

Birds of Paradise & St. Almavity

by [Robert Heard](#) (February 2023)



Strelitzien-Stilleben (Birds of Paradise Still Life), Max Beckmann, 1950

Birds of Paradise

Always counter-clockwise,
Begin the birds of paradise.
Though not themselves, they stay
To practise a secret art.

From the branches where they fall,
To a vanished place they call;
Recovering their eyes,
To find a possible way.

To be naked they display
The feathers they trail by chance:
Tall shadows, unseen by day,
In a now-forgotten dance,

Where they see each other apart,
Before they shrink to the size
They always have to start.

St. Almavity

By his life's end, Almavity,
Had had his fill of stories;
Without exaggeration,
He was weary of every telling—
Glad only when they ended—
Hated the beginnings—
Surprises unsurprising,
As he waited for what was next.

Yet of souls that wait, afraid
Of the Hour-that-Never-Ends,
Who need stories, in lieu
Of what is terrible, real and true,

He ended their saint.

For hearing his last account,
The Silent, Spellbound Judge—
Though He loved it to its ending—
Knew his poor Almavity
Had missed what he'd been seeking,
And what he'd told Him, in His city—
Though the man thought it was true—
Was mainly a made-up story,
And its conclusion a grudge.

So He told the teller plainly,
It was the ending He hates,
And, 'Your full story pending,
Keep your name, and your fault;
And until you end your story,
You are the Temporary Patron
Of Saints who love waiting.'

Then assigned an open booth,
In many-mansioned Truth,
Now Saint Almavity,
(Needing no entreaty
By those listening, who halt),
Tells stories unending,
Which he loves beginning.

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Robert Heard was born and educated in Toronto, Canada, and is retired from work in the city's library system. His avocations are poetry, and illustration.

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