**Traveling in the Dark**

David Jenkins

Traveling in the dark a white flutter gusts

from the sage at the edge of the road

and blows beneath the truck rusted

with age, our night’s killing loaded

in the bed. We stop and shudder: paper

should not thump, flutters should not

bang the undercarriage. The empty desert,

the cool air, the spray of stars offer aught

but silence on this calm night. Headlights

ghost coyotes’ eyes, varying hares heaped

in back, their eyes no longer ghosts bright

with desire but dulled by yahoos and cheap

.22s shot with easy accuracy. Leap and bend,

land and breathe: all stilled by light, all killed

by velocity’s pierce of brain and lung—friends’

guilt upended by science, the hard-won thrill

of evolution’s trajectory exposed in print and

reprint. Dead Lepus dissected and unmoved

by human ghosts who have their own grand

desires, turning leaps into graphs to prove

a point of theory that cannot match our weary

surprise at the night’s crumpled paper: a small

white dog panting in the road, dark eyes blurry,

trembling between ghost and heart’s mauled

tremor. It cannot move. It pants and growls

in pain. Was it abandoned in this vast desert?

Left to feed coyotes or hawks? A night owl’s

feast, perhaps, its imagined fate. Now, dirt-

covered, filled with blood, taut to the touch,

the flutter lies on my lap. I can feel its heat,

its heart, each beat faint against my rough

fingertips. Dead hares, dying dog, rusted beat-

up truck on an empty highway, the night sky

offers silence as we quiet our own blasphemy.