

**Elliot R. Mandel, Glen Ellyn, IL**  
**in the middle of Nosomewhere**

or

**on the road with the bradley university chorale,**  
**spring tour 2002**

in the middle of Nosomewhere

or at least, between the mississippi and the rockies,  
or more practically, between the last concert and the next,

is space:

the sun has room enough to make whole shadows of clouds  
upon terrain known as kansas

where a continuous yet flimsy wire-woodenpost fence guides the two-lane  
highway supporting a greyhound going one way  
and a peoria charter going the other.

make no mistake,

we're not settlers on this western prairie  
we're not staying long enough, and some of us aren't even awake.

chin rests on knuckles, shoulder smushes against window,

eyes watching the land stand still;  
after all, it's the bus (with me inside) that does the flying by.

"american" doesn't describe the landscape;

this space sitting blurringly still isn't kansas, you don't cross a line into colorado.

this part of america is defined not by the presence of people, but by the wind that  
carves, whistling its song of ghostly vastness

over dried-up streams  
dead-grass-golden hills  
the backs of benevolent bovine  
skimming the tumbleweed along...

glancing up from out, now approaching the golden arches of mctropolis,

it sometimes wears an arby's hat

promising intestinal havoc;

*this* is american landscape,

so is the train out there that classically parallels the road.

the distinctive american stamp:

any town with nine or more people has a baseball field.

there is also farmland, both meat and wheat

and occasional proof that rickety windmills still creak in the prairie breeze,

but are the only wild animals the silhouetted birds V-sweeping the sky?

as the edge of the road-pavement and grass-smears along the bottom of my window,

a feathery dark mass seizes my stare.

the regal hawk puffs out his chest

subtly poised in a tree's mid-march skeleton  
surveying the vista, ruler of everything his eye pierces  
unflinchingly oblivious to the concrete arteries  
pumping people empowered by sedans.

if the years did 75 down a lonely highway,

this bus and those cars passed the people we inaccurately dub

"indians"

("native americans" in a spasm of political correctness)

a long ways back;

as a matter of fact,

we left 'em drunk off our dust.

time and driving fade the silver spur motel into the rusty spur saloon

outside a colony of crumbling ranch shanties.

some were promised paint jobs, others knew they'd survive without 'em.

a grove of trees sprouts on the horizon  
soon dusk will drive seamlessly into dark  
and the grove will go with it,  
and in another hour, the color on the other side of the window  
will begin to look like the underside of my eyelids.