

Sharon Olds

FEDERAL STREET AT NIGHT

Silver as a train at full throttle on a  
prairie in moonlight,  
the locked diner. Inside, a waitress  
scrubs in bright light. Outside,  
in the stopped air of the parking lot,  
dangling from the rear-view mirror of her car,  
a cross, greenish and milky, sad as the  
Southern Cross seen from a lifeboat  
adrift at night, the silent space of  
Camden, New Jersey all around us,  
Whitman's body buried very near here.

The sky is smoky - midnight, a dead  
town, and yet you can feel something  
pulling at you, as her powerful arm  
pulls the sponge across the table.  
From under the hard dark sea of this land,  
his bones glowing like whales' teeth in the  
rolling black,  
he is calling to us, he is calling us to come  
down into America.