1979

For Mark Rothko

Jorie Graham

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For Mark Rothko · Jorie Graham

Shall I say it is the constancy of persian red
that permits me to see
this persian red bird
come to sit now
on the brick barbecue
within my windowframe. Red,
on a field made crooked
as with disillusion or faulty
vision, a backyard in winter
that secretly seeks a bird. He has
a curiosity
that makes him slightly awkward,
as if just learning
something innate, and yet
there is no impatience,
just that pose of his
once between each move
as if to say, and is this pleasing?

When I look again he is gone.
He is easy to imagine
in flight: red extended flame
I would say, or, ribbon
torn from a hat rising once
before it catches

on a twig, or
flying painted mouth...
but then how far
have we come?
He could fly now
into a moment of sunlight
that fell from the sun's edge
ten thousand years ago,
mixed in with sunlight
absolutely new.
There is no way to understand
the difference. Some red

has always just slipped from
our field of vision, a cardinal
dropping from persian to magenta to white so slowly
in order that the loss
be tempted
not endured.