

The Zoo

For Gordon Rohlehr

The stoic, old man, nodding goat,
the rear-feet, knock-kneed antelopes,
with slow, translucent, deep, autumnal
watercolour eyes:

grave birds: vulture & raven,
rook, and all sorts of crows:
hawks, like hooked councillors:
and the ostrich, that withered

scholar, camel-like, with knobby
knees and x/act feet: the dodo,
like someone you know: sophisticated
uncle; and the cats: those

velvet devils, nerv-
ous leopards, dreaming tygers with black paws
for pillows; the blue
electric panther with moonlight in her eyes
smouldering aloof

the lions
sitting in the sun like dozing, stretched-out golden
thunder

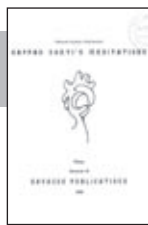
then those queer creatures: the little boar-
rhinoceros, with stumpy tusks & bony face
pushed permanently into flatt-
ened grunts; the long-

tit-

udinal & arrogantly vert-
ical giraffes, with tip-
toe heads; and parakeets
with cries like falling plates

and those thin awkward little gentlemen,
the penguin, posing in clerical black
& white, stand-
ing stock-

stance with blink-
ing, pale, pink eyes;
even their transformation into duck-
sleek, underwater innocence like that of seals -



the seals
themselves like large sad shell-
fish, cling-
ing to the rocks in lieu of shell -

cannot conceal the fact
that where they play or flap
is merely minor freedom for them:
that all these birds & beasts:

the polar-bears like solid smiling ghosts,
sitting to their necks in yellow water,
cracking nuts,
the monkeys, act-

ive lion-rats,
alert, red-bottom'd, india-rubber acrobats,
picking their family fleas
or swinging one-hand hellos from a pole:

the flap-ear'd, bumpy-headed, dusty-coloured, loco-
motive elephants, with small savannas on their
backs,
flexing their hose-pipe nose & grinning for a bun -
are merely gathered here so we can gape &
celebrate their public idiosyncrasies -
so we can pause, point, peel oranges,
buy buns to throw,

clutch at each other's sleeve
and feel we recognize some old acquaintance
sticking out his thong,
our next-door neighbour the orang-

outang

.

But towards dusk we came upon flamingoes
with delicately fashioned, bent, and coloured
chinese heads; with necks like poured

venetian glass; with red reed legs
and sunset-softly-tinted-coral-coloured wings

Here on this river where they feed
continually splashing silence on their slender

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stilts and still protesting at the solitude
with their surprising tints, we lost the sense
of caged & circumscribed freedom - the geometric
shadowed zebra
eating goat-wise at the wall -
Here by this gentle water, these flamingoes,
court of pleasant mandarins, these
fragile, sibilantly feeding herds,
these fishers of such fine perfection
they do not splash a sound:
unlock
the ugly gadgets of the zoo: release
the leopard, lemur and the kangaroo:
so that the eagle finds again his perch,
the polar bear his berg,
the monkeys hanging one-hand down
forgets his act and
falls
the flopping seals become sea-
cats again, torpedo-shaped with whiskers
and lions stretch & roll their golden thunder down
the quivering river of the crocodiles
And we this autumn evening falling
watch in our minds the pink flamingoes rise
and rise/ing wish them well for well
we know their wings bless bird & beast
and pray they slumber well
and that the nervous cat, the do-
cile dog, the never-changing camel
find in these silent fleets now sailing heaven
release from this long xile's solitude still holding
them



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