

The Buffalo, the Beetle, the Bouncing Kangaroo, and the *Bufo marinus* Cane Toad

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Lively (♩=165)

To un-der-stand the im-pact of the crea-ture that says "moo"
U - pon the is-land con-ti-nent, one must con-si-der too
The buf-fa-lo, the beet-le, the boun-cing kan-ga - roo,
And the Bu - fo ma - ri - nus cane toad.
For pur-pose of dis - cus-sion, we will say this sto-ry starts
When a buf-fa - lo in Af - ri - ca lifts up its tail and farts.
The whiff of gas that pas-ses lets some sca-rabs know an ung-
U-late has like-ly stopped a mo-ment to re - lease a pile of dung.

The beet-les set their wind-ward course be - fore the ground is hit
By the pun-gent, fresh con - sti-tu-ents of seve-ral pounds of shit;
The lea-ving, rich in cel-lu-lose, of what the beast once ate
Pro - vide the food and space to brood, so beet-les start to mate.

Vary the rhythm in the verses sensibly to fit the words – don't slavishly alternate quarter and eighth notes. Here are three places that things need to change more than usual:

1. sca - rabs know an ung - U - late has like - ly stopped a
3. fau - na could add - ress it - self to hand - l - ing the
4. Aus - trai-lia ma - ny years A - go did not con - si - der just how

Before, between, and after the five verses:

To understand the impact of the creature that says "moo"
Upon the island continent, one must consider too
The buffalo, the beetle, the bouncing kangaroo,
And the *Bufo marinus* cane toad.

For purpose of discussion, we will say this story starts
When a buffalo in Africa lifts up its tail and farts.
The whiff of gas that passes lets some scarabs know an ung-
ulate has likely stopped a moment to release a pile of dung.
The beetles set their windward course before the ground is hit
By the pungent, fresh constituents of several pounds of shit;
The leavings, rich in cellulose, of what the beast once ate
Provide the food and space to brood, so beetles start to mate.

The rollers and the dwellers and the tunnellers invade,
Continuing a cycle that Egyptian art portrayed.
The rollers push their dung away to gain a bit of space;
The tunnellers drag theirs beneath; the dwellers nest in place.
Though individually small, they transport ton by ton
And bury dung that otherwise would bake hard in the sun,
While mites that hitch a ride on beetles' bodies start to eat
The eggs of flies that otherwise would for the dung compete.

If you're a biophysicist, then you can calculate
That beasts can't move efficiently above a certain weight
By hopping on their hind legs, and the mass this rule allows
Means kangaroos cannot evolve to be the size of cows.
In consequence, the dung they leave is golf-ball sized, or less,
And so Australia's coprophagous fauna could address
Itself to handling the smaller forms of pre-digested leaf,
But not the kind that's left behind by half-ton hunks of beef.

The settlers who brought cattle to Australia many years
Ago did not consider just how cow dung disappears,
And so the growing, lowing herds left calling cards around
Which, sun-baked and inedible, were occupying ground
Until eroded by the weather, trampled under hoof,
Or taken by the termites to form floor and wall and roof.
Eventually, despite the fact that Murphy tends to win
When people meddle, hexapedal livestock was brought in.

Not all the coprophagous species introduced so far
Are forming useful colonies. Among the ones that are,
Onthophagus gazella, found in Queensland, flies at night,
When cane toads lurk at dung pads to consume those who alight.
These toads, of course, have been of not much use protecting canes,
While threatening survival of some beneficial strains.
Perhaps a daylight flyer should assume *gazella*'s role,
Or else one tough and fierce enough to fight when swallowed whole!

References:

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