

BRIAN BARTLETT

## A DREAM OF BLACK CLOTHES

On the blurred bus every woman is dressed in black  
from head to foot. Why are the streets, shops, and offices  
filled with single-minded fashion? Black coats  
over black dresses, above black shoes.

The enticements and mysteries of darkness  
fade into commonness; the cool, into cold.

Men's styles, no better—crows and ravens,  
not a bluebird or goldfinch among them.

Even in film noir I've sensed warm yellows  
and greens, but this day's cotton and wool  
insist on blankness without prisms. What was "pure"  
or "classic" diminishes into stinginess. I check  
strangers' feet for red shoes, their necks  
for scarves the colours of sunrises. Is every eye  
all pupil, irises pushed away? Have fashion designers  
around the world conspired against the spectrum?

The nightmare tilts and  
turns giddy as I cry, "Rainbows . . .

gardens . . .

photosynthesis!"

but when I awake, the bedroom walls' whiteness  
like an optometrist's blinding beam  
forces my eyes shut.

## A DREAM OF RATS AND SWALLOWS

A flurry of fur, whiskers, and tails  
races over mud and garbage, circling,  
circling, as if searching for the centre of a maze—  
    then, in a blink, the sewer-dwellers  
turn into swallows, the bare ground into sky  
bare but for the birds whose blues and greens  
echo sunlight, while a question  
flies into my head:

*Did these birds chase away  
those rodents or reveal the swallow nature in rats?*

Surfaced from the dream (not quite nightmare,  
with its shiny plumage, its agile soaring and  
veering): did the long-winged birds soon  
    speed up like kaleidoscope fragments  
and revert to the berserk mob  
(rats' nature tucked away in swallows)?

Through the following hours and days  
questions of whether the dream mistook  
*Rattus* for *Hirundo*, or vice versa,  
    lit up memory less  
than the speechless moment when fur  
transformed into feathers, and scrambling  
    into lightness and flight.