

WILLIAM FORD

Bird Plague

That's what they are, starlings,
Beaks like snub-nosed hypodermics
Unearthing the ground
To the high-pitched outrage
Of nuthatch and junco,
The great winter athletes.
At dusk the whole sky darkens
Above our downtown.

Even the flicker won't fight
But rages from the suet wire
If but one of these thugs
Muscles in—five, now,
Flapping crudely, head to head,
Meaner than anything
Even to themselves.

In winter, drops of old gold
Show through on their flat black coats
Sucking up the very sun,
Their numbers increasing so much
We debate continuing the feeders.

Not Americans at all, these birds,
But flapping Elizabethan icons
Shipped here because some gull thought
We needed all of Shakespeare's kind
To become more fully civilized,
No matter the character.