

THE BLUE BOOBY

The blue booby lives
on the bare rocks
of Galápagos
and fears nothing.
It is a simple life:
they live on fish,
and there are few predators.
Also, the males do not
make fools of themselves
chasing after the young
ladies. Rather,
they gather the blue
objects of the world
and construct from them

a nest—an occasional
Gaulois package,
a string of beads,
a piece of cloth from
a sailor's suit. This
replaces the need for
dazzling plumage;
in fact, in the past
fifty million years
the male has grown
considerably duller,
nor can he sing well.
The female, though,

asks little of him—
the blue satisfies her
completely, has
a magical effect
on her. When she returns

from her day of
gossip and shopping,
she sees he has found her
a new shred of blue foil:
for this she rewards him
with her dark body,
the stars turn slowly
in the blue foil beside them
like the eyes of a mild savior.

This was Tate's most anthologized poem when I first discovered his work in the early 90's, and was among the first to really turn my head towards poetry. It features whiplash movements from the small ("a string of beads") to the enormously large ("fifty million years") that would make John Donne blush. The one time I walked through Paris and lingered around a newspaper stand, my first thought was of the bright-blue Gaulois cigarette packages of the Blue Booby. I bought a pack.

- Greg Purcell