



**Ned Balbo**

is the author of three books. *The Trials of Edgar Poe and Other Poems* (Story Line Press) received the 2012 Poets' Prize, and the 2010 Donald Justice Prize selected by A. E. Stallings.

His previous book, *Lives of the Sleepers* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), received the Ernest Sandeen Poetry Prize and a ForeWord Book of the Year Gold Medal, and his first, *Galileo's Banquet*, was awarded the Towson University Prize for Literature.

The recipient of three Maryland Arts Council individual artist grants, he has received the Robert Frost Foundation Poetry Award and the John Guyon Literary Nonfiction Prize, and he has also published a chapbook, *Something Must Happen* (Finishing Line Press, 2009).

Recent credits include *Avatar*

## **Marco Polo Travels Through a Landscape with Snakes After Nora Sturges' [painting](#)**

"I've heard that every Eden needs its Eve,  
but, more, its snake: if so, this land is blessed  
past all conception, bare earth parched and wriggling  
just below the elevated planks

where fearful tourists walk unsteadily.  
*If this is Eden, how soon can we leave?*  
I'd like to ask: fanged mouths aren't reassuring,  
nor do reptiles squirming yards below

accord with my idea of paradise.  
A few climb toward the boards; I use my staff  
to drive them back in coils....I've heard, by evening,  
everything looks veiled or venomous,

and I believe it here, where pelicans  
like pterodactyls gather on the trees,  
as if prepared to sort out weak from strong,  
and carry them to sea . . . . Eden had Eve,

Adam, and a talking Adversary,  
but here, the sinful, virtuous, or lost  
pray only to keep moving, to escape  
that constant hissing sounding more like whispers,

*Don't leave us. Every Eden holds an Eve . . . ."*

## **At the End of Five Days' Journey, You Begin to Discover a Few Towns Built Upon Rocky Heights After Nora Sturges' [painting](#)**

*[From Marco Polo's notebook]*

Reader, the heights I seek are those abandoned  
to mistake and myth, the mists of time,  
the mise-en-scène of mystics, misanthropes,  
and master builders, that will touch the sky

beyond all architectural good sense.

*Review, Birmingham Poetry  
Review, String Poet, and  
Unsplendid.*

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Reader, the heights I seek hold those abandoned  
to the contemplation of their choices  
from high cliffs and eccentricities

of altitude, cloud cover, point of view,  
starved visionaries monkish in their robes,  
teetering feverishly, old lives abandoned  
far below for one-room, bamboo huts

from which, on clear days, all is visible.  
How tiny things seem when you stand so high!  
Even the Khan's majestic pleasure-dome,  
Reader, where white mares race in wild abandon

all day long, and yield holy milk,  
from here looks like a grain of rice, at best.  
One day, I'll reach those heights . . . .

But will I stay  
or travel back with news of them for you,

Reader, if I don't find them long abandoned?

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