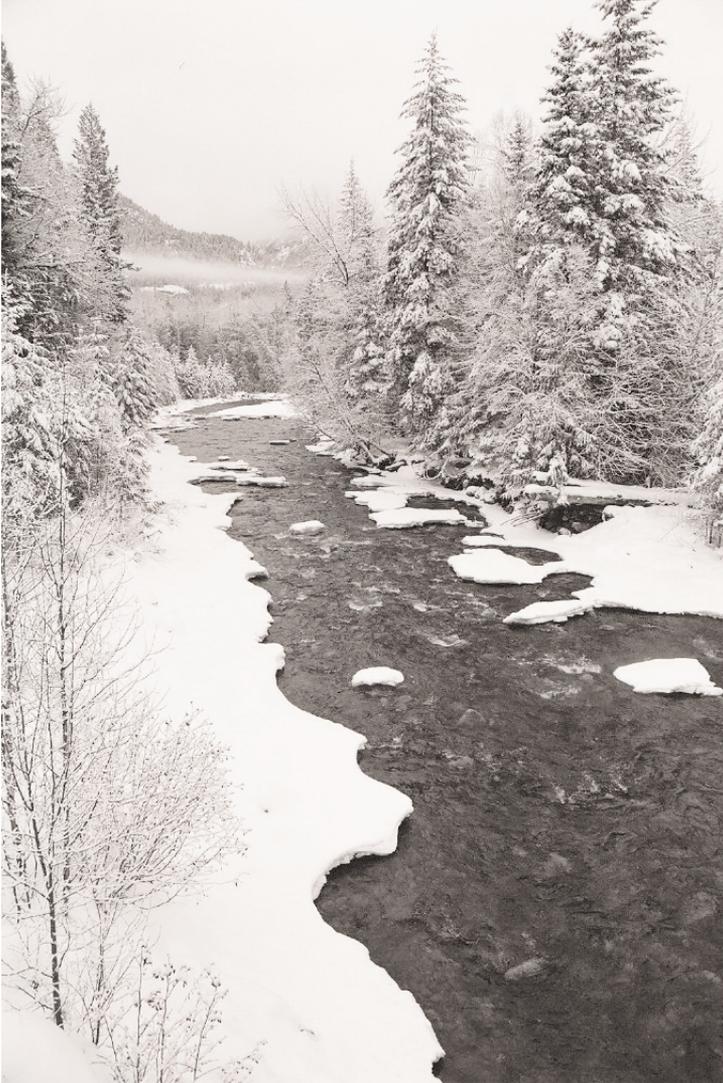


# ALBATROSS



#18

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

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# ALBATROSS

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# ALBATROSS

## # 18

Editor: Richard Smyth

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*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*

-23-

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

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**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.

**Joan Colby** has published over 800 poems in such journals as *Poetry* and *Hollins Critic* and has published five books of poetry. She is also a recipient of a Literary Fellowship from the IL Arts Council.

**Cynthia Cox** received an English degree from U of Houston and teaches high school in Katy, TX. She has poems in *The Houston Poetry Fest Anthology*, *Blue Violin*, *Curbside Review* and others.

**Todd Davis** teaches creative writing, environmental studies and American lit at Penn State U. Altoona. He has poems in *Poetry East*, *Quarterly West*, *Green Mountains Review* and others. His second book of poems *Some Heaven* was pub'd by Michigan State U. in 2006.

**Roger Desy** lives in Verona, PA. His religion is seasonal, his politics post-Christian hybrid, and his profession a metamorphosing sonneteer. In early morning, he is a serious feeder of birds.

**Derek Economy** practices and teaches psychotherapy in Atlanta. His poems have appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *JAMA*, and *Cumberland Poetry Review*.

**Rina Ferrarelli** has previously pub'd in *Albatross*. Her latest book, *Winter Fragments*, is a translation of Bartolo Cattafi's lyrics. She also has poems in *Tar River Poetry*, *Zone 3*, *VIA* and others

**Trista Foster** was a semi-finalist for the 2005 "Discovery"/The Nation Prize, and her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *the minnesota review* and *32 Poems*.

**Nicole Henares** is a native of the Monterey Peninsula. She now lives in San Francisco with two cats and one husband.

**Amy Jo Huffman** has previously pub'd work in literary journals in the UK as well as the USA, in such journals as *Avon Literary Intelligencer*, *Ellipsis*, *The Penwood Review*, *Icon*, and others.

**Monica Judge** is a native Texan who moved to NY a decade ago to attend Sarah Lawrence College and then pursued an MA in Creative Writing in South Africa. She now teaches English and Social Studies to eighth graders in the Bronx.

**Shelley Kirk-Rudeen** is a freelance writer and editor living in Olympia, WA. Her poems have appeared in *Manzanita Quarterly*, *Rock and Sling* and *Strange Familiars*, an anthology of local poets.

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**Mitchell LesCarbeau** has pub'd poems in *The Nation*, *The New England Review*, *The Carolina Quarterly* and many others. He has won the Grolier Poetry Prize and has one volume of poetry pub'd by the New Poets Series. He is professor of English at Green Mountain College in VT and has previously appeared in *Albatross*.

**Susan Lowden** is currently a freelance writer living in northern Michigan with her life partner Daniel and two children.

**Michael B. McMahon** teaches at Fresno Pacific U and has poems appearing in *Seneca Review*, *Green Mountains Review*, and *Atlanta Review* among others. His translation of Jesus Serra's book of poems *Paramos en la Memoria* has been reissued by the U of Andes Press.

**Jamie Parsley** is author of seven books of poems, most recently *Just Once* (Loonfeather 2006). In 2004 he was designated Associate Poet Laureate of North Dakota.

**Simon Perchik** is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The New Yorker*, *Albatross*, and elsewhere. *Family of Man* (Pavement Saw Press) and *Rafts* (Parsifal Editions) are both due out in 2007. See [www.geocities.com/simonthepoet](http://www.geocities.com/simonthepoet) for more info.

**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

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