**Owl**

is my favourite. Who flies  
like a nothing through the night,  
who-whoing. Is a feather  
duster in leafy corners ring-a-rosy-ing  
boles of mice. Twice

you hear him call. Who  
is he looking for? You hear  
him hoovering over the floor  
of the wood. O would you be gold  
rings in the driving skull

if you could? Hooded and  
vulnerable by the winter suns  
owl looks. Is the grain of bark  
in the dark. Round beaks are at  
work in the pellety nest,

working. Owl is an eye  
in the barn. For a hole  
in the trunk owl’s blood  
is to blame. Black talons in the  
petrified fur! Cold walnut hands

on the case of the brain! In the reign  
of the chicken owl comes like  
a god. Is a goad in  
the rain to the pink eyes,  
dripping. For a meal in the day

flew, killed, on the moor. Six  
mouths are the seed of his  
arc in the season. Torn meat  
from the sky. Owl lives  
by the claws of his brain. On the branch

in the sever of the hand’s  
twigs owl is a backward look.  
Flown wind in the skin. Fine  
Rain in the bones. Owl breaks  
Like the day. Am an owl, am an owl.

—George MacBeth

**A Barred Owl**

The warping night air having brought the boom

Of an owl’s voice into her darkened room,

We tell the wakened child that all she heard

Was an odd question from a forest bird,

Asking of us, if rightly listened to,

“Who cooks for you?” and then “Who cooks for you?”

Words, which can make our terrors bravely clear,

Can also thus domesticate a fear,

And send a small child back to sleep at night

Not listening for the sound of stealthy flight

Or dreaming of some small thing in a claw

Borne up to some dark branch and eaten raw.

—Richard Wilbur

**Sea Owl**

Unlike the hawk he has no dream of height,   
his shadow is what he cannot remember.   
In the wide and unlit room of the night   
he waits. It is always December,   
  
with the floor of the pines full of silver.   
His toys move but his claws go tight   
as soundlessly he descends the stair.   
Nothing knows his cradle, where the white   
  
drone of the day hides him. The flesh-bright   
ribbons tear in his grip. He dismembers   
the shore’s secrets. The iron spike   
of the sun is all he remembers.

—Dave Smith

**The Owl**

I saw my world again through your eyes  
As I would see it again through your children’s eyes.  
Through your eyes it was foreign.  
Plain hedge hawthorns were peculiar aliens,  
A mystery of peculiar lore and doings.  
Anything wild, on legs, in your eyes  
Emerged at a point of exclamation  
As if it had appeared to dinner guests  
In the middle of the table. Common mallards  
Were artefacts of some unearthliness,  
Their wooings were a hypnagogic film  
Unreeled by the river. Impossible  
To comprehend the comfort of their feet  
In the freezing water. You were a camera  
Recording reflections you could not fathom.  
I made my world perform its utmost for you.  
You took it all in with an incredulous joy  
Like a mother handed her new baby  
By the midwife. Your frenzy made me giddy.  
It woke up my dumb, ecstatic boyhood  
Of fifteen years before. My masterpiece  
Came that black night on the Grantchester road.  
I sucked the throaty thin woe of a rabbit  
Out of my wetted knuckle, by a copse  
Where a tawny owl was enquiring.  
Suddenly it swooped up, splaying its pinions  
Into my face, taking me for a post.

—Ted Hughes

**Owl**

last night at the joint of dawn,   
an owl's call opened the darkness   
  
miles away, more than a world beyond this room   
  
and immediately, I was in the woods again,   
poised, seeing my eyes seen,   
hearing my listening heard   
  
under a huge tree improvised by fear   
  
dead brush falling then a star   
straight through to God   
founded and fixed the wood   
  
then out, until it touched the town’s lights,   
an owl’s elsewhere swelled and questioned   
  
twice, like you might lean and strike   
two matches in the wind

—Alice Oswald