

Poetry Group

For our August meeting nine of us gathered at Annie's welcoming house to look at poems about animals.

We started with John Clare's 'The Frolicsome Old Dog' (a condition we all aspired to - 'Forgetting, in his joy's excess, his frolic puppy-days are done').

Lawrence Ferlinghetti's 'Dog' was another independent spirit as he passed through the streets of San Francisco ('He doesn't hate cops He merely has no use for them'). The third canine poem was the comic 'Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog' by Oliver Goldsmith which was far more amusing than the title suggests as 'The dog, to gain some private ends, Went mad and bit the man'.

John Clare's 'The Badger' was much darker and described the horrific baiting of a badger by dogs and men. The tough badger fights hard to survive and 'Though scarcely half as big, demure and small, he fights with dogs for hours and beats them all'. He is defeated in the end only by weight of numbers.

Cats were popular too, and represented by T S Eliot's 'Macavity: The Mystery Cat' ('he's called the Hidden Paw') and 'For I Will Consider My Cat Geoffrey' an extract from a long eighteenth century poem by Christopher Smart called Jubilate Agno.

White tigers, lambs, fallow deer and oxen all figured in poems by RS Thomas, Philip Larkin and Thomas Hardy.

Birds were not forgotten. Ted Hughes' 'Hawk Roosting' is implacable - 'There is no sophistry in my body: My manners are tearing off heads'. 'Toroa: Albatross' is described by the New Zealand poet, Hone Tuwhare - 'Day and night endlessly you have flown effortless of wing over chest-expanding oceans far from land'.

Finally, we were moved by 'Owl' written by our own Mike Catling:

'I heard the owl call,
much like God does,
distant and unseen.
Tempted as I am
to leave the well-
trodden path in twilight,
I know he will remain
elusive, hidden, calling
always from one tree
further into the distance
as I seek to approach.
Looking down at me as
I cannot look up at him.'

Terry Whitfield