
Three Poems

Somatic Sympathy

Raising Meat Birds

Fish in a Barrel

By E.F. Schraeder

These poems explore moments when animal---human intersections raise questions about the continuity of animal ethics and perspectival compassion. Considering topics from hunting, fishing, and raising meat birds as choices, the poems offer insights into the imposed obligations of vulnerable populations as well as the legitimacy of anthropocentric choices and preferences.

Somatic Sympathy

November morning air breathes back mist,
his arms stiff in a checkerboard wool shirt,

patient green eyes aimed into the brush.
He points the sights on a lean, doe, her short tail

flipping. She freezes, huffs her nostrils, then
glances up, brown eyes lock with a hunter's,

who stares back, his finger sweating
on the cold trigger, steady, but still

*I dropped the gun to my side without firing,
and that was the last time I hunted.*

Grampa glanced out the window, adding,
She looked right at me.

-E.F. Schraeder

Raising Meat Birds

She talks about feminism and food sustainability,
biting into a salty gas station hotdog,

then explains her partner raises meat birds
but she's not sure how she feels

about the killing. Her eyes search me
for a nod that doesn't arrive,

as if how she feels or my approval
unlocks some mysterious equation;

no matter how sharp the point, opinions
float their perspectives like unstrung balloons

compared to the ignored lives
swallowed by habit and choice.

She says they both care about balance,
work to make sure the birds are happy.

At least, until the axe

-E.F. Schraeder

Fish in a Barrel

I stood over the white plastic tub full of trout
the smell of dirty lake and fish rising,
watching their slender bodies curve,
twisting in the small circle of their world.

Where are they from, I asked,
my small finger dipping
into the water's surface like a lure.

Pa caught them at the lake.
For dinner, Mom said,
waiting for the steady tears

that came down my cheeks,
drawn lines of disappointment
connecting the tiny losses over
our cruelties and whims.

A fish nibbled at my finger,
pleading, as I did, for delivery.
We took them on a slow drive,
returning to the lake.

-E.F. Schraeder