

Stephen Cushman

The Red List

Endangerment's foreplay en route to extinction
often but not always. Ask the bald eagle,
ridiculous nickname for that elegant hood
rhymed with its tail, a matched set distinctive
against distant spruce, white as the transit
of pre-dawn Jupiter's super-heated drop
soldering sky plates to cement a meridian;
ask the white hoods about last-minute comebacks,
all but erased by really fine pesticide
but now off the red list and suddenly nemesis
to the gull population, herring or black-backed,
whose chicks make good snacks during long days of fishing.
Eagles increase, local gulls dwindle, till one day, who knows,
seeing an eagle skim low overhead, no bigger deal
than seeing a crow, so what, who cares, the national bird,
as in permit me to flip you the.

Move forward as the way opens.

But will the way open? Will the endangerments
prove passing fronts, slow-moving, stalled-seeming
for months, even years, but in the end ushering in
survival's high pressure? Or is this the one
there's no coming back from? And what kind of danger?
The one of tonight they'll drag me away,
my remains in a pile of anonymous others,
or that of believing I have no connection
with someone who's, what, fill in the blank,
male to my female, old to my young, light to my dark?
Connection, praise connection, I'm always connected,
says Hannah, 13, and there's more life online
than for those who are off, who don't have a life

or really exist. Tell it, little sister, whatever one thinks
of eagles and Jupiter and a parallel universe
where nothing plugs in, the urge to exist
engines most urges from the gull and the eagle
all the way up to you who discriminate
between mere existence and really existing,
no exception made even for the urge,
when existence gets sickening, to endanger oneself.

Ooh, lighten up and give us a break
from these blocks of long lines, we don't have all day
and no one's entitled to jumbo attention
even from throwbacks who still can sustain it
instead of yacking on the phone while navigating traffic
or texting on the crapper or, Hannah, does this happen,
poring over some small screen while taking it from behind?
You're too young to know, one assumes, and, boy,
your parents hope so, but that would be a question
arising from your assertion: Do the connected do it now
like sailors in rough weather, one hand for you,
one for your ship, that glowing device? Could be nice
in some ways, the distraction, perhaps, slowing things down
so no one lapses prematurely and two can synchronize,
thanks to messages back and forth,
RUT ILBL8 UT2L SRY B2W THNX

Dirty Martini

For this lip-reader
olive juice is hard to tell
from an *I love you*.

One's distraction's another's aphrodisiac,
so who can say that connection here can't enhance
connection there or that texting jimmy
while banging johnny won't turn all on

and move the earth

as the earth moved Tuesday,
day before yesterday, 5.9 on Richter's scale,
Charles Francis, born in Ohio, Hello,
I'm a seismologist, what about you,
are you a seismologist too, as if getting paid
to track our temblors weren't cool enough,
you also get to say I'm a seismologist,
never felt the earth move? here lemme help,
don't speak English? no problema, sismo,
Erdbeben, maanjäristys, tremblement de terre,
whatever you call it it jostles us all
thirty miles from epicenter, teenage kid
with three life sentences, middle-age lady
with daily radiation on top of her chemo,
premature baby urgently delivered
to intensive attention, and connects us all
for thirty seconds, even someone standing
alone in the woods while the woods roar and rumble
the sign sufficient, the message received.

The national bird,
Washington's white monument,
has closed for a crack.

Wonder what the eagle's doing
to ready for the hurricane, prophesied for Sunday
and bearing a name that might make one ask
if people paid to christen storms, yet another job to envy,
have anhydrous senses of humor or nasty knacks for irony
or plain don't know Irene means peace; it's sure peaceful now,
blue morning in the buff, not the fig leaf of a cloud,
not a single stitch of wind, for the forty she's left dead,
the bozo on the Outer Banks who thought it boss to surf,
the guy who fried while wading to save a small girl stranded
by waters hiding two live wires, the many hapless felled by trees

crashing in windows, dropping on rooftops, swatting cars like blood-puffed mosquitoes. What are you supposed to do? Act like a bozo, something may happen; act like a hero, something may happen. But sitting quiet in your room, minding your own beeswax, when suddenly, pow, you're history gives Pascal the lie. Death, Leading Causes of: accidents rank third for men, for women sixth, but rule out anything having to do with booze or with some kind of machine, narrow it to nature, in her high assassin mode, e.g., falling tree, falling coconut, lightning strike, landslide, avalanche, tornado, flash flood, earthquake, tidal wave, meteor debris, and the number must be pretty small, especially for those, neither bozos nor heroes, who keep to little rooms meekly hoping to miss misfortune. And yet it happens; shut-in, agoraphobe, convict under house-arrest, the deeply depressed who sleep all day with sad heads covered share endangerment, too. Wonder what the eagle's doing.

The white fog covers
island contours like the sheets
drawn over faces.

Move forward as the way opens. And if it can't open beside the sea or in the woods, perhaps it opens, in project or penthouse, trailer park or track development, with a story instead. Today another aftershock, 3.4; yesterday the queen of Sheba came to test Solomon with spices by the camel-load, gold and flashy stones, but he answered her questions, showed her his stuff, lots more opulent than hers, knocked the wind right out of her before he sent her home again with all she could desire. Odd transaction. What's her game? Show him up? Put him down?
Is this how monarchs pass the time? A shrewd investor, maybe she figured on a good return in a bearish market: Bring King Solomon X in gifts, your retinue groaning,

and you go home with ten times X. Or maybe she was angling
to make herself his newest wife, number seven hundred and
one,

not exactly top of the heap but possibly a notch or two above
any one of his three hundred concubines. Or maybe she really
needed his help with questions she couldn't answer, like Why,
if you're smitten with foreign women, haven't you come to
me?

Am I so ugly? Look at this; take a peek at those. Here we go
into apostasy, hand in hand, just say the word and we can build
a very high place for my abomination. If so, did he say no,
and she chose to attribute a failed seduction to something
she called wisdom? Solomon's sharp, no doubt about it,
that prayer for discernment ranks near the top,
as does his judgment between the two harlots, and don't forget
he built the temple. But all the excess, whether in women
or conspicuous consumption, while slobbering after other gods
when one was taking such good care of him,
doesn't feel much like wisdom. Good story, though.

And thinking it over surely beats heck out of sitting around
making big idols out of one's problems. If you ever have
trouble

distinguishing the queen of Sheba from Bathsheba, Solomon's
mom

and his dad's first big transgression, just remember David saw
BATHsheba in her BATH. Careful: This trick won't work
in Hebrew, Greek, or Latin.

Things not lost today:
any weight, a tooth, my nerve.
Praise the plus column.

But does the eagle, its branch-nest humming atop a dead
spruce
with chirpy eaglets hankering for fish, herring or mackerel
so fresh it was swimming just minutes ago, until the big
swoop,

too fast to be fell, snagged it from the full-moon flood tide,
ever give an eagle thought to whether or not to leave them
alone?

Come on; confess. If you're an eagle, you rank pretty high
on the shoreline food chain and don't worry much about
ending up

as somebody's lunch. And who could manage to raid that
nest,

weighing in at a metric ton, when adults usually guard it?

But one of the parents could up and die and then the survivor
would be in a bind, having to exit to bring home the
mackerel

while junior's defenseless. Helpless. Endangered.

Yellow-haired boy arms to the sky in yellow fall light
chasing to catch yellow leaves flying.

I remember saying
you will remember this.

Now I remember this.

So many mysteries, no wonder detective fiction
has been detectable ever since Daniel, in defense of Susanna,
cross-examined witnesses, or Oedipus, insistent,
sent for the shepherd, or Scheherazade's *Three Apples* story.

Who can't admire Auguste Dupin, Sherlock Holmes,
Hercule Poirot?

Or the great Chief Inspector, who cracked many cases
while fathering analysis? But Freud had his blind spots,
among them a mystery beyond solution, so of course he
belittled

religion as illusion; our largest spirits have never believed
in the God he didn't believe in either. What a low bar:
diss the divine into trivial silliness and then call it silly.
Talk about illusion: ideas of God are childish

so God is childish and doesn't exist? What logic primer
did he find that in? Grow up. You've finally figured out
God's not Santa Claus, a school principal hot to suspend
you,
or your personal short-order cook? Good for you.
Congratulations.
How does it feel to graduate from kindergarten?
Hope you do as well in first grade. Easy, Cush.
Unemployment's high and there aren't any jobs for more
Jeremiahs.

In my trilogy
of sky and shore, wind and sea,
this is volume three.

So many mysteries, no wonder some like detective fiction;
solutions comfort, especially when mystery comes
with a copious side order of brain-dicing pain. But others?
Others may find investigation too exhausting
and opt themselves out of intractable inquiry:
When did this happen? Who did this to you? What do you
remember?

Maybe it's better to kill the day in bed, skip the medication,
say you've been robbed of a certain kind of life,
one that sadness doesn't disfigure and force underground
out of the light of others' attentions, out of the headlines,
the prizes, the raises, the perks of looking good or doing
well.

Or maybe detection, even successful, doesn't diminish
the deficit of hopelessness, so why bother trying?
Maybe, could it be, hopelessness is ecstasy?

Red leaf in the road.
This place will shake my dust off.
Crickets effervesce.
Ecstasy. There's a subject that's lots more fun

than spending a morning in General District Court
with shoplifters, trespassers, fishers without licenses,
inmates in jumpsuits who hobble to the bench in shackles
where the clean-cut judge, who doesn't sound judgmental,
denies them bond for risk of flight. Ecstasy. Much better
but in its way as complicated, variegated, unless you settle
for euphoria, bliss, exalted delight as adequate synonyms
and let it go at that, eager for the next installment, please.
But if the Greek means displacement from senses,
how can you settle for synonyms like those? So many ways
to end up displaced. The young man angry
at how his folks flubbed, ruined his life
from infancy on, isn't there ecstasy in the way he can't focus
on the simplest task or verbal exchange? Or how about sadness
his mother now feels, the majesty of her motherhood
suddenly spilled, unmoppable mess on linoleum floor?
Or ecstasy of fear as when someone says you jerk you scared
me
shitlessly witless, or of boredom so bored one truly is bored
out of one's mind and into its boondocks. Ecstatic hatred,
ecstatic jealousy, ecstatic disgust, ecstatic confusion,
ecstatic embarrassment, ecstatic bereavement,
ecstatic compassion, ecstatic detachment, ecstatic obsession,
ecstatic stress in the ravishment of overwork. So much more
to ecstasy than pleasure, the back rub, hot bath, warm bed,
the fond folderol between your legs or someone else's.
When you get down to it, ultimate ecstasy,
super-deluxe, five-star vacation from the sensory grind,
wouldn't it be in the Grand Last Resort? Or if that's too glib,
wouldn't it be in whatever-they-call-it? Near-death experience?
(Well look at that: it's even got an acronym, NDE,
but surely the army could have done better, something more
like NEARTHEX, Sergeant, take those men and flank that
NEARTHEX,
Yes sir, Lieutenant, except it sounds too much like narthex,
although come to think of it, the resemblance resonates;

when in doubt, Greek gives good word, parathanatosesthesia
 or perithanatosesthesia, on the model of perimenopause,
 pericarditis, peridontist, but not Perry Mason or Como,
 and could yield the acronym PETE, suddenly changing
 For Pete's Sake, or also possible, PETHE, which hip insiders
 like us, who else, could pronounce pithy when we apply
 for grants to study the pithiest pithies; where's my pill?)
 But what do we do in the meanest of meantimes?
 Here's the thing: there's no displacement from one's own
 senses

except through one's senses. If you're simply not interested,
 skip this strophe and pick it up below; if you can't control
 seizures, fits, or spells, you don't have a choice
 and displacement will come, willy-nilly, sally-tally,
 holly-folly, so good luck to you; if you're receptive
 and in the market for a nice starter ecstasy, choose a sense
 and then overload it, or bring it to the brink
 of such overloading. Eyesight failing? Touch unavailable,
 other than your own? Smell a little dull,
 thanks to allergies or sinus infection?
 Worried that taste will lead to gluttony and put on pounds?
 Here's the good news. Words: organic, fat-free, low-calorie
 and whether you're deaf or pretending to be,
 they're all dressed to shimmy that auditory ecstasy.

Mates found or unfound,
 birds shut their mouths and leave us
 fall in songless woods.

yellow-haired boy *electroconvulsive therapy*

arms to the sky *severe depression*

in yellow fall light *when psychotic*

chasing to catch

refusing to eat

yellow leaves flying

thinking of committing

yellow leaves flying

Tough time lately

IDing a tree, its leaves turning red, first on the ridge again this September, but even with a specimen branch and field guide to common timber, one's small knowledge of opposite simple leaves, edges smooth instead of toothed and leafy veins concurred with edges, amounts to little when it comes to pronouncing with confident conviction the mystery tree a species of dogwood, which it might well be.

It's so much easier to say what it's not: buttonbush, buffaloberry, the golden branch that must break off for permission to visit, a visa for Hades.

Authorized Personnel Only. Hardhats Required. Passport, please.

I don't have a passport, but here's a branch I broke from a tree

I think might be a species of dogwood, although it differs from the flowering ones that mostly go purple.

Are you kidding? You can't come down here with that.

Back up to the surface for you. No Admittance. Access Denied.

I know, I'm sorry, I thought it was just descent from the ridge,

maybe thirteen hundred back down to six, which is where I live if you call this living,

but I must have gone wrong, taken a bad turn,

since here I am, now flying stand-by, on Air Katabasis.

Well, as long as you're down here, let's see who's around.

No thanks. Little as I like what's up there,

I can't handle it down here. Not so fast, pal;
 somebody's recognized you; we got rules against rudeness.
 Who is it? Over there. Tall, a little stooped,
 orangish tonsure below a dapper hat. No, it can't be.
 That you, Archie? *I'm at fifty Octobery.* Younger than I am
 when we met. *How you getting along up there?*
 Tough time lately. *Still writing?* Still writing.
Then what's the trouble? Hard to say. *Ease up; ejamb
 more; let it all mosey.* It's not that. *What then?*
 A yellow-haired boy. *Oh that.* Yes that. *I do
 the ones I love no good.* Yes that: *there are those whom to
 lose
 soaks direction out of the tree boughs.* That too.
You still got the letters I wrote? Got em right here:
*if treated obsessively it becomes obsessively important,
 whereas, in fact, a good many things are important,
 including the love between poets. Fight free
 to the true spirit—.* Twenty-one when I opened that.
I treasure the knowledge of you. His age now. *I treasure
 the knowledge of you.* Last thing you wrote me
 twenty-one later. *Look me up when you're down here
 for good; sign the guest book.*
 I treasure the knowledge of you

A favorite cow,
 calf-bereft, loudly out-lows
 a bellowing bull.

Move forward move forward, but it's hard to know
 where forward is down here, now a shore, a rocky stretch,
 this bitch of a beach where urchins and barnacles
 can slice the shoeless and ocean's so cold
 heads hurt, privates burn, but no swimming like it
 for a saline facial, a salty rubdown that sloughs dead cells
 and when you get out in a fresh west wind it makes your
 skin feel

as if you'd taken communion on the outside: thus spake
the shivering imp, yellow-haired elf, blue eyes and goose
bumps,

laughing tongue of laughing fire. Not every day
includes eagle-sighting or should, if it's special
and meant to stay so; not every place, no matter how real
the health it restores, the spirit it resuscitates,
or how thin the membrane between its trees and
sacred emanations

is more than real estate in someone's eyes. One owner dies,
one survives, wants to sell, and just like that
it's gone, though still on the tax map and under surveillance
by satellites taking the very long view, gone, gone,
and if you're kin, even if distant, to airborne Antaeus
and needed your feet firmly on that ground or your face
in that water or your eyes on that eagle, then my poor friend,
you're one step closer, one giant's stride closer,
to being gone too. The Greeks got it wrong:
Mnemosyne's queen of the overstuffed underworld
where places go to be with people.

Been flipped the finger?
Only a prosodist can
give you the dactyl.

Can't move forward? At least change the scene,
eight straight days of some kind of rain, so heavy muggy
pages curl, covers warp, slime molds and fungi
erupt in the woods now studded with puffballs, inkhorns,
fatal Amanitas, one little bite of a Panther Amanita,
four-inch Death Cap, Destroying Angel, you don't feel a
thing
for ten full hours, maybe more, but then it's too late
for puking to help or any kind of drug, but the great thing is
your change of scene, you nailed it cold, the underworld
express

without all the hassle, delays, cancellations, long lines
at security, no room for your carry-on, the seat in front of
you
smack in your face across the Atlantic or worse the Pacific,
while back upstairs in the light and air
the surface you rippled when you ate the wrong mushroom,
was it by accident, smoothes over fast and very best of all
it doesn't cost a thing. What a great deal but a tad extreme
for some mobilizers, who'd rather zip off to Europe instead,
London, Madrid, Paris, or Prague, whoopee, la-di-da,
welcome to Europe where thirty-eight percent suffer from
illness,
we're talking mental, insomnia, anxiety, dementia,
depression,
so welcome to Europe, sit back, relax, enjoy the quick trip
out of the pan into third-degree burn
over ninety-percent of your transient body.

No problem so huge
it doesn't shrivel puny
from a moon's-eye view.

Everything triggers sadness.
That's what he said, eyes filling up, while stroking a dog's
ear.
He's right. Of course. Who can argue if anything can
trigger anything, and it's only a matter of how light you set
the trigger resistance. If you're motion sick or morning sick
or sickly hungover, a big bowl of chowder can make you
upchuck;
horny, enthralled, obsessed, or infatuated, even the breeze
can be deeply engorging. So it makes perfect sense
that the sadder you get the sadder it looks, the sadder it looks
the sadder you get. The next question is is sadness the rule,
joy the exception, the most trigger-happy a gated community
of neurobiologies wired for mania, while the trigger-woeful

inherit the landfill. Or does joy have a chance
to get half the pie? Desolation Consolation Desolation
Consolation, how much of one offsets the other?
Can one arrive where it all triggers joy
without drugs or booze or mental disorder?
Black clouds backlit with hip orange edges: last night's sun
set,
which after a day of even more rain was looking mighty foxy.

Recession's no fun
for gums and economies.
Rough on hairlines, too.

If it all triggered joy, you could just think
of the names of newborns, the three most popular,
Jacob, Ethan, Michael, virile trochees strutting smartly
to the Hebrew Bible, but girls mix it up more, number one,
Isabella, also Hebrew, a form of Elizabeth but more Español,
then off to Greece with wise Sophia, as Emma rounds it out,
whole, universal, with Old High German. Especially for guys
the Bible hangs on, the top twenty-five still bringing in
Noah, Daniel, Joshua, Andrew, David, Matthew, Elijah,
James, Joseph, Gabriel, Benjamin, and Samuel, whereas the
girls,
except for Ava, akin to Eve, Hannah, Leah, and a couple of
others
such as Nevaeh, heaven's own palindrome, go for the hetero
-dox or -geneous. Must be something to it, but what?
Maybe boys' parents, even agnostics, cling to nostalgia
for something like Logos and hope that their angels,
named for an angel, an apostle, a prophet, won't break the law
unspeakably badly and might end up righteous. If that's not
a laugh
to generate joy and perk up an underworld, try the old system:
open the book at random and point. I hereby name thee
Shaphan, Jeremiah twenty-six, and now quite possibly

unisex like Jayden or Brandon or Rory. Hurray for the
epicene;
joy's hard in jails, especially gender ones.

Jupiter rising
over sadness set to set
still shines when joys rise.

In ratty routine randomness refreshes, here the name
Shaphan,
there the coarse bulldozer roaring next door. Who doesn't
love
a blue October day, top-shelf weather with leaves turning too;
who doesn't hate the mechanized grinding, continuous
drilling
by some sadistic dentist, or is there a nervous system
so calm and evolved, a brain so remapped by meditative
practice,
it hears the grating growl as purling susurrations? Wait.
It stopped. Now don't you feel like a jerk for complaining?
Now don't you wish you'd left lamentation
up to the soul-crushed who really have earned it?
Boo-hoo, so you're banished from the land of the eagle,
boo-hoo, so he's sick inside his handsome head,
boo-hoo, you can't travel and leave him alone,
boo-hoo, you can't sleep, boo-hoo, your shoulder aches,
boo-hoo, there's no raise, boo-hoo, you're always older,
boo-hoo, so your work has suddenly come to nothing.
Time's up. Quiet's over. It started again. Back to the dozing
of overbearing bull, or should it be dosing, as in a big dose,
a really big dose, of endless-link treads tearing up air waves,
getting in gear to gouge out the day, the china shop of silence
or small sounds and whispers, crickets winding down, wasps,
breezed leaves, a white-throated sparrow on his way south.
Instead get the earplugs. And where is that book,
since my last train of thought done jumped off the track.

No, not the Bible. Already downed a good shot this morning,
Jeremiah, Paul, especially that Matthew, do not be anxious
how you are to speak or what you are to say
whenever trial comes and you're delivered up, wish all my

lectio

could be as divina, now that eyesight's even more precious,
wish all our tax collectors could sing the same song
or that the same song were soundtrack instead
of bulldozer muzak shattering Sheol. Here's the book,
thick and black, so play the game, open at random,
*Thou art now in the vale of misery, in poverty, in agony,
in temptation; rest, eternity, happiness, immortality,
shall be thy reward, as Chrysostom pleads, if thou trust in*

God,

*and keep thine innocency. Though 'tis ill with thee now,
'twill not be always so; a good hour may come upon a
sudden;*

expect a little. Yeehah, now we're talking, keep on trusting,
keep up that innocency, expect a little, and most of all
don't continue reading, *Yea, but this expectation
is it which tortures me in the mean time; future hope
makes present hunger; whilst the grass grows,
the horse starves.*

That mackerel sky.

How big would they have to be,
eagles to eat it.

But then, starving horse, along comes a day, one single day
when, lo and behold, medication works, or is it good
weather?

Or maybe it's prayer, go ahead and smirk, whatever the
cause,

he's got a little zip, the smile shines again, there is the sound
of his chuckle and singing. Expect a little? Receive a lot,
glory be, alleluia, don't you dare think ahead

or look up this drug, what it's meant for, what the side
effects
of antipsychotics they designate atypical.

Before dawn, ladies,
Jupiter was ogling
passing Pleiades.

Superlative blue of optimal October, how can one born to
you,
with yellow light for breast milk and red leaves for toys,
question joy's inoculation or say such a thing
as the universe hates me? Today is a birthday.
Tell the black tupelo, maroon in the field,
to glow when he passes. Make the clear sun
apply to his cheek an ache-easing compress.
Swaddle him up in southwest wind
that tousles trees and floats the hawk
while smelling of ginger. Today is a birthday.
Let him gaze at zebras in gazebos;
let him liberate leopards in jeopardy.
Help him be born; help this day bear him
and him bear this day.

is silence escape from noise or noise from silence
contemplation escape from action or action from
contemplation
built environment from rubescent maple or rubescent maple
from downtown buildings crammed with self-promotion?

That's a blot on your escutcheon.

Rhomboid in the male, triangular in the female,
escutcheon meaning shield-like pattern of pubic haircoat
is medical lingo and doesn't appear in the dictionary
usually used here or in any of the household back-ups, so it
helps

to have a doctor friend, although the doctor also says
escutcheon meaning shield-like pattern of pubic haircoat
doesn't appear on many crotches these days either,
at least among the young or not so young who maybe figure
a little shaving's cheaper than a tummy tuck
and could be more effective in getting business back.

That's a blot, your escutcheon.

Is faith escape from skepticism or skepticism from faith?

If you put it on display,
anticipate assessment.

*so that the people could not distinguish
the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of people's
weeping*

Of those whom thou gavest me I lost not one
in all those years on that cold water not one
I took in a boat I never lost one not one

but this morning he wasn't in bed or anywhere
did I lose him would I find him at midday on the mountain
where he'd gone up to end it under Jupiter?

three times this week dreams of the house
someone else is calling home

the only thing better than sunset at sea is sunrise at sea;
there's no night sky like night sky at sea

the deeper the faith, the deeper the skepticism;
the converse may not be true
poo-poo to honolulu

What if the universe really did hate us does hate us
What if they got it wrong and bumper stickers should read
God hates you What if the constant onslaught of omens
signs oracles revelations theophanies amounts to an over
 flowing
inbox of heavenly hate mail and the eagle in the spruce
really means you miserable abortion of a soul I hope they
diagnose you tomorrow with inoperable pancreatic cancer
or Jupiter rising at downtime setting at uptime really means
may a beam pulled out of your house impale you on a
 dunghill
or the rubescens maple in the full throes of its blood-flush
mean let dogs dine on your precious interior the one you
 tended
petted caressed primped and plumed the one you gazed upon
doted upon drooled over and trumpeted abroad without
 ceasing once
in or on your memoir Christmas letter resumé web page pod
 cast
blog a word so ugly so onomatopoeia for vomiting it makes
perfect sense where is she she's in the bathroom blogging
up her insights I'm so sorry I blogged all over your lap
oh no someone else announcing the substantial impact she's
 had
on American poetry these last thirty years I think
I'm going to blog What if this is really the way it is
What if he's right the universe does hate him and the
 medication
that could produce confusion fainting spells irregular heart
 beat
frequent need to urinate stiffness spasms trembling
 constipation
sexual impairment sleeping impairment weight gain is
 nothing
but sugar-coating on the hate a rose-colored contact lens
for each blue eye so he sees the leaves as they let go

into the whirling wind sees and says let go let go
it will be all right the wind will lift me sail me up
and over this troubled time these troublesome times up and
over
up and over until it's all over?

“I've fallen below the level of presentableness.”

Give us a sign. But who needs a sign with signs and
headlines
in such abundance, as in an airport: THE WORD *FOREIGN*
IS LOSING ITS MEANING. Really? What's the latest
salary
of the genius who generated that tour de force,
expense account, retirement package, favorite hotel
in downtown Hong Kong? Does he or she stroll
with black designer roller-bag and matching laptop case
through this treeless, breezeless oasis on the way to a drink,
bourbon in business class, look up, and think
I wrote that one all by myself. Well, not quite myself;
I had a team on that campaign but remember the meeting,
time zones away, when the rhythm just came, who knows
from where,
Is Losing Its Meaning Is Losing Its Meaning, *and when I*
shouted
out loud to the board, we knew we had a winner
for the xenophobe market. Poor foreign. You're out of a job
if everything's domesticated, housebroken, tamed.
Nothing left alien, uncanny, exotic?
And all you meant was *out of doors*.

Praise the inventor
of headlights opalescing
dirty-blond fox fur.

Even if one's a steerage class peon, courting blood clots
in a small middle seat on an overnight long-haul
back from the underworld, it's still good to read
the financial page of a decorous newspaper, if only to escape
aggressive alliteration in the hectoring headlines
of your typical tabloid, especially its sports pages,
but also because, even for investors only in invisibles,
financial headlines pay spiritual dividends. Consider:
FINDING YIELD IN A LOW-RATE WORLD. Okay, okay,
an auditory audit aimed at eliminating erotics for the ear
might object to terminal consonance in *yield* and *world*,
but quibbles aside, isn't this all that Emerson's saying,
for just one example, and isn't this really the basic goal
of the spiritual portfolio, no matter how diversified
among thriving theisms, mono-, poly-, pan-, and a-?
Or how about this one: WHY VOLATILITY MAY BE
HERE TO STAY.

No need to bother reading the article; enough to know
tranquility gone AWOL in transactions with the world
isn't afflicting you alone, enough to grasp if peace and quiet
are high on your list, you'd better learn to grow your own
when they can't be imported. Five dismal days
of unbroken darkness, and then, with November,
he suddenly looked up. Today's a Thursday, Thursday the
third,
the sky mostly sunny, highs in the 60s, lots of trees leaved.
But the last two months, his Thursdays go bad.

Aquila Jovis,
the eagle of Jupiter,
was golden, not bald.

It was and is not and is to come. How could he know,
John in the cups of Patmos apocalypse, that the beat of the
beast
with seven heads and ten horns and a woman on its scarlet
back

is the beat of the beast in a head so distressed?
Yesterday it was, unshakable shadow hooding his face
as if before hanging, but is not today because, who knows,
the angle of the sunset cuts more sharply or he dreams a
dream
that leaves a good taste or some small short in neurotrans
mission
suddenly connects and power's restored, the juice resumes
flowing
until it comes again, the reliable beast, repetitive bastard.
Have mercy, Master; my child's possessed, severely
possessed
by a most severe demon. Nothing's changed. Two thousand
years
and still the parents of offspring afflicted beseech and
believe
in very little else. And can one blame a young man for
hunting
escape from unbearables when the first day for
muzzle-loaders
finds, yes it's true, his old father straying up toward the deer,
just before dusk, chancing an accident?

The light bleeds away.
November's the hemorrhage.
Three minutes each day.

Last stripe of afterglow in clear, cloudless sky
goes to ROY on the spectrum, while to the naked eye
for the first time tonight a new face in town
offsets austerity, the recent cutbacks handed down
and more light laid off: Venus returned from celestial
sabbatical
spent behind the sun, its curtain drawn on her boudoir
these last eight months, but now she's back starring, however
dim

compared to Jupiter, his maximum magnitude her eastern
opposite
(somebody check: was he this big in 4 B.C.?), but bright
enough
to outlast winter, exhaust its cold lechery, and rise refreshed
up through midspring. Bright enough. Bright enough.
As is the moon, three days from full, a screech owl trilling,
the white-throated sparrow's password at dusk, deer in the
road,
three tails visible. This is enough. Or could be enough.
But not for him, along for the walk.

New tongues build your brain:
bird slang, colloquial breeze,
the phrasings of rain.

Most days one wakes parallel to the floor, overnight
long-hauls
afflictive exceptions, but whether one's supine, all laid out
like Tutankhamun's gold sarcophagus or one of those
knights
in dim Norman churches, hands chest-folded (my preferred
mode),
or prone to sleep prone or hugging soft pillow, fetally balled,
the first roaring Rubicon yawns to be crossed: how does one
get
from parallel to perpendicular? What's the carrot, goad, or
spur
to drop that last dream, shed the cocoon of cozy bedclothes,
and somehow levitate ninety tough degrees to, let's say,
a grimly dismal Melvillian morning, November rain ripping
down
the last of the oak leaves, nothing ahead but the usual gruel?
And this from an optimist, an eager believer in eager
believing,
a poster-boy morning person who doesn't drink coffee

or tee off with tea and doesn't wake starving without any
food
or to bars across windows and automatic weapons fire.
What's someone luckless expected to do, lonely, despairing,
constant heart-ache that's not metaphoric but chronic
anxiety,
its snug anaconda squeezing him tighter with each
exhalation?
Sleep's his relief. Waking him's cruel, so isn't it better
to sit there a while, stroke the short hair, kiss the sad head?

I lift up my eyes
for some help to the foothills
the Spanish call skirts.

Thank goodness we're small and soon leave the earth
to much grander motions. Why care? Why try? Why
bother
with a sabbath day you have to work hard to keep half-holy?
As long as we're resting, then let us start resting
from Commandment Number Four, even though Mosheh,
drawn from the water (think no one's left for you to admire?
refresh yourself on Shiphrah and Puah), claimed it ranks
higher
than later commandments that keep lawyers billing. It's
simple really:
no sabbath, no rest of any deep kind; no rest, no distance
from the funhouse of feelings addiction to busyness
can make you think real; no distance from feelings, no
chance
for your ashes to start to reheat, your juices regenerate,
your punctured lungs fill with fresh second wind
only true apathy gives mouth to mouth. We're talking
true apathy, as Stoics conceived it there in their portico,
not the kind now that endangers surprise and most curiosity,
but the bona fide kind that fires the drama jack king or
queen,

for magnification of minor emotion. Sure, feel sad
and then feel free to share that sadness with someone who
cares
or wants to appear to, but then take a shot at letting it drop
and don't say you're dying unless it's high time to shop for
a coffin.
If it is, speak the word, and we're off to the undertaker,
but if not, try transmuting sadness to askesis, lead into light,
rather than ass-kissing into high status they may not have
earned
your ambient blues. Given a chance, sadness makes ascetic,
draining the appetites of erstwhile pleasures. Movies
magazines
booze and most food can suddenly seem cumbersome, ditto
the news
or keeping up with the latest buzz, the one going viral,
as if a virus were a plus. Pare things down. Bask in basics,
cool water, dark bread, weather, the sky; if it's available,
long-standing friendship simplified by trial into true trust.
Sex is trickier and not often thought of respecting ascetics,
appearing at first to have nothing to do
with self-control, strict discipline, or renunciative regimen,
but maybe it does, or maybe it can, since nothing's more
austere
than absolute nakedness and how can one deny oneself
any more fully than when one surrenders one's self to
another?

Yes, ithyphallic
once upon a bygone time.
Now, iffy-phallic.

“I'm sorry to be a parasite.”

Abnormal skull: *fenestra rotunda* and temporal bones
distinctly pronounced, cochlea coil unusually large,

temporal gyri impressions, inferior and fusiform,
suggesting marked development of opposing cerebral zones.

Was he born with this brain, or did practicing music
alter its architecture? Say yes to the former
and Prelude and Fugue in E-Flat Major might as well be

Jupiter

for all the chance you'll ever get there, but yes to the latter
and suddenly it matters how hard you practice pale sky scales
on December's first day or listen to gasps and the comelier

grunts

these lines keep whispering into your ear as they go on trying
to work closely with you to find the right rhythm

one hopes might result in phonemic satisfaction, mutual
esteem,

inclination toward future encounters. Ready readers' radars
with signals enough, discrete and discreet, and soon

sensitivity

gets cranked so high it takes fewer words to enter the
kingdom.

See that closed door? Someone's behind it stoking the notes
for your delectation and what's more there's no need
to huff and puff and blow the house down or sing to the door
paraclausthyrons of your own composition, no call to

wheedle

or bully it open because the composer's not what you want
so bad you can't swallow; it's the thing that's composed.

Can't trance to Bach's skull, even in a powdered wig.

Rangers on their rounds

carry tampons in their packs,

slip them into wounds.

Sustain a gross insult to one's self-importance

and slip into sulking, prodigious, sublime, getting passed over
for raises, promotion, the Hot Stuff Award so stoking

resentment

that one soon warps bitter, bitchy, and hurtful when suddenly
there she blows, the Goldilocks planet, six hundred light
years
off through gray sky, where given a watery greenhouse effect
life may be happening--this rainy instant--and under a sun
a quarter less luminous (same way it seems down here some
days),
its years sliding by with seventy-five fewer evenings and
nights
(give them November, January too, and maybe throw in,
at no extra cost, July's second half). Discoveries like these
put the cosmic beats-me of nescioquiddity into ascendancy,
and one doesn't need didactic reminders of how not to be
conformed to this earth. Conformed to this earth?
What can that mean, when superlative earthliness
is scoping out space, hunting for planets? What about there,
somewhere on Goldilocks: is somebody saying be not
conformed
to Goldilocks also, and does sentience there likewise
distinguish
between Goldilocks versions of earthly and earthy?
Be not conformed to the earthy? What else is worth it,
if Professor Ornithologist has figured it out and sexual
choice
in birds has to do not with genetics but with a strong
preference
for what's merely beautiful? It makes perfect sense:
the eagle's an aesthete and mating is art, since art is a form
of communication co-evolving with its evaluation.
(here's where the footnote should go if there were one),
though skepticism jumps to say, Then art doesn't differ in
any big way
from marketing or politics. Oh stuff a sock in it
and take a few seconds to ponder instead how Professor
explains
the angry upheaval we had only yesterday: if mating is art,

your face was displaying its luminous plumage
of tears in low lamplight.

Prosopagnosia,
worse than color, snow, or night,
blindness to faces.

Old and Middle Kingdom well-to-do Egyptians
sailed for the underworld in coffins lined with spells,
Here I am sailing, crossing the sky, but not afraid
because of good deeds, and litigants in Ethiopia
used to sue in poetic form, plaintiff or defendant winning
based on how the form impressed. Even an Inuit has better
 charms
up in the Arctic, warm in her igloo, humming as she mends a
 parka
one to stop bleeding, one to catch fish, one to make some
 thing
too heavy light. But where in the atlas can you find this:
*Whenever you sing, / Whenever it's dawn, / The path of
 death /*
Will never be gone. It's not in any coffin yet, and no one's
won a lawsuit with it, and now that the sun's already set
in Greenland, Nord, two months ago, you're not going to see
 it
again for two more, no matter the charm you happen to
 choose
or how hard you say it. No, that one's by a little boy,
five years old, composed by a river. They scanned his brain
this past Tuesday, the right side fine, so good at music,
Whenever you sing Whenever you sing Whenever you sing,
the waves of the left all scrambled and choppy. No wonder
he can't function sometimes, make a list, remember to call;
no wonder when December darkens, as it did Tuesday
for two rainy inches, he won't wake or speak at all

Whenever it's dawn

Will never be gone

It's not complaining
when starling wings start grumbling;
it's murmuration.

Solstice minus nine but just minus three till sunset ticks up
that first minute later and comeback's begun, spring's on the
way
through ice storms and snow drifts with summer on its tail.
I am the frostbite and the heat prostration. In my wind chill
is my sun stroke. Half a million minutes in a calendar year,
even the worst, and that's their leading lady, at this latitude,
four fifty-five, December sixteenth, the tourniquet's applied,
we won't bleed to death, this year at least, from
equinox-slashed
blue wrists of sky, bow down, bow down in total adoration,
high beta waves completely released in trances of theta
gamboling with gamma, so check your agnosis back at the
door.

For Ahab had a little vial . . . whose fleece was white as
snow.

No, no, don't horse around. Ahab had a little vial
of soundings in his pocket, for *nostos* to Nantucket,
which must have gone down in the North Pacific with him,
now mixed profoundly with its benighted bottom. Ahab had
a little vial smaller than a junk-shop flacon
half-filled with sand from that extinguished beach
only the eagle keeps eyes on now. The sand looks like
pepper
coarse-ground from corns of granite by eons of ocean,
the master spice, and yet does it help, a keepsake like this?
Or is all the flavor now past enhancing, the taste of each day
best left to blandness so palates forget, don't go off riled?
Light may seep back, but some day that sand will get thrown
away

by whoever cleans out this cluttered little room. Let it be
him.

He.

Won't be long now, compared to time needed
for grinding up sand. The Hunter has started
making an evening of ending this autumn
above the black ridge line.