

LINCOLN IN LOVE

When we hear the song
of two tanagers
and stand in the warm
shade of an elm
it's the same as
it was in my dream.
But in the dream
it was night and
no one was waiting
for you. It was
a summer night and
yet the yellowthroats
and two tanagers
were out. We sat
watching them courting
across the river,
chasing each other
beyond the bank. We
said nothing and there
was no need to.
One bird calling and
one bird answering—
but by daylight
whatever they sing
is a mystery.
It means nothing
at all or whatever
it was was lost
in my long ears.

I believe the birds
must know the words
but they won't say.
They like to see
you and me suffer
this way. They enjoy
the chagrin of children
like us. Of course
it won't be better
before it's worse.
They must cherish
the anguish of adults
as much: a man
explaining his marriage
to the darkness
where his dog sits
silent and the mule
waits to eat. In all
the field of natural law
we wade with our feet
submerged in sucking
mud and it seems
we must stop and
sink at any hour
because we are weak
and the only peace
is in our sleep
and the only power
is in our dreams.