

D.E. STEWARD

*Maig*

Thirty-one pintails, a few mallards, and more than a hundred Canada geese were in a shallow slough in winter-saturated cornfield stubble, at the 1994 vernal equinox

By summer 1996, the old cornfield was a patch of vinyl-sided condo-land, the slough's depression an asphalt parking lot

By spring 1999, the condos had a few asphalt roof shingles peeled back, trash, plastic toys and a dropped transmission on the grass, big dumpsters, two cars down on their rims in the oil-spotted crowded parking lot

At that 1994 spring equinox, a full moon along with Jupiter and Venus was in the western sky, that the pintails no doubt registered as they flew off the corn stubble slough to nest on the St. Lawrence or beyond

In the vast North American sky, ducks fly rapidly and hard, raptors soar and glide on the thermals, the passerines fly steadily and sometimes in graceful catenaries

In between, over, from

Through the great sea of sky

"The great fresh, unblighted, unredeemed wilderness"

Over awesome distances, all the way over Montana to Hudson Bay, over the roads that trace the canyons and slice the taiga, the rivers, their valleys and plains

Lifting knife-blade platform of roaring, blinking lights in the early dawn leaving us here excited at watching

At first light down I-84 toward Hartford from the Mass Pike, *Alces alces*, an adult bull moose, grazing in a bog two hundred yards off the interstate in Toland County

Like the vividness of the Cardinal's red in Georges de La Tour's *St. Jerome Reading*

Elgar's Ninth Enigma Variation and the silence of English remembrance from 1899, theme music for spinning out the following century

Elgar's solitary island

Starch blue is smalt

Woad, the blue of the Druids, is dark, slightly paler than Marine Corps blue, paler than Japan blue, and redder and duller than Peking blue

Elgar's ethnic pull for the British is as Glazunov or Borodin for Russians

Chinese blue matches Prussian blue

And mountain blue is mineral blue, or azurite blue

Morgantina, a Greek city on the plain east of Catania in Sicily, lay near an archaic settlement from three thousand years ago, abandoned in 459 BC

In the Far West of the Hellenistic world

Its raddled wattle enclosures

A long house with foundations cut into rock

Weaving loom weights in use before the arrival of the Greeks

Lives were lived in tattooed, barefoot, heads-back, loose-haired ways

Wondrous innocence in those pre-classical cities

Siculi culture also flourished before the Greeks came to eastern Sicily

Ridge pole cover tiles

Although Siculi was written with the Greek alphabet by 600 BC, you tell a Sicul town from a Greek town by the alpha, the Siculi alpha looks like an arrowhead

Poetry begins with the word, fiction with the event

The first-century mummy portrait of Demos in the Egyptian Museum has her—she who sits across the table—serious look exactly, the spin of two thousand years of Nile Valley genes

Understanding the seminal distinction between biocentric and anthropocentric, she is declaring for the former

*Vande Mataram* is India's national hymn

In giant Indonesia, two imperialisms, European and Islamic, have clashed for centuries, badly blurring Buddhist-Hindu traditions, that now endure mostly only on Lombok and Bali

In the decade of Yugoslav wars, more than a quarter million were killed, another two million uprooted

He wore an Albanian *qeleshe* everywhere between his Upper West Side apartment and his office at Columbia until the Serbian army and police left Pristina, was often hooted at, called a conehead

Huge taro leaves are the main fodder in the research station's tortoise pens at Academy Bay in the Galápagos

*Mansedumbre*

Obviously, African lions, who hunt by smell, are much more successful when they approach prey upwind, still they never learn to avoid downwind stalks

Dander in the American sense apparently has a Spanish derivation, or it could come from Scottish as in get lost, take a walk

Skarl, skinned cormorant, that island Scots claim only tastes fishy when you eat the heart

The virtually sadistic awfulness of much Scottish food

Haggis, like eating sheep offal

Vile Scottish food, English perfidy, Irish spite

Tokens of the obdurate *patrias chicas* across the world

The death of a brother haunts deeper into a future, that with all his acute native savvy he had no inkling of

His radical idealism and conviction of his own superiority blindsided him into pompous grandiosity and an inability to see the gap between his ever more delusionary ideas and reality

Quixotic in the extreme of not caring anymore at all

And he died very hard, and in denial of almost everything he'd been.  
So he died alone

Looking out on the hopeless, barren gravel on the flat roof just outside his hospital room

Lives as macaronic texts, the laughable absurdities and desperate ironies

Jules Michelet's poetic books, *L'Oiseau* (1856), *La Mer* (1861) and *La Montagne* (1868), are visionary salvos, following his seminal *Histoire de France*, in his relentless campaign against the Jesuits and obscurantism

"My recipe for happiness: take something away from someone, give it back to them again"

Maxine Hong Kingston's house was burned out in the Oakland fire of 1992

She has remarked that neither she nor her husband were able to concentrate enough to even read for six months afterward

She is *une ambiencière*

The longest living newspapers in the U.S. are Chinese

In mathematics all must be explained, and to do so is taxing, tiring, draining

Of Lisbon's population in 1550 of a hundred thousand, at least ten percent were Congo Basin slaves

For a while the Atlantic world's culture found unity in slavery, Brazil to Nantucket to Liverpool and Cádiz

Rachmaninov's *Isle of the Dead*

Lox with cream cheese and pepper, rye toast or a bagel

Old glory blue is a moderate purplish blue that's redder and stronger than marine blue, duller than cornflower, and redder and darker than gentian blue

A common nighthawk tips out grandly over the strip mall's movie-set façade but in the parking lot no one is looking up

*Sampling credits go to John Muir and Hugo Williams.*