trying to travel through time and to conjure the life of a photograph the way Levis does over and over again, but with particular admiration for how he does it in the poem “The Clearing of the Land: An Epitaph.”