

Poetry

# ANIMAL FEAR

*(The Dead  
Zoo, Dubs)*

by  
*Heleana  
Bakopoulos*

## I: The Dream

It was always the same desert.  
I used to wake from it as a child,  
my tiny body pouring itself through its pores,  
as though waking in a dune.  
It was always the same desert,  
with its viscous, sepia air like boiling caramel,  
a mess of wind and debris and bone.

I used to wake from it as a child,  
but now I stay for the whole terrible vision—  
a distant rumble vibrating the ends of my hair,  
a rumbling flurry of dust dancing up  
from the desert floor into my eyes.  
It all happens quick the way the ground vibrates  
my legs with it the way something comes  
even before it comes and beats a tattoo  
into my body and when it comes I am ready  
and quickens and quickens and we quicken  
and it takes my tattooed body into the stampede  
so deeply I see nothing but hooves and in them  
I see it the stampede the many the each

*the world wild with silence  
my body wild with ending*

DEGENERATE  
ART

**II: The Museum**

The bats are spread-eagle,  
not their preferred position of rest.  
Each crevice floods with light;  
a few teeth, hollow bones pulling taut blank wings,  
bellies like crowning babies, naked, hairy, dry,  
and claws fanned, humbled before  
God the man the museumgoer,  
who calls them  
LEAF-NOSED SPEAR-NOSED  
YELLOW-WINGED SAC-WINGED  
names that all mean NAMED.

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One head above all others,  
the deermonster has no plaque next to its corpse, no music  
but the quickly extinguished echoes of chatter  
reaching into its eye cavities from below.  
Its deadness is deafening and true,  
but in its still, beatific menace,  
it could lift a blueblack hoof.  
No one would know.

Antlers wider than a redwood trunk, fanning  
out from a skull, a neck, a spine—a cobra  
poised to snap at milling museumgoers—  
no one could stop it.

My breath quickens beneath it, taking in, flowing out  
*if you are dead if you are dead if you if you if*  
I forget who I am as I breathe into the deermonster,  
into its silence.

**III: The Opera**

It's always the same desert, the same dry bones  
that I give skin, the abortions I rebirth.

*Before the beast, I become so many kinds of alive.*

My eyeballs dance into its sockets, I  
watch myself watching it, be it watching me.  
I inhale from the holes in its face,  
get down on all fours and fill its gaps,  
breathe out and rock side to side.  
I kick our legs, I shake off time and—

i am full of red again  
i am baring my teeth  
i am music  
i am the bats

*Animal  
Fear*

these tiny ghosts surround me like stars  
they hang from my antlers we howl

we are humbled  
we are a tree of sound  
we are many  
we are each  
we are unnamed  
we are

the root the branch the deermonster in unison and  
we charge

#### IV: The Gunk

Humble me, dear monster.  
I give you my animal fear, I fulfill your pose  
with this warm flesh, these blueblack eyes, my rumbling heart,  
the stemcell reincarnation voodoo waterwalking gunk of fear  
seeping into the spaces between your ribs in red.

*I stay for the terrible vision,  
the same desert again and again,  
this wild, silent redness.*

Dear monster, I flood your bones;  
*we who are many are one body of red,*  
the lifegiving injection of animal fear  
coursing through God the man the museumgoer  
when he looks at me, us, and  
bristles.

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