

1990

# Husbandry

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## Two Poems · *Robin Behn*

### HUSBANDRY

*Marsupial*, he says, *marsupial!*  
holding it up by the terribly naked tail, proud  
as if he's invented the word, or, better yet,

become it: all morning long  
since he'd found it in the henhouse,  
shivering, crouched near the sucked-out egg,

itself no more than egg-sized, really,  
but missing, now, its own furred shell—  
he'd tucked it in his shirt pocket

where it rode all morning,  
bulged and shifted, rested and wrestled  
like a small exterior heart.

Thus, he made the morning rounds,  
feeding all the bigger, the  
penned-in animals.

*It was dropped*, he figured. *An accident*, he figured.  
And hadn't he been dropped, so?  
Hadn't he seen a motherness trot off

swinging the many ones she loved better  
from her swollen underbelly  
like a carillon of sucking bells?

So that now he lived alone,  
miles from anyone, but with so many animals  
an aerial view would lead God to think

*what man lacks so much caring for  
that a plethora of gentle beasts  
gathered around him to soften his days*

so *home* came to mean a thick coat waiting  
for him to rub his fingers through  
at each and every turn: Old Max

and Young Max, the original dogs,  
then Maxes to follow, herding  
the dingy, uncountable sheep,

foreground to the dozens of horses, the  
dozens of long almost-human jaws  
where the words so hard to say

are chewed and chewed  
and finally pronounced  
in glistening field-fulls.

And all this, a set-up  
to bait the wilder creatures  
who come, like the best lovers,

when we're so consumed  
with what we think is happiness  
we forget to watch for them;

who come, nonetheless,  
to visit us domestics, us  
more married animals, to sink,

if they can,  
their long teeth like thoughts  
into the husbanded eggs

and suck out their rightful place in the grand plan  
—egg to egg to egg—by which  
we believe we might circumvent

(by the planned brood,  
the selling off, the day  
to drive the mares to stud)

whatever loneliness  
too many or too few  
creatures makes for.

They come, the uninvited, the wild,  
the still-too-young, out of their wild  
pockets in the woods, into

the farm, just  
visiting—like him, like all  
the planned-for creatures—just

visiting the farm, visiting  
the planet, the particular pocket  
of sun's warmth that nests,

for now, among the other stars  
like galaxy's *g*: at home  
for the moment

language lasts, then off to another word:  
*good*, as in the boy he'd always been, or  
*gimme*, as in, well, now he's unsure

quite *how* to ask for his opossum back,  
since he's lowered it  
—his whole cupped hand into my

whole cupped hand into which  
its little long-nailed feet (birds', maybe?)  
dig, a bit—but he's done

displaying his year's best find.  
Done with the show-and-tell he drove to town for.  
He snatches, tail-dangles it up like a crazy watch

and we, little pocket of fellow-humans gathered, we  
watch as it goes  
back into his pocket (too late, now, *not* to picture

its little dimple already forming, too late *not* to think:  
*pocket in a pocket in a pocket*)  
as he drops himself back

into the old paid-off pick-up's cabin  
that seems to have borne them, and that bears them  
safely home.