

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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In Hell

When I reach Hell

I will build my house
of finches and mice and foxes.

I will structure the frame
with wasps and dogs and squirrels.
Turtles and ants and speckled trout.

I will measure that house daily,
cupboard to floor to attic

so when they come,
those neighbors bearing casseroles,

I will tell them
I am damned to eat
only what my hands have killed;
only what my house provides.

The Operation

I break open the chest of a beast
any beast you choose:
mastodon, elk, bald eagle.
I fish my hand through blood
and pillows of tissue.

Pulling out the arched bones,
ivory and clean as elephant tusks,
I hold them up to the sky, these
pieces of curved moon.

You lay across two rivers
joined together by prayer.
I break open your chest, your breasts
you beast, my mother
and I give your lungs

the power of stampedes across Africa
flights through the Orient.
When you open your eyes
dandelion seeds fall down like tears.
I have stitched you closed with
Philodendron roots and when I say breathe
you inhale deep as the earth
deep as a great howl in the night.

Sunflowers

Grotesque bonnets
For what appalling infants are they designed?
What curdled squalling,
Outburst of fecundity. Crows
Clamour for that fat seeded visage,
That one legged buccaneer
In a fringed cap, baby faced, leering,
Steering by the sun.

Big, bald, glowering
Full of ruthless grandeur,
Strutting like someone who's won a lottery,
Brutes of the garden overshadowing
Placid rows of beans, carrots, squash,
Greedy peasant faces intent on growing
Filling themselves with light
Like good porridge, like buried gold.

Crazy, canny, compulsive,
No wonder Van Gogh
Painted them over and over.

Insurance

There is one thing I get right: every spring I plant the nasturtiums. My husband shakes his head, says: *For god's sake, woman, why don't you just do pansies like everybody else?* I know better. It's insurance, I say. He walks off and shrugs, turns on his weed whacker. I go about my business, not planting pansies, stuffing fat seeds into thin holes punched too close together: packing the future tight. I know: it's a long summer but a short one, too — iris to coreopsis to New England aster, suns up and down. Come September the evenings grow chill. Kids are off, the house goes mute, dried oak leaves scritch along the walk like small, arthritic hands. Only the nasturtiums are becoming: teeming — cascading — extrapolating — luxuriating in their greenness, even the blossoms, tipped in gold, their little open mouths . . .

Royal Poinciana

Transplanted like most of us,
it found a home in Sanibel.

Many lay dormant in winter,
delicate and wind-blown,

pausing, pausing to be laid open,
to be drunk, sink roots knee-deep.

Every summer it explodes
in a paradox amongst so much

green, we tilt our heads
as we drive down Periwinkle,

astonished by the profusion
of pumpkin panicles, astonished

we try to name the color: ocher,
flame, cantaloupe, carrot,

sherbert, tangerine. We try
to name perception, a brightness

beyond distant fireworks
shot over Fort Myers.

Far more, the eye expects
the sweetness in each passing,

expects the sugar to drop like bits
of candy into our open mouths.

Baneberry

What can be said in praise of the bane-
berry on its stem glowing as red
as Mars, as red as blood? Compared
to it, the brightest ruby is dull;
it will stop your heart if swallowed,
but if you have wings and a heart
the size of a drop of rain, it will
nourish you, carry you through the night.

I Think Again of Those Ancient Chinese Poets

Summer. Snow still on the mountains
and only a few blooms on the iris again.
My neighbor wonders why I tend to them year
after year with scant success; it's very clear
to him I've failed. I think of those Chinese poets
who climbed for days to reach an alpine meadow
on the rumor of an iris as dark as the night,
old men calling to each other like cranes in flight.

The Last

I

For the peace
of one night's easy passage
I burned all
that my name had brought me,
all that I had
I put into memory
to make light enough
I might see you by—

for the near-sleep coming of you,
not a word; not the sound
of the rose but
the rose. The steady pulse
lifted across years
and led back to silence.

II

See the moon is out
rocking the river
to sleep

The moon is out
horned
silver basket I
will a flower into
its bright cup
See how my dying is taken
by you

III

I crush my one promise.

I swear to defend the ruins.

The Misunderstanding

I did not say: *You are nothing to me;*
I said the hummingbird, the anglerfish
are not amazed at themselves.

I did not say: *I have forgotten you;*
but that every day a man
finds more things that trouble him.

Not *You are not beautiful,*
but that, often, when I lie in the grass,
a lute sings in the earth beneath me.

Not: *I regret—*
but that I stare at these keys
I carry in my pocket
and think of the narrow bones
I once turned over in the garden.

Not *I never loved you,*
but You are all you have.

As for the rest, yes,
it is as you say, the words
are mine, but all the rooms of the world
we have lived in close now
over the words of others.
Earth, keys, man—
when will you seek out
that lamp, that light,
under which they were written?

like water in the morning

what must be remembered begins in the body
rooted sorrow momentary quiet

within language and naming is that first truth
the idea of happiness

the moment
when one thing becomes another

like water in the morning
I've grown accustomed to our differences

and how names for shadow and light
limit the language of this world

this near blue above us
its tendency to perfection

never ending horizon
in every direction

in-habiting and holding
placed and having place

Take This Page

Look past
the distraction of words,
our endless procession
of letters.

In the presence of white,
touch the page itself,
this rectangle,
this empty room,

a place for meditation,
if we ignore
the black scuff marks
on its ivory floor.

Let natural light
reflect the textures
of felted fibers,
cotton and flax,

egg shell, bread dough,
wool and bone,
the pressed shirt,
the linen shroud,

smooth, uncreased,
a sheet of paper deep
as any world we enter
through a book.

With the whorls
of our fingertips
we can read beneath
the watermarks,

between the laid lines,
faint patterns
left by the mesh
where pale pulp dried,

the cellulose in its slurry,
the wood chips, sawdust,
splinters, bark,
the cambium, the core

of a tree giving ground,
a legion of trees, a forest,
the billion leaves
they gird on every year,

their green machinery,
the sugars in the sap,
oxygen, carbon, lignin,
every molecule made

with heat, the photons
charging through space
from the flares of our sun,
its fiery hydrogen

burned into this room,
written into this page,
this book,
this volume of light.

Ruins

Sifting through the pages
of *National Geographic*,
I excavate the tomb
of the Emperor who defeated
six warring nations,
called forth an army of terra cotta
and wrenched a young girl
from her village home.

Her ghost sails
upon the wings
of the returning geese.
Sixteen years and ten thousand
sorrows resound in their cries.
Sister to me, no less so
for distance or time.
At the willows, I join her.

We fill water jugs
for the clay makers
and replenish the river
with our tears.

Mounting a vessel
upon the curve
of our hips,
we sway under
the weight
of lost years

About Nests and Springs in Montana

My daughter mentors school kids. She's 18, eating chocolate cream pie for breakfast, but I say nothing. I'm a mom braced for empty-nest pain, racing through

my late-for-work routine, *Yesterday I was with the kindergartners.* setting out water for the dogs, coaxing the toilet to stop, checking my emails. Now that we have internet, no one

ever calls. *And there was a little boy in the back of the class.* There's a photo of my mom shoveling 14 inches of spring snow, wearing her grandson's fur-lined bomber hat. *So I helped*

him write a Disney poem. My dad is proud of her. A quick note from my farming sister: Sunday frostbite. *"Mickey Mouse, Mickey Mouse."* Monday sunburn. Two bum lambs in her warm kitchen, forty four

in three sheds. *"You are number one."* I find lunch money, turn the furnace off. *His teacher thanked me later for sitting with him. No one ever has.* We run outside to start our trucks, something sparkles

on our lawn. *We're going to be late, aren't we, Mom.* I nod my head, we hold hands and stop. A robin is plucking Christmas tinsel from the grass in our front yard.

roadkill

years ago — november — conscientious — at peace with peace — driving home
i hit a buck a button yearling — perhaps sixty pounds of flesh and bone —

the oncoming car with high beams blinding held tight to its own lane and was gone

— it was late at night for what there was of us — standing by it in the cold

its eyes fixed on mine and beyond me — the wasted poise — no fear or pain its tense
unsensing instincts relaxed from the adrenalin of their panic — twisted beyond all
reason

i returned to it an hour or so later — after learning from a call to the state police

— as compensation for my own car's damage — i could keep the deer

— looking for help — to make and so remake the moment out of bits and pieces
i couldn't reach the expertise a brother-in-law who used to hunt would have

— at 2am his wife — my wife's sister — refused to wake him being ill

— needing an answer — no alternative — absurd as it was — a medieval rubric
of courteous behavior was all i had — so with it — husbanding an unwanted skill

still warm — i dressed it — hung it out in cold to cure — and later — tanned it white

Standoff

I've been walking this trail thirty years
but today I have to change course
because a pair of Canadian geese
have built a nest on the left.
The male hisses and rushes at me.
I stand my ground but he won't give up.
This is life and death to them,
and the pair are screaming their outrage,
defending the nest.
It becomes clear
I will not win this argument
against pink hissing tongues.
It becomes clear
I will not win this argument,
not in a million years.

The Work of Morning

No matter how good the light,
everything has sleep in its eyes.
Flora and fauna seem caught in
what wants to stretch or yawn.
Dreams grow paper thin, lucent,
as the sun sifts into a new day.

There is work to do. Leaves
must change the sun into sugar;
every cell must create another
of its kind; beetles and their kin
must search for drops of dew,
drink them before they fade into

thin air. Breakfast becomes
the first order of the day. Those
who graze and those who hunt
move among those who draw in
minerals to meet their needs.
Everything is at risk. In the end

there should be fewer mouths
to feed — but it won't happen that
way. Life will come from death
and the living will replace those
the world lost in less than a season.
And just now — it all waits to begin.

Summer Hunting

Three shots is about right—the first at the target, the second two for whatever appears after the first, and after that not much stirs—what was there is either dead or gone so you're standing there with the gun, red shell casings at your feet and you think that was good, reload, walk on a bit, looking for something else to appear, fly up, crawl from the grass into the plain sight you've carved out of this field and boy you're ready, reloaded, and a second away from pulling the trigger, the one conclusive act, then something seems to be hovering over the green field, moving toward the ditch bank—coyote loping or bird shimmering—from this distance it's all the same—an intermingling of colors, the darker and the lighter, the reversal of them as you shift, sun shifts, then pulled apart. The floating—levitation by trick of distance—you want to do it, save the cold wet of this summer morning from soaking through your shoes again, the whole farm moving from symbol to metaphor to the thing it is and then there it is underneath you, grass, dirt, bushes, trees—all that's meant to be is, much simpler than you've ever known, and now you can't touch it, a few feet above it all, unsure how you got there, unsure how to get back.

Harrier

Not red-tail.
Something smaller darts up,
hunting, wings feathered back like a hawk's
but not floating—more needle-like, honing,
knife's sharp edge about it—
around fencepost, thistles long seeded out,
S turns among them.

The attention it must take to live like that.
The always spiring-up—is it hopefulness?—
around the apple tree's fallen apples—
another turn, then doubling back.
Looking for the scent,
the distraction in the weeds, a variant,
a translation, a recombination.
As if according to some plan, whispered
or silently like wing bank or plunge to prey.

Competition

It's no pretty business
staying alive, you have
to get up in darkness and bundle
tight against the sea's chill
take motor launches out
to arrive on the ice shelf
in the bloodlight of dawn
you have to kill as many
harp seals in the paltry
48 hours they give you
these do-gooders
government men
bureaucrats and vegetarians
safe in their pale office towers
it's bloody work no-one
said it wasn't, competing
for cod, scrambling
for meat supply
it takes rifles aimed
between the eyes
and clubs and slicing knives
it requires standing
here on this red ice
wearing these stiff
spattered boots

Corporate Identity

This Saturday you're behind the counter
in the work coat you want to shed
like an unwanted skin at the end of your shift.
There's the 5 o'clock rush to get through
& you don't want to hear how Michael on bags
got an extra shift at Subway to save for his car.
Your white name tag lets the customers think
they can call you by your name;
the logo on your chest promises a New World
but little was gained from the shelvers' lockout.
What's left after the prepaid's paid for
you'll put to a silver Playboy necklace
with an imitation diamond eye, or
a pair of Nike trainers, each whoosh
a tick for a Vietnamese child's
fourteen hour day. Last week Tala
gave you Resurrection & you copied
Tupac Shakur's name into your senior
Social Studies notebook in the style
of a typeface owned by the Sony Corporation.
You hand back the man's Flybuy card, try
not to frown as he fumes when the EFTPOS
doesn't take his PIN. On your inside
left thigh there's a tattoo of the Vietnamese
character for love you let no-one but Tala
see. You got the idea from Angelina Jolie—
now it has become your own & beneath black
polyester pants the sigil warms you;
keeps you real.

Childhood

The child opens the planet at dawn
with his eyes — what an airy
benevolence, what a lightness
in the world unfolds from the evening's dreamwork.

A blessed dozing over cereal.
The silence of the house breathing in its sleep.

A parent's egg congeals on a plate,
a stabbed cigarette in the middle.

Then the clothes, the bus,
the gluey hours of school.

The black and white clock on the wall
was like an operating room's, like a door
ticking open to the frightened heartbroken world of adults.

How the windy seas inside the child
begin their slow evaporation.
A white crust, an alkali silt clogs the blood.

A tree aflame with talking leaves.
This monotonous oratory of the dead.

Oh child, little Buddha
inside his kernel of light,
how with a marionette's jerky gait
he mounts the bus at the end of day.

He steers for the harbor of his bedroom,
the stuffed animals awaiting discourse
and the night with its brooding diminishing sublime.

Winter Woods

Breath cold, full moon behind a gray veil,
the tree tops map the moon.

Three pairs of socks, through my boots
my toes are still cold.

Three hours of hard wood in the Vermont casting
lifts the cabin from 13 to 38.

Vegetable soup and a bottle of Girondas,
read Frost by bed candle.

Sleep to wind in high trees.

Winter Solstice

This life lackluster, this raucous swirl,
throw it back like the snow throws back the sky.

An earthquake tilted the earth's axis
and now the day is forever fractions of a second shorter

but why obsess over such large problems
when we stumble through each hour, clamber

into one another to survive, to make something
happen? It is windy, so windy the rain gutter

vibrates in protest. Looking up through the trees,
I see a spider-veined sky, branches clawing

for a tear, a slip of warmth.
I found one in his kiss finally.

I smelled too much like three a.m.
with cigarette-infused hair and vodka breath

and I babbled about the contradiction of mortality,
the fact that our skin is self-healing.

A scratch or bruise will repair itself,
yet flesh is the first to melt into the ground.

He shut me up and it was a brief bubble in time,
the meniscus, a desperate clinging to the walls.

He agreed this world is full of contradiction,
of friction and so we made a quick spark.

The rupture of rapture. I throw it back, like the snow
throws back the sky. Each day is shorter.

In the Time of Temperatures

Yesterday's actual
exceeded today's average,
The Weather Channel reports.

More than we ever knew
at this time of year
is plaguing us. The warmth

is global, but comes
in pieces, some moving
faster than others.
Ice is unstable
in areas of low pressure.
Storms disturb
the insulated earth,
an unintended consequence
of light from the staggering sun.

LisaMarie Brodsky received an MFA in Poetry from UW-Madison in 2005. Her poems have been in *The Atlanta Review*, *The North American Review*, and *The Southern Ocean Review*, among others. *We Nod Our Heads*, a chapbook, was published by Parallel Press.

Paul Brooke has published widely in such journals as *The North American Review*, *The Antioch Review* as well as many international journals. *Light and Matter: Photographs and Poems of Iowa*, a full length collection, came out in 2007 from Wheaton Publishing.

Joan Colby has recent poems in *Atlanta Review*, *Spoon River Review*, *Red Cedar Review*, and others and received a 2008 Illinois Arts Council Literary Award, as well as an Honorable Mention in the 2008 James Hearst Poetry Contest (*North American Review*).

Ralph Culver lives in Burlington, VT. He has been a grantee in poetry of the Vermont Arts Council, and his poems have appeared or will appear in *Albatross*, *Iodine*, *Onion River Review*, and *10X3 plus*.

Roger Desy is forever finishing a cabin at the edge of the Catskills, farm country that grounds the figures of his work. His religion is seasonal (all four), his politics post-christian hybrid, and his profession a metamorphosing sonneteer.

Melissa Holm received an MFA from the U of Mississippi. Her poems have appeared in *The DMQ Review*, *Plainsongs*, and *The American Poetry Journal*. She currently lives in Atlanta, GA where she is an editorial assistant at Emory University.

William Keener is a writer and environmental lawyer living in the San Francisco Bay area. His collection *Gold Leaf on Granite* won the 2008 Anabiosis Press Chapbook Contest.

Linda King is a Vancouver, BC poet/workshop facilitator whose work has appeared in numerous journals both in Canada and internationally. She has previously appeared in *Albatross*.

Mitch LesCarbeau has poems pub'd in over fifty journals including *Albatross*, *The New England Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, and *The Nation*. He is the winner of many poetry prizes, including The Galway Kinnell Poetry Prize and the Grolier Prize, and his book, *The Comedy of Memory*, was published with The New Poets Series.

Mike Lewis-Beck was inspired by a rough cabin in the woods to begin writing poetry. Gardening—dirt more specifically—also moves him. His poetry has appeared locally where he lives in Iowa City.

Paula Sanders McCarron lives in Chelmsford, MA after living in Alaska for 20 years. She is a health care worker and freelance writer whose poems have appeared in *Ice Floe*, *The Bridge Review* et al.

Harvey Molloy lives in Wellington, NZ where he teaches at Newlands College. His poems have appeared in *Albatross*, *Blackmail Press*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *Southern Ocean Review*, and *Takahe*. His first book of poems, *Moonshot*, was recently pub'd by Steele Roberts.

W. Dale Nelson has had poems most recently in *The Nation*, *Nimrod*, and *The South Carolina Review*. He has received awards from *Poetry Northwest*, *Plainsongs*, *Visions* et al. as well as a creative writing fellowship from the Wyoming Arts Council.

Sherry O'Keefe is a descendent of one of the first Montana pioneers. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *The Sow's Ear Review*, and *Main Street Rag*.

Andy Roberts lives in Columbus, OH, where he recently retired as a wastewater treatment plant operator. He has previously published in *Albatross*.

Tom Sexton is completing a collection of eight-line poems based on his reading of and love for the ancient Chinese poets. His new book is *For the Sake of Light: New and Selected Poems* from the U of Alaska Press. He published in the third issue of *Albatross* over 20 yrs ago.

Michael Shorb is a poet, technical writer, editor, and children's book author living in San Francisco. His work has appeared in over 100 publications including *Michigan Quarterly*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *The Nation*, and *Commonweal*.

Mark Simpson has published poems in a number of magazines. He received a Ph.D. from the Rhetoric Program at Purdue University and works as an instructional designer in Seattle.

Lyn Stefenhagens has recent publications in *Tiger's Eye*, *Coal City Review*, *Sow's Ear*, and *Permafrost*. She lives in Osprey, FL.

Kim Triedman has had poems accepted / published widely in literary journals and anthologies here and abroad, including *The Aurorean*, *The New Writer*, *Byline Magazine*, *Poet's Ink* and others. Most recently, she has won the 2008 Main Street Rag Chapbook Competition with her first collection titled *bathe in it or sleep*. She is a graduate of Brown University and lives in the Boston area.

Fredrick Zydek has previously appeared in *Albatross* and has also published poems in *The Antioch Review*, *Cimmaron Review*, *The Hollins Critic*, *Nimrod*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry*, *Yankee*, and others. His 9th collection entitled *T'Kopechuck: The Buckley Poems* is forthcoming later in 2009. He lives in Omaha, Nebraska.

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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