

2017

## Three Poems by Myrna Stone

Myrna Stone

Follow this and additional works at: <https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/mrr>



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Stone, M. (2017). Three Poems by Myrna Stone, *Mad River Review*, 3 (1).

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by CORE Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mad River Review by an authorized editor of CORE Scholar. For more information, please contact [library-corescholar@wright.edu](mailto:library-corescholar@wright.edu).

Myrna Stone

*The Relationship Poems II*

John James Audubon Describes His Childhood  
to His Sons, Victor and Johnnie

*Henderson, Kentucky, Summer, 1819*

In Saint-Domingue there was sun and sun  
and the incessant chatter of sugar stalks  
just beyond the verandah's view. Crimson  
the sun set and crimson it rose while talk

burbled from Martine's kitchen like Latin  
from Fr. Giles's tongue during daily mass  
in the plantation chapel, his silver paten  
mirroring his black hand as he passed

a host into each gaping mouth. Outside  
the doors was a greensward and a border  
of pines darkening a ridgeline, a wild divide  
where once, I am convinced, I heard ardor

wax in a Vervain Hummingbird's delirium  
of song. Though I was but six, I remember  
well the whirring machinelike thrum  
of his wings as he flew by, the somber

gray of his throat and chest. A sly Puritan  
he was, with only a glint of metallic green  
visible, then fugitive, a hue whose origin  
is light and the bird's own preen-oil sheen.

Barely larger than a hawkmoth, a Vervain  
is often taken at a blossom's end for a Bee  
Hummingbird, which is smaller yet. I claim,  
in truth, to have drawn one of each, and see

no good cause to kill another. When Father  
returned to his villa in Nantes, France with us,  
his bastard son and daughter, our stepmother  
kissed us both at the door and pronounced us

home at last. We bless her, and her exemplary  
virtue still—Anne Moynet, of the ardent  
heart and barren womb, whose *l'orangerie*  
in winter and garden in summer were parent

to the two most credulous of the villa's naif  
dwellers: Rosie and I, afoot among the furred  
and the winged, each mouse and bird a waif  
whose name we printed in a book of words.

Joseph Mason, Audubon's Former Background Artist,  
Speaks to Their Mutual Friends on Loyalty

*Philadelphia, Spring, 1832*

Some prefer to label him a braggart  
for calling himself *the* American Woodsman  
while visiting London. And perhaps his heart  
and his ego *were* inflated by women

fawning over his long hair and homey  
fur-trimmed buckskin, or by the daily rags  
that reported his gaze as *direct, intensely*  
*wild, and dark as Satan's*. He crabs

now about the folly of that last bit,  
though I quite suspect, boys, that flattered  
by its reference to power, he secretly likes it.  
Even dear Lucy, bless her soul, battered

by life with or without him, continues  
to describe him as a *genius*, and *charismatic*—  
and who are we to dispute her? Our sinews,  
muscles, minds, our local and domestic

lives, shall never rise to John James's  
level of drama in excellence. I've seen him  
lure birds with seeds and silence, dazed  
at how quickly he rose and shot them

with his fine-pellet gun. His subscribers  
ask him how he transfuses the breath of life  
into such creatures. I can tell them: he scribes  
a board with a grid, and before the bright

colors of the bird's wings dull, pins  
its body to the wood in an approximation  
of flight or stance, after which he outlines  
on a corresponding graph its simulation.

He has a gift that will not be outdone  
he will make a fortune—mark my words—  
thus we, as his friends, must seek to caution  
him against overweening pride. In thirds

his heart is divided—by birds, by Lucy,  
by his sons—and though he merits our affection  
whether woodsman or artist, stable or swoony,  
he may yet have need of our correction.

Upon Taking Delivery of Audubon's First Published Bird Prints,  
Joseph Mason Sees, Then Shares With His Son, a Bitter Truth

*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, January, 1835*

I was but thirteen—clearly more boy than man  
despite the confidence I affected—when Audubon  
and I left for New Orleans to implement his plan  
of recording undocumented birds, all drawn

to scale, while I, sketching beside him, rendered  
their usual haunts: Blue Yellow-Backed Warblers  
on a Coppery Iris, Painted Finches on a tender  
Chickasaw Plum, a lone male Thrush atwitter

on an Indian Turnip. Come sunset, we slept  
where we fell, exhausted, into beds of thigh-high  
prairie grass or the piney earth beyond, kept  
until birdsong woke us and a new day's supply

of specimens required our attention: wire  
inserted into their wings, dousings in clear water  
to deepen their colors, and later, of course, fire  
to cook them over. . . . Even acts of slaughter,

boy, should occasion no waste. Yes, I prized  
that life, for in it I found not merely my calling  
but a man whose heart pumped the same blood.  
Yet, how misplaced my trust, and how galling

his betrayal. Look at these prints. Do you see  
anywhere at all, in any corner, *J. Mason*?  
Here, and here, and here, this flora, these bees,  
are mine in stroke after stroke, line after line!

Audubon denies, and falsifies, to fatten his ego.  
His famed night in a cabin with Daniel Boone  
on the edge of the wilderness is simply a blow-  
hard's story, as is the tale of his father's spoon-

fed wealth. Why write, or call upon, or trace  
him, or seek to cross paths with any of his kin?  
Let us erase him with silence, just as he erased  
my name from these works again and again.