In English you shoot guns and you shoot pictures; I.Z. doesn’t know that, as familiar as he is with Howard Hawks. There’s that language barrier. Then there’s the draft dodging. A mysterious kidney infection waived I.Z.’s mandatory army service at nineteen. Chronic phobia of guns did the trick for him at forty-two. That Balkan war went on without him. At fifty-five, he took a picture of wild ducks descending upon icebergs. He stood on the Danube’s right bank, next to the ruin of the Workers Club, and clicked. Low-res, ducks like specks, but the ice was mighty. More so than the Orthodox steeple, than the Catholic steeple within I.Z.’s vision. Behind him and the birds stood one large silo, one factory, apartment buildings, one harbor, construction cranes. One thing he’s always known, being a duck in the hawks’ domain is no cowardice. Further up the river, and sixty years back, his father spent the entire World War Two as a civilian, neutral like a one-man Switzerland
in the bull’s eye of the Third Reich, when
Vienna was laden with meaning.
In winter ’04, wild ducks

invented a game only they could play:
float on an iceberg a bit, fly back, float a bit,
fly back, or so did I.Z. report.
When they got tired, they flew into the marshes
on the river’s other bank, which was (and still is)
another country. Border patrol sat tight in the harbor,
binoculars and revolvers at hand. Their speedboats docked,
waiting for the ice to melt.