

**AGRIBUSINESS,**  
*a pastoral*

The milk production farm,  
a thousand cattle strong,  
is biologically controlled by its design.  
A workforce in white coats  
and rubber gloves devotes  
its anxious care behind the No Admittance signs  
to newborns in their cells.  
Our tour guide proudly tells  
how Baby gets colostrum fed by intubation,  
then is bottled like  
a Skinner-managed tyke.  
In a grass-free lot with row on row of sheds,  
each hut has its growing cow,  
chained to it like a hound;  
unlike a dog, she's never entertained and petted.  
Growth accomplished for  
this lot, their bits of earth  
are scraped away by 'dozers and replaced with clean.  
The move to an adult barn  
ties the milker down  
to stanchions for her life; there are no pastures here.  
The monstrous udders of some  
are seen to brush the ground.

"It's all about production," our modern Virgil boasts.  
"From artificial insemination to the market,  
nothing is wasted." Even the dead make saleable compost.  
A cow is melting, wrapped in her sawdust sheets and blankets,  
she and her bedding becoming one. "There is no smell."  
One of the ladies asks how she died. "Calving," he tells her,  
then translates, "She died giving birth." A murmur  
of dismay, a keening, breezes among the women,  
recalling all the times it could have been oneself,  
how close one came with this child or the other to death.  
"A loss;" he adds, "A fresh cow's worth a lot of cash."

Only visitors from another world  
could feel for the poor lost cow-girl, her pain and failure,  
for to allow her to be fully creature  
will allow her to be somewhat human.  
One is put in mind of those Egyptian  
gods with animal and bird heads, only  
the body in man's image to make them holy.

Shall we call her Sylvia,  
who in life was just a number  
stamped upon her ugly regulation earrings?  
Granted, the better people tired  
of executions, cockfights.  
But say, what peace is possible  
between the hammer and the forge?