

*David Evett*

TOO HIGH

You've heard me tell the story before—  
how the poets wanted to go duck hunting—  
how they came home that night with chattering teeth,  
wet, and hungry, and empty-handed.  
"I don't know, Seamus," one of them said,  
"maybe we were throwing the dog too high."

But Seamus is remembering  
how when the ducks came gliding in  
they sent the dog up to swim in the sky—  
remembering the feel of the coarse paws,  
one in each hand, then the swing,  
the yelp, the wild rocking of the boat,  
the veer and soar of the startled birds,  
and the dog climbing, tail tucked,  
sprawling and scrabbling at the air,  
then hanging, finding a moment of repose,  
and the silver curve where the low November sun  
caught the black haunch before the tumble, the splash,  
the dog half-wading, half-swimming back to the boat,  
the three of them struggling to haul him in,  
panting, reeking with the rotting muck of the pond,  
all four panting, reeking, rolling their eyes.  
And then the long, damp wait for more ducks.

"I don't know," says Derek. "Maybe we forgot something."  
But Czeslaw leans over the dog,  
strokes the still-trembling flank,  
stiff now with drying mud.  
"Tomorrow," he whispers. "Tomorrow.  
We'll come back.  
We'll get you up there yet."