**Bat**

At evening, sitting on this terrace,

When the sun from the west, beyond Pisa, beyond the mountains of Carrara

Departs, and the world is taken by surprise . . .

When the tired flower of Florence is in gloom beneath the glowing

Brown hills surrounding . . .

When under the arches of the Ponte Vecchio

A green light enters against stream, flush from the west,

Against the current of obscure Arno . . .

Look up, and you see things flying

Between the day and the night;

Swallows with spools of dark thread sewing the shadows together.

A circle swoop, and a quick parabola under the bridge arches

Where light pushes through;

A sudden turning upon itself of a thing in the air.

A dip to the water.

And you think:

‘The swallows are flying so late!’

Swallows?

Dark air-life looping

Yet missing the pure loop . . .

A twitch, a twitter, an elastic shudder in flight

And serrated wings against the sky,

Like a glove, a black glove thrown up at the light,

And falling back.

Never swallows!

*Bats*!

The swallows are gone.

At a wavering instant the swallows gave way to bats

By the Ponte Vecchio . . .

Changing guard.

Bats, and an uneasy creeping in one’s scalp

As the bats swoop overhead!

Flying madly.

Pipistrello!

Black piper on an infinitesimal pipe.

Little lumps that fly in air and have voices indefinite, wildly vindictive;

Wings like bits of umbrella.

Bats!

Creatures that hang themselves up like an old rag, to sleep;

And disgustingly upside down.

Hanging upside down like rows of disgusting old rags

And grinning in their sleep.

Bats!

In China the bat is symbol for happiness.

Not for me!

 —D. H. Lawrence

 **Bats**

A bat is born

Naked and blind and pale.

His mother makes a pocket of her tail

and catches him. He clings to her long fur

By his thumbs and toes and teeth.

And then the mother dances through the night

Doubling and looping, soaring, somersaulting—

Her baby hangs on underneath.

All night, in happiness, she hunts and flies.

Her high sharp cries

Like shining needlepoints of sound

Go out into the night and, echoing back,

Tell her what they have touched.

She hears how far it is, how big it is,

Which way it’s going;

She lives by hearing.

The mother eats the moths and gnats she catches

In full flight; in full flight

The mother drinks the water of the pond

She skims across. Her baby hangs on tight.

Her baby drinks the milk she makes him

In moonlight or starlight, in mid-air.

Their single shadow, printed on the moon

Or fluttering across the stars,

Whirls on all night; at daybreak

The tired mother flaps home to her rafter.

The others all are there.

They hang themselves up by their toes,

They wrap themselves in their brown wings.

Bunched upside-down, they sleep in air.

Their sharp ears, their sharp teeth, their quick sharp faces

Are dull and slow and mild.

All the bright day, as the mother sleeps,

She folds her wings about her sleeping child.

 —Randall Jarrell

 **Mind**

Mind in its purest play is like some bat

That beats about in caverns all alone,

Contriving by a kind of senseless wit

Not to conclude against a wall of stone.

It has no need to falter or explore;

Darkly it knows what obstacles are there,

And so may weave and flitter, dip and soar

In perfect courses through the blackest air.

And has this simile a like perfection?

The mind is like a bat. Precisely. Save

That in the very happiest of intellection

A graceful error may correct the cave.

 —Richard Wilbur

 **The Bat**

We returned to the empty ballroom

And found a bat demented there, quite

Out of its mind, flashing round and round

Where earlier the dancers had moved.

We opened a window and shouted

To jam the signals and, so we thought,

Inspire a tangent in the tired skull,

A swerve, a saving miscalculation.

We had come to make love secretly

Without disturbance or obstacle.

And fell like shadows across the bat’s

Singlemindedness, sheer insanity.

I told you of the blind snake that thrives

In total darkness by eating bats,

Of centuries measured in bat droppings,

The light bones that fall out of the air.

You called it a sky-mouse and described

Long fingers, anaesthetizing teeth,

How it clung to the night by its thumbs,

And suggested that we leave it there.

Suspended between floor and ceiling

It would continue in our absence

And drop exhausted, a full stop

At the centre of the ballroom floor.

 —Michael Longley

**Explaining an Affinity for Bats**

That they are only glimpsed in silhouette,

And seem something else at first—a swallow—

And move like new tunes, difficult to follow,

Staggering towards an obstacle they yet

Avoid in a last-minute pirouette,

Somehow telling solid things from hollow,

Sounding out how high a space, or shallow,

Revising into deepening violet.

That they sing—not the way the songbird sings

(Whose song is rote, to ornament, finesse)—

But travel by a sort of song that rings

True not in utterance, but harkenings,

Who find their way by calling into darkness

To hear their voice bounce off the shape of things.

 —A. E. Stallings