Gift
Bob Cording

How long can one man's lifetime last?
Wang Wei

Long enough, he said to our tears,
to know *all of it is a gift.* We wanted
to hold him back from the dying

he was busy doing, nine months of working
his way through the Book of Subtractions:
first the relished taste of food and wine,

and then Yeats, the *Four Quartets,*
and the Psalms he could no longer read
alone. In the end, even the music

his children loaded on an I-Pod—
Mozart and Brahms to counter the morphine
that countered the bladed pains

that ran through his back—
became too difficult to listen to.
And yet he called each painful day a gift,

and held fiercely to each moment,
whatever it brought: swallows freelancing
in the wind, the odor of lilac

after a night's rain, the way sunlight settled
over the rug like a large dog—
nothing he earned, but accepted,

as he accepted the near identical looks
his children and his wife exchanged
when they saw how, daily, his cancer grew

towards the dread of his utter absence.

To all of it he said *yes.*
Yes to the pollen greening the roofs

of parked cars as his body withered,
and to the cold of the window glass
he leaned his cheek against,

and *yes,* to the nearly unendurable love
he felt for his wife and children
whose longing for him he could not

lessen, and to everything that remained
unsayable between them. And *yes,*
finally, to whatever came next, after

this life he had been given, this death.