

Two Poems by Joan Colby

The Birds of Peru

The lecturer's report

The Cock of the Rock
is the national bird.
Its head an orange boxing glove
with a jabbed period circled in white.

The males adore display.
Dance in the lek
bobbing and flapping like breakdancers,
Squawking like rappers,
face to face, a mania of insults

to astonish the drab squaw
who will be abandoned
to solitary maternity
while the Cock of the Rock revs up
for his next engagement.

Next, the Harpy Eagle
who does not soar the skies, but hunts
beneath the canopy, coming in
low as a bomber, under the radar.
A vast wingspread centered with the bullet
head of a thug. He snatches woolley
monkeys from their branch, seizes sloths,
macaws, with enormous yellow claws
that should be part
of some earthmoving machine.

A ruffed crest like Harlequin. White
executioner's hood, big stippled legs.
A fearfully human face impervious
as he carries the dead to Hades.

The lecturer proceeds
to hummingbirds of which
there are numerous iridescent species.

But I am still thinking of the
Cock and the Harpy conundrum,
still standing in the greenery
where the Cock of the Rock practices
his ornate moves and the Harpy Eagle
glides in fast and smooth and ready.

Karma of the Bones

I
Head down, stroking powerfully,
Churn past, breasting waves,
Kicking the steady froth of wake
To stay afloat. How gravity calls
Heavy bones, exhausts the breath.

Some labor, some float
Easily as a trifle, an aquatic litter.
Sun-stabbed rivulets like a host of slaves.

II
Geese trouble the morning
With casual tirades

Mustering formations
To familiar ponds.
Ancient flyway codes forsaken.

South of here, men in goose pits
Stare at empty skies. Their bones
Inherit the earth. The bones
Of birds are hollow.

III
Indentations marked with
Strong bones of peasants.
Ox bones. Warrior bones.

Bracelets fall from wrists
Frail as hummingbirds
A hand could crush.

IV
Skeletal definitions: you study
Diligence. I skim like a
Scavenging gull. Form tells
Our stories. Yours fraught with history
Of valor and ruin. Mine a poem
Brief and enigmatic.

V
I tell you stones
In coat pockets won't weigh me
Enough to drown
In the easy death

Of halted motion
Sinking down
Into calcification.

Joan Colby has published widely in journals such as *Poetry*, *Atlanta Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *the new renaissance*, *Grand Street*, *Epoch*, and *Prairie Schooner*. Awards include two Illinois Arts Council Literary Awards, Rhino Poetry Award, the new renaissance Award for Poetry, and an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship in Literature. She was a finalist in the GSU Poetry Contest (2007), Nimrod International Pablo Neruda Prize (2009, 2012), and received honorable mentions in the North American Review's James Hearst Poetry Contest (2008, 2010). She is the editor of *Illinois Racing News* and lives on a small horse farm in Northern Illinois. She has published 10 books including *The Lonely Hearts Killers*, *The Atrocity Book*, *Dead Horses* and *Selected Poems*.