

Howard Nelson

READING "CROSSING BROOKLYN FERRY" ON A SUMMER MORNING

In the quiet of the barn loft study I've read the poem
again
and the breeze comes through the screen of the big window
and lifts the old lace tablecloth hung for a curtain
and blows a coolness into my face.
Birds are rustling under the eave near my head, beyond
the gray beam with its delicate cracks of dryness.
The veins in the back of my hand make ridges
in the skin--and a spider web trembles from a rafter.
It is another clear morning.
A shaggy man is sitting alone late at night scratching
at a sheet of paper,
and like the marks carved twenty thousand years ago on an
antler in a cave, which say "someone was alive here,"
these scratchings are secret messages told to everyone.
"The dark threw its patches down upon me also. . . ."
He listens to the night, and remembers the flow
of the river, and the men and women on the deck, and the
curious crown of beams of light his shadow wore on
the water,
and feels the pull of his words in his chest, and his
hand scuffs slowly across the page.