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## Ring-necked Pheasant

Howard Schaap  
*Dordt College*, [howard.schaap@dordt.edu](mailto:howard.schaap@dordt.edu)

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# Ring-necked Pheasant

For Robert Siegel

*Howard Schaap*

Improbable,  
he's evolution's joke,  
wearing the designer's gaudiest gown  
grabbed from the creator's mixed-bag of blessings.  
He's the millionaire overdressed for his own masquerade ball  
where everyone stands to gain from his murder,  
and even his plain wife, jealous of nature's bejeweling in him,  
has got the poor sap to put on a red felt mask of oversized eye patches  
so that he looks out at his enemies from behind two bull's-eyes,  
oblivious or defiant, his cold lizard's irises narrowing in on  
the number of himself he can sacrifice for the species as a whole.  
The rest of his costume is equally ridiculous:  
his smooth head crests into a backwards beret;  
a hijab in purple-green-blue hologram wraps his neck,  
terminates suicidally where Muslim meets Christian  
in his sharply isolated clerical collar,  
his signature moment of solemnity undone  
a moment later by the billowing ascot of shimmering rust  
that glows in the light of those chest-out moments—  
every dawn and dusk with naked sunlight  
when he lets it shine out from ditches like a beacon.  
The inventor of paisley, his Joseph-coat  
sports poshly layered ocher and black tear drops  
that resolve into rust and gray pears down his back,  
but it hangs unimpressively from his round shoulders  
where it gives way to pinstripes on his comically short arms.  
Below, impulsively, as if he were a closet belly dancer  
prepared for a midnight performance, he's strung  
a minty green fringe shawl to highlight his rump,  
but, most scandalously, from this scanty cover  
his erect and protuberant tail erupts electrically:  
tawny light punctuated by regular black lines  
like the moving lights of a Vegas strip arrow,  
advertising, in selfless selfishness,  
"Shoot at me! Shoot at me!"  
as he draws the gunfire that sows  
his cornfield hangout with deadly lead  
seeds and he or his species skirts off safely  
to another millennia of showy existence.

