

Poems

Hugh Dunkerley

Imperial Carp

The carp in the moat
of the Imperial Palace in Tokyo
rise, nibble at the cherry blossom
snowing down through the traffic
reflected in the moat of the carp
of the Imperial Palace in Tokyo

Plastic Heron

The plastic heron stooping by the pond
fools me again as I wait for it to move.

Decoration, decoy or scare-bird,
I'm never sure quite sure of its purpose.

Certainly there are no goldfish left
in the still, weedy pond -

the pair of actual, patient, high-stepping
birds have seen to that,

each one a rickety contraption
of wings and legs gliding in,

somehow getting itself on the ground
before folding up like an umbrella.

Motionless, vaguely ludicrous now,
the plastic bird balances on its one metal leg

locked in a blind staring-match
with its own unseeing reflection.

Swallows

Kejimikujik National Park, Canada

Above the river
swallows crowd the air,
a frenzied choreography,
the myriad birds nibbling
at the swarming haze of insect life.

Under the long porch,
you show me the nest,
a small grey turret daubed onto the eaves,
the bald heads of the young
peeping like tiny warriors over its parapet.

When an adult slips, bat-like
into the coolness,
the air is brushed with wings,
the bird a flickering presence
inches from our heads.

The Whale

Waterless, it lay under the sky
while the outgoing tide
nibbled at the pebbles
and the loud, airborne gulls
swooped and flocked over
the grey acres of its blubber.
Its breath was another tide
blasting over the stones, becoming
more laboured with every roar.
The small rheumy eye
flickered and waned
and the wilting flukes
stirred the pebbles, thrashing great pits
along either side of its body.
People came to watch its death:

dogs flew across the stones,
then stopped short, nosing the air,
puzzled by what they had thought
was part of the landscape;
a cloud of fishy breath
whipped downwind
and children screamed happily,
running to dodge its clownish shower.
Later, men with ropes arrived,
but by then the tide had left
and was mingling with the horizon.