

# *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

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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.