

**Claude Wilkinson**

**Birds That Serve as Still Lives**

Indeed, the prerequisite is death,  
and though the both of these  
I'm recalling are common enough  
crows, maybe found in a winter field,  
then hung by the swarthy stems  
of their legs, their scapulars  
ruffled from Petrine crucifixion  
and their satin primaries masterfully  
splayed in Andrew Wyeth's  
gouache and ink study, none,  
neither pink-necked fruit dove  
nor emerald-damasked cuckoo  
has ever seemed too precious  
a sacrifice for our lasting admiration  
in one fashion or another, whether in  
a milliner's abstraction of flight,  
in Audubon's ironic conservancy,  
or Daedalus's plan of escape.  
It was the avian part of the angel,  
you see, which Jacob wrestled for —  
a thing divine in them that's always  
been our truest desire. I've already  
confessed my own early trespasses  
of quelling the radiance of waxwings  
and redstarts, along with all the many  
others untitled and forgotten, not  
for the exultation of making pictures  
to be adored in museums, but  
just to hold and behold lives  
lived so much closer to heaven.

### **The Translation of Enoch**

In retrospect, when I dreamt almost nightly  
of flying as a child, and of course,  
without any referents of Apocrypha  
or Midrashim back then,

what I must have been hoping for was  
to so please God that he  
would lift me till I, too, “was not.”  
Now I have the illustration of Hoet

and the lithograph of Blake — visions of how  
it very well could have seemed.  
Yet they, and even John Copley’s *Ascension of Jesus*,  
though lovely in their serenity

and sentiment, don’t feel right to me.  
My raptures happened  
mostly during some state of unreadiness  
coupled with the bliss

and horror of being ripped from this life.  
Maybe Hoet’s and Blake’s Enoch  
is to be presumed already seeing those gates  
of pearl, past that breathlessness

and vertigo I always suffered ascending. Maybe  
my diluvian dreams were merely  
in the realm of swooning, thus why always when  
just about to break paradise’s plane,

I shuddered and tumbled back to our fallen world.

**Water Strider**

Dirt roads puddled  
after warm evening rain,  
became a sort of

Mississippi Lourdes  
quicken with the miracle of these  
Jesus bugs

flaunting that  
mustard seed faith, skittering  
over their ochre universe

like small sepia stars  
in time-lapse photography.  
Though Gerridae

is the more  
intellectual title, since when  
have reason

and the less than  
possible ever had anything  
in common?

I mean, who  
offers to feed thousands on  
insufficient fish

and a couple  
of bread rolls or decides  
to catch up with

one's storm-tossed  
boat by foot? Perhaps not  
coincidentally,

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in a kind of  
cannibalistic Communion,  
the bugs even take

of each other's bodies  
for their earthly preservation.  
As for their walking

on water, there are  
those who will hold that the gift  
is no more than their

evolution of balanced  
design and millenary hairs on  
such spindly legs,

while others surmise that  
at least some chosen few are among us  
who simply step and believe