

John Laue

The Blackbirds---A Fable

There were blue skies, green trees, brown earth, white waters, no speck of a human being; only blackbirds littering the air like thrown confetti blown into trees. The colors of the world drifted down, settled in their pinprick pupils, bobbing heads while busy as executives they fanned the wind. Knotty bushes bent with their weight, toppled in time; pregnant seed pods burst reluctantly open under scissored beaks.

There was no lift of ground unnoted by their musical tracks, no loft of stalk unbent. They were everywhere, back-stabbing, sharp bills preening. They sang from sagging branches' tips, hopped in boles of rotted stumps, scabbled on rough bark of towering pines, taking in vibrations with unblinking eyes, bone nostrils, flat but potent earholes.

Decisive in their every motion, gliding only when it was the most expedient means, they filled miles of airspace as if descended from dark clouds. Native squirrels refused to venture out, were only seen as eyes peeping from deep pockets hollowed high in trees, noses twitching swiftly, ready to retreat from pecking jabs or slashes.

No chit-chat passed around that forest; quick, furry breathers cushioned their own hearts for fear of discovery, fatal trial in a court of black-robed justice. These see-saw shapes, severe tragedians held sway for two and twenty months until forest fires chased them away, and cities were recipients of their mischief.

One could see them gathered on a window ledge at dusk, planning an attack upon a howling cat that prowled among musky garbage in dark alleyways. One could hear the howl turn to a scream, throat impaled on needles, footpads chewed, ragged wedges cut from ears. In the morning one could observe blind cats wandering like tattered beggars among leftover piles of trash, scenes that moved milkmen into silence.

The cities' outlines resembled picket fences with multitudes of birds perched high against grey skies. Evangelists arrived, made grand gestures on street corners, preached explosive words to people who believed. A Blackbird Cult emerged with jet black idols set in gold and rings of precious ebony. They drew curtains, flapped their arms like wings, whistled birdcalls. This divided into separate sects: some thought the birds were sent by God; others were convinced the birds themselves were Gods.

Shiny feathered presences stared down from seedy altars, rose to fly in circles making signs that augured well or not for watchful worshippers. At last the movement of decisive wings disturbed the Powers-That-Be. The birds had clogged giant stained glass windows of the Brass-Bound Church, too much indignity for councilmen to bear. Committees were called; plans of action made. Engineers drew diagrams complex as intestines of great sound machines. But no machine could drive them out. Poles and phone wires crashed beneath their weight interrupting arcs of talk.

By the time the multiplying birds began to dim the sun, emergency action was taken which accomplished riots between the Birders and the Nons. Trucks were overturned, settled on by blackbirds singing to worshipful arms. Buildings burned; the war began in earnest when the army poisoned several scores of people by mistake, then dubbed the sorry incident collateral damage.

No one knew what made bird millions leave, but suddenly they rose; the sky was thick calligraphy that writhed and coalesced into a great black curve, the sound of wings a roar that drowned all exclamations. People stood aghast with unsheathed weapons sagging in their hands, heads tilted upward, mouths open, mesmerized for nearly fifteen minutes.

Then, as clots of fliers turned to shrinking blots far in the West, a shot was fired; a great cry rose from the crowd and they fought on, fought on---

Epilogue

Wild bird millions settled, fed their fill surrounded by blue skies, green trees, brown earth, white waters, with no speck of a human being, only miles of ink-dark avians completing the colors perfectly with sleek black feathers, tiny, gleaming, yellow eyes.

John Laue, a former teacher, editor of *Transfer* and Associate Editor of *San Francisco Review* has five published poetry books to his credit plus one of prose, *The Columns of Joel Mobius*, a guide for psychiatrically diagnosed people. He presently coordinates the reading series of *The Monterey Bay Poetry Consortium* and edits the online magazine *Monterey Poetry Review*. In addition to writing his main interest is mental health. He has served on the governing board of *MHCAN (The Mental Health Clients Action Network*---a drop-in center for the mentally ill), and is a member and former Co-Chair of the *Santa Cruz County Mental Health Advisory Board*.