# Watching Slow Flowers

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 1 8/28/08 5:14:16 PM

#### ALSO BY GAIL SHER

#### Prose

Writing the Fire: Yoga and the Art of Making
Your Words Come Alive • 2006
The Intuitive Writer: Listening to Your Own Voice • 2002
One Continuous Mistake: Four Noble Truths for Writers • 1999
From a Baker's Kitchen • 1984/2004

#### Poetry

*DOHĀ* • 2005 *RAGA* • 2004

Once There Was Grass • 2004

redwind daylong daylong • 2004

Birds of Celtic Twilight: A Novel in Verse • 2004

Look at That Dog All Dressed Out in Plum Blossoms • 2002

Moon of the Swaying Buds • 2002

Lines: The Life of a Laysan Albatross • 2000

Fifty Jigsawed Bones • 1999

Saffron Wings • 1998

*One bug... one mouth... snap!* • 1997

Marginalia • 1997

La • 1997

Like a Crane at Night • 1996

Kuklos • 1995

Cops • 1988

Broke Aide • 1985

Rouge to Beak Having Me • 1983

(As) on things which (headpiece) touches the Moslem • 1982

From Another Point of View

the Woman Seems to be Resting • 1981

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 2 8/28/08 5:14:16 PM

# Watching Slow Flowers

Gail Sher

NIGHT CRANE PRESS

Copyright 2006, Gail Sher

All rights reserved.

Night Crane Press 1500 Park Avenue, Suite 435 Emeryville, California 94608

No part of this publication my be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner and the publisher.

ISBN: 978-0-9726115-7-2

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 4 8/28/08 5:14:17 PM

## For Brendan

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 5 8/28/08 5:14:17 PM

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 6 8/28/08 5:14:17 PM

### WATCHING SLOW FLOWERS

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 1 8/28/08 5:14:17 PM

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 2 8/28/08 5:14:17 PM

My pointy feet, my sweaty fists, my quirky nose, higher than a mountain.

Regarding the precepts, I behave like some kind of trained animal.

Now, even though I wear Shakyamuni's robe, everyone laughs and calls me old rice bag.

So be it! Grass-being and form-being both reside in the jeweled palace.

"Were his crows faithful?" I ask this, hearing one caw.

Its voice is young, high-pitched, naïve.

Leaning on my oar, coracle adrift, I doze as villagers chew rice.

One thin crane slurps a bit of water.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 4 8/28/08 5:14:17 PM

The smell of dawn pulls me toward its shadow.

Yesterday's flower, missing two petals I see.

A flower falls from the wheel of life, Mahakala, from the ocean of purity.

Yet the blue-black sky, electric (shocking), roars at the cliff's edge.

Rain carves a path where cicadas have yet to keen.

Lunar light seeps through stone.

The creek is packed with birds. They're lined along the bank.

Even now the branches and peaks of Phula Hari tilt toward the north.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 6 8/28/08 5:14:17 PM

On serried steppes, trees arch awkwardly.

Too many springs of salt-sea wind.

Or so people say. I myself, a crotchety old man, find comfort in their crookedness.

In melon dawn they flower. Their sweetness freshens the altar.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 7 8/28/08 5:14:17 PM

One lily by my gate, through the frost, upright.

From my door, limpid valley sounds.

Pine tree paths, washed out by rain, riddled with mud and decay,

make me mindful as I gingerly, step by step (do I?) avoid its worms.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 8 8/28/08 5:14:17 PM

I stand on a knoll, the sky just now cyan-colored.

"Was it lethargy in a previous life . . . "but my thoughts peter out.

New springs, softly softly, are you sprouting in the willows?

One scraggly branch carves in my mind a very deep impression.

Wild geese in wild grass swarm the day's near end.

Waddling, chewing, flocking, long green necks of light.

Fish nibble shadows. A few grouse rustle brush.

At dusk, they simply enter the earth naturally.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 10 8/28/08 5:14:17 PM

A common day. My hill supine and blue

At a pheasant's cry, old memories arise.

Plum trees drop fruit. Sweet juice down my chin as I kneel, gazing at the nubile dirt.

Their plot of earth, like a waiting boat.

Sparrows under fen, flit flit.

Dark dawn becomes a sound.

A circle moon, a solitary star, linger still from last night's sky.

In their mouths, deer carry flowers.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 12 8/28/08 5:14:17 PM

Layers of dawn peel from the hill.

White clouds return, illuminating herbs that flourish year after year.

Pine winds no longer stir the mud, sodden, creviced, bare.

Yet they break the current's route, slowing the fishes.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 13 8/28/08 5:14:17 PM

"Is that rain?" The daisies look cold.

Sun (dawn's peak) crawls across the hill.

Flaccid petals greet the sky (though the day is not pretty).

"They're babies!" I exclaim, suddenly surprised that flowers have babies.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 14 8/28/08 5:14:18 PM

Fine spring rains! I try moving my candle.

From a stand of elm, wild turkeys (like wind-tossed leaves).

Hoping to draw fresh water, I climb the blue-green slopes.

Tides rise, level with the bank, as sun and fishing boats gather.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 15 8/28/08 5:14:18 PM

Clear light. The daisy hill awake.

"Hello hill." (I'm thinking it's my lama.)

Sparrows chortle. Crows caw. A warbler sings through fragrant fir.

I close my eyes. Their piercing notes glide in.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 16 8/28/08 5:14:18 PM

Today is glorious! The sky clear.

Tara land. (Cupped land.) Weeds rear their cocky necks.

At the southern porch, with sunlight on my back, like some crazy flower I nod.

"May the thunder of the tantras shake earth and sky and trees," I mumble (a bit delirious).

By the water's mouth I wander.

Shadows sink in far-off mist, spread their ocean net.

A thin drizzle appears, disappears. As it passes it turns gray.

My eye falls on an orchid, blowing in a breeze along the swaggering bank.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 18 8/28/08 5:14:18 PM

I walk to a place where flowers are effulgent.

"When the Buddha tosses his toothbrush to the earth, it instantly becomes a wish-fulfilling tree," I read.

To the west graze numerous gentle animals.

A tip of rye sings to itself.

At dusk I climb the greening steppes, the road in settling mist.

Crossing a bridge, its webs a whirl of drift.

Birds birds birds, their hour of grass (of wallowing).

Truculent (dancey) in a hollow by the river.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 20 8/28/08 5:14:18 PM

Gently honking, the wandering geese.

Beaks to grass, a pack of them at day's end.

The lapels of my robe flutter as I, slowly, reluctantly, turn home.

When spring winds wake, the dead tree roars.

To all my mothers and all my fathers whose treehouse rooms will last unto antiquity.

The tales of your deeds place a person on the Path.

In beds of bog, ganders scavenge for grubs.

Above, 'neath a strange moon, flaming clouds spasm.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 22 8/28/08 5:14:18 PM

Windblown rain darkens dusk.

Tills its edges, smudged by dew left behind to melt.

Green mountain, warbling finch, mind too clarified for sleep.

"I'll wait for dawn," I think as I kneel, scrubbing my feet on the stream's icy rocks.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 23 8/28/08 5:14:18 PM

With the long rains I stay home.

My window-shade flaps softly.

I put on my clogs, go out to check the radishes.

"Hey Molly!" a woman shouts (somehow damaging the auspicious circumstance).

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 24 8/28/08 5:14:18 PM

"Handsome day!" The lady wears socks.

She pauses, pulls something from her cart, then continues pushing.

"I know her," I think. I struggle in my mind to place her coltish gestures.

"Can I buy that doll?" (Her child points to a gorilla.) Its eyes are soft.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 25 8/28/08 5:14:18 PM

It's spring! Wildflowers purple, violet, blue.

Through the canyon's clouds, a flock of blackbirds wash.

Though listening, I look away. My lama is near and I am aroused.

Bracelets and rings wrap his forearms and fingers.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 26 8/28/08 5:14:18 PM

Sweet One, are you calling?

Frogs sound from deep within the fall.

Alone I walk the creek, watch clusters of clouds gather.

Pillows for the wings of birds?

Sea-blue like a witch stirs the bubbling cauldron.

Imprints from my feet, swept clean by the tide, starfish, shells, sea-grapes, crabs, cover of the hard-packed sand.

Wandering here and there, I gaily pass the time.

Wild animals amble, utterly at ease, singing, dancing, carousing, while I sleep in the tufted grass.

"The gist of blue. Is that the Pure Land of Ogmin?"

Black of night, pink of day—blue makes them possible.

I WANT blue (crave it) imbibe it with water, though I'm not really thirsty.

Drinking blue I become myself.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 29 8/28/08 5:14:18 PM

Dark sun shortly to be replaced by moon.

"Later I'll rest in a meadow full of flowers," I think.

This old body, once immune to wind and cold, looks forward to the comforts of day's end.

"Have you come from Tashi Lhunpo to take me home?" I ask a group of monkeys.

My *hoya's* limbs like an arrow pierce the dark.

Straight to the sky—the hawk ne'er makes a steadier path.

A windbell chimes, *ting-ting*, *ting-ting*, casting emptiness to the hills.

My mind snaps it up.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 31 8/28/08 5:14:19 PM

Clouds gather. The Dharma Hall is wet.

One sprig flutters despite a lack of breeze.

In the mountain's dawning mist, I flip impatiently through a text.

Every day it's the same.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 32 8/28/08 5:14:19 PM

Moss darkens as it rains.

Trees drip on slippery, turquoise rocks.

Naked in the stream, I wade out past the reeds.

Later I walk the hill. A circle of mares rests calmly in the grass while a strong brown beauty swathes their flanks with cool, clear water.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 33 8/28/08 5:14:19 PM

The gate shuts. Click!

Hallowed aloneness, sanctioned by dazzling stars.

I sit by my window, loath to move . . . to breathe even . . . lest the pleasure distill.

Tonight I will not read.

"Look! The sun! It hits a white camellia."

Cook-smoke glazes early morning light.

A gentle breeze stirs. A ferry departs.

Strange birds call as I walk north.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 35 8/28/08 5:14:19 PM

In and out, the scalloped pools, a light breeze leaves scattered petals.

Their pink, rose, yellow, brighten the mountain wood.

"Look at the sky!" someone says pointing to its eastern corridor.

"I am a tuna. Devolved from the three fields. Now, near death, my dry fins flail." (My thoughts become nonsensical.)

Sitting on a hill I watch the embers fade. (Stumps that remain, mere charcoal silhouettes.)

A creek gurgles loudly. As it carries off ash, I find its chatter soothing.

A crow flits about before drifting through debris.

Its reddish tail disappears leaving the landscape unchanged.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 37 8/28/08 5:14:19 PM

Vast time descends across the ridge.

Vast wind, the plateau covered with cinder.

Tiny birds drift in and out. Their drab feathers fade in the chilly air.

Neither swishing willows nor sparkling streams dash through fields of mustard and peas, as they did in Tibet . . . or do.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 38 8/28/08 5:14:19 PM

Sing owl. With your hum sounds the Pure Lands.

Sleep animals. The fat of the summer will hold you.

I sit in cool shade. Admire their delicate fur.

"Please take care of yourself," I think.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 39 8/28/08 5:14:19 PM

Ten thousand gullies, invisible.

A dark moon rises in seasonal white dew.

Thunder, then wind, though the latter comforts with its fresh, eucalyptus fragrance.

By a bog, swamped in ominous murmurings, I pass the smolderings of a farmer's fire.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 40 8/28/08 5:14:19 PM

Home again, I wash my legs and hands.

Chortling sparrows swarm the silver bush.

Dusk creeps in. "Tomorrow I'll mend my sandals," I think, noticing my cloak streaked with mountain shadows.

That a full view of sun is blocked by the hill makes its radiance even more marvelous.

Cutting my toenails by a sunny window—"Magic sun," I think, "are you paying attention?"

(My tomato vine dangles over parched scratched mud.)

Like a passion-flower it blooms, providing lionthrones for kings.

A swastika, some *kusha* grass, diamond and moon, for my *dorje* cushion.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 42 8/28/08 5:14:19 PM

Weeds clog the gate. Ground fills with trailing gourds.

"I hate gourds," their owner used to say, so villagers came to gather them.

A girl from the bridge (her gaze is intent). Gritty sunglasses sag.

One dove coos. *Coo coo coo*. Its imago in the deafening moon.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 43 8/28/08 5:14:19 PM

West of the bridge, east of the willows, heat, flies, what compels me to return?

Late-summer night, its fathomless pink.

"China is hot. You are old. In your own country the water agrees with you," I muse.

Teacher, protector, kind dharma lord, may your radiant qualities instill in me this lineage of the wordless.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 44 8/28/08 5:14:19 PM

A Brahmin girl, offering her needle to a *bhikshu*, transmutes into the noble Shariputra.

A woman, giving a meal to a beggar, rebirths in a mansion enjoying delicious food.

A pig who makes one circumambulation of a stupa (being chased by a dog) takes the form of household Palkye (who eventually attains the level of an arhat).

Thus it is said, even small virtuous actions bring great merit.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 45 8/28/08 5:14:20 PM

Summer wanes. (Lightning-bugs, lightning-bugs.)

Birds drift off and don't return.

Some may wonder that one so crooked and smelly is still alive.

Yet within one's skin are the Path and the fruits of the Path.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 46 8/28/08 5:14:20 PM

Tonight a mountain moon. Mindful voices of cicadas.

Trees drip dew from soft afternoon rain.

I sit by a grate listening to the chattering brook.

Its banks are about to fold, which is of concern.

From beyond the tall willow, a firefly.

Otherwise, only clouds move.

I lie on the grass. "I'll just watch for a while," I think, as heat melts into quiet.

"I am the wind. I stroke my little pets."

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 48 8/28/08 5:14:20 PM

A fragile being, tufted (hairy) in its confusion has brushed me, but sleep prevails and I forget.

"Has he killed me before?" my stuporous mind mutters.

Selfish night. You take what you want. You howl. (You're rude.) Shatter everything in your path.

This clock-bound life makes me sensitive.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 49 8/28/08 5:14:20 PM

Bullfrogs croak. Their throaty bass closes in.

Leaves lift their palms in despair.

Heat floods the berm kindled by inner glow.

Smoothing my pillow, I sleep fitfully.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 50 8/28/08 5:14:20 PM

Clambering along the quiet canyon creek, morning ripe, choked with charcoal mist.

Deer slumber. Birds stay put, though I sense their impatience.

This old man moves slowly, the path clogged with scree,

unwieldy beneath a waning moon.

Here in the mountain where sky is vast, morose clouds merge, rain about to burst.

At the storm's first sound, my body gets drenched in dew.

Just then a needle falls. Crashes to the earth.

"Li Po floatingly rode off on a crane," I think, reminded of this suddenly.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 52 8/28/08 5:14:20 PM

That starving doe who roams the vale . . .

On a distant peak, the mauve of daybreak clear.

An old man pauses, then resumes slowly walking.

"Tonight I will light a fire with the last summer wood," I murmur.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 53 8/28/08 5:14:20 PM

"Wherefore in me is Chokhor Gyal's mystery?"

Vet of time, drop by drop.

"I'll rest here," I think, spotting an old monk's bench!

From a bramble an oriole flutters.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 54 8/28/08 5:14:20 PM

Wind blows the wild grass low.

"Mexican Hat" daisies—is that what the mendicant said?

They are young (like a child) with thick, prominent necks.

A flock of geese quickly turn to night, leaving no tracks.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 55 8/28/08 5:14:20 PM

I gaze at the water. Its rising peaks turn pink.

Snow-leopards sprawl some rocky mule-shaped clouds.

That monk—he'd stitched a fine swatch of silk to his tattered robe (someone had offered it to him) though the manager of a nearby monastery hated to see such good brocade go to waste—for some reason sticks in my mind.

Though not yet ready to leave off musing, dusk falls, and I mount my old horse.

You wash before "sitting" in the empty bird's-nest temple.

I think to join you, but wait instead by the eastern gate.

Robins chime (make a gnomic peace).

A reddish tail disappears leaving the landscape unchanged.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 57 8/28/08 5:14:20 PM

The roar of the woods, which I hear from below.

Old old old, its silence untouched.

Where are the ducks? (Nectar filters through their webs.)

Well, the sand still holds the storm.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 58 8/28/08 5:14:20 PM

The path, full of weeds, near the fence, a bloated squash.

From over the river, the sound of logging dulls.

Fringed water (its edges bird-filled). Fish scuttle under.

As the setting sun drops behind the western cliff, I stop, rest a while, wash my feet.

Sparrows seem used, uninvented.

Scaly mud, dull sky, colorless birds, remind me of my mind.

To see the autumn leaves scatter in my home. (The longing they arouse as they lie on the wood turning red.)

Is it of my body that they partake?

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 60 8/28/08 5:14:21 PM

Windblown scruff down empty cloisters.

Pinecones fall (tumble the decayed halls).

Lesser snow in the hollow air drifts to the spot where the jade woman washes silk.

Then it spreads (the circumference of activity).

Pines, eclipses by peaks, a sundry of color.

The lake's autumn water melds into the woods.

Limned with ice, its scum of leaves.

A hundred palms slurp them up.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 62 8/28/08 5:14:21 PM

Tonight the rain purrs then dribbles against my rooftop.

The sounds of animals out on-the-prowl. (Nits in the ravaged hill.)

Illumined by moon, shadowed by cloud, I stay secluded in a mountain recess.

Occasionally my lamp flickers. In this pleasant way I pass the evening quietly.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 63 8/28/08 5:14:21 PM

In this ancient gully, I await the crane's return.

On a rock I scrub my robe, river water soundless.

A sparrow pecks at withered leaves. On the clean hill, mountain fruits.

Should I rest? Just now I prefer to admire the pink chrysanthemums that border the east wood's edge.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 64 8/28/08 5:14:21 PM

Erratic petals tip eastward.

"The hill will catch them. Or a nearby stump, lichen-choked," I mutter.

A dog pees, then shakes itself vigorously.

With the days short and the weather cold, the ground fills with crusty water.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 65 8/28/08 5:14:21 PM

Behold the snowy fields I pass, the orchids, the wild (gorgeous) beasts!

See the swards of sweetly smelling grass.

Rivers gurgle, freshets cheep, fish sail the air.

The skirts of my robe I spread carefully as I lay back, swathed in eerie winter warmth.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 66 8/28/08 5:14:21 PM

I eat air, chew the motes hard.

I swallow stars as they fall through snapping wind.

I sing to myself the ditties I learned as a child.

Thus the autumn days vanish.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 67 8/28/08 5:14:21 PM

Sun sinks, covering the cold embankment.

Pebbles roll about (whose sound I find friendly).

I bow a stalk. Its backlash pings (student of the mountain's flow).

"Look!" someone exclaims. Is he gathering herbs? (He puts something in an apron pocket.)

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 68 8/28/08 5:14:21 PM

Smoky-black, bog roils in whorls of spit.

I stand here gazing, winter trees shrill.

A band of ducks with neon coats nestle in the longstemmed grass.

A bullfrog moans (or maybe it's my lama murmuring sweet nothings)?

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 69 8/28/08 5:14:21 PM

Puddles, and on the pathway ponds, so that spray is everywhere.

Crickets purr, slender moon low.

Whoosh! Water. (More water.) Stubbles from nine waves.

A hall of clouds over soaked dark earth.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 70 8/28/08 5:14:21 PM

A wolf's defeated stride contains its prey's proximity.

Just as pears <u>seem</u> green but the blue of the sea settles in the earth and appears in its fruit (if you look closely).

With oncoming winter, foliage decays. Yellow breeze covers its roots.

"When Kunga Palmo died, her skull (pure pearl) bore a clear impression of the deity Heruka Chakrasamvara," I randomly recall.

71

Alone with the light, incipient, silent.

I laugh with the river riffling stones of green.

"Soon it will be too cold to simply gaze at the empty earth." (I calculate.)

It's hard to detect by my old skin and hair, that I am unshaken.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 72 8/28/08 5:14:21 PM

Duck or gull—I can hardly tell—ring between the crests.

In the heart of the night, one small boat, softly framed by moon.

Tossed not by waves nor swayed by breeze, yet rising, falling, drifting,

the throb of a horn, long, low, subtle, blows from the north with the wind.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 73 8/28/08 5:14:21 PM

Snow of the South Peak. Stolid trees, white.

From my window, glistening sun stuns.

"Buddha stamps his right foot, causes the six worlds to shake." (This from my liturgy.)

Can it be doubted? Padmasambhava was slain how many times only to turn up smiling on a lotus?

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 74 8/28/08 5:14:21 PM

The red sun wakens me. (I am weightless. Light as a bird!)

Dogs, goats, dri, regale their noise morning routine.

A man grunts. (He has nothing to say.)

A traveler, in the distance, forges ahead slowly.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 75 8/28/08 5:14:22 PM

Snow falls logically. Crystals from the sun fluff it full of pink.

Silence (by layers) saturates its porous skin.

"Your shags are limp." I point a wagging finger.

Because I imbibe ambrosia from the Land of Snow, when I touch my tongue to a bit of roasted flour, a tablespoon suffices an entire season.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 76 8/28/08 5:14:22 PM

Exuberant snow, you fall dexterously.

For falling you know. It's your Way.

Fall, rest, die—your legacy, my heritage.

But by your beauty . . . I get distracted.

77

From this white world, one bush (one branch).

Thorns pierce the downy drops that plummet, land, bleed.

Poor drop. I watch you dribble down a stem.

Seeing this, I chant some manis.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 78 8/28/08 5:14:22 PM

White diamonds melt. Become white diamonds.

Tilling earth (the "plow of winter" they say).

Soft space, soft air, filled by soft white worms.

Blood trickles in. Squiggles of raw-red prick the stark terrain.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 79 8/28/08 5:14:22 PM

Sitting by the fire, I stitch, but my mind is full of snow.

Unmelted snow, rock hard.

"December! It's the Tenth!" Biting cold at another year's end.

A blossom last night ripe, as from a crane's bill, quietly dwindles.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 80 8/28/08 5:14:22 PM

Winter deepens with urgent birdcalls.

A few later Monarchs recklessly flap south.

The sound of snow brushed by wind grows stronger with arousing night.

As I walk the mountain road, one shrill moan in a sudden gust.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 81 8/28/08 5:14:22 PM

Branches drop their clothing.

They WANT bareness. Nakedness is relief.

The ghost of the year is held in the trees.

Do no try to ply them with unwanted gifts.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 82 8/28/08 5:14:22 PM

Hair and eyebrows white, I climb the wild slopes.

Clutching brambles, hoisting myself over rocks, may I excoriate this residue of heedlessness.

Myriad mothers have cared for me through the years. All have been kind to the extent of their ability.

Therefore it is said, when the mind contracts, like an old scroll rolling itself up, one must examine it thoroughly.

83

Inside the pass, the freeze (arriving early) half-withers the mountain's foliage.

Snow piles up, smothering pilgrim's stones.

I trudge slowly. Holes from my staff, quickly filled by drift.

For His sake. For His sake. (With this mind, guided by my lantern's shadow.)

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 84 8/28/08 5:14:22 PM

A full moon floats through leafless trees.

Softly it rises like steam from my rice pot.

"If you take that portrait to be me, your mind will never be united with the wall," suggests an ancestor.

From out the drift, one red flower.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 85 8/28/08 5:14:23 PM

For we are, one and all, continuously watched.

Lovingly cradled in the arms of heavenly beings.

Whose presence brings brown to fruition.

We plod through snow in our thin soles.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 86 8/28/08 5:14:23 PM

"Another winter," I think as snow besieges my door.

Rising sun finds me still asleep.

It's not cold, oddly, though the lake is frozen and the headwind stiff.

In each heathered fen, it gathers more debris.

87

Sewing by the stove in the early morning light.

Snow falls in craggy piles.

As deep clouds clear, a man appears.

The sound of a rake on the doughy earth.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 88 8/28/08 5:14:23 PM

Today the sky is yellow.

I want to go out but do not, passing the morning in indecision.

Rice and curd—"food of a hundred tastes!"

Buddha bowl heaped, I couldn't be more pleased.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 89 8/28/08 5:14:23 PM

The smell of snow (a long, deep breath).

I scale the cliff. The clear cold sets a trance.

Children roll you into balls, toss you, clothe you, feed you.

"It's dry," a woman says, rolling a carpet into place.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 90 8/28/08 5:14:23 PM

An old pine sighs, though there is no wind.

Its green needles spar softly-falling flakes.

A lingering moon lights the truculent road north.

Dusk is thick with scribbled paints, which, pathetic me, mimics.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 91 8/28/08 5:14:23 PM

Keutsang Hermitage is on a rocky incline.

Its grate is cold. Its branches claw.

Though nests line its top, vultures never descend.

Thus, after several occasions of vulture descending. I make sacrificial banishment offerings.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 92 8/28/08 5:14:23 PM

This old body, inside a mirror, I watch it cast about the room, feebly.

Shabby skin a bag. Like the fire pit, cold.

My breath, in the chill, swallows up five colors.

My lama gives me entry. To Him I deeply bow. His name alone shatters me.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 93 8/28/08 5:14:23 PM

Insentient beings hear insentient beings.

Yet "walls and fences cannot instruct the grasses and trees to actualize springs," a great-one said.

Still, the bell, its tintinnabulation, the ringing of the ringing,

gently inspired by wind, clearly articulates emptiness.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 94 8/28/08 5:14:23 PM

Beneath tonight's full moon I swallow up Xi River.

For me the clouds serve better than an old mare.

Relaxing by my fire, I keep company with Manjushri.

Thanks to the fullness of Ju-ching's mind, his "Look!" as he raised his *hossu*.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 95 8/28/08 5:14:23 PM

Day breaks. The Big Dipper slips east.

In its bowl my gaze rests comfortably.

Like a tender blade my thin body wanders.

Is there anyone who would not be moved?

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 96 8/28/08 5:14:23 PM

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 97

With inky dawn the still bird stirs.

A gust of wind, it fluffs its wings.

Still sitting, from side to side its head.

Eyes close and again . . . motionless.

8/28/08 5:14:23 PM

On the hill's grass edge, an icy creek.

Dragon limbs dangle perilously.

To establish the practice in me—that it move forward without obstacles.

Thus I hear the cypress on the quiet shore whispering together.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 98 8/28/08 5:14:23 PM

Death at the bottom. (That's snow's secret.)

It exists, does not, falls, does not.

In its short life, my life abides, full of fervor and verve.

For once I have an edge.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 99 8/28/08 5:14:23 PM

Red faced demon, you swallowed my son.

Posed under earth with your open, ravenous mouth.

Don't tell me to relax. While still alive, to plunge into the Yellow Springs.

What appears in front of a ghost cave is not an ordinary fox.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 100 8/28/08 5:14:23 PM

Mist-soaked fields congeal the mountain's green.

In the second month, only plum blossoms open their faces.

Light snow falls. Glazes the earth in silk.

A grizzled hawk shaves the narrow river.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 101 8/28/08 5:14:24 PM

At first light, rain. You can hear the wet.

Lifeless ashes stir, but my fire refuses to spark.

I listen to the sea (wind and waves ceaseless).

In darkness my rocker creeks.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 102 8/28/08 5:14:24 PM

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 103 8/28/08 5:14:24 PM

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 104 8/28/08 5:14:24 PM

Watching Slow Flowers
was set in Minion, a typeface
designed by Robert Slimbach
and first issued in digital
form by Adobe Systems,
Mountain View, California,
in 1989.
Typesetting & production:
Claudia Smelser.
Printing & binding:
Lightning Source, Inc.

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 105 8/28/08 5:14:24 PM

WatchingSlow\_text.indd 106 8/28/08 5:14:24 PM