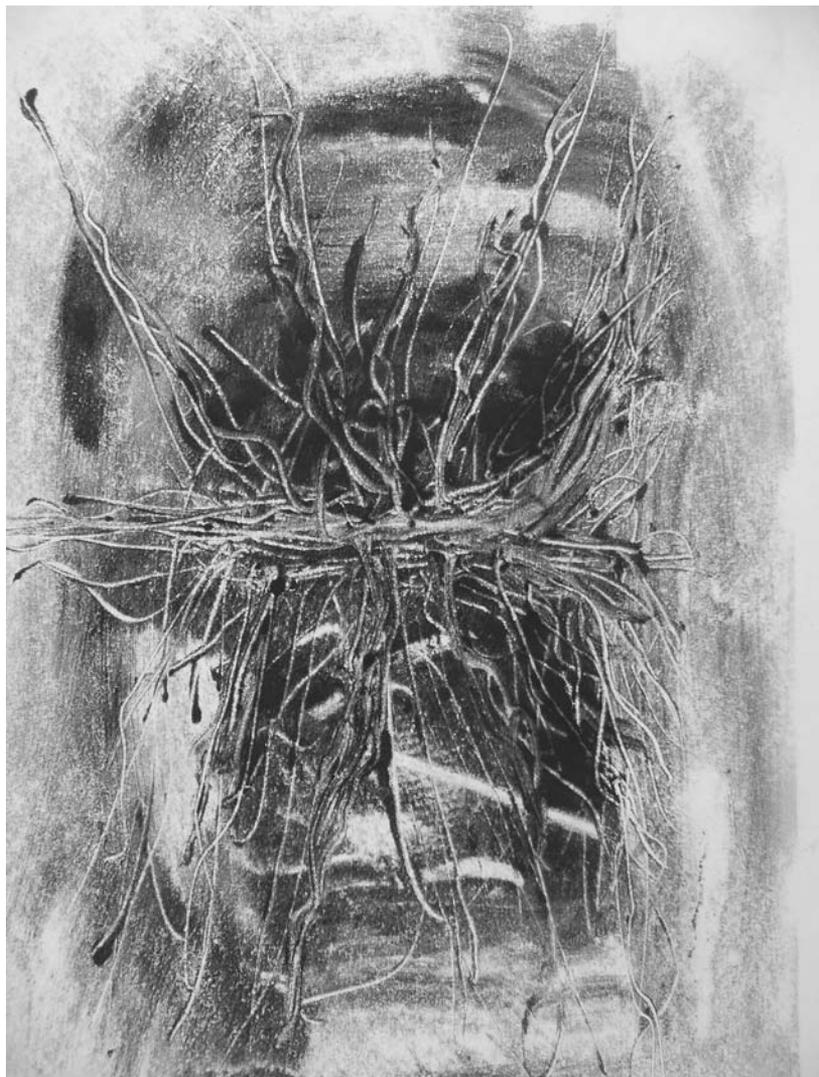


ALBATROSS



#28

“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

#28

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Walking on Water

Speak of miracles. Speak
of defying gravity and all
the laws of physics. Speak
and be ignored in this age of the explained,
the mundane.

Metaphysics, after all, is on the way out.
No God need apply.

Yet we seek to know
what the gods know,
the ability to walk across the clouds,
and, though grown giant-large —
heavy as mountains, heavy as broken bridges —
to be light as rain, to be carried like rain
in the moving womb of wet air.

The story itself is the doing:
the telling a telling of crossing over
with the weight of a great burden
upon us.

Gum

When Miss Hooker dies, she's my Sunday School teacher, she'll go to Heaven hands down, her soul will, anyway, her body will hang forever back on earth in its grave, I mean her body's grave, the earth's grave is the universe, I guess, and she'll be young forever up there and if I'm good or maybe that's just good enough I'll see her again, I'll go to Heaven, too — even if I don't stay there forever I'll be there long enough for God to pass judgment on me and tell me if I get to stay or if I have to go to Hell for all time and the bad things I've done, whatever those are, including chewing gum in church and swiping candy bars from the drug store and trying to smoke a Swisher Sweet and failing English in regular school and skipping Sunday School class to go fishing in the pond behind the cemetery

where one of those stones has my name on it or it will, I mean, one day when I'm gone but still here, my soul shot up to Heaven but my dead body remaining. After class today I asked Miss Hooker if when I die may I please be buried beside her and she said that that was up to me and my family so then I asked her could someone open up her grave and put me still newly dead in there with her bones and after she thought for a moment, I guess she was thinking although she looked like she just woke up, was resurrected even, she said that she'd have to give it some more thought. So I'll see her again next Sunday if I'm not dead by then or she is or

we both are and if we both are then we'll
see each other there in Heaven at least
long enough for me to be judged and sent
to Hell. It's like God thinks of everything.

Cous

This is the river dump.
We smell wet, sleep with dogs.

Here vowels have a bum knee.
Them prophets of bad weather.

Collect the cutoff fingers of our uncles,
we'd have a full set to bet with.

Gave Ma mastitis straight away.
Savage and Texas near spelled the same.

Born-again so much times I start to feel invincible.
And it a forgiving God up here.

Said you on the other side of the moat now bitch.
He come at me like he holding a hand of dirt.

Was watching my mouth cuz wires just got out.
Wasn't sure if he knew or not my weak spot.

Heard his daddy bit Jermeys lip half-off, them two alone
in his single-sounds queer as a turtle in a attic to me.

Not consummating any friendship, not even Bert.
Call me corn cockler cuz I went Crayon to Career.

Sheet metal. I speak complete sentences:
Fuck you. Ain't about to fake it.

Onions, Late July

A morning glory
opens
in the overgrown
row of grass
and seedling maples.
The cherry blossoms
all fell weeks ago.
I reach past
tiny trees
find an onion
planted in March
and pull:
this is the greatest
act of faith
I am capable of.

Sail

In Maine I built a small model
of the San Francisco Bay
so I could sail
my little boat there
without crossing the desert
or going around Africa
This was cheating
but to breathe is to cheat
You did not make the air
I was too big to fit
in the little boat so I made
a model of myself to sail it
which I guess was also against
the rules
but when I'm anchored
near the Bridge and fog rolls in
the world shrinks
and I do what must be done
In tsunamis predictions of scale
have little meaning

Maine Childhood

I often dream of the wretched
place I call home.
As I age memories lose their protective glow.
Stark, beautiful trees felled in wild succession
are determined by the wind and skill of the cutter.

I know the outhouse still stands far from the house,
a journey toward the hell of poverty's grim hold.
I ploughed through knee deep snow with bare legs.
The dark was timed as if from a clock inside the moon.

Sapphires glinted over small hills in a pale blue glow,
pushing me forward to the crooked door shut with snow,
a red shovel beneath it.

Winter Evening

Winter takes shape as a glistening
helmet over our house. Trees suffer
bandaged with ice. The mail box empty.
Waiting months for his letter, he does not need me.
A shot is heard. Later father is bent
dragging a deer carcass.
Soon we will eat blood cooked into gravy.
Mother sings Hank Snow songs as
she boils a venison dinner. I gag on meat.
Winter broods in her until she rants like an
animal in a cage, smoking, pacing.
Dead now a decade, I still fear her.
She had a way of breaking my life apart,
until I received his next letter.

Query

So you've brought
down the red tailed hawk
with a mere twitch
of the trigger finger.

I wonder if
your own return to earth
will exhibit such
a passionate descent
when your full name is called.

Summer Dawn

The stars withdraw
silently as the dew
has come into its own.

A breeze stirs
the thick maple —
a river sound.

Across the field
a dog barks twice
and goes quiet.

The first robin carols.
A distant truck changes gears.
Your back turned to the west

you stand in a story
imperishable as that
which survives every war.

Dummy Town, Nevada, 1955

They were arranged in family units:
husband, wife, daughter, son,
family dog posed by the fireplace,
the television screen in static pattern
while mother was tied to the sofa
in her new rayon dress.

Her husband,
wired to a fence post,
stared aimlessly
as the sun set into a glow
across the desert.

The children were bedded down
in the reinforced bedroom,
and each of their arms were animated,
reaching out
for something unobtainable.
Grasping for something
that, even at the last minute,
had it been there
they would not have recognized.

Killing the Animals

The bulls have fallen
to their knees, their eyes, huge
and rolling towards man's heaven,
muscles quivering beneath
the steel shank.

I would like to think
that beautiful flowers will crack
the earth beneath their blood, bloom
in this arena of mud,
but they are killed
only out of man's infertility.

Whatever power that there is
called God, the death
of these bulls
will diminish
if there is purpose
to any born thing.

Task

If willing it won't fill the feeder,
There'll be no more titmice, no chickadees,
Though a full bag of seed is in the shed,
Right behind the hydraulic car jack wedged
In front of the green bin with the summer floats.

Knowing exactly where it is
Doesn't make the slightest bit of difference.
And that, my friends, about sums up
Why it's been so damn hard to draw
The sweet things back to me.

small creatures

next to a burrow
on this wooded bluff
beside the Mississippi
singing hymns of well-being
for that which lives within
perhaps even a goddess
yes, the goddess of
some small creatures

prepared

and if the night hawk
calls my name
I will answer,
yes, I will answer

and if the horned owl
calls my name
I will answer,
yes, I will answer

and if the old crow
calls my name
I will laugh, but,
yes, I will answer

yes, thankful
they know me
by name

Looking Out at the Stream

which is really not a stream
but a dried river bed that we installed last summer,
carrying bucketsful of mixed gravel
which are really bits and pieces of the last ice age
that came rushing out of nowhere
in a great, white wave of change,

I noticed that some dried bamboo leaves on the ground
resembled little canoes piled up on the imaginary shore,
and then forgot all about it until now,
trying to make something more of it,
of the mind's preoccupation with metaphor,
of the need to know, to explain the inexplicable —
the world as it is.

Grateful for failing that, again.

Return to Bamboo

— for Bill McCallum (1951-2004)

We spent most mornings mowing the lawns
and cutting back the frost-burnt bananas
along a winter waterfront of homes.
Currents of canals drifted brown
from Okeechobee. I laughed at myself,
watching the heron's blue flight
with snow-bound eyes. My hands broke out
with blisters, the work unfamiliar
to my touch. But the work was always
hard and good, well worth its day of sweat.
Shaking off the hibernation of my life indoors,
I swore I could hear your bamboo grow,
the papayas sweetening the evening breezes from
the Atlantic. But now, you write to say
a hard frost burnt the bamboo dead brown in sand,
the papaya stalks like shriveled fingers,
and the northwest winds are pushing south
promises of new fronts. This is it for you:
no more papayas. You've listened to the palms
cackling like old women with every gust
and have dreamed of flamingos shivering blue.
Dear friend, I write back in this, a dead cold —
that ain't no cliché. Nights frozen morgue stiff.
These words wrapped in wool and long johns.
Even the power lines crackle complaints
as another Arctic Express trucks down from
the polar cap. Man, it's too damn cold for me.
Nothing unusual, says a Minnesotan,
and another from Maine measured snow
in layers like sandstone. They laugh when I envy
the Canadian geese migrating to the warm marshes
along the Gulf. Tonight, I feel as comfortable as
an egret alone on an ice floe and want to tell
the starlings, the sparrows huddled on my windowsill,
that I understand. It's a matter of degrees.

Pebbles Down a Well

1.

The crabber throttles down, sliding
a small wake beneath the interstate bridge,

commuter traffic above him shuttling to and fro.

Some scent on the river says
the blues are on the move.

A hundred thirty-two traps to bait by noon.
Better than life on the hill dry-docked.

2.

Armadillos root among the palmettos.
Grackles grackle among the palms.

Fire ants freckle the sugar sand.
The men, named and unnamed, are gone, buried;

their dock rotted, sunk to the bottom of the river long ago,
when your daddy's daddy was just a boy.

Their work and lives sweat without equity.

3.

Here, high on this hill, let us pray,
and let the mullet leap without meaning.

Let the osprey roost atop a dead gray pine
and the alligator sun its appetites warm on its bank.

Timeless as this tide runs out.

Pacific

— for Kortni

Alone, on the sea just off Catalina,
there is a sailboat tacking
in the autumn wind. Crafts afloat
can resemble butterflies
in the brush, look like Calder mobiles,
or a surrender flag. The sound
of Aum fills my life, which is my body,
which is an ocean.

Along the cliffs

of Highway One, along the coast
between Santa Barbara
and San Francisco, you can park
and see what others have disregarded
(they set their tripods up
in rows elsewhere). As the sun

submerges, see
what the ocean has to tell,
this dusk, this destination. Wait
until the moon, Jupiter, Venus, and Mars,
and the stars are all that's light.
No reason

to rush, none at all. Tides go on,
nature goes on. A poem is an ocean.

Distinguish the Sun

The drive is long from city skyscrapers,
miles away from light pollution,

civilization into constellations,

gazing into a friend's telescope in pitch dark,
the night still chill before summer.

The distance of Proxima Centauri
or a red smudge, a galaxy
on a deep range photograph from Hubble,
inspires countless. Stars

hide during the shine of Sol as shadows

become thin and the

yellow blaze defines day,

and only eight minutes away at light speed.

Solar Farm, Morris Road

Sunlight's not a zero sum game.
It's endless, more so than air —
or even time,
although mine is running short.

Everything in this place glitters,
except a heap of burning tumbleweeds
that will smolder for days
and hundreds of black mirrors
hoarding light in their darkness.

Alkali dust like frost glitters
on the rutted, dirt road;
so does water drying up
in an overgrown pond.

Two ducks panic when I stop,
shimmering as they fly away
in a wide circle
that will bring them back later,
after I'm gone.

First Frost

Late, late, mid-October and only now
the cold begins to come. White lines
trace the grain of boards on the porch
and the grass is hoary, a beard turned
abruptly grey.

Overhead the sky is cloudless, blue,
blue, and five crows wheel overhead,
harbingers of the dawn, inscribing
their aerial prophecy in looping words
I cannot read.

The rising sun, obscured behind a
steel seamed roof, gleams on the leading
edge of their wings, bright, bright, as if
new-sprung from the forge of heaven
and not yet quenched.

Swallow Dance

Today the swallows flock above
the hayfield,

a cloud of them

flitting and darting and gliding
to the end of the field

and back again,

rising and falling,

swirling and circling,

such grace and energy,
such speed and acrobatics

that our eyes

are fooled

and cannot see

the thousand insects

hatching

and rising

into the mouth of August.

March 17 Notes

one day I will have a daughter
and she will try to make sense of it all.

later she is next to me on the porch
and our fingers hem the sky at the root, watch
as it blossoms into chrysanthemum,
petunia, shades of flax canvassing the earth.

lately I've been taking pills
for the ruse in my chest. a girl
in a hemlock dress confuses me
for reeds. how empty skin looks
under the guise of shadow.

in the lazy canyon, rock forms
in stratospheres, there's a way
to clutch a stone so tight that her
granite fuses into skin and her label
becomes a name, warm and heavy
with meaning.

on the trail — two stones perfectly connected.

I think of the world eloped,
a gravity of meditation and christmas stars,
fallen onto the branches of each pine.

I think of a harmony of little footprints
on stepping stones. rushing water licking imprints away.

there is a way to press leaves to the cheek
so that it feels of skin. I have gathered
river stones, tossing them off an edge of white.

one by one they become eggs,
birds in falling flight, a quiet girl melting
back into stone.

Family of Weasels

On last night's news I heard
of an engineer named K_____ who
invented the microchip and changed
our lives. How the chip now contains
a billion circuits which I still don't get
but what I do perceive is this engineer's
(a man modest in pride, fame and wealth)
achievement of Teilhard de Chardin's vision
of a world that is one organism and a single-
minded mankind.

Also mentioned
were Edison, the Wrights and Ford,
oddly not Einstein, Galileo, Copernicus, Newton,
Hamilton or Jefferson, Christ or Buddha,
or the unknown gatherers and traders
who invented agriculture, money.
8,000 generations and each individual
an experiment gone well or wrong, a chance
to respond with love or grief to the universe's effort
to extinguish us.

Family of weasels, young ones playful.
One reference says they're vicious murderers,
killing for sport. Absurd, I think, in the wild.
Another clarifies they eat 1/2 their body weight daily,
extremely active, high metabolism, hunt all their caloric needs
before eating. And, like the raccoon, ferocious defenders
of their young.

Where I'm From, #2

It's the spot
I've only just left,
imprints unfolding up
from the grass and leaves,

that opening, there,
a little less light
than full day sun, or

out here in the field flatness,
trailhead, and before that
whatever

was canopied, where a nose
full of Hemlock led the way,
and before, a climb,
mud

slogged but not impossible,
for here we stand
speaking of it,
of when boots were fresh,

when morning
was the stone door tread,
needle floor and hammock hitch,

and before, a kind of slumber:
but careful, for where

I'm from possesses the means
of never letting go.

Process

It's a winter class, a seminar
on the metaphysics of poetry
and three maintenance men
are outside raking the leaves.

I'm distracted from our class
instruction by the metaphors
offered by the men's hands
as they work past the fogged
window, by what I can hear,
sounds of tools and laughter.

They pull at the half-brown,
snow-spotted, leaf-lined grass
with their rakes in time with
each other, lifting their quarry,
pressing the already rotting
humus into barrels, pressing
it down, compressing harder
with each lift, turn, delivery,

the barrel heavier as each man
contributes and forces another
layer, a lesson in the patience
of archaeological layering
of which only the barrel can
know how long it will handle.

With enough pressure, with
whatever may happen after
today, a falling of ton after
ton of leaves and rains, snow
and drought, the fall of man
even, when civilizations rise
once again and others come

*

to dig in this place and study
poetry again, or rake leaves
on lightly cool winter days,
only to find skeletons frozen
there in the ground, tools or
books in hand, gloved, neon
hats, safety glasses adorned,

all of it rock hardening to dark
strips of coal, will they want
what they find in the ground
and burn it up as we do, or
simply rake us all up out of
curiosity and fill in the hole.

Contributor's Notes

Gale Acuff has had poetry published in *Worcester Review*, *Florida Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, and many other journals and has authored three books of poetry: *Buffalo Nickel* (BrickHouse Press, 2004), *The Weight of the World* (BrickHouse, 2006), and *The Story of My Lives* (BrickHouse, 2008).

Richard Brobst was born and resides in Sarasota, FL. He is an advocate for animal rights and worked as co-editor of *Albatross* for many years.

Mike Dillon lives in Indianola, Washington, a small town on Puget Sound northwest of Seattle. He is the author of four books of poetry, including *That Which We Have Named*, from Bellowing Ark Press (2008) and three books of haiku.

Jerome Gagnon lives in Northern CA where he works as a teacher and freelance journalist. He has an M.A. in English/Creative Writing from San Francisco State U. Recent work appears in *Crab Creek Review*, *Roaring Muse*, and several anthologies. Info at jeromegagnonblog.wordpress.com.

Henry Goldkamp has lived in major cities along the Mississippi River his entire life. Recent work appears in *Mudfish*, *Blood Orange Review*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *Permafrost*, and others. His public art projects have been covered by *Time* and NPR.

Vincent Hao is an aspiring writer who attends high school in Austin, Texas. His work has been published in *Anomaly*, *Adroit*, *Soundings East*, *Blood Orange*, *River Styx*, and has previously appeared in *Albatross*.

Cody Kucker has poems most recently appearing in *JuxtaProse*, *The Opiate*, and *CALLIOPE*. He received his MFA from the University of Alaska Fairbanks and currently lives and teaches high school English in Haverhill, Massachusetts.

Judith Ann Levison is of Micmic descent and was raised in a logger's family on the Maine coast. She was first pub'd in *The New Yorker* at age 15 as Judi Croxford. Her MFA is from Hollins University, and she has two chapbooks of poetry: *Oak Leaves* and *Sand Castle*.

Gary Metras has two new books of poems: *White Storm* (Presa Press, Feb. 2018) and *Captive in the Here* (Cervena Barva Press, July 2018), and in April he was chosen as the first Poet Laureate of Easthampton, MA. He is also the editor and letterpress printer of

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Stephen Reilly presently works as a staff writer for *The Englewood Sun*, a daily newspaper with circulation in southwest Florida.

John Timothy Robinson holds a Regent's Degree where he minored in Studio Art Printmaking. He is a ten-year educator for Mason County Schools in WV. He is a published poet with many poems pub'd in addition to his art work.

David Rogers has poems and stories published in *Bryant Literary Review*, *Atlanta Review*, and *The Comstock Review*, among others, and has authored the novel *D. B. Cooper Is Dead: A Solomon Starr Adventure*. He has lived in the cave region of Kentucky for over twenty-five years.

Robert Ronnow has two recent poetry collections: *New and Selected Poems: 1975-2005* (Barnwood Press, 2007) and *Communicating the Bird* (Broken Publications, 2012). His website is www.ronnowpoetry.com.

Richard Smyth earned his Ph.D. in English from the University of Florida. He has poems in *Southern Poetry Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, and others. He edits and publishes *Albatross*.

Dana Stamps II has a B.A. in Psychology from Cal State U of San Bernardino, and has a chapbook *For Those Who Will Burn* (Partisan Press, 2016). His recent pubs include *Slant*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Plainsongs*.

Larry D. Thacker has poems in over a hundred publications including *Poetry South*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology*, and *Mojave River Review*. His books include the poetry books *Drifting in Awe*, *Voice Hunting*, *Memory Train*, and the forthcoming full collections *Feasts of Evasion* and *Grave Robber Confessional*. His MFA was earned from West Virginia Wesleyan College. Visit his website at: www.larrydthacker.com

Don Thompson has lived in the southern San Joaquin Valley for most of his life. He has published a dozen books and chapbooks of poetry. Visit his website [San Joaquin Ink](http://SanJoaquinInk.com) (don-e-thompson.com) for more info.

Tim Wolfe holds an M.A. in Creative Writing from Dartmouth College. He currently lives in central Vermont.

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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