

## Dynamism of Dogs on a Leash

*Inspired by the painting of Giacomo Balla*

On Tuesday morning I walked the canal path. After the road bridge and before the power plant there's a stretch hidden from town. Tree roots criss cross beneath your feet, rivulets trickle down the cliffs, and across the water pine trees and firs line the slight incline to the clouds. The iron foot bridge is the only man made feature in sight. It takes only a touch of fantasy to imagine even that was built by forest trolls, a portal for them to leave their leafy domain and bury treasure in safety before scurrying back to the trees. It is a magical place.

It was there I saw the old lady with her dachshunds. She was pittering along towards me holding back innumerable sausages with a spaghetti of leashes, endless folds of dark dress crinkling around legs and ankles. She must have come from one of the houses that nested above the canal, else from some earlier century. Her head bobbed as she walked, shoulders swayed, below one could not separate swirling waves of cloth and wagging tail, the whole ensemble a mystic beast of Viking myth: half woman half litter of puppies. It looked too knotted a mess to be able to move at all, but it pattered along at a rapid pace regardless, racing towards me, engulfing the path.

I stepped to one side to let them pass, although doubting there was enough room. As they came closer the dancing movement and chorus of yaps and barks bewitched me, a kaleidoscope of intermingling browns and blacks pulled me in, sent my eyes swirling around with them. Beyond her shoulder swelled glittering undulations of water, were those droplets of spray or a thousand fishes gazing at the scene with bulging eyes? Trees on the hill swung, was it the slight breeze or branches dragged aside by creatures within, all desperate to bear witness? I trembled, certain that I would be swept up and borne away into an eternally rotating sphere of human and dog.

But then she was past and away.

A gale of breath rushed out of me. Canal and trees and footbridge swam back into focus, showing no sign of the other world in their stolidity. I smiled at myself, panting in ridiculous relief, then turned round to view the lady, with dogs, marching away. I saw the heels of her boots kick up as she walked, leashes swing to a crazy rhythm, a host of tiny tails wave madly back and forth, and another tail, longer and more sedate, creeping out under the folds of her dress, waving left and right across the path, sweeping the gravel, erasing any trace that the strange group had ever passed that way.