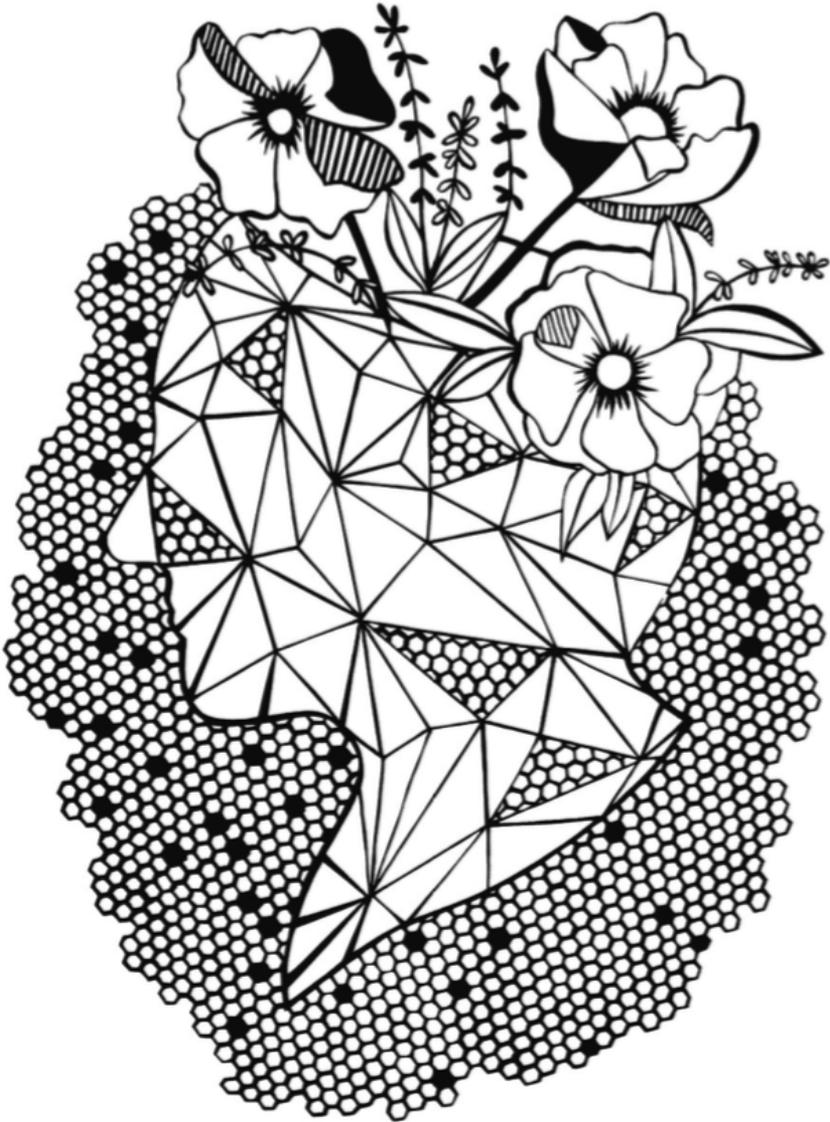


# ALBATROSS



#27

“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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# ALBATROSS

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# ALBATROSS

## #27

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Cover art: "Amber Matter" by Portia Apple.

Digital interventions by Roy Parkhurst

### Subscription Rates

One issue: \$5.00

Two issues: \$8.00

Checks payable to ALBATROSS.

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ISSN 0887 4239

ALBATROSS accepts submissions of original poetry and black-ink drawings. Please mail all correspondence to ALBATROSS, 2 South New Street, Bradford, MA 01835. We do not appreciate receiving simultaneous submissions and later finding out that poems submitted to us were accepted elsewhere, so please do not do this. Be sure to include a SASE (self-addressed stamped envelope) with all correspondence.

<http://www.anabiosispress.org>

<http://albatrosspoetryjournal.wordpress.com>

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*Blades of Grass*

There are those who say  
modern science hasn't caught up  
  
with the occult arts of certain  
Gypsies nor the cabalistic notions  
  
handed down from antiquity  
as revelations to old Jews  
  
— both proclaiming that not a single  
blade of grass rises from the Earth  
  
unblessed by the loving hand  
of a Divine Being.

And there are others  
who believe our fate

is as random as  
the burning of faded

blades of grass  
on the mountainside

when lightning strikes  
haphazardly

before the great  
storm is unleashed.

*Little Song #3*

Mourning. Choked and cloaked  
as a hung monk. Sky-buried.

Wings a heart-splayed  
rain of answered prayers,  
folklored antlers, sick-green, rare as

the small alabaster spine  
of a four-foot dragon  
coiled under glass  
in a cloud of formaldehyde.

*Emmylou*

Who will remember your name?  
These breeze-combed  
trees with their  
thousand hushes.

Under the thunder  
on the tall white porch  
a mislaid teacup catches rain.

Name me one thing more  
beautiful than a living  
being's laughter.

*Since Your Birthday*

I paid attention, recorded  
everything: red  
big moonrise quick over cloudbank.  
The sourmilk scent: mums wilt  
on my altar, flesh ashing,  
cymbals. All of us clanging: "Wrong,  
wrong, wrong." The fruit  
offering baked into ache.

A beautiful bright  
house of slight  
blue to walk through,  
its name "Tomorrow  
And The Big  
Sky Who Opens  
Up With It." Sliver

of lapis in my changepocket.  
My thumbnail hill-lost  
wandering your clavicle.

My heart's throat  
and the song you pull  
from it. Your lily petal  
fingers bloom  
onto my palm.

Thrum of thumbed string,  
secret as a tree root drinks rain.  
There is no lack of you.

*Emily as Light Spun Out of Nothingness*

The progress is not a bird, shining  
to flight, leaving for the sky context,

the progress, the coming light,  
revered for relevance, we can see!

I have had many hands touch me,  
I had no names for those hands,

until I could see, until I looked down  
from the heat of the touch, and saw

Emily, spread as blue fire, spun out  
of nothingness, unrelenting, sacred.

*Emily as the Holes Are Light*

There are no bad drugs,  
but there are some girls  
you need two hands for.

*Emily as Iron Gossimer*

Black dress, serrated  
by the explosion  
of tonight's moon,

my Emily has flirted  
with catastrophe  
in the silky fabric she

chose. I am thrilled  
that the actual tearing  
will be done by no light.

*Emily as Strong, Dark Tea*

Even in my lonely office, the steam  
of Emily rises to my tongue, the lift  
of her shadow underneath the door  
hands me wing, hands me sword.

*Emily as a Dead Sparrow*

Beak to the stonework, ghost  
bird, girl haunting the morning  
of my last six years, I wake to you  
  
& wonder about the feathers  
splayed like sacrifice in the sheets.  
Limp, your body is covered  
  
in the thrashings of last night,  
the science of action, hemmed in  
by weak thread. Do you have  
  
a song for me today? Do you,  
with the rich sound of audition,  
have other animals we could be?

*Blue at the Table in the Hot Sun*

give him a shot of light,  
give him ragged glass  
to escape thru,  
black cat blues dogging  
the bed

He, ok, it's you, hell bound,  
in a hurry. You're pulling blue  
out of the strings. Mama's got

a brand new. It's the table  
in the light. Cat on the chair  
with night scratching

Wind rattles the panes,  
rattles gone love thru your  
spine. Your baby's  
changed the lock on the door

If you're still singing,  
earth fills your lips

*Daddies like Pennies*

my father — picture barren wasteland hands,  
shallow, pooling breaths.  
picture blossoming tulip eyes,  
the stamp of little reds on concrete.  
he laughs with a romantic tongue:

*all ten million of our stars are born the same way,  
soil blistered by roots and skin,  
the craters moon-patches of boyish identity*

my father owns a restaurant in the villa  
and loses coins too easily,  
and when he is twenty-five his eye  
catches on a chinese girl's collar hook.

*on special nights where the moon is close —  
gone earth-kissing again,  
stargazers truly know the shape of twilight*

and they find it in the same light he cuts radishes  
and tulips, through the deep black of his stem.

*and somehow, in a blended  
sky clouds are erupting, birthing  
little birds*

in the back, starless elvis wailing,  
the taste of siren-gypsies cooked into  
noodle stew — coarse, meatless.  
bone on marrow becomes  
what separates kin, and the girl, she is crying  
about the way movies never seem to end.

*Untitled*

Halfway up the mountainside,  
on the hewn stone steps, the sun  
already set, the path  
curved beneath a canopy  
of cicada covered leaves.  
I thought I saw a silhouette,  
a nearly recognized shape  
against the castle's still  
standing walls. I turned back.  
There is nothing so horrifying  
as being left alone with beauty.  
At the base I slip from  
tree's shadow to tree's shadow,  
my own hungry ghost burning my last  
memory of you between my palms.  
A silent memory of thick tongued nothings,  
barely enough to heat one breath.  
Then once again my feet are  
the only ones padding down  
the dirt road. If I could  
tell you one more thing again  
it would be something  
beautiful and soft enough  
that you would have followed me  
up the mountain pass.

*Pulling Vines Off Plywood Walls Forever*

The treehouse has been swallowed by kudzu.  
We could feel it growing. In a few days,  
I will finally lose everything. My arms  
find nails in the bramble. I ask you to stay,  
but you work in an hour. We cannot blame  
our inexperience alone; this house has doors  
we never even bothered to explore. If you  
are leaving me today, will I be able to burn  
the orchids that blanket our floor? I turned  
myself into a pile of twigs. I was bored —  
the two of us were lonely for a nest. *Start*

*at the root. Pull deliberately with honest hands.  
Before you build a house, check for invasives.*

*Digging for Dinosaur Bones*

— for Sam

We drew a circle of dirt  
and that was our job.  
There was only the earth,

our fingernail shovels,  
and what little we knew  
about paleontology —

we hadn't learned to burden ourselves  
with the thought of sewer pipes  
or what reaching one meant

for our parents. We  
were asteroids.

*The Ring of Brodgar, Orkney (2500 BCE)*

Our last afternoon of whirlwind and rock,  
I would never say you emerged from the stones,  
but I did see you walk up a small rise,  
I did see you casually stepping out of  
meadow of purple, loch-born and flowing.  
So, rather call the place sacred to thistle,  
sacred to deep scars of entrenched heather;  
rather refer to an avenue of  
heather with some ring of stones added in;  
because the stones were confined to their ring  
of numbers: three-hundred forty-one feet  
around, thirty or so of sixty stones left,  
and the cratered depth of four thousand years.  
But no numbers for blossom, no boundaries,  
no pattern of crosshatching heather and  
thistle, no plan in the two lochs, or the  
panorama of slightly curved backs everywhere.  
In every real way, the ring was placed here,  
the ring of now pock-marked, planetary stone,  
weathered, stained green or yellow or white, or  
spattered as if with ink out of the dark —  
the landscape was first, the stones only our  
attempt at echo and veneration.

*Migrations at the End of the Ice Age (10,000 BCE)*

I like to think about it this way:  
the ice sheets of Old Europe, rather than  
melting and making a run to the north

simply because the weather got warmer,  
instead retreated, were sought out and stalked,  
harried and run down by animals, plants

and human tribes living off the new:  
new forests, new seas, new islands, and new  
places to settle, hunt, or be hunted,

to die and be buried, ornamented  
with the bone, stone, and shell of this landscape,  
the belly full of water lily, pear,

salmon and horse, pig and seal and tubers,  
the sky blue along with birch, oak and beech.  
That's how I like to imagine the scene

from my own perch, some twelve thousand years on —  
that the continents of covering ice  
retreated from the hunt for new meaning,

every branch and drop and living thing made  
to signify something more than itself,  
up to the roasting scent of hazelnuts.

*Gone to the Roots*

So with winter  
a snow came  
white, powdered,  
deep in drifts  
piled high about  
the blackened  
old-growth forest  
that had blazed  
then smoldered  
from the last of summer  
through an anguished autumn,  
flame — an incandescent drunk  
stumbling about the hills  
sweeping aside all custom  
all convention all comity  
before its engorging appetite —  
and then with winter  
and snowfall after  
blinding bright  
snowfall skies cleared  
to a hurtful blue  
ash settled as in an  
intestate statement  
and the fire left  
and the men who  
fought it too and  
the scorched ponderosa  
and coastal oak stood  
stripped, bare as refugees  
thin final spirals of smoke  
under an early April sun  
snow cracked like  
rifle shot, went to a  
gray mush, puddled, then  
ran cold, gushing, ashen,  
down the ragged hills and  
up — impassioned — sprang  
fire —

fire lain like a devotional,  
ruby ember, all winter —  
fire set on the heart of the matter —  
fire that had (like all true flame)  
taken up residence  
in the roots.

*Most People Say and Do Too Much*

the wind comes from the four corners  
sweeps across the last, high, sapphire  
lake.

the bull elk lower great heads and  
commence the yearly shedding  
of antlers.

the green quaking aspen  
glitter against  
the slopes.

the brown trout waken  
from the deep-water drowse  
of winter.

the strands of cottonwood  
leaf out into crowns  
of adulation.

over the high banks  
of red river soil, swallow and swift,  
duck and hawk.

a beating of wings.

*Considering Flight*

I'm just  
          scattered,  
          struggling to collect  
and launch  
like a barn swallow  
          from its nest,

from its cup of mud  
          to swoop the sky.

It wants to go. I can see it.  
          It wants to leave  
not from weakness, nor from any lack  
          as a way of escape,

but from the ledge  
          it needs a trajectory  
          to tug its small body  
          into flight.

Like learning algebra  
          on a square card table  
going forward is not the equation  
          of regret, moving on  
is not  
          the loss from the away.

Altered to apparent emptiness  
          explanations are  
the reasons,  
          one's self the recognition  
in that collapsing moment  
          when dark wings join

*The Wind*

I am always listening for it,  
near the door or a drafty window  
as if it were whistling a tune.

I know it can't really be singing,  
but I have watched the arborvitae  
swaying in a line from left to right

before a warm thunderstorm in May,  
the flutter of pink dogwood blossoms,  
those tinkling waves of blue spruce and pine

sprinkled with rain, like tarnished green coins.  
It's impossible not to regard  
the wind as the greatest musician;

its breath surges, passing through hollows,  
hurling up great trees and rolling  
roof shingles. An invisible sea

of sound, it is the everything and nothing,  
the sigh of a ruffled bedroom curtain,  
the voice of every untouched leaf.

*That Moment*

That precise moment of dawn  
when light has not yet  
left the backlit clouds  
to shine on every object here,  
when light suffuses the whole  
expansive backdrop of sky  
leaving us bereft:

that is the moment  
when we can see, if we look,  
each discrete detail of these trees  
in crisp relief before us,  
their surfaces drained of color,  
their silhouettes solid and defined.

*Morning Glories*

Our first problem —  
we started with seeds, not plants.  
Then summer was unexpectedly cool.  
Vines barely grew,  
no buds developed till late in April.

When the first flower appeared,  
fully open at dawn,  
it was like sunrise — blue unclouded sky  
with blush of pink, rays of white light.  
More blooms developed only slowly.

We won't welcome flower-laden vines.  
Our harvest —  
a single blossom living a single day.  
We rush to the patio daily,  
celebrate each one. Devotion  
is all we offer till frost comes.

*Bandai Bridge*

I stand alone & restless  
on Bandai Bridge over the Shinano River,  
the longest in Japan,  
wanting to fall in and be carried out to sea  
past the ferries and lighthouses  
to deeper currents  
where squid boats come out with their bright  
lights and nets: a beacon to swim toward.  
Yes, this kind of volition may one day  
give me courage enough to graduate  
from one who stands to one who jumps.

*Darkness*

Each morning wake & speak into the darkness  
What am I doing here?  
& the answer that comes back: Not much.  
Keep counting.

*Counting.*

Yes, numbers keep me grounded when I start to float away;  
I spend most of my days barely touching the ground.

When someone opens a window and lets a cool breeze in,  
we comment on the refreshing air, not  
on the skill of the opener.

*Carrots*

I clear a little space for them,  
choose the varieties,  
Kumiko plants the seeds,  
thins and weeds them a few weeks later.

\*

But the germination, and below, what happens  
in the soil, the real work —

roots reaching deep and true by a logic  
not learned in any text, greens reaching up in love  
with the sun —

for this I can take no credit.  
I do not recognize my hand in the vivid  
color, the sweetness, the satisfying crunch,

nor did I write the map of where  
the flavor takes you when you bite in,  
those private autobiographical joys.

I cannot say I grew this, only I discovered this,  
I waited for this.

Myself as amazed as anyone,  
I write my occupation, "Farmer, ostensibly."

*Snap*

Each year in September  
something snaps &  
summer breaks;  
pools are abandoned,  
bicycles left in the way.  
But here on this long afternoon,  
scorched lettuce leaves are  
singed in summer's  
swansong & a slice of bitterness  
gets folded in  
while above the nearly dead  
cucumber beds  
the last vine-tired fruit curls  
into the world.

*After Berry Picking*

Making the turn on the road toward home.

Toward my own body  
that has been waiting for  
some gentle arrival.

Coming home to where  
words

rise out of the blueberry dusk  
and hang in strange new constellations  
from my longest  
bones.

This morning an hour before daylight, Orion  
rose over the dark east edge  
of the amazing  
immediate.

*Wait, he said, the cold, the clarity.*

I knew it. The winter, the snow  
will bail me out.  
Even so, I have nothing to give.

*On the Lake*

It's a way of taking days slow,  
stopping at night, an uncertain anchorage,  
the wind comes up after midnight  
and holds steady until dawn,  
the anchor holding firmly in the mud.  
I turn from one side to the other  
and so change lives, hoping,  
one night, to find the one  
that would like to try again,  
holding its breath as the water rises,  
waiting until the air is nearly gone  
to take that last breath.  
Living would be easier then,  
and death would only happen to old people  
when they're not looking  
but are still tired of how fast  
the life around them is moving.

*The Truth About Homework*

today cup mushrooms  
reclaim the shower

my own shed skin  
dusts the windowsill

spiders remind  
who was here first

and what will come —

deer pellets and thistles  
in the kitchen

grasshoppers and  
wild rye in the hall

purple clover  
returning bricks to earth

*In Case of Stairs, Use Fire*

— for my arthritis

I write to escape this gravity —  
ligaments of sun-dried rubber  
shrinking with every flare —

I look for my likeness  
in something brighter  
like the sun —

another body consuming itself  
shining with exhaustion  
releasing its borrowed light

*Spring*

The earth is made of stone and glass  
and everything that happens  
in between. All stories  
center on love and heartbreak  
yet for ten thousand mornings  
I could walk through this rutted path, illuminated  
by soft green buds that gradually unfold  
into flowers of unbearable beauty  
and never once think that the petals  
will darken, furl, then drop, to become  
nothing more than grains of thirsting soil.

*A Few Things to Remember While in the Desert*

Trees are not  
welcome; branches only  
complicate landscapes.  
Shadows, the moon's  
path and a distant  
drumming of thunder are all  
that matter. Silence is  
heartbreaking, busy. Good  
manners dictate blending with  
rock, thorn, cinnamon  
adobe mud. Always work  
toward horizons, even though  
they shift and waver. Mountains  
are sudden, bare, expecting you  
to be the same. Prepare  
to listen to yourself, because  
you can't hide under  
slivers of shade, and water  
is worth killing for.

*Threadbare*

I am not the only one  
looking toward night skies

to give thanks for consistency  
because here on earth

a profound unraveling  
began long ago. It may have started

with the invention of that damn  
wheel, or when this hemisphere

was invaded; not for its forests and what lived  
within, but for what lay beneath.

Heart cannot be cleaved from shiny rock  
no matter how deep you mine.

Let us be clear:

It is an act of resilience when  
trees sprout above parched soil

It is street theater when weeds  
out of sidewalks crack

As non-negotiable filaments fray  
we must learn resistance —

Listen to the red bird's song  
its words are dangerous and good.

**Andrés Berger-Kiss** was born in Hungary, raised in Columbia, and currently works as Chief Psychologist for the State of Oregon. While this is his first U.S. publication, he has pub'd four poetry books written in Spanish, and an anthology of short stories in English, *The Sharpener and Other Stories*, was pub'd by The Latin American Literary Review Press.

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**Robert Fillman** won the poetry contest at the 2016 Pennsylvania Writers Conference, and he has been featured as a "Showcase Poet" in *The Aurorean*. His poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Chiron Review*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Third Wednesday* and others. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate at Lehigh U where he edits *Amaranth*.

**Mark Frank** spent 12 years in Japan where he studied agriculture, sake making, Buddhism, and Chinese-style poetry. Since 2010, he has worked as a market farmer, growing Asian vegetables on a small organic farm in southwest Missouri.

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**Mark B. Hamilton** has recent poems in *Plainsongs*, *Written River*, *Poetry Salzburg Review* and others. He was editor of *Words on Wilderness* (U of Montana) and editor-in-chief of *Groundwork: A Natural Incentive* (Ball State U). A new chapbook, *100 Miles of Heat*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press. See [markbhamilton.wordpress.com](http://markbhamilton.wordpress.com) for more info.

**Vincent Hao** is an aspiring writer who attends high school in Austin, TX. His work has been pub'd in *Anomaly Literary Journal* and is forthcoming in *Adroit Journal*, *Blood Orange*, and *River Styx*.

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**Lyn Lifshin** does not need a bio note because she has pub'd millions of poems in thousands of journals, and anybody who reads bio notes in poetry journals will have encountered her name numerous times. She has published numerous times in *Albatross* as well.

**Tim Miller** has poetry appearing widely, and his most recent book is the long narrative poem *To the House of the Sun* (S4N Books). He writes about poetry, history, and religion at [wordsandsilence.com](http://wordsandsilence.com).

**Jan C. Minich** lives in Wellington, UT and Bayfield, WI. He has a book of poems, *The Letters of Silver Dollar*; two chapbooks, *History of a Drowning* and *Wild Roses*; and a book forthcoming from Mayapple Press titled *Wild Roses: Poems* in 2017. He holds an MFA from U of Iowa and a PhD from the U of Utah and is former lit prof at the College of E. Utah.

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**Beth Suter** studied Environmental Science at UC Davis and has worked as a naturalist and teacher. She is also an award-winning poet with recent pieces in *The Avocet* and *American Tanka*. She lives in Northern California with her husband and son and has previously pub'd in *Albatross*.

**Jeremy Yocum** holds a BA in English Comp with a Poetry Concentration from the U of N. Texas. He has worked a gamut of unusual side jobs and daily gigs to support his creative pursuits. He currently lives in Brooklyn, NY. This is his first publication.

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

The Anabiosis Press  
2 South New Street  
Bradford, MA 01835  
[www.anabiosispress.org](http://www.anabiosispress.org)

