

Words on the Wind

—Ford River Rouge

I'd walk up the hill through wild grasses
rich with milkweed and flags and make a nest
in the place I'd tamped down over the days
of decent weather. The view was something
terrifying and never the same:
on calm days the great plumes rose straight up
to insult the delicate nostrils of angels.
I was twenty-four and had no use
for the God of my fathers, no use for any-
thing spiritual. I believed in the deepest organs,
the liver, the kidneys, the heart, the lungs.
Nonetheless as I sat cross-legged drinking
chocolate milk words came on the wind.
Can you imagine God speaking to you
as you ate a little round store-bought pie
on a hilltop in Dearborn, where no Jews
were welcomed, where the wind came
in waves through the wild grasses
that had the guts to thrive? How I yearned
for the character of weeds and grass
that seemed more mysterious and grand
than the words the wind scattered through air
so fetid it was sweet. Noon, May 12,
1952. I wrote it on a calendar
at home and later threw the thing away.
You want those words, you who still believe,
who think the exact words are essential
to your salvation or whatever
it is you pray for? I'll take you there
on a spring day of wind and low gray sky,
a Dearborn day. We'll bring two quarts

of chocolate milk and little store-bought
pies—apple, cherry, or pineapple,
each worse than the other—and find the nest
of fifty years ago, and maybe we'll smoke
as all young men did, and lean back
into the flattened grass, and rest our heads
on the cold ground while we add our own
exhalations to the exquisite chaos
of the air, and commune with whoever.