

NED BALBO

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Athena and the Owl

A variation on Apollinaire's "Tristesse d'une étoile"

From Zeus' skull, Athena, you were born,
and now my head, like his, is touched with blood.
Blood makes a star. The wound itself will burn
in healing. Time alone will do me good.

Worse things have happened. Maybe soon, the owl,
whose bright eyes mirror yours, will watch me wake,
bandage removed, no throbbing in my skull.
Renewed, I'll walk away. Make no mistake—

I've other wounds I never talk about,
as you, Athena, know: your watchful bird—
wise counselor, predator exempt from doubt—
reports to you my every act and word.

The Last Count of Brederode

A variation on Rilke's "Der letzte Graf von Brederode entzieht sich türkischer Gefangenschaft"

They followed, merciless, into the woods,
aiming from far away. He thought, *All's lost*,
but kept on riding, driven by his blood's

urge toward survival, life at any cost.

He felt more like a driven animal
than someone noble—till, nothing to lose,
he heard the river's sudden roar. What does
a man do when he's desperate? Find the will

to stand back, pull the reins, and think things through.
His title made him prey, but men and women
who'd been kind, the past he'd live up to

were reasons to change course, accept the omen,
test the river's depth, and then stay true
to this new trail, impoverished and human.

The Cabinet

A variation on Rimbaud's "Le buffet"

This cabinet is carved quite carefully.
The odors we discover when it's open
tell us that its locked doors shut away
not empty jars or inexpensive wine

but fragile things collected, mended, sewn—
Our lives, you'd say; someone's, at any rate.
Reminders: scraps of linen not our own,
scrawled recipes, lace remnants folded flat—

the griffin on a headscarf standing guard.
Religious medals, photographs—the weird
detritus of years past and, weirder still,

dried flower- or fruit-smells, even locks of hair
preserved and waiting for the perfect spell
to summon back the dead, whose things these are.

Strange Sea

A variation on Valéry's "Le Vin perdu"

The sea is strange and strangely we behave
upon it, slightly seasick, on a ship,
seized by some sudden insight that the deep,
unearthly fathoms think that we are brave,

and call to us, *Oh, won't you pour some wine,
a few small drops, into your wine-dark sea,
these waves that bear you on your odyssey?*
Even the seagulls, now, look aquiline....

But the sea itself keeps changing, ever changing,
letting us glimpse the strange shapes it withholds—
dim octopi or gray squid rearranging

tendrils in pleasing shapes, like bursts of breath—
or silver scales that flash beneath the folds
of waves transfigured in their aftermath.

Wolf

A variation on Rimbaud's "Le Loup criait"

A wolf howled from the brush,
jaws smeared with blood and feather,
last residue of flesh
devoured altogether,

killed meat his only meal.
Fruit ripens to be plucked.
A spider waits, quite still—
what myth shall I construct?

We're predator or prey,
flesh sacrificed is lost,
and stone signs point the way
to streams King David crossed.

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Index and Contributors



Ned Balbo's latest book is *The Trials of Edgar Poe and Other Poems* (Story Line Press), awarded the 2012 Poets' Prize and the 2010 Donald Justice Prize by judge A. E. Stallings. His second book, *Lives of the Sleepers* (U. of Notre Dame Press), received the Ernest Sandeen Prize and a ForeWord Book of the Year Gold Medal. Additional drastic variations of French and German language poetry may be found at *Unsplendid 4.2*. He was Featured Poet in the Fall 2011/Winter 2012 *Valparaiso Poetry Review*.