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The Evolution of Birds.

Making do with what's at hand,
In this case, 'hands' -
Used to be 'legs,' but they became
Useless little arms
With claw appendage, the kind
You find on odd marsupials like kangaroos,
And on that two-legged oddity
Of the Jurassic, Dinosaur Therapod.
By God! There's a black swan development
If ever there was one.

Fossils unearthed in limestone quarries
By homo sapien with evolutionary tools -
Stone axes won't do it -
Record the evolution of the theropod hand
From flexing wrist
of Velociraptor to
Unenlagia's wing-like flaps and
Primitive feathers of Caudipteryx,
Say, there's a giant step for birds.
Then the momentous uncovering of
Flight feathers on fossil Archaeopteryx
And we have lift off! ...

While precisely 'how,' or maybe 'why,'
The wings of birds evolve remains a mystery.
Just when homo - sapiens think - they - may
Have some sort of handle on the evolution of birds,
Tricky Nature calls up another black swan,
Or cygnet maybe, seems some new and
Up - to - now - unknown phenomenon
Has been at work in the evolution of birds.
For yet another evolutionary technology.
X - ray CT scanning of bird skulls
Throws new light on their progression
Or paradoxically - regression. Progenesis
They call it - seems birds are really
Baby dinosaurs. Precocious maturation of birds
In just a few weeks, a portion of the lifespan
Of therapods, becomes the whole life span
Of a new successful species.

A new successful species. Praise be
To tricky Nature for the evolution
Of birds! Lords of the air, of updraft
And perilous tumbling,
Of utterance of sweet song, of joy
To the world and tremulous longing,
Of feathers rivalling in pattern and profusion
The spangled universe, touching the imagination
Of Homo sapiens, inspiring the visionary words
Of poets, expressive of delights and lamentations
Of mature lovers and yearning dreams of adolescents.
Two haiku.

Fragile universe.
Within the egg shell sphere,
yoke of everything.

Progenesis from
dinosaur to tree rooster,
eggs in need of nests.
Black Cockatoo.

Cockatoo funereus, your mournful cry - 'kee aah'
Bespeaks the long history of ancestors,
Of Pangaea and the shifting of continents,
Of separation from exotic kin, the flashy
Macaw cousins from Brazil.

Black cockatoo, in appearance you exemplify
The platonic fallacy of the perfect form of things,
Of birds, your helmet crest, remnant of dinosaur origin.
Your awkward form, less defined than
The shape of more dazzling kin,
Of sulphur crested epigone. Your slow moving
Heavy flight, precursing the flight display
Of birds of prey, the dalliance of eagles.
Your diet befitting mourning.
Not for you nectar of sweet blossoms.
Instead, hard-crack seeds, fruit of hard times
From narrow-leaved trees of adversity.

At dusk a flock of funereus choose the tops of trees
To roost in - jungian response to memories of tree-top foraging
By dinosaur predators. You thrum your insecurity
In reassuring chorus until, exhausted, you sleep.
Do you, then, dream the dream of your ancestors?
White Cockatoo.

Dazzling plumage, white cockatoo-
Personality type A - wakes at dawn - full on -
What do we do today?
Same as yesterday -
Food, full flight display and frenzy.
Voice rises from high register to piercing shriek
Across the quiet valley: 'Wait for me, Maisie, wait!'
Sulphur crest, barometer of mood swings - by the minute,
Shifting from subdued hysterical
To flat - out frenetic.
Dance of the Grebes.

We think with delight of the flight of birds, 
Of aerial acrobatics on high. Closest we get 
To birds is hang gliding, or bungee jumping 
Off cliffs. But birds aren't limited to 
Flight display or rite of passage epic 
Journeys across oceans. Sometimes, 
On land, they dance, sometimes even 
Walk on water.

Grebes meeting on a lake, rippling, watery 
Rings inter-acting and over-lapping 
As they begin the ancient ritual of attraction. 
Tentative courtship, circling and departing, 
Over days. The gift of pond weed from the male 
"I'm good for providing - take these weeds!" 
And if she does, the dance steps up, 
Necks arch and inter-wine in sync, beaks 
Cross like twin swords - uncross and cross again 
And suddenly in a flurry of silver spray 
They're off, running on water - together - 
Heads and slender necks tilted towards each other.

Oh, it's a dance like no other - 
Defying gravity. 
Defying imagination!

There's a scene in a sixties movie where 
Romeo and Juliet meet for the first time 
In a formal dance. Arm extends 
To arm, glancing gesture of attraction. 
Hands touch, palm to palm, feet move in 
Patterned sync to reedy music. 
Social mores of the time, however, 
Preclude the gravity - defying 
Ecstatic finale. 
No running on water
Playboy of the Southern World.

Superb Blue Wren
Malurus cyaneus.

Some birds, like characters
In tales of true romance,
Are faithful unto death ...
Not this bird, however.

Oh he's the jewel
Of Australian birds,
She's more subdued in colour.
Though quite cute nevertheless.

But he, why he's as beautiful
As a Regency beau dressed
In sky blue apparel ...
But much more macho.

For a bird, not large,
He's well endowed, a Napoleon
Of the Australian bush,
The Don Juan of his patch of forest.

Look! He's just returned from carousing
With hens from a near by commune,
Pleased with himself, perky tail
Held aloft like a banner.

Only to find the she bird's
Out'a, there. Unknown to him,
She's carousing too.
Oh well, c'est l'amour.

And all seems well in the hippy
Commune, every bird happy,
The chicks get fed, the long line
Of wrens cyanous flourish.
(Variety, they say,
Is the spice of life,
And some say it strengthens
The gene pool.)
Magpie

(Gymnorhina hypoleuca)

What have you, magpie, to celebrate?
Such glorious chortling in an arid landscape,
Leaves of eucalypts hanging motionless
In the breathless mid-day heat. It isn’t
That you can’t, or won’t complain in some
scenarios, but rather that, by your very song,
You are constrained from self-reflexive musing,
For magpie, you may sing only the songs
Passed down the line by those first ancestors.

Songster extraordinaire, you are programmed
To voice liquid stanzas of affirmation,
Your concert repertoire scarcely allowing
For lamentation.
Darkling Thrush.

In bleakest winter
storm, still your full throated
sweet song: "I am here."

Singer and Song.

In its way the transient is as permanent
As what we call the underlying
Reality, the bird’s song
As permanent as the progression
Of song birds that carry
The song’s genetic code.
Wind riffled perturbations on the river
Appear as real to us as the bedrock below.
The scent of a desert rose
Speaks to us no less intensely than
Trade winds that mark the passing
Of seasons and millennia.

Lovers’ hearts beats seem more real to us
Than radio pulses from the singularity
Or the imperceptible movement of
Continents. Ozymandias, long gone,
And his monument slowly crumbling
In desert sands, share the same fate,
And it is ours.
In their impermanence, transient moments,
Bird song, flight shadows on water,
Speak more truly to human experience
Than the endurance of monuments
Or the movement of continents.
Bird Song - Or Not.

From the golden throats of modest
Song birds, thrush and nightingale,
Glorious song. From other more showy denizens
Of the bird world, chain-saw cacophony ...
Cockatoo screech, cawing of crows in
Immemorial elms, kookaburra
Insane laughter at some joke
That's obvious to him but
Not to us.

In the human world, sometimes likewise,
A homely wench who sings like an angel,
A golden girl with the voice of a crow.
In the world of bird song
You play the cards you get,
In the human world, less so.
The homely wench may invest in
Cosmetic treatments, the golden girl
Take singing lessons.
Common Pheasant.

Phasianus colchicus.

Take one bird, for example, just one bird, ... this one, Phasianus colchicus, The common pheasant.

Though it's not unique, its plumage seems a microcosm of the universal profusion, explosion of creativity of a star-infused cosmos, zig-zag of storms, pattern of ocean waves and gyres, colour of earth, of chemical and geological strata of clay, silica and slate.

And that's just one bird ... this bird's plumage.
Two Ducks.

Two ducks sliding on the river,
Trailing matching v's of silver,
Side by side, wakes expanding
Like the universe to
Become one glorious
Matching double - 11.
Swans and Certainty.

Black swan, ebony gloaming,
Gliding artlessly on
A mirrored lake, unaware
That you're an oddity exposed
By northern ornithologists.
Glossy bird, you'd be surprised
To learn you are compared
To Hume's thanksgiving turkey,
Symbol of the out-liar event,
The single observation that exposes
How fragile is our human knowledge.

Black swan, you have become
A symbol too - so much
Less and more than
Mere blackbird - you.
Azure Kingfisher.

Like some knights of old, you flag fealty by your blue coloured plumage.
Life on the Edge.

Newcomers have moved into
The tenement - tree. Epigone,
Lorikeet interlopers asserting
Gangland claims on its clusters
Of winter flowers. Upper story residents,
A pair of crested doves, are already
Moving out, can't stand the noise.
'Ours!' shriek the new tenants, 'It's ours!'
They'll defend the tree, or even
One blossoming branch, if need be,
Against all comers, as long as
The seasonal flowers hold out.
Then, like itinerant workers when
The seasons change, they'll move on.
Great Cormorant.

Phalacrocorax carbo.

Fenghuang bird, oddly in a species
Known for eccentricity.

Miscellany of parts, head of a dragon,
You turn your s-bend neck, as the earth
Tums from dawn to dusk, one-eighty degrees,
Your arched, phoenix-wings, water-bird -
Webbed feet, make you lord of the littoral,
Mingling with the elements of air, water, earth,
(Your feathers non-water-proof, adapted to
Submerged swimming par-excellence.)

Fisher king of river, marsh and sea,
So you must come to land and spread
Your wings to dry, (streaked feathers
Metallic in sunlight like an iron birds')
That you may fly.
Flight of Birds.

Against an ivory sky
Birds flying in a flock,
Patterning of wings, on, off,
From dark to light, then dark again,
Positive to negative
In effortless fluidity.
Chiaroscuro landscape,
Even the beat of wings
Is muted as the flock
Turns and turns about
In subdued and lovely unison.
Spotted Pardalote.

Tiny jewelled wings,
fractals of starry night sky,
thrum like beetles' wings.
Three haiku.

In fitful moonlight
pilgrims gathering to make
the long migration.

The travellers hit
a wall of storm cloud that sends
the flock asunder.

This will be the last
migration. The tiny heart
flutters and she falls.
Barn Owl.

Tyto Alba.

The moon drops down silver daggers of light
On the dark trees, and calls to his totem,
Tyto Alba, 'Come, ready your claws,
It is time for the ambush of blood
That quickens my frozen valleys. Come.
Time for the hunt. I will allow no shade
To hide our prey. They will not escape us.'

The Barn Owl replies, pair calling, 'ee iy iah,'
I come, I .. your creature of the night,
I hold your image in my round eyes.
Reflect your light reflected from the sun,
I follow where your silver rays penetrate
The dark forest, shining on the feathers and
Terrified eyes of victims. My downy wings
Make no sound as I flush out our prey,
Without warning, without mercy, which is the way
Of night hunters, highway men, foot-pad assassins.

The owl screams across the tops of trees,
Disturbs the dreaming of small birds,
Giving pause to small mammals scurrying
On the forest floor, warning them
That death is never far away.
The Nest.

A nest has fallen to the ground. 
Though so cunningly made it could not withstand 
The sudden Spring storm that brought it down 
From its niche in a tall pine.

See how meticulously its maker has woven 
Each separate blade of grass in and out, each 
Blade brought in by air and stitched together 
With cob-web by the small beak, the nest. 
Then shaped by the bird's round breast and 
Inlaid with its feathered down. Already 
Ants are investigating the broken 
Egg-shells scattered on the ground.
Golden Eagle.
Aquila chrysaet

You soar on up-draughts of air as easily
As lazy clouds drift across a summer sky.
By subtle adjustment of flight feathers
You catch every thermal and ride the wind.
You are monarch of all you survey,
Your golden eagle eyes can mark small prey
More than a mile away.
Your elevated flight
Gives you a god’s eye perspective of the world.

You see further than other emperors of
The animal kingdom, the lion pride
Confined to the African veldt, or
Leviathan ploughing through opaque seas.
For you look down upon the wrinkled sea
And view the movements of the tides,
You scan the rhythmic earth and observe
The long shadows of approaching night.

Lord of the air, only man can surpass
Your range by his flights of fancy and
invention. Exploring through poetry
And music, transcendent experience,
Exploring through science, the laws of
Gravity and mysterious space-time,
Discovering through engineering,
The means to fly and journey into space.