

~~NEVER FAR FROM WATER~~

CLOSE FOCUS

LOOSE-ALPHABETICAL



AFTERNOON FAWN

ARBITER

AUTUMN COIWAGE

BALDCYPRESS in WINTER

CALLIGRAPHY BY NITE

CAPTURING CAT

CHEETAH MAST. of ARTS

DEEP SWAMP

DEMOUMENT - (ELK HUNTED)

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MOOSE

NIGHTKILL

NOT GOOD DAY FOR FISHING

OUETURE BEE FLA-

POLAR MOTHER

POND SCUM

REPTILIAN

SWAMP STANDARD TIME

SEASIDE SIMILE

YELLOWSTONE JANUARY

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CLOSE FOCUS

10 pages

Tiger, Tiger	--published in THE LYRIC
Encounter With <u>Canis Lupus</u>	
Cat-walk	--published in LYNX EYE
High Plains Hurricane	--published in THE LYRIC
In Search of MacDougall's Dahlia	
Pheasant, Hunted	--published in GRAY'S SPORTING JOURNAL
The Interloper	--PSA DIAMOND ANTHOLOGY
Old Woman, Three Cats	--NFSPS PRIZE POEMS
African Synopsis, The Baobab Tree	--published in BUCKLE &
Cheetah, Master of Fine Arts	--NFSPS PRIZE POEMS

## CLOSE FOCUS

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AFTERNOON FAWN  
(*Odocoileus virginianus*)

Your mother is nowhere near.  
She'd have stomped a single muffled drumbeat  
before her rump flashed a white flare.  
And you'd merge with the vanishing point  
in the musky collage of leadwort and tanoak.

Already spotless,  
first ground-hugging pattern gone,  
your budding tines punch through sueded taupe.  
Your splayed legs look as if an inept sculptor  
made your armature from the wrong gauge wire.

Your eyes and nose lavish me with curiosity.  
Clearly you would let me touch you.  
But you must learn certain lessons  
about my kind. The county has counted  
more of your kind than the forest can feed.  
Thickets of decisions have been planted,  
dug up, replanted.

The dilemma grows. Imagining you starved,  
beauty savaged by woodland recyclers,  
hungry children denied your meat, is painful.  
Yet, man the meddler, seldom solves the whole,  
the interlocking rings he doesn't see.  
Nature is well-rehearsed, time her ally.

This minute, young confidant, is ours,  
this wonder we share.  
With regret, I sharply clap you away.

AFRICAN SYNOPSIS, THE BAOBAB TREE  
(Baobab: "upside down tree" in Swahili)

Morning:

An inkblot on the sun  
erupts hundreds of finches like a geyser  
against crazed sky.  
Zigzag in slow motion  
a black quill  
returns to tangled branches of calligraphy.  
Wayward roots that grew bark  
and aspired to heaven,  
lurch upward to await the twilight embrace  
of winged exclamation points who won it.

Afternoon:

Twisted lines on sheets of glare,  
an ancient narrative  
of heathen heat blanches the horizon.  
Bias shade accents last night's lion prints  
punctuated by commas of fallen twigs.

Evening:

Reunited on the moon's page  
birds and boughs compose  
cryptic verses of quiet  
rising above  
the voices of the veldt howling hunger.

ELF OWL  
(Micrathene whitneyi)

The saguaros lose weight and pleat  
as they enter the death phase. It may last  
for years. It's been so long since water  
made good the sky's promises  
there's a rattle in the desert's breath  
not made by the sidewinder.

Leafless ocotillos dangle blips of red  
against day's end, one-spark blossoms  
on the end of long arcs  
like bobbing semaphores  
signaling the elf owl to hunt.

In midnight sandshine, the tiny raptor  
withdraws to its hollow  
in the oldest saguaro. The cactus tightens  
on its own tall thirst, narrowing its cells,  
its clustered spines hard as medieval maces  
guarding its deep secret moisture.

Twice more the pigmy predator haunts the night,  
silence feathering swiftly over empty silence,  
coming home empty.



POLAR MOTHER  
(Ursus maritimus)

Jaws for tearing seal hide and walrus,  
Claws for claiming slippery meals,  
Paws webbed for paddling, splaying on muskeg.

Cause for concern: her cub's shortened foreleg  
Draws itself inward when speed is required.  
Flaws of nature aren't part of her knowing.

Laws of the Arctic are harsh, unremitting,  
Maws more demanding where cold keeps its edge,  
Gnaws just as deeply in June and July.

No chest, just forelegs and powerful neck.  
Low belly-- a hammock. Her slung larder may  
Stow 100 kilos of protein and blubber.

Slow-learning offspring limits her range.  
Show him the tenets of staying alive.  
Go with your instincts for finding more food.

Tow the sea carrion back to the shelf ice,  
Floe and berg extending their range,  
Glow of the night sun refusing to set.

Hair oily and shaggy, the half-ton  
Bear hauls out, rolls dry in snow,  
Glare narrowing already-slitted eyes.

There is her fresh kill out on the floe.  
Where is her tunnel in ubiquitous white,  
Lair with an always-hungry cub?

Heir to the tundra, to northern lights:  
Scare skuas off, suckle mother dry.  
Share a final esker slide. Before parting.

## MAINE FLOOR

Garlands of ground pine decorate the aisles,  
matching the Christmas zeal of city merchants  
before Halloween. Puffs of minuscule spores  
send seasonal smoke signals to customers  
milling around upper and lower levels  
of the woodland mall. New entries are tunneled  
in haste. Fungi set up umbrella tables loaded  
with snacks. Vivid hyperbole seduces consumers  
browsing last year's litter and today's largess.  
Wild blueberries and cranberries flash neon ads  
for the long-awaited autumn rummage sale.

Ants of every persuasion  
are the most numerous shoppers, beetles  
the most selective, squirrels the hastiest.  
But it's the bargain-hunting black bear,  
indiscriminate grasping rude  
who makes me abandon my squatting rights  
of having spied the best wares first.

## LIONESS

Your mate abdicates the role. You rule.  
You don't need that paling tan  
pooling with shade in the parched brush,  
smearing against sunburned veldt gnawed bald.  
You could pose bold as bird scarlet;  
you could pause to cool your bright insolence  
at the only water hole glowing orange  
as monarch wings. Your span doesn't spin  
on daily choices between locusts  
in the nerve center or grassfire in the throat,  
doesn't wheel on trembling limbs  
supporting fear and thirst.

You don't need camouflage to raid the night,  
parting zebra stripes, stropping your fangs  
on kudu bone. You are Artemis,  
bane of the grazers, eyes like arrows,  
an exercise in dominion for your subjects  
never to forget their ranks in the realm.  
Your coat of arms should be iridescent  
with pride colors-- royal blue, gold, purple  
should radiate rampant where you preyed.

And when at last you lie down with the lamb,  
do it in spectral splendor.



## CALLIGRAPHY BY NIGHT

Three migrating cranes  
Brushed their inky strokes across  
The waxing moon's empty page.  
In silvered silence  
We read their cryptic verses  
Like an ancient haiku scroll.

Many North American natives believe that wild game makes a present of itself to a worthy hunter. The debt is paid by a man taking no more than needed to feed his family.

DENOUEMENT  
(Cervus canadensis)

Just after dawn the old wapiti arranged his headgear among dark branches and faced, unseen, his stalker, yards away. Standing still as a pine bole, he watched the human make ancient noises with antlers against tree bark.

The watched waited-- a long time for a kind geared to minutes. Matched to mosaic shadows, he scanned the high forest. Soon he made a new sound; it trebled through the cervine brain, triggered nerves dormant since his last rut battle.

Two autumns ago, the big bull was driven from his cows and his browsing choices to heal in cedar silence. Nomadic now, wedded to solitude, he had no desire to encounter his kind. Disgruntled at any intrusion, he was baffled by his attraction to the man. Lately he felt an unknown need. His spring nubs were sore too long. Growing a six-point rack wearied him. Old wounds panged in his forequarters, his bones ached. His weight was hard to raise.

The human had tracked him two days; he knew the man wanted him. His blood whispered, telling him the man offered something he wanted. The wapiti's flanks swelled, shuddered on a long breath of piney morning. His massive neck maneuvered his pride free of limbs and brush. He bugled his decision high and clear to the woodland canopy, turning to offer his great hart's heart, startling the man with his nearness.

The hunter's sights came up true and swift.  
Grateful, he took the gift.

ENCOUNTER WITH CANIS LUPUS  
Northern Montana, 1995

He's no loner.  
The stance, the stare  
confirm him. Pack leader.

He feels no need to summon the others.  
My rabbit gun stays shouldered.  
Startled into perfect stillness,  
neck hairs alert,  
communion is a thrumming wire,  
predator to predator.

So much is coiled in his laser eyes:  
lessons in alpha honesty,  
millennia of wolf wisdom  
filling the dark doors of his pupils.

Pale ocher eyes admit everything,  
it's all there: the taste of warm blood,  
secrets of the dominant female,  
ritual hierarchy in moonrise, battles  
of rank, his the sole right to breed.

His eyes do not blink.  
In a swift curve of light  
I enter for a moment  
the pure heat of their certainty  
  
and forgive all their knowing.



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## ENCOUNTER WITH CANIS LUPUS

Fir-lined Montana morning. Backcountry  
brown and viridian lacing every angle,  
seasoning each breath. I heard wolves

last night after moonrise.  
Blue ice peaks on my spinal graph.  
No chance of seeing them. Yet I wish.

My gaze veers. A sudden presence. Startled  
into perfect stillness, neck hairs alert,  
communion pulsates, predator to predator.

He's no loner. The stance,  
the stare confirm him. Pack leader.  
Freshening a claim when I appeared.

He feels no need to summon the others.  
My rabbit gun stays shouldered,  
my walkie-talkie stays on my belt.

So much is coiled in his laser eyes:  
long lines of wolf wisdom,  
lessons in alpha honesty

fill the dark doors of his pupils.  
Pale ocher eyes admit everything:  
sovereignty his jaws decided,

warm secrets of the dominant female,  
the taste of hot blood, deer marrow.  
Lunar-lit rituals of hierarchy,

choirmaster, arbiter, pliers poised  
on a throat, brief challenges ending  
with long muzzles dubbing his shoulders.

Our eyes are locked. His do not blink.  
On a curve of light I enter for a moment  
the pure heat of their certainty

and forgive all their knowing.

## CAT-WALK

Her name is Nefertiti, this tabby  
asserting ancient wiseness, suspending  
all my substance against the wall  
with her gaze-- secret lenses  
of Alice's looking glass eye-level,  
unguarded for an instant.  
Always I've known if I moved with dark  
quick as light I could descend  
one of those twin tunnels when they opened  
to receive impatient night.

As I entered, (did she know?)  
the passage vibrated, still hot  
from her last leap atop the bookcase.  
My trackless feet swirled faint smells  
of fennel and toadflax. Tiny sparks flared,  
died deeper in iris mazes of mist  
and whispers of small things hiding  
in crevices. Ahead, the shafts converged  
in a vault of oak bark, sun-stain,  
leaf-shine. Joy was magneto rhythm, prongs  
of root forks and moon-shed. A trophy room  
was collaged with grasshoppers,  
shrews, bright wings. Shelves held stacks  
of hoarded summers and adventures  
wrapped in fur or sensuous string.

Convolutions of shapes and sounds flowed  
on a weft of black, approaching, receding  
on a vector of velvet. Green was a flavor  
and all other eyes a strong scent.  
Motion was a prolonged spring, a dive  
that never reached water.

Deeper was slow cryptic drumming,  
a flash of gilt and ebony  
lancing through scorched grass  
dissolving in jungle dusk.

Another door: A sly stir in a chamber  
beyond, a brink, a river noise,  
a rush of olive and indigo.  
At my feet a beetle. No, a scarab jewel!  
And I returned to my place  
without crossing the Nile.

IN SEARCH OF MACDOUGALL'S DAHLIA  
Southern Mexico  
(D. macdougalii)

I read it in their eyes: "Senora Loco."  
They recommended Juan who flew sightseers;  
He might be willing to pursue my quest.

His open cockpit plane was old but sturdy,  
His fee was less high-flown than most. He spoke  
My language with a flair. We made a deal.

We winged above the Aztec canopy,  
An undulating inland gulf of green.  
Moist leaves refracted light like peridot.

He'd spotted orchids in the trees, but not  
The flower I described, the specimen  
I showed him in a dahlia genus book.

All afternoon we searched. At last Juan banked  
For home. Sweet air consoled my cheeks, and I  
Found solace in its blue taste on my lips.

Just then, a glimpse; low-angled rays glanced off  
A different shape from flora we had seen.  
"Out there!" I yelled and pointed east. Juan nodded.

He skimmed the myrtles raising dahlias high.  
A spread of ivory cups with pointed petals  
Hailed us, seemed delighted to be found.

Next day my pilot offered four-wheel drive  
To weave our way through rugged plateau woods.  
This unique dahlia is an epiphyte:

Discovered here in Mexico, at home  
On middle elevations, rarest bloom  
Of all, I longed to hold it in my hands.

Its woody stems, two inches thick, had grown  
To forty feet in length, and snaked out yards  
Of dangling skinny roots that touched the ground.

It perched atop a forest, borrowed limbs  
To lift its salutations to the sun.  
Its hosting trees supported wild ambitions.

My guide climbed, minus wings, to fetch my prize:  
Two blossoms. Dahlia lovers understand  
My joy. Enhanced with Kodacolor proof!



PHEASANT, HUNTED  
(Phasianus colchicus)

Earlier,  
I saw you settle, blue and russet,  
ruby haloed eye, white-collared as a CEO.  
I watched you go down in a corn row mounded  
with yesterday's rime, slurried, refrozen  
pearlier  
than the loose-grained humidity falling now.

The dog's nose has discovered you. My eyes  
have not. My boots are moments away as you wait,  
melding  
your camouflage with the surface you covet,  
welding  
your sweet meat to the ground.

Ours is an old pact. You provide food; I provide  
feed and habitat. Now is a contest of waiting.  
Motionless mammal, motionless bird  
rathering  
to let the pointer's trained desperation  
stand close enough to hear its heartbeat,  
gathering  
your feathered mulishness into perfection,  
practicing every avian art but flight.

How do you know this dog will hold,  
curbed  
on this rung of feral urge to catch  
and eat? How do you know this hunter will heed  
protocol that calls for your being airborne?  
My pattern of shot need only pelt the circle  
beyond the canine's flawless freeze.  
Loathing to fly, loving to run, yet you sit,  
unperturbed,  
personification of cocksure.

My boots move slowly closer.  
Your nerves at last become a lighted fuse.  
Prepared or not, I always jump when you explode  
from cover: Instant propulsion, winged missile  
whirring.  
I mend my aim, can't lead you at this angle:  
Blurring  
of collages, fragment thoughts, the atavistic  
stirring  
in my cells. The edge of my sight catches  
the quiver of dog jowls,  
the splayed iridescence of tail sweep,  
corn stubble jiggling in bias light.

My burst of decision matches the bird's.

AUTUMN COINAGE

October switches  
to the gold standard,  
squandering its riches  
in a dither of days.  
Wise to the prodigal's ways,  
the river banks the loose change.

## BACKYARD SEQUEL

After the storms blotted out  
colors and holiday semantics,

wind urges the white oaks  
to make charcoal sketches

on morning. Juncos smudge  
torn edges of bleached sky,

the wide blank scratch pad  
of January's first chapter.

A gray squirrel tail  
raises the question mark

for burnt-out scribes  
and narrowed apertures

awaiting something to develop,  
bleakly toiling toward spring.

BALDCYPRESS TREES IN WINTER  
(Taxodium)

Wading out where blue is deep;  
Wading in where ice will keep  
Flaring trunks in crystal rings,  
Where each frozen ripple clings:

Light reflects on wood and rock;  
Sun's small flares cannot unlock  
Titans from their solid floor--  
Spring must find the key once more.



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CALLIGRAPHY BY NIGHT  
(Grus canadensis)

Three migrating cranes  
Brushed their inky strokes across  
The waxing moon's empty page.  
In winter silence  
We read their cryptic lines  
Like an ancient haiku scroll.

CHEETAH IN A ZOOM LENS  
(Acinonyx jubatus)

She ambles past her grazing nervous prey,  
Dark-spotted hunger, simile for speed:  
A chase machine, a disappearing breed.  
Blonde head aloof, she idles, seems to pay  
No heed to shuffling hoofs. She eyes a stray.  
The healthy bucks set off the herd's stampede,  
Releasing her restraint. Intentions freed,  
She starts her sprint, this cat who hunts by day.

With undulating spine, this specialist,  
Hind quarters pushing sixty-miles-an-hour,  
Soon overtakes the antelope in dust.  
This makes her third attempt; twice now, she's missed.  
She can't always succeed despite her power.  
This time she heard her cubs and knew she must.

THE AFRICAN QUEEN  
(Acinonyx jubatus)

Explosive expletives, light speed  
Define this cheetah hunting prey:  
Designed to chase, an ancient breed.

Aloof, she seems to pay no heed  
To grazing herds. She looks away,  
Dark spotted expletive, light speed.

Alerted, healthy bucks stampede;  
The cat is looking for a stray  
Designed to chase, flaws in the breed.

She's driven by three young to feed.  
Tall shoulders, rowing spine convey  
The oldest expletives, light speed.

She's made her choice. Intentions freed,  
She sprints, the rolling muscle-play  
Designed to chase, perfected breed.

She kills a lame calf for her need.  
She hunts by sight, she hunts by day,  
Dark spotted expletive, light speed.  
Designed to chase. Endangered breed.

CHEETAH, MASTER OF FINE ARTS  
 (Acinonyx jubatus)

I've released you in full color  
 from my camera, from my sketchbook,  
 even uncollared you from dark Egyptian tombs.  
 Capturing your style (medallions  
 of smoldering charcoal on sheet ice)  
 takes all the illumination and motion  
 camel's hair can muster.

Draining my sienna palette,  
 you refuse to keep your canvas context.  
 Unhampered by layers of super-polymer,  
 you complete your spotted streak  
 across the papyrus on my other easel.  
 Your dissident design brushes past my strokes,  
 tracking shadows in my studio, haunting  
 the old passageways, hunting  
 the presiding tomcat, a drab native mouser  
 who may not submit to your dynasty.  
 Shoulders knotted like Osiris's fist,  
 your precedent pushes into dimensions not resolved  
 in pigments or even the bas-reliefs of Pharos.

I warn Tom of your Isis eyes coming, your speed  
 matched with light, and hope he hunches himself  
 in a small niche you can't enter  
 with your leggy serpent length,  
 your heathen haunches and expletive head.

Confrontation comes spitting sudden:  
 Arranging himself on a vacant pedestal overlooking  
 my work, Tom bristles his long lineage,  
 his black leopardship. Smoothing the smug cap  
 of Ptah, he arcs down sovereignty from ankh eyes.  
 Below, your tail tip conveys grudging recognition  
 of your high-flown ebony kin.

It is the artist confronted:  
 You've both made the point. I put away the paints  
 and reach for the sculpting clay.

At midnight my palm slides over your undulating spine.  
 At last, cheetah, you're free--but mine!

CHEETAH, MASTER OF FINE ARTS  
(Acinonyx jubatus)

I've released you in full color  
from my camera, from my sketchbook,  
even uncollared you from dark Egyptian tombs.  
Capturing your style (medallions  
of smoldering charcoal on sheet ice)  
takes all the illumination and motion  
camel's hair can muster.

Draining my sienna palette,  
you refuse to keep your canvas context.  
Unhampered by layers of super-polymer,  
you complete your spotted streak  
across the papyrus on my other easel.  
Your dissident design brushes past my strokes,  
tracking shadows in my studio, haunting  
the old passageways, hunting  
the presiding tomcat, a drab native mouser  
who may not submit to your dynasty.  
Shoulders knotted like Osiris's fist,  
your precedent pushes into dimensions not resolved  
in pigments or even the bas-reliefs of Pharaohs.

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CHEETAH, MASTER OF FINE ARTS  
(Acinonyx jubatus)

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from my camera, from my sketchbook,  
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the old passageways, hunting  
the presiding tomcat, a drab native mouser  
who may not submit to your dynasty.  
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Arranging himself on a vacant pedestal overlooking  
my work, Tom bristles his long lineage,  
his black leopardship. Smoothing the smug cap  
of Ptah, he arcs down sovereignty from arkh eyes.  
Below, your tail tip conveys grudging recognition  
of your high-flown ebony kin.

It is the artist confronted:  
You've both made the point. I put away the paints  
and reach for the sculpting clay.

At midnight my palm slides over your undulating spine.  
At last, cheetah, you're free--but mine!

DEEP SWAMP

Two wading egrets  
in long courting plumage drink  
their last reflections

Sun drops suddenly  
After is not for humans  
A night heron shrieks

Wind stirs brown water  
around cottonmouth coils  
and bald cypress knees

Mist and moon mingle  
Wings and pawpads ply shadows  
Rats and rabbits hide

Now is the hunter's  
Only hunger rules the dark  
Law is ancient here

THE FORGIVEN  
(Pinus taeda)

Three pine seedlings  
I once tried to weed  
out of my bean patch  
now shade my old age

Cloudy autumn moon  
cold moonflowers opening  
making their own light

Upturned wiles wafting  
fragrance-- enticing a moth  
to serve their future

(Calonyction)

orange wings fraying  
against wind not going where  
monarchs go to die

(Danaus plexippus)



LAST STANZA

Blank volumes of snow and moon  
Fill the canyon floor.

I search for poems  
In white that gathers all sound

Rolling down the slopes  
Between doe tracks and pine trunks.

A creaking lantern  
Halos my unbelonging.

Pausing, I translate  
Drag marks underlined in red.

Deer blood writes the theme.  
A distant cougar cry rhymes.

MIGRATION  
(Gorgon taurinus)

High speed shutter at f/11: This field  
the depth of equatorial heat,  
this filter peeling layers of indifference  
off colors, clarifying day's deviant slant,  
incising the tidal wave of wildebeest  
numbing all sense of numbers, hoofs pounding  
for days, separating the Serengeti Plains  
into levitating levels, different densities,  
sound mixed with motion.

Some slip on a mud bank, some stumble  
in the press of flesh. The telephoto lens  
leaps the river, not losing the albino calf  
or the lame mother swimming back to look  
for her struggling offspring. Overhead,  
chaos freezes into still life-- windless  
thorn trees blooming with hunched vultures.  
Beneath, stilled lives pile on a sand bar  
slicing the downstream current.  
A wide-angle, last-frame view of Africa.

CAMERAMAN

Running wildebeest rearrange the grit,  
reels of undulating muscle and hide,  
unstoppable deafening quaking earth  
as bison once rumbled  
over American grama grass; as caribou  
still cross pale negatives of Alaska,  
and masses of overlapped wings of bats  
or birds nullify the sun.

Across the world, Bangkok to Bangor,  
mangrove to man, moving, breathing things  
store their images in my sealed boxes,  
stowaway in the right and left privacies  
of my brain: Each a twin lens reflex.  
Part of the great bellows  
of transmigration from dust to dust.  
Revelations of above and below.  
Multiple versions of light and dark.

MOOSE  
(Alces americana)

Why are you here, shadow creature of forest,  
fen and stream? Out in the open, long legs  
wading dry green, primitive mass posed  
against uninterrupted light.

Over half a ton of purplish brown sullenness,  
dewlap dangling like an amulet.  
Your sudden magnificent bellow causes a stir  
in the distant treeline. Another armed bull  
pauses there, and another, dimly beyond.  
Knowing it is you they must overcome,  
your silent rivals advance no farther  
into your lording space.

Your first autumn, first rut:  
Rack like a park bench, still upholstered  
in velvet. Head lowered in threat position,  
eye repeating the message.

Before the first noisy wield of weapons,  
the first plunge of antlers,  
bigger, more bellicose, you are  
already certain you are the alpha male.

NIGHTKILL  
(Felis leo)

Not for hunger. His motives  
as old as allegiance to his kind,  
the strange cat followed the pride  
for days. Four lithe females, three cubs.  
He was part of kopje shadows and grass  
extravagant with his smell. He chuffed  
his presence on cooling twilight,  
letting his sounds roll downhill  
to bank off termite mounds,  
rattle crumbling basalt.

In the seventh moonless dark, impatient  
sovereignty moved black as his mane  
to snap the neck of each hidden cub.  
And while his blood was high, waiting  
for the females to return, to feel  
their triggered heat for him,  
his oldest bane, always trailing  
death, came near. Jaws that could break  
his hindquarters missed their chance.  
He left the boldest pair gaping  
inches above the torn-out final laughter  
as the lionesses welcomed their new king.



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NOT A GOOD DAY FOR FISHING  
(Larus marinus)

The surf is on edge this morning. And you,  
a lone black-backed gull, hang over me  
and my needy creel like an old decision  
I'd like to move out from under.

Another fisherman comes,  
reel whining expectantly. You,  
anciently wise-eyed, watch his lure  
splash rumpled sheen beyond foam fringe.

You follow it against a headwind.  
Treading air, you wait with beak,  
gullet and practiced patience  
for a strike hooked on barbed steel.

The man hasn't seen your act before---  
just a big gull splitting  
September's hot glare a few feet up  
where our eyes can't stay.

Now it's you who are caught.  
He winds you in, flapping  
like his mackerel, your pinched treble  
sounding snared on a broken music staff.

I fish deep in my tackle box  
for the wirecutters. Once again.

POND SCUM  
(Myxophyceae)

Slimy epithet  
one-celled specks  
greenly merging  
for recognition  
Mindless colony  
snaking over  
backwater  
giving away  
wind's secrets

## REPTILIAN

The sidewinder knows only  
the foreverness of sand--  
maybe supposing it is eternity  
and immortality is already  
in his looping grasp.  
Yet even endorsed with snake signitures,  
the sand is neither content nor patient  
as behooves a metaphor for always.

As I disintegrate into smallest components,  
my dissemination will glisten and roll  
not really free as wind has its way  
or gravity decides one more granule  
is too many on the crest.

Duneside, I watch belly-crawling progress,  
watch serpent wisdom  
abandon the great desert crossing  
and disappear slowly downward  
underneath the isness of sand.

The downside of mammalian mentality sees  
the distinct difference in us--  
the snake made his own decision.

# SWAMP STANDARD TIME

Long-legged appetite in courting plumage,  
still as the stylus on a sundial,  
the great blue heron presides  
over his reflection in a circular pond.

Too far away, the Saturn rings  
of his gilled bull's-eye rise  
to the surface, spreading.  
The heron's leg must not quiver.  
He must let the fish come trusting  
into the jurisdiction  
of his spring-loaded waiting.  
All the heron knows of speed is cocked  
in the curve that propels his beak.

The feathered fishtrap fires and misses.  
Slowly the bird moves his blue shadow  
toward another quarter, reckoning the hours  
in increments of hunger.

SEASIDE SIMILE

One fairy tern  
hovers high  
wings outspread  
on a column of air  
like a white finial  
on Neptune's mast.



TIGER, TIGER  
(Felis tigris)

Night or day, forest or riverside,  
he's only good for a short conflagration,  
not a steady burning. His eyes  
store sparks to ignite flare-ups  
fueled by the scent of food.  
A while he allows his lids to close,  
ignoring his halo of gnats, his head  
lolling above a monsoon-swollen stream.

No urgency in his belly, certain  
of his next meal, he saturates his stripes  
in brown water reflecting short trees  
and tall grass, already hot at daybreak.

Slowly he emerges like a wet sunrise  
climbing the slick bank. He brushes away  
a token scattering of leaf litter to rasp  
his tongue over his latest sambar's flank,  
settles heavily to restoke his fire.

Vegetation and mud explode in his face.  
A lashing hoof connects with his jaw. Bellowing  
outrage, he gains his feet too late. His deer,  
only stunned earlier, has won a second chance.

The Bengal carefully shakes his head.  
He stretches, waning-blaze lazy, eases back  
into the covert water,  
sinking his ache below the surface.  
His luck may burn brighter  
in tonight's forest dark.

## YELLOWSTONE JANUARY

Curtains rise  
a scrim of netherworld steam  
Lodgepole and ponderosa  
backdrop the scene

Boiling earth/frozen pyramids  
perfect the Janus namesake  
Bison silhouettes on watercolor sky  
pose Gaia's production logo

Pale and edgy wintertime  
catches on winter tines  
of an old elk  
January hones itself on horn

Lichens  
beneath ubiquitous white  
hide from muzzles and tongues  
Indigent fare

Hoof-stippled river banks  
lie quietly unreliable  
in the path of sustenance  
January tightens its long hold

Slippery crow-black mud claims  
an unwary ankle fleeing  
the wolf pack The elk must master  
survival this martial month

Brute cold hunches  
in blueing shadows  
its haunches gaining strength  
as night nears

Bears stay holed up  
in hoarded fat  
waiting for spring stardom  
January postpones hope

Well-rehearsed coyotes  
always on cue  
refuse to surrender the stage  
to lobo's comeback

(cont.)

Death  
is camouflaged in a wardrobe  
of designer costumes  
The new year's first triumphs

Flamboyant sets  
attract wide-angle lenses  
Hungry jaws snap  
on narrowing subjects

Beauty is unrivaled  
magnificent  
Perhaps because it knows  
it can't last