

ANITA SULLIVAN

Worried about Birds

I am worried about the birds again.

As I walk past the library, I stop to tie my shoe
so the young man in front of me, loudly conducting
clouds with his cigarette, will not feel me at his back,
will not veer again into the street.

Dutilleux! comes into my head, and I whisper it.
“Dutilleux.”

The name sounds exactly how a winter wren in
February
quietly practices the opening of her song.

Did I always worry about the birds, I mean, before?
This is different from cats and windmills and people
with guns.

This is about what they eat. I mean,
when they peck on the open ground. Has anyone done
studies
about whether juncos swallow, for example, cigarette
butts?

And if so—? And if not
what are they taking from the surface of the earth that’s
keeping them alive?

Rapsallion! comes into my head, and I whisper it.
“Rapsallion.”

I pick at the skin on my thumbs, rub my hand
behind my neck, scratch the small
scabs on my shoulders.

If nobody smoked, would be good; if nobody had
a reason to start smoking,
would be even better. Smoking begins as a displacement
activity, but then it
starts keeping you alive.

You need a displacement for the displacement.
You need to start worrying about birds.

Which is not totally obsessive. It’s more like rolling your
head around
in a slow and complicated way as if it were
a kaleidoscope.

Even if you can’t see inside, you can hear
all the little pieces ganging up, tipping into new patterns;
you want
to wait for the best one, then stop.

Come de light an’ I wanna go home

Anita Sullivan is a poet and essayist whose most recent book, *The Rhythm Of It: Poetry’s Hidden Dance*, brings a piano tuner’s particular insights to how rhythm works in so-called free verse poetry. She continues to owe most of her ideas and perspectives to the natural landscapes of Oregon’s Willamette Valley, with its myriad geometries and abundant wildlife (especially the birds).

EILEEN NEFF

Who’s Afraid of Yellow, 2016
Archival pigment on dibond, 32 x 27 in



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