

# JUDITH BARRINGTON

## *IN PRAISE OF NOT KNOWING THE NAMES OF BIRDS\**

I cannot name the one with the scimitar beak and the mohawk  
who spends all day drilling holes in tree trunks.

I cannot name the enormous one with the white stocking cap  
on his head, hounded by glory and flags, poor devil.

I cannot name the thumblet with wings that whirr  
like the new kind of dentist's drill – "Rupert" or "Rufus"  
come to mind when I watch her at the scarlet feeder  
but I cannot be sure: the flash of her arrival  
too swift for color, is what matters in the long run.

I cannot name the one who hoots  
the one who dives from treetops  
the one who stands on chopstick legs  
waiting for sushi.

I cannot even name the caged one who calls himself "pretty"  
and mocks the world with his nasal chant  
nor the big white one on the beach who stabs  
the rotten flesh of his dead brother.

Then there are those with the red vests or speckled chests:

I cannot name them either (or perhaps I simply will not).  
Unnamed, brownish ones doze on telephone poles  
hunched and grumpy as old men  
while the black-jacketed strut in the road  
rolling like sailors and holding up traffic.

I cannot name the tiny chirper who follows me along the creek  
moving so fast that I see nothing of bird, nothing  
of shape or weight or color or sex, nothing  
to look up in a book if I had a book or wanted a book.

I cannot even hazard a guess:  
She might be the spirit of my dead horse.  
She might be nobody.

**Judith Barrington** is the author of three volumes of poetry and of *Lifesaving: A Memoir*, winner of the Lambda Book Award and finalist for the PEN/Martha Albrand Award. She has won many prizes and is published widely in literary journals. She teaches at workshops across the United States and at The Poetry School in Britain.

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