

# HAWK & WHIP POOR- WILL

Winter 2018

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*poems of nature & humankind*

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## A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

As poets, we bear responsibility for the work we create. As an editor, I bear responsibility for the work I choose to publish. As a general community of the arts, we all share a collective responsibility to strive ever to do better. (And they say the arts aren't important!) This being said, nature poetry in particular has a spotty past. For every Keats, there is a Pound.

For every poet who loves and respects nature for its beauty, power, and intrinsic value, there's a hateful person with a difficult life who channels their negative emotions into a hatred for the other. For this latter type, nature often represents a sort of idyllic past—the way things were “before”, when men were men, when gender roles were clearly defined and enforced, when the racial hierarchy was unchallenged.

For these poets, who should be challenged when they are met, nature is a tool to spread hate. Their false image of a “natural order” which reinforces their bigoted worldviews is a grail which they seek, loudly and with much bravado, in order to normalize their hatred. And yet, for every Pound, there is a Keats. In the current sociopolitical landscape, at least in the western world, it is more important than ever for the Keatses to speak out. For centuries, nature has served as a source of inspiration for artists; now, the artists must defend nature. In defending nature from those who would mischaracterize it, we must also defend, support, and encourage those that the Pounds would like to denigrate.

Art will have power, regardless of our input. It is up to us to make sure that its power is directed toward the benefit of all humanity, and not toward the oppression of groups without social power. If you write, lend your voice to those whose voices, by dint of history or class, have been diminished or silenced. Help them be heard. And if you don't write, be sure to challenge poems which contain veiled or not-so-veiled bigotry. Challenge, too, the editors and publications who support the literature of bigotry.

In this effort, we won't always get it right—but the bigots will always get it wrong. We will survive this Winter, and emerge into Spring with a renewed sense of purpose. Until then, dear friends.

— Cory Willingham

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# HAWK & WHIPPOORWILL

Death in the Springtime . . . . .	Jane Zwart 4
Strip of Land . . . . .	Marco Colombo 5
Waters . . . . .	Sandra Kohler 6
Lines Written After Reading . . . . .	Deb Baker 7
caldera . . . . .	Paul Rowe 7
Lessons From the Greek . . . . .	D. Eric Parkison 8
The Catch . . . . .	Holly Day 9
On an Unfamiliar Path . . . . .	Anita Ouellette 11
The Starling . . . . .	Shawn Fisher 12
Seasons . . . . .	Israel A. Bonilla 13
Raztsvet . . . . .	Zachary Bos 14
Wasteland . . . . .	Kevin McDaniel 15
Ant Tree . . . . .	Constance Wrzesniewski 16
And So I Watch . . . . .	Helen Marie Casey 17
Tidal Desert . . . . .	Nell Smith 18
It Is a Mouth, This Dawn . . . . .	Tom Sheehan 20
Domicile . . . . .	Elizabeth Joy Levinson 21
Gonyeshk . . . . .	Marcell Inhoff 22
The Pact . . . . .	Elisabeth Horan 22
Fireflies . . . . .	Sassan Tabatabai 24
Night . . . . .	Janet Butler 24
Cold April . . . . .	Blake Campbell 25
Some New & Recommended Reading . . . . .	Zachary Bos & Cat Dossett 26
‘Ondatra zibethicus’ . . . . .	27

Art on the front cover is by Hannah Dion, 2018. Illustrations on page 10 are based on sculptures by Lewis Iselin, installed at St. Mark's School in Southborough, Mass. The work is an interpretation of the canticle “Benedicte, omnia opera Domini—O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord.”

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JANE ZWART

## Death in the Springtime

Recall the snow, and the rot begins.

A lobe of orange, pale lunchmeat  
in plastic. The tomato we did not pick.  
    It turned into a crumpled polyp.  
    It hung from the vine like a bauble.

The flicker that struck our window.  
    Its beak was lead, its neck's scruff painted.  
    My grief was neither abstract nor acute

because how else could I have taken so long  
taking in the ruffs of yellow and red  
pomaded to that bird's nape, the dull bead  
cupped in a socket, the legs  
with the slack of waxed strings

and because how else except borne  
on a child-sized shovel  
could I ever have exacted its weight?

MARCO COLOMBO

## Strip of Land

A strip of land like a finger  
sticks out from the continent  
and scratches the sea right  
where the sea is weakest.

Foam washes white  
the line in which sea  
and land meet and  
land and sea mate.

Then there's the sky  
that brushes sea and land  
heaving waves that rock  
the seething scar between them.

With feet in the foam  
two fishermen glance higher and  
higher, rods piercing the sky  
where the sky is softest.

The men point at a shadow  
crossing their path above them  
moving from land to sea

and already distant.  
They breathe one more wave  
then it's time to go home.

SANDRA KOHLER

## Waters

My sister—sleeper,  
swimmer—enters  
my dream's waters:  
a heedless plunge  
into slime, murk,  
seaweed strewn  
depths, their color  
a brown which  
is green a green  
which is brown.

My sister is not  
afraid—though alive  
these waters would  
have threatened  
her with what she  
feared, hated:  
slithering reptilian  
forms terrifying to  
her in old age as  
in childhood.

My sister is dead  
and free of her fear  
of snakes, her fear  
of murky waters,  
of depths. Dead,  
my sister is finally  
able to be brave,

free finally of  
the oldest parts  
of her self.

DEB BAKER

## Lines Written After Reading Tang Dynasty Five-Character Quatrains

There is no one here with me,  
but I hear a poet's voice  
whispering in the loblolly pines,  
which are lightly rooted in red Georgia clay —  
they fall whenever strong wind blows.

PAUL ROWE

## caldera

pale light surges from the horizon line,  
its glimmer ripples the water's edge in strands

—apparitions of life hastily scrawled  
upon the crumpled glass of Aegean twilight;

volcanic wasps rise, sulfurous effusions,  
mercurial breath that carves the crater, admits the flood,

shapes the ochre crescent, mirrors what's above.

D. ERIC PARKISON

## Lessons from the Greek

This sunrise meets my excavation of Thucydides.  
In the village, I read what empire inflicts  
On itself in hoplites, in mercenaries,  
While the briki on the hotplate squats

Over the burner, wrestler that flips  
The coin of silty coffee muck  
While Demosthenes argues about the ships  
He needs to get stuck troops unstuck,

How many siege engines to lay the fertile plains to waste.  
How like the partisans who hid in the mountains behind  
My rooms were those men, how did their coffee taste?  
This history gets so muddled in my mind—

Who made camp in stony hills, scattered  
Over brown lands, who chose to kill everyone  
In the village boys-school, allowed the dead  
To be retrieved in peace, who died in which conflagration?

The dune of boiled grounds at the bottom  
Of the demitasse remains sunk at first.  
Then it comes, visible in the drink. The gleam  
Of milk fat, the morning sun, the bell rings from the church,

A breeze rubs the curtain between forefinger  
And thumb, eggs fry in oil,  
The scents of dried herbs linger  
Around each rubber-banded bunch. Roll



This cup and read the grounds, but they won't tell you  
About the course of anyone's brief life spent  
Trying to connect what's been done to what we do  
In our liquid, black descent.

HOLLY DAY

## The Catch

The clump of dirt comes up, half-frozen  
revealing the sleepers beneath the snow:  
a tiny purple centipede, the thick white bodies  
of beetle larvae, unspecific maggots.

In my position of power, I consider  
destroying them all in their sleep, because I can't tell  
what these things will pupate into  
if they're something that will fatally drain my flowerbed  
or perhaps just fertilize and helpfully propagate.

My daughter joins me, on her knees  
coos into the hole: "Baby bugs! I always wondered!"  
starts imagining aloud what these indistinct, clawed worms  
will look like when their wings burst forth  
what colors they'll become, the sounds they'll make

and if they'll visit her bedroom window  
on some far-off, summer night.



ANITA OUELLETTE

## On an Unfamiliar Path

I saw a mountain bluebird yesterday  
as we approached a mesa just before  
a hairpin uphill turn into the sky.

Before an icy wind received my breath  
and blew it with approaching storms  
I saw a mountain bluebird yesterday

after a dawn as cold as this upland crest  
soaring so far above the desert floor  
as morning turned uphill into the sky.

If all the blaze-marked trees have disappeared  
the trails remain as ravens fly toward home  
as mountain bluebirds fly in skies today

unfazed by new clouds bringing unknown weather  
above the canyon views as dry winds soar  
above the roads that turn into the sky.

Forget-me-nots hold tight to rocky clefts.  
Murmuring hot springs solace wintry souls.  
I saw a mountain bluebird yesterday  
cross clouds and fly beneath our common sky.

## The Starling

Poor little refugee,  
wedged on the ledge of my office window  
this darkened afternoon –  
a starling, the drenched darling of pastorals,  
trembling not from the rain  
but from the burden of a name with aspirations.

You're a victim of poetic diction, my weary malaprop,  
a wishful-thinking fiction who wings with ease  
through lines of lyric sylvanry,  
however clumsily you plod along in life.  
We adore the gloried soaring word of you,  
but not this mudling stormed  
upon a sodden sill –  
no star alight, aloft through night,  
but a groundling compounding my fear  
that sound is more charming in poesy than truth.

For in truth, a lump of tar is all you are  
and all you would be called if we recalled your spirant,  
took that tyrant from your back which makes of you  
a verbal sleight of hand,  
another grand illusion set in verse.  
Your lofty name's your curse: what poetry anoints  
so often disappoints outside of stanzas.  
I look at you, a daub of humus brown,  
and all my muses topple down.  
But it isn't you I blame.

Could we release you from your shame  
by granting you a more befitting name?  
Must we devise with airy words  
a beauty we don't find in leaden birds?

But here you end your rest by puffing out your chest,  
as though to show you've had enough of earthly assignations.  
Your feathers tipped with drips of rain, you shake  
and spray into the air before your flight  
a universe of iridescent light so bright I need to look away.

O thou Keatsian starry Fay...

ISRAEL A. BONILLA

## Seasons

There are many for whom change  
needs no autumnal emphasis,  
no spectacle of decline.

There are many who never see  
the disciplined work of snow,  
its steady siege of windowsills  
and rarely guarded gardens.

For them it is enough to feel  
a slightly fresher breeze.

ZACHARY BOS

## Raztsvet

In Sofia people all winter long wear  
string bracelets as they await spring  
and the day the downy branchbuds  
hatch into pompons pink and crimson.

The custom is to remove your string  
only when you first see a tree in flower  
and to find someone to kiss on the cheek  
and to tie your string around the branch

as a gift or as a placebo against the fear  
that winter some year might not end.  
It is May now—so who is this man here  
who recoils from the crowds on the street?

His fingers worry the thread he wears.  
His fingers fret the string he still wears.

\* *raztsvet*: Bulgarian, for “flowering”, “zenith.”

KEVIN McDANIEL

## Wasteland

When naked pine trees  
spread their brittle branches,

they say to me, *Look*  
*at our stunted, sick needles.*

*Our emaciated trunks have*  
*no shade from savage summer heat*

*or thick insulation that buffers*  
*against callous winter winds*

*that ambush us at night.*  
*We die daily in plain sight.*

I want to raise hell  
in an op-ed piece.

Call me a green Romeo  
whose conscience cannot rest

because of wooden leprosy  
along this slow stretch of road.

I am not above hyperbole —  
*Toomer's Corner copycat spikes pines?*

But like most, I cast empathic looks,  
too afraid to say anything.

Afflicted scrubs fear the buzzing  
chorus of corporate chainsaws.

## Ant Tree

Certainly  
a hybrid  
a late bloomer  
last to flash its  
wispy green shoots  
along its scrubby bark

Surely  
a remnant  
most undesirable  
oddly shaped one trunk  
upright the other elbowing out  
at right angle close to verdant grass

Likely  
A weed  
grown wild unruly  
tough strong resistant  
to forces of nature we  
dubbed this pinnacle of creation

“Ant Tree”  
named for the  
huge black invaders  
that skitter along bare limbs  
while it drowns through spring’s  
early pinks and whites outlasting the rest



HELEN MARIE CASEY

## And So I Watch

Red-tailed hawks are said to have  
excellent vision. Still, one crashed.  
He killed himself on a car windshield.  
How meaningful can that be?

You chose a tree, the same one  
you began to climb when you were  
just twelve, yearning to be bigger,  
stronger, more muscled, and agile.

Now no one wants to look at the tree  
because they keep seeing you, inert.  
It's like looking at your Christmas gifts,  
the ones you didn't live to open. Time

stopped. Altered. *Before*. Then *After*.  
Nothing else except vacancy and  
the scream of the red-tailed hawk  
whose flight is notably deliberate.

The hawk occasionally hovers on beating  
wings, and so I watch for you, thinking  
you watch, too, but not all the time.  
Not all the time.

NELL SMITH

## Tidal Desert

*i.*

I came to live in the desert,  
having never imagined  
how it goes still and cold at night,  
the slew of stars stippling the sky with light.

My parched roots disregarded  
the thin vein of the Colorado River,  
comparing it to the coastal currents,  
the Atlantic's expanse.

I craved the first flush of birch buds,  
lush after a spring rain,  
because the soil tasted like dust instead of dirt,  
and what was tender only came out at night.

I traced quartz crystals  
with my fingernail across the surface  
of granite, gold in place of grey,  
and suddenly felt the absence in unconformities.

*ii.*

Gradually, I learned to notice small conformities—  
the way ferns grew along the base of boulders,  
how even between the spines of cactus,  
flowers unfurled in spring.

I placed strength in adaptation,  
because of the oaks

that press all their energy  
into small, sharp leaves no bigger than my thumb.

Because I could descend  
in the chasm of dissolution  
between the layers of sandstone  
to where life is pressed like petals,

I began to sense the land's lungs  
beneath the soil, see the hardness of the desert  
and understand that here,  
life is not to be presumed.

*iii.*

I came to see the resilience  
of creeks and streams,  
the way they come in ragged arteries  
and cut existence into the jagged landscape,

but until I returned to the ocean,  
I never wondered why I had thought  
the desert and sea were so different—  
neither invite nor offer anything with ease.

I stared hard at the unforgiving swells  
and thought how canyons  
still curve around absent water,  
and perceived the pull of a tidal desert.

I felt the urgent and necessary movement  
of the mahogany seed  
reaching out through a single bead of water  
to find roots in the spiral of the universe.

TOM SHEEHAN

## It Is a Mouth, This Dawn

It is a mouth, this dawn, gaping promise,  
the open doors of a strange barn where  
bees throb their thick aching against  
sheet metal sun, drawing survival  
like ingots from a forge.

All maples wear brash green helmets  
the springsmith hammered out of winter.  
One of them, stripped by ants, is numbed  
into its roots by recollection  
and leans into history.

For the first time, for my listening,  
the geese, sprung from their southern  
bow, heading home to Ottowas, Crees,  
marshes and reed grasses still frozen  
in the backyard of the Earth,  
are silent,

as a hammer rests between strikes,  
perhaps arched as the silent horseshoe  
at its apex coming to be  
a noisy ringer.

ELIZABETH JOY LEVINSON

## Domicile

I'm feeling how the prairie  
might have moved beneath me,  
grasses with roots that grew deep  
into the earth, so they could withstand  
the often fire and  
long winter.

What tender blades broke beneath these bricks?  
Some days a home feels like less than that.

When I reach my hands into the soil,  
to feel its sickness, shards of glass and rusted nails,  
what grows here now, in these small carved out spaces,  
between the homes and the roads,  
it isn't from here, it dies a little each year,  
needs the constant reseeding,  
needs constant, constantly.

MARCELL INHOFF

## Gonyeshk

I take great pride in my letters. I lined my coat with them, for nighttime safety. There is no safety in numbers and no violence that was not caused by loose language. I know this place. They called me possessed when they needed to describe me, but usually my name was enough. *Should I take you seriously?* the sparrow said, something I will always remember. I will find the sparrow. I don't know where it lives, but the metal sheets of the wharf heat up when it passes. The wood in the walls warps into its direction. I pass by these walls and I kiss this wall and that wall. The pale light dwells within. I didn't think I would return to this place where the people knew me, they still whisper my name: *The thief*. Go find the moon.

ELISABETH HORAN

## The Pact

I lay face up  
soap bubbles

tangerine-vanilla playthings  
pop as i swish  
pop as i swish

My hair; an aged mermaid grey  
as a slate-mist horizon –  
wiry 40-something strands

She crawled up along me, a refugee –  
the H<sub>2</sub>O, too base for her,  
an outdoor storm more suitable for survival

Arachnids only love the inner liquid of others –  
the poison of the glycerine not unlike  
the poison she injects –

I allow her safe passage  
I allow her full carriage  
Class A travel of my femur, ulna, carpal –

She wants not a bite of me;  
blood of mine too fueled with Cymbalta –  
the blood of her prey must yield  
viscose, translucent calories –

Mine, a chem-soup: Levothyroxine  
and Buspirone, Wellbutrin tapers...

Enough, she-spider!  
Let us rise up together,

Dripping like Eden –  
I won't let you drown.

SASSAN TABATABAI

## Fireflies

Through the heavy darkness  
descending on the lawn,  
fireflies flicker  
to an undecipherable rhythm  
of their own making—  
sending coded messages  
in soundless Morse:  
announcing high tide,  
urging the full moon to force its way  
through the cleavage in the clouds,  
praising the perfect rings of Saturn.

JANET BUTLER

## Night

(短歌)

I think of night

when I think of him

a flicker of star

a full moon almost

close enough to touch



BLAKE CAMPBELL

## Cold April

The grackles cackle. At the pond, wood ducks  
pair off and fuck, the drakes

gleaming in their green imperial headgear.  
The joggers begin the circuit, gleaming

in their expensive sweatsuits,  
as if nature were only a backdrop.

It is nature that makes us unnatural.  
This body I walk in remembers

its brief awkward beauty  
bought at the cost of health, and the loss of that beauty.

It knows the pressures of death  
and those of friends still alive but silent

as I follow my usual path, afraid  
to pick up the pace. At the end

of the circuit, what remains but morning,  
already unfolding its petals toward corruption?

There is only the sun, cold on the water,  
the long walk home, the workday awaiting,

the mouths of the crocuses closing at nightfall,  
the debts to be paid.

WRITTEN/COMPILED BY ZACHARY BOS & CAT DOSSETT

## Some New & Recommended Reading

*Through the Woods* collects five of Emily Carroll's graphic stories. The award-winning author/illustrator paints a sinister yet beautiful world. Includes the famous webcomic "His Face All Red," printed for the first time. Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2014: \$17.99.

*The Ever-Changing Coastline: Tidal Forces at Work*. Photographer Joseph Votano illustrates the variety and geographical beauty of the water's edge. Schiff, 2018: \$29.99.

In *Bearwallov*, Jeremy B. Jones finds himself entrenched in local, familial, and personal history after settling into the Blue Ridge Mountains with his wife. Blair Books, 2014: \$24.95.

One day, a female red-tailed hawk that called a park in New York City home slumps over in death. Novelist Carole Giangrande reflects on the bird's death by rodenticide in this short piece in the *EcoTheo Review*.

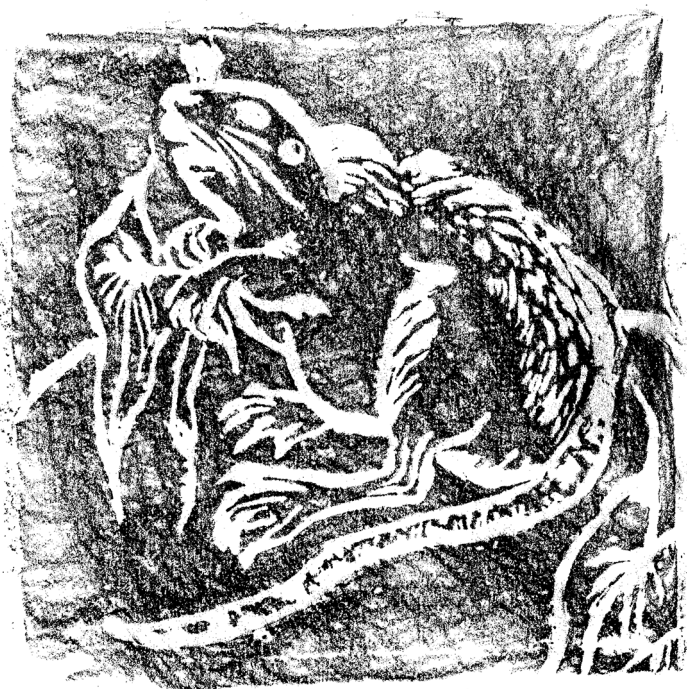
"After Hurricane Michael, a hunt for surviving oysters in Apalachicola," in the *Tampa Bay Times*. The oyster industry is acutely vulnerable to ecological disruption. The BP Deepwater Horizon spill caused the productive oyster fishery in Apalachicola Bay to be declared a disaster. After showing signs of recovery, Hurricane Michael hit this fall. In this article, Laura Reiley profiles the impact of this latest crisis on farmers, dock workers, truckers, restaurant workers and others whose livelihood depends upon oysters.

*Galapagos: The Islands that Changed the World* (2007), narrated by Tilda Swinton. This two-and-a-half-hour BBC documentary is a nice look at life on the islands, again with gorgeous footage. Available on Netflix.

*Bodies of Wood and Water* by Kirk Westphal. Kelsay Books, 2018: \$17.00. The author is known to us editors as a fellow plein air nature poet. He lives between an orchard and a lake in Stow, Massachusetts.

*Animal Encounters: Contacts and Concepts in Medieval Britain* by Susan Crane (University of Pennsylvania Press; 270 pages; \$59.95). Discusses beast fables, hunting treatises, saints' lives, and other texts in a study of the human-animal interaction in culture making.

*Find more recommendations online at [www.penandanvasil.com/bw/6](http://www.penandanvasil.com/bw/6).*



*“... the wary muskrat plunges low,  
and willows turn from grey to red  
in freshet time.”*

—Tekahionwake (E. Pauline Johnson), 1861-1913

The MBTA agent was bewildered to find members of the *H&W* editorial staff sprawled on the floor of the Alewife station on the Red Line, using paper and graphite pencils to make rubbings of low-relief bronze tiles created by local artist Nancy Webb. The tiles had been set into the station's mezzanine floor in 1981 as part of the T's “Arts on the Line” initiative. Each features one of a dozen different species of plant or animal indigenous to the marsh-and-meadow Alewife reservation, the largest intact wetlands in Cambridge. The image here—depicting the muskrat, *Ondatra zibethicus*—began as one of these rubbings, before being scanned and cleaned-up in photo-editing software. We thank Ms. Webb for her kind permission to publish these images in print and online. Readers can learn more about her work at [www.nancywebbstudio.com](http://www.nancywebbstudio.com).

*In this issue:*

\$5

DEB BAKER  
ISRAEL A. BONILLA  
ZACHARY BOS  
JANET BUTLER  
BLAKE CAMPBELL  
HELEN MARIE CASEY  
MARCO COLOMBO  
HOLLY DAY  
SHAWN FISHER  
ELISABETH HORAN  
MARCELL INHOFF  
SANDRA KOHLER  
ELIZABETH JOY LEVINSON  
KEVIN MCDANIEL  
ANITA OUELLETTE  
D. ERIC PARKISON  
PAUL ROWE  
TOM SHEEHAN  
NELL SMITH  
SASSAN TABATABAI  
CONSTANCE WRZESNIEWSKI  
JANE ZWART

*"We need another and  
a wiser and perhaps a  
more mystical concept  
of animals. Remote from  
universal nature, and  
living by complicated  
artifice, man in civilization  
surveys the creature through  
the glass of his knowledge  
and sees thereby a feather  
magnified and the whole  
image in distortion. We  
patronize them for their  
incompleteness, for their  
tragic fate of having taken  
form so far below ourselves.  
And therein we err, and  
greatly err. For the animal  
shall not be measured by  
man. In a world older  
and more complete than  
ours they move finished  
and complete, gifted with  
extensions of the senses you  
have lost or never attained.  
They are not brethren, they  
are not underlings; they are  
other nations, caught with  
ourselves in the net of life  
and time, fellow prisoners  
of the splendour and travail  
of the earth."*

*// from The Outermost  
House by Henry Beston*



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