

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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Snow

Begin with snow. The white moon
flying backwards through night.

Begin with the smell of alder,
smoke rising up like searching hands.

Begin with night and the long road
curving its release into wind.

Begin with words
peeled from the bark of
cottonwoods,

yellow shyness,
tender age of growth.

Begin in utter release
on your knees

at the mouth
brimming with water.

Begin the prayer with snow.

Begin

Her bathing suit is the color of blueberries
in spring and she is the first to go,

the first to give her body to the river,
so the river receives her as a gift.

Everything says begin here.

As she swims, the river opens her body
wider, so she takes in the color of transparent things.

Together the woman and the water
form the shape of all beginning places,

form a language only the two of them speak.
When it is time to go she pulls her clothes on

over the voice of the river, and in that way
they become the language of nature, spreading her word

bit by bit as she goes home.

Going Deeper

I wanted to go deeper,
pine needle night
sage brush secrets.

I wanted the heart of winter
to talk to me

in bird language
or left behind prints in the snow.

I wanted the other side of stillness
to find its way back inside me,

open up locked doors,

wake up sleeping charcoal
that burrows beneath the cold.

All spring these trees
have been waiting
for the first brush of fall,

they keep lowering their eyes
like new lovers grown shy

with winter's first advances.

Coyotes

A few flakes in the air, all curlicue
And calligraphy, the silver-nib
Script of ghostly poets in waistcoats.

With snow this deep it's more like
Shoeing than
Skiing. When I rest on my poles,

I see the familiar logos etched
On the card stock:
The twin curving teardrops of deer,

Delicate scrimshaw of birds,
Furtive beads of mouse tracks,
And everywhere the paw prints

Of our suburban coyotes—amber eyes,
Hunched shoulders, tight
Curl of tail—here, now, peering at me

From the covert of a blackened sumac or
A jumble of broken trunks
Ridged with snow. Their eyes

Are portals into a cunning hunger.
The road noise fades on the ancient
Prairie, all skulk and survival.

Instructions to the Reader

Don't hold this poem as you would a wine glass,
with your fingers curled around its stem,
balancing the dark bowl of it inches from your lips—

carry it like the plastic bucket you use
when collecting sea shells,
its handle rimmed with sand and slick
with sunscreen from your palm.

Let it bump against your knee as you walk,
fill it with the pearled husk of some animal
whose name you once read
but have long since forgotten.

Driving Through My Hometown in the Rain

I am weary of this drumming, of the spider-leg twitch
of my windshield wipers, shoving aside the blur

to reveal another scab-roofed barn, another field
of blank-eyed cattle nosing the muddy ground.

On days like this I can almost buy it—
that we were born of earth, and climbed

from that clay womb raw-skinned,
already clawing at our salty eyes.

Optics

After cold rain—steel filings—
Landscape sharpens
To a primitive.

Wipers
Immolate the last drops.
No blur.
The world is getting through.

Moving windows.
How speed
Increases mass.

It's Saturday
March 24th. Cold rain
All morning. Now
Clouds load wagons,
Head east. A bad light
Glares everything to prominence.
Cellophane of sight peels off.

Black trees
Irritate the sky. Houses shrink
Into a single dimension
Squatting in fierce outlines.

Blink. The world resists
Illusions. White iron sky
Scoured of reason.

Heartsongs

Cardiac effusion, this is how we swell
Into the mystery of years beating
Slightly out of rhythm—or in your case fluttering—
An atrium full of wings—while I skip
In premature anticipation of things
Gone amiss. Count on this:
There are just so many thuds, so many steps
Along the pavement, our hands extended
For balance, the ballast of our bodies
Shifting. The stagnant pools of memory
Still birth amoebae. We have not come so far
That we can devise another strategy
Or bypass those narrowed arteries,
Roads upon a map that has no destination
But like a roundabout circulates the traffic
Of whatever we feel, it all becomes redundant,
Stacks up between us, waterlogging the desire
To encompass whatever is still missing.

*

The mirror a convict holds out
and between two bars
sees the long, steel corridor :the sun

aches too, hunting down the light
that escapes each evening, hides
a few hours, a few clouds, the cold
the lifetime —what did you expect

holding out your hand
as a dorsal fin will deflect
and everything swerves to the floor
—I'm drowning
so close to your lips

and my heart held out
still looks down the hall
the dust covered breasts
no longer thirsty for lips
or hands almost on fire

—a small mirror shares my room
with an electric switch
with light that kills on the spot

and what did you expect
holding out the sun
till it finds a window
covered with frost
and how the curtain warmed your shoulders
and kisses and yes, birds and oceans too
are hiding somewhere from my arms.

Missouri Headwaters State Park, Montana

Here, near the confluence of the Madison,
Jefferson and Gallatin Rivers
where the Missouri begins, we stand

atop a rock where Clark, and soon Lewis,
once stood to survey the land around them. They
chiseled nothing in the stone atop the rise

now popular with marmots, judging from the profusion
of scat. But this is the spot best suited to look
all around at rivers and plains and mountains.

And there were others before them, nameless
now, watching for game, blind as anyone
who stands here as to what might come.

Ten More Miles of Dirt Road

The vistas are stunning;
Hay-bleached hills bake in the summer's heat.
Turns and twists in the road
on the way to the lake seem
like time leans into the timeless;
but that is only a mask;
actually, it is only another bend in gravity
of the earth's seeming stillness;
and if you think for one moment
these are only sketches of a paradigm
you are mistaken;
this is a shadow of a gliding mirror,
a reflection of another reflection;

Soon we will be there
and the fish will be biting for we know
a hover of trout survived another winter
before the snow plows came
as our breath
makes another string of memories;
our touch
the butterflies of late afternoon,
lilies of projected scents,
lasting solitudes in the treetops of our days,
the unconscious at work in the design
of our forgetting's birth,
journeys of our flesh,
a hotel intimation of our passings,
our prehistoric configurations
that startle us even now.

Your Breath Used to Rise in Clouds like Wood Grain

Sycamore limbs have little to do with you
and tree skin cannot stretch like yours did
around the curve of knee and knuckle. I split
a gnarled limb where wood bends down
a calcium-white,
hold it to my chest and count the living rings
and ringlets that would have been. Your lips
folded around the bottle. I remember your skin
pulled tight over neck and shoulder, drawn
across arm and wrist, as if this shell
could wrap close enough to hold you. Bark
peels from the trunk, grey and brown shapes
sink to the ground beneath me. The weight
of your head on a pillow.

And Other Back Roads

Things can hardly hold on tonight.
Beech leaves cling to silver limbs,

paper pearls that hang and fall
amber and opaque, the tint in your eyes

when songs hit their bridge. I see a spruce
drop its cones, scales barely shut

and covered in sap, the shape of your lips
against my name. Even the sun lets go,

wraps the woods in canary ash
while cardinals brush wings and bleed

beneath cloudfire. I see cattails unwrap
as our knees unfold. I see the blue fade

from pine needles and our wire bodies,
a bridge between cedar fence posts.

Sisyphus

First the day,
then the night.

In the night
I dream it is day—
the rock with its lichens
I'm beginning to love,

the melancholy tug of gravity
with its infinite patience,

the frozen mountaintop with its views
of other frozen mountaintops.

In the day
I dream it is the night—
far away, I see myself from another peak,
shouldering aside the dead
in the cobwebby darkness.

I snort like a bull but find myself floating,
gliding among the luminous angelfish
of some half-remembered Aegean inlet.
I shimmer and break among the shifting columns of light.

And then it is the night.
I dream the day awake.

My rock is a white pebble among a thousand
at the bottom of the sea.

There are so many rocks to lift,
and I am in love with each of them.

Precambrian

On cold days I drink lemonade
by a fire that spits like sea.

Nebraska is a state of mind.

I clothe myself in soil and time.
Eyes stuck to the second hand.

Burn and live forever. Never waiver.
The old farmhouse drowned.

On warm days I drink coffee.
The telephone rarely rings.

I trace my hands in wheat,
count bones in twos and threes.

Old time flood, five lives curl into one.

I walk dirt roads in need
of nothing. Take my turn and thud.

These bodies that will petrify to stone.
Kicking at gravel, I wonder why

the earth preserves so much of its dead.

Origami Lotus

to A.C.

"Then, too, at night, the flower closes and goes underwater, only to rise up in its splendor again at dawn..."

—Vedantic Symbology (Schaller von Weber)

Happy I am
of this tiny
folded paper
lotus flower
with green leaf

floating as it were together
that you made for me

also sad
that you made this
for me instead
of the writing assignment
on life after death

happy though
that you and others in the class
care not at all to think of death
but sad

because I hoped
to be the one
to teach you that
there is no death

(but this cannot be taught:
this only can be learned)

and happy too
because this folded
floweret seems more to me
than words than death
than heart-red life

than the glassy surface
of deepening darkness
into which (my sources say)

nightly sinks
the creaseless kind
slips into murk
to sleep: whence

rising early
from the slops
to blossom let us
say unfold

and what I hope
one day to learn
to do and do it

well: float

100 Years

for Miguel Hernandez, born 10/30/1910

Lightning should fall gently today
felling a fig tree's branch.

Lightning should greet the hills of
Spain and then silence
should fill the day for just a while.
Fig trees should be planted
in your name, in the cities
where you walked, in the city
where you died, and may they
live and grow for 100 years.

Twilight

Black Rock Desert, Nevada

Darkness slides, a flood
of black onto the horizon—
distant, closer, now within reach.

Then, a dusty moon rises,
sways tethered to the sky
by the buzz of white light.

Creep toward it, then quicken
your pace—reaching out for fistfuls
of stars, the is and the was of fire—

like the thinking, then
the having had thought:
this is the what of dying.

House of Bone

in sympathy
with the shadowed one
the rain awakens
in the spring, water
so sweet it feels
like sap, and the logs
in the walls, the planks
in the floor green
a little, swell,
warp and tilt,
wanting to loose
their bonds, to reach
for the light, break out
in leaf and song.

We the Living

Sticks and bare limbs
have come back to life
turning into a garden
the city of the dead,

and we the living
feel like royalty
walking under the new
shining canopies

stepping on the wet paths
strewn with flowers—
frangible carpets
light and dark pink

white and lavender.
We walk in the scent of rain
and the soft wind
showers us with petals.

No Need of Heroes

In the thickening spring a half-dream
of a life smudged out overlays reality.

Across the apple-calm waters of the lake,
voice small, at mountain's base is a man

made tall on his reflection. How fragile
was the canoe of her womb. From between

straw-flattened bracken and the velvet brown
of winter-locked heather an inverted fan

of grey-dappled scree
leaks from the fellside.

Between Lakes

A totem of the past, on one green bank
the stone pier of an old railway bridge
now a pile of pale grey boulders that supports
only grass tufts, ferns and clumps of moss.

Also over there, behind some trees, a once farmhouse
freshly painted white; while this side, from holes
in the low clay cliff, brown sand martins slip out
across the wide river that runs clear and deep
just a few upswelling ripples, light curved on
its surface with, in the dark below,
weed tresses mimicking the river's flow.

The insect-feeding martins soar, dip and skim;
and a practising warplane drives a tight arc,
enforcing and enclosing all in its raucous bowl.

The Factory Floor

On the far side of a flat
and overcropped field
— part pattern of islanded molehills
 among thread-veined sheeptracks —
is the languid white-grey
against an ivy-dark column
of a single woodpigeon's wings.

In the adjacent field, hoof-pitted,
the thin rear shanks of holstein calves,
— up to their hocks in cocoa mud,
 box heads sunk in damp hay —
encircle a galvanised carousel.

Clatter of a half-dozen
woodpigeons taking fright
scatter out the ivy tower.

Snowbird

I could die
in either bed,

that last frame
in my closing eye
maple tree or palm

through constant,
sun-shot windows.

I know what they said,
those Victorians:
'Choose a house for death.'

I say, 'Enjoy the wait,'

the sexy life
of sweet gum, acacia,
winged seed or nut—

the tossing of odd grasses

where winter is always summer,
the hot afternoons in gracious shade,
the cotton curtains bellied
by rose and myrtle breezes.

I say,

when my turn of winter comes,
I, unencumbered Persephone,
will dictate my own white season,

will author my own migration.

Cold beds
and bare trees
are not among those options.

Daphne Major, Galapagos Islands

A brutish atoll, rock shear and upright,
flat where the mountain down-faults.
Then a ledge, a foothold
to staggered stairs. The path?
A thin diagonal along the cliffside.

All day the waves rush the walls,
wash the rock, while stars
behind blue gauze wait night's firing.
Finches are busy in the cactus,

their beaks like linemen's pliers
crack its tough seeds, open its flowers,
drink its nectar, its pollen.
Like bees, they pollinate.

Like us they chatter
to anyone who listens.
Here is where it began—Darwin's
long conversation with the world.

After, he pattered in England's mud,
collecting bird droppings, seed husks,
stuffing bodies of wrens and warblers,
writing it all down in his secret notebooks.

While the finches went on, each bird
a specialist, a tool maker, a farmer,
a seed cracker, their beaks
honed for this place, this task.

Flight Pattern

The single bird in the branches
of grief.

I need for it to fly
taking the stones away,
bringing the turning
wheel.

Walking in the flooding stream
I believe there's
no sorrow
without two
to make it,

a beginning and ending
over and over
in one another's arms
begging the dark away

as though it might depart
on a long train
stopping only for
light.

And light. I need it to enfold
me in its long arms pushing
back the fierce shadow
of illness,

the same that lifted you
away and over the
impossible horizon
to that other
place.

I offer the bird,
the unseen, unseeing
bird,

that flower of
supplication,

anything that will
grant me grace
of flight.

White Trees in the Distance

a white wind of
petals, maybe snow.
The longest I've
been so close to
you on the sheet
of paper. Like your
death, these poems
about you, a wild
surprise. The last
page in the note
book, still I think
I'll need another
notebook before I
can let you go

Moving By Touch

that afternoon an
unreal amber
light 4 o'clock the
quietness of
oil February blue
bowls full of
oranges we were
spreading honey, butter
on new bread our
skin nearly
touching
Even the dark wood glowed

Cranberry Bog

A boom frames the blood-red tide,
"crane-berries" cut free by ferry harvesters,
buoyed to the surface by tiny, tuber bubbles.
A conveyor sifts the burgundy waste,

leaving beads near the shore for gleaners
to stuff birds or tang breads while the worked
water flumes out below the road.

The crop will flavor vodka, lace with autumn
faraway dinners, bite the blood with the life of birds.

Ohio Autumn

Cacophonous flock
above harvest field
spreading their sky-net

sideways falls and soars
medusoid in the pulsing
light of afternoon

under bundled clouds
neither to feed nor mate
before migration.

Cistern

The word itself says purity and sound

like a rock bounced from the top,
echo ringing clear as air,

a room in the house of earth
with walls of layered stone

the sky pours itself into
holding fullness of days,

a vessel rippling starlight
and the half shell of the moon

riding on its back.

Sea Urchin

Between the glittering rings
of tide, a flower—
sudden and unexpected.
A bone-colored
chrysanthemum,
midsummer.

The children's fingertips
transgress its tiny textures,
like an ocean, like a hunger
succinct in a bucket's
bright plastic well,

where the moon will skim
this pooled bit of night
in increments of a wilting bloom—
pale tentacles falling away like petals,

and a bald pod beneath,
hollowed by morning
that still whispers of surfaces:
sea foam, aqua, stars.

Devreaux Baker has received numerous awards for her poetry including a MacDowell Fellowship and three CA Arts Council Grants. Her new book of poetry is *Red Willow Purple* published by Wild Ocean Press.

Luis Cuauhtemoc Berriozabal works in the mental health field in Los Angeles. His poems have appeared in *Green Silk Journal*, *Leaf Garden Press*, and *The Stray Branch*. His chapbook, *Digging A Grave*, was published by Kendra Steiner Editions.

Francis Blessington has pub'd two books of poems, *Wolf Howl* and *Lantskip*, many translations, and numerous poems in such journals as *The Florida Review*, *The Southern Humanities Review*, and *Southern Poetry Review*. He is an English professor at Northeastern University.

Doug Bolling is from Flossmoor, Illinois and has appeared widely in literary journals including *Georgetown Review*, *Poem*, *Slant*, and *Minnetonka Review*.

Richard Alan Bunch was born in Honolulu and grew up in the Napa Valley. His works include *Summer Hawk*, *Rivers of the Sea*, and *South by Southwest*, and poems have appeared in numerous journals.

Joan Colby has 900 poems in journals including *Poetry*, *Atlanta Review*, and *Kansas Quarterly*. She has pub'd seven books of poetry and has won multiple awards from the IL Arts Council, among others.

Joelee Dekker lives, reads and writes in Fruitport, MI, where she was born and raised. She earned her BA in Creative Writing from Western Michigan University. She also writes fiction and creative non-fiction.

Lesley Doyle currently writes, sleeps and gardens in Kentucky. Recent work has appeared in *Mad Swirl* and *Southern Women's Review*.

Rina Ferrarelli is from Pittsburgh. Her work has been pub'd widely. *The Bread We Ate*, a book of poetry, is forthcoming from Guernica Editions.

Deborah Fleming has poems in *Sucarnochee Review*, *Pennsylvania Review*, *Hiram Poetry Review* and others. She teaches creative writing at Ashland University, OH, where she edits the Ashland Poetry Press.

Alysse Hotz received her MFA from U of Missouri–Kansas City where she held the Stanley H. Durwood Fellowship for Creative Writing. She lives and teaches English in Omaha, Nebraska.

Fred Jacobs is an English teacher at East River Academy, the public high school for incarcerated students on Rikers Island in New York City.

Sigrun Susan Lane has poems in *Crab Creek Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Sing Heavenly Muse*, and others. She has received awards for poetry from the Seattle Arts Commission and the King County Arts Commission.

Mitch LesCarbeau has pub'd in over fifty journals including *The New England Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, and *The Nation*. He has won a number of prizes including the Grolier Prize and the Galway Kinnell Poetry Prize. His volume of poetry is titled *The Comedy of Memory*.

Lyn Lifshin has pub'd poems in probably every journal in existence as well as over 120 books and four edited anthologies. Her website is www.lynlifshin.com.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. His book, *Hands Collected*, was published in 2010 by Pavement Saw Press.

Suzanne Roberts holds a Ph.D. in Literature and the Environment from U. of Nevada-Reno and currently teaches at Lake Tahoe Community College. Her books include *Shameless*, *Nothing to You* and *Three Hours to Burn a Body: Poems on Travel*.

Laura Sobott Ross is from Sorrento, FL, and has poetry in *The Columbia Review*, *Tar River Review*, and *Calyx*, among others. She was named a finalist in the Creekwalker Poetry Prize.

Sam Smith is a UK-based author and editor of *The Journal*, publisher of Original Books Plus, and current poetry editor of BeWrite Books. He has published several poetry collections and novels.

Matthew J. Spireng has published four chapbooks, and his book *Out of Body* won the 2004 Bluestem Poetry Award from Emporia State U. *What Focus Is* will appear this year from Word Press.

Lyn Stefenhagens is from Osprey, FL, and has been kicking around the small press scene for many years with over 200 acceptances.

Lance Wilcox is an English professor at Elmhurst College and editor of *River Oak Review* who has poems in *South Carolina Review*, *Comstock Review*, and *RHINO* as well as scholarly articles, short fiction, and plays.

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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