

DEAN RADER

FROG AND TOAD CONFRONT THE ALTERITY OF OTHERNESS

The sun was hot in the sky
like a muffin in a bright blue tin.

The day was just the day.
The wind was nothing more

than wind, the leaves were leaves
and kept on being leaves.

Frog, however, wondered why
he was Frog and Toad was Toad.

Frog knew he was Frog,
but this strange morning,

he feared he was the wrong one.
His skin felt too clammy,

his eyes too bulgy.
Even his pajamas seemed

that of another creature.
Everything was wrong:

The trees overhead; the birds in them.
Toad, on the other hand,

woke up troubled by how
different he was from Frog.

To him, Frog, was wholly
unknown and unknowable.

The yellow flowers outside his window,
the waterbirds down by the lake

that arrived only in winter,
the dreams of alligators and snakes

that swam through his sleeping,
all made more sense to him

than this Frog in his threadbare suit
and flappy feet.

How odd they both wanted to fold
into the foreign skin of the familiar,

inhabit the Frog and Toadness
of the other—

It is Toad who will understand that to love
the unknown is to say yes

to the ineffability of difference.
And Frog shall find himself

stunned with a recognition
that to love the miasma of mystery

is to say yes to sorrow,
yes to the presence of absence,

yes to the chance that *alethia*
may never rise out of the pond.

Frog makes Toad a plate of toast
with strawberry jam.

He waddles across the room,
sets down the plate,

pours Toad some coffee.
The sun is hot in the sky

like a scone on a skyblue table.
Toad looks over at Frog.

Good old Frog, he thinks.
That bastard knows I hate toast.

Toad spreads the jam like a man
might smooth mortar on a brick

for which there is no building.
Thank you, he says,

Thank you, Frog.

JACK RIDL

THE ARTIST TO THE CANVAS

I see the lost
light of the dead,
the occult of morning,

the same moon
rising behind the night.

The next child is
the next child, each
stillbirth
chasing the disappearing
world.

I let you in the back door,
mortician of beginnings,

tramp
sleeping in a newly mown field.