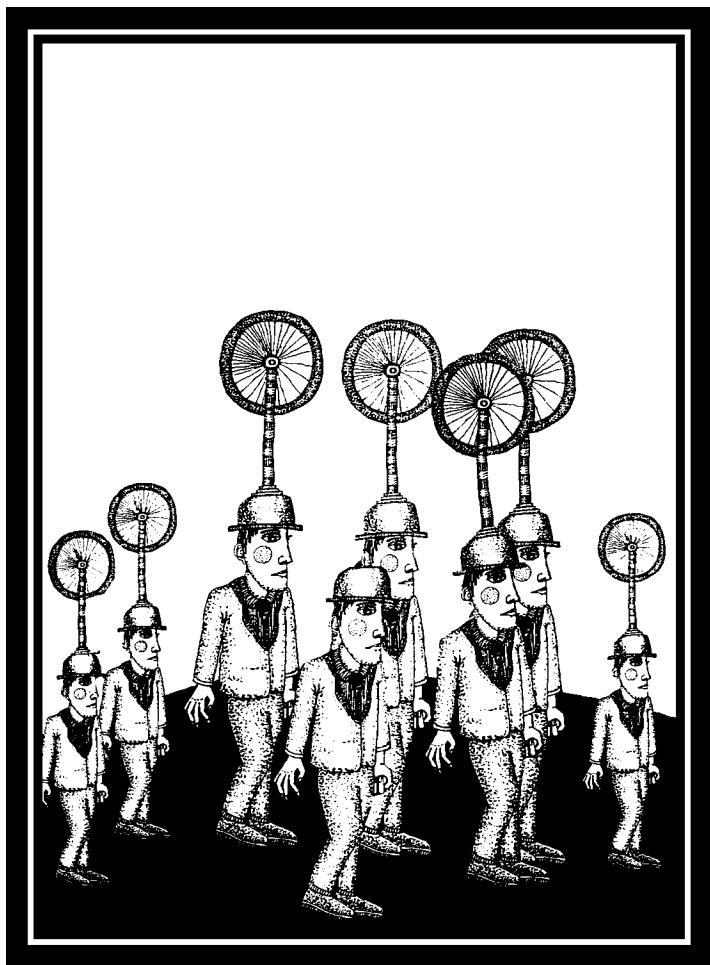


ALBATROSS



**“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

#13

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Prayer

We bow our heads
and utter words
not to the cicada
speaking through
a spring night
or the beetle
crawling slowly
across the leaf
searching for the edge.
We bid the crow
silent, the child
to sleep, the cat mewling
his hunger and lust
to crawl under a porch
awaiting morning.
The stream flows
slowly by, carrying
a blade of grass
and the early fallen leaf.

Higher Order

Among certain species of spider
at the moment of arachnidial orgasm
the female devours her mate
for the protection of the young.

The lion stalks his prey, then leaps
tearing flesh to sate a hunger
born of the endless sun
beating down on the grassy plain.

It is left to man to hunt
for trophy, for proof of dominion
over all else, as promised
by a self-created God.

The Feast of St. Augustine

Augustine liked hard questions,
the kind you can't ask
in catechism class,
like whether angels reproduce asexually,
or whether women will turn into men
at the general resurrection.

You don't read far before learning
little Augie was mama's boy.
He hated going to school,
prayed that he wouldn't get beaten
for not knowing his lessons.
This was when he learned
the element of risk in prayer.

When he got religion
and gave up sex,
he was still just a young rhetorician
going nowhere.
The Church did't cry, Rejoice
we've just gained a genius!
He would have his revenge.

One day he stole some pears
for no good reason,
and the West had a guilty conscience
for 1500 years.

Poppies Gathering

Green sloped searching hills
splash toward the sea
with its dissolving beaches
and cormorants diving.

In mustard fields, out of
darker spaces, these
tongues exhale sunlit
flame orange
to swaying wild in manias of joy.

Beneath theologies
blue shadows interlace the journey—
behold: this lingering fruit
the lovers almost.

Shells

A couple keeps the pretty ones.
Homely ones they leave behind for dunes of another time.
They do not seem to care
If cracked or chipped shells
Yield their own summits,
Pouring through this summer of driftwood.

Pretty ones, too, need a place to end.
Perhaps a book case.
Or part of a child's display, for
A philosophy tugs behind every period.

Yet even here still they can hear
The lonely armor
Ragged scalloped emptiness, a voice that intones
Blustery across a rock-scrawled sand.

On the Lake After Dark

We drift among stars dropped from the sky
And drowned in the dark water of the lake.

The Earth careens through constellations caught
In the outstretched wing of the Milky Way.

The galaxy, they say, goes screaming out
From a point in a finite universe

Where all things were in no place:

From this utopia, bones and dust were flung

Out a four-dimensional window into the void,
And separated kind by kind and each to each.

There above the pines, on Jupiter, howl winds
Whose gentle cousins set this water whispering.

We kiss to catch the cool air on our tongues,
And swallow desires borne like pollen by the wind.



Scar

It's improbable and hairless
as the pink, skinned foot
or the pink, flayed tail
of a rat;

it's thick and opaque and holds
its pain well, like a drunk
holds his liquor well,
implacable and numb;

it's white as salt, useful as salt,
like salt has many origins:
the earth, the ocean,
exertion or great fear.

The Guitarist

Singing in a voice deep as the rivers he fished,
he played for her on the hood of his car,
parked in our gravel driveway.
I watched from inside during a time
I thought would never end:
when nights seemed a hollow body of stars,
with fireflies throbbing in the summer heat
to the fretful rhythms of bullfrogs.

Now, two children later,
my sister no longer kisses him with eyes closed,
doesn't hold the hands that shoot rabbits and deer,
doesn't care that his guitar sits forgotten
in a basement where all light dies:
the flower-rimmed soundhole wide with regret,
the broken strings dangling like cobwebs
after a passionate storm.

The Small Rain

First in England he wrote
of the "small rain" and how it fell.
He knew lovers
but vanished without leaving his name.

The rain is anonymous like that.
It is there to know
but you must be one of the lovers
with a low roof and a little thunder.

The rain has no patience with those
who praise loneliness for its own sake.
It has come again, knocking.
It has left its damp shoes at the door.

The Wealth of Seasons

Another summer of fire
and the tips of ferns curl brown
like a lyre-bird in the broom.

Another summer of wilt
I heard the lost lambs of rain
calling beyond Sunday Falls.

When the dry days end
I will curl myself into a ball,
a fiddlehead as at the beginning.

A spider has strung his web
across the wide field of October.
I anchor one corner for him.

Autumn Garden

Behold the sturdy brussel sprout
standing upright against October wind,

carrot fronds as yet unfrozen
signalling orange roots—sweet still,

withered pea vines—whitened, chalky—
rattling reminders of fresh-picked flavor,

emptied weed seed pods marking
where next year's crop is planted.

Behold! We may not be temporary.

The Sugar House

He knew what he had, time and land.
Mostly, he kept it as it was.

He called maples weeds
and let them take back the fields,

overgrow the granite walls
that tried to keep them out.

He let the boiling shed sit and rot
and remind itself of the snow

that broke its back,
let hardwood have—

as long as it would take
to ruin, to purify—

the bones and skin
still bloody with burnt sugar.

Spring

Lined up along the iced edge
of the hayrack, snow piled half way

up the rusted wheelwells, the glazed
walk treacherous from the riverbed:

but I'd seen the oddly uniform shapes
even through the haze of blizzard,

fourteen dead coyotes in a farmer's
wintry crypt and one red fox on a bale

of straw, all eyes solid as marbles,
peering, each rough coat a distinct shade

shot through the head, the fox propped high
on the strawbale, above the other hanged-over

heads, deader than all the rest put together.
And a strange rustling, too. Winter's dying.

My Job is This

Though I know the large ferocious
nasty dog ticks are only doing their job,
trying to make a living out of blood,
I don't cheer them on like I do
the hummingbirds at the honeysuckle's
perfect flowers. No, I pluck them
from scalp, from behind ear, and pit
of knee and pull their legs off,
flush the button body down the sink.

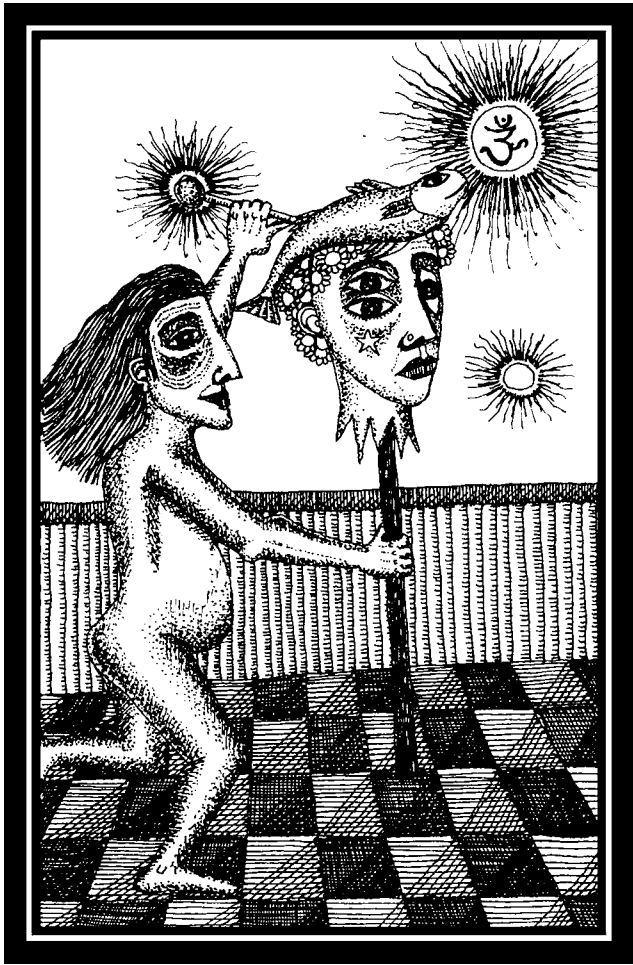
It's a monarch's job to fly to Mexico.
A cowbird's to find a sparrow willing
to raise its young. Our cat's to just stare.
My backyard's job is simply to be
a backyard, despite the crows and their
secrets in the ravine, the moose dipping
its head quietly, quietly under dangling
limbs, the grouse fanning her tail
choreographed to make me look away.

For the most part I don't interfere.
Zen cat focuses all morning on
an ant. Peony, poppy, iris perch
on stems ready to fly. I strip
and add my skin to the commotion.
Magnolia petals circle the trunk,
a pink train as fine as my mother's
in her wedding photo, circa 46,
lace wrapping her ready feet.

I worry she made marriage her job,
made being married what she did
for a living, there in her twenty-fourth
spring. And it was spring, late March,
Massachusetts a bumper crop of slush.
With ready feet, in my own 24th Spring,
I hitched north. Each car door a flower
opening. Trucker, lighthouse keeper,

*

plucking me from narrow lanes.
It was my job to keep moving,
to make a living out of roads. Out
of the wild berries that grew there
and the insects that fed. Out of a stranger's
transformation into friend. The film
of moon on waves that never quite
reached land. Light let out
on a reel, then sucked back in.



Risk

She's six years old and loves wolves.
Her dad wonders how such an affection
bodes for the future: The three pigs:
their innocence is nothing to her.
The wolf's just trying to survive,
everybody has to, the job bouncy, buxom
mama nature holds out to us like a set of keys,
like a bingo mistress beaming at the Friday crowd.
The wolf was a loner, and an omega,
which is the lowest rung
on the lupine ladder. He had the somewhat
bearing of an artist, scientist, or political thinker.
He was un-successful with the opposite
sex; those meager northern winters of his
tend to sap one's speech and musculature
down to bare essentials, leaving nothing
leftover for charm or surprise.
The story of Red Riding Hood
is actually a perversion of that episode in time:
the dingo-mastiffs of Schleswig-Holstein,
the hybrids who went rabid, charged
through town, and mangled ten.
She is six years old and likes the sky.
She strings things together, even
disjointed things. Why start gnawing
people now, after three milleniums developing
rapports, being brotherly, teaming-up on
boars and mammoth? Have you seen
the book *The Three Little Wolves*
and the *Big Bad Pig*? Bullets leap out of the night
and crack into the woods. Sure, the wolf
takes a sheep now and then,
coyote taught him how, and if you never take risks
have you ever really lived?

Strange Hybrid Animals

Bolder and more common now,
these artificial-looking creatures
are vicious and not at all shy.

Two varieties: one husky
and cinnamon, one lean and gray.
The cinnamon wears an expression

almost human. The gray looks mean
and weasely—built for cunning,
but languid and morose. I note

how these critters nose about, rattling
locked doors of houses, savaging
the occasional neglected child

left unsupervised, unloved,
only a few scattered buttons left.
No one seems concerned. Police cars

drift past with hardly a glance
at the basking, grinning animals.
Women burdened with groceries

move only slightly more quickly
than usual. I've read that lab-bred
animals can't reproduce

on their own, but herds of these beasts
haunt the suburbs of New England,
sometimes roaming downtown, thriving

on scraps from expensive restaurants,
competing with homeless families
for the slop of business luncheons.

Perhaps the Endangered Species
Act should apply, and certain suburbs
and small cities abandon themselves

entirely to these animals,
whose toothed ferocity reminds us
we shouldn't evolve anymore.

Birding in America

Bobolinks flash through the meadow.
The unfolding of their flight mocks
our lack of binoculars to watch
their effort in greater detail.

Underfoot, pinks bloom so boldly
it's impossible to step on them
by accident, tiny fists of flame
defying the overcast sky.

Walking through slots in tall grass,
paths worn by custom and habit,
we feel for the moment placed
as carefully on the planet

as students in a science class,
our observations duplicating
lifetimes of effort by others.
I hated that in chemistry—

repeating timeworn experiments.
More seriously, you rejected
dissection of cats because
it lacked educational purpose

and served merely to callous
pre-med students against the pain
they'd spend their lives inflicting.
Yet here we are observing birds

observed so often before, as if
our vision didn't brutalize,
our presence offend the nestlings
and crush the flowers underfoot.

Instead of blustering through the fields
and woods with senses tingling
we should spend long days with our books.
By rarely allowing ourselves

even to peep through the window
at the creatures busy outside
we'd learn to avoid unnerving them
with the vacuum of our gaze.

Great Warehouse Clerk

the naming
cataloged in gardens
seed bottles in a shed
behind the cottage

itself within
the walled garden
after the age of huts
and first flowers

near tidal marsh
a dark warehouse
guarded by a dead dog
lost one name

but the red song
warbles
a carol
of darker perfection

red creature
in the wind
crown ruff
rising and falling

one sudden trill

There Are Many Languages I Don't Understand

The voice of the tree
outside my window
is muffled by rain.

But the birds
that visit its limbs,
however briefly,
seem to get
an earful
of its wisdom.

They take
its silent yearning
high on their thin
wet wings.

Birds of a Feather

The short red line
on the edge
of a great blue heron's wing
looks like blood
if you think the bird
is injured.

It'll make
you want to save its life
even after you discover
it is as healthy
as the bald eagle
carving spirals through the air
above the tree tops.

Passage from Guilin

—Li River , China

The river ship fills with strangers,
throbs, shows a little prop wash,
scrapes gravel bars hidden
in the glass-green current,
then finds the river's mid-line,
lets go and drifts -

past blue hills crouched
in the finest drizzle, hills
fading into haze, ranks
of chessmen, hats, slippery
crowds. The cliffs are riddles.
From them, Collared Crows
complain; the Brahminy Kite
is free to fish - slow and buoyant

as smoke.

Ashore, women with umbrellas
walk their bison home. Eighteen
egrets rise white and wheel.
No gibbons have called here
for a thousand years.

The captain blasts the horn. Drives
the egrets on. They swirl up in pale,
calm alarm, beat their wings
in rhythm deep as galley oars,
and grace us with silence.

Daintree River, Queensland, Australia

—Great-Billed Heron

Dawn stretches
from a single color:
charcoal from balsam,
blue to the grace that draws
nineteen cervical vertebrae
in a liquid line.

Edges of wings that once
held back a longer sky
smooth crests of hills
and now in landing tuck
and fold the wind away.

He hides in the open.
Obvious. Evolved.
Waits like dignity,
disappears only to frogs,
fish. They see one leg
still and think rush
or reed:
nothing fearful.

Water whorls spin
slowly inside and out
behind the slight
obstruction of his leg.
Slack water, the canvas
of unsteady waver. Meander.
Swell. The slight wave curls,
small tongue. Fixed breath

then stab
stiletto and no splash.

Future Imperfect

You would name your daughter
Columbina
the Italian word for
dove.

Instead:
a hilltop in Cold Spring, NY and
a five foot pine
the size of you

takes root in the ground.
Gets taller
somehow.

Your sister's eyes will grow
weary upon you.
As she watches, you will circle
outwards
slowly
once per year.

She will mark you then with
simple white lights.
And small porcelain angels
the size of
smooth, cold fists.

Night Vision

Friday nights, I sign my name
to the volunteer sheet at the Wildlife
Center, check assignments. . . . laundry,
dishes, clean flight pens, defrost
rat for great horned owl.
A slow night—our wildlife
hold their own. I reach
for the defrosting tub, fill it
with cool water, pull one stiff
white rat, neck neatly slit,
from the freezer. The tub is pale
blue, the color of my Grandmother's eyes.

Sunday afternoons, I call
my Grandmother, her voice faded
since hip surgery. We fill the miles
with talk. . . . the rain continues, she hopes
to feel stronger
tomorrow, I spend too much
money on phone calls, when will I
come home? Toward the end
of our conversation she breathes
faster, lets out big gulps of air
saying she loves and misses me. She must
always be the last to whisper goodbye.

When the rat has loosened
its grip, when internal organs
are soft, fur slick, I squeeze excess water
with firm but gentle hands, leave
for the flight pen, lay the air-warmed body
on a tattered hacking board, look
that hungry owl full in the eye.

Pictures of the Moon

There may come a time in your life
when you see pictures of the moon
more often than you see
the moon herself
when you glance
at the pin prick glow
of another planet
casually
and without wonder.

These are dangerous times.
Dangerous times:
the glare
of a street lamp
blocking out
every star.

Contributor's Notes

Frederika Bain has published poems in HAWAII REVIEW and THE SUN AND THE MOON. She lives in Syracuse, NY.

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William Doreski has recent work appearing in ATLANTA REVIEW, HARVARD REVIEW, and FLASH!POINT, and his new book ANOTHER ICE AGE will be published this fall.

Louis S. Faber is a poet and corporate attorney living outside of Rochester, NY. His work has most recently appeared in MIDSTREAM, THE WORCESTER REVIEW, THE SOUTH CAROLINAREVIEW, and elsewhere.

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Jeffery L. Skeate has had many poetry publications both in the USA and abroad, most recently in INDEFINITE SPACE and TEARS IN THE FENCE. He does a fair amount of trout fishing in the Iowa Driftless watershed.

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Lynn Parish Sutton earned a Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology from University of Vermont in 1993. Poems have appeared or are forthcoming in THE PINE ISLAND JOURNAL OF NEW ENGLAND POETRY, MOTHERING MAGAZINE, BYLINE MAGAZINE, THE AUROREAN, and COTYLEDON.

Gail White was co-editor, with Katherine McAlpine, of the anthology THE MUSE STRIKES BACK from Story Line Press. She also edited a four-poet collection, LANDSCAPES WITH WOMEN, published by Singular Speech Press. She has two postcard collections and several chapbooks. She lives in Breaux Bridge, LA.

Bill Yake studies toxic contamination of water, fish, soils, and sediments for the Washington State Dept. of Ecology. He has published two chapbooks: CONFLUENCE and SHORT SHRIFT from Radiolarian Press and THE FACES OF BIRDS from Scatter Creek Press, and his poems have appeared in PUERTO DELSOL, WILDERNESS MAGAZINE, and others.

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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