

PETER MUNRO
Animal Kingdom

*Shall I be still in suit?
Have I no harvest but a thorn
To let me blood, and not restore
What I have lost with cordial fruit?*
—George Herbert, “The Collar”

*“Sir,” she replied, “even the dogs
under the table eat the children’s scraps.”*
—Mark 7:28, NEB

1. Survival of the Fittest

I wish I moved like a beast, brutally
obedient to all animal law,
haunch and foreleg drawn taut to beautifully

strike prey or take a female. Smooth on paws
of a cat, I would pad through a silence
altered when lust and hunger spread my jaws

to a roar, thoughtless in the violence
stringing sinew to bone, which iron and sperm
whisper blindly through my core. If I sensed

estrus, the urgent, red tempo of germ
cells, and mounted in a surge sharp as fire,
the female’s ruff in my mouth rolling warm,

and if I stalked through the dark unattired
in wisdom but full of the awful grace
that every animal bears like desire,

I would not chafe this diction of restraint
against my skin until I am erased.

2. Antistochastic

Since I am a beast it would make sense
to move like one, to drawl the language
of the skin across this present tense

slowly, dripping with sunlight, languid
in my pleasure. Sleek as a porpoise
leaping, muscling up from liquid,

I should flex my blood with no purpose
beyond the kill or sex. But strictures
inflect me and I loudly practice

the law scribed in this richly textured
cassock, this word made meat that I wear
past imperfect, fractaled Scripture

coded along procreation's hairs,
chromosomes raveled like asps and smooth
as adders, where, latent in word-pairs,

a lion dies of a broken tooth,
a lamb frisks in the garden of youth.

3. Knowledge

Attired in wisdom, I am struck
stupid. Commerce in the lingo
of squander renders my nut shucked,

money-brained. Wild as a dingo,
blood pelts whole vocabularies
past a future tense with jingos

and hucksters, power and glory,
preachers and prophets and cut-rate
retail sales. Mine offertory

biddeth high unto Big Mac. Great
value. Full meal deal. Extra cheese.
Communion and fries consecrate

glut. Numbed by abundance, I feast
against the death my dearth betrays.
I am the kind of bartered beast

who knows, and thus must choose to pray,
who, knowing, forgets to be praise.

4. Moral Animal

This narrow kingdom of death
defines my prayer. When germ cells
encrypt scripture and a deaf,

blood-hardened penis retells
laws of nature, when a bleached
blonde sags to all fours and sells

lots drawn on her womb, her breached,
Golgotha portal hammered
at by three-piece-suits who preach

money, and when I stammer
my want, hungry and alone,
what harsher desire clamors

through the harsh desire I own?
I praise from narrow domains
hollowed in tablets of bone

because these peptides contain
living, as the law ordains.

5. Cryptich

My soul has a bone-splint.
I pray the prayers in genes.
I repent my blue-print

for flame and tongue. I sing
my want in the inner
sanctum of want. I glean

fallen crumbs, a sinner
claiming procreation
rights, or at least dinner.

My rough incarnation
slouched in that instant God
set self-replication

sets God in motion. Flawed,
body split from the holy
as if a crypt for awe,

molecular, lonely,
I bear God, slowly.

6. Animal of the Cloth

Wearing the vesture
of a dog, I've humped
among investors

in the fuck biz. Pimps,
and their prodigals
in high heels and simp-

ers, weave madrigals
of silk and honey,
promise miracle

stiffeners, money-
sleek love or at least
good times. All moony-

eyed, I've pierced the greased
birth canal and touched
Golgotha's bright beast

bleating praise, the breach
mitosis completes.

7. Meiosis

Each gamete chipped
off the old block,
each image spit-

shined and half-cocked
haploid as Christ,
each soul unfrocked

by body and twiced
nicely, each skinned-
alive and sliced-

in-two gene-skein
coded with ad
campaigns absconds

with one half Dad
and Mom, burgles
the crypt of sad

news, those squiggles
Jesus juggles.

8. Oracle

If the knit
between soul
and flesh sets

soul equal
to flesh, I'd
loaf easy,

the lush juice
of a plum
smeared across

my tongue. Glazed
purple skin
offers praise

enough, burst
in my mouth,
if I trust

the dark fruit,
my sweet heart.

9. Broken Word

Blood-thumped
iambs
unslump.

Enjamb-
ment breaks
my I

AM a-
cross lines
that ex-

alt mol-
ecules,
the syl-

lables
this an-
imal

conforms
to form.

10. After the Assay

Bro
ken
by

Dar
win's
wis

dom,
I
claim

de
sire
is

blazed
breath:
faith

less
death.