



JOHN PHILIP JOHNSON

TWO POEMS

BROODS OF LUNAR GOSLINGS

after a painting, "Reunion," by David Farren

By an instinct useful on earth,
she finds a lunar crater the size
of a salad bowl and lays a clutch
of small, pewter-colored eggs.

She spreads her wings until they just
touch the rim, and she squats,
staring with glassy eyes
at the blue disc in the black sky.

Razor shards of moon dust
lodge under her feathers,
cutting her if she moves.
But there is no reason to move.

She is frozen in the sun.
What little heat the light imparts
on her gray wings is passed
on through to the rock-like eggs.

She takes almost no energy, gives
almost none. Her brood barely lives.
What few joules of heat they need!
Just enough to keep their atoms stirred.

Those few that hatch are fed
from little pieces she takes
off her own gaunt body. Then,
after a while, she leaves them.

Alone, with nothing but an attraction
to the blue light, they crouch,
coil their legs and frames,
aim themselves, and launch

like little bullets to the earth,
their one chance to find
a winghold, a breath, a way
to come back here and lay.

LUNAR GEESE

As they ascend, the thinnest air
yields to their wingwork.
Even the stray, smaller atoms
and bits of cosmic dust
floating beyond the earth
are enough for them to find
a featherhold, and push on.

They migrate like souls
leaving this world
but stop short of the stars.
This hardy breed settles
in the pale dust of the moon,
wintering at the edge
of oblivion.

They sit very still.
They wait.
They stare at the earth
without blinking or caring,
indifferent to the painful flight
that awaits them.

As summer arrives again
in the Northern Hemisphere, these birds
leap to an escape velocity,
gaining momentum across
the black gulf in their otherwise
improbable return home.

Then, strangely, they hesitate
in the upper atmospheres,

seeming to resist
the cold, wet fire of their first breath,
the reawakening of their appetites,
the hard moment of their coming back,
briefly, to life again.