

~2~

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 a flare-up  
fueled by the scent of dinner.  
For awhile he allows his lids to close,  
keeping his whiskers haughty  
above a monsoon stream.

No urgency in his belly, knowing  
where his next meal lies, he saturates  
his stripes in brown water reflecting  
down-turned leaves already hot with morning.  
His ears flick away gnats' tunes.

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

Vegetation and mud explode in his face.  
A cloven hoof contacts his jaw.  
Bellowing outrage, he gains his feet too late.  
His deer has won a second chance.

The Bengal shakes his head with care.  
He stretches, waning-blaze lazy, easing  
back into the covert water, this time  
sinking his ache below the surface.  
His luck may burn more brightly  
in tonight's forest dark.