

## Past and Present become One in *Ornithologies*- newsletter interview from Anhinga Press

"...a simple equation for the book would be 'bird = father.' Unfortunately, according to *Entertainment Tonight*, birds are out now. Squirrels are the new birds." -- Joshua Poteat

The first thing to know about interviewing [Joshua Poteat](#) is not to expect long, complicated answers about his poetry or his life. He's way too humble and real for that. Not that his poetry isn't phenomenal, or his life, interesting.

Joshua Poteat's unusual childhood, as the son of a biologist/environmental scientist/avid naturalist, set the stage for his recent literary success.

"I was forced to learn bird calls, many of which I have forgotten," Poteat said. "As a child, I would come home from school and find an injured seagull or cardinal recuperating in our bathtub more often than not."

[Ornithologies](#) is the rare stage on which past and present collide beautifully and coherently. Lucid and hearty, *Ornithologies* stirs the imagination. According to Poteat, readers interpreted the poems in *Ornithologies* exactly as he meant them. But, as with almost everything under the sun, there's always an exception.

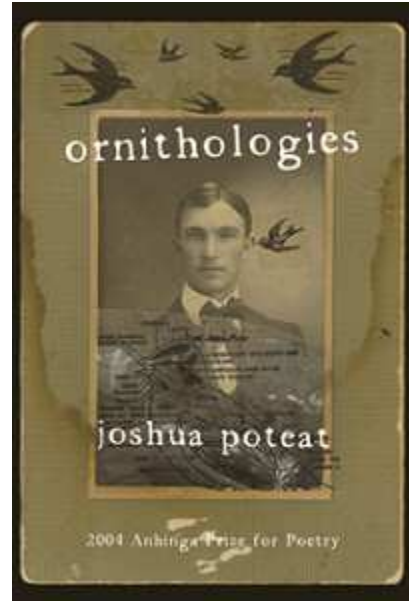
"The problem with persona poems is that readers aren't quite sure how autobiographical they are, if at all," Poteat said. "During my Florida reading tour, I offended a guy in Winter Park with one of my poems. You know you're doing something right when that happens."

"'Were you the one incinerating those owls?' was a question I was asked often," Poteat said.

Even though *Ornithologies* (named for the branch of zoology that deals with birds), for which Poteat won the 2004 Anhinga Prize for Poetry, charmed critics and readers alike, Poteat maintains an air of humility: He takes himself way less seriously than he has a right to.

Not to mention he's got a sense of humor that could stitch anyone's side.

"I wanted the book to look as beaten up and worn and discolored as possible," Poteat said. "[Anhinga Press's editors] did not agree with my suggestion of hiring several child laborers to scuff and stain each book, so I found a photograph in my collection that did the trick and avoided breaking several Florida labor laws."



Though much of the book exudes an elegant, almost sweet sadness, many of the book's portions induce happy feelings for Poteat because they focus on the southern landscape.

"There are moments of happiness here and there, at least for me, especially where landscape is concerned," Poteat said. "The southern coastal landscape of my childhood somehow brings me joy."

Of course, Poteat's modesty made it a little difficult to get him to admit having or not having a favorite poem in the book. And of course the answer eventually wheedled from him caused a chuckle.

"Just between you, me and the newsletter readers, I kind of like those half-assed Irish Curse sonnets, because they are simultaneously silly and sad."