

## **Richard Raleigh**

### **ON THE CENTENNIAL OF WHITMAN'S NEW PHAETON, DONATED BY FRIENDS IN 1885**

When I handed the salesman the cashier's check and signed  
the papers, took the keys and sat intoxicated by that smell  
that new cars have,  
And when I adjusted the mirrors and moved lovingly into first gear,  
and pulled into the five o'clock traffic, still I did not feel  
that I truly owned the car.  
And when I visited friends and terrorized them with my acceleration,  
and put up the volume when the Stravinsky came on, and drank  
a cold beer while driving home on I-95, still I was not content,  
But arising early the third day and driving till dark, and beginning  
again the next day before dawn, and watching the sun rise  
over the Albermarle Sound,  
And honking at Richmond and Washington and Baltimore as they  
passed by, and crossing the Delaware River into New Jersey  
as Bruce Springsteen sang Dancing in the Dark,  
And arriving at last at the great white house three doors  
from the sea,  
And finding inside on this shimmering summer day the boy  
all alone, watching the Phillies, his left leg over the  
arm of the chair, O then I was happy,  
And when I saw the photographs of his dead parents on the piano,  
and his Irish face break into smile as we walked outside,  
And when I handed him the keys and watched him swing his  
sweatsocked feet onto the pedals and start the engine,  
And heard him squeal onto Atlantic Avenue as I studied the  
photographs of his parents on the dusty piano—  
O then I felt at last I owned the car, and was happy.