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Poems: Salutation / Sightings; Or, Mr. Redhead / The Map; Or, Perhaps

Harry Brown
Eastern Kentucky University

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HARRY BROWN

SALUTATION

for Sue

A rare and common sight these January mornings,
say at ten or so after twelve or fourteen
the night before, is my small cow herd standing near the top
of the rise behind the barn looking every one southeast,
stock still as if exhumed statues awaiting the Rapture,
the only motion small, thin clouds drifting slowly up
from noses and mouths to quickly disappear in the bright, still quiet,
and steam slowly rising from frosted backs to dissolve
in the icy air while this motley congregation, half their bodies
spread in obeisance before old Helios,

warms.

I leave these winsome oblations
for private matins
before my kitchen Yotul.*

*Norwegian wood stove

SIGHTINGS; OR, MR. REDHEAD

for Jim

A shy and rare fellow, bolts when I come nearly near,
taking to the undulating road and hiding
his shocking top in flight; rather a quick distance
half disguises it, while in collusion a quarter moon
of wing and rump more bright and twice more spread than Mr. Red's
famous head upstages Helios, taking me
and pleasing yet teasing my soul with but at most ten
or twelve tantalizing seconds in air and eye.

This evening at seven near the back pasture pond
I watched Neighbor Redhead slightly flap in scalloping
steps from an old treated post (no supper here!)
to a pitted, doty ash fifty yards away,
his buffets fewer nowadays because of asphalt,
concrete, and legion burgeoning houses
supplanting ash and oak, and planted almost as close—
but not so friendly or tasty as the forest homes.

Because my neighbor is shy and his clan in some decline
I'm double blessed by these brief glimpses, and thrice tonight
for added blaze: the Missus joined her husband late
for a short dessert. She probably always accompanies
him on visits to our farm, but often comes
and goes unseen, for Neighbor Red is fully as jealous
as uxorious, and keeps his consort hid.

THE MAP; OR, PERHAPS

“The Truth must dazzle gradually. . .”

—E. Dickinson

“No, no; speak,

my heart tells me.”

—Odysseus speaks to Eumaios and Philoitios

for Eve

Not go, gas, fast. That’s not the way. Not this ubiquitous
St. Vitus’s dance skewing light and life. Not 95
but wilderness without a trace where we must search
our way. Or the Mohave—there may be better till we can grow
our own still, sandy silence lit by the sun within.
But—who knows? Better perhaps is but fasting
for less is our best bounty, as wandering in quest
the straightest narrow course with East, not West, our true North.

In wilderness know by sun only—the little we glimpse
through leaves—or in desert by stars come night if it’s dark enough.
We sometime need the leaves to shield against the blow,
sometime as friend to thwart too sudden, too easy seeing;
we need the night that makes us seek and wonder till it frames
the light.

Perhaps till later, perhaps till always.

When leaves but obfuscate

or night is naught but dark, navigate by heart.