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The Streets of New Orleans

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on seeing the flooding after Hurricane Katrina

Thirty years after departing
the stucco house in Gentilly,
for a moment this morning
chatter ceased, an internal
space opened, like the stillness
when a dog's bark ceases.

As a child, I lived near an avenue
called St. Bernard in that city
with magical names, where saints
and muses share equal billing.
In that still space a sensuous flood:
the bricks of the Vieux Carré,

odors of molasses and coffee,
the chug of ships on the dark mix
of the Mississippi, churning
toward some port far from the city
of my birth, my youth, that place
now more water than earth.