Cyril Dabydeen

Handprints on the Wall

—for Simi

She plays the violin, thinking back of her first memory, she says, sounds coming all the way

Being in a crib in China, eighteen months old then, and everywhere babies were

Crying with hand-prints on the wall, everyone slapping hard, the cribs being tied

Together: two or three; and the colour was green, Simi remembers; and it was really

A large hall, and the image of a hotel next after she’d been adopted: three years old

She was then; and how she kept walking through a big, wide space. Oh, spaces everywhere

And she keeps playing the violin, the strains coming louder: what I will hear once again

In China, or somewhere else I will imagine, close-up; or, one voice only, no other.
A Dogged Life

“I’ve come that close to it,”
    he says, holding up two fingers
and offering a space in-between—
    like an emblem from long ago.

“What method shall we use?”
    he asks, considering a duel
or pact...preferring a gun—
    I hear him say,

Being forlorn from days on end—
    what we keep talking about;
and the books he might have read,
    like Alvarez’s *Savage God*.

“Why the hurry?” I ask; and it’s
    being where we’re at—
with trees, the river winding,
    red-winged blackbirds

Becoming noisier than before—
    all in more than one
life-time, with cormorants
    and the blue heron

Looking at the water, steadfastly;
    and fish will appear and
disappear, as seagulls keep
    making dizzying turns

And ducks gliding by smoothly
    in water with their young
in tow, the wood-ducks diligently
    moving alongside.

What I will consider longest—
    as the wind surfs, the river
keeping us glued to it—
    the more I think about

Where all things will end up—
    in days long past, or now
what’s to come, at whose command?
    Time’s behest, I say to him,
What I will make much about—
wanting him to claim
another day, life indeed—
as we’re here to stay.