

Run-Over Squirrel

We stop not because he's dead, but because he's dead on
Vernon Street, where so little happens outside houses.
Because he's broken open—

scarlet, vermillion? Here we stand at the edge
of the visible spectrum, a man and a woman
out for a walk in the black pastures

of the murderous suburbs. The squirrel, an old-world
sacrifice, draws us out of our bodies, out
of our separate minds. It must

have just happened, given the chromatic
collision of beauty and violence. Arsenic,
the covert ingredient in fifteenth century

Venetian red. By the sixteenth the Aztecs'
cochineal, parasitic insect, crushed
the European dye market. Cabbalistic,

cryptic red, reserved for cardinals, princes, bankers,
courtesans. Translated through a Vernon Street
window: sun-shot shoulder, flash

of a satin strap. The squirrel's blood now a hit-
and-run red. I finger my
dangling ruby earring like a rosary.