

THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT A THUNDERBIRD

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One of the high priests of American poetry, Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) was – you might say – a loon. Like those nocturnal birds of dignified plumage that yodel insanely across ponds of a summer evening, Stevens was by day a drably gray-suited executive of the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company; by night, he wove orchidaceous lines of poetry, like “The lacquered loges huddled there / mumbled zay-zay and a-zay, a-zay.”

One can imagine the business letters Stevens might have composed if he hadn’t kept his polychromatic side quite so well closeted. (“Compatriot connoisseurs of the chaotic sublime! Do the leaves of evanescence whisper on your path? Does the German gondolier whisper ‘Get more coverage’? Sing to me, acrobatic polymorphs, ai-yi-yi, at 515-1234. Vertiginously yours, Etcetera.”)

One can imagine the minutes of weekly meetings at the company. (“August 5. No old business. By way of new business, Vice President Stevens went ‘*cou-cou-rou-cou*’ while caressing some chintz.”) One can imagine the array of novel policies Stevens might have offered, insuring the indemnified against the color turquoise or death by synecdoche when you fall into part of a hole).

One might imagine a Wallace Stevens born several generations after he was, under the sign of Pepsi, a French-symbolist esthete wearing a Speedo thong. One might imagine, as well, Stevens’ *oeuvre* – say, the familiar “Thirteen Ways Of Looking At A Blackbird” – reimagined to reflect his position as an American consumer.

I

*Among twenty snowy mountains
 The only moving thing
 Was the headlight
 Of the totally cool
 1955 Thunderbird.*

II

*I was of three minds
 Like a garage
 In which three Thunderbirds
 Are parked.*

III

*The sticker price
 Is nothing.
 The Thunderbird
 Is everything.*

IV

*A man is one.
 A woman is one.
 A man and a woman
 Having sex in a Thunderbird
 Are one.
 Unless they do it twice.
 Then they are three.
 Or maybe four.
 You do the arithmetic.*

V

*I do not know which to prefer,
 The beauty of innuendoes
 Or the genuine leather upholstery.*

VI

*A shadow on ice
Has an undecipherable cause.
A coughing sound under the hood
That
Could cost me bigtime.*

VII

*O thin men of Hartford,
Listen to that baby purr
And eat your hearts out.*

VIII

*I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms.
But I know, too,
That a babe loves a guy
With a Thunderbird.*

IX

*When a Thunderbird goes,
It really
Goes,
Man.*

X

*At the sight of a Thunderbird
Flying through a yellow light
The Dodge dealer
Lowers his prices.*

XI

*He rode over Connecticut
In an aqua Thunderbird.
Once, a fear nagged him,
That he had forgotten
His license and registration.*

XII

*It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
No chance
To take out the Thunderbird
For a spin,
Hélas.*

XIII

*The speedometer needle is moving.
The Thunderbird must be moving.
Or else I'm really drunk.*

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