

ALBATROSS



#14

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

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Boulder Talk

time means nothing
to us
patient ones
with our traditions
of silence
in this
brotherhood of stone

long and long

beneath fierce bees
of wind
glacier taste
still
in our mouths

we've waited
to speak

one millennium
one word
two millennia
and another

forcing questions
in the shape
of pain
answers in the form
of god

born of earth
to earth returning
bloodless
boneless
brothers of altitude

only poets
know us

spoken before a
thousand years
going
to speak again

Standing Rock Basin, Canyonlands

I cannot love these places
sifted-earth canyons
fallen, still sliding
down the knees of land
sagging
into a drought beyond
any congealing water
to hold pieces together,
to reverse loss.

The terrible dignity
of these crumbling rock towers,
geologic minarets coiling
into a sandstone sky,
this elemental land—
takes too long—thinking a mind,
too big a heart,
to connect in any smaller way—
 blue cornflower
 many wrens at once
 couch or yard or
 lettuce in a windowbox.

This place is bones.
To live here would be
to live with the dead and hear
their repetitious lessons
all night long

 yet live, making
one's silly little steps
as quiet and giant
each time
as one can.

*

This slab once curled up inside
the way quarries stink from stonecutters
and slaughter and the Earth

chipped away for a pool half dawn
half clutching this shallow stone
where you and I are swimming

cramped in the same womb
not yet born —unfamiliar cries
already dark green and our mouths

filled with never-ending water, fit
the way each raindrop
still leaves an ash, becomes

a speck, a chance split second
that could start this stone again
the crushing light it almost remembers

almost hears —we splash across
arm over arm as if the waves
are somehow reaching out, seeping back

shrinking, then expand till this stone
half you, half me, half rain
wearing the Earth and the waiting.

Brian Cronwall

Ruins at Shawadine

—Shropshire, England 30 August 1983

rites of ancient stones yield
to the liturgy of the graveyard

beneath mounds of grass and crumbling castle walls
lie the dreams of the dead

as we lunch on sandwiches and oranges
history swims in the wind

poetry not written melodies not played
gather in the refuse of useless old battles

the grass softly says
you need not kill nor die for me

the dust adds
but if you must

I and gnarled boughs
and the clouded yellow butterfly

and the mist-breaking sun
will embrace you still

Brian Cronwall

Near Keaiwa Heiau

Near Keaiwa Heiau above Aiea Heights,
a boy fans charcoal with a paper grocery bag.
The smoke rises straight up like the pines surrounding it,

then, a breeze coming up, drifts to the west,
ghosts seeking the rock, light, and ti plants
where they can dissolve and become all time, all place.

I come to this park today, I think, to get away
from the dense noise and metallic speed
of Pearl City, Aiea, even Honolulu below,

but once I get here, I am reminded of other reasons:
the kupuna with her bamboo cane,
the ohana of ten picnicking in the shade,

the keiki throwing balls and learning to juggle,
and the black guardrocks that welcome and protect
the heiau's sacred ground and holy plants.

I feel the strength here of greens and browns;
I watch the clouds gather in the east
and pass through other clouds the way the past

and present go through each other without collision,
just the occasional sense of someone or something
touching my shoulder, but when I turn, I see

nothing but the heat rising from a portable grill,
bending the world as I know it, for a moment,
until the boy and his father put the hamburgers on

and children whistle in the wind that comes
from somewhere, goes to sometime,
and opens the sky wider, wider, wider still.

On the Washington and Old Dominion Trail

Our cul-de-sac gives birth to woods, a creek
 where beavers toil all summer long
to turn landscaped suburbia into a wilderness.
 Beyond, a trail beside a teeming swamp
where frogs call out *harrumph* like cross old men,
 and long-legged birds pose, arrogant,
for men in floppy hats and booted women
 armed with cameras and *Peterson's Field Guide*.
I've seen an otter swim, pad to lily pad,
 down there, and ducklings struggle up the bank
behind a pair of gold-webbed feet. Deer and rabbit,
 snapping turtle, fox, a snake stretched
side to side across the trail—
 green, with a diamond-patterned back.
One night, at dusk, four geese swept, honking,
 into crimson sky, and as they rose,
and all around went dark, wild daisies
 threaded through the grasses held the light,
as though the undergrowth had broken out in stars.

Mice

They wake us up at night.

They come and go as they please.

Running across the roof,
scratching in the attic.

The traps we set
only catch our eyes.

You might see them
if you forgot your face,
which fits nicely
in one of their footprints.

What we forget, they sow.
Seeds in every corner of our house.

The wind arrives, lowers itself swiftly
down the chimney to drink.

Invisible roots tap us for water.

Blossoming around us,
fields of stars.

Gifts

The black cat offers us its gift,
body of the red-winged blackbird,
silent handful of wind and song
curled on the doorstep,
an invitation to attend
our own continual delivery
wherever we walk or fall.
Never mind our missing wing.
To kiss our empty orbit,
fill it with breath.
Heart that loss
also completes.

Canada Geese

A grounded southbound flock gleans
the corn plowed under after frost,
its raucous calls cutting the hard air
like love parts indifference, opening
the way to another's course. That these geese
in greys have stood where I only dream
and go where I dream again, far north
and far south, the broad unfrozen places
no human goes, gives them vision I can only
hope to hold. Together for life, they
mate in immutable ways that set me longing
and leave me musing on what it is
that no man or woman knows but
the goose does, a simple thing with wings
more like an angel than any human ghost.

Landing

The seagull glides,
touches, settles,
the soft white wings
shudder and fold.
It is over,
the glory of soaring,
the snatching of sky.

The goodbye graze of your lips
was like that,
a slamming of feathered doors
against flight.

DK's

Some days
a glazed twist
and a cupacoffee
at DK's Variety Donuts
is as good as it gets,
and that's good enough.
You can take a window seat,
watch the traffic
stitch and unravel
and smell the sea's clean breath
in snatches through the door
that's always opening
and closing
as the orange-haired punkers
and the heavy-moving, off-duty nurses
and the leather-creaky cops
and the nicekids
with faces like flowers
come and go,
trailing scents of perfume and tobacco,
grass and b.o.,
that hang in the oily air
until the next salt sigh
blasts the place
clear again,
blowing all the way back
to the pinballs and the deep fryer,
blessing them.

II.

“They eat all the grass
crop it real short
then sleep on it
and it turns brown,”
one man says.

Another
fenced his yard in:
“My children
picked up the pellets.
They look like raisins.”

“Something will have to be done,”
the mayor says.

A buck makes a stand:
he stamps his foot,
hisses and spits at the camera.

April Takes Time

The weather comes easy, not hard
and wastes no wind on plains
meant for mountains or man.

It brings along its cloak
and issues mists forecast daily
to cloud the river's teeth as fog.

Don't tell Winter he's locked.
He's free to go north like a bird
and whisper things familiar to ice.

It's some kind of Spring we want,
warm and full of shade to age in.
We want parades and open windows,

roads without mud or bite.
We want to come out of dreams
into something warm as waking is.

Stage Names

Full last night, Egg Moon,
Grass Moon, Moon
of the Big Leaves, Spica
behind you, a dance
of sky lights, names
aswirl on the year,
come from many voices,
many watchers, how we
reach out, our flashlights
cannonball, search,
seeking a story, we weary
writers trying to catch a plot,
and the heavens' answers
all a sly wink in passing.
Milk Moon, Full Beaver.
How true the Full Cold Moon.

Common Threads

One day somebody told me
eight out of ten critics agree
poems about barns
are exploitive of the pastoral image.

Like the thread of this narrative,
the pastoral has become lost.

In the clutter of rust and dust,
the harvest leaves scatter
over Joe Farmer's field.

Somewhere beyond the cattle gap,
pale barbed fence,
a poet is telling stories about
when he traded
his barn coat for a book jacket.

Rubies

Wheels ripple a somber sky,
silver tails flopping for one last look
after the spawn,
the shore longer than in reality,
spruce and birch dwarfed on canvas
by open bellies with orange roe,
mined, canned and shipped
for chic palates back East.

Critics will title his work
mundane and out of touch
while a young ghetto face
wonders
in reverence aloud
how rubies can grow in the bellies of fish.

The Grandmothers

At a public information meeting on the burning of PCBs in a power plant
at Granite Falls, Minnesota

When I think of this ancient river valley
I think of the grandmothers,
the women like "Woman Who Talks to Iron"
and the other red women, their bodies arched
like prairie grasses over a shining river,
their hands cupping water for a child
who will never imagine he is a rusted machine.
I think of the white grandmothers,
water in their kettles,
and fish no one was afraid to eat.

Now, in these waters of March,
in these ghostly fogs rising along the valley,
I think of the grandmothers' spirits
shaped like rock worn by water.
I think the grandmothers in their grief and grace
have come up from the river into this place.
And they are carrying in their whole bodies
a dying river
and they would like to speak
to the ones
who have sold their hearts.

Certificate of Need

“The Minnesota Waste Management Board may certify need for a repository for hazardous waste only if it has determined there are no feasible and prudent alternatives.”

What is feasible and prudent
when a trust is broken,
the atom split,
any cold war begun?
The earth is afraid of us.
When we have taken anyone
any way against his or her will,
it is prudent to come weeping
however we can weep,
with ideas or jokes
or what we are most, water.
And with many many small
generosities in our hands.
And it is feasible that we lie
on the earth as if it were our body
and be mouth a moment
for one syllable of its pain.
Maybe even necessary.
Because the earth we all claim
we want to protect
is not filing her comments here.
She has no legal counsel
and doesn't understand
words like negative impact
and intrinsic suitability.
Only one word keeps appearing
on her certificate of need:
Listen Listen Listen

Peter Bush

Odessa, Texas 2AM

even without sight of the oil wells
the scene is spoiled by the stench,
like a thirty mile gas spill

give me a field of cows and shit,
a reminder that something alive
went through its vital motions

manure spread lends itself to life;
this odor proves death over and again
with only cars and lawnmowers

left out of the mourning

Beached Pilot Whales

Is it they remember deep in their cells
how land was before they migrated back
to water and, suffering extreme
nostalgia for what they once had,
having shared their memories in whale ways,
the sea in the pod's proximity
overwhelmed with songs pitched high as if
filled with excitement and joy, seek now
to return all at once from the water
and would fail but for persistence in death?

Jersey Shore Summers

It was no marina act:
dolphins grounded on our beaches
weren't playing dead.
And we didn't pretend
to know why,
wondered if they were so smart
they knew something about the future
that drove them to mass suicide.
But in the immediate future,
scientists sized-up
a cause of death
more down-to-earth:
microscopic human shit
from the dumping grounds
not far enough off
Sandy Hook.
The foaming ocean
had been giving us
the same shit for weeks,
confining our suspect asses
to the increasing heat
of scratchy beaches.
That was last summer's news.
This year, heavy doses
of vials and syringes
washing up have cured
even the beaches of crowds.
We're beginning to disappear from everywhere.

Why You Shouldn't Buy A House in the Dismal Swamp

That area will always be
the Dismal Swamp
to anyone native,
even though a sign
calling it Paradise Acres
is carved in stone.
A thousand streetlights
won't brighten it up,
bring into focus
what's blurred by fog
nearly every night.
It's mainly wetlands
so perpetual dampness
weighs down, depresses
the very atmosphere
and gets into everything,
even your head.
If those aren't reasons enough:
endangered marsh hawks
might mistake your hair
for something to eat;
raccoons will rip apart your garbage,
may not stop at that;
and if you're superstitious,
disturbed Lenape bones
will attack your imagination.
Scratch yourself from the buyer list
if you don't like mosquitoes;
or neighbors who won't speak to you
because you could never be as quiet
as 500 acres of wilderness,
and because no matter how good-looking,
you could never compete with a view
that's anything but dismal.
Such extensive background
increases the visibility of the stars,
seems to enlarge the moon
and makes us feel
closer to the universe.
An astronomer or a minister
moving into our midst
couldn't do that for us.

Traitor

I am waiting for the wilderness to come and kill us all,
to swoop in like a razor beaked bird
flying over blue as blood, fish rich water,
to ring the human city with an army of flora and fauna,
to set up catapults and lob among us
the severed heads of factories, highways, and shopping malls.

I want to be a traitor,
to sneak down to the gate during the night,
stab the guards and let slip the bolt,
to watch laughing as the army streams through,
as the people emerge from their homes half clad
and blinking, alarm bells clanging, too late, too late.

As payment I would ask to be made into a lizard,
allowed to remain among the ruins of the sacked city.
I would live in the ivy choking the collapsed buildings
and listen to the few surviving dogs barking in outrage
at the rabbit blood yellow moon sex calls of coyotes.

During the night the dogs would hide
among the burnt shells of cars and houses,
trembling when leopards or bears lumbered past.
They would paw at the rotted collars around their necks
and whine pathetically, longing for their masters.

2050

Emptied crates disclosed
 amphorae, necklaces
 worked in bronze. . . .
 and so the vanished had become
a sheen of wear.

 My cabinets open
 to what will be for you
 curiosities:
feather, leaf, bone.
 Try naming
 a charm
 on each link
of the once unbroken chain:
 heliconian,
 bald cypress,
 golden-winged warbler.

Contributor's Notes

Peter Bush lives in Georgia. This is his first publication.

Cara Chamberlain lives in Lakeland, Florida, and has published poetry and fiction in many journals, most recently THE SOUTHERN REVIEW, THE CHATTAHOOCHEE REVIEW, and PRIMAVERA.

Brian Cronwall teaches English at Kaua'i Community College in Hawai'i. His poetry has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies including BAMBOO RIDGE, ABIKO QUARTERLY (Japan), LOUISVILLE REVIEW, RFD, and others.

Florence Chard Dacey has two published collections: THE SWOON (Kraken Press) and THE NECKLACE (Midwest Villages and Voices Press). She has been published in numerous anthologies and in NIMROD, OKLAHOMAREVIEW, and others.

Rina Ferrarelli has published two collections: HOME IS A FOREIGN COUNTRY (Eadmer 1996) and DREAMSEARCH (malafemmina, 1992) as well as two translations and has poems and translations forthcoming in THE PANHANDLER, TAR RIVER POETRY, ZONE 3, and others.

Grace Marie Grafton has published extensively for 20 years and has recently had two books published: ZERO (2000) and VISITING SISTERS (2001). She has work forthcoming in RUNES, SYLLOGISM, and POETRY (online).

Sarah Jane Hall has returned to poetry writing after a long hiatus. She lives in Burbank, California, and has most recently published poetry in the Bay Area Poets Coalition Journal, POE-TALK. She earned an M.A. in Psychology in 2001.

Carol Hamilton became poet laureate of Oklahoma in 1995 and received the Oklahoma Book Award for her chapbook ONCE THE DUST. She has many recent publications which include SPOON RIVER POETRY REVIEW, POTPOURRI, CUMBERLAND POETRY REVIEW, as well as three books of poetry.

Eric R. Hoffman lives in N. Adams, Massachusetts. His poems have appeared in ALBATROSS, BLUE COLLAR REVIEW, and others, and his chapbook THINGS LIKE THIS HAPPEN ALL THE TIME was published by Lone Willow Press in 2000.

J. Clayton L. Jones has work appearing or forthcoming in STILLPOINT, THE G.S.U. REVIEW, and RED BUD CHRONICLES. He has an M.F.A. in Poetry from Georgia State Univ.

Serge Lecomte lives in Anchor Point, AK and has published in hundreds of magazines including PERMAFROST, MOEBIUS, OSIRIS, and OKLAHOMAREVIEW. He also has published 12 books of poetry, most recently WELCOME TO AMERICA (Paper Radio, 1998).

Richard Murray has had poetry appear most recently in RATTLE and SMALLPOND. He lives in Monmouth Junction, NJ, and holds an M.A. in English from Rutgers University.

David Musgrove is the author of a book-length poem titled THE BEAR HUNTER. He lives in Prattville, Alabama.

Simon Perchik has published many books of poetry, including most recently THE AUTOCHTHON POEMS (Split/Shift, 2001) and TOUCHING THE HEADSTONE (Stride Pubs, 2000). His publications include THE NEW YORKER, BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL, THE NATION, POETRY, and others.

Robert Pesich is an associate editor for THE MONTSERRAT REVIEW. Recent work has appeared in THE BITTER OLEAN-
DER and PASSAGES NORTH. His chapbook, BURNED KIL-
LIM, was published by Dragonfly Press in 2001.

Joanna Catherine Scott is a graduate of Duke University and has published novels in addition to a chapbook and two full-length collections of poems. Poems have been published in SOUTHERN POETRY REVIEW, ONTARIO REVIEW, PEMBROKE MAGAZINE, and others. She has also recently won the North Carolina Poet Laureate Award.

Matthew J. Spireng won the 2000 Bright Hill Press Poetry Chapbook Competition with his INSPIRATION POINT, and he has had poems appear in such publications as SOUTHERN HUMANITIES REVIEW, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, SOUTHERN POETRY REVIEW, TAMPA REVIEW, and others. He holds an M.A. in Creative Writing from Hollins College.

Tracy Alan White is a writer from DeWitt, Iowa. She has been published in many journals such as MIDWEST POETRY REVIEW, PSYCHOPOETICA, and CRICKET. Her first chapbook, AFTER LIGHTNING, BEFORE THUNDER, was published in 1995 by Anticipation Press.

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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