

**When I Went Back**  
**by Clay Waters**

I did not detour  
down the tree-dusked street  
with the lemon ice-box house,  
that cool, unwitting container.

I didn't picture your upstairs bedroom  
or the dark sour den  
shared in fierce coeval friction  
with a divorced mother,

did not read again those first letters  
from under a discreet payphone

did not check if violet still clung  
onto those faded envelopes

didn't close my eyes  
to listen for thunder striking  
from the grassy patch  
off the frontage road.

Now we share a city ten-thousand rooftops deep,  
a thousand places we'll never meet;  
a chopped skyscape  
unclumped with accretions  
of memories  
stamped still in the orange bricks  
of a vanished boutique,  
coded in the minor keys  
of a summer soundtrack  
forever infected

and after everything in that old town  
is pulled down  
still I could trace  
the short way to your house  
like found gold on a glowing morning  
your green-eyed absence  
blinking in and out beside me,  
only half asleep.