

AGNUS DEI

A true *murmuration* is a hundred thousand starlings
tumbling a shadow in the sky above the fields. *Cloud*

crowds in; then, *leviathan*. But whenever that notion
of brilliance appears—that briefly-collected, *my lord!*, silver

belly of wind—and when all we have to do to know its heft
is take an evening stroll along the roadside fences; trace

the hand-cut squares of mint, peas, beans, tobacco; turn
to the hum-honk of Interstate 90; and lift up our eyes,

we find the word for this glory, the word for this world,
taken away. But maybe not the word for what we came upon

next: the eight-year-old Mexican, swaddled in a gunnysack
jacket, of sorts, and hung from the span of Kent Road Bridge.

Maybe this word comes and comes to stay—a terminology
built of artifacts, a gilded evidence of an earlier scene

no one can see—though who could survive its utterance?
Rope, corded, not very thick; an impeccably-fashioned

fisherman’s clinch; black-bottom feet flexed in like worms,
two worms dangled to gushes and cusses of traffic. And

the laughing, that bizarre sound. Was the boy laughing?
I return to the starlings, return to the starlings, because

the marvel of their never-tangled arcs, at first, misguided us
to skygaze. We stopped on the bridge, *good god!*, under-

rumbled by the honk and lift of car exhaust gusts. Later
we knelt on concrete, mouthing gently nonsense Spanish

to the boy the patrolmen had hoisted up. Earlier, it was Friday,
Labor Day weekend, getting on toward dusk. We were headed

to the Millers' for fish fry. We thought nothing of the flickers
of familiar eyes missing in the fields: the turkey and crane

erased from alfalfa, the workers in their ever-lowered hats
disappeared, or the lone trophy buck blotted out in the corner

of fresh-cut corn. We walked out onto the bridge, but then,
like I said: the murmuration. Fifty yards above our heads

are birds in heaven: a peloton of vapor, exaltation undulating
in and out of view, condensation bluffs flashing sudden

acres, coal-plant smokestack blossoms in the lurch—all
birds. Now, imagine this thunder is wings; this darkness

is bodies, spontaneity is flesh, and not the simple matter of dust
lifted, dispersing. Then, the laughing. How is it that we even

use words anymore? *Exaltation* is never made of starlings.

No *blossoms* ever opened this particular darkness; neither

did *smoke*. And *laughing* is less and less the proper gospel
for the sound we couldn't hear—a boy's voice. We couldn't

hear a word above the din. And yet: the word nonetheless.

We looked down from the edge, tried to say what we saw.

The little one wasn't singing. He wasn't bleating. But wasn't
silent. He wasn't. And there, below, what did you see?

I saw carnations, fresh white ones, freshly unfurled, fresh
as forgetting—the widening eyes of passengers flashing

upward, unbidden, unopposed; blooms as if grasping at
the holy light itself. And only light. The road rushed white

with carnations. There was no catching that awe with our
shadow hands. There was no stopping that pummeling up