

THREE POEMS



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ANIMALS

A narrative is all right so long as the narrator sticks to words as simple as dog, horse, sunset.

—EZRA POUND

Admit it, you wanted to shoot that dog
who stood barking on the edge of town,
right from the start of sunset, until
the clock in the square struck twelve
and the hotel's horse started to whinny,

sending you out from your musty bed
to the window that you flung open,
before sticking your head out and shouting
in bad French "Fuck off, animals,
some of us are trying to sleep here!"

At that, the dog barked louder, faster,
and the horse galloped round the field,
and a rooster, fooled by the noise,
began crowing, and two cats fought
openly, on an adjacent wall.

Closing the window was all you could do,
that and turning on the shower until
the animals were lost in the hiss,
and you slept there on the bathroom floor
till light brought the squawking of gulls.

THE LAKE

The man stood at the edge of the lake
at dawn. Behind him, in a field,
a scarecrow's rags fluttered in the wind
while a sleepy owl gave a last call.
The man stood there, as if made out of stone.
Only he could have told he was blind.

It was a lake like this had made him blind,
a similar-sized, though much warmer lake
in a province ruled over by a stone
god who'd stood in a sacred field
and who'd banished, forever, the wind
that ancestors had said used to call—

and when a big wind comes to call
it takes the houses away. Being blind
he could easily see this, and the wind
was red, not like this northern lake-
wind that came over the grassy fields
with all the colour of grey stone.

The man bent down and picked up a stone
which he threw in the lake. A call
echoed out over the water and fields,
long and plangent. It isn't easy being blind
and standing at the edge of a lake
in a cold and unseasonable wind,

standing there, wishing you could wind
back to days when you *saw* the stones
you threw in a very different lake,
to the screeches of monkeys, the calls
of parrots—the reckless, blind
assumption that days in the fields

would always be like this, and fields
would stay bare and brown, no wind
buffeting scarecrows, a god of stone
that didn't save you from going blind
because of a worm that swam in the lake,
and a mother that rushed to your wild calls.

The man stood there. Behind him, fields,
winds away, he heard those wild calls
when his eyes turned blind, turned to stone.

THE TUNNEL

When they opened the manhole
on the street outside our house
I wanted to climb into it.
I could hear the rats calling.
I could hear the smugglers
manhandling kegs of ale.
I could hear the engine
of a midget U-boat
making inroads from the sea,
and behind it, whispered German,
what these bored submariners
were saying they'd do.
I knew the tunnel went on
down the length of Ireland
and I could row for weeks
in my home-made dingy
before I'd hit the southern coast,
with my strapped-on torch
getting weaker, my water
and sardines running out,
but already I could see
the walls lightening, hear gulls
at the tunnel's end, then the strange
accents of Cork fishermen
who stood and watched me emerge.