

The Cranes

Someone told Athanaeus the cranes turn into people
once they go back up north, tall and spindly-legged
with a shock of red hair where the sun they said touches
the earth's edge only twice a year and the moon the same
and it is warm there among the thin crane people
who never have wars or forget though very far north and their
voices are very loud trumpeting peacefulness for miles
across the unfrozen tundra and time it seems without end
since they first flew down in ragged lines to look at the strange
new creatures who could not fly at all and shivered naked
in the dark a third of the time asleep not even dreaming
of more to life than making a living or getting out of it
or around it or taking their minds off it
(getting angry or sly or laid) compensating themselves
for their rotten luck with love when they can (which isn't
often) or poor substitutes they pay dearly for with
a hardening of the heart, a bickering among themselves
and insane cruelty against the other creatures, the world
itself, a fist shook or finger jabbed against the sky
where the dark formations, the shifting Vs, swing through the cold
morning air in miles-wide ever-widening arcs
rising higher and higher above the still frozen fields
beginning almost at random to head north, their raucous calls
and turbulent flurrying wings finally out of earshot
leaving a sudden silence between winter and spring.

from *Mr America Drives His Car*