

I-80 LIEDER

Toyota wagon, seats bent down,
I'm stretched in the back, feet propped
against the tailgate, speeding the five hour hospital
trip to Chicago. Friends click on the radio, Mahler,
the bass strings humming from both speakers,
and lips pressed, the clouds outside the window
are my dead driven home in old Chevys, in horse-drawn carts.

Buggy and buckboard, the whip snaps
against the mare's flank, and the violins,
the violins echo the tune. Sir Georg Solti lifts the baton.
Milkwagon, meatwagon, down the entrance, up the exit ramp.
Gustav on the Interstate, Gustav on the old cow path, the mud road,
conducting the rows of corn, the tumbled down barns and towns—
Wilton, Durant, Atalissa: The Vienna Imperial Opera.

Then bring on the viola, the oboe toward Chicago,
Hog Capitol of the World. *Kindertotenlieder*,
liederkranz, Toyota Corolla, little garland,
now the station's drifting, fading out. They turn up
the volume as we cross the Mississippi River, the state line,
the cold brown water below, the cellos underscoring the winds,
garland of song, little garland in hand.