

STEPHEN BURT

THE PEOPLE ON THE BUS

We have had our lives.
The reservoir visible
In the window beside our elbows, and the willow
Branches trailing at our stop
Are the nature we leave
Behind us gladly, since it has no place

For all we have recently learned: that sex
Is temporary, help
Ours to hand down now, and materials science
Not the only kind. We thank
Calm, careful Minerva, goddess
Of adults, who for so many years took us

To school: her voice the timbre of fretless bass,
Her eyes the color of pencil lead, she taught
Us how to behave in order to have our rewards
In twenty years. We have them, and if we wish
Too often, this fall, to have led another life
We do not mean that we would give up ours:

Though we stand in a row and sway
Before an obstructed view, we are able to find
Initials outlined in the crosshatched trees,
And pebbles—calculi—around our ponds
And cherish them; we like to watch the roads
Along which the perennial pollen sifts down

As finely as ever, making a soft powder
Of brass amid the troughs in softball fields.
Our skills are finally in demand.
If you mock us, Pan,
In whom we also believe, do it
As gently as you can.