

A Salutation, Not an Embrace

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Knowledge is not eating, and we cannot expect to devour and possess what we mean. Knowledge is recognition of something absent; it is a salutation, not an embrace.

— George Santayana

Those moments when everything
slips away, perhaps
when you fall asleep reading
on the living room couch
and dreaming that you are back
in your dormitory room
trying to get through *Moby Dick*
which you will never finish.
Or in school when with your students
sitting in front of you reading.
You look up from your gradebook
and you don't know where you have been.
A room of bent heads before you,

and not one of them signaling.
Or on the road late at night,
thinking perhaps of something
that gave you pain years ago,
and it is as if you have been sleeping
and suddenly wake
with your hands on the steering wheel
unsure where you are,
the mailbox and the spruce
and the sign advertising Toyotas
new and strange, as if you are in another country,
maybe South Dakota.
And you are frightened
and keep driving
until the old world
begins to wave back
its single fist.