

Rhapsody at the End of Human Language

My old phone, hooked up, transferring
its data to my newly purchased phone
through some impossible intermediary
data-share device: in the future

this will be “sexual intercourse,” this
will be “job” and “government oversight.”
When I see the future coming toward me, *zoom*,
it isn’t coming toward me,

it’s here. And even that idea, that new idea,
is already old. If I’m correct in this, then everything’s a cliché
as soon as it’s uttered—and saying that serves

as its own example. Which is to say . . .
if time is actually a construct in our minds, it’s now
a different time than ever
and our minds are different minds.

In fact, if time is known
by linear and progressive change,
there isn’t time any more,
just simultaneity . . . as in

This bird ~~was~~
is

—as soon as “happen” occurs, it’s reoccurred
into its next tense. So this poem is both
the end of human language *and*
a traditional lyric poem. In the latter,

that bird from six lines up
is a brooch, a scarlet brooch, on the velvet
deep green breast of the forest.
(That's the way we'd say it ~~then~~

now.) The sun confirms its constant presence
at the tip of an inhuman-scale distance
by the slats of light the rustling
forest canopy admits into the otherwise

consistent gloom of this afternoon
in this forest near the snow line.
Enter the bird, so quick, so blur-quick,
it reminds me of when Robert Bly ~~wrote~~ writes

*We are the sparrow that flies through the warrior's
Hall and back out into the falling snow.*
and this image of evanescence
is so beautiful, so beautiful

that I want to cry out, "Bird,
thou art a churning of the air
as if you could thicken it
into something richer. Stay a while,

be not so ready to flicker and disappear!"
—the way that it was spoken,
without self-consciousness, without irony,
once upon a time when there was time.

My Friend Dayvon, a Flying Saucer Enthusiast (Read: “Nut”),

is googling “ufology,” you know, the study
of “unidentified flying objects,” but
—his finger’s too-quick tap—“urology” pops up.
Although I’ve only experienced one of the two
(my urine still reveals a ghostly blush
of blood sometimes, a brief reminder of the surgical
reduction of my prostate that thankfully
saved my life) I understand how –ologies
blend or overlap confusingly: moreso now,
in a googleverse, than ever. In an early letter,
writing of dawn, when he normally worked, the poet
James Wright observed, “There is something uncluttered
about the air at that time of day,” and I think we all
have a sense of how used the air can come to feel,

entering our lungs after having dragged across
the –ology of torture (someone staring with her one eye
at the other eye, on the dirt floor, gelid, beginning to lose
its spherical definition by now) and the –ology of carnival
on the fireworks, snake-dance, booty-beat streets
of Rio . . . maybe it’s this one woman accentuating
her already mucho hypnotico eyes
with butterflies of sparkle paint that has me
flipping back and forth confusedly between
those two completely unlike domains and the breaths
of their participants. You know: the way they always say
in science magazines that any breath you take may hold
a remnant molecule of Jesus, Elvis, Cleopatra, the zither-playing
busker on the corner, that dog you buried in 7th grade . . . they

mix and remix in your pulmonary welcoming
of oxygen, they jockey for attention in your mind. If
one night Jesus zithers “Blue Suede Shoes” and “Hound Dog”
in your dreams, it’s understandable enough. I even think
it’s understandable that one day I was floated
into a lit arena, on my back, surrounded by alien beings
in robes and masks, and another mask was set
on my face, and then their alien probe-things
entered my body, their incomprehensible science
entered my body, in an otherworldly wedding of hurt and healing.
I remember that I tried to be brave, whatever
this -ology was. I tried to be strong and not break.
“The branch will not break,” as James Wright wrote.
I might have inhaled at atom of him.

This Age of Terror

In Borough High Street, south London,
on April 21, 2016, the local police responded
to a call about a “suspicious package”
left at a bus stop. Such, after all,
are the times in which we live. It could be
any person attempting to board the plane,
it could be any ordinary bunged-up piece
of Wal-Mart luggage. What if the woman positioned
to smilingly high-five the first of the marathoners
breasting the line has a wired palm
and doesn’t mind dying herself? Such are
the times, and their stories. In Italy,
in the city of Modena, the local police
were called about a rubbish bin

suspiciously buzzing, and the bomb squad
set up a 200-meter cordon and went about
its gingerly business for three fraught hours.
It’s tempting to wax imaginative—“the sky
above that bus stop was a school of fish-bone clouds,
to which the setting sun provided a lush
and appropriate salmon color”; while “the sky
above that rubbish bin was as clear (the Italian
saying goes) as a baby’s initial tear, as clear
as a glass of white wine made from grapes
(the saying goes) pressed only by toes of virgins.”
Tempting: “the onlookers milled about like a battery
building up voltage,” etc. But no: these need to be
factual in the telling, so that

their final moments also follow through as true. Because
it’s increasingly difficult—it *is*, for all of us—to know how

to maneuver through the overwhelming facts out there,
or pseudo-facts, or cyber-altered “news.”

The bomb-smoke footage of invasion: do we panic, or do
we roll our cynical eyes? When is our gauged reaction
adequate, and when is it a mismatch? When they
tell her—all too suddenly, there in the clinical
iceberg light of a hospital hallway—that her mommy is dead,
what squeaks out from her seven-year-old’s body is
a titter, is that first attempt to dial across the wavelengths
for a fit. In movie audiences, too:
the default titter, when the poignancy onscreen is too
enormous and naked. So this, I see, has become a poem

that considers our misplaced responses to cues,
even as it’s about assumptions and objects
that are also misplaced. The sandwich in the brown bag,
for example, that released a misty spray of egg and pesto
all over the nearby first-floor windows, when
police in Borough High Street necessarily conducted
a controlled explosion. Sometimes it *isn’t*
a bomb. Sometimes this age of terror skews
our expectations out of reality. In Modena, they discovered
at last that the sinister buzzing under the rubbish
came from a tossed-in vibrator. We can guess
at the hearty duration of the onlookers’ spasms of laughter.
And it’s tempting, of course, to join them in that;
as if this were a funny poem.

Deep Down

I have said, and intend to say, nothing of the hideous business of the Six Snowmen, and the unspeakable end which threatened Ursula Trelawney.

Cay Van Ash

Okay, let's count 'em up. There's 1)
a small-time pimp with big-ass dreams;
2) an undercover op [as opposed to the undercover cop
he sometimes sleeps with]; 3) the newbie dancer
at Titters; 4) the nurse in the refugee camp,
in a never-ending pinwheel of sweat flies; 5)
the undercover cop; 6) the top-floor CEO of the very
important multinational petro-corporation that . . .
what *does* it do, exactly, and does even the embedded
exposé reporter have an inkling?; 7)
the single mother with her two jobs, one of which
I can't reveal; 8) the exposé reporter. But
I see now that my numbered list misled you
into believing there are eight people. No,

there are four; but each is two of the list, and some
are even more than that, although we'll never know just
who and which, no more than the one-sixteenth-of-an-inch
of a knife-tip broken off in the body of one of these people
—carried (dull and inert and inoperable, a bad dream
with a mineral weight) in a deep-down muscle—
will ever lead back to the knife itself, or the forge
of its birth, or the story of the attack, which is,
by now, not even a hinted-at glint on the bottom
of a lake of changing seasons, screening weeds, and too much
intervening time. No more than anybody's—yours too—
2.5% Neanderthal genome is going to declare a visible,
you-could-point-your-finger-at-it presence: but it's there,
deep down, in the species bud. The National Security Agency

(Fort Meade, Maryland: *sssh*) “each year
obliviates one hundred million supersecret documents”
[I think I’ll repeat that figure: *One Hundred Million* a year]
—these papers are driven at sixty m.p.h.
through turbine “suck pipes,” are converted by a hydro-pulper
to “grayish slurry,” and then are sold for their reconversion
as pizza boxes, egg cartons, grocery bags: the tales
that may have toppled governments (or rescued them) are blotting
lipstick, swiping clean a dipstick, are as unknown
an unknown as the year in a cult for one of the eight
(who are four). And I’ll tell you one has jail tats, but
inked where only one of the other four will ever see them
and excite them with the drag of a hungry tongue. As for that year
in the cult: one night, a dozen couples in an octopussish,

orgiastic writhing in the “Meditation Pool”; another
night, the damp “Interrogation Cellar,” there
without food or a light, although the rats saw perfectly well.
How *could* that astonishing history ever be erased! And
yet, it’s erased. The eight (who are four) are here
at a party; its raucous surface is dizzily busy
enough without the past. “Hey everybody, look!”—the trick
with the shotglass and the egg. The standard acoustic
wrestling: country, rap, in alternating strangleholds.
Some arguing. Some flirting, maybe serious, maybe
just to stay in shape. Hot Slicez delivers: pepperoni.
The paper towels below the greasy heap of onion rings.
The pizza box, that once was the story of Ursula
Trelawney, six imposing “snowmen,” and . . . other things.