

Stephen Cushman

Austromantic

Weathercock, windsock,
One wet finger in the air,
As though direction mattered much
And wind meant nothing more
Than rain today, sun tomorrow;
As though to know the wind
By where it comes from
Or the speed it blows would be to know
More than any pilot knows, any sailor,
Farmer, dog, and what is what they know
Of air in all its motions
Compared to knowing it by touch
Against the cheek or neck,
By exhalations in the ear
Or ways it plays through someone's hair?

Semele

Come to me as you come to her.
Poor girl, pregnant and in the heat
of wanting to know her lover a god,

wheedles from him the promised favor
that can only mean the end of her
seismic skin and resonant lips.

Come to me as you come to her,
queen of heaven with studded sceptre
unable to conceive and fixed

on seeing this fertile rival
across the Styx into total blackness
where he will never hope to follow,

having come as she insisted
in the fullness of a fire
no human can withstand and overwhelmed

her hummingbird heart, its seizure
complete before the coupling
cremated her, still warm, and left him

alone to carry their issue,
holy and intoxicating offspring,
sewn up close inside him.

June

You probably thought it enough to be
the lightest month of the year
and wear your solstice like a sign

of royalty, a diadem of early dawns,
games outside or aimless strolls
after dinner, children tucked in

before rooms go dark. You've always been
the most desired (you know it's true)
by pupils and teachers, and I suppose

all that yearning goes to your head
with the annual fuss made over you
by brides and grooms, named as you are

for the goddess of marriage.

But now don't you see
not everybody likes you, whether it be
the allergy-wracked, for whom you're misery,

the farmer or gardener who seethes
under drought, or the introverted night owl
your thoughtless radiance has trespassed against.

As for brides and grooms, it depends,
I guess, on how much a marriage,
with each anniversary, takes after Juno's,

which one should celebrate in songs
that rhyme you not with *tune* or *moon*
but with *lampoon*, *typhoon*, *spittoon*.

White Rainbow

A trick
Of heavy fog
Blanketing our hollow
While from blue sky above a ridge
The sun

Glosses
Floating droplets
That somehow glow and bend
The light in one translucent arc
Like this.

You are
At the center
Of each rainbow you see,
Says my encyclopedia.
Uh-o.

A ghost,
An albino,
No prismatic spectrum:
What kind of covenant is that?
Soothe me

Again;
Say the center
Hasn't lost all color;
Say, We're richer unrefracted,
Aren't we?

Stephen Cushman

Pyromantic

Blue-tipped kitchen match,
Teach me how to strike
Anywhere and flare beyond
The reach of children, teach me
How to burn without burning
Up or down or out.

My Sister's Watch

keeps its own sweet time,
quarter to lilac, half-past apple tree,
sugar maple sharp, and makes time fly
now like a heron, Great Blue, loping
with folded neck and trailing legs, now
like a fish hawk already rising
from the talon-punctured sea. Waterproof,
yes, or at least enough to shed any tears,
while at night its dial, aglow in green,
presses a luminous face to hers.
Three sweeping hands patrol her cheek.
What makes them tick, the hidden works
behind the crystal, scored and cracked
by spills she's taken on foggy rocks?
Not much mystery for an average watchmaker.
What about her, though, the one who wears it
to keep appointments she's always making?
What about someone unspoken, disguised,
with whom she's secretly synchronized?

