

## Seven/Elevens

### UNTITLED 1

words are dice thrown across floors,  
gambling tables, where language circumvents who  
won or lost, comes down to bets  
lost in chips when snake-eyes dooms your first throw, though  
turn a seven, eleven  
after bones stop rolling you dance as though great  
music, love, entered your soul

### UNTITLED 2

living in the world is mostly about chance,  
the draw of straws, or cards dealt  
in a game of poker, it's all about nerves,  
how your eyes react in tight,  
cold-blooded moments of chicken, will you fold,  
cave in to raw fear, pressure,  
will you become an improviser with chance,  
probability living  
inside this new moment offered you singing  
as solo, the notion fresh  
thoughts can carry art to new, profound plateaus

UNTITLED 3

walking beside a building  
offers possibility of a falling  
brick cracking your skull with death  
coming in the blink of an eye, a dice throw  
unfavorable to you  
in that moment, the fickleness of chance, odds,  
is an opaque, feckless risk

TOMAS

tomas came whipping in suddenly, winds howled  
through wet morning darkness, wings  
of cold rain, drenching voices swirling anger  
from a roiling, angry sea,  
tree branches kneeled down as if they were blessing  
snapped sugar cane stalks, whirlwinds  
tossing leaves, switchbacking currents, closed hands held  
tight together as in prayer,  
benedictions raised up to God to spare us  
holy terror like this one  
whipping hurricane winds in from Africa

UNTITLED 4

eye hear cold voices whipping  
my language of poetry wet with snapping  
syllables, flying off white  
pages full of dreaming, whirlwinds of rhythms  
trying to create a form  
history can walk through as pure poetry  
rooted in language of place

UNTITLED 5

poetry is form, draws from nothingness, song  
seeking language to create  
metaphor, meaning, a vehicle through which  
words shape themselves into sound,  
local elocutions mapping birdcalls, grunts,  
slippage of puns, wordplays, jokes,  
the march of history's impact on tongues, words,  
the chance mixing of races  
splices mestizo voices, tongues simmered down  
in pots of creole culture,  
food we eat today is language won or lost

UNTITLED 6

throw the bones again to see  
where the dice stop rolling through life's chief moments  
of chance, do they roll stopping  
with snake-eyes, seven/eleven turning up  
inside luck, ability  
raised up from cultural fusion, risk, fresh modes,  
language echoing the new

UNTITLED 7

poetic language rolls off tongues like dice throws,  
words tumble through poems risking  
they might fall off cliffs of sheer rock-face meters,  
rhythms suddenly breaking  
backs of sentences, veering in another  
direction, alongside chance,  
risk the only way to dance with creation,  
expression, art, politics

in the hands of poets become high-wire acts  
balancing cool survival,  
creative voices walk through space, joyously

#### UNTITLED 8

snake eyes in eyes of hustlers,  
pimps, who throw their lives into moments of death,  
snake eyes in stares of lizards,  
who slither belly-down through sawgrass, people,  
snake eyes fixed in eyes of men  
shooting bullets with their gazes, guns firing,  
snake eyes empty of beauty

#### UNTITLED 9

on the first throw of words tumbling off tongues, risk,  
chance takes over, becomes birds,  
spreads wings, lifts off into space, is a solo,  
music as air beneath wings,  
breath of notes is a chance to where wind takes poems  
in the moment art lives, thrives,  
takes off as tongue when rhythm rolls as thrown dice  
huck-a-bucking across floors,  
carrying the sound of possibility  
artists creating in air  
carved out by miles davis, monk, jimi hendrix

#### UNTITLED 10

where is the courage to sing  
songs no one plays over airways, radios,  
television, internets,  
where are great poets celebrated as news

anywhere in this country,  
their poems & faces splashed all over TV  
like that of sarah palin

#### UNTITLED 11

it is late in the game when new dice are thrown  
again, where did the risk go  
with the early throw of the bones, time always  
moves in the moment of now,  
choices thrown across gambling tables become  
the present voices, the new  
throw of language as dice roll toward edges, chance,  
risk, art lived in the margins  
where great poetry creates in peril, loss  
the name of the modern game,  
is fame, the throw of cold dice, no matter what . . .

NOTE: I grew up in the inner city of St. Louis, Missouri, and I watched older and younger people—mostly men—gambling when they played the game of dice. Some were killed because one of their adversary's perhaps thought they were cheating, though sometimes it was for winning a great deal of money, which made their opponents mad. So in my mind playing the game of dice contains within its mandate an essential element of risk and chance. *Seven/Elevens* is my attempt to create a new form based on the roll of the dice and the elements of chance and risk embedded in that game. To put it simply the form goes like this: in the "seven," the poem is seven lines, with alternating seven- and eleven-syllabic lines, beginning with a line of seven syllables. With the "elevens," the poem is eleven lines of alternating eleven- and seven-syllabic lines, beginning with an opening line of eleven syllables.

In my view of the form the series of poems opens with the seven form, with the next form being an eleven, though I don't see the form necessarily conforming to this strict configuration. For me the idea is to write poems that address risk, chance, as the throw of the dice does when someone is gambling, because in my view life and living is always about taking risk. Even if one approaches life conservatively, there is no way to predict what will confront you while passing through the daily activity of breathing and living.