

Barbara Lydecker Crane

Resplendent Quetzal

a bird species in Monteverde Cloud Forest, Costa Rica

In flaming red, sapphire, and emerald green,
their feathers glow with iridescent sheen,
 like sunlit leaves still wet
from recent rain. A female stands between
two males who whistle, swoop, and preen,
 competing in duet.

The blue plume feathers in each suitor's tail,
dazzling in the light, seem out of scale
 to bodies half as long.
In treetop breeze these feathers waft and sail —
two mythic ocean creatures' fishtails
 plying liquid air with song.

Gods of the Air, ancient people called
quetzals. Mayans and Aztecs would be appalled:
 these Gods are rare today,
as man's dominion in this land has sprawled.
Beneath the birds I hold my breath, enthralled,
 before they glide away.

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The Shoes on the Danube Promenade

art installation by Can Togay and Gyula Pauer,
2005; Budapest, Hungary

Boots, pumps, kids' shoes in rough array
along this high embankment of concrete . . .
did 1940s families step away

to picnic above the river in bare feet,
and later on they just forgot their shoes?
My daydream fell away, sweet self-deceit:

"Iron casts of wartime shoes were fused
onto this walk in memory," said
the guide, who dropped his voice, "of all the Jews

"killed here one winter. They were made to shed
their shoes (reused), then shot, despite their pleas.
Adults and children fell, bloodied or dead,

"into the river. The water was forty degrees.
The gunners, Arrow Cross, were local men
who sympathized with occupying Nazis."

I flinch and freeze to almost hear again
repeating shots of rifles that delivered
wailing cries, shouts, screams, mayhem.

From this embankment I look down and shiver
to picture large and little unshod bodies
floating past, staining red the river.