from JOURNEYS

I

Genji caught a gray bird, fluttering. It
was wounded, so I hit it with a coal shovel.
It stiffened, grew straight and symmetrical,
and began to increase in size. I took it by
the head with both hands and held it as it
swelled, turning the head from side to side.
It turned into a woman, and I was embracing
her. We walked down a dim-lighted stairway
holding hands, walking more and more swiftly
through an enormous maze, all underground.
Occasionally we touched surface and redescended.
As we walked I kept a chart of our route in
mind—but it became increasingly complex—and
just when we reached the point where I was
about to lose my grasp of it, the woman trans-
ferred a piece of fresh-tasting apple from her
mouth to mine. Then I woke.

VII

Underground building chambers clogged with refuse heaps
discarded furniture, slag, old nails,
rotting plaster, faint wisps—antique newspapers
rattle in the winds that come forever down the hall.
ladders
passing, climbing, and stopping, on from door to door.
one tiny light bulb left still burning
—now the last—
locked inside is hell.
Movies going, men milling round the posters
in shreds
the movie always running
—we all head in somewhere;
—years just looking for the bathrooms.
Huge and filthy, with strange-shaped toilets full of shit.
Dried shit all around, smeared across the walls of the
adjoining room,
and a vast hat rack.
We were following a long river into the mountains. Finally we rounded a ridge and could see deeper in—the farther peaks stony and barren, a few alpine trees.

Ko-san and I stood on a point by a cliff, over a rock-walled canyon. Ko said, “Now we have come to where we die.” I asked him, what’s that up there, then—meaning the further mountains. “That’s the world after death.” I thought it looked just like the land we’d been travelling, and couldn’t see why we should have to die.

Ko grabbed me and pulled me over the cliff—both of us falling. I hit and I was dead. I saw my body for a while, then it was gone. Ko was there too. We were at the bottom of the gorge. We started drifting up the canyon, “This is the way to the back country.”