

Birds of Prey

Claude McKay

Their shadow dims the sunshine of our day,
 As they go lumbering across the sky,
 Squawking in joy of feeling safe on high,
 Beating their heavy wings of owlsh gray.
 5 They scare the singing birds of earth away
 As, greed-impelled, they circle threateningly,
 Watching the toilers with malignant eye,
 From their exclusive haven—birds of prey.
 They swoop down for the spoil in certain might,
 10 And fasten in our bleeding flesh their claws.

They beat us to surrender weak with fright,
 And tugging and tearing without let or pause,
 They flap their hideous wings in grim delight,
 And stuff our gory hearts into their maws.

Textual Note

This poem also appears in *The Messenger* (December, 1919). When it appeared in *The Messenger*, there was a break between the octet and the sestet, and even numbered lines were indented.

1 shadow] shadows *Mes.*
 1 dims] dim *Mes.*
 1 ,] *om. Mes.*
 7 ,] — *Mes.*
 8 From their exclusive haven] Birds of the darkness
Mes.
 8 darkness—] human *add. Mes.*
 9 for the spoil in certain] upon us in merciless *Mes.*

10 And] They *Mes.*
 10 .] *om. Mes.*
 10 They beat us to surrender weak with fright,] (We
 may be black or yellow, brown or white) *Mes.*
 11 And] , *add. Mes.*
 11 let] rest *Mes.*
 12 in grim] with wild *Mes.*
 12 ,] *om. Mes.*