Crow

black dot black dots, spotting
pebbles dislodged from the macadam
running the other way
hands in front of my face
to protect from Corvid onslaught
I know they know me
recognize me
have done one of their members ill
something with a hose, I think
a harsh onslaught of water
the fierce stream hissing like bullets from a gun
and this is the repayment
as I return home from laser eye surgery
corvus cunning
they can master tools
what have I left out in my back yard?
not the hoe, oh, not the shovel!
the nozzle grows wings
a sudden sweep out of the corner of the eye
a flock of “m” birds

crows? an elongated wing span
as if in the drawing of a child

I think of Ted Hughes’ *Crow* poems
is this “Crow Tyrannosaurus”?
primeval, it wants to become more and bigger
hulklurking into recognition?

is this “A Disaster”?
the spreading oozing lamprey body
vindictiveness cleverness
streaking through the retina
a close-up of all black
black as purity
black as death
what omen?
crow, perhaps raven
a large wing
a midnight winging of crows
sheeting down
crow, trickster god

not a murder but an ague
a plague of crows

or

sweet cease
a restful primed gesso black canvas
ready so ready
awaiting the light

not just the *Crow* poems after all
a conjurer’s trick
behind the ear
coming from the back of my brain
opposite movement of “The Thought Fox”
violently malevolently
the eye eye eye becomes
its own hot dark panting muse
Francis Bacon’s
*Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*

triptych
elongated necks and limbs
having eaten and drunk too much
like a perverted Alice
X-rated Tenniel pieces
disembodied
not one has eyes
one is blindfolded
what’s beneath?

bend sinister synecdoche
piece of tail
tail of piece
misogynist, misanthrope
equal opportunity hater
nihilist existential gloom
blindness

for protection?
can’t see the horror?
or is it punishment itself?
the sightlessness
a crucifixion

rows of teeth and open mouths
where the eyes should be

the frantic malevolent teeth of his screaming popes
as if the world is something to be consumed
and voraciously
predator predator
ingress egress
impacted wisdom tooth
wicked incisor
uvula trembling like a constricted eye
clarion calling all
down the fanged esophageal tunnel
Alice forever falling
dark constricting dark
to the beguiling ranks of blood-leached blindness
all fall
The Blind Birdwatcher

he trolls woods parks meadows
for a startle of song

each unseen colour
everald magenta sunrise yellow
their sibilant plumage
the lemon pucker of flight

the brain’s neurons fire
along the slow tunnel of the dormant optic nerve
like water buckets hand to hand
a frisson of sound

bird song he sees
and vividly in the mind’s eye
birding by ear

stumbles over roots for a nuthatch
a pileated woodpecker
feels the cadence of a hummingbird’s quick wings

several feeders in his backyard
well away from threatening windows
peels three bananas
smells their sticky sweetness in the feeder
hears the tortured wings of fruit flies
who cannot believe their luck
the soft swish of their wings
even softer than the hummingbirds’
protein in their feeding on the fruit flies
bloats with sweet and savoury submission
higher in the food chain
small and smaller still
buys unshelled peanuts by the kilo
the taste of peanut on his tongue
makes specialty blends of suet and feed

marvel:
Black-Capped Chickadee
Sharp-Shinned Hawk
Double-Crested Cormorant
even the names are musical

so ordinary but still his favourite
a Steller’s jay
a cunning thief
punked out bird
electric blue
with a black Mohawk
beak bulging
its nut-brown proboscis
cartoon of the thieved nut
sports a Mick Jagger swagger
sound, a frayed amplifier on fry
the blind bird watcher flaunts a similar haircut

he feels the birds’ footprints on the railing
after the bird bath
steps so close
he gets feathered in the spray

their sounds like tiddly winks caught up
in his eye’s cup

birds can’t taste the hot pepper in purchased feed
no such sense receptors
squirrels can, repellant
just rats with pretty tails, dirty
at Maplewood Mudflats
he snacks on the pellets
believes you are what you eat
wincing at the searing pain
has not yet become bird himself

he can feel the murder of crows blotting out the sky
an eclipse he senses in his body
the thwack as the bird hits
the Nature House’s window
eerie silence heightens
the elegiac wailing choir of its compatriots
stumbling, he toes the small corpse
the dead bird like a sandbag with tied-on feet

the body in his knapsack
along with his wax-papered sandwich
far too busy to eat
a dignified burial later in his backyard
garden trowel and a flower bulb on top for new life

dawn chorus
evening chorus
the parentheses of his day
so full of

now, at the bird sanctuary
on the white board
he traces the magic-marker letters
of the birds sighted that month
grins at the pun
and hears each song
the letters thrum to life, leaping, rustling, flapping

though he prefers to birdwatch alone
sometimes he goes with his sighted friend
—he hears more; his partner sees more—
it’s like an equation or a musical composition
birdwatching sharpens the mind
good for the body, the soul

he watches birds with his heart and brain
also his ears and tongue
fingers nostrils
even his penis though it’s not perverse
much less perverted
an involuntary stiffening
like a wet dream
when a song always beautiful
is more than usually so
a thrum
a recognition of wonder
of small beauty almost divine
some might cry

the Organization of Blind Bird Watchers
he is head of his chapter
the paperwork pains him
but he is conscientious, passionate
this, too, part of his life list

there are deaf bird watchers, too
he is going to meet the local branch now
When they go out after for coffee
their fingers will move like the flights of small birds
and he will listen to the faint slaps and thwacks
smile at the sounds
as identifiable
as arresting
as any unsung songbird’s
Don’t Bend Over

the old joke about the soap in the shower
but I’m not allowed to shower anyhow
no shampoo for three days
smell like chicken manure
dream of Herbal Essence
the green fields, misty meadowy
Vaseline on the lens

I unpack Easter decorations
look straight ahead
box on table
do squats to chin level
let the packing paper fall to the floor
don’t look down!
don’t want my new implant to slip out
hold bunnies and eggs and egg cups in front of me to see
the peachy artificial grass of the coops so cute

eggs the same shape as illustrations of a myopic eyeball
dotted lines show where the shafts of light meet
in front of the retina
no longer orb but as elliptical as an egg
representational, but still

eye cups for washing
—a teeny bird bath!
such delighted splashing
with its miniature wings
though right now I can have none of that
as gritty as my eye feels—
and egg cups so similar
though mine are less utilitarian, prettier,
al floral curvature and spring-like colours
one falls on the floor
if I aim just right
I could have a hole in one!
don’t think on that!
look up! look up!

it’s the season of rebirth
not all grass is pink and plastic
what visions will hatch from my new eye?
a small cheep
the rustle of fissured ice, out of season
the sound of squawking
fierce enragement
my eye cracks open

ugly duckling
beautiful swan
rooster caruncle
gizzard
avian flu viruses
the floor beneath me cackles to life
pecks at my ankles
a feathery fleshy swish
I’m too afraid to look down
Dornen

raindrops in triplicate
political imbrolio
my simple Courier font has become Gothic
letters like an unset jelly

reading writing both lost in translation

thorns reflections silhouette shadows
all at once
Hazard a guess
translation is everywhere
even in my muttersprache!

In *The Bell Jar* when Esther went crazy
she couldn’t read
letters grew “barbs and rams’ horns”
Rams Horner Widerhaken
but James Joyce is always impenetrable
and German a rusty chain link fence Kudzu tall
barbed wire above

Maybe it’s not in my eyes
but in my head?
Stacheldraht?

Plath honeymooned in Benidorm
Did Joyce ever visit Santorini?
I can’t read what Google claims

Sporting antlers like elk
surly mountain goats
walk on black lava cliffs
far above me
in the swirling eddies
or are they pack ponies with tie-on antlers?
intractable bleating
cheating? deleting?

I flail and flounder
they mock me
as I wait and wait some more
warten ausbrechen
for my volcano to erupt
Fun and Games

makeshift
plump chair as for chemo drips
warehouse for abandoned furniture
desk cornea-curved

desks

this waiting room needs more than
a re-face to bring it up to speed
Renovate!

Let’s rock and roll, the O. R. nurse says
squeezing eye drop after eye drop
*there’s a party hat in your lap when ready*
ready for what?
I think of conical paper hats
bright Crayola colours
kiddy birthdays
presents desired and unwanted
New Year’s Eve celebrations
inebriation, pursuit and capture
midnight kisses
eyes wide open

it’s all good fun and games until someone cries

but it looks more like a shower cap
to keep out the reno’s dust
maybe it’s happening earlier than I think
the sedative is taking effect
whewee!
a buzz saw in the background?
or is that a chop saw?
can’t shower or shampoo for three days
no water in the eye
surely the tears won’t be that big
this is all my protection?

it’s all fun and games until someone loses an eye

dimly, a parade of Stepford patients post-surgery shuffle
careful not to look down
leis that look like nooses
a conga line of party hats, noisemakers, blowouts
only the O. R. nurses and doctors kick extra high
their laughter balloons up and up
suspended, a hush, an intake of breath

suddenly the ball drops
the door slides shut on the lingering patient
last in the line
it darkens
serpentine streamers
siren song
an abandoned lei, not mine?

Ready or not, here I come

fuck, it’s all fun and games until someone dies
What’s Left

myopic child
so close to the chalkboard she might have been velcroed
white on black so hard to see
but see and read and write and do she must

coke-bottle glasses and then contacts

years pass
she looks
intently
wilfully
longingly
hopefully
at the world, at its wonders
throws herself into dance, hiking, birdwatching
leaps into marriage, into parenthood

then ALS entombs her
a slow weakening, melting

now the only muscles left are in her eyes
she looks at letters on the board
spells out

i

love

u
Bindi

before follow-up laser surgery
a stick-on yellow plastic dot on one cheek
to make clear
at which eye the surgeon should
aim his laser ray
blasting the monsters of scar tissue
so that there won’t be a never event
a video game, low art

the lone dot like slippage
an out-of-place bindi
a fallen coloured tear
a faltering third eye
displaced
chakra not sure where to go
oscillating aura
mysticism on the move

around the periphery of the eye clinic
in a slow-moving meditative trance
we walk
marked, dilated, we of the pineal eyes
waiting waiting for the surgeon god
whose hand and word are wisdom
what will spill into our too-open pupils?
enter our torpid brains?

we are a tribe set apart from normal routine
the quotidian is beyond these walls
though it seems as if we have been here forever
so long that we’ll need to get another
referral from our family doctors
or a walk-in clinic for this appointment
ritual, repetition
perception, hubris, injustice
the eye clinic now a special satellite of the VAG
we will soon become a new Bharti Kher performance art piece
our affliction high art
The Second Coming

to avoid marking
stacks of incomprehensible poetry analyses
sullied student logic like hieroglyphics
Yeats’ rough beast as a celebrity rocker
I’d joked about what a rough ride his Mary would have
as he slouched into the holy city

I’ll get some cleaning done
floors washed and waxed
pet hair sucked up
dishes dried and shelved
surfaces immaculate

now what?

in my absence
the paper piles have grown to a teetering height
so I mop myself into a corner of the bathroom
housework to bodywork

clean it up

what might be found in the hidden recesses of my body?
drug runners cross borders with drugs in rectums, vaginas
like so many Benwa balls but probably not as titillating

fornix fun fact,
this from a spectacularly weak student,
prostitutes used to ply their trade under the arches
of Ancient Rome
the question: fornicate in your vault or mine?

I try to turn myself inside out
but it’s a chore and a bore
the hand mirror a too-teeny speculum
not much bigger than a Q-tip
and no chance of hitting my G-spot
cakes of earwax plucked
look like floating candles wickless, witless
I really should be getting back to work
but what might be wrested from my nose with a finger?
circlets of gold?
the lost scrolls of Ancient Somebody-or-other?
maybe an essay that reveals Somesense?
(I should be so lucky)

while examining a wrinkle
I pull down my lower left eyelid
some woman had 27 contact lenses hidden in hers
not urban myth—
I’ve seen the pictures!

wrinkled dingbat, her deep-set eyes
like treasure chests
pirate fortune
17 lenses, 17!
becoming a thin pearl
mucous shielding the irritant, its shimmer coating
a gem, a halo

I’m vigilant about good lens hygiene
but what the hell
I excavate my left fornix … and find
—I’m as surprised as anyone when out fall—
two turtle doves
four calling birds
and a partridge resembling a falcon
in a desiccated all too-familiar pear tree
which scratches and burns a little
as it exits
I have to back away from the sink
the bathroom is crowded!
all those wretched birds in the Jacuzzi tub
too loud for a solitary Tuesday afternoon
Christmas yet months away
so this cache is from last year?

if this is the secular, where’s the sacred?
will frankincense, magi, and a baby Jesus
plummet from the right eye?
That rocking cradle will have awfully pointy corners

Well, I’d rather leave something for tomorrow
wait on the advent
everyone needs someone to love
something worthwhile to do and
something to look forward to

so I’ll put the cotton balls away
go back to my marking
surprisingly refreshed and weightless
if it weren’t for all the squawking
the gnashing of beaks
and the unsanitary, slippery
bird droppings
that I really should clean up

goose grease as lubricant
a fornix is as a fornix does
maybe the Immaculate Conception
was through not the ear but the eye?

suddenly the disturbing flutter of wings
how big is that bird?
oh, Geez, a ministering angel?
not the dawn of a new-fanged Gabriel
blethering about another Annunciation
Yeats clearly a little off
with the timing of “The Second Coming”

though I doubt it will do much good
—egress, ingress, don’t you know—
I step away from the sink
make an emergency rain hat of a small clutch of essays
double-lock the bathroom door
avert my eyes from the too-yielding expansive mirror
my face leonine, hooded

close my eyes tight tight
turn out the light
and pray
Intimates

at the eye doctor’s no stirrups and speculum
no probing pink canals and narrow cavities
no thin fishy leakage
but a deeper intimacy

she stares into my inner orbits
curvature of each retina
orbs’ hydrostatic equilibrium
back of my brain
a planetary pull
getting close to the soul
her Eckleburg eye looms
aperture

she commands
my eyeballs move as the hands of a clock
look to three o’clock
six o’clock
eleven o’clock
what time is it, Mr. Wolf?
oh, grandmother, what big eyes you have!
putting me through a long day
I’ve been in this chair forever
soon into the seasons
don’t want to lose an hour
will I see better if I gain one?
daylight savings time?
I struggle to remain stationary
compliant

for today’s children
analogue as ancient as Sanskrit
what does she bark to them?
I recall a Beverly Cleary story
mother tells Ramona to leave home
at quarter after eight
She knows a quarter is twenty-five cents
so she leaves at 8:25
doesn’t understand how she can be late for school
runs and runs but can’t catch up

sure don’t want that kind of miscommunication
when the cataract surgeon marks my eye
for implant placement
six o-clock, he says and marks below my iris
six? is that a.m. or p.m.?
time for a drink?
it’s cocktail hour somewhere

don’t fuck up
don’t want my eye to be a cinematographic photograph
no camera obscura for me
how obsolete is that?
no aqueous humour leaking through a pinhole
like a blown-out Easter egg
my vision like a Jeff Wall lightbox
do not desire to stand on my head to see everything
my life unfolding as a photo-conceptual performance piece

is Pluto even registered as a planet anymore?
things can change in the blink of an eye
don’t blink!
my eye jerks into readiness—fuck!
Springs back!
Fall forward!