

Friesian Herds

Among the bulrushes, and the blackened clumps of nettles,
 Marsh-marigolds, sorrels, flecks of yellow
 In a green weft, the slow drift of cattle
 Browsing, nibbles away at the back of my mind.
 Now in the autumn, with the ground mists
 Rising around them, watered and fed,
 Instinctively tired, they lie down to rest.
 Their light is an orange sunspot, miles to the west.

And I clear a space for them, in the Great Mind.
 A few flat acres, the wraiths of trees
 In the grey of oncoming rain,
 And lapwings, with their otherworldly cries
 Of disenchantment, endlessly shifting their ground
 Like metaphysicians, breaking the peace
 That was before the beginning, and will be after the end—
 A few flat acres, on the north German plain,

Strung with electric fences, voltage pulsing
 With the rhythm of the human heart,
 Spasmodic, violent. That, and nothing else,
 Is what confines them. Their mottled blacks and whites
 Woven, like eschatology, in the fabric of art,
 The old Dutch masters, are false to them in the end,
 The blobs in the background
 Tugging at feedracks, drinking their fill from artesian wells

In theological innocence. Were I the God
 They stumble towards, drooling cud,
 The cloven-hooved, in their mulch and clabber world,
 I would exempt them from biblical evil
 Flooding the mudflats, and the windswept polder country,
 When the plug is finally pulled
 Around Cuxhaven, and the dykes implode.
 I would let them go on grazing, below sea-level.