

FRANCIS BLESSINGTON

## To Market (Scrabster, Scotland)

A bullock shambles through the maze and bows,  
reverses fast the lane along our siding.  
"Gie 'im back!" I slap alit along the long slit  
till he rears quick rumbles, a murderous pirouette

to an empty pen, and calms; then climbs the ramp  
with clobbering hooves—at last bolted in.  
The speckled snout gapes and glistens  
as my son reaches for the quivering drool.

Down the gangway, along the breakwater  
to these barnboard barricades, the other  
black one-year-olds nuzzle my son's hand  
through the openings and fasten eye-to-eye.

Three times their age, he backs off,  
sees himself reflected below a scar  
down a drooping lash, hears the pounding  
of the thwacking across mouth and flank.

He won't watch the red arm  
at the stick's end, hammering the cattle  
into lorries to feed further in Aberdeen,  
unlike the still lucky on Orkney.

The ferry waits. My son stares at the pen's  
muddy center, like a 'fresh grave in the green.  
I lurch about. I muster "'To Market. To Market,"

as our steam whistle implodes, "*Forgive! Forgive!*"