

THE INTERLOPER
(Eichhornia crassipes)

Beneath inverted black fir jungle
of water hyacinth roots underweaving
my hidden bayou, my diver's lamp the only hold
with my world, I disturb a concert of stripes:
Hundreds of inch-long fishes silver-slanting
right or left as my hand directs. A king-size
mud cat like Genghis Khan eyes me
from the olive drab floor. And the dark bulk nearby--
my lost boat! Impounded since winter's big storm,
secreted under two broken cypress trees
and clamped listing in a wet/dry vise:
Sun-half of bulbous green vases
feigning innocence with flowers; night-half
of long fringe trimming the propeller
upholstered in velvet. I tear off the slimy grip
and feel hairy stalactites creep closer,
determined as topside kudzu. Armies of young trees
wade out to make a stockade. Roman-helmeted
herons patrol the spreading perimeter above,
weapons spring-loaded, lances plunging.
The mighty Khan rules this secret space, phalanxed
by armored turtles. And I, lingering nakedly spellbound,
born slave to light and lungs, must fight myself free.