

Bedlington Terriers

Today's a wet epic of cloud, so I'm reading
about Craigie Aitchison in a book
I was given last Easter. He said

the crucifixion was the most horrific story
ever told, and painted it repeatedly.
Here is a painting of an orange field

bellowing at a wall of unwavering
magenta, where sky ought to be
and a handful of weak stars bloom.

In this one, two canaries flit across a plum
horizon; and in every painting
Christ is always pinned to the cross, dying.

Here are the paintings with Aitchison's dogs
gazing at the suffering Christ. They suffer so
He doesn't die alone. Bedlington terriers

like my sister's, that was lost in a tunnel
last spring, while my sister lay alone all night
praying for her dog to be saved,

and was saved by a man from the council,
who, locating the manhole next morning
raised up that filthy wretch into the light.

The dog was shivering, ecstatic,
black with sewage. Forgiven,
forgiving us everything.