Mockingbird

It was the birds who taught her how to sing.

As a child, she sat with her cheek pressed against her window,

searching for a glimpse of feather or fat in the pale of dawn,

for proof that her teachers were more than just wind in the trees,

ghosts crooning in the glow of a rising sun.

She often found them sat atop quivering branches,

their breasts flashing colour and beaks hung wide open -

that was her definition of an artist, their art not seen, but heard.

For they sang as if liberated, composed as if tortured, sat gently on the edge

of cadences and pierced soprano notes through the down of their chests;

she mimicked their craft, a new breed of mockingbird,

warbling their scales in unsteady unison until she grasped

her own timbre, moulded a distinct resonance,

slowly lost the need for teachers.

Her range grew wider

and she grew taller, sprouting to the centres of stages.

She spat vibrato into the crowds and they bled beneath her,

their slow breaths cradling her name - *songbird*;

and so she belted her voice raw, spewed her crowning notes,

watched as spectators perished at her feet, awestruck.

They rotted under her stage and slowly, steadily,

her voice began to wither, her throat torn and leaking,

spiteful towards her years of glory;

and so she sat bedridden,

watching the sunrise outside her window, vaguely searching for a glimpse

of something long forgotten. Under her fallen devotees, her old teachers

decayed, the name for them lost in the clamour of her crowd.

She lived in her head, for her voice lost its sound,

and died swathed in skeletons of those who once cried her name,

fading in silence under an empty sky.