

The New Criterion

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Night passage

by Curtis Harnack

After sundown quiet gulls fly
in from the ocean, over
houses facing the channel,
coming up like pigeons
in a shooting gallery.
No swivel-neck peering
for bits of refuse, or
jealous cries among them—
it's too late for that.
A songbird grace as they pass
singly or in a tattered procession,
guided by afterlight on hilltops.
They'll alight somewhere on the flats,
to feed at dawn in vegetable fields,
though I won't be up to watch them—
just as well, for it might
spoil the mysterious portent
of this oneway travel at dusk:
gulls in the guise of doves,
reverent in holy flight, more
than they could hope to be.
I stand in shadow looking up,
wishing for more of them, urgently
flying in the dim, seeable night.
The last ones seem to know
they're just ahead of the dark.

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