



COW SONGS

d press 1999 sebastopol

Cover painting by Jane Booth

SINGING TO THE COWS

When I see the moon rising
I think of a cow I saw in Arkansas
and I feel sad.

When I think of the years passing
and worry about my knees blowing out
I only need to see your cow eyes
and I'm rejuvenated.

I think of you every day
sweet heifer on the ferryboat
between Sebastopol and Bucyrus.

Looking through an old yearbook
I see your bovine face
and remember you on rollerskates
at Mel's Drive-In.

VARIABLES OF EXISTING CHOICES

Shorty is now in Glen's feedlot.
What if I stuck him in a hotbox—
a square of electrified wire fence?

Turn on the juice so this steer understands
the concept of fence.

You may call it a concentration camp,

but I call it home.

CATTLE ARE JUST AN EXCUSE FOR SHOOTING COYOTES

Lest decomposing acids or infectious
pests affect your stock and feed
take heed.

Here's hoping we are blessed
with bountiful crops
and all our calves drop well.

It's midwinter spring.
I notice rhythmic modulations—
the last leaves on the cottonwoods

and birds turning and turning in the air.

CANIS LATRANS

Coyotes run with the herd.
Cows pay no attention.
I take a bead on one,
and Trickster says, "Caio, Dude!"
and weaves through my sights.

OM OM ON THE RANGE

I received a pamphlet advertising
an artificial vagina, a liquid semen
refrigerator, and a trans-jector
electronic ejaculator.*

*You use it, you keep it.

WIND

The wind is cousin to the night.
It gyres the hawk's flight.
Color it glacier blue.

A corridor for gale winds—and
sylvan meadow whispers,
caresses, playful darting zephyrs.

The valley below draws off the warm air.
The wind doesn't blow in Kittitas.
Yakima sucks.

RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

At first we were cowhunters.
Texas in the 1830's. We were called
cowboys because of our youth.
Cowpokes poked cows to their feet
through the slats of the cattlecars.
A cow to a cowboy is anything
he can drive.

CRITICS AREN'T AGREED

upon meaninglessness. Knowing
the tack helps in taming a maverick.
It's some struggle, how to place

the what where. A running *W*
will put a horse on its knees.

NOTES ON THE BACK OF A FEEDBILL

FIRST INSCRIPTION: "Take that statue,
i.e. Hammarabi Code

I. Qualification

A. Ontology

1. ()

...O. it's base Overpowering

...6.023 times10 to the 23rd

II.

A. Whitespace

1. Points to that which transpired"

...a broken odelisk

WASHINGTON SWINE SEMINAR

I write this from the Holiday Inn
where I attend the Western Washington
Swine Seminar. African Swine Fever is
an expanding threat to American hogs.
Note depreciation and shrinkage.

Between the ten year farm inventory
and depreciation allowance bit and
irrigation system design capacity functions
there's a bluesy sax thing with moog rhythm
on the Musak.

DUKE'S MIX IN WINTER

One cow rubs her ass on the feeder,
one hits the dustbag, one butts an intruder.

Two magpies pick at frozen grain,
then walk like fat Z's
towards the squeeze chute.

Fog filters the light,
sagebrush just visible over the hogpen.

Don't fret— it's a cow's life.
There's a growing cavie in your womb
singing for another bale of first cut hay.

A *Surefire Heater* in the water trough.
Dry snow caps each fencepost.

LIVING WELL

October *Family Circle* special issue
contains Mrs. Earl L. Butz's
Russian Noodle Casserole.

Says Earl, "When my wife wants to be thrifty, we have casserole dishes.
They are very nutritious and very tasty, and I enjoy them. Anyway, I've spent my whole life always eating what was put before me."

EVOLVED AND ECLIPSED

I took my pigs for a walk
two gilts and a young boar.
Kicking and barking

we frolicked in the fields.

The moon arose.

The moon descended.

The bear and the hunter,

the warrior, the lovers

CALF GRAFT

Count the stock. And again,
still one heifer missing.

Down by the west fenceline
four legs stick out of a catchditch.
Eyes rolled back, nose bleeding,
my presence adding to her fear,
"Lay back, Cowslip, relax."

More than I'd rope and tie,
I wrestle her to her feet.
Moaning, she makes for the feed.
She'll be all right if she can walk and eat.

Later, I tell my irrigating buddy,
and he guesses I was some kind of lucky.
I see a hide hanging on his fence and
asked if he had lost one, he replies
"Just born and coughed up its guts.
Skinned it out and bought a new calf
off a cow with a blown udder.

Put this new calf in the dressed skin.
Cow finally took it for her own, after
I sprayed deodorant up her nose.

This morning I smell something dead—
that skin rotting from the calf's heat."

BILLY MEETS THE CANYON SPIRIT

Dawn of the manicured fingertips.
Billy swallows a handful of peyote
and pulls himself out of bed
and away from the warm senorita.

He walks up a draw and into a canyon
a mile from his hut. The spirit of a bullet
ricocheting. A hiss of cymbals.
Billy's hand trembles.

He blazes away.
He fires six rounds. Reloads. Fires.
He shoots bushes, rocks, holes in the earth.
He shoots bullets at bullets in the breeze.

Billy the Kid shooting in the chaparral.
He outdraws his shadow.

NOW IS LIKE THAT

Driving along 4th Parallel Road, I see
an Angus cow with placenta attached
and dangling umbilical cord, licking
the sack off her calf's face.

The calf staggers and falls, and his mom
nudges him up and goes back grazing.
Like lightning the calf finds the tit.
My first birth of the season.

Around the calf there's a beige halo.
Or maybe it's just the light.

Maybe I should shave?
Leave the mustache?

A TUMBLEWEED CARRIES ITS SHADOW TUCKED IN

Round-up's over and the cattle are culled.
The fences rebuilt and the barbed wire
stored. Now, I'm painting the barn.

I use an electric wirebrush
to get off the peeling paint—until
it catches on the fly of my overalls
and twists into my groin.

I'm out here on the Diamond Hanging J
Floating I Ranch
doing the Bred-Sow-Concentrate Rag.

ECOLOGICAL HAZARD

If it weren't for cats
the mice from the timothy fields
would create havoc. As it is

the cats shit everywhere.

LANDSCAPE WITH LIVESTOCK

Tyger, a house cat, in a still life pose,
as Witch, a barn cat, wends through
amaranth and lambs quarter unaware

—too late—it's flying fur and blurs.

Chitadeck and Oveline look on.

"Shit is sure a funny name for a horse,"
says my son. Chit is gentle, but
Ovy'll twist like a snake in hot water.

The hills above the pump canal
are irrigated with long green shadows.
"Why are those cows standing so still?"
"Those aren't cows; they're bales of hay."

WATER UNDER THE FOOTBRIDGE, ICE OVER THE FENCERAIL

Snow contoured in rococo shapes.
Snow blowing up out of the ground.
Cows with icicles hanging off their noses
doing all they can just to stay standing.

Standing in a row, and when one
has had enough of the wind's edge
she huddles into the herd
letting the next one take her turn.

Later, the moon is beneath Orion.
He's become a retiring sort of chap.
She's more voluptuous than ever,
astronauts in her mustache.

UNTIL THE COWS COME HOME

Toward the satisfaction of constructing
a stunning stanza of meticulous meter,
I muse on the happenstance

of papery whitespace.

.

Where was I?
On the edge of
something of no importance.
"Heaw, up there!"

.

Meanwhile,
on this side of the wall
Bodhidharma sat—
a grove of pine on that.

MAGNIF I CAT

22 below in Badger Pocket.
A foot of snow on the ground, at least
the wind can't burn the grass.
I found Witch froze against the haystack.

ET MISERI FECIT POTENTIAM

And mercy, he hath shown strength
painting the upstairs bathroom.
The color is eggshell white.
Whiteonwhiteonwhiteout.

ANIMA MEA IMPLEVIT MEUM BONIS

My anima fills me with good vibes.
Just dig the icecrystals on the treelimbs.
I drain the oil from the VW bus.
Not a movement in the air but light.

INCENSE FOR EUROPA

Let the following stimulate the gamma
aminoacid transmission to your neuron synapses.

Reactions can be counteracted with a dose of
dihydroxyphenylkalanine.

My horseshed turning out to be a looser
as the horses never use it.

Mount Rainier—an oily silhouette
before the brush of dawn.

My notebook teeming with tootings
and jumbled jottings.

In the hayloft, you revealed the world,
and all the wheels are still spinning.

NEW FEATURES

Counter culture cowboys herding doggies
to Jefferson Starship—bleeding shorthorns
and Ayurvedic medicine.

The Taittiriya Upanishad sustains me.
I am that food which eats the eater of food.

Utilizing the Cosmic Cube
The Beatific Buckaroo bores to the root
to thrall you with the cutting edge of irony.

It is announced—my name is selected
as a prizewinner in the d-Con sweepstakes
(a brand of chemical defoliants)—my prize
is a sweatshirt imprinted with d-Con.
It'll fit on the scarecrow just fine.

DIAMOND HANGING J FLOATING I

I mend the fences.

I tend the herd.

The shit is ten feet deep,
and the shitters play for keeps.

What are you after, they ask,
a hoof in the mouth?

The shit is ten feet deep,
and I can't eat or sleep.

Coyotes yap all night
below the blown moon.

The shit is ten feet deep.

Shine on, shine on.

Hold it down, you buggers,
or I'll rope your ass, I sing.

The shit is ten feet deep
and dear.

Hay has more than doubled in price.

There's no market for feeder steers.

The shit is ten feet deep
and clings like it's alive.

Pour on gas. Set those doggies afire.

Give those cows a kick in the udder.

The shit is ten feet deep
and thick.

Chew your cud, mama,
let those juices flow.

The shit is ten feet deep,
and sometimes it hums.

The shit is ten feet deep,
and here and there a head protrudes.

The Angus are black—
purgatorial beings.

The Herefords are red—
mythological monsters.

The Charolais are white—
easy to spot against the dung.
The shit is ten feet deep
and covers the fences.
The shit is eleven feet deep,
my shovel is hooked to coke.
The shit is beginning to climb,
making inroads through the hills.

O, the shit is infinitely deep
and running still—running.