Australasian Darters

By Robert Adamson

These water birds flew out from the minds
Of fishermen and became fishing peons
Wealthy sailors watched as darters emerged again
To spread drenched wings in the sun
And marked them as emblems for spinnakers

Painters and ornithologists studied darters
Until they became black-feathered arrows
That pierced the souls of their creators
These birds rode surf of bitter laughter
And wiped out on a zoo’s concrete Key Largo

To imitate darters lovers ripped off their clothes
And plunged into the swiftness of estuaries
Down the water column they entered brackish hell
Their hair transformed to iridescent plumage
Ruffled by memories of earth’s human atmosphere

We can experience the lives of these feathered beings
By flexing our particular despairs each morning
At evening we take in the news as best we can
On late nights we gaze at dead bodies of water
And almost perceive those wet wings working the tide

Source: Poetry (December 2017)