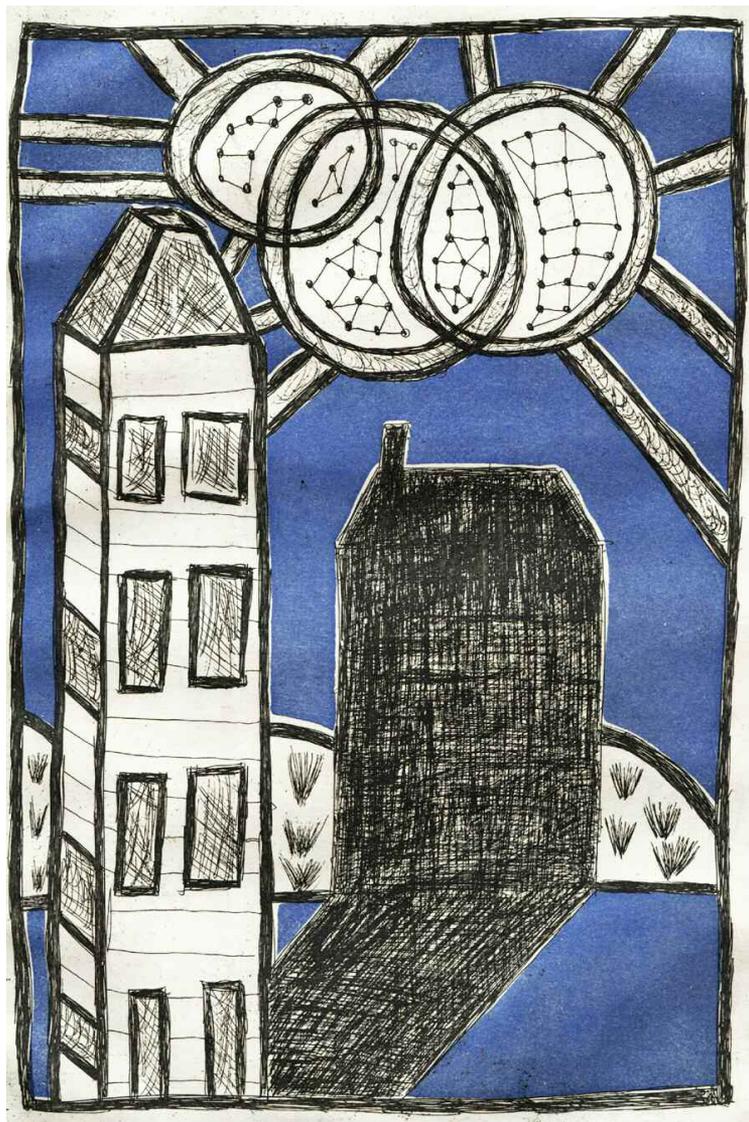


ALBATROSS



“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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Ponderosa

I.

Unwindowed, my fingers voyage deep
And resinous, out of the cocoon
Sliding, in curious terror, down
The quiet quidditas or home
Of this warm Ponderosa's trunk.

Unwindowed, fingers of the wind
Stroke (bacchant, Wholly Other)
My warm and newborn cheek.
Holy with sunlight I raise
My face to the new-borne touch
Of sun through dark and brilliant green.

II.

Through dark and burning green
A bourne or hypocaust of blue:
Above my eyes this ragged spire
Surges, gnarled and shining, into light.

Sun's blaze out of Sistine fire breaks,
Gyres, pleni gratia, down
Through hypocaust or bourne of blue
And binds
Through dark and brilliant green
My pilgrim eyes.

Prairie Theme Park

The tepee's smoke-hole opens
to the sky's blue tent, I wake
to glimpses of the moon, and cramps,
blood spilling down my thighs,
no flush toilet for miles, here
on the trail of my cold mad fathers,
feeding their herds, the fathers'
fathers who'd prospered in ore,
cattle chutes and cattle.
One sired fifteen children on
three wives, dead by turns,
leaving orphans sunken-eyed like
Alonzo in family photos. A boy
the age of our Ben in cowboy gear.

Like the old trail blazers,
the new leave tracks, addicts
taking anything they can find,
mounting the rigs to plumb
for oil in the raw-rubbed earth—
soil hallowed by Oglala Sioux,
who lived simply—in poverty,
some would say—who might have
got on fine without fuel siphoned
from old rock and mammoth bones.
The rest of us, like old gods,
devise our means of interference,
too clever by half, bronzed
in salons, air-conditioned,
blind eyes swiveling like cameras.

Our son eyes intently what
the cowboy whittles and fletches
deftly for his quill, while his partner
rustles eggs on a skillet, and we eat,
pack up, head out. Tourists still,
we'll view the battlefields, rangers
in crisp uniforms, flag and trumpet,
blood, those who died where
they had lived: sweetly and—
as Thoreau might say—near the bone.

Silence

Silence rises in the canyon,
wilding in like fog, clinging
to buckthorn and desert mallow,
the sharp contours of the hills,
the split to the Backbone Trail,
the curls of the dried-up stream
and fallen sycamore leaves.

But there is the whisper of a fly
on manzanita, washing its face, hands,
a trace of spider breath,
web rustling like the distant fall of air,
sparkle echoing across a rock.

There is the faintest whoosh
as rocks dissolve into sand,
the willow's bark loses its finish,
ferns unfurl, dry, and fall,
chaparral swallows air and light.

There is the thrum of the hummingbird's thin heart,
the slurp of the bird juicing a bloom,
the clap of butterfly wings,
the crackle of a stinkbug's steps,
the susurrantion of a king snake's slink.

There is the deer's intake of breath,
the chuffle as it gulps up water,
drips from its muzzle,
the nosing of a doe and her fawn,
their dreams as they sleep under a tree.

Hear the silence
of the canyon.

Listen, for the silence is telling.

On the Chetco

It's quiet this morning
and I'm happy for that.
Too much TV last night
and earlier, in the park,
too much noise.
It was a warm day
in February, a record high.
I'd never seen so many people
there. Cars parked
all over Big Meadows,
cop directing traffic.

Went down to the river
where it was running
high, brown and muddy
through the 200 year old sycamores
in the flood plain.
And I wished
I were someplace else,
where the water ran clear and fast
over big white boulders.

Like that time Dad and I
took a rubber raft down the Chetco River
in Oregon. Hot sun on our backs
and the water ice cold.
Most of all how we didn't
argue, I didn't let him down
somehow. How peaceful it was.

That's what I thought about
yesterday when I saw
that muddy water
and all the people.
How I wanted to
dip my hands in and
turn it clear,
drink from my cupped palms.
The way Dad did fifty years ago.
Go ahead, he said,
that's good water.
How we both drank from it.

Christmas Eve Morning, North Coast

South of Stewart's Point, muddy sheep graze, tend to
their slow-moving work among stone, wood, sea. The sun

has begun its rise over the wide Pacific, the two-lane
highway steaming from last night's rain. Pines,

redwoods, eucalyptus, and occasional oaks draped
with Spanish moss stand, watch, wait; water sings

down the hills: brown, green, so ready for the day.
And bones house stories of the stars; granite,

keeper of the news; new waves emerge out of morning
song, shadows. The road curves, narrows, widens,

straightens, only to then curve and narrow again.
Around the next corner, clouds welcome a new sun.

In and Out of the Arkansas

heard it said
that seeing a mountain lion in the wild
is a rarity that's hardly seen
but even more unusual
and even more spectacular
I declare

is seeing a great
longnose migration
like Scotty and I saw
down below
the Toad Suck Dam

there were thousands all
breeding size
three, four, five feet long
some even six feet long
leaping leaping constantly
frenetically

up up
up upstream
the entire dam
under water
swollen creeks
raging downward
mass gar shooting
for the fields of their birth

we'd come equipped
with rods of course
and found a spot along the shore
where we could see them way way out
spread out over a hundred yards
porpoising toward us
elongated snouts
actually grinning

as the ballet tapered
single file
as they passed just ten
feet from us

so we were casting
into their midst
and they didn't
give a damn

because they were heeding
the chromosomal call
of a hundred million year
milt egg pilgrimage
to get to their spawn on
Sargassoly
then cycle through
the system again
their yearning burning
into our brainpans

needless to say
all we caught of the exodus
were flashes akin
to an old time
chemical bath
used to create
photographs

which we can access any time
apocrypha working
its own magic dance.

Walking on a Ditch Bank in November

The cracked dry mud in the bottom
prophesies the end
of much more than a year—

but falsely, despite snarls
of dead grass, urine yellow
or burnt umber turning black.

Wherever the frogs have gone,
they do know the way back
and know when to come.

Water will flow here again,
exuberant grass shouting green,
and the false prophet in my head

will relent, listening to
the self-satisfied plop of frogs
leaping into spring.

this frog produces no atomic dust

listening to the moon
gazing at the croaking of frogs
in a field of rice.

—Buson

this frog produces no atomic dust
no hydrogen explosion
no gangrenous breezes
sulfureous waterflumes
strip mines
agrichemicals
no barbed wire

this frog honors dandelions, dew drops & large sapien
figures which urinate on its home &
with solomonic equanimity, this frog accepts cumulus
clouds, toxic clouds, the sun's corona & stinkbugs.
this frog cannot tell you the difference btwn
dutch schulz, richard the 3rd or the kalihari bushman.

this frog does not create a permian period of mass destruction
does not slaughter humpback whales
no climate change no killing fields no cancerous polyps
nor burn down the library of alexandria
nor build worker robots to replace worker humans
this frog produces no atomic dust.

no torture
no gang rape
no skid row
mental hospital
bump stock assault rifle
no billowing smokestacks
small pox blankets
industrial waste disposal sites
no xenophobic marches
3rd reich
genocide
suicide
population explosion
no vengeful deities
this frog produces no atomic dust.

without judgment this frog leaps
among splendid fallen leaves, rainbow tinted shadows,
blighted elms & large excrementous canine heaps &
in hops & bounds this frog bounces upon crumbling
greek ruins, future fossils & pre-fabricated
foundations.

this frog moves unseen thru wedding receptions
upon mosaic alhambran floors
junkyard glass
cemetery plots.

this frog has known the neanderthal
the cro-magnon
the writers of sanskrit and torah
early cave christians
this frog has shared breakfast crumbs with nostradamus
has travelled with christopher columbus
has mingled socially among friends on noah's ark

this frog has been roasted on the spits of pre-dawn
river dwellers &
served with ceremony & etiquette upon the opulent
plates of georges auguste escoffier.

holocaust times breath & desist
conspiracy & brainstorm become same-caste citizens
of the hour glass
worlds come, worlds go
this frog produces no atomic dust
this frog survives.

at night he joins his fellows
to drink darkness & sing joyful their croaked
chorus to venus & the horn of the moon.

in the morning
once again this frog hops unnoticed over
a spring blossom & a dead bird.

about & around
god nods his head
acknowledging perfect obedience.

Ribs

You should not see their ribs,
Not in September.

By September fawns should be fat
With round stomachs and
Thick haunches.

They should not look like cats
Arching their backs as they rise
Their legs looking long
Because their bellies are so small.

About Light—

the herring gulls know, when they first unfurl
each drowsy head from wing. To them,
Earth's surface gleams illimitably—
the sand, every speck a spark,
the sea, a bounty of billowing sheen

so bright, the naked human eye averts,
unable to take it all in,
just as it hurt, last night, to hold
your gaze in mine.

To a gull's eye—
the brilliant morning streak on sea
is a blazing swath from Salt Island to breakfast crab,
crouching next to a beer can, in what's left of the marsh
on Good Harbor Beach, where every blade of grass
bares light skyward.

High Tide

A gull hovers above
a moment
as we stare into each other's eye.

This pause,
this flume of locking eyes—

to release my insides
into the sudden wide opening,
to be swept clean of all debris,
to fall into flight, into buoyancy,
to plunge into the great gape of Sea.

Clarify

A ring-billed gull stands
in the frigid November waves.

She dips her beak
draws three deep sips of sea
tips eyes up to the clouds
allows the cold brine to slip
down inside her white neck
to the buoy of her gut
drips salt from her skull
out grooves in her bill.

If I could so easily drink
the brine
lift my face to the sky
invite it to slide through me
immune to its cruel alkali
distill sweet water from salt
stream white crystals
down furrows in my brow
be quenched.

The Reflection and the Swan

By the tangled bank along
the train tracks between Burnside
Plantation and Illick's Mill

a swan dips its head beneath
the water's surface, its broad
body a perfect brightness

lingering above as though
a lost wish trying to burn
its way through the morning fog,

its reflection a shadow
of whiteness breaking bubbles
on the slow creek's skin as if

trying to will itself to
life, become something more than
memory flesh bathed in light.

Cloud Walking

the weather man
called it

freezing fog

it looked
like

heaven
in the hills

where spangled

feet of frost
tiptoed

through the cedars

From a Flax Field in South Dakota

you are
sunshine

I am seed

make me
sprout

blue blooms

For Georgia

Isn't there a master painting
of peony flowers in a vase:
voluptuous,
dropping their heavy petals
on the table?

These plus-sized beauties
droop in a gray-blue
wine carafe on my worn
kitchen table.

Burgundy petals fall to the floor
with such weight
they make a sound:
A woman shedding
her bra before her lover.

She lets it fall with abandon,
staring her partner dead
on. No apologies for her body.
Eyes like fire.

On this rainy June day,
she sleeps in the dark,
cluttered bedroom.
The floor strewn with black
fringed scarves and shimmering
undergarments.

This is why Georgia O'Keefe
painted flowers like women.
This vase of three red peonies
given to me on my birthday,
beautiful even as the petals
fall.

These are not demure and naïve
flowers. They cabaret.
They bellydance and smoke cigarettes.
They yell furiously, and love
passionately. They are good in bed.

*

I struggle to sweep
the mess off the linoleum.
I have a masterpiece in my kitchen.
A still life, alive and waiting
for a painter.

Reading Jane Kenyon's Last Book

I pause between sections
two and three knowing
that what I will read
I have read before and was
moved beyond what
I normally am when I
read what a poet
has done. I've no desire
for the sadness
it will bring
reading her words again,
knowing she will write
no more. I've no desire
for that sadness
just now, the swollen
creek a steady rush
in the dark, a dog's
high-pitched bark fox-like
in the distance, the crescent moon
quiet in the sky.

Denise Levertov Gathers Gladioli

as thoughts; their exuberance
can not last long enough.

This rising up out of the rain
and the dark earth, hungry

for the sun's light and warmth,
the very air she breathes

is a variation of this same
need. In bunches, they stand

erect and resolute, dry
leaves lancing the sky,

guarding the garden edge
in a show of bluster

as fierce as a wildfire,
petals fluttering in the breeze

like a mass of flames—more
crimson colored than orange,

some quick to anger. Others—
salmon or peach—ripen slowly

over hot coals. Departing
in winter in equal parts spark

and smolder, she inhales
their scent like smoke.

Rhizome

(for E and A, on the birth of their son)

This uprooting is autumn's work left undone.
The herbs pull loose while lilies of the aspic
Nile, flowering *agapē*, cling to pockmarked

cakes of soil, frostbitten, bound by rootstalks
that the steady turning of a rust-flecked trowel
releases. They give way. Thin clouds of dust bloom.

Mix this with water. Watch a millennium's
accretion of humus send viscous plumes
to the surface, how its thirst resurrects

itself in the formless primordial
murk that thickens against its world's clay bounds
and waits for the warm mercy of human palms

smoothing blankets over fallen seeds.
Still, it's far too soon to think of these.
Winter has not gone; the rain will turn to sleet.

Though the labor absolves us of nothing,
these preparations are necessary:
noon's low wind upon the face of the deep.

*

Though your shadow carries names
its scent is falling off, luring piece by piece
the stone it needs for nourishment

—you hoodwink these dead, stand here
the way each hillside reaches out
with the wooden carts that go on wobbling

as if they once had wheels, circled slowly down
smelling from fresh cut lumber and warm soup
—it works! Your shadow has always found room

for you, for the creaking inside these low trees
that grow only a darkness not yet the bloom
by itself giving back so many years later.

*

You fold this sweater the way a moth
builds halls from the darkness it needs
to go on living —safe inside this closet

a family is gathering for dinner, cashmere
with oil, some garlic, a little salt, lit
and wings warmed by mealtime stories

about flying at night into small fires
grazing on the somewhere that became
the out-of-tune hum older than falling

—you close the drawer and slowly
your eyes shut —with both hands
make a sign in the air as if death matters.

CV

Now she lives in Manchester's woods,
Just off the highway, the end of a lane.

Tall trees seal her small circle.
How can she not get lonely sometimes?

Deer at dusk, the coyote's nighttime howl.
Still, she's certain she's better alone.

She hears, in the invisible growl of 128,
Her ancestors' labor in Lowell's dead mills.

JDD

Spindrift desperado, "cockroach killer" boots
And dress shirts that only work on you,

Greasing the heavenly dynamo
Until it roars, electric midnight.

NYC had better be ready.
There's nothing a guitar can't fix

Except words. No doubt you
Got the beat—keep hammering.

DP

The ocean deepens in the dark.
The small lights of this eastern city come on.

Once the sun has been set free,
Who knows if it will return.

At your table, our group scrutinizes stories.
When your wife arrives from New Orleans,

You hurry to her and embrace her so fully
All our faces become flowers.

LH

Sometimes I see your arthritic hands,
And I want to call it a day.

And then I think of you in Iowa City,
Everyone young and writing and behaving badly,

Except (why am I so certain?) you,
Who cares for refugees and puppies

And students and, well, everyone,
And whose poems fit like the perfect dress.

Garbage

Let the near-meatless sparerib bones lie quiet
among mushroom stems, tomato tops, cucumber
skins, crumpled and gray paper towels, banana
peels in the silent trash bag. No necessities
remain among the discardables ready
to begin to decay. The long, slow process began
at birth, grows, then starts to fall apart, ready
to reunite with everything else in this bright
universal chorus of dying, death, the way
all fertilizes all, fecund and completely,
creating new bones, new plates, and the marvelous
new life that gives us such a meal and more.

Brian Cronwall is a retired English professor from Kaua'i Community College in Hawai'i. He has published recently in *Bamboo Ridge*, *Chiron Review*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Ekphrasis*, *The Santa Fe Literary Review*, *The Briar Cliff Review*, and others. He has previously published in *Albatross*.

Deborah H. Doolittle currently lives in NC and has an MA in Women's Studies and an MFA in Creative Writing. She currently teaches at Coastal Carolina Community College and is the author of *No Crazy Notions*, *That Echo*, and *Floribunda*. Recent poems are in *Barbaric Yawp*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Mudfish*, *Slant*, and *The Weekly Avocet*.

Robert Fillman has a chapbook forthcoming from Main Street Rag Publishing called *November Weather Spell*. Poems have appeared in *Poet Lore*, *Poetry East*, *Salamander*, *Tar River Poetry*, and others. He lives in eastern Pennsylvania and is a senior teaching fellow at Lehigh University. He has previously published in *Albatross*.

Ruth Gooley published a chapbook called *Living in Nature* and has poems in *Your Daily Poem*, *Ibbetson Street Review*, *vox poetica*, and *Nature Writing*, among others. She lives in the Santa Monica mountains.

Ted Loepfert has a Ph.D. in Victorian Literature from Northwestern University and taught college English for eight years before finishing his career as an administrative judge with the Illinois Secretary of State.

Willow Longo earned her MA from the Bread Loaf School of English at Middlebury College. She is a homeschooling mother living in VT.

Jennie Meyer has an M.Div. and is a poet, yogi, and nature lover whose poems are in *Anchor Magazine*, *Common Ground Review*, *Ascent Aspirations Magazine*, and *Patchwork Journal*. She lives in Gloucester, MA.

Sheryl L. Nelms is from the Flint Hills of Kansas. She has had twenty-one books and chapbooks published and has been nominated four times for the Pushcart Prize. She has previously appeared in *Albatross*.

normal remains "one of the last american primitives" with 550-600 pieces published between 1992-2015 without the internet. His most recent book is *i see hunger's children: selected poems 1962-2012*, pub'd by lummoX press.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Forge*, *Poetry*, *Osiris*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *The Osiris Poems* pub'd by boxofchalk (2017). For more info, see www.simonperchik.com. He has previously pub'd in *Albatross*.

Zara Raab has published several books of poetry, including *Swimming the Eel* and *Fracas & Asylum*. Her poetry reviews and poems appear in *Nimrod*, *River Styx*, *Poet Lore*, and most recently *The Hudson Review*. See www.zararaab.com for more information.

Andy Roberts is the author of eight collections of poetry. His latest chapbook is *Out of Blue* (NightBallet Press, 2018). Recent publications include *Atlanta Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Nassau Review*, *Slipstream*, and *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*. He lives in Columbus, OH. He has also previously published in *Albatross*.

J.D. Scrimgeour is Chair of the English Department at Salem State University in Salem, MA. He holds an MFA in Poetry and a Ph.D. in English from Indiana University. His most recent book of poetry is *Lifting the Turtle*, and the poems in this issue will be appearing in his next collection, *festival* (incessant pipe press).

Harold Sneide lives in Colorado and has an M.A. in Library Science and an MBA from University of Minnesota. His work appears in *The Avocet* and is forthcoming in *Woods Reader*.

Matthew J. Spireng has published five chapbooks (*Clear Cut*, *Young Farmer*, *Encounters*, *Inspiration Point*, and *Just This*) and two full-length books (*Out of Body* and *What Focus Is*). Since 1990, his poems have appeared in *North American Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Rattle*, *English Journal*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Poet Lore*. He has also previously published in *Albatross*.

Mark Spitzer is the author of 27 books, mostly about big ugly fish. His latest is *Beautifully Grottesque Fish of the American West* (U of Nebraska Press). He is currently a professor somewhere in Arkansas. See www.sptzr.net for more information.

Don Thompson has been writing about the San Joaquin Valley for over fifty years, including a dozen or so books and chapbooks. For more info, visit www.don-e-thompson.com. He has also previously published in *Albatross*.

Logan Wall has work appearing in *Frontier Poetry* and *JewishFiction.net*. He has also published academic articles on Faulkner and Jewish poetry. When he is not writing, he teaches, studies Yiddish, gardens, and watches too much baseball.

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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