

Don McKay / FIVE POEMS

STURNUS VULGARIS

I

Untrue to their colours, they wear
acne in the winter and an oil slick of deceptive
shimmers in the summer, waddling their squat
poxy bodies on the lawn. Pests. Bad Guys.
Illegal immigrants
stealing nesting sites from Bluebirds,
Kestrels, Red-headed
Woodpeckers. Once introduced in North America
(New York, 1890)
they swept across the landscape like free enterprise.

Against the
furnace of society
they warm themselves
and mock: whistling
warbling wheedling segue skitter
squeak chirp chortle they
impersonate the local dignitaries, e.g.
cardinals, flickers, phoebes, peewees, phone calls, dogs,
cats, chevrolets and ultra
sonic T.V. frequencies.
You step outdoors into a soundscape skewed,
perverted into satire.

II

Time was,

no seriously folks,

I'm into this roots and buries number, no kidding and incidentally its terrific to be here in beautiful downtown London Ont., city of malls, cardinal capital of the universe and birthplace of regionalism, moderate applause, thanks that'll do, actually while I'm on the subject I've brought testimonials from grateful Celts, Kwakiutl, Yoknapatawphans, William Carlos Williams and the mayor of Oberammagau, a village in Germany, all eager to have membership cards and bumper stickers, no really, its super to be here among so many cardinals, as we exrootless cosmopolites will often pontificate, when in Rome (*italics* would be apt here squire) *do as the Romanians* do, ok, so here I am cardinalizing in your forest city, right, and you're all saying to yourselves like what the fuck does he know, is he on *drugs* or something, what's mything man, where's his cosMOlogy or is he like from *out of town* or somewhere, and by the way are there any folks here tonight from Tilsonburg, Tobacco Capital of Canada, hey wonderful, keep smokin' man, really, one of the least objectionable forms of public oral gratification, you getting much of that street fellatio around here, no? not like Hamilton where recent figures show they cut lung cancer stats significantly, but folks seriously,

tonight, since, as adumbrated earlier in my address, I'm into roots and buries, family trees, ha, barking up my archetypes woof woof, I'm going to cut the comedy (misnamed paranoid schizophrenia by my ex-shrink) and deliver the straight stuff: here we go, *Cosmogony Sturnus Vulgaris*, catchy huh? subtitle how come starlings are the last true birds, so fabulous, so — let's have a little hush here folks, avec some wispy fiddles, maestro Lombardo s'il vous plait — so

how zhall I

zay cheri, zo *mahnyfeek* — uh, yeah well as exPounded previously in my Discourse friends,

TIME WAS

everybody had our scintillating moves, as Danny Gallivan, a prince of a guy and a personal friend of mine, would say, undt zey ver making mit der mitternachtsnack undt der hippetyhoppen all der

time like what I'm saying here's essentially caDENza city man,
arpeggioso mio before you could say care for a cuppa cola you'd be
doing this dissolve into another slim exquisite *je ne sais quoi*, tovarich
you were life of the party like this non-neglected negligée where
everywhere was eros, truth was tinsel, etcetera uber alles—

OK so far?

Enjoy the moment folks because that old devil minor key comes
creeping in at this point, thank you maestro Lombardo, hey he's
some kinda guy, right folks? London's own and one of the first to
translate jello instant pudding into music, bet you're surprised to
hear the Royal Canadians *do* minor keys like catching a Mountie
bugging the Ploughshares offices or scratching his nuts in front of the
parliament buildings, hey never mind, just listen to it sidle through
the atmosphere like the fine whine from an IBM 5000, OK, so

How Come You're So Dull

is basically the title of this chapter of the treatise,
folks: Answer, because, amigo, you wanted to be one

(1)

one

item with a single sun (the most obvious, least subtle sun) blabbing
away inside you early to bed early to rise you got yourself enamoured
of the sentence snip snap/ ABCDEFGH I'm switching to another
channel here, Sesame Street fans, just imagine you've wandered
through Wanda the Wicked Witch, through Yuck to the big Zero,
which is where you wind up everytime, typing: the quick brown fox
jumped over the lazy dog, the quick brown fox jumped over the lazy
dog encore, capito? sure you do—encore was a lazy dog, but man
you were one smart sapiens we gotta hand it to ya grabbed that syntax,
owned it, wore it like a fucking necklace, right? Encore yapping
round you, begging for a milk bone.

So where we at, mon? There's you and your
satellites, singing the hearty anthems of yourselves smiling like a
coke commercial, here's us slipping through the noose, still
wearing the entire night sky speckled blue black purple
drunk on its deep unthinkable
spaces we compose and decompose in manyness;

the wombed

curvaceous lynxes zonk the piqued and jaded goldfinch,
joking zebras film the vapid ox-eyed cows, cheri, we are
the first surrealists, so witty, so
(how zhall I zay)

illicit we
improvise upon your dull routines and everywhere
outfox your fucking foxes.

III

Children of the Night Sky

When Night Sky felt constellations organizing like unions, claiming bear, chariot and archer from his free undifferentiated space, he knew he would need an operative working secretly behind the lines. Plucking pieces of himself he fashioned the first starling, filling it with flux for maximum adaptability. We'll beat them at their own game, kid, he whispered.

But of course the starling,
still voiceless, couldn't answer. Hmmm. Night Sky knew a voice could be his spy's achilles heel, the first phrase in seduction. Still, his starling could hardly manage in the ordered world without one. So he took the deep rich echo of his emptiness, packed it like a snowball and planted it inside the starling's chest. Then he took a shaft of starlight, drove it through the throat. Now every time the starling tries to sing itself, its voice punctures on the silver nail and splatters like light through a prism or water through a garden sprinkler.

Which is why,
if you catch a starling, pry open its beak, and reaching down its throat with a pair of needle-nosed pliers, extract the silver nail

epics will implode into their
spaces with a hush like babies breathing

and you will
learn something about nothing.

DRINKING LAKE SUPERIOR

Come on foot
and from far off,
carrying your pack of what
is necessary, falling
with the shield in drastic waves of rock, ridge by
ridge down the valley of a stream or fault until
your thirst is its desire, sung
cut from morning by White-throated sparrows.
As you walk, rehearse
your dealings with the elements:

have you made a poem out of wind, or drawn
gods on the rock in rock's red ochre?
Can you fly?
Have you been buried (however briefly)
or on fire?

By the time you reach this beach you should be
something of a fool,
idling the shoreline where the rock is ground and
polished into jewels by this
overdose of clarity.
Drink.

Blood bone flesh weather water make
a man.

FINDING SILENCE

may not be easy
as it sounds.

It doesn't. Some
border crossing must be happened on, must
happen. Once, the watcher,
following a many-breasted warbler into spruce
was pierced with sudden focus as the raindrops, poised
on needles, glanced,
sharpening light.

Not as eyes

but lenses of remote
surveillance. Closed circuit T.V., possibly
the sky's, he couldn't say. He paused
like this:

A Saw-whet owl caught in your headlights, all
vowel.

Who can afford such recognition?

Once our thinking was another species.

Once our minds, lithe with risk and mystery, once we were
watched as warblers, not as terrorists,
are watched.

MIDNIGHT DIP

Whose dumb idea was this
anyhow? Silently
the chill air purges content and establishes
its interrogative. This is going to be
more dangerous than we supposed, wrapped
in our living room of beer and friendly conversation.

Moonlight
sheds itself along the path, madly
abandoned underwear.

What essences await us in the lake,
that lived inside our talk as easily
as bath and wash, now
sharpening to something like the afterlife of music moving in an
arc beyond the reaches of its melody?

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Act 13. Tinkerbelle is dead, a crumpled kleenex by the sofa. Lost boys and girls are playing indians and pirates in the rec room, brandishing their edges, really bleeding. Fluorescent lighting. Each totes a pack oozing the PCBs of his and her sad histories, a sort of Germany.

Back in Act 12, voice put down its animals and has taken up the telephone, paring down to buzz whine click.

I'm not home right now.

So what? I got your number

into which

you will reduce, or else:

the original recorded message, something muttering for chrissake

let there by dark.