Overcast Beauty, June 10, 2012
by Robert K. Wallace

Crystal clear and deep blue this morning,
the sky clouded over before
my evening walk, no shafts
of light or even soft shadows
on the way to the wall.
Across O'Fallon I saw
what seemed to be the new owner
of the house on the corner
across from the church
out sweeping his sidewalk,
and when I asked him,
yes, indeed, he just moved
from Fort Thomas to take
a job with the Bellevue Police
department, having worked at NKU
until six days ago.

Without sunlight on the grass
the path out to the wall
was inviting in a different way
tonight, harmonious green
uniting the entire mound
of the wall with the equally
uniform green of trees across
the river as I turn upstream.
Looking out at the water
over the stack of tractors
I notice the beautiful sliver glints
behind any passing boat,
not nearly so brilliant
when the sun directly shines.

From the tractor park all
is smooth and brown up to,
and over, the former dirt pile,
no sign of action now,
although earlier today
trucks were running both ways
up and down the Avenue.
Also missing was the standing water
always on the side of the pile,
a week of very warm weather
having dried it up as
the cavalcade of trucks
came heavy and left light.
Beyond the former pile
all is spread out a little wider,
my imagined golf tee maybe
higher but not looking so,
as the former drop off
on the right is now filled
level and smooth to where
the height of the mound meets the wall.

Continuing the length of the imagined
dogleg, the analogy is stronger
than before, a nicely plateaued
fairway of just the right width
stretching from the mound for the tee
all the way to the cottonwood green,
with two portable floodlights
there for nighttime sport
as the trucks come and go,
the way they are spreading
the new debris out being
very impressive, as skeptical
as I am about the actual project.

On the way upstream I’d stopped
to frame a B&B Riverboat
as it cruised downstream
past the former dirt pile
and then the tractors.
On the way back from the turnaround
bench I saw something even better, a few moments after having noticed the silvery tracks where the more recent trucks had backed and jolted around to dump their weighty loads. Abstractly, these imprinted tire tracks reminded me of Frank Stella’s Circuit prints, whose incised lines were made by the routing tool in the backing board as he cut the metallic shapes for his painted reliefs, the pattern there below me on the expanding base of this waterfront development the same casual result of active work unconscious of the marks it makes.

As I was savoring the pattern of tractor marks on bank a white boat passed upstream far enough beyond the river’s edge to leave a spreading silver wake toward the near Kentucky shore and the far Ohio one, too, as a slightly larger white boat cruised downstream, its wake overlaying that of the other in a complex intersection of shifting light and motion which I hope my camera caught more permanently than my eye saw it, there only for one evanescent snap to catch the liquid pattern in the water against the tractor marks on the shore, the overcast light equalizing the shallow ruts and ridges with the shallow waves and troughs in what I hope will be a blending of land and water, of shoreside occupation and mid-river recreation that marks a moment of rare revelation amidst the unsettling development along the shore, the rising
foundation along the bank
surprisingly smooth given
all that’s been trucked in,
the middle of the river
absolutely dancing now
in a complex silvery pattern
worthy of Escher, those
lines of his that seem to be
going backward and forward
at the same time, now
pulsing like a strobe light
in the ongoing dance
def light and motion,
a Bach-like fugal melodic
intersection over the solid
ground base of the tractor tracks.

By now one wave of dog-walkers
after another was out, a short
rotund man unable to manage
his two tiny dogs; two hefty
young couples with two large dogs
and a small child; a family
group whose composition
from afar made me hope
for Laura with her daughters
and husband but who turned
out to be a new family
I’d not seen; a mother
and her daughters with large
beagles that could be mother
and daughter too; a cavalcade
of walkers on a sunless eve,
hot but not yet humid;
overhead the ESPN blimp
over the Great American Ballpark
as the Reds play the Tigers
in a national broadcast
from this curving river shore,
a steady red light along
the control capsule beneath
the swollen, suspended airship
too far away to tell,
as it turned on and off
from time to time, if it was
an advertiser’s message board
or a warming light to mark its presence
in the dark of the night sky,
echoed for me as I walk up O’Fallon
by the first fireflies of the year,
flashing their lights as I passed
in a random aleatory pattern
John Cage would have savored.

Thirty years ago I dipped into
a new book called Gödel, Escher, Bach. I never did get
the Gödel part, but I imagine
he too might have seen
something in the patterns
I saw tonight on what I expected
to be a walk lacking in beauty.