

# Clobbered by a Linnet

poems and photographs  
on the topoi of animals and time  
by

Chidsey Dickson

*We cling to things so we won't drift too much, like a baby to mama, a teenager to the entourage. Sociality is a kind of clinging, a merging of lines, a meshwork, if you look at it over time, or through levels or modes of engagement.*

*Blobs, on the other hand, can bump each other but not cling. Blobs have volume, density, but no flexion, or vivacity. Life began when lines began to emerge and to escape the monopoly of blobs.*

*A potato in a sack is a blob. A potato in the ground is an explosion of lines: sprouts, roots.*

**Tim Ingold**

*To read haiku is to become its coauthor, to place yourself inside its words until they reveal one of the Proteus-shapes of your own life.*

**Jane Hirshfield**

## **fish**

spotted yesterday dawn a large channel catfish  
10 feet off the river edge  
a low-rider on a topside meander, a barge  
of meat and ancient brain

waded out without thinking  
& to my surprise, touched her or his perdurable  
stolid slimy back

before the creature swiveled off,  
rippling the dark skin of water.

## **birds**

so many poems about singing birds,  
squawking birds, flying birds,



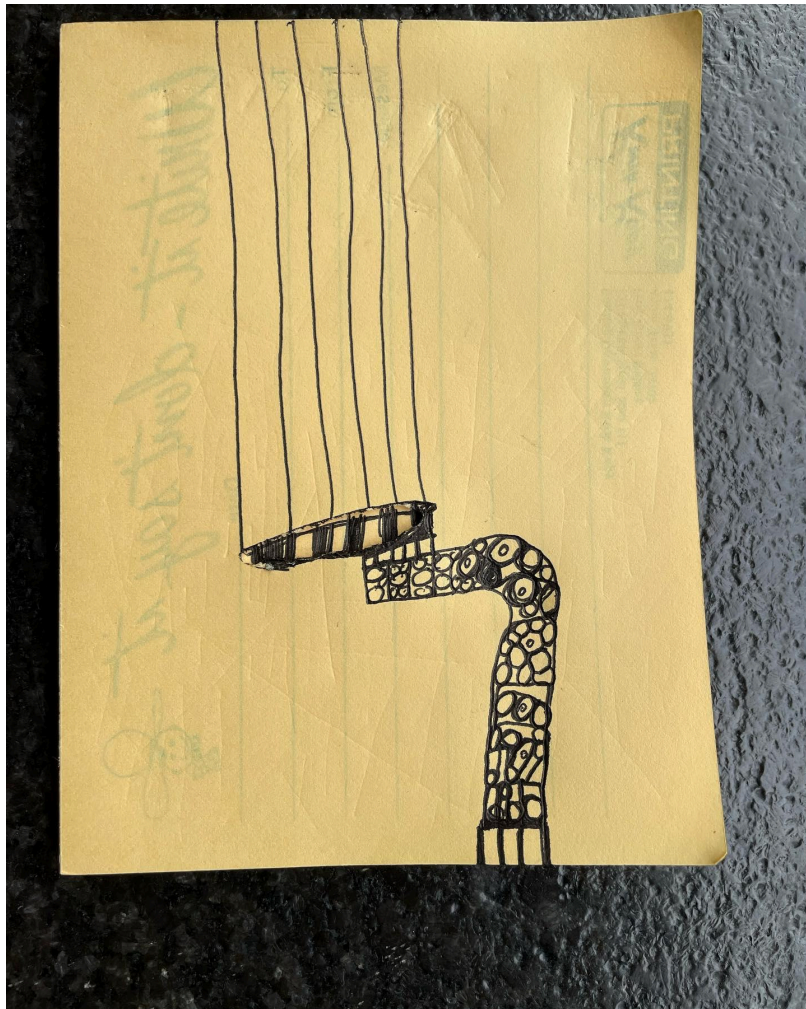
roosting birds  
even shitting birds!

poets love birds: the flitty ways, the mysterious  
long-distance flights, the stalwart love of babies,  
the knack for falling and soaring

and of course they have poise, enviable poise  
and they are carnivores of worms and mosquitos  
and they build nests from sticks and they are not bothered  
by the summer frenzy of crickets or hail or rain  
or most of the awfulness humans can doll out

I think of them sleeping

in their perches hunched down,  
bills tucked, eyelids lightly  
closed.



## **train**

on the amtrak train to St. Louis  
across cornfields and soy fields and  
other fields (not sure what they are

skidding by)

one feels it, whatever it is: earth laid out  
in rows and rows of our celestial solid  
still on a slow spin  
lucky (for us, a bit of the biosphere) fluke  
from the collapsing cloud that started it all

## **oceanic**

there were many beginnings  
but *In The Beginning* was sound,  
the vocalizations of birds and insects and the sea tide  
on sand, foaming and fizzing and the light  
there blazing then dimming,  
all keeping time

and then our story goes humans came along  
we of puny voice and sublime instrument  
and uncontrolled industry  
all keeping time

## **rain**

every day, after a rest, we locate  
the good like after rains come heavy and loud  
under a thundering sky split by the flow of electrons

lightening exists to equalize the charge

stars collapse and out of it something  
else gets to break through the nothing

## **you**

the swaying canopy  
the wet leaf



the desert flower,  
the waves  
rolling  
all say I do

the stars above with their humble  
infinity and the sea, its quintillion gallons  
of water dotted with salt crystals and beaucoup fish  
and pecks of deadfall and the vibrating molecules  
of a whale song propagating from the other side  
of our globe



### **emily**

this year's best poet (as with every year)  
is Emily Dickinson for all the stuttering scraps  
of beauty and tense staccato of pause and praise,  
sorrow fumbling forward, a bee at blossom: fact,  
together: the vast and the miniscule

### **pagan hope**

masse curlique  
a slurry of blah

a world of stupendous  
nothing

but you know: you won't see a spider  
caught in another spider's web and fish do not  
fight water and dogs do not refuse 'bad' smells  
(though they will jump back  
at the scent of a snake)

eyes open: alive to hints  
that point the wrong way

### **lullaby**

the long bridge of the first time God swooped down  
to us for to catch a whiff of puny endless night

empathy even divine is as light as driftwood

and smooth as sea turtle on a slow descent

### **al anon**

once upon a time there was gargantuan or something,  
lived in Great Dismal Swamp was the address  
a shy colossus a gnarly hirsute inarticulate quiet deadly.....

it attracted epithets like flies

but anyway the leaches and wasps loved this creature  
didn't mind how it spent its time  
half submerged in a cold muck, one nostril peaking above  
a grimy cud of algae and stagnant froth

he could handle any predator-- crocodile were insects  
but humans ( fishing and hunting and birding)  
he let alone for he had quit the old ways  
unabridged carnage, and no longer doted  
on the wind, breathing up every ribbon of scent  
for meat and sinew and bone. He had found peace.

### **succulence**

there are more starved coyotes than we care to count  
although we bash them in the press as opportunistic

they are critters like us and they dream of better days  
of gopher mounds and untended house pets  
and tipped over trashcans with too much bolognese  
made by the hopeful host

me: i dream of the soft graze of your mouth and oysters  
**starling**

an undulating blob of juvenile starlings  
inked against a white flat sky

nothing like a solitary heron slow-stepping

or a crab (doing whatever in its murk)

I would like to map the veins just beneath the surface  
of your skin just there beneath your collar bone  
and one spot on your wrist there's  
a pink bubble like a tiny drum  
being hit from the soft inside

### **bus**

in an old house, Rilke wrote in a letter, nothing is ever quite closed  
isn't that a fable for our times?

or all times?

example: on the greyhound bus: people's mouths  
both sleepers and talkers, and eyes of those of us  
incurably awake  
staring ahead or out the window

never quite closed

my fellow riders file past in a dribble  
at the stops every X miles and stand on the pavement  
sharing lights and blowing funnels of gray smoke,  
the darker it is the more they become iron shadows



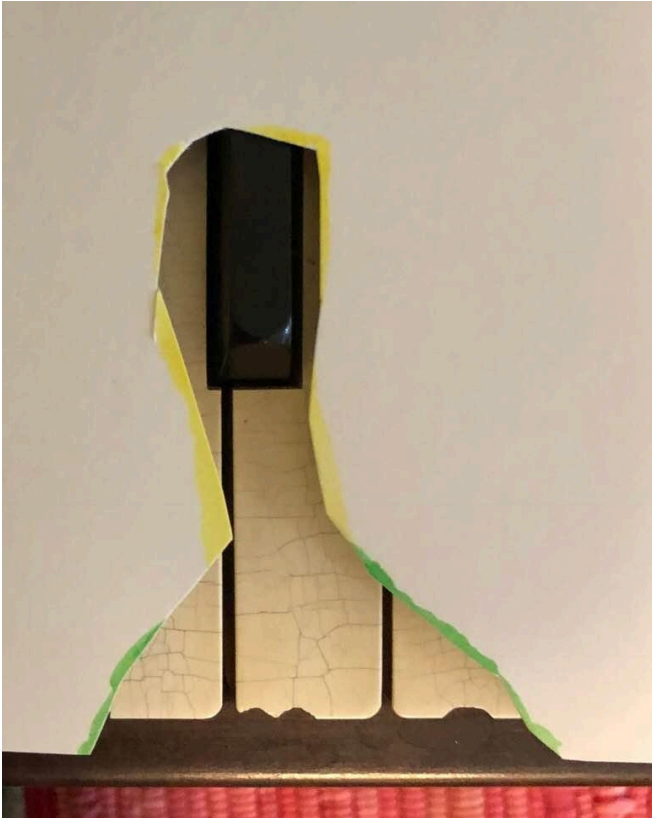
leaking white light

always, they file back to their seats, shoulders low,  
reeking of their resignation

### **sleep**

the snow starts at midnight and keeps coming for hours,  
erasing borders—street and yard, car from curb, the whole block  
finally an unbroken bumpy blanket: white as the page.

all particularity erased, all everything  
to us now missing or muted, gone.



### **postcard**

I stall in the corner of a thrift store in Tulsa  
standing over a shoebox of old postcards,  
my hands flipping through, drawing out, reading

what I can make out of the handwriting:

*Even the wind is hot*—one says in a fine felt tip scribble.

most of them are banal reports, but often there's a turn  
towards the evocative, as when a sermon turns to song.

I think all these lives have faded now.  
none of them are acrimonious. It's not a mood  
the postcard invites. more epilogue than anything.

*Lovely weather.*

*Keeping busy! See you soon? Love, xx*

my favorite one ends: *The rain has stopped.*  
*Rabbits are everywhere in the backyard.*  
*We watched from the window upstairs.*  
*We named them. I named one after you.*



**molecules**

Carl Sagan's answer when asked to describe himself:  
*I am one example of what some hydrogen atoms  
can do, given 15 billion years of evolution.*

this is a way of putting it: creature as energy-releasing  
events plus non-mass whatsits and galactic gas and dust  
jiggered by a gravity of gravitational force and bacteria and fungus  
and industry-sludged water and for humans too much tv etc.

but what of the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug  
which drags its armpit-stench across my pillow  
and disturbs my reading trance with its clattering  
flight from wall to bed. I read that they are real  
sex fiends: fitting their angular papery bodies together 24/7.

they're miracles of happenstance as well.

### **rest**

my dog kumal prefers to slumber on a pile of my dirty clothes

he takes his ease in my stale mouldering

I don't always see it but I know how it happens: like a pitcher's windup  
he circles before he slumps to the floor in a slow-motion drop  
with a long gorgeous sigh.

### **toads**

Bolano said: *I could live under a table reading Borges.*

I wish I had dedicated my life to studying toads.  
I love the toad's textured back, the toad's relaxed posture.  
I would be ok with turtles, too; the physics  
of how they crawl: the infinite calm of belly  
to ground.

### **hail**

goosebump-sized hail a symphony of soft ticks  
I took shelter under an evergreen and marvel

at the whiteness of the precipitation: cod, baby teeth, sea shell, sinew.

### **thoreau on the shore**

flotsam from the wrecked ship  
includes bodies, a splintered railing,  
a woman's hat, a corked half-drunk  
bottle of champagne

every minute feels like a saw drawn  
across a violin, the sun struggling  
against an intolerable gray  
and a punishing wind



## **hands**

calligraphy, crafts, cooking, sex, gardening, cello, drums, lip reading, raising koi, all of this requires hands.

even alone, even idle, hands are active—smoothing and moving, finger up to test the wind, touching privates, digging out a booger, massaging scalp and eyes and shoulder

## **Quotes from Ludwig Wittgenstein that are Poems**

we expunge sentences that don't  
get us any further.

language is not one uniform thing  
but a host of different activities.

the meaning is the use.

nothing is so difficult as not deceiving oneself.

what can be shown, cannot be said.

## **birdsong**

birds and deceptions, ongoing as surf  
covering and bringing forth secrets





**A Quote from the Roman rhetorician Quintilian  
about talking with your hands which is a Poem**

the hands are almost equal in expression  
to the powers of language itself.

with our hands we ask, promise, call persons  
to us and send them away, threaten, supplicate,  
intimate dislike or fear; we signify joy, grief, doubt,  
acknowledgment, penitence, and indicate measure,  
quantity, number, and time.

we incite, restrain, beseech, admire, shame....

in pointing out places and persons, our hands  
discharge the duty of adverbs and pronouns....

amidst the great diversity of tongues pervading all nations

and people, the language of the hands appears to be a language  
common to everyone.

### **at it again**

woodpecker hammers at the side of my house,  
soft dawn flares into high noon, a sultry heat, shadows  
stuck fast to leaves, dragon flies hover and swerve,  
still the hammering continues, with longer pauses.

sea creatures are by contrast quiet: the wet doggy face  
of a manatee

### **eros**

florida seashells: the names could describe  
a repertoire of erotic congress

Jingle, Worm Shell  
The Fighting Conch  
Lace Murex, The Cat's Paw  
The Tulip

### **final thoughts**

the world doesn't come from us  
(Galileo)

the wolf will have to pay for the sheep's tears  
(Dostoevsky)

