

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

CONTENTS

James Conroy	3
Michael McCarthy	4
j bruscini	5
Rhett Watts	7
Lewis Mundt	9
Jack Giaour	13
Robert Ronnow	16
Ed Lyons	17
Richard Hedderman	20
Michael McCarthy	22
John Kucera	24
James Conroy	25
Deborah H. Doolittle	26
Contributor's Notes	27

ALBATROSS

31

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In the Beginning

Adam never asked
And we've wondered ever since.
As the First
He had the privilege of naming things.
Beasts, Stars, Honeysuckle
Were called as they moved him.
Adam gave three names
To himself and five more
To Woman. Eve added
One more for herself and never
Told him.
Adam called himself
Hunter, Gatherer, and Woodcutter.
He called Eve
Lover, Mother, Peace, Gazer, and Home.
Adam called the Snake "Deceit" for he
Often mistook it for a branch on the ground
Or a vine in the trees.
Woman called it "Power" because it was not afraid
Of anything larger than itself.
"Say your name," the Snake tempted Eve.
"Which one?" she asked.
"The one only you know and Man doesn't."
"Why should I tell you?" Woman asked.
"With it I can give you Power," claimed the Snake.
"Go see if Man wants Power," said Eve.
"It is enough I have to carry his Sins."

This Poem Was Written by Hand

In the beginning,
there was a blank page.

A pen held a small distance
from the paper. This gap was thought

empty; the page couldn't
be scarred when

the poem had not been summoned
to wound. It remained symbols

and syllables, meaning and metaphor,
ink pent up in the blood,

Adam to the pen's reach. The gap closed
only when you couldn't otherwise survive.

Still, the hand hesitated, started and stopped,
was unsure. By creation's end,

each symbol scrambled its referent,
but its meaning was true to you.

This would suffice, if not
for a plague of eyes.

So the poem became a battlefield
of corrections and excisions.

The hand was but too eager
to strike down its fledgling creation.

The figures that remained
meant nothing to you. And yet,

when all that was blank was air,
you wished you had done more.

Pomoxis I

too small to free its gills of the life

popped out the hook,
soothed its slick terror,
a tenor drop,

And I let the fish go.

Pomoxis II

you cut back, little panfish,
when the hook had sunk its way through the looseness,
and gaped a hole in your lip.

you frilled your fin,

twisting when my grip hand clenched round spine and stomach,
probably flecking the scales in.

you fleck out.
you pierce the water.

far from a fair trade,
my bled red blood gets left behind.
swim away.

For Jose

Milking sweet from you, the wet negatives giving glory to the mānuka honey,
shipped place to place and always far from home...

But I believe in this: One day,
when the last tree roots still parasitic with laetiporus have struck their last water,
there will still yet be earth to pulse life through.

So,
tonight when I dream, your rounded edges hit my mind
and I drink and I eat plenty.
I fatten. I ripe til full of seed, a scattered crabapple delight.

I am thankful for this that sacrifices little lives to me.
(You, dehumanized and nurturing being,
marked with the rough stretch of time
and what your rubtouch tastes.)
Bees swarming a sugar water,
sticky-sweet sweat or
beads of cream.

How many times have you choked out in the smoke
and coughing, like an animal hacked out what upset your stomach?

Inhalants, the "smell like summer" smell,
the alive and spreading. The open touch wind.

Invasives

Under a cacophony of birdsong
whose calls I cannot decipher

I sit, beside the morning glories feeling
weathered as the lattice they climb.

Some trumpet heavenly blues. Others
twirled tight as closed umbrellas.

A crimped blossom leans on trellis.
Her moment passed, I sigh and look away.

Mull over the anatomy of a flower,
a melancholy. Turned back,

the dented bloom now fully open.
A reverse memento mori —

Remember: you, too, must die...
but not yet. A mockingbird solos

its profusion of confusion,
the dahlias shredded by some bug.

Beginnings, endings are tangled vines.
Monarchs absent the milkweed, moss

still grows between patio bricks.
The Dawn Redwood thought dead,

half-buried in the woods, rises green
reaching for light.

Dark Brook

You must come down,
down to the level of wild flowing.

You can hear it while indoors
but seated brookside,

water is all you hear. Fiddle-fast,
yet soothing as a strummed harp

it drowns out cars, neighbors
and the hum of distant trains.

Leaves skitter as day unwinds.
Silk lines of jumping spiders

shiver as you feel yourself merge
with all you see—mind mirroring

low breezes ranging over the dell,
over your body, clicking into place

remembrance of other seasons.
This afternoon in the darkening year

offers more than a need for closure,
for dominion. Enough to be

by freshwater rushing white over
rock and leaf, sleek in the flow.

Late sun on late skin, the moment fluent
as the brook departing soon as it arrives.

Someone Tell My Boy I Love Him

"We can stick anything into the fog and make it look like a ghost"

Buddy Wakefield

Last night I had my first dream about you.

I dreamt of you like someone looking for a cab,
my stuck out into the road, my arm tentative
a few feet between the air and the ground, my eyes
looking through everything that wasn't you,

by which I mean: like I was waiting for it.

Numbers, like anything else,
are just something we made up
when we realized we needed a way
to order the world.

And if numbers are just numbers,
if three after two means only as much as three before four,
then I want to say it like it is:
time
is just a pretty way of pretending
that everything won't eventually be not what it is right now.

Once, driving you home
on country roads
that were as much the weather
as the clouds are,
you told me your house was three just light poles
past the big curve.
It was always foggy out there,
you said, but you could count to three
and you'd know where you were.

I said thanks for the tip
before I backed out of your driveway,
and you laughed and told me
you'd just made it up then.

The dream makes as much sense
as anything we ever did.

In the dream, we walked through a blizzard,
the kind of blizzard that only feeds on Minnesota woods,
the kind of woods that might close their fingers around your house,
whisper shhh like a pillowcase stitching shut around you.
In the dream, we come upon a broken ladder
in a snowbank.
Pull it piece by piece
back into the air,
and we put it together without saying words.
In the dream we took a photo together,
of us together, as if to freeze it, us the whole
together, the moment never over.

See? Was is.
Just needed. Are like.
Made as much as we walk.
Whisper shhh, stitched around you.
Piece. By piece. The air, gasping.
We put it together without words.
The moment never over.

See? See none of this in order
but a story still. See, Cody?
I told you it made just as much sense
as anything else.

Once, after a pause, I texted you
from the top bunk of my dorm room bed
just to say I loved you,
to call you family.

You asked if I was high.

Shit happens.
Shit happened.

I have my first dream of you almost two years after.
Grief, like healing, is not linear and this is proof;
you, written into the code of my body,
you, us, speaking another language altogether,
listen: it makes no sense it would be two years before I dreamt of
you,
and as much sense as anything else.

I don't write about the people I remember;

Memory is, as it always is,
just the first draft of a story after it is over,
and see, there is no way you are over
as long as I can hear your voice in the winter woods.
I don't write about the people I miss,
the you I miss, because looking back to say,
This is what you in the past means to me in the present,
doesn't make sense with you.

There is, somehow, still time.

Wasn't there?

Something bloodyshy of brother,
something heartshy of safe,
once we stood in the woods and chopped down
all the small trees. When we go,
they will all fall — and see: time doesn't matter.
It doesn't matter how it passes,
which way the snow falls.
You are not still here,
and that is okay, because we are.

If your life is over
as much as it never will be
are you not suspended
just inches above your life
in a kind of heaven?

I wake up from a dream
and begin counting:

one

two

three

and of course,

we're home.

Traveling to the Past to Re-Claim History
The Audience Almost Misses Trans Man

he could have been any man
as he got off the train and headed toward the waterfront with little spots of dandruff
clinging to his jacket and a slight hunch in his narrow shoulders
but he is not any many even though he could be

ladies and gentlemen let me draw your attention to his perfect invisibility
let us examine his disappointing normalcy

he looks well-bred and clean-cut
he is the perfect image of the 20s businessman
the 30s salesman the 40s journalist
just a shy guy who keeps to himself
but not enough to seem like someone with a secret

just your average white collar man
holding his hat and leaning slightly against the railing of the pier
a self-made all-american man
enjoying an evening smoke after a day at the office
his dark hair ruffled by the sea breeze that sends
the flame of the match to quivering against his slender fingers

he's easy to miss folks so look closely
as trans man closes his eyes and takes the first after-work inhale
in hard-earned anonymity

Coast

this moon-tinged pool full of soul-light
 love and sun lost
a spreading tear over the sand

you step into it
 the once-still water
up to your ankle

before time
 one of these slim-shelled creatures
crawled from the water

and now here we are
 you and i
two great apes

slim-boned and hirsute
 towering over the tidal
understory

beauty is this moon underfoot
 an interval departure from the
delicate wanting that governs our daylit lives

your shoulders are still warm from the beach-sun
 tomorrow morning they will burn
tomorrow morning you will push me away when i try to relieve your pain

you will be rougher than intended
 and the mug will slip from my fingers
scattering porcelain and half-opened leaves of black tea

across the kitchen floor

Poker Face

we are supposed to look into the amber glass and see the other
and we do and it's terrible
 i laugh when you are upset
 then quiet then both of us take another sip
 love just isn't for us and in between beers it's mostly obvious
tomorrow will be longer than today
the glorious veins in your eyes and in your brain will ripen and redden and swell
you'll sob all morning and gnaw on ibuprofen and i'll simply disappear
then be full again and much shinier
 tonight i've been shrinking and you notice
 but never point it out you just smirk and say
 /thanks for having no backbone/
 and open another
how did we get like this ?
 we were supposed to howl with the moon
 full of amber foam and amber glass
but instead we just shake at each other
jealous in the glare of the other's happiness
 you're always squeezing the cuts and sore spots
 thirsting for something to drink for something to suck
you kiss me enemy me divine me baby me
and i just keep my dying to myself
 compared with our bodies the moon is insignificant
 dry and shining in the window as he grows unwillingly
 to his round and painful fullness
sighing like an opened bottle

Under-Sky Sleeping, Bone Keeping

In the holy spot
with the sitting rock
there is oak. Out
where humans live
there is shagbark hickory
and maple.

Ants climb the rock.
August, and young birds
are quiet when the parents
celebrate the flowering
weeds. Next come
the seeds of autumn.

I am here to name it
and know it and help it
to grow. True, these mountains
are my grave. A good grave
to go to.

The crows have been
in conference, again.
A jay, blue, pokes
a hole through reality.
There I find the sumacs
fruiting and the male sex organs
of the Queen Anne's lace.

Company of flies, so
intelligent. Two abandoned
farmer's fields are wide as
Alaska. Is there one
who could name
every flower here?

The Mythos of August

Lammastide, in the old religion the days between the beginning of summer and the beginning of fall, when we notice that night comes sooner, still alive with crickets and fireflies. What we call the Dog Days, until the Feast of the Assumption, when as the story goes, Mother Mary after five days arose from her grave and was taken up into Heaven, leaving behind her the smell of flowers.

And the flowers are thick and bright, and the cosmos ring faintly in the ear. These are the days of the Harmonic Convergence, of Woodstock, three days of peace, love, and music in that long-ago summer in a world that care forgot. And the sky is overcast and the air is muggy, while the cricket and the dove put forth their lazy songs. The mint blossoms have faded, and the zinnias are fading, and the asters are coming and the mistflowers, while butterflies scramble to mate or soar elegantly into the trees.

A magical force connects all things. And on the finest of all days, I go with my friend to her place in the mountains. A river nymph she is. The butterflies absorb soil on gravel as she leads me into knee-deep, waist-deep water. She teaches me the names of fish we catch there. She notes the chill water where springs flow from the creek bed. A dragonfly lands on my arm. We pass the afternoon, and as the sun flares on the ripples and raccoons begin to chatter, we change into dry clothes and head for home by a different route.

Now September is close at hand. The air is thick with storms. The goldenrod is coming.

A September Rhapsody

No, we will not go back to school this year,
The water is cool, and dry land beckons.
See, a door has opened into the land
Our forebears knew, we shall disappear
 Into the earth.
 We are getting ready for winter.

So it's a golden afternoon, Old John is in
The garden two doors down mowing a hayfield
With a hedge shears, and we talk of weeds
And herbs, and I help him finishing up
The front beds, and can take what I want.
A bag of string beans for myself,
Tomatoes, peppers, and herbs for Joy,
Who is freezing sauces. So with the
Hand shears I take oregano blossoms,
And thyme, basil, and parsley, sage,
Working around the varied bees who feed
Here, that crowd the aster blooms,
And I'm ready to leave. I have
Time to kill so I take Dozer to the park
Ad watch butterflies and venture
Into a goldenrod meadow not yet ripe,
And then I pass by the community garden
On Cleveland to see if they still have
Corn, but no, they cut down everything,
With a group of volunteers working
The few remaining beds. I won't be back
This way.

 So I head to Joy's acre
And she's still in a meeting, so I pick up
A rake and begin preparing the ground
For fall planting. Paris arrives to help
Shuck the case of corn I bought on
Labor Day. I lean on my rake and hear
Him speak of his love for making things.
His mother calls, I work a little more,
Joy finishes the meeting in the church,
I bring the corn up to it in the wheelbarrow,

And we sit in the shade of approaching evening,
Talking as people talk
 While shucking corn
 As people have for ages.

The first fallen leaves give forth
Their tart clean scent. Night falls
And the moon rides golden. And then
Another day I'm in the supermarkets
Reading tomato prices. We'd like to make
A run of sauces to serve with steaming dinners
On cold winter nights, and prices are low,
But we need some volunteers to do the work.
 And a kitchen.

Another day and I'm in the garden.
I steal flowers from the butterflies
To give Joy's mother. I lay my shears aside
And take the week's yield of string beans,
Enough for Joy to freeze a big bag.
Joy doesn't feel well.
I tend the compost pile and head for home.

The Harvest Moon is hidden
And autumn rain approaches,
So that the equinox arrives
On a dark wet morning.
A rooster crows.
The crickets resound.

Let us open the windows.
To the chill of the night,
And rest in the palm
Of the Earth we have cared for.

October Sunflower

Rooks have plucked your sun-struck eye,
mining seeds to nourish the dead,
and the bone-white sun of August has singed
your florets. Head piked, the down-turned

mouth of the outcast is twisted with defeat,
and bears now the blackened mask
of summer's rout, slumping crownless
on autumn's mute gallows. Blind worshipper

from the land of the one-eyed,
amid the slag of spent leaves you turn
your back on us, to the brooding furrows
and the dead weight of the sky, waiting

for the earth to reclaim its wreckage.
Heliotrope, when the corona mounts its zenith,
a solar pulse will once again toughen your spine
and, like the broken heart of this world,

you will be driven once more into flower.

Streets of Old Milwaukee

—Milwaukee Public Museum

It is endless, the early October dusk, smelling of smoke,
And lit in the flare of gaslight. The butterfly in the Mason jar
Folds its wings as if under the weight of dust,

And the draft horses haul their shadows back to the stables
In the alley, the black cat tilts his head in the dark, listening
For a rat in the grate, a spider on the wall, or something else

We may never hear. Even the films in the Nickelodeon
Unspool silently in black, silver and silken gray, the actors
Gesturing as though signaling for help. The kite, torn by rain,

Hangs snagged in the wires. The streetcar reaches its vanishing
Point, and the barber summons his final customer, beckoning
With his gleaming razor. In the saloon, the cards,

Face down upon the table enfold their cache of prophecies.
The Western Union messenger leans his cycle against the fence;
The gate is locked, the dead leaves scattered. Winter

Is coming, and so, too, a war that will strew telegrams from here
To Belleau Wood. Then the apothecary hoards his bottles stoppered
With the vapor of poppies, and the bells summon the clerk,

the newsboy, the schoolmaster, to The Somme, The Marne,
and Amiens. So where, then, is the funeral parlor,
its windows shut, the thick drapes pulled tight

against the gathering dark? And where, too,
the undertaker with his heavy gloves
to lay us all to rest?

It Snowed in La Latina for the First Time in Fifty Years

And the man of a hundred years
Reached his wrinkled hand

to the blank, unwritten sky
squinting, though no sunlight slit

Through the mystery above.
Couples snuggled and tugged

For more blanket in their bedrooms
As their red roofs were blanketed in white,

One color to cover Madrid today,
One palette to matte its patterned

Self-knowing. Ice turned water in
His hot palm as it puddled in the ruts

Of his floorboards back home, the windows
Open a crack to combat an overzealous furnace.

Clothes froze stiff on the line outside,
But who cared? Neither chilly socks nor

Frosty laundry, neither breakfast left
Uneaten nor dishes left undone,

Neither dirty floor nor forgotten chore
Mattered to the man alive a century,

For it snowed. Halfway through life,
He'd paused before, paused and bore witness

To whimsy of children sledding downhill
On trashcan lids, parents skidding

Like figure skaters on ice.
It was the same miracle twice

And one more to witness both times.
Two, he thought, is twice enough for one life

And three proof enough of divinity.
He stayed there after he left for his coffee

At his favorite cafetería, after he sat at the window
Watching flake after flake rake the gentle wind,

Just as he'd remained in bed after stepping out-
doors to the snow-rich courtyard,

Just as he'd rested asleep while waking,
Breaking the silence with a slow gasp

As the ceiling became sky, birds flying aloft
And snow settling on his bed, wet and soft.

He woke to a world swirling in shades of white,
A brightness like the start of life.

The Old Ones Claim

A rainforest changes the man,
it changes the woman.

Some were born with rivers
in their blood. Their ancestors
spoke to raven and bear,
spoke to wolf and otter and black fish,
spoke to salmon and eagle and frog and heron.

You speak to them, too,
and they talk back. Sometimes
you're close to grasping what they say —
that's one way the rainforest
changes you.

One day at dusk a bear
walks through the eye
of the camera.
The old ones claim
a man lives inside a bear;
you tell no one
a bear lives inside a man.

There are weeks in the forest
when your whole body is
a word even you can't utter
but the trees, in their
deep listening,
hear.

Headings

From notes
made
each trip
I compiled a map.
There was flat land
south,
hill country north,
and a river
that flowed down the valley.
This I carry with me,
and a compass.
The map is flat and square;
the compass,
even in my hand,
points over the edge.

Fire on the Plain

Fire gone out on the plain
get going Pony Express.
Indians took the fire and gone
back to reservation

where old medicine men chew tree bark
and converse passionately with
Spirits,
fire cut furrows in their faces.

Vision:
one horse and rider,
hoofs fanning ashes into air.

Circa Eleventh Century

There were trees then, places to hide
and see your village burn to the ground.

Just after sunrise or sundown
or whenever you least expected it,

Vikings showed up. Would take the cup
from your hand, your hand too, if you

let them. Left behind charred beams and
splintered wood where your house had stood.

Would take your little sisters caught
napping, dragging them by their hair,

or hefted like a sack of turnips
or squirming eels, squealing as they

disappeared from your life forever.
Bitterness tasted like those charred bits

of parsnips roasted in the fire
and the scorched fingers used to pluck

them out of the cinders. Never
mind Beowulf and brave men, you

must start over again. The trees
mute witnesses to the mayhem.

j bruscini writes poetry, although their work can be hard to find. You can find them at cozy open mics and small town library writing groups; in out of print zines and across unarchived lit mags; scrawled on sticky notes crumpled in their pockets; sung only to the bird calls passing by, or not even written yet. Perhaps still only a thought to be passed along when truly ready. Their work can also be found at bluej.blue. They live in Vermont.

James Conroy has poetry and short fiction appearing in *Blue Unicorn*, *The Café Review*, *Xanadu*, *The Iconoclast*, *Freefall*, *Speakeasy*, *The Grove Review* and numerous other fine literary journals. The Permanent Press published his novel *The Coyote Hunter of Aquidneck Island*. It was subsequently nominated for the National Book Award, the Chautauqua Prize, and Foreword Reviews' Multi-Cultural Book of the Year.

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*.

Jack Giaour (he/him/his) won the 2023/2024 BOOM Chapbook Contest from Bateau Press with his manuscript *hunting the bugs*. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Fourteen Hills*, *The Sonora Review*, and Tulip Tree's 2023 *Stories that Need to be Told* anthology, among other publications. He has an MFA in Creative Writing from Chapman University. He has taught writing workshops for Mass Poetry, the Peabody Essex Museum, and the Salem Arts Festival. He sunlights as software manager for a steel fabricator just north of Boston. Visit him virtually at jackgiaour.com.

Richard Hedderman has published in *The Stockholm Review of Literature*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Rattle*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Kestrel*, and *Chautauqua Literary Review*. His latest book of poems is *Choosing a Stone*, (Finishing Line Press). He has performed his writing with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and served as a guest poet at the Library of Congress. For more about Richard and his work, visit his website <https://richardheddermanpoetry.com>.

John Kucera was educated at Carlow University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His work has appeared in *New Reader Magazine* and *Philadelphia Stories*. He currently lives in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Ed Lyons lives in Winston-Salem, NC, and has been writing and publishing poems for over forty years. He earned a B.A. in English from the University of FL and an MS in Instructional Systems from FL State University. He is a regular contributor to the *Poems from the Heron Clan* anthology, which he co-founded, and a frequent contributor to *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, which won him a Best of the Net nomination. Ed's work has also appeared in *Albatross*, *Woodrider*, *A New Ulster*, *An Aitiuil*, and *North Carolina Bards*.

Michael McCarthy is a poet and translator whose work has appeared in *The Adroit Journal*, *Runestone*, and *Prairie Schooner*, among others. His debut poetry chapbook *Steve: A Gift* is available from the Moonstone Art Center.

Lewis Mundt is a writer and event coordinator living in central Minnesota. He is publisher at Beard Poetry, a small Minnesota press dedicated to producing affordable, high-quality publications for readers and writers, and is the author of the poetry collection *The God of the Whole Animal*. His work has been published by *The Rumpus*, *Revolver*, and *Paper Darts*, among others, and his second collection, *SOUTHSIDE FOREVER: A love letter to South Minneapolis*, is slated for release in 2024.

Robert Ronnow lives in Williamstown, MA. His most recent poetry collections are *New & Selected Poems: 1975-2005* (Barnwood Press, 2007) and *Communicating the Bird* (Broken Publications, 2012). Visit his website at www.ronnowpoetry.com.

Rhett Watts lives beside a brook in MA with her husband and Siberian cat. Some of her poems appear in *Sojourners Magazine*, *The Worcester Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, and *The Kerf* among other journals. Her chapbook *No Innocent Eye* was co-winner of the Rane Arroyo Award from Seven Kitchens Press. She is anthologized in *The Mud Chronicles: A New England Anthology* and in *Best Spiritual Writing 2000*. Her books include *Willing Suspension*, *The Braiding* and coming next year, *The Double Nest*.

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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