

A PILGRIM'S TALE

Late afternoon, the American sun
pulled gravity down on me, so I lay

on a bank of the river Commerce
and fell asleep. I began to dream.

In Empire City I saw a temple. The dome
rested on the Five Pillars of Islam

and revealed the Six Unifying
Principles of Design. I moved among

those pillars and gazed at that dome
as a field of folk surrounded me. They called:

*emphasize prayer daily five times emphasize
Ramadan Ramadan Ramadan balance*

*give alms repeat give alms repeat give alms
until repetition becomes rhythm.*

*Journey to Economecca pilgrim,
if you can, Economecca.*

*There is no variety. There is no
variety but God who is various.*

The pillars then caught fire spreading
across tongues in the field of folk:

one mouthed security; one sounded reveille;
one quoted Boccaccio; ladies in black

mourned Neanderthal Man and
a chorus sang Dark Age boasts while

the technocrats chanted *Mastigophora*
Mastigophora Mastigophora.

The dome shrieked and cracked.
Before collapsing it became

an enormous bird which beat
its wings and rose then

exploded into a sky of rain falling
to quench flames burning on tongues

in the field of folk. When the rain quit
the folk had become prairie grass. I heard

the wind move through them saying *shalom shalom*
salaam salaam salaam shalom shiloh

shylock sublime sha-lime. The field
was now empty of human construction.

I opened my mouth and out dropped
permanent lies: The Plague of 1348,

Last Things, The Will, Fire of 1666,
Napoleon and Mrs. O'Leary's Cow,

Local and Transnational Control,
The Cunning in my Body (enough

to kill ten bad men), Faults, Failings,
and the fall falling cold of early winter.

The lies dropped until there was no more
history in me but the mind's last version.

When that too was cast out, I awoke.
I stood and started walking to Empire City.

It was now time for me to set out
on my journey eastward.
(2001)