

AURIGA

Soundlessly Auriga drives
his undrawn chariot
through unfamiliar territory,
a landscape so desolate
he suspects he has strayed
into some secret region the gods have crafted
for the punishment of outcast souls.

The land holds no wildlife
but birds. What birds there are
hang in the air,
out of his line of vision.

The unmarked road itself is smooth—
too smooth for his liking.

The useless reins lie slack in his hands.

Under his crooked, left arm, three kids
struggle against his ribs
and nibble at his fraying vest.
Occasionally one bleats, sensing
that in all the time spent traveling
it has not moved even one step nearer
the shriveling teats of its tethered mother.

Though the air is devoid of moisture,
Auriga tastes neither dust
nor the film on his teeth.
He is concentrating, as ever,
on the name that drops from time
to time through his memory
like a meteor, fading
before he is able to make it out,
vanishing without his having gleaned
even a clue about his destination
or any given that might suggest
whether the goats he holds are for market,
consumption, or sacrifice
(and, if sacrifice, to whom).

Suspended between bull and queen,
warrior and the Dioscuri—figures
he neither sees nor hears—
isolated, unstoried,
heroic in his aimlessness,
Auriga coasts above us,
mirroring our fitful gestures,
reserving our generation
a place in the stars.