

The Gene that Ages Words in Winter

i

An angel is the hope of a message
larger than itself if we believe
the white circle in which it stands,
its blue eyes, its small English hand
paler than most but otherwise perfect.

Forgive me for writing this season.
Winter is long enough as it is.
In the lamplight tonight
the street shines with salt and snow,
and small drifts clumsy
with the white of hospitals
feel the world crawl this way
and that around them and beneath.

ii

In the beginning the word said
“let there be winter.”
But the woman already had felt change
in the air for more than a day,
and she covered the man
with her thin white coat.
On the Plaza’s south side the flowers
were brown, and by afternoon
black trees jutted out of snow
and the sky between them grew immense

with two redtail hawks
circling lower, one of them
screaming its ice-age secrets
over and over to the river below.

iii

For all the students in the doorway
and their long disorder of laughter
on the river's far sides
the wind had made its adjustments,
and the man watching them
from the bench by the riverwalk
subsides into what remains of him.

iv

Winter read out of itself.
How none of the shadows is right.
How the hawk will not relent.
How students have come outside to argue.
How the stillness of young ice
at the edge explodes like a rifle shot.
How a woman buying a newspaper
is warmed by the setting sun.