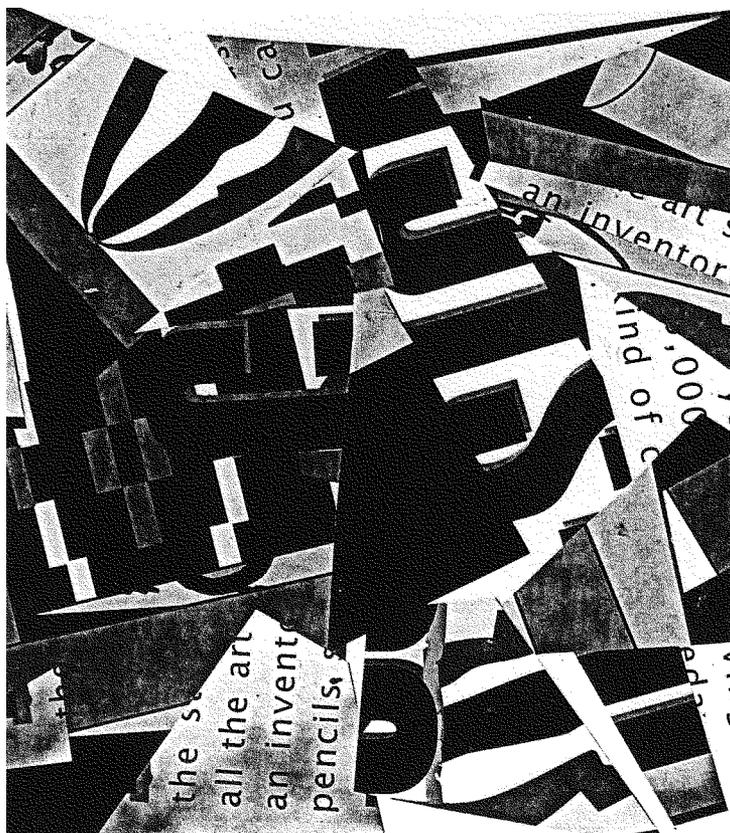


ALBATROSS



**“God save thee, ancient Mariner!
From the fiends that plague thee thus!—
Why lookst thou so?”—With my crossbow
I shot the ALBATROSS.**

ALBATROSS

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ALBATROSS

#12

Editor: Richard Smyth

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Things Eaten

A fractal line splits the Strait
blue green, turquoise

I break a warm cookie &
lick crumbs from my fingers

The In Flight magazine tells me gourmets
have an appetite for destruction

While I study the emergency evacuation chart
looking for typos and design errors

Afternoon brings a new commission:
The gulls and trees want me to work on a translation.

Songs for the Banyan

the wind frustrates itself held
in the thin leaves, sifted

through the tendril, rope-like
roots of the mighty banyan

with its stumps of elephant like feet,
tough grey skin, a tree that doesn't bend

against strong wind or storm
many survived Hurricane Andrew

in Coral Gables, they grow backwards
into the ground and sprout

more roots. How like exile
to leave such marks on those spots,

the places where life continues
to persist, in exile, the hand clutches

any dirt it can call its own.

Birch Tree Trilogy

I.

If you are tired
of the birch trees'
incessant conversation
you should go down the hill
hide indoors
watch every rerun
drink tea with aunts
uncles brothers and
all their shadows
fill the silence
with the babble
the birch trees
wouldn't listen to

II.

Caught in the stillness
of birches
I am held prisoner
until released by a flutter
of passing birds

III.

It is November
when the birch trees
take hold of me
white bark sketching
the thin cool air
slender bodies like silver dancers
caught in delicate poses
their leaning embrace offering
no explanations
a white ecstasy that came
with nakedness
unabashedly shining
in a sudden burst of sunlight
the conversations of branches
drowning out the faint crumbling
of leaves underfoot
their stark poems piercing the air
mysterious murmurings you want to hear
so much
you stand and wait,
forever, it seems,
to perceive bare
birch trees

Helen Drummond

Litany

This paper.
Clean.
Thin as unanswered
prayers.

This paper
from a missing tree
that laid its life down
to an axe.

This paper
lays its life down
to the point
of my pen.

The blade
of this paper.
So thin it cuts
my fingers.

These fingers,
a prayer
writing poems.
Benediction to trees.

Star Magnolia Leaf

At this moment I see
its separation from the stem,
gold falling toward decay.

Two crows fly overhead
as if to say
nothing has changed

Locust Blossoms

Today
in the city of squirrels and bumblebees,
down through the layers,

past the oriole,
past the grizzled bark of the sugarbush tree,
in a green, spongy corner,

where shadows ripple
the weed-rippled dirt, and micro-swarms of gnats
do their best to stay warm,

the locust blossoms are coming
to rest.
White, curled, & navigating

by their shape's relation to the air,
they drape
on the dead stalks,

on the hoof-matted grass, or string
like tossed clothes
on the spiders' happy trails,

& few are alone in gathering
on leaves; in fact,
hoedowns occurred on more than not—

ladybug, pollen sprong, flimsiest twig—
ten thousand milligrams
of lissome detritus, & more dropping

all the time, piling up
with each turn
of the land's good breathing.

Morning-glories

At noon I walk across the wooden bridge
that leads home, past the morning-glories

open for the day. At night they hang
like white grapes, pearls hidden within

a well-spring awaiting a jeweler.
Jelaluddin Rumi said the secrets

of the world come at sunrise.
At dawn I never see the sun

peel open their royal violet centers
the color stolen from Florida sunsets.

In the early slant of moonlight
I call the moths to the white petals

wait for their pollen visit
like drunks at a lamppost, sober

enough to discover the moment light begins.

Flight

It was a year before the first birds came.
Weaker, he watched them prepare, beaks
full of dried grass, gum wrappers and straw.
The time between trips became
the way he measured the days, the time
between nests, the way she understood
the time he had left. Death was a beginning
and migration was to tell him when to fly.

That last summer, he marvelled at the way
they lived their lives. Birds made a place
for themselves in awnings and steeples,
hollow trees and chimney flutes, ardent utilitarians.
The fine red bird house nailed to the tree
outside his window was more than enough.
He watched them call and flutter, flirt
and mate for show making a ceremony of it
as it was meant to be.

His wife brushed his hair.
She read to him and even though he didn't stir,
she knew the words reached him.
She remained beside him that last season
watching him go. In sleep, he turned
on his side and curled in on himself small
the way birds did, and like their feathered bodies
nested in circles of work, his mind constructed
and reconstructed what was lost in life
and what was found.
During a night like this, he woke
to the pale oval of her face; startled,
eyes round.

Early that spring the birds returned home.
The red paint mansion was faded.
The back wall was so rotted through
the whole house pulled off its nail, tearing a hole.
With a bird's eye, she peered inside
to understand how they lived
a life of losing all they had season after season.
In her hands a carcass; red paint, bird shit,
Doublemint wrappers, feathers, dirt and twigs.
The last years of his life became nothing
but light in her hands.

Cat's First Bird

Possum-lazy. Grey as soot. For years our household
Joke. Raised, a bumpkin Lazarus, by taps on certain tiny
Plates, or squeak of opening can. Irksome rub of mewling
Fur, till miffed, but humored still, we'd boot him out
Into the night. . . . How strange to find the delicate brown
Spines of shattered wings, rust head ripped loose, there
By the porch door in morning light. Perfect tiny beak
And lolling tongue clamped in the terrible grin of
Shock. Mangled thrush we'd felt beside us, briefly spied,
Proof to us, perhaps himself, droll foolish one we
Pamper, then punt out into the night. Warm moist wind
an omen, insects shrill. He'd left the life we'd given
Him. To stalk among our flowerbeds. To kill.

And glue each feather closer
though when you pull back a deep breath
a nest shrieks —this makeshift arrow

clawing your fingers open for lift off
—you aim dead center and the sun
slowly the way a lid already covers one eye

while the other pinpoints the deluge
—carefully, you open the bow
into umpteen zillion years still smelling

from salt and lift off
—you will blame
the sky should be bigger

but who you going to believe, me
or these feathers falling off
as if they wanted to spread lower

shake from the sea floor
the sun overflowing with sea gulls
pouring out its darkness and oceans.

Lovak

Népek, viharok
maga as idő is
lovon járt egykor.

Vágtató lovak hátáról
szállnak föl
a szuperszonikus gépek is:

a beton kifutók szélén a fű
úgy logog, mint a lovak
sörénye.

Horses

Humanity and storms,
even time itself,
used to ride on horseback.

It is from the backs of
galloping horses that
supersonic planes take off:

at the edge of the runway
the leaves of grass flutter like
the mane of a leaping horse.

(translated by Paul Sohar)

Any One They Never Forget

Shouldn't we be like
Elephants and whales
Who fret when
Any, any one of them is suffering,
Who mourn in their swaying
Together and who
Don't leave
Dying loved ones, they sway
And rub each other gently
Their cries rising
From distant squeals to
Crescendo, crescendo through
Massive bones
All those miles of tough skin

New World Overture

It is minimal, an octagon
reduced to a diptych. Weeds
have been cut from the gutters,
saints strangled by their haloes.

Nothing gothic or moral dare
intrude, no darkening stains
through the glass. Above
this street the only grey

cement is the sky, my love.
We live on the plains forever.
The industries of Eden will custom
fit even the animals to our touch.

Transference

Five gray coyotes sweep as one
through my snow drifted
front yard,
plunge over creek bank,

descend into thick, tangled brush,
copper as sun sets,
that must
shelter mouse, rabbit,

or vole, searching in frozen grass
for fallen seeds. Each
dry grain
complete in itself,

destined to surrender what heat
it holds to air, or
burn once
more in bright, red blood.

Bill Brown

Frank Church Wilderness, Idaho, 1998

On the trail where Marsh's Creek
joins the Middle Fork of the Salmon
haystacks stretch and roar
between mountain and meadow.

Monkey flower and columbine
paint the falls spilling to river.
My wife stops as a howl
rises above the rush of water.

"Wolf?" she whispers, and a closer
howl sings from the stone outcrop,
cuts the horizon. "Wolves,"
I stutter, half lost in a reverie

ghosted with eyes and fur,
a blowing rock in high wind
whistling my blood, a raven
in winter counting down the years.

Pillow

Take not
into thy bed
the girdle
of hours

But make
thy pillow
a text
unto sleep

In the
design
of
fullness

So it
dwell with
you all
the days

Look upon
thy pillow
as the lily
and the balm

In the garden
of silence
and hushed
colors

And read
upon
its
tablet

Where
sleep
doth
write

The pillow
is the
seat
of the soul

Make thy
place with
thy pillow
in thy heart

And it
shall be
as thy halo
unto the moon

And in the
dark time
and the
night

Shall it
comfort
thy brow
as the hand

And be
as the
cornerstone
to thy dreams

And the
garland
and the
laurel

And lay
you down
upon the knee
of favor

In all
the hours
of thy
days

Anon

The vines bend like clever minds,
Against the break of summertime and inside
The winds beat unholy hymns as the cars thunder by,
Reading a book once considered cruel, you know now
It was really innocent. You type at the keyboard naked.
Hopeless with your thoughts this cold sunny day with the ice-chill
Of the devil wind as you call up your fear again.
And in your head the song that might not let you dream again.

You are maskless and without face,
You are timeless under the pounding of saws and axes on the wall,
Of construction time which takes forever,
You breathe of the past,
The colors of the waiting time.

They are fire red-eyed hope to find you with their sharp hands,
Many hands and many hearts bleeding,
The shadow is a friend for there they do not see you.
You burn your books because you are cold.
And with this your heart goes dead.
It spins and the world closes.
So much to drown a person, so much to drown.

You take the bag of letters and wrap them up in a bag,
And cast them into the smiling seas with their grabbing charms,
You take your childhood out for a swim,
In your suit of Spanish blue and your dead heart of irony,
You follow it to the bottom of the dankest reef and twirl your hair
Into a piece of heavy pink coral so nice,
So pink and so delicate like a sweet child, a perfect baby,
An infant who kills you.

Helen Drummond

Georgia Memory

I am aging now but I can see
late sun melt
toward a field of cicadas,
hover in my mind
like the gnats floating motionless
in the thick honey air,
feel the gentle prickle of hay
rhythm of the truck,
dust mingling with the sweetness
of our moist hands held,
the first kiss.
Somewhere in the dark of me
I saw a fleeting glimpse,
I could be loved one day.

Waiting for Songs

If we are still
then the songs will come.

Do the words come
from our being in the world?

My son shits his nappy
'baba done poo-mess';
I say 'big boys don't poo in nappies—
you just think you're not a big boy.'

Rohan with the triskelion
around his neck

on the minitramp
in the lounge
listening to his Nana:

there's a time to run
a time to have rest
a time to play with toys.

Thursday I go swimming
Friday I stay Nana's house
Saturday we go tumbletops
Sunday we wait for the songs.

The Astronomer's Christmas

The magic wasn't enough.
He wanted to know what makes the stars burn.

The kids asked for knee rides,
brushed chocolate thumbs on the star maps.

The planets waltzed their retrograde waltz
above the dolls' house.

"I'm not up to it today," the astronomer said,
"The shapes don't fit—

—besides, it's Christmas."

After dinner, Tobias brings his gift:
a grain of castor sugar, cracked open;
a Christmas cracker.

1965

It happened before school.

A kid, not much older
than us, spilled his bike and slid
beneath the wheels of an oil truck.

We saw it all, every kid
who rode the bus:

men with flares that burned
like fireworks
in the rain,
the blood that pooled
at his feet.

The teacher told us in a
gentle voice, hardly above
a whisper,
the boy would be okay.

No one spoke, and the lesson began:
numbers drawn in neat columns
beneath the President's
smiling face.

Numbers, she told us, never lie.

Poets

They tap at the window, sleep late,
eat whatever's in the house, drink
the good booze and the bad, won't talk
or even laugh unless they feel like it.

They leave in the afternoon, find
a bench or boulder to hide behind,
watch listen, refuse to believe anything
is more lovely than a leaf, more real.

At night, they search for something
the bars don't sell.

Their only love is a woman whose face
they've never seen, who rides them
to the stars and back but kicks them
out of bed, locks the door once again.

Boy Builder

It bounces off a deep place inside me,
seeing fathers and sons do things together.
Outside my window, three floors down,
a tall son in jeans and green shirt
is leaning against a concrete wall.
He's holding three 2X4's
as his blond head lifts
toward his father on a balcony.
It gets me contented
to watch this, the work men do,
while I button a blouse on a hanger.
I'm filing a paid bill
when I hear the old yell, "Hey."
I glance out to see lumber on a rope.
The boy stands half at rest, half in action,
as he picks the bundle out of the air.
The father pulls up the rope.
I water my ivy.
It's an old echo—
the woman tender of plants
under knowledge of men out there
heaving their lumber, building their bridges.
It still feels safe
to hear the young being trained,
even if all this busy rearranging the planet
may have us—trees, animals, people—
way down the road to dead and gone.

Contributor's Notes

Edward Beatty received his M.A. from the University of Wisconsin and has been teaching literature and philosophy at Sauk Valley Community College ever since. He has published poems in more than two dozen journals since starting to submit poetry about four years ago.

Bill Brown teaches literature and creative writing in Nashville. His work has been published in journals such as THE LITERARY REVIEW, PASSAGES NORTH, ZONE THREE, and has many forthcoming poems in such journals as THE WORCESTER REVIEW and THE SOUTHERN POETRY REVIEW. He has published three collections of poems, HOLDING ON BY LETTING GO, WHAT THE NIGHT TOLD ME, and, most recently, THE ART OF DYING.

James Doyle has magazine publications in over 100 journals, including BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL, ALASKA QUARTERLY REVIEW, CAROLINA QUARTERLY, SOUTH DAKOTA REVIEW, and POETRY. He has one book, THE SIXTH DAY (Pygmy Forest 1988 Winner), and one chapbook titled THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE (Black Bear 1986 Contest winner).

Helen Drummond has published poems in SPINDRIFT, READER'S BREAK, and several anthologies. She retired from music teaching and is now able to spend much of her time working on poetry and painting. She has lived in the Seattle area for over 30 years.

Nicole Grabe lives in Schoolcraft, MI.

Sandor Kanyadi is the dean of Hungarian poets in Transylvania. Through translations his poetry is well known and respected in Germany (winner of Herter Prize) as well as Scandinavia.

Jeannette Miller lives in Kalamazoo, MI.

William Miller is an associate professor of literature and creative writing at York College of Pennsylvania. His poems have appeared in over a hundred journals, including THE SOUTHERN REVIEW, THE AMHERST REVIEW, and THE CUMBERLAND POETRY REVIEW. He has three collections of poetry: THE TREES ARE MENDED (Northwoods Press), OLD FAITH (Mellen Press) and BREATHED ON GLASS (Druid).

Thorpe Moeckel has had poems appear recently in FIELD, COLD MOUNTAIN REVIEW, and POTOMAC REVIEW. He lives with his wife and daughter in Pennsylvania.

Harvey Molloy is an Assistant Professor in the Core Curriculum Programme at the University of Singapore. His poetry has recently been published in JAAM (NZ) and Takahe (NZ) and his art appeared in ALBATROSS.

Sharon O'Hanlon lives in Kissimmee, FL.

Simon Perchik has numerous magazine and book publications, among which are poems in POETRY, APR, and THE NEW YORKER. He has previously published in ALBATROSS.

Alice Pero has been writing poetry for 15 years. She is a dancer and musician and teacher of creative writing. Her poems have appeared in POETRY NOW, SALONIKA, and a number of other magazines. Her first book, THAWED STARS, was published in 1999.

Dennis Saleh's most recent book of poetry won the first chapbook competition from Willamette River Books: THIS IS NOT SURREALISM. A new collection was published by Quicksilver in 1999: RHYMES' BOOK. His poems, prose, and artwork appear widely, in such magazines as ART/LIFE, ARTWORD QUARTERLY, POETRY, TRIQUARTERLY, and IOWA REVIEW.

Paul Sohar was born in Hungary, educated in the USA, and has been publishing poetry in small mags like SENECAREVIEW, OFFERINGS, and POET'S PAGE. His book of poems IN SUN'S SHADOW was published by Footprint Press in addition to a volume of translations.

Virgil Suarez recently published his first book of poetry with Tia Chucha Press/Northwestern University. His poems have recently appeared in such journals as NEW ENGLAND REVIEW, PLOUGHSHARES, and THE OHIO REVIEW, among many others.

Lorraine Tolliver is a professor of writing and literature at Compton College in California. Her short stories and poems have appeared in POETRY/LA, WRITERS INTERNATIONAL, COLLEGE JOURNAL, and others.

Paula Yankee writes poetry, short stories, and short fiction, and is completing the MFA program at Hamline University in St. Paul, MN.

And I had done a hellish thing
And it would work 'em woe:
For all averred, I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow.
Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
That made the breeze to blow!

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

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