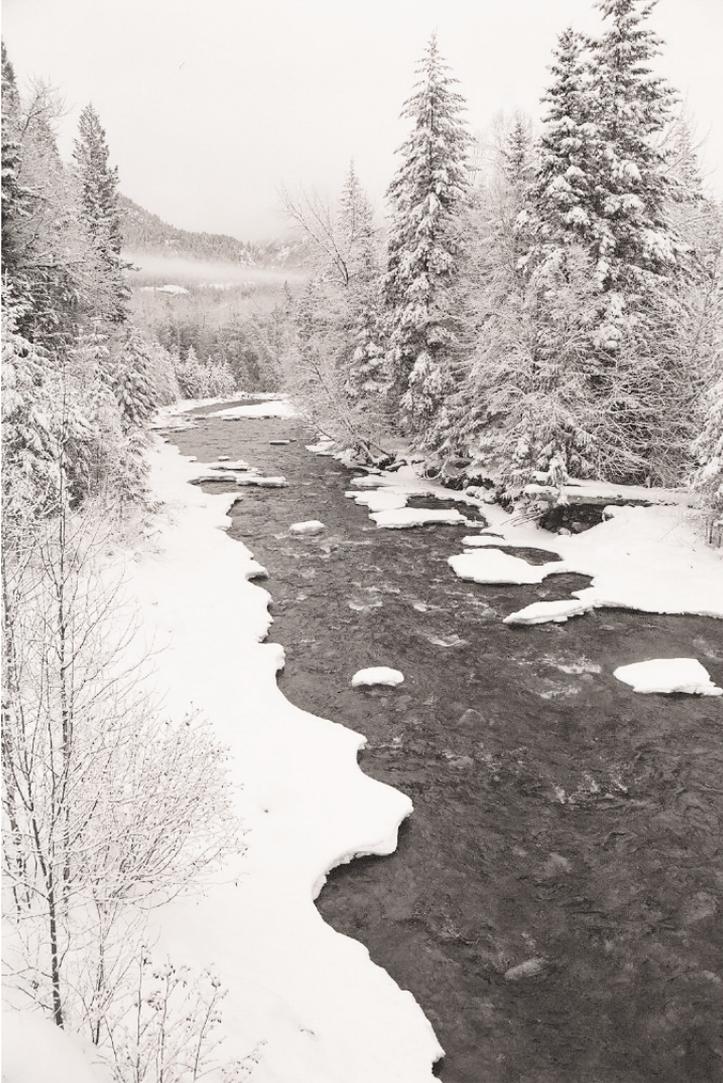


ALBATROSS



#18

“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

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Editor: Richard Smyth

Cover photo, "Copper Creek (Winter)," by Phil Gruis
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, 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>

Speaking into Existence

He spoke.
Sound waves rippled off the ocean,
words were fire
he pulled apart from
the sticky black, like gum
from a child's hair.

Another word and the heavens
poured out of his pitcher mouth,
filling each empty space,
stretching sky across sky,
breathing itself for the first time.

He shaped the land
into a dress form around
the ocean. Water swelled
to fill its curves.

Eggs appeared in his hands,
like my mother's on Saturday
morning. He broke them on clouds,
releasing birds, blue and brown.

All life that was not life
cried to be born.
Uncontrollable now
his face, the first ark,
speaking life.

He mouths their names
like a grocery list.
They fall off his tongue,
fur and all.

Athena

Sweet gray-eyes, you always seem alone.
Most of the gods a bunch of squabbling louts,
and us no better, with our stolen queens and our royal jelly,
you're always dawdling around the edges of the party,
locked into your pose of bemused wisdom.
And the helmet! For God's sake, get rid of the helmet!
Just once I wish you'd lift your crimson sun dress
and sidle free among the crickets and the heather
floating on a sea of sweet unreason to me
on this moonlit Aegean millennial beach.
Go ahead: listen to the sea whisper in a shell,
or spill a goblet of red wine onto your splendid breasts
and watch the constellations pinwheel into the sea with me.
Sweet gray-eyes, sweet inviolable, we live by so much
that's indefensible.
Let's stay up late, smoke cigars, break windows.
Let's play chess naked with stones and driftwood,
cheating every other move.

In Heaven

Bertrand Russell, Bertie
to Jesus and Buddha,
flirts with Tallulah Bankhead.,
who still calls everyone
dah-ling. A store on

the corner of Cloud and Rain
sells old 45s for 39 cents,
like when I was a boy. Stanley Kunitz

yats with Moms Mabley. That scuttlebut
about gold streets was bosh. Hell
has gold streets and tycoons. Heaven

has lupines. People say good morning
and really mean it.

When You Ask for Evidence

This is all I can say:

a single raindrop
releases a cloud of pollen
from the pine bough

the weight of one wasp
is enough to spill dew
from the cabbage leaf

in the dim of the forest floor,
beetles carry daylight
on their backs.

What I know is that grace
most often comes in small measures:

as worn stone cups
a sacrament of rain

as spiders hang by silken threads
and travel at the mercy of the wind.

She is a Woman, You See

Rising out of the earth,
fingernails rimmed with verdant soil,
dirt in her hair,
in her ears,
between her moist thighs,
the sweat and tears of
being
with the loamy earth,
a paradise,
silver butterflies alight upon
a green triangle of fronds,
floral petals spread before the sun,
her scent a musky mist,
sweet, pungent,
her rounded belly
sated from a meal of
compost, manure, water,
and the light from within
where she gardens,
patiently,
she gardens.

Homeland

This is my here, my grounding, my firmament,
where I can feel its presence with each step,
a place revered by ancestors, chosen by family,
a place where the disrespectful are dismissed
with a bootkick elsewhere.

Be intimidated: this is sacred ground.

Yet I am supported here in the unrelenting,
in the changing and unpredictable seasons
because I only borrow the smallest portion
from this place, always grateful for its loan.

I can hear the dialogue of the gravel roads,
the movement underfoot, the stones creating
such careful positions to mark my path home.

These stones know me, know all those before me,
know those who crafted so carefully from its bounty,
gently promising preservation. Any attempt to unhinge
our relationship is carved in these woods
and documented in the silence. This is worth saving,
this is worth loving, this here, this gift of surrounding.

from *Spare: Meditations*

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Each cycle of sunless
scything wheels the soul
closer to bright

too fragile to be touched.
Release arms, let eyes
reach the sycamore, dark

hairs counted, cry spare
me these paltry agonies,
no, let the days be

there, she says, and
there, vision cups
height to depth, there

spring; each afternoon's
slit of light shows
the shoots further thrusting—

clumps throbbing there,
call them sparrows
un-falling, lily echoes,

journey. Cut the chest,
open, let the heart be
bled clear into water:

let the hearing cling

Arte Poetica

Ya no es posible despertar de este insomnio.
El cristal que su imagen utilizo de tiempo en tiempo
a la hora de caminar por la dura
escalera ya no cruje,
la pared indefensa, intocada;
hay palabras que rebotan y hoy son extranas a su vida.
Privado de vileza y de grandeza
parece seguro como todas las cosas que se apagan, lejos.
Rara avis lo lleva cerca de las ventanas,
hoy, cuando el escuchar los pasos es una nueva estratagemas.
Imaginar dolores es el arte del poeta
para que algo
cuando nadie falta, cuando nadie ha muerto,
surja apenas un momento fuera de la nada.
Una tumba debe ser creada, inhabitada.

Arte Poetica

(trans. Ricardo Carrizo)

It is no more possible to wake from this insomnia.
The glass its image used from time to time to walk through
the hard ladder whose wooden stairs do not creak
the helpless wall untouched
words there are that spring back
strange nowadays to its life.
Bereft of vileness and of grandeur
it seems secure like all things that fade off, far away.
Rara avis carries it near the windows
today when listening to steps is a new strategem.
To imagine sorrows is the craft of the poet
so that something like this
when no one is missing when no one has died
may just for one moment emerge out of nothingness.
A grave must be created, uninhabited.

Black-Capped Chickadee

Once upon a bird on a branch,
once a time sung he,
upon the spring of the year
it was the spring,
wound, like a little brook,
once, within his breast,
upon a time I would sing as he

would sing him, as he sang.
(a bird on a branch
would make a simple sign of me.
would make him break,
be broken, sing bro-
ken song, be bro-
ken as me.

I would draw breath,
draw words, broken
from the touch, your
mouth my mouth,
draw song, broken
from your
bare beak

Raptor

night-herons by the flooded
river cried fear at its rising, . . .
—Robinson Jeffers

Early October, high in the Sierras, I climb
to keep pace with the sun, to balance it whole
on the last long ridge, to stay the coming night.
Walls across the canyon slowly gone to shadow,
my trail dead ends on a granite spine.
Grasshoppers burst into zig-zag flight
and a small black lizard skids over scree.

On alpine winds, a cruising hawk banks
and suddenly drops to magnify some hapless
creature strayed into his ken. Drumming his
wings to hang in place, he drops again,
strafes my roost. Passes grow tighter
and tighter—so close I count the reddish-brown
quills speckling his white underside—

tighter until I'm fixed by his gaze, stunned
he takes me for prey. Having marked me well,
he climbs once more, cocks his claws
and dives at my face. Cowered to a fetal tuck,
I'm fanned by disdain as he races past,
mounts a rising canyon draft and is gone.

The sun, instead of setting, simply quits the sky.
Juncos at vespers in manzanita shrubs,
and I—bedded down on brittle duff—pray to the buzz
of green-headed flies and the grief of distant coyotes.
At 9,000 feet the cold will find me long before sleep,
wind will sough the boughs of this pine,
and I will give in to the night, consent
to that part of the terrible dark that is mine.

A Clan of Raccoons Near Brunswick

They are sleeping in the old hollow tree out behind our barn. Earlier I watched from my window as the alpha male led his clan back in from the fields. He's as big as a sun bear, rotund as an armadillo, and as cautious as a point man at war.

He scoped the clearing and the trees beyond, stood up, sniffed the air, then scurried to the other side where a stand of mulberry trees surround our old barn. Once sure that way was safe, he hurried back, grunted something to his clan, then

watched as four cubs raced to him. He turned only after his mate, nipping the backside of a last cub, pushed him onto the lawn to follow. The old male looked only once over his shoulder. He knows I watch them, knows I'm the one who leaves melon rinds,

old bread, water and leftovers on the picnic table for them as surely as he knows the tree behind our barn is the safest place to live in this neck of the woods. He knows coyotes stay away because we have dogs and leave the whole area smelling dangerously human.

Summer Night with My Father

Stretched side-by-side on lawn chairs, we run
our fingers through blades of grass black
as seaweed. The porch light casts us yellow.

I say the nearest sky is the deepest part
of the ocean, where we rest like merman
and mermaid, dreaming up coastlines.

And you say the sky is the underside
of the black mutt on the porch, scratching
at stars of blood left by the fleas.

We sit silently until you say
softly as a cicada
you used to dream of becoming an astronaut.

I try to imagine you weightless in a space-suit,
powdered food pinched in your silver glove, but won't.
I want to say that you have always been my earth.

I stay quiet. Your eyes strain heavenward.
It is the first time you tell me a secret, and we stare
at the night sky like it is the other's face.

Children

They say I saw a star fall and
mean it, thinking there is one less
point of light pricking the night sky.
It's as if they have always known
more stars exist than they can count,
that one will not be missed, even
nights meteor storms make it seem
the whole galaxy is falling, so many
coming down you'd think the sky would
darken, all those lights going out
one by one, and children watching.

*

Tighter than a branding iron :my flashlight
worn down —I will name him
and his cheek melt from the wound
—he will bleed, recognize the kiss
that clinks :an anchor torn open from outside
delivered in the dark, letters tangled, missing
and from his crib the cries
the way lost—at-sea
sailors listen for their name.

I will twist these batteries
so no one hears creaking in every oak
chosen from among the quietest leaves
as sails still bandage a breathless mast

—his name will heal :a scar
where a star still alive
over his cheek heavier than water
and in that dark
sent to the bottom
waiting to say his name

—two names :the second chance
—flames favor the dead, refire
but only once :my son
named after me, at night
with a burning-glass :this flashlight
as if some need-fire
without any ashes
names him and trembling.

Jamie Parsley

Lullaby (A Fragment)

after Attila Jozsef

The sky is full of blue eyes, closed like
the eyes of a child sleeping. Even this
house has eyes, a hundred eyes that
have closed into a blissful sleep like
raindrops in an unending night.

The field beyond the window
lies quiet and blue. It dozes in
the moon's pale glow, snoring with
the steady hum of crickets and frogs.

Sleep! Sleep, little one. Let sleep
come over you. Let it settle on you
as gently as the dew this evening
secretly makes its strange darkness.

Otro

after Neruda

After wandering around in places
even maps don't show
I finally came to that terrible place

where no one cared
if I ate fat heads of lettuce
slightly brown on the edges

or that incredible mint,
green as elephant dung.
I said nothing

and in doing so
kept my heart
yellow as a summer dawn.

I am that girl you seek with the lustrous hair

—for Lorca

I do not search for the sunrise
I do not search for darkness or science
flesh and dream
I search for myself in you
motionless in the twist of time

I walk sideways
to keep from flying

In the crystal of dawn
I am the song
of the strawberry woman
gathering scarlet flowers
and hummingbirds
beaks filled
jeweled feathers gleaming
home

Prayer for the Watermelon

As the trumpets fill with smoke, I hide
because there isn't room in the shadows.

The ladybug outstretches her wings; a prayer
for the watermelon, flocks of pale rosebushes,
and fat goldfish floating
bright
in a blue tank.

He says nothing,
his fingers send cup shaped flowers of C#
& turgid purples
into the cat faced night,

returns as love
early in the morning,
his silence wrapping me
in lavender.

Radish

Rose red, Snow white duality,
it might have been a radish
that inspired such myths.

A perfect belly
of tartness, sharp, crisp, cool
and hot simultaneously
like an embarrassment,
a word spoken you can't take back
or the crazy love affair
you knew was going nowhere.

Turret of tang, peasant in a red cap,
not sweet not bitter
but purely itself, fast grower
shirking dirt from its Kremlin
pushing like a birth.

Smart as a slap,
nothing bloody about it,
brazen as a backside
jeering the salad from riddance
to uproar. Take this
red fist, white flesh
taste this
polka dancer, papoose, full purse.

elm

—the tree was dying—its bark appeared still whole—intact—to insulate
it from extremes—preserve the sterile purity—a pure illusion

it lifted off with little effort—beneath—the lingering rude spoor
an insect introduced by chance left on the white wood—wet—sweet

with the juice of its thaw—followed by various contaminations each content

with its own small niche for a time and place to thrive—each parasite

in its particular humility subtle and opportune—clinging only to its needs to dwell—
mingle and breed in peace—find warmth and shade—sustain a hold—no more

accumulating cell by cell—exposing—weakening the membrane—stressed the tree

—brave in its way through long summers—long winters silent—conscious or not

—tolerant and temperate—it too took only its own moment of sun—

with saw and ax the wedge—studied and surgical—took time—then from behind

the quick cut straight down in eased an extinction into its prepared space

After the Backpacking Trip (Palo Alto, 1977)

Home with still no sign or song of rain,
we maintained the grim rituals of drought,
the bricks in toilet tanks, alternate day
showers, and watched the brown grass die
by filthy cars. In July, the Ventana Wilderness
exploded. The news arrived like fire itself,
haunting dreams with toppled redwoods,
bark charred like pumice, and high above,
an osprey circling.

Past the time the rains returned, I'd learn,
as tiny purple horns of yerba santa
greeted a new generation of bees,
that tragedy is more or less a human thing,
how redwoods, nearly fireproof, rely
on flames to thrive amid their rival trees.
Crown sprouting shrubs in the chaparral
hold to life undaunted in burls underground,
and whispering bells, that only grow in burned
ground, wait in seeds for years until some sensor
feels the heat and bursts the shell. Mysterious
as the hormone that signals labor, or the story
that guides the migration of the tern, they wait
for sunlight, air, the richness of ash.

This Veil

In this low place between mountains
fog settles with the dark of evening.
Every year it takes some of those
we love—a car full of teenagers
on the way home from a dance, or
a father on his way to the paper mill,
nightshift the only opening.
Each morning, up on the ridge,
the sun lifts this veil, sees what has been
accomplished. The water on our window
screens disappears slowly, gradually
like grief. Heat of day carries water
back up into the sky, and if you look
near the river, where the fog is heaviest
and stays longest, you'll see the lines
it leaves on trees, the flowers that grow
the fullest.

The Ozone Overworld of Oz

I want to write about politics.
I want to roll in the dirt.
I want to roll in the money.
Give me a leader.
I'll disrobe him.
Find me a princess.
I'll lead her astray.
And they'll print it.
All of it.
In bold letters.
Italicized.
Right beneath
the computer enhanced photos
they "found"
in someone else's attic.
I want the sex.
The death.
The scandal.
And I want Maury Povich
to report it all
with the least amount of tact
he can master.
I want exploitation.
Nothing is sacred.
I want to level the powerhouses.
Bring them down
to my own sorry level.
I want to see the royal bloodshed.
I want to feel the pure blue tint
of their tears.
Then we'll talk about freedom.
Yes.
Then we will talk.

Watching and Learning

The woods are gone. Refugees
have been fleeing for days

and crossing to our side of the border.

A rabbit
has been sniffing around the yard
all afternoon,

in plain sight,
deliberate,
poking in the privet and mock orange,
in the briars and yew thicket—
walls of green
under a roof of green.

And birds in great numbers
have come to the feeders,
cardinals, finches and chickadees,
sparrows and mourning doves,

the rumble of bulldozers
drowning their songs.

Like the rabbit, they too
ignore the falling dust,
leave their losses behind.

Breathing Machine

When earth is gone—
the vegetal earth, the dogwood root,
the green, rock salt earth—
when earth's consumed—
its cornstalk, milkweed spent—
what comfort to be had
from human intellect,
the careful geometrics:
cityscapes, cafes with shiny spoons,
or spaceships built to carry politics
off to other moons?

And who will thank the farming man
whose hands brim with crop seed
when wealth depends
on supply of breath,
demand of the leaf machine?

Like California

According to reports, vast areas of the Golden State are sinking, grating against another age, worrying a world already weary with fault and fracture. Once on a day's vacation, I felt it happening, when I ventured past the property line onto unpurchased acres, and a snake confronted me from a deep ridge in the high weeds, rattling like a rusty cog choking into motion. For a moment I was so still I disappeared, willed into nonexistence. It was not unpleasant, or unfamiliar, as if our meeting were prearranged, the decision to be made already known, and although I believed I would be set free, something within began unsettling, as if parts of me would never reappear, small certainties returned to earth like scattered stones—just like California, shifting back into the sea, one concession at a time, each release a small restructuring, simple as a shell's ear, dissolving into all our fatal histories, our gentle rumbling towards destruction.

Contributor's Notes

Luis Benitez was born in Buenos Aires and has published eight books of poetry and two novels in Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Uruguay, USA, and Venezuela. He has won numerous awards and titles.

Steven Brown lives in Lake Charles, LA with his wife and daughters. He has published in *The Christian Science Monitor* and others.

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Kenneth Pobo has poems, essays and stories appearing in *Indiana Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Colorado Review* and others. His book *Introductions* was pub'd in 2003 by Pearl's Book'em Press.

Kenton Wing Robinson is a reporter for *The Day* newspaper in New London, CT. His collection *Common Bird Songs* was a finalist for the 2004 Tupelo Press Chapbook Award.

Matthew J. Spireng has a full-length manuscript *Out of Body* that won the 2004 Bluestem Poetry Award, and his chapbook *Encounters* was pub'd in 2005 by Finishing Line Press. He has pub'd over 400 poems in many journals including *Albatross*.

Jackie K. White won the 2006 Anabiosis Press chapbook contest with *Bestiary Charming*. She is a native of IL with a PhD in Creative Writing from UIC, an editor for *Rhino*, and an asst. prof at Lewis U.

Kim Zabel is a Minnesota writer who teaches at Rochester Community and Technical College. Her poems have appeared in *Blue Mesa Review*, *EDGZ*, and in regional literary journals.

Fredrick Zydek has pub'd five collections of poetry, and his sixth, titled *Takopachuk: The Buckley Poems*, is forthcoming from Winthrop Press. He has over 800 publishing credits including poems in *The Antioch Review*, *Cimmaron Review*, *New England Review*, *Poetry Northwest* as well as *Albatross*.

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

