

Andrew Earle SIMPSON (b. 1967)
Birds of Love and Prey (2014)

[1] Prologue: Bird Cadenza

Ee, yakakae, yakakae!

[2] I. O Beloved Nightingale

(Text: Aristophanes, c. 446 BC–c. 386 BC, from *Birds*, translated by S.B. Ferrario)

O beloved nightingale,
Best loved of birds,
Sharer in all my songs.
Nightingale, my friend.
You've come, I've found you,
Bring your sweet voice to me.

O, as you chirp your lovely flute,
With springtime voice,
Now begin our songs.

[3] II. The Tit and the Lovebird

(Text: Anonymous)

A little tit and a rosy-faced lovebird
Were a-sittin' on the branches of a tree.
Now the tit moved over to the lovebird,
And he said, "Since you're a little lovebird,
Won't you give a little love to me?"

Rosy said to the lovebird,
"You're certainly a forward little tit!
There's courage in your poor words;
But you got too much of it!
Move on down the branch, boy:
(So soon to get so cozy!)
Move on down the branch, boy:
And find yourself another Rosy!"

"But I'm an honest bird,
Blue as the sky!"
The tit persisted still.
"I'm an honest bird,
True to my kind,
But I'm lonely as a bird can be, Rosy!"

"I'm an honest bird," said Rosy in reply,
"But that don't mean I'm a fool!
"If you want some love from a lovebird
Then you'd better go back to school,

Boy,
And learn this simple rule:

Lovebirds with lovebirds
Together will unite;
But lovebirds with no other birds:
For the rest we put to flight, blue boy,
The rest we put to flight.
That's right:
The rest we put to flight.
Good night!"

[4] III. The Eagle

(Text: Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 1809–1892)

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

[5] IV. Night Interlude

(Text: John Keats, 1795–1821, from *Ode to a Nightingale*)

...tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne.
...
Thou wast not born for death, Immortal Bird!

The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:

...
The same that oft[times] hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

[6] V. The Owl and the Nightingale

(Text: Anonymous English, 12th-13th century
Freely adapted by A. E. Simpson, based on a translation by Bella Millett, ed. L. Kopar)

In a verdant valley,
I heard an owl and a nightingale dispute.
The nightingale started it.

She looked at the owl: looked her up and down, detested her.
And then she said:
"You nasty creature!"
"You make me want to puke to look at you!
Your body is squat, your neck is scrawny, your eyes are black like lumps of coal.

https://www.naxos.com/catalogue/item.asp?item_code=8.579064

Your face is so ugly, it stops my song in mid-...
You're disgusting!
Better I should *spit* than sing about your screeching!"

The owl waited till dark, so ticked off she could hardly breathe, and then she said:
"How does my song sound to you now?
If you were in my claws, you'd sing a different song!
You insult me all the time.
Why not fly out into the open and see which one of us is prettier?"

"No, you have very sharp claws.
Owl, *dites-moi*: Why do you do evil things?
You're ruthless and bully small birds.
You fly by night and not by day,
And ev'ry evil creature loves the dark and not the light.
That is why so many birds despise you, owl."

The owl replied:
"Well, you sing all the night,
And cheapen your song by singing so much.
But I sing in the evening at the proper time."

The nightingale answered:
"You mean you *screech* and I *sing*!
Your song is lament, but mine is celebration!"

The owl answered:
"You're good for nothing except warbling.
Useless, tweeting away.
But I can catch mice in a barn, and in church in the dark."

The nightingale said:
"No, it's only when you're *shot* that you turn useful,
because then your carcass is put on a stick,
and you become a scarecrow!

But I sing about love. All my song is about it.
All love, of any kind, is good."

[7] VI. Bird Cadenza

Ah, yakakae, yakakae!

[8] VII. The Turtle Dove

(Text: Jules Barbier, 1825–1901, from *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, freely translated by A.E. Simpson)

Your turtle-dove has flown away!
Ah, memory too sweet!
Vision too cruel!

Oh! On my knees,

I see him, I hear him!
Your turtle-dove has flown,
far, far from you.

But she is ever true.
My beautiful love, my voice is calling;
All my heart is yours.

Precious flower, newly opened,
answer me!
You know if he loves me still,
If he is yet true!
My beautiful love, my voice is longing...
Ah! That your heart would turn to face me.

Your turtle-dove has flown
Far from you.

[9] VIII. Interlude

[10] IX. Blest are the Birds on the Wing

(Text: Aristophanes, from *Birds*, translated by S.B. Ferrario)

Blest are the birds on the wing,
Who don no winter cloaks.
Summer's shimmering beams
Do not melt us into misery
But I make my home in the leaves,
In the vales of flowering meadows,
When cicadas, sweet and clear,
Gone mad for love of the sun,
Cry forth their sharp songs
In the noontime heat.

I pass my winters in canopied caves,
At play with the nymphs of the mountains.

And in springtime we feed on the myrtle,
Virgin white,
And the gardens of the Graces.

Eric KITCHEN (b. 1951)

The Olney Avian Verse of William Cowper (2000)

(Text: William Cowper, 1731–1800)

[11] I. The Faithful Bird

The greenhouse is my summer seat;
My shrubs displaced from that retreat
Enjoy'd the open air;

Two goldfinches, whose sprightly song
Had been their mutual solace long,
Lived happy prisoners there.

They sang as blithe as finches sing
That flutter loose on golden wing,
And frolic where they list;
Strangers to liberty, 'tis true,
But that delight they never knew,
And therefore never miss'd.

But nature works in every breast,
With force not easily suppress'd;
And Dick felt some desires,
That, after many an effort vain,
Instructed him at length to gain
A pass between his wires.

The open windows seem'd to invite
The freeman to a farewell flight;
But Tom was still confined;
And Dick, although his way was clear,
Was much too generous and sincere
To leave his friend behind.

So settling on his cage, by play,
And chirp, and kiss, he seem'd to say,
You must not live alone;-
Nor would he quit that chosen stand
Till I, with slow and cautious hand,
Return'd him to his own.

Oh ye, who never taste the joys
Of friendship, satisfied with noise,
Fandango, ball, and rout!
Blush when I tell you how a bird
A prison with a friend preferr'd
To liberty without.

[12] II. To the Nightingale

Whence is it, that amazed I hear
From yonder wither'd spray,
This foremost morn of all the year
The melody of May?

And why, since thousands would be proud
Of such a favour shown,
Am I selected from the crowd,
To witness it alone?

Sing'st thou, sweet Philomel, to me,
For that I also long
Have practised in the groves like thee,
Though not like thee in song?

Or sing'st thou rather under force
Of some divine command,
Commission'd to presage a course
Of happier days at hand?

Thrice welcome then! for many a long
And joyless year have I,
As thou to day, put forth my song
Beneath a wintry sky.

But Thee no wintry skies can harm,
Who only need'st to sing,
To make January charm,
And every season Spring.

[13] III. On the Swallow

Attic maid! with honey fed,
Bear'st thou to thy callow brood
Yonder locust from the mead,
Destined their delicious food?

Ye have kindred voices clear,
Ye alike unfold the wing,
Migrate hither, sojourn here,
Both attendant on the spring!

Ah, for pity drop the prize;
Let it not with truth be said,
That a songster gasps and dies,
That a songster may be fed.

[14] IV. Sparrows Self-Domesticated

None ever shared the social feast,
Or as an inmate or a guest,
Beneath the celebrated dome,
Where once Sir Isaac had his home,
Who saw not (and with some delight
Perhaps he view'd the novel sight)
How numerous, at the tables there,
The sparrows beg their daily fare.
For there, in every nook and cell,
Where such a family may dwell,
Sure as the vernal season comes
Their nests they weave in hope of crumbs,

Which kindly given, may serve with food
Convenient their unfeather'd brood;
And oft as with its summons clear
The warning bell salutes their ear,
Sagacious listeners to the sound,
They flock from all the fields around,
To reach the hospitable hall,
None more attentive to the call.
Arrived, the pensionary band,
Hopping and chirping, close at hand,
Solicit what they soon receive,
The sprinkled, plenteous donative.
Thus is a multitude, though large,
Supported at a trivial charge;
A single doit would overpay
The expenditure of every day,
And who can grudge so small a grace
To suppliants, natives of the place?

[15] V. Invitation to the Redbreast

Sweet bird, whom the winter constrains-
And seldom another it can-
To seek a retreat, while he reigns,
In the well-shelter'd dwellings of man,
Who never can seem to intrude,
Though in all places equally free,
Come! oft as the season is rude,
Thou art sure to be welcome to me.

At sight of the first feeble ray,
That pierces the clouds of the east,
To inveigle thee every day
My windows shall show thee a feast;

For, taught by experience I know
Thee mindful of benefit long,
And that, thankful for all I bestow,
Thou wilt pay me with many a song.

Then, soon as the swell of the buds
Bespeaks the renewal of spring,
Fly hence, if thou wilt, to the woods,
Or where it shall please thee to sing:
And shouldst thou, compell'd by a frost,
Come again to my window or door,
Doubt not an affectionate host,
Only pay, as thou pay'dst me before.

Thus music must needs be confest
To flow from a fountain above;
Else how should it work in the breast
Unchangeable friendship and love?

And who on the globe can be found,
Save your generation and ours,
That can be delighted by sound,
Or boasts any musical powers?

Gabriel THIBAudeau (b. 1959)

Cycle Avicellus (2014)

(Text: Mykalle Bielinski, b. 1987, translated by C. Schoch)

[16] I. De ton perchoir

De ton perchoir jus-qu'au fond des histoires: Chante!
Ne t'arrête pas, je verrai dans ta voix:
Tout ce que j'ai, tout ce que j'ai oublié, oublié
Chante, chante encore, rappelle moi les décors d'autrefois.

De ton perchoir, soir après-soir, chante, chante encore!
Qu'il y a longtemps déjà j'étais comme toi.
D'un safran orangé, dans la fleur de l'âge, enrobée de plumage.

De ton perchoir ravive ma mémoire: Chante!
Comme si j'y étais juste encore une fois.
Quand se lève le rideau et que j'entre en scène.
Quand je sens sur ma peau le halo de l'arène... oubliés...
Me reviennent les sons, me rappellent à moi les odeurs, l'éventail des couleurs d'autrefois.

De ton perchoir fais revivre mon art: Chante!
Je t'écouterai épuiser les années, tout ce que j'ai oublié.
Je le vis de plus belle.
Chante, chante encore, Chante encore!
Je serai éternelle!

[17] II. Blanc harfang

Blanc harfang, une seconde suffit à réveiller la douceur
devant l'hiver, devant l'hiver.
Blanc harfang, une seconde suffit à faire tanguer la beauté,
le son des neiges.
Vous avez caché trop longtemps à nos yeux le printemps,
ce qui calmera du froid.

Blanc harfang, j'aime tant votre image.
Blanc harfang, je vous sais paysage de l'instant.

C'est un hiver sybillin, c'est un âge de givre.
Vous regarder longuement,
percera la gelée, réchauffera le frimas.
Je passerais des heures à contempler ce moment.

Blanc harfang, de vos yeux perçants vous pouvez voir au delà
de la saison, de la saison.
Blanc harfang, vous passez par les songes pour donner de l'ampleur
à votre majesté.

Nous garderons des visions de votre passage,
de ce qui calme du froid.

From your perch

From your perch, deep into stories search, and sing!
Don't stop, in your voice I will know
Everything, everything I have forgotten.
Sing, sing some more! Bring back to me scenery I knew before.

From your perch, every evening hour, sing, sing some more!
Such a long time ago, I was like you,
In plumage of orange saffron swathed, in the prime of age.

From your perch, revive my memory, sing!
As though I were there just once again
When the curtain rises and on stage I come,
When on my skin I feel the footlights aglow again, forgotten,
The sounds return to me, the scents I knew before, the colorful array of yore.

From your perch, make my art come alive again, sing!
I will listen to you run through the years; all that I have forgotten,
I live through it again even better.
Sing, sing again! Sing once more! I will be eternal!
[I will live forevermore]

Snowy owl

Snowy owl, one second is enough to awaken the mildness
Before winter comes, before winter comes.
Snowy owl, one second is enough to set beauty reeling
The sound of snow.
You have hidden spring too long from our eyes,
That which will relieve the cold.

Snowy owl, I so love your finery.
Snowy owl, you are the scenery of now.

It is a sibylline winter, an age of frost.
To gaze at you at length,
Will pierce the ice, will warm the bitter cold.
I could spend hours pondering this moment.

Snowy owl, with your piercing gaze you can see beyond
The season, the season.
Snowy owl, you employ dreams to give breadth
To your grandeur.

We shall retain visions of your passage,
Of what relieves the cold.

Blanc harfang, j'aime tant votre image.
Blanc harfang, je vous sais paysage de ce pays.
De ce pays couvert de blanc!

[18] III. Ils partent

Ils partent on ne sait où quand l'hiver les saisit.
Vers les jardins d'infinis soleils!

Ils ont soif d'espaces, insatiables nuées.
Voiliers des océans du ciel, où leurs traces se confondent aux schémas
qu'on sonde pour voyager en soi...

Ils partent sans dire au revoir, l'été les rappelle.
Leurs volières recouvertes de la première neige.
Endormant les rêves qu'on veut dompter.
Leurs coeurs ne tolèrent aucun élevage.

Ils fuient les frontières de l'esprit.
Qui se terre quand la nuit interdit l'effervescence.

Qu'elle confine l'utopie, met l'avenir en cage.
Quand l'idéal obéit aux ennuis qui ravagent.
Ils partent sans bruit.
Leur départ est un cri!

Ils sont libres toujours personne ne peut forcer leurs retour.
D'un battement d'aile, ils se posent sur les plages.
Effaçant l'orage qui les feraient tomber,
Qui les feraient tomber.

Se reposent des affronts puis se donnent au paysage,
comme une chanson contre les naufrages des saisons, des saisons.

Ils partent on ne sait où quand l'hiver les saisit.
Vers les jardins d'infinis soleils!
Soleils!

[19] IV. Envol

J'aimerais te dire
Nous sommes comme les astres
C'est ce qui nous tient en place audessus des toits.
Nous passons par les champs les plaines entières
Nous planons audessus des mers pour nous mettre au monde.

Nos ailes s'ouvrent
Je nous vois survoler la vie, sa vue nous soulevant.
J'aimerais dire que nous ne savons pas
où ce la nous conduira

Snowy owl, I so love your finery.
Snowy owl, you are the scenery of this land
This land covered in white

They're leaving

They go who knows where when winter takes hold of them
Toward gardens of infinite sun

They thirst for open spaces, insatiable swarms
Sailboats on the sky's oceans, where their traces blend with the maps
We explore to travel within ourselves

They leave without saying goodbye, Summer calls them back
Their aviaries covered with the first snow
Rocking to sleep the dreams we wish to tame
Their hearts will not be domesticated.

They flee the frontiers of the mind
That burrows when night forbids excitation

When it confines utopia, puts the future in a cage
When the ideal obeys the troubles that ravage
They leave without a sound
Their flight is a plea

They are free always, no one can force their return,
With a beat of a wing, they alight on the shores
Spiriting away the storm
That would bring them down

That would bring them down, resting from injuries, giving themselves up to the scenery
Like a song against the shipwrecks of seasons, the seasons.

They go who knows where when winter takes hold of them
Toward gardens of endless sunshine
Sunshine!

Soaring

I would like to tell you
We are like the stars
It holds us in place over the rooftops
We fly over the fields, over entire plains
We glide over the seas, to bring ourselves into the world

Our wings open
I see us overfly life, the sight of it lifts us.
I would like to say that we don't know
Where it will lead us.

Suivons les horizons
Nous trouverons de nouveaux noms
Fions-nous aux gestes du vent
Nous connaissons ce qu'il ressent
Son mouvement nous donnant l'élan!

J'aimerais te dire
Nous laissons des traces
de ce qui nous tient en place audessus des toits
Il y a, il y a tant à voir.

Nous empruntons les voies rapides de l'air
Nous traversons les hémisphères
par devant le monde
Nos ailes s'ouvrent je nous vois survoler la vue,
la vie nous dépassant.

Et le chemin est de ne pas savoir
quand nous perdrons, perdrons le nord.
Où cela mène?
Il y a tant à voir!

Let us follow horizons
We'll find new names.
Let us trust in the wind's wave
We'll know how it feels
Its movement gives us momentum!

I would like to tell you
We leave traces
Of what holds us in place over the rooftops
There is so much, so much to see.

We take air's fast lanes
We cross hemispheres
Ahead of the world
Our wings open, I see us overfly the sight,
Life runs ahead of us.

And the way is not knowing
When we lose our way,
Where it takes us
There is so much to see!