

INTERPRETATION OF A PAINTED LANDSCAPE

This little world is a quiet one. Cattle graze on a rock
jutting out above the bay, while sailboats,
brown and grey, grey and brown, drift above the harbor
like weather-beaten swans. One cow, standing at an angle
to the other members of the herd,

looks as if a strange thought had occurred to her
and almost immediately gone away. Who knows where
the boats are going, and whether the business
taking them there is wicked, or benign? Are the animals
to be loaded onto ships, and shuffled off to slaughter,
or have the cowherds brought the cattle here
simply for the pleasure of spending the morning
by the water? The only people we can see

are represented in profile, or from behind,
so we can't read their features, any more than we
can really know the mind of that solitary cow.

Everything is at the center, and
at the periphery: a landscape values people
at the level that it values other things.
Soon the great grey ships will unwind themselves
from their torpor, take the wind, and depart.
A pair of gulls are so remote, they might as well
be disembodied wings.