

ENIGMA

Chicago. First Lady of the Lake. Still struggling with the art of ladyhood. The old broad's broadened since dragging her long ragged petticoats through swamping crow-black mud, Indian twilight and the evil stink of skunk cabbage.

She favors night, ripe with urban musk, polyglot racket, erotic alliteration, the patina of impacted space. The phallic towers of the powerful probe the high haze, challenging low-flying angels. Damp breezes flutter the curtain of diesel fumes. For miles you can see the aura of millions of offspring-- part light, part heat and motion.

Michigan Avenue fires countless rounds of glowing ammo from oblique angles. You can't escape the shrapnel of light, incendiary shards of it, infecting you with a virus that keeps you coming back for another pelting.

Down in the outback, still in sight of magnificence, magnanimity, maggots-- the lower level is pocked with puddled reflections, shimmering shades of lust, logic, business as usual, obligatory beauty. The trumpet in that storefront retreat is tonguing out blues-- a color, a condition, a signature sound. Mop-and-dust folk rehydrate inside, jockeying barstools, betting on hot-lipped riffs to raise them higher.

The motorized metal never stops moving goods and people from somewhere to elsewhere, scoring the dark with trails of light. Everywhere hands open, point, clasp, caress, make a fist. Simmering grease sounds like rain, glass clinks, small machines gritch, whine, close hard on your cash. Neon viscera wind in and out of the collage-- raw meat geometrics, opaline fish, potato pyramids, miles of newsprint, stone, fabric, fabrication, fable. The man dozing in the cardboard box waits to eat from upscale garbage. The city honors and trashes, adores and ignores. The city coughs, spits, curses, cries, blesses.

Giant tools are at rest, teeth slightly bared. Chuffing semis disgorge at sun-up. Sleepers roll over, restless before rising relentless to track across Chicago's not-yet made-up face.

Steaming or frozen, the city is a womb. The city incubates despair, discovery, desire, greatness. She has character but outgrows her soul. Still-- Chicago is a phoenix-- amassed ashes not her blight but fuel for her strength.