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translated by Alexis Levitin

WALT WHITMAN AND THE BIRDS

On waking up, I remembered Peter Doyle. It must have been six o'clock, and in the Mimosa tree across the way a bird was singing. I won't swear it was singing in English, only Virginia Woolf's birds have such privileges, but the jubilation of my bullfinch led me to remember the skylark of American meadows and the chilled face of the young Irishman whom Walt Whitman loved that winter, seated at the back of the tavern, rubbing his hands, close to the heat of the stove.

I opened the window and in the first thin light that was approaching I searched in vain for the pristine delight that had wakened me. But suddenly, one, two, three, moist trills sounded, leading me to a puff of feathers one could scarcely tell from the leaves. Then, invoking ancient metaphors of song, I turned to the venerated book in my hand and, stanza by stanza, opened the flood-gates to the waters of being, like one who prepares himself for flight.