

delta sun

A photograph of a sunset over a body of water. The sun is a large, bright yellow-orange orb in the center of the frame, just above the horizon. Its light reflects down the center of the water, creating a shimmering path of light. The sky is a gradient of orange and yellow. In the foreground, there are dark, silhouetted branches of bare trees. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

Jianqing Zheng



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## Foreword

“The sun shines not on us but in us.”

—John Muir

“Every sunset brings the promise of a new dawn.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Mississippi Delta is not a place where one can easily seek out charming landscapes since it is a vast flatland dotted with ghost buildings, shotgun houses, hamlets, and underdeveloped small towns; but, when you drive on a tar road or a gravel road through cotton fields, you may discover close human connections with nature, land, and environment in a farm machine, a barn, a silo, a patch of ploughed land, a fish pond, a roadside church, a drifting cloud in the blue sky or a red sunset sinking on the horizon.

Frankly, life in the flatland can be flat. For me, a creative way to make life a tad bit bumpy or lively or lovely is to

haiku it with dawnlight, sunlight, and twilight so that it will become more sunbright, more sunsational, and more sunlicious. Delta sunset is particularly unique in that it not only glorifies the flatland with its dazzling, blossoming, shimmering, tranquil, or bluesy radiance but also promises a new hope, new experience, new connection, and new dawn, as said by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Included in this collection are 56 haiku and 30 photographs with a single topic on the Delta sun. They are the presents of mind. Most of the haiku are the traditional three-liners, while some are the one-liners or appear in vertical or concrete forms. They present moments to express visual feelings about Delta sun, to enrich life in the Delta, to reveal deeper emotion of personal unconsciousness, and to create an immersive mindscape in an eternal now that is unchanging and omnipresent. That's at least one part of my Delta life, a life in a state of *mu* to mesmerize with its flatness and to content myself.

Although photographs are silent, visual expressions of human feelings, they are also part of the human language. Having lived in the Mississippi Delta



for more than twenty years, I have found myself obsessed with photographing the Delta sun. Most of the photographs here are concrete presentations of stoic loneliness in the Delta landscapes. They are empty of human figures, but they are not empty of human feelings. Each suggests a part of Delta life in a state of loneliness for a state of loneliness and for a moment of delightful forgetfulness of the self and the world. This state of loneliness is not meant to be a sentimental overflow of personal emotions, but an intentional pursuit of solitude and tranquility in a creative life, or a purposeful self-fulfillment of egolessness and loneliness that comes to terms with the principles of Zen Buddhism.

These photographs are also used for writing ekphrastic haiku. Each catches a moment to juxtapose human mind and nature, to seek meaning of living a Delta life, to gain sensibility to nature through the mind's eye. For instance, the golden sunset sparkling through tree leaves in the first photograph provides a base to imagine an interactive connection between the golden sunset seen with the naked eye and the waggle-dancing bees seen with the mind's eye in the haiku.

It is my wish that this book of haiku and photographs  
would also provide a moment of delight and call for  
an introspective response from my readers.

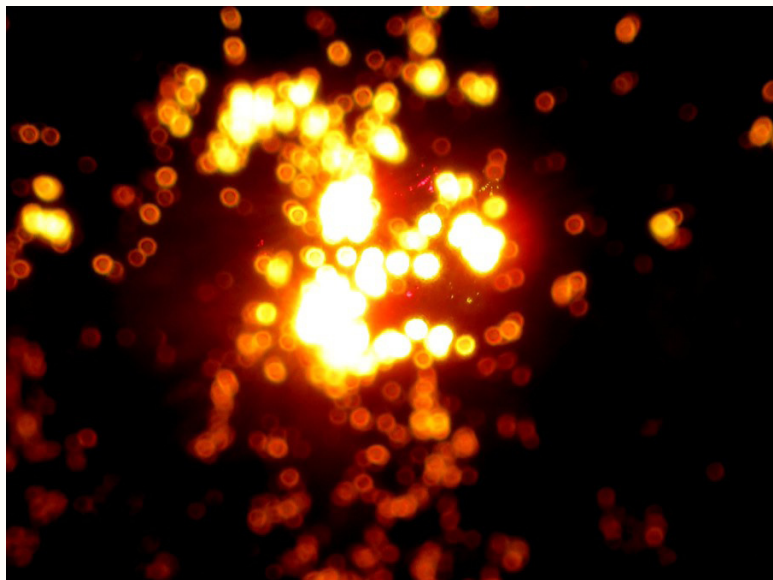
—Jianqing Zheng

delta sun



autumn breeze   sunlight shimmering on a spider strand

golden sunset  
around the honeycomb  
waggle-dancing bees



bro ken  
f  
i l  
s i  
h n  
i e  
n' s

h  
a f  
n r  
g o  
i m  
n' a

cyp  
ress  
limb

sun  
rays  
thru  
thick fog



spring creek   fallen dogwood petals drift with sunshine



wrought iron  
lacework  
on the verandah

beautiful patterns  
in spring sunrise

autumn sunset  
a blaring red  
recedes from fields

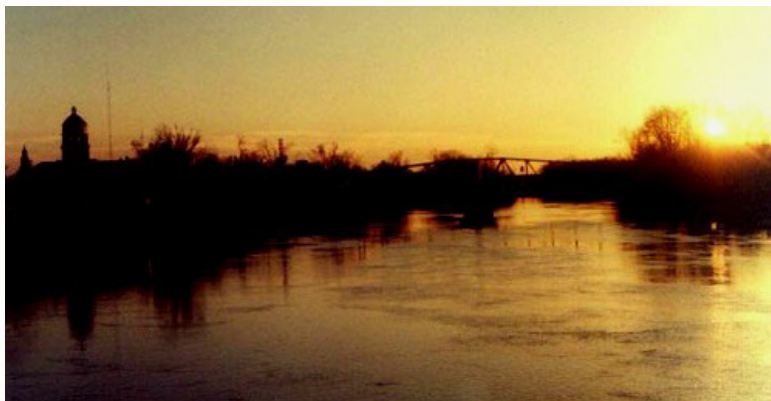
slanting sun  
its red gleam on the shed  
shines into the den



in repose a pivot irrigator silhouetted against twilight

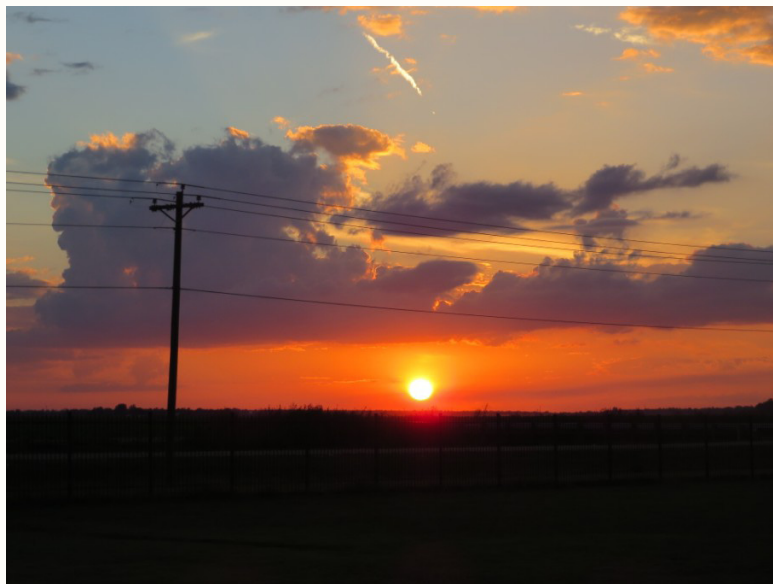
against the muzzle  
of a cannon  
bloody sunset





winter sunset  
the Tallahatchie River a shine  
of cold red

a  
water  
k e t t l e  
refracts sunlight  
this quiet afternoon



sundown  
downtown brick streets  
a dim shimmer

power outage  
autumn twilight flickering  
on the window

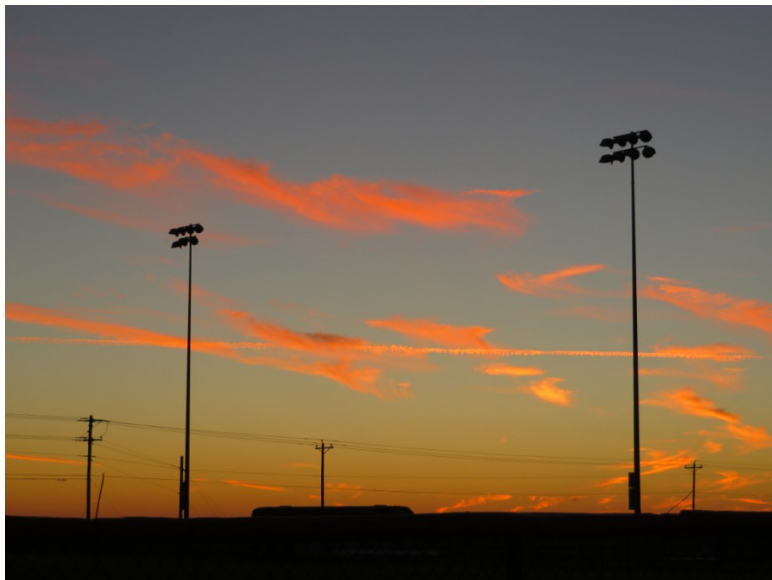
winter sunset  
the desk lamp in the den  
switched on





retreating twilight blackbirds burst off in all directions

before evening class  
viewing the sun-toned clouds  
over campus

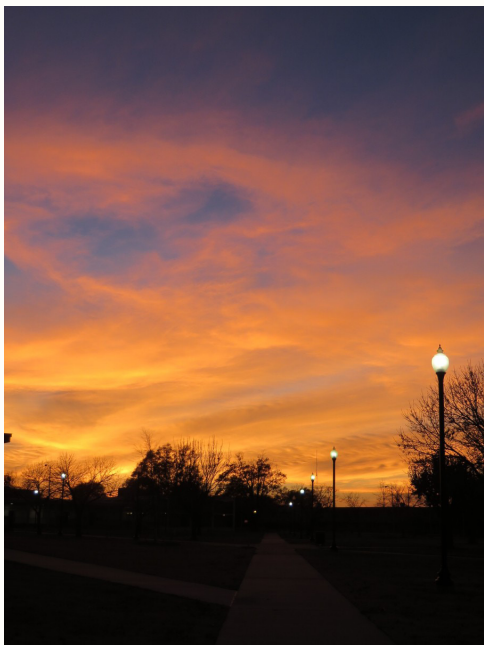


hot noon sun  
behind a coke machine  
a quiet dog



noon sun  
the tar road to the paint store  
hot and sticky

high noon  
a leaf spirals down  
to its shadow





evening walk  
lights come up all at once  
against twilight

delta sun so hot for so long for the whole summertime



red sunrise  
his bloodshot eyes  
after night shift

driving home  
in the rearview mirror  
“ribbon in the sky”



homebound—the sunset nods goodbye on the horizon

Tutwiler Jail—its high wire fences glaring in sunlight



sun at dusk shards of broken glass glint on the tar road



greyhoundbusstation theslantingsunextendingherwaitingshadow

slanting sun shadow of the lone pine extends to my window



autumn          sunshine

a  
spider  
lily

un  
furls  
its  
umbels

autumn sunset

seated

i

n

z e n

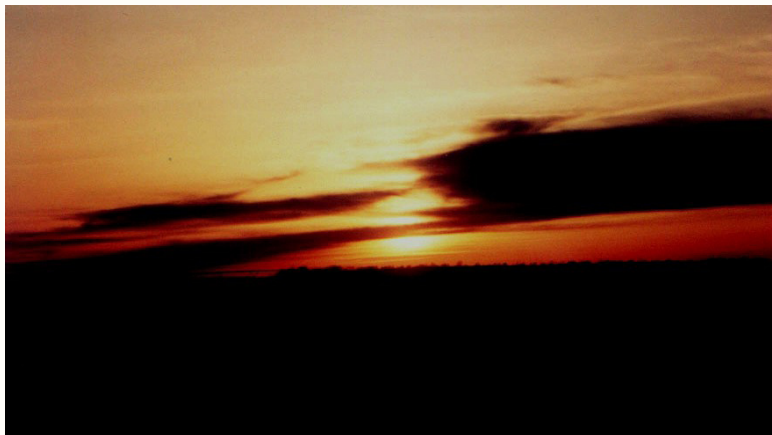
with folded legs



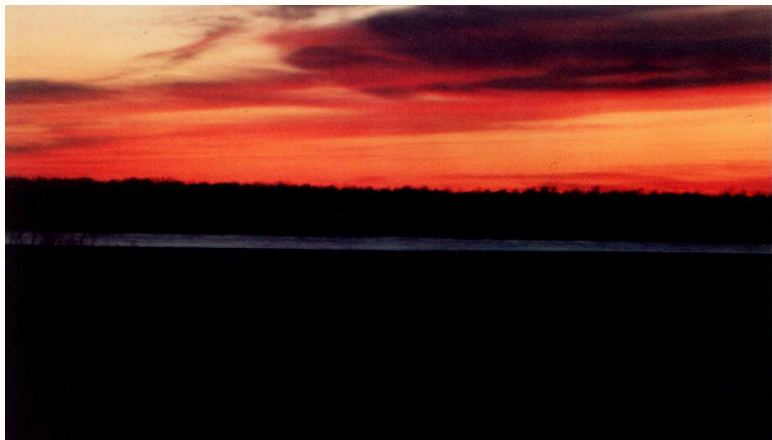


so long so faraway the diminishing delta sunset

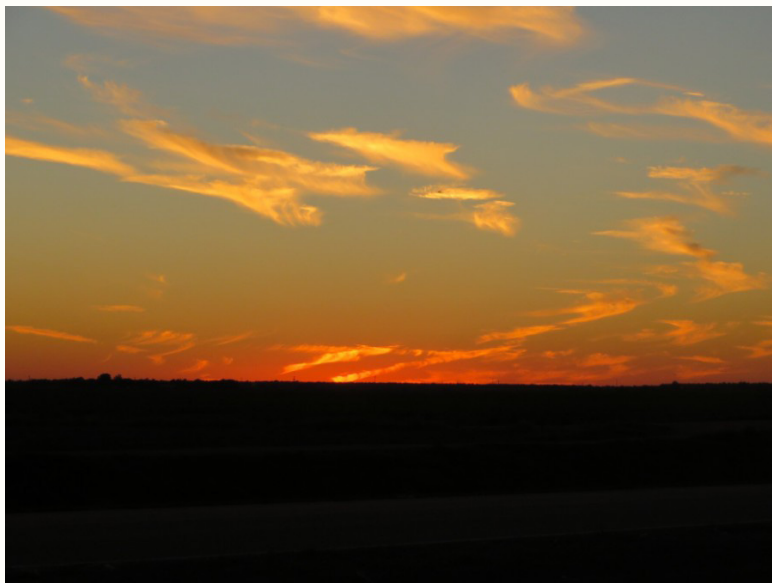
autumn sunset—  
a red-faced man leans on the bench  
watching the river



darkening sky  
sunset  
almost banked



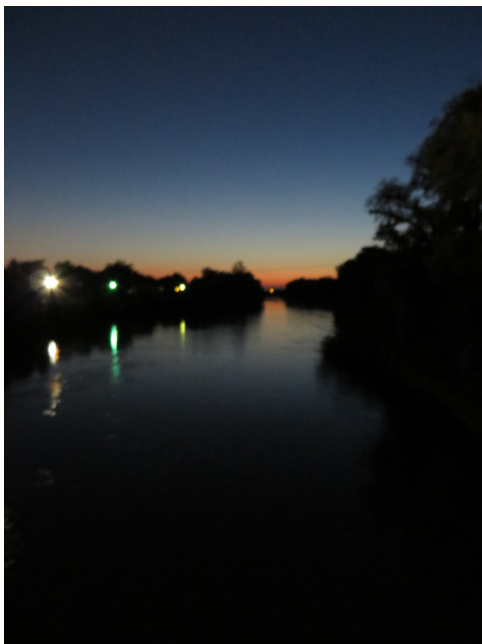
watchtower:  
the big muddy shimmers  
against red sky



Indian summer surge after surge of afterglow



end of workday  
the sun and I squint  
at each other



darker and darker the luster fades into river lights

receding sun the moss-slick slabs a silver sheen



horse pasture   mist drifting   at sunrise

silent dawn   fog rising from the river to reveal sunrise





autumn twilight over Money so sad so tragic so Emmett Till-ic

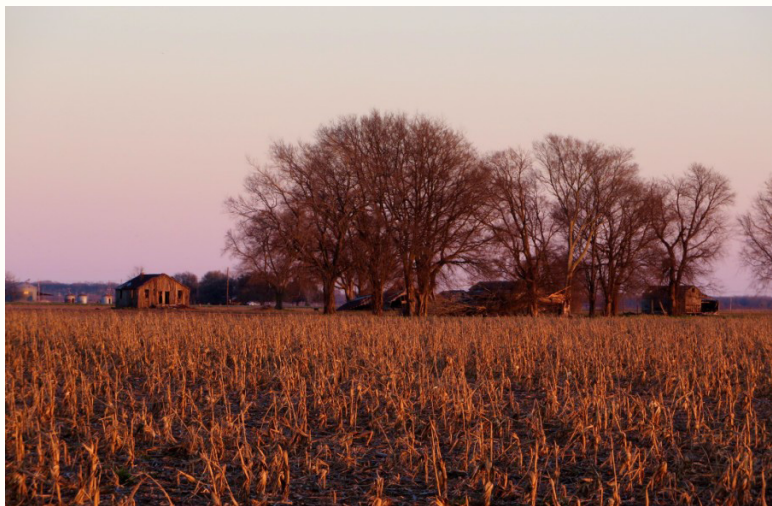
“sunset blues” — the shadow stretches longer and longer



summer twilight  
a beer bottle flickers  
in roadside weeds

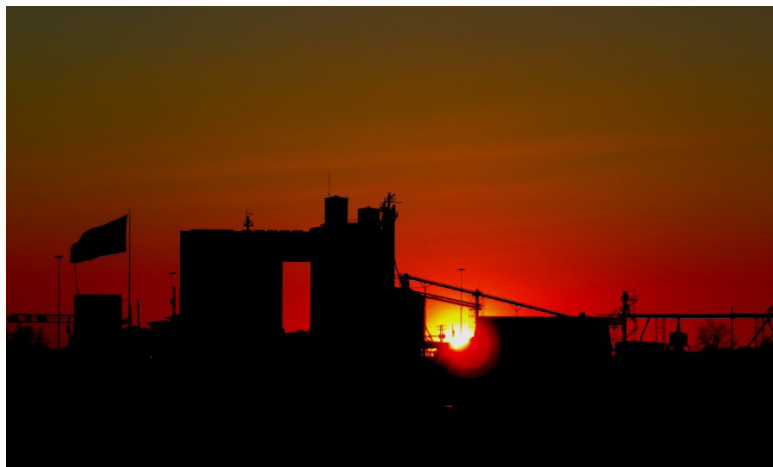


sunup a loud yawn from dream



winter afterglow  
fields trees barns  
all tinted





“Highway 82 Blues”  
the glory of sunset  
a welcome sign



home coming  
delta sunset  
warm on the back



dark room  
in the slit of sunlight  
dust specks twirling

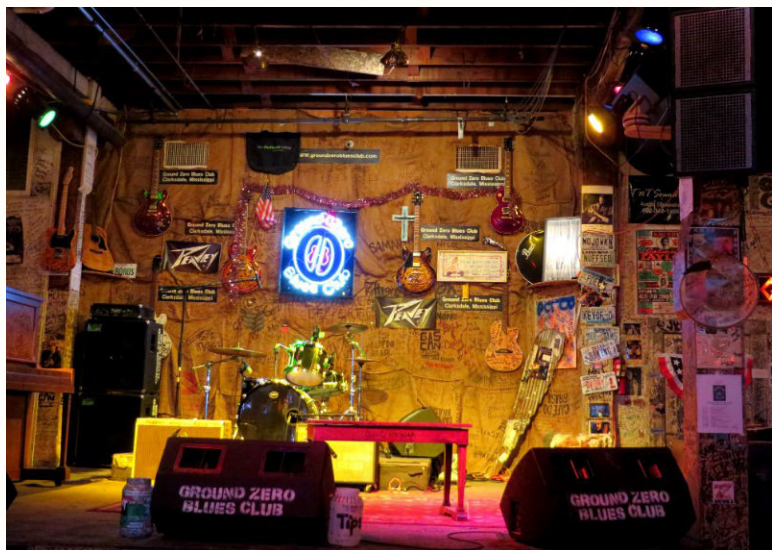
return from travel   my heart warms up with delta sunset





delta sunset  
each sinking  
a promise of dawn

sun out after rain  
go for a blues burger  
at Ground Zero



delta noon  
a blare of ash-blue  
of dead silence

winding creek  
a flicker of sunlight  
in the curve



total eclipse  
a crown of thorns  
glorifying the sky

solar eclipse  
my god, who should be thanked  
for emceeing the show?





JIANQING ZHENG is editor of *The Other World of Richard Wright: Perspectives on His Haiku*; *African American Haiku: Cultural Visions*; and *Sonia Sanchez's Poetic Spirit through Haiku*, and author of *The Landscape of Mind*. His photographs have appeared in journals and on book covers, including *Down to the Dark River*, *The Southern Quarterly*, *Arkansas Review*, and *NHK Haiku Masters*.



