

**Stephen Cushman**

**Juicy Gossip**

Avowedly the avocado's  
partially autogamous

and would survive in solitude  
playfully self-pollinating

its own receptive stigma  
if only its small flowers,

pale-green, yellow-green  
in racemes near the branch tips,

could open up concurrently  
hermaphroditic organs,

rather than flip-flop hers today,  
his tomorrow, but fruitfully the avocado

arrived from central Mexico  
in two varieties, on different schedules,

so the trick, again, is simply to look  
for one tree's mate at some remove

and there it stands, across the street,  
orange-edged foliage of its peak

cresting the roof of another house,  
beaming from another yard

its steady seed on wind or wing.

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### **An Ether Purer**

*"Whenever a man hears it, he is young." (Thoreau, Journal)*

The singing intensifies just before sunrise

neither aubade — had he got laid,  
he wouldn't be singing — nor serenade  
because it's not evening,

                                jet lag perhaps,  
some other time zone calling his shots,  
or maybe a loner late in the season  
has to switch tactics,

                                quit the high perches  
away in safe woods to zero in low  
up close to the window

                                or end up a wallflower,  
no genes transmitted, let alone lonely,  
cicadas and dog days rubbing it in,

his failure to mate, despite the best song,  
spun by this listener, solo and celibate,  
into a triumph that refuses to please

a hard-to-get tease while singing deeper stuff  
lasting all summer for sheer love of tune  
designed to amuse

                                the singer alone.

  That's quite a lot

to load on a wood thrush:

July '52 included two moons, respectively full  
first day and last,

                                5th fell on Monday  
so Sunday was tough, both Sabbath and 4th  
piling it on,

                                small wonder he heard  
in the notes of the bird — avian amateurs  
don't quote this part —

                                relief for the slave  
in the house of his luxury,

                                relief for the inmate  
of one's lowest thoughts.

**The Progress of Railroading**

*(Union Station, Washington, D.C.)*

The one with bare boob and wheatsheaf in lieu  
of her usual scales, that would be Themis  
without modern blindfold but still with a sword  
and eighteen feet tall, *FAIREST OF ALL*  
*O FREEDOM*, oracular, mother of Horae  
by gigolo Zeus and paired with Apollo  
above central arch for triumph through loggia  
to vaulted white hall in gold leaf and granite  
where thirty-six centurions, rumored as naked  
behind their big shields, keep watch on travelers  
and those going nowhere, one with a hand out,  
shuffling, mumbling, too thin to hold up  
pants that emancipate woe-to-you moon.

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### **Mated for Life**

As though a goose alone on the pond  
or make it a gander passersby take  
for solo rogue maverick afloat on composure,  
detachment, free-standing, easy to hate  
an avian Emerson whose celibate wake  
of self-assured ripples ruffles our orgy,  
our frenzy, promiscuous, of surface connections,  
how dare he, really, pretend to transcend us  
until the light dims on dusky discovery  
up in the woods above the far bank  
of goose down with feathers a little too  
strewn for nesting or bedding and lying beside,  
this part's not fun but what can you do,  
coyote sign to honk at in goose tongue  
for wailing and howling as Pink Moon appears  
to sob on his vigil, his other lone wake.

**Dark Social**

Saturday morning daredevil foreplay,  
red-shouldered courtship spiral display  
by monogamous mates, first in wide loops  
above the frayed trees, then into stunt dives  
urge pulls them out of a few yards away  
just before impact under leaf canopy  
or where one would be if April this year  
quit casting cold spells, frigid air layer  
close to the ground refracting intenser  
hush-threshing wing blades venting a need  
for breeding again and nothing beyond  
twin immolation without an apostle  
to bear distant witness, nary a follower  
licking and liking.