

POET'S CORNER

Wilson's Storm-Petrels

"Sea Swallows"
breeding in February
at the Strait of Magellan
on the South Orkneys, on the edge of the Antarctica

"Mother Carey's Chickens"
the square rigger sailors called them
Said they gathered around sinking ships
Said they were the drowned coming back

Did the old mariners suspect
these birds follow the Equatorial stars
the Caribbean stars into the North Atlantic summer
That they revel in the plankton-rich seas
off Britain, off the American coast
over the Grand Banks of Newfoundland

Pattering their feet over swells
still wing-borne
they make seafarers think of St. Peter
walking the lake of Gennesaret
until he saw the wind raving
and he was all a-pleading, "Lord save me"

Petrels are only animals
But they return to their nests
in the circumpolar south
as surely as earth arcs thru darkness
around its solar star

Maxwell C. Wheat, Jr.