

POETRY

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**By the Mouth of Two or Three**

*Doug Talley*

If the world were truly and wholly sullen,  
the starlings would never sing—never.

They would see only blood in the clouds  
of sunrise and sunset and hold their peace

until the last of any remaining songs blurred  
deep into the earth never to rise again.

But every morning, every evening, they hold  
court in a cluster of trees and shimmer—each

dazzling feather dipped in black—shimmer  
with ancient ululations that echo the notes

of Judaeen tragedy. Something of this tragedy,  
it is true, is worth the singing, or the starlings

would never sing, never, and I, I would never  
trouble you, nor anyone else, with this temple

and its walls made up of days and its solitary  
window to look through those days and there

discover a life where all birds sing a truth even  
the most doubtful will someday acknowledge.