

# THE ALBATROSS

*Charles Baudelaire*

Often, for their amusement, crews will seize  
That great seafaring bird, the albatross  
Who, like a shipmate, with unhurried ease  
Tracks vessels as on bitter gulfs they toss.

No sooner laid on deck than this proud king  
Of azure skies, now awkward and abashed,  
Trails oarlike at his sides, crestfallen thing,  
Those huge white pinions from the heavens dashed.

How gauche is this winged voyager, how frail!  
And, late so grand, how droll and ugly too!  
A cutty prods his beak and makes him quail;  
A hobbler mocks the cripple who once flew!

The Poet resembles well this prince of clouds  
Who haunts the tempest, scorns the archer's aim;  
Exiled on earth among affronting crowds,  
His mighty wings impede him, he walks lame.

—*Translated by Philip Higson*

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