Writing

By Howard Nemerov

The cursive crawl, the squared-off characters these by themselves delight, even without a meaning, in a foreign language, in Chinese, for instance, or when skaters curve all day across the lake, scoring their white records in ice. Being intelligible, these winding ways with their audacities and delicate hesitations, they become miraculous, so intimately, out there at the pen’s point or brush’s tip, do world and spirit wed. The small bones of the wrist balance against great skeletons of stars exactly; the blind bat surveys his way by echo alone. Still, the point of style is character. The universe induces a different tremor in every hand, from the check-forger’s to that of the Emperor Hui Tsung, who called his own calligraphy the ‘Slender Gold.’ A nervous man writes nervously of a nervous world, and so on.

Miraculous. It is as though the world were a great writing. Having said so much, let us allow there is more to the world than writing: continental faults are not bare convoluted fissures in the brain. Not only must the skaters soon go home; also the hard inscription of their skates is scored across the open water, which long remembers nothing, neither wind nor wake.
