

## SIXFOLD SONNETEER

### A Sweep of Starlings

A sweep of starlings blackens autumn's blue,  
a fluid choreography precise  
in every turn, its shadow keeping true  
below to every whim of wing. No ice

that falls as diamond dust can match  
such grace, nor brilliant leaves in twirling flight.  
Our hummingbirds are much too quick to watch,  
electron-like, or flashing light

itself—a particle or wave—how can  
we know? Our starlings come from Shakespeare's  
plays, let loose by Eugene Schieffelin  
in eighteen-ninety New York, no cause for fears

to humans *then*, omnivorous foreign birds.  
No birds to curse but strive to praise in words.

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### A Sonnet For Old Glory

The flag was Uncle Lee's. He fought in France  
in World War I, inhaling gas that rolled  
like fog along his trench—a ghostly dance  
of chemicals that seared his lungs and told

his heart the bitter truth. No medicine  
could make him whole, and so he spent his years  
in V.A. hospitals, a veteran  
of circumstance, the last of all his peers

to muster up and out. In Arlington  
they buried him with gun salute and flag-  
draped box, as if he'd actually won  
that war because he missed the body bag.

Aunt Vera claimed the flag in '53,  
and when she died it somehow came to me.

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### To Temperament

The hand of Fate is swayed by Temperament,  
let planets dance and stars swirl as they may.  
We shape our days regardless of intent:  
Thus Scott and Zelda loved without delay.

Though Time and Chance and Circumstance create  
the pail of water, Jack and Jill must climb  
the hill and laugh their way to Doomsday's gate,  
where broken crown and tumbling count as crime.

Our dispositions haunt us like bad dreams.  
The past returns as if it knew the route—  
and catalogues a litany of screams  
we've heard before—to strike us mute.

If I could only leave my self behind,  
Smug Temperament would never be unkind.

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Until

Until the day that all the stars collapse  
upon themselves in clouds of light and dust  
(or raise their fissile mushroom heads, perhaps),  
as quantum physics proves what physics must—

Until on Earth the oceans split and flood  
the poles as if old Moses bade them to,  
and cities lie awash in salty blood—  
I'll bide my time and concentrate on you.

Apocalyptic visions slip and slouch  
through history to leave us in their wake,  
but not a damnéd one, in truth, can vouch  
for Truth. Imagination fails. Forsake

the future, then, for *this*—the day we share  
with atoms that bombard the very air!

SIXFOLD SONNETEER

Clawed

—for Barbara Ehrenreich

The self can pick a psychic scar until  
it bleeds afresh. Or gnaw again a wound  
so deep it festers through the skin. Who will  
say what agency, so callously unbound,

permits the universe to intervene—  
right here!—in daily banal intercourse  
of grave or petty wants, as if to glean  
a modicum of spite at its own source?

Or what is worse: no source at all, no way  
or means or attribute the natural world  
might ken beyond the warped haphazard sway  
of fickle free-lance particles unfurled.

Don't ask as if you have a right to know.  
Just scratch your scabs and let the life-blood flow.