Revelation I – Ephesus

A doting son

and elder mother shuffle.

A blur of eggshell blue-

an apparition or a nun-

enters the arched stone door

of the Blessed Mother’s hovel.

I strained to see

the teetering marble

of Ephesus

as sacred and true,

but John’s exile to Patmos

was all my mind would invoke-

the desertion of Mary,

the torment she knew.

Silver pokes out

from a lady’s cruise-ship tote,

the same Artemis idol

that sent Saint Paul in uproar?

Idols were worshipped,

but they never spoke.

Nor did the river gods-

who silted up the ancient harbor-

ask permission

of the Holy Roman Emperor.

A mother scowls

as a boy takes off his shoe,

and pours out the dust

of ancient martyrs.

Revelation II- Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira

A contorted old woman

cooking one ear of corn,

on a broken branch

in the middle of the lane,

waved her apron

at our rental saloon,

‘Not here, shoo, shoo!’

Smyrna had vanished eras ago,

a message conveyed

by the poor and their pain.

Perched high on the steepest of hills,

crowned by a wide amphitheater,

Pergamum glowered at us.

Her polished stones,

once lit by torches,

glittered like jewels of fire-

a shimmering devil’s throne.

Her empty words

float over the plain

and no name remains

on her broken white bones.

Awakened by the call to prayer,

as it claimed the land,

I saw and blessed

the morning star-

bygone goddess of love.

A ragged old man,

thumbing a ride, yelled to us:

“Do you know the prophet?”

We replied, “Do you know

Thyatira?”

He shook his head,

“Instead, try searching for the dove.”

Revelation III- Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea

Silent stands a Roman bath

on Sardis’s scraggly land,

where soldiers scrapped

their dead skin clean,

voices gushing, “Victory!”

Menorahs claimed

the Roman’s seven stars-

rebuilt the bath

into a synagogue-

but even that collapsed.

No conquerors remain,

wind and heat still stain.

Her rusted gates were shut.

Young children teased a cat.

A dozing guard

did not awake,

the world did not cry out.

We could not sneak

a parking space,

cross women stared

from plastic chairs

on no name streets.

Stalwart and thick,

the patient pillars

of blank Philadelphia

spoke to only the sky.

Lizards Laodicean

of bright jasper

and carnelian

overran her ruins,

emerald rainbows

flashing from their scales.

Dark clouds

rumbled warnings.

We lunched in the car,

watched wild horses

charge across their field.

In the pummel

of the rain

the whispers

of saint’s sorrows fell.