

Mount Desert
(once Pemeteq)

1604, the French found it (*Isle de Monts Desert*)
then the English (*Arcadia*)

the Hudson River painters
the buyers of bird feathers
for ladies' hats

the Penobscots gave it up
to the State of Massachussets
then sold
birds to milliners
canoes to sportsmen
baskets to tourists

and finally themselves
in early pale
photographs:
Indian family at Bar Harbour
(once Man-es-ayd'ik
"clan gathering
place")

now a national park where
you can't pick a stone
or sea lavender
for luck

the Penobscot Indian Nation
- population 2000 -
is up the river now
at Old Town
selling audio cassettes
and bingo tickets
its high stakes

Wendell Gilley Museum
 (plumber, then bird-carver,
 Southwest Harbour, Maine)

Wendell Gilley's hands
 tapping a finished bird
 gently

soothing it for the camera

grey knuckles - loose
 from carving

*mekin' birds -
 gave up plumbin' in the end
 for it
 put my son through college
 on it
 in just one lifetime you
 couldn't begin to
 grasp it*

never did get one to suit me

Wendell Gilley's first bird (1930)
 basswood mallard drake
 dark, shiny
 solid - decoy,
 sitting duck

*as you get older you just get to the point
 where there's no desire to shoot at all*

his later birds
 might move, painted feathers
 shifting - painted eye
 glinting as
 close as can be
 to what you see

*just common birds, just common ducks,
 not many hawks - a few hawks -
 a lot of owls, a lot of owls*

later outside that cormorant
 still under rain
 wings raised

could take wood in my hand, a knife,
*whittle off a little here
 and a little there*

could sit here all day
happy as a fool

Harriet Tarlo teaches creative writing at the University of Leeds. The poems here and below are from Poems 1990-2003 (Shearsman Books, 2004). She is also the author of Love/Land (rem press, 2003) and Nab (Etruscan Books, 2005).

Puyé*

no time to write now
night cools round the kiva

footmarks of years
broken off where
they built
homes

and lost

* Native American cliff dwellings in New Mexico

mid may through june

hawthorn

bluebells

may

rhododendron

red campion

lilac

goosegrass

through

elderflower slowly

foxgloves

buttercups

clover

june

hedgerow

dogrose

last flicker gorse

odd cornflower