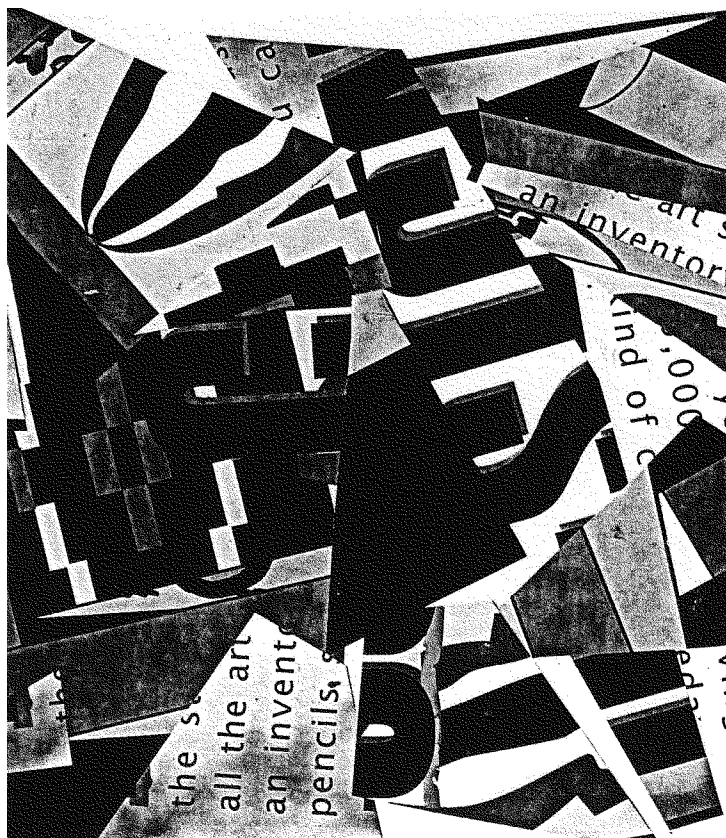


# ALBATROSS



**“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

## #12

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*Things Eaten*

A fractal line splits the Strait  
blue green, turquoise

I break a warm cookie &  
lick crumbs from my fingers

The In Flight magazine tells me gourmets  
have an appetite for destruction

While I study the emergency evacuation chart  
looking for typos and design errors

Afternoon brings a new commission:  
The gulls and trees want me to work on a translation.

*Songs for the Banyan*

the wind frustrates itself held  
in the thin leaves, sifted

through the tendril, rope-like  
roots of the mighty banyan

with its stumps of elephant like feet,  
tough grey skin, a tree that doesn't bend

against strong wind or storm  
many survived Hurricane Andrew

in Coral Gables, they grow backwards  
into the ground and sprout

more roots. How like exile  
to leave such marks on those spots,

the places where life continues  
to persist, in exile, the hand clutches

any dirt it can call its own.

*Birch Tree Trilogy*

I.

If you are tired  
of the birch trees'  
incessant conversation  
you should go down the hill  
hide indoors  
watch every rerun  
drink tea with aunts  
uncles brothers and  
all their shadows  
fill the silence  
with the babble  
the birch trees  
wouldn't listen to

II.

Caught in the stillness  
of birches  
I am held prisoner  
until released by a flutter  
of passing birds

---

III.

It is November  
when the birch trees  
take hold of me  
white bark sketching  
the thin cool air  
slender bodies like silver dancers  
caught in delicate poses  
their leaning embrace offering  
no explanations  
a white ecstasy that came  
with nakedness  
unabashedly shining  
in a sudden burst of sunlight  
the conversations of branches  
drowning out the faint crumbling  
of leaves underfoot  
their stark poems piercing the air  
mysterious murmurings you want to hear  
so much  
you stand and wait,  
forever, it seems,  
to perceive bare  
birch trees



Helen Drummond

---

*Litany*

This paper.  
Clean.  
Thin as unanswered  
prayers.

This paper  
from a missing tree  
that laid its life down  
to an axe.

This paper  
lays its life down  
to the point  
of my pen.

The blade  
of this paper.  
So thin it cuts  
my fingers.

These fingers,  
a prayer  
writing poems.  
Benediction to trees.

*Star Magnolia Leaf*

At this moment I see  
its separation from the stem,  
gold falling toward decay.

Two crows fly overhead  
as if to say  
nothing has changed

*Locust Blossoms*

Today  
in the city of squirrels and bumblebees,  
down through the layers,  
  
past the oriole,  
past the grizzled bark of the sugarbush tree,  
in a green, spongy corner,  
  
where shadows ripple  
the weed-rippled dirt, and micro-swarms of gnats  
do their best to stay warm,  
  
the locust blossoms are coming  
to rest.  
White, curled, & navigating  
  
by their shape's relation to the air,  
they drape  
on the dead stalks,  
  
on the hoof-matted grass, or string  
like tossed clothes  
on the spiders' happy trails,  
  
& few are alone in gathering  
on leaves; in fact,  
hoedowns occurred on more than not—  
  
ladybug, pollen sprong, flimsiest twig—  
ten thousand milligrams  
of lissome detritus, & more dropping  
  
all the time, piling up  
with each turn  
of the land's good breathing.

*Morning-glories*

At noon I walk across the wooden bridge  
that leads home, past the morning-glories

open for the day. At night they hang  
like white grapes, pearls hidden within

a well-spring awaiting a jeweler.  
Jelaluddin Rumi said the secrets

of the world come at sunrise.  
At dawn I never see the sun

peel open their royal violet centers  
the color stolen from Florida sunsets.

In the early slant of moonlight  
I call the moths to the white petals

wait for their pollen visit  
like drunks at a lamppost, sober

enough to discover the moment light begins.

*Flight*

It was a year before the first birds came.  
Weaker, he watched them prepare, beaks  
full of dried grass, gum wrappers and straw.  
The time between trips became  
the way he measured the days, the time  
between nests, the way she understood  
the time he had left. Death was a beginning  
and migration was to tell him when to fly.

That last summer, he marvelled at the way  
they lived their lives. Birds made a place  
for themselves in awnings and steeples,  
hollow trees and chimney flutes, ardent utilitarians.  
The fine red bird house nailed to the tree  
outside his window was more than enough.  
He watched them call and flutter, flirt  
and mate for show making a ceremony of it  
as it was meant to be.

His wife brushed his hair.  
She read to him and even though he didn't stir,  
she knew the words reached him.  
She remained beside him that last season  
watching him go. In sleep, he turned  
on his side and curled in on himself small  
the way birds did, and like their feathered bodies  
nested in circles of work, his mind constructed  
and reconstructed what was lost in life  
and what was found.  
During a night like this, he woke  
to the pale oval of her face; startled,  
eyes round.

Early that spring the birds returned home.  
The red paint mansion was faded.  
The back wall was so rotted through  
the whole house pulled off its nail, tearing a hole.  
With a bird's eye, she peered inside  
to understand how they lived  
a life of losing all they had season after season.  
In her hands a carcass; red paint, bird shit,  
Doublemint wrappers, feathers, dirt and twigs.  
The last years of his life became nothing  
but light in her hands.

*Cat's First Bird*

Possum-lazy. Grey as soot. For years our household  
Joke. Raised, a bumpkin Lazarus, by taps on certain tiny  
Plates, or squeak of opening can. Irksome rub of mewling  
Fur, till miffed, but humored still, we'd boot him out  
Into the night. . . . How strange to find the delicate brown  
Spines of shattered wings, rust head ripped loose, there  
By the porch door in morning light. Perfect tiny beak  
And lolling tongue clamped in the terrible grin of  
Shock. Mangled thrush we'd felt beside us, briefly spied,  
Proof to us, perhaps himself, droll foolish one we  
Pamper, then punt out into the night. Warm moist wind  
an omen, insects shrill. He'd left the life we'd given  
Him. To stalk among our flowerbeds. To kill.

\*\*\*

And glue each feather closer  
though when you pull back a deep breath  
a nest shrieks —this makeshift arrow

clawing your fingers open for lift off  
—you aim dead center and the sun  
slowly the way a lid already covers one eye

while the other pinpoints the deluge  
—carefully, you open the bow  
into umpteen zillion years still smelling

from salt and lift off  
—you will blame  
the sky should be bigger

but who you going to believe, me  
or these feathers falling off  
as if they wanted to spread lower

shake from the sea floor  
the sun overflowing with sea gulls  
pouring out its darkness and oceans.

*Lovak*

Népek, viharok  
maga as idő is  
lovon járt egykor.

Vágtató lovak hátáról  
szállnak föl  
a szuperszonikus gépek is:

a beton kifutók szélén a fű  
úgy logog, mint a lovak  
sörénye.

*Horses*

Humanity and storms,  
even time itself,  
used to ride on horseback.

It is from the backs of  
galloping horses that  
supersonic planes take off:

at the edge of the runway  
the leaves of grass flutter like  
the mane of a leaping horse.

(translated by Paul Sohar)

*Any One They Never Forget*

Shouldn't we be like  
Elephants and whales  
Who fret when  
Any, any one of them is suffering,  
Who mourn in their swaying  
Together and who  
Don't leave  
Dying loved ones, they sway  
And rub each other gently  
Their cries rising  
From distant squeals to  
Crescendo, crescendo through  
Massive bones  
All those miles of tough skin



*New World Overture*

It is minimal, an octagon  
reduced to a diptych. Weeds  
have been cut from the gutters,  
saints strangled by their haloes.

Nothing gothic or moral dare  
intrude, no darkening stains  
through the glass. Above  
this street the only grey

cement is the sky, my love.  
We live on the plains forever.  
The industries of Eden will custom  
fit even the animals to our touch.

*Transference*

Five gray coyotes sweep as one  
through my snow drifted  
front yard,  
plunge over creek bank,

descend into thick, tangled brush,  
copper as sun sets,  
that must  
shelter mouse, rabbit,

or vole, searching in frozen grass  
for fallen seeds. Each  
dry grain  
complete in itself,

destined to surrender what heat  
it holds to air, or  
burn once  
more in bright, red blood.

Bill Brown

---

*Frank Church Wilderness, Idaho, 1998*

On the trail where Marsh's Creek  
joins the Middle Fork of the Salmon  
haystacks stretch and roar  
between mountain and meadow.

Monkey flower and columbine  
paint the falls spilling to river.  
My wife stops as a howl  
rises above the rush of water.

"Wolf?" she whispers, and a closer  
howl sings from the stone outcrop,  
cuts the horizon. "Wolves,"  
I stutter, half lost in a reverie

ghosted with eyes and fur,  
a blowing rock in high wind  
whistling my blood, a raven  
in winter counting down the years.

*Pillow*

Take not  
into thy bed  
the girdle  
of hours

But make  
thy pillow  
a text  
unto sleep

In the  
design  
of  
fullness

So it  
dwell with  
you all  
the days

Look upon  
thy pillow  
as the lily  
and the balm

In the garden  
of silence  
and hushed  
colors

And read  
upon  
its  
tablet

Where  
sleep  
doth  
write

---

The pillow  
is the  
seat  
of the soul

Make thy  
place with  
thy pillow  
in thy heart

And it  
shall be  
as thy halo  
unto the moon

And in the  
dark time  
and the  
night

Shall it  
comfort  
thy brow  
as the hand

And be  
as the  
cornerstone  
to thy dreams

And the  
garland  
and the  
laurel

And lay  
you down  
upon the knee  
of favor

In all  
the hours  
of thy  
days

Anon

The vines bend like clever minds,  
Against the break of summertime and inside  
The winds beat unholy hymns as the cars thunder by,  
Reading a book once considered cruel, you know now  
It was really innocent. You type at the keyboard naked.  
Hopeless with your thoughts this cold sunny day with the ice-chill  
Of the devil wind as you call up your fear again.  
And in your head the song that might not let you dream again.

You are maskless and without face,  
You are timeless under the pounding of saws and axes on the wall,  
Of construction time which takes forever,  
You breathe of the past,  
The colors of the waiting time.

They are fire red-eyed hope to find you with their sharp hands,  
Many hands and many hearts bleeding,  
The shadow is a friend for there they do not see you.  
You burn your books because you are cold.  
And with this your heart goes dead.  
It spins and the world closes.  
So much to drown a person, so much to drown.

You take the bag of letters and wrap them up in a bag,  
And cast them into the smiling seas with their grabbing charms,  
You take your childhood out for a swim,  
In your suit of Spanish blue and your dead heart of irony,  
You follow it to the bottom of the dankest reef and twirl your hair  
Into a piece of heavy pink coral so nice,  
So pink and so delicate like a sweet child, a perfect baby,  
An infant who kills you.

Helen Drummond

---

*Georgia Memory*

I am aging now but I can see  
late sun melt  
toward a field of cicadas,  
hover in my mind  
like the gnats floating motionless  
in the thick honey air,  
feel the gentle prickle of hay  
rhythm of the truck,  
dust mingling with the sweetness  
of our moist hands held,  
the first kiss.  
Somewhere in the dark of me  
I saw a fleeting glimpse,  
I could be loved one day.

*Waiting for Songs*

If we are still  
then the songs will come.

Do the words come  
from our being in the world?

My son shits his nappy  
'baba done poo-mess';  
I say 'big boys don't poo in nappies—  
you just think you're not a big boy.'

Rohan with the triskelion  
around his neck

on the minitramp  
in the lounge  
listening to his Nana:

there's a time to run  
a time to have rest  
a time to play with toys.

Thursday I go swimming  
Friday I stay Nana's house  
Saturday we go tumbletops  
Sunday we wait for the songs.



*The Astronomer's Christmas*

The magic wasn't enough.  
He wanted to know what makes the stars burn.

The kids asked for knee rides,  
brushed chocolate thumbs on the star maps.

The planets waltzed their retrograde waltz  
above the dolls' house.

"I'm not up to it today," the astronomer said,  
"The shapes don't fit—

—besides, it's Christmas."

After dinner, Tobias brings his gift:  
a grain of castor sugar, cracked open;  
a Christmas cracker.

1965

It happened before school.

A kid, not much older  
than us, spilled his bike and slid  
beneath the wheels of an oil truck.

We saw it all, every kid  
who rode the bus:

men with flares that burned  
like fireworks  
in the rain,  
the blood that pooled  
at his feet.

The teacher told us in a  
gentle voice, hardly above  
a whisper,  
the boy would be okay.

No one spoke, and the lesson began:  
numbers drawn in neat columns  
beneath the President's  
smiling face.

Numbers, she told us, never lie.

*Poets*

They tap at the window, sleep late,  
eat whatever's in the house, drink  
the good booze and the bad, won't talk  
or even laugh unless they feel like it.

They leave in the afternoon, find  
a bench or boulder to hide behind,  
watch listen, refuse to believe anything  
is more lovely than a leaf, more real.

At night, they search for something  
the bars don't sell.

Their only love is a woman whose face  
they've never seen, who rides them  
to the stars and back but kicks them  
out of bed, locks the door once again.

*Boy Builder*

It bounces off a deep place inside me,  
seeing fathers and sons do things together.  
Outside my window, three floors down,  
a tall son in jeans and green shirt  
is leaning against a concrete wall.  
He's holding three 2X4's  
as his blond head lifts  
toward his father on a balcony.  
It gets me contented  
to watch this, the work men do,  
while I button a blouse on a hanger.  
I'm filing a paid bill  
when I hear the old yell, "Hey."  
I glance out to see lumber on a rope.  
The boy stands half at rest, half in action,  
as he picks the bundle out of the air.  
The father pulls up the rope.  
I water my ivy.  
It's an old echo—  
the woman tender of plants  
under knowledge of men out there  
heaving their lumber, building their bridges.  
It still feels safe  
to hear the young being trained,  
even if all this busy rearranging the planet  
may have us—trees, animals, people—  
way down the road to dead and gone.

## Contributor's Notes

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**Edward Beatty** received his M.A. from the University of Wisconsin and has been teaching literature and philosophy at Sauk Valley Community College ever since. He has published poems in more than two dozen journals since starting to submit poetry about four years ago.

**Bill Brown** teaches literature and creative writing in Nashville. His work has been published in journals such as THE LITERARY REVIEW, PASSAGES NORTH, ZONE THREE, and has many forthcoming poems in such journals as THE WORCESTER REVIEW and THE SOUTHERN POETRY REVIEW. He has published three collections of poems, HOLDING ON BY LETTING GO, WHAT THE NIGHT TOLD ME, and, most recently, THE ART OF DYING.

**James Doyle** has magazine publications in over 100 journals, including BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL, ALASKA QUARTERLY REVIEW, CAROLINA QUARTERLY, SOUTH DAKOTA REVIEW, and POETRY. He has one book, THE SIXTH DAY (Pygmy Forest 1988 Winner), and one chapbook titled THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE (Black Bear 1986 Contest winner).

**Helen Drummond** has published poems in SPINDRIFT, READER'S BREAK, and several anthologies. She retired from music teaching and is now able to spend much of her time working on poetry and painting. She has lived in the Seattle area for over 30 years.

**Nicole Grabe** lives in Schoolcraft, MI.

**Sandor Kanyadi** is the dean of Hungarian poets in Transylvania. Through translations his poetry is well known and respected in Germany (winner of Herter Prize) as well as Scandinavia.

**Jeannette Miller** lives in Kalamazoo, MI.

**William Miller** is an associate professor of literature and creative writing at York College of Pennsylvania. His poems have appeared in over a hundred journals, including THE SOUTHERN REVIEW, THE AMHERST REVIEW, and THE CUMBERLAND POETRY REVIEW. He has three collections of poetry: THE TREES ARE MENDED (Northwoods Press), OLD FAITH (Mellen Press) and BREATHED ON GLASS (Druid).

**Thorpe Moeckel** has had poems appear recently in FIELD, COLD MOUNTAIN REVIEW, and POTOMAC REVIEW. He lives with his wife and daughter in Pennsylvania.

---

**Harvey Molloy** is an Assistant Professor in the Core Curriculum Programme at the University of Singapore. His poetry has recently been published in JAAM (NZ) and Takahe (NZ) and his art appeared in ALBATROSS.

**Sharon O'Hanlon** lives in Kissimmee, FL.

**Simon Perchik** has numerous magazine and book publications, among which are poems in POETRY, APR, and THE NEW YORKER. He has previously published in ALBATROSS.

**Alice Pero** has been writing poetry for 15 years. She is a dancer and musician and teacher of creative writing. Her poems have appeared in POETRY NOW, SALONIKA, and a number of other magazines. Her first book, THAWED STARS, was published in 1999.

**Dennis Saleh's** most recent book of poetry won the first chapbook competition from Willamette River Books: THIS IS NOT SURREALISM. A new collection was published by Quicksilver in 1999: RHYMES' BOOK. His poems, prose, and artwork appear widely, in such magazines as ART/LIFE, ARTWORD QUARTERLY, POETRY, TRIQUARTERLY, and IOWA REVIEW.

**Paul Sohar** was born in Hungary, educated in the USA, and has been publishing poetry in small mags like SENECAREVIEW, OFFERINGS, and POET'S PAGE. His book of poems IN SUN'S SHADOW was published by Footprint Press in addition to a volume of translations.

**Virgil Suarez** recently published his first book of poetry with Tia Chucha Press/Northwestern University. His poems have recently appeared in such journals as NEW ENGLAND REVIEW, PLOUGHSHARES, and THE OHIO REVIEW, among many others.

**Lorraine Tolliver** is a professor of writing and literature at Compton College in California. Her short stories and poems have appeared in POETRY/LA, WRITERS INTERNATIONAL, COLLEGE JOURNAL, and others.

**Paula Yankee** writes poetry, short stories, and short fiction, and is completing the MFA program at Hamline University in St. Paul, MN.

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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