

Charles Borkhuis

## ANIMAL IN EXILE

after a hard day at the zoo  
you may end up

staring through the bars  
at a curious ape in exile

and when eyes meet  
you might laughingly mistake him

for the *talking animal*  
who has a few words for you

or is he just a remnant  
of your prehistoric past

that will one day emerge  
as the absent-minded

domesticated you  
searching for the remote in the dark

the cozy you  
little more than a character

out of a comedy of errors  
sprawled out on a couch

watching a laugh-track sit com  
while the family dog

that repository of the foreign  
and forgotten puts a paw

on your shoulder growls  
and nudges you to slide over

## FINAL ON FRIDAY

today's class is on the sublime  
and the ridiculous

rule one - you are not allowed the sublime  
rule two - you can have some ridiculous

many's the time a sublime alchemist  
has tried to forge one from the other  
and ended up with fool's gold

of course purists will argue that the material  
cannot birth the spiritual  
or visa versa

and even derrida had to admit  
he couldn't deconstruct a fart

say you what every buddhist knows  
there's always a little ying in your yang  
if only a memory

einstein who bent matter and energy  
into a pretzel said he was religious  
but maybe he was just covering his bets

perhaps no one has ever actually counted  
the angels on the head of a pin  
or how many neurons it takes  
to screw in a thought

or for that matter how nothing  
comes from something  
or visa versa  
ah the old paradoxes  
go now I think you are ready

## ONCE AGAIN

what's dropped wants nothing more  
than to escape by any means necessary  
to bounce then crawl under a couch or chair  
to be left alone bereft of human hands  
to lose itself and be passed over  
invisible as a child at play  
under the dining room table

as though it were there all along  
but unseen free to drift between words  
and their morsel of meanings  
to wander between the elder's legs  
through underground tunnels  
and dark passageways that connect  
one world to another

so one may travel while barely moving  
from the path of the toy soldier on the rug  
to the rug itself with its curious mauve  
cross stitching of thoughts and things  
like laces pulled through shadowy shoes  
but nothing or no one escapes for long  
lost only to be found again by a future stranger  
who picks up an old coin and wonders  
how long was it there before it found her

## BIT PART

who was that sweet lolly in the dark  
come to nipple raise me  
an octave or two  
then tie my sentences in knots

I'm your jack  
pumping up the back of your lamborghini  
bit out of season still  
I can tell a come on from a walk on

I play mostly to the curtains  
and the mirror now  
different times of the day different strategies  
for rehearsing your afterglow

reality comes in stages  
one must act it out as if a word here  
a leg there makes all the difference  
tricked up and wound 'round an embrace

disappearance in a mood swing a phrase  
that sticks in the heart and vibrates  
like a plastic spoon in jello  
where are you now where have you ever been

one loses one's skin and takes on another  
for the demands of the role  
in which you play the wife cheating  
on her lover with her husband touché

one eats the bridal flowers like a horse  
and spanks the bishop for his indiscretions  
one burns at the stake for stuttering  
and licks the flames as if they were a hole in the wall

through which an insect crawls  
you're the insect the consummate actress  
who's escaped detection I'm an escape artist too  
in love with your feral dislocations

## PRE-FLIGHT INSTRUCTIONS

why push a pen across oblivion  
whose giant ear is listening in

what kind of joke who's dreaming  
this story I've become

what's left when the void  
has been breathed in

and you feel yourself  
collecting in the corner

with the dead skin and hair  
to reflect upon the sweating glue

and feel the flowery paper  
peel off a hotel wall

or hear the syncopated drip  
of rain through a sewer grating

words dribble forth  
I hear you as I speak

clocks tick me past memory  
no more than a spreading cloud

an endless story  
cut short by a stray bullet

shot skyward that must eventually  
land somewhere