

## THE ANIMAL WAY

### ANIMAL WIVES

"We know what the animals do, what are the needs of the beaver, the bear, the salmon, and other creatures, because long ago men married them and acquired this knowledge from their animal wives. Today the priests say we lie, but we know better. The white man has been only a short time in this country and knows very little about the animals; we have lived here thousands of years and were taught long ago by the animals themselves. The white man writes everything down in a book so that it will not be forgotten; but our ancestors married animals, learned all their ways, and passed on the knowledge from one generation to another."

—Carrier Indian

### MAGIC WORDS (INUIT)

In the very earliest time,  
when both people and animals lived on earth,  
a person could become an animal if he wanted to  
and an animal could become a human being.  
Sometimes they were people  
and sometimes animals  
and there was no difference.  
All spoke the same language.  
That was the time when words were like magic.  
The human mind had mysterious powers.  
A word spoken by chance  
might have strange consequences.  
It would suddenly come alive  
and what people wanted to happen could happen—  
all you had to do was say it.  
Nobody could explain this:  
That's the way it was.

— Edward Field,  
from Knud Rasmussen

## THE ANIMAL WAY

"We patronize them for their incompleteness,  
for their tragic fate of having taken form so far below ourselves.  
And therein we err and greatly err.  
For the animal shall not be measured by man.  
In a world older and more complete than ours  
they move finished and complete,  
gifted with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we  
shall never hear.  
They are not brethren,  
they are not underlings;  
they are other nations,  
caught with ourselves in the net of life and time,  
fellow beings of the splendour and travail of the earth."

—Harry Beston

An archetype...has the divine quality,  
and that is always based upon the animal.  
Therefore  
the gods are symbolized as animals;  
even the holy ghost is a bird,  
all the antique gods and the exotic gods  
are animals at the same time...  
naturally in possession  
of the wisdom of nature,  
like any animal or plant,  
but the wisdom is represented by a being  
that is not conscious of itself,  
and therefore  
cannot be called wisdom.

—C.G. Jung

## THE ANIMAL WAY

The physics of beauty  
is one department of natural science  
still in the Dark Ages....  
everybody knows, for example, that

the autumn landscape in the north woods  
is the land,  
plus a red maple,  
plus a ruffed grouse.

In terms of conventional physics  
the grouse represents only  
a millionth  
of either the mass  
or energy of an acre.  
Yet subtract the grouse  
and the whole thing  
is dead.

An enormous amount of  
some kind of  
motive power  
has been lost....

My own conviction on this score  
dates from the day

I saw a wolf die....

We reached the old wolf  
in time to  
watch a fierce green fire  
dying in her eyes.

I realized then, and have known  
ever since, that there was  
something new to me in those eyes—  
something known only to her  
and to the mountain.

—from Aldo

Leopold,  
“Thinking Like a  
Mountain”  
Sand County Almanac

## THE ANIMAL WAY

WITH MOUTHS OPEN WIDE IN THE WAVE. John Caddy

---

Nighthawks over the lake with swallows and swifts,  
all the migrants with mouths open wide.  
The eye tracks among hundreds, all heights.  
In this dusk there is sky and lake, a black band of trees.  
Sky and lake the same pewter, a small chop of orange.  
The eye tracks one weave among hundreds, expects a rise  
to the contrast of sky, loses it always in trees.  
Caught in this rhythm of hunting nighthawks  
and swallows and swifts above water,  
the easy swoop and drift and quickbeat and catch,  
all the wide mouths swallow invisible flies,  
and the rhythm of the whole is the ocean  
at dusk, not the soundsurge of surf but  
translucent rising waves just before breaking  
when fishshapes and kelp fronds  
and cormorants weave and dart in this same  
soundless rhythm of nighthawks hunting a lake  
two thousand miles away, both waters lit from the west.  
There are moments when all a backlit wave contains  
can be seen, then chaos, collapse in confusion until  
the next wave is seen and crests, and the next.  
There are moments when all the world's wave contains  
can be seen, and the collapse is only the limit of eye.  
But we know the world's wave continues its rhythms,  
its nighthawks and fishshapes hunt in their waves  
and its leaves lift from earth in the curve of their season,  
spring green from the bud, and dry for the fall  
to lift in the curve of this wave we all roll in.  
The birds hunt now high as eye can see.

## THE ANIMAL WAY

But ask now the beasts,  
and they shall teach thee;  
and the fowls of the air,  
and they shall teach thee;  
Or speak to the earth,  
and it shall teach thee;  
And the fishes of the sea  
shall declare unto thee.

—Job 12: 7–8, King James Bible

“One does not meet  
oneself until one  
catches the reflection  
in an eye  
other than human.”

—from Loren Eisely, *The Unexpected Universe*, (1964)

Nonhuman Nature is  
the outward and visible expression  
of the mystery which confronts us  
when we look into the depths of our own being.

—D.H.Lawrence

## ANIMAL TEACHERS

### THE HOLY INDIFFERENCE OF CORMORANTS, John Caddy

---

Looking north and south, the black line  
dwindles into specks where  
the coast fades into sea  
and is lost in the limit of eye.

The line trembles, shifts in wind and caprice,  
but replaces itself endlessly in single file  
where I look west across an endless sea.

The line of cormorants flies close in  
above the surf along this coast  
of black rock stacks and chimneys.

Their wings beat quick sure scissors,  
beaks point south, long necks stretch,  
they pause for nothing, just fly.

When I come here early and sit on a rock  
they are already flying as far as I can see.

When I unwrap my sandwich hours later  
they still fly past the limit of eye.

The black birds make no sound that carries  
over surf crashing on the rocks below me except  
once when the line veers over me and wings whir.

As the sun drops into the Pacific the line  
—no longer single birds—continues,  
same direction, same speed.

Awe can't last past these numbers.

They will continue flying in this line  
all night or forever, and it has grown hard to care.

This line tires me, I have never felt so extraneous.  
It is the birds' indifference. No hostility,  
no affection, no notice. Here I am reduced  
to the state the ancients entered when they resolved  
Nature into enemy—it wasn't beasts and bugs  
and desert wilderness and seas which would not end  
that tumbled the old ones into millennial war.

It is this holy indifference we will not accept in our concepts of infinity.  
But I stay and stare all day at infinite black birds  
across the gulf we grew.

## ANIMAL TEACHERS

### TRICKSTER AT PLAY IN WINTER'S TEETH

---

John Caddy

Raven tumbles from the sky, a black scrap  
pretending the wingflailing fall,  
and just above the pines catches  
wind and throws her shout upon it,  
the shout tumbles in its turn downwind  
and lifts the fox tongue from its licking in the den.

Her shadow leaps across a muskeg opening.  
One feather drops as she flies.  
It falls lustrous, ambiguous, she reads her own sign:  
A positive on negative white,  
A taste of black feather for the mouth of wind.

High she hangs and plays through  
white empty air, one bead eye  
cast down at muskeg's vague hieroglyphs of winter,  
reads the signs of wind working  
on ragged black spruce and leatherleafs,  
whatever sticks out of snow,  
the filling tracks where paws and hooves  
have pushed snow down, the long curve  
of foxtrail along the bog's edge,  
a sense of cold paws, ice building in hair,  
a burst of static feathers where a grouse leapt up  
too late, Raven reads the signs  
and sculls through empty air.

Raven's shadow stretches across the white bog  
from the tip of a windshredded tree.  
A small steam curls from the nostrils  
as she holds her beak high, chuckling.

## ANIMAL TEACHERS

### EATING THE STING

---

—John Caddy

Caught in the snapped circle of light  
on the cookshack oilcloth,  
an upright deermouse holding yellow  
in her fine fingers  
like an ear of black-striped corn,  
a wasp I'd slapped dead earlier.

She stares, belly resonating, round above  
a scatter of brittle wing, bits, a carapace—  
she has already eaten the stinger—  
stares at me, still,  
something thrumming in her eyes

beyond herself, a mouse stung  
onto an edge as far from cartoons  
as the venom she's chewed into food.

She cocks a fawn ear now, trembling poisonchanger,  
caught in the circle of light  
I've thought myself in at times,

but never sure, I ask her softly how  
she does it, if I can learn this turning  
of sting into such food as startles in her eyes,  
learn to suck pain into every sense  
and come up spitting seeds, force poison  
to a tear held fierce between my lips  
and whirl it into tongue which sings, but

here I've come too loud: She drops the husk,  
fusses whiskers with her paws, kicks  
a scrap of wing aside, and whispers  
*thanks for the corn,*

steps backward off the table  
(and so potent she is with wasp)  
flips a circle through light and  
lands running on her leaf-toed feet.

## ANIMAL TEACHERS

I think I could turn, and live with animals,  
they are so placid and self-contain'd,  
I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,  
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,  
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,  
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things,  
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago,  
Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

—from Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*,

## ANIMAL TEACHERS

### COME INTO ANIMAL PRESENCE

---

Come into animal presence.

No man is so guileless as  
the serpent. The lonely white  
rabbit on the roof is a star  
twitching its ears at the rain.

The llama intricately  
folding its hind legs to be seated  
not disdains but mildly  
disregards human approval.

What joy when the insouciant  
armadillo glances at us and doesn't  
quicken his trotting  
across the track into the palm brush.

What is this joy? That no animal  
falters, but knows what it must do?  
That the snake has no blemish,  
that the rabbit inspects his strange surroundings  
in white star-silence? The llama  
rests in dignity, the armadillo  
has some intention to pursue in the palm-forest.  
Those who were sacred have remained so,  
holiness does not dissolve, it is a presence of  
bronze, only the sight that saw it  
faltered and turned from it.  
An old joy returns in holy presence.

—Denise Levertov

## ANIMAL TEACHERS

### PRAYER

—Joseph Bruchac

Let my words  
be bright with animals,  
images the flash of a gull's wing.  
If we pretend  
that we are at the center,  
that moles and kingfishers,  
eels and coyotes  
are at the edge of grace,  
then we circle, dead moons  
about a cold sun.  
This morning I ask only  
the blessing of the crayfish,  
the beatitude of the birds;  
to wear the skin of the bear  
in my songs;  
to work like a man with my hands.'

## ANIMAL TEACHERS

SNAKE

— Theodore Roethke

I saw a young snake glide  
out of the mottled shade  
And hang, limp on a stone:  
A thin mouth, and a tongue  
Stayed, in the still air.

It turned; it drew away;  
Its shadow bent in half;  
it quickened, and was gone.

I felt my slow blood warm.  
I longed to be that thing,  
the pure sensuous form.

And I may be, some time.

## ANIMAL TEACHERS

### THE SNAKE

---

D.H. Lawrence

A snake came to my water-trough  
On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,  
To drink there.

In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carob-tree  
I came down the steps with my pitcher  
And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he was at the  
trough before me.

He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom  
And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down,  
over the edge of the stone trough  
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,  
And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a small  
clearness,  
He sipped with his straight mouth,  
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long  
body,  
Silently .

Someone was before me at my water-trough,  
And I, like a second comer, waiting.

He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do,  
And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,  
And flickered his two-forked tongue from his lips,  
mused a moment,  
And stooped and drank a little more,  
Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning bowels of  
the earth  
On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking.

The voice of my education said to me  
He must be killed,  
For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold  
are venomous.

## ANIMAL TEACHERS

### The Snake (cont.)

---

And voices in me said, If you were a man  
You would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off.

But must I confess how I liked him,  
How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet, to drink  
at my water-trough  
And depart peaceful, pacified, and thankless,  
Into the burning bowels of this earth?

Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?  
Was it perversity, that I longed to talk to him?  
Was it humility, to feel so honoured?  
I felt so honoured.

And yet those voices:  
If you were not afraid, you would kill him!

And truly I was afraid, I was most afraid,  
But even so, honoured still more  
That he should seek my hospitality  
From out the dark door of the secret earth.

He drank enough  
And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken,  
And flickered his tongue like a forked light on the air, so black;  
Seeming to lick his lips,  
And looked around like a god, unseeing, into the air,  
And slowly turned his head,  
And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice a dream,  
Proceeded to draw his slow length curving round  
And climb again the broken bank of my wall-face.

And as he put his head into that dreadful hole,  
And as he slowly drew up, snake-easing his shoulders, and  
entered farther,  
A sort of horror, a sort of protest against his withdrawing  
into the horrid black hole,  
Deliberately going into the blackness, and slowly drawing  
himself after,  
Overcame me now his back was turned.

## ANIMAL TEACHERS

### The Snake (cont.)

---

I looked round, I put down my pitcher,  
I picked up a clumsy log  
And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter.

I think it did not hit him,  
But suddenly that part of him that was left behind convulsed  
in undignified haste,  
Writhed like lightning, and was gone  
Into the black hole, the earth-lipped fissure in the wall-front,  
At which, in the intense still noon, I stared with fascination.

And immediately I regretted it.  
I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act.  
I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human  
education.

And I thought of the albatross,  
And I wished he would come back, my snake.

For he seemed to me again like a king,  
Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,  
Now due to be crowned again.

And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords  
Of life.  
And I have something to expiate;  
A pettiness.

## ANIMAL TEACHERS

### OUTSIDE

---

William Stafford

The least little sound sets the coyotes walking,  
walking the edge of our comfortable earth.

We look inward, but all of them  
are looking toward us as they walk the earth.

We need to let animals loose in our houses,  
a wolf to escape with a pan in his teeth,  
and streams of animals toward the horizon  
racing with something silent in each mouth.

For all we have taken into our keeping  
and polished with our hands

belongs to a truth

greater than ours, in the animals' keeping.

Coyotes are circling around our truth.

## ANIMAL TEACHERS

from AUGURIES OF INNOCENCE—A Cutting

---

William Blake

A Robin Red breast in a Cage  
Puts all Heaven in a Rage.  
A dog starv'd at his Master's Gate  
Predicts the ruin of the State.  
A Horse misused upon the Road  
Calls to Heaven for Human blood.  
Each outcry of the hunted Hare  
A fiber from the Brain does tear.  
A Skylark wounded in the wing,  
A Cherubim does cease to sing.  
The wild deer, wand'ring here & there,  
Keeps the Human Soul from Care.  
The Lamb misus'd breeds Public strife  
And yet forgives the Butcher's Knife.  
He who shall hurt the little Wren  
Shall never be belov'd by Men.  
The wanton Boy that kills the Fly  
Shall feel the Spider's enmity.  
The Caterpillar on the Leaf  
Repeats to thee thy Mother's grief.  
Kill not the Moth nor Butterfly,  
For the Last Judgment draweth nigh.  
The Beggar's Dog & Widow's Cat,  
Feed them & thou wilt grow fat.

## ANIMAL TEACHERS

WITH TRUMPETS AND ZITHERS #10

---

Czeslaw Milosz

The dream shared at night by all people has inhabitants,  
    hairy animals.  
It is a huge and snug forest and everyone entering it walks  
    on all fours till dawn through the very thick of the tangle.  
Through the wilderness inaccessible to metal objects,  
all-embracing like a warm and deep river.  
In satin tunnels the touch distinguishes apples and their color  
    that does not recall anything real.  
All are quadrupeds, their thighs rejoice at the badger-bear  
    softness, their rosy tongues lick the fur of each other.  
The "I" is felt with amazement in the heartbeat, but  
    so large it cannot be filled by the whole Earth with her  
    seasons.  
Nor would the skin guarding a different essence trace any  
    boundary.  
Later on, in crude light, separated into you and me, they try  
with a bare foot pebbles of the floor.  
The two-legged, some to the left, some to the right, put on  
    their belts, garter, slacks and sandals.  
After they move on their stilts, longing after a forest home,  
    after low tunnels, after an assigned return to It.

## ANIMALS WITHIN

### THE CHANCE TO LOVE EVERYTHING

---

Mary Oliver

All summer I made friends  
with the creatures nearby —  
they flowed through the fields  
and under the tent walls,  
or padded through the door,  
grinning through their many teeth,  
looking for seeds,  
suet, sugar; muttering and humming,  
opening the breadbox, happiest when  
there was milk and music. But once  
in the night I heard a sound  
outside the door, the canvas  
bulged slightly—something  
was pressing inward at eye level.  
I watched, trembling, sure I had heard  
the click of claws, the smack of lips  
outside my gauzy house—  
I imagined the red eyes,  
the broad tongue, the enormous lap.  
Would it be friendly too?  
Fear defeated me. And yet,  
not in faith and not in madness  
but with the courage I thought  
my dream deserved,  
I stepped outside. It was gone.  
Then I whirled at the sound of some  
shambling tonnage.  
Did I see a black haunch slipping  
back through the trees? Did I see  
the moonlight shining on it?  
Did I actually reach out my arms  
toward it, toward paradise falling, like  
the fading of the dearest, wildest hope—  
the dark heart of the story that is all  
the reason for its telling?

## ANIMALS WITHIN

### OLD BACHELOR OFFERINGS

John Caddy

He rises from the slough like history,  
cattails sluicing from his shell.  
The huge snapper rises breathing, bubbles on the nostrils,  
gusty breaths blessing lungs  
empty all the icelocked darkness,  
since ice first sang thinly in November wind,  
and thickened, and locked him in.  
Sluggish he comes from the silence of waiting,  
where the year slowly rotted  
and sifted down to coat his shell,  
where he lay dim for months like an ancient stone.

But this is waking: now  
he pushes clumps of ice aside, black honeycombs  
dissolving into sun and muskrats' paddling,  
now he staggers through sedgemat and mud  
dragging long algae streamers.  
He is cloaked with leeches, festooned with black  
twisting, recoiling from sudden brightness and heat.  
He stops and gusts air, snorkel nose straining high.  
In a straight line he flounders on, crushing cattails under him.

Weedslap: jerks his head in, stops. Rotates his eyes.  
Old man gumming his jaws, he works his beak from side to side,  
cautions his head out, and shoves his way up the gravel bank,  
lifting his bulk step by step and sliding back, clawing up again  
all pitted plates and scales the color of drying algae  
beneath the frantic, tiring leeches. He breaks the crest  
and gasping sprawls, clusters of snails huddled  
in loose folds of skin

like an old bachelor lumberjack  
in baggy longjohns winterstained  
all the colors of a deeryard thaw,  
who buttonless had sewn himself into them  
last November, logged in them,  
cooked in them, spilled on them,  
slept the long incontinent darknesses in them  
until they were both a season's record  
and a second skin.

He sags at an oilclothed table next to a stove,  
one bony hand resting in a net of sunlight,

## ANIMALS WITHIN

chapped pores open to this heat.  
His hand knows it is almost May  
and time to shed the winter skin,  
time to bare himself to sun  
that winter burn from him.  
The fingers curl and drum.

A flap of longjohns!  
and he's leaping out the door  
to purge himself in sunlight  
on the matted grass,  
He whirls barefoot among stumps  
in the madness of Spring,  
reeling at his chest  
but he can't find the threads,  
finds a rent and rips it wide,  
shucks them to his ankles,  
hopping in gaunt arabesques.  
Like a boy he hurls up his arms,  
stretching blue shadowed ribs,  
and offers his paleness to the sun.  
But his lungs cannot catch  
this trembling air, he weaves  
exhausted spirals toward a center  
where he sinks

so the old bachelor drags himself,  
abrading his sunken plastron with winter debris.  
He knows this hurts, he knows this is laborious,  
he knows his stomach is a shriveled kernel in his gut,  
but he knows the sun is here and he has to get the damned things off.  
He lumbers into light, crushing last year under him.

He scrapes and burns the winter from his shell and skin,  
a trail of leeches, snails and algae threads dropping  
as he ploughs another hundred yards.  
On a mat of snow-flattened grass he stops to bask,

## ANIMALS WITHIN

ragged legs outstretched, tendons in his neck  
stretching the sun as it weaves from side to side.  
With a hind foot he shoves himself in a slow revolution,  
catching brilliance in the darkest pockets of his skin.

Enough. He takes his bearings  
and lurches back along his path. Stops. Notices.  
What are these black dying questions curled in wintered grass?  
He noses one, snaps and gulps, and pushes off toward the slough.  
He has made his offering.  
They were Winter. Who thinks in Spring?

## ANIMALS WITHIN

MANITOU RIVER: RUFFLED GROUSE, John Caddy

---

He'd drum on the log,  
strut slow to its end,  
jump down and vanish  
in green, run all the way  
through his hollow log, pop up  
on the original end,  
and drum and strut  
his way down the log again,  
feathers large as the season,  
and each time  
he closed this circle, he  
untied a knot inside him  
he had to untie.  
The season feels familiar.

We trespassed on his  
drumming ground,  
hiking through, and stopped  
to soak in this music  
of feather and wood,  
this wonderful dance of male.  
He saw us and exploded  
through trees, flew right  
at our faces, tail fanned  
and neck pouches  
swollen to purple,  
and beat our heads  
with his wings until

he routed us, willing  
as we were to run  
in our grinning delight,  
ears slapped red  
and chest feathers  
floating in our eyes,  
in this drum season  
so lovely and knotted  
and loud, and so familiar.

## ANIMALS WITHIN

### THE GEESE

---

Joe Paddock

A long line of geese wavers  
across bright sky, calling,  
and without a single thought,  
white faces  
of men and women  
turn upward to them,  
and each, lost in flight,  
is a child again,  
and within each mind,  
a still pond opens  
where the geese will settle  
for the night.

### A LIGHT BREATHER

---

Theodore Roethke

The spirit moves,  
Yet stays:  
Stirs as a blossom stirs,  
Still wet from its bud-sheath,  
Slowly unfolding,  
Turning in the light with its tendrils;  
Plays as a minnow plays,  
Tethered to a limp weed, swinging,  
Tail around, nosing in and out of the current,  
Its shadows loose, a watery finger;  
Moves, like the snail,  
Still inward,  
Taking and embracing its surroundings,  
Never wishing itself away,  
Unafraid of what it is,  
A music in a hood,  
A small thing,  
Singing.

## ANIMALS WITHIN

### NIGHT CROW

---

Theodore Roethke

When I saw that clumsy crow  
Flap from a wasted tree  
A shape in the mind rose up:  
Over the gulfs of dream  
Flew a tremendous bird  
Further and further away  
Into a moonless black,  
Deep in the brain, far back.

### THE SALT CRIES REMEMBER

---

—John Caddy

The foetus yawns in the sea,  
adrift in the cell memories.

We are the sea in a skin,  
the craving of salt for the ocean.

We batter the wet from our flesh,  
but the land we hunched onto is dry.

What is salt is the sweet  
bitter gift of the tidepool.

The tonguetip, helpless, remembers.  
The sea knows itself in our juices.

We answer rain with our tears,  
answer love with our drifting, our cries.

## MAGICAL ANIMALS

### BEASTS

---

Richard Wilbur

Beasts in their major freedom  
Slumber in peace tonight. The gull on his ledge  
Dreams in the guts of himself the moon-plucked waves below,  
And the sunfish leans on a stone, slept  
By the lyric water;

In which the spotless feet  
Of deer make dulcet splashes, and to which  
The ripped mouse, safe in the owl's talon, cries  
Concordance. Here there is no such harm  
And no such darkness

And the selfsame moon observes  
Where, in the warped glass, it sponsors now  
The werewolf's painful change. Turning his head away  
On the sweaty bolster, he tries to remember  
The mood of manhood,

But lies at last, as always,  
Letting it happen, the fierce soft fur soft to his face,  
Hearing with sharper ears the wind's exciting minors,  
The leaves' panic, and the degradation  
Of the heavy streams.

Meantime, at high windows  
Far from thicket and pad-fall, suitors of excellence  
Sigh and turn from their work to construe again the painful  
Beauty of heaven, the lucid moon  
And the risen hunter,

Making such dreams for me  
As told will break their hearts as always, bringing  
Monsters into the city, crows on the public statues,  
Navies fed to the fish in the dark  
Unbridled waters.

## MAGICAL ANIMALS

### THIS IS THE CREATURE

---

Oh this beast is the one never was.  
They didn't know that; unconcerned, they had  
loved its grace, its walk, and how it stood  
looking at them calmly, with clear eyes.

It hadn't been. But from their love, a pure  
beast arose. They always left it room.  
And in that heart-space, radiant and bare,  
it raised its head and hardly needed to

exist. They fed it, not with any grain,  
but just with the thought that it might be.  
And this assurance gave the beast so much power,

it grew a horn upon its brow. One horn.  
Afterward it approached a virgin, whitely,  
and was, inside the mirror and in her.

— Rainer Maria Rilke  
trans. by Stephen Mitchell

## MAGICAL ANIMALS

### THE BEAST

---

Theodore Roethke

I came to a great door,  
Its lintel overhung  
With burr, bramble, and thorn;  
And when it swung, I saw  
A meadow, lush and green.

And there a great beast played,  
A sportive, aimless one,  
A shred of bone its horn,  
And coloped round with fern.  
It looked at me; it stared.

Swaying, I took its gaze;  
Faltered; rose up again;  
Rose but to lurch and fall,  
Hard, on the gritty sill,  
I lay; I languished there.

When I raised myself once more,  
The great round eyes had gone.  
The long lush grass lay still;  
And I wept there, alone.

ST. FRANCIS AND THE SOW

---

Galway Kinnell

The bud  
stands for all things,  
even for those things that don't flower,  
for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;  
though sometimes it is necessary  
to reteach a thing its loveliness,  
to put a hand on its brow  
of the flower  
and retell it in words and in touch  
it is lovely  
until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing;  
as St. Francis  
put his hand on the creased forehead  
of the sow, and told her in words and in touch  
blessings of earth on the sow, and the sow  
began remembering all down her thick length,  
from the earthen snout all the way  
through the fodder and slops to the spiritual curl of the tail,  
from the hard spininess spiked out from the spine  
down through the great broken heart  
to the blue milken dreaminess spurting and shuddering  
from the fourteen teats into the fourteen mouths sucking  
and blowing beneath them:  
the long perfect loveliness of sow.

GRANDMA'S BATS

---

John Caddy

Which is not a description of Grandma.  
It was Grandma's cabin walls  
that housed the bats, not her,  
and she wasn't my grandma  
and was long dead by this time, but  
I lived then in the cabin known  
in that place as Grandma's.

The first night I slept there  
I woke sweating to a strange  
chitter in the walls, a squeaking  
and scraping of small claws,  
and the next day figured out  
I had bats right behind my head.  
It maddened me the first weeks,  
I raged, whined, asked around.  
There was nothing to be done.

But in time, I'd sit out on the stoop  
of a summer evening and watch night  
gather over the lake, watch my bats,  
the softness of flight more silent  
than any feather but owl's,  
the dart, the sudden shift for mosquitoes.  
When full dark came, I'd turn to bed  
and sit with my head against  
the young ones squeaking in the walls.  
How you guys doing tonight?  
Familiarity comes from family's root.  
In the morning I'd find myself talking to the folks—  
How was the hunting? And how's the kids?

HOW IT GOES ON

---

Maxine Kumin

Today I trade my last unwise  
ewe lamb, the one who won't leave home,  
for two cords of stove-length oak  
and wait on the old enclosed  
front porch to make the swap.  
November sun revives the thick  
trapped buzz of horseflies. The siren  
for noon and forest fires blows  
a sliding scale. The lamb of woe  
looks in at me through glass  
on the last day of her life.

Geranium scraps from the window box  
trail from her mouth, burdock burrs  
are stickered to her fleece like chicken pox,  
under her tail stub, permanent smears.

I think of how it goes on,  
this dark particular bent of our hungers;  
the way a wire eats into a tree  
year after year on the pasture's perimeter,  
keeping the milk cows penned  
until they grow too old to freshen;  
of how the last wild horses were scoured  
from canyons in Idaho, roped, thrown,  
their nostrils twisted shut with wire  
to keep them down, the mares aborting,  
days later, all of them carted to town.

I think of how it will be  
January, nights so cold  
the pond cracks like target practice,

## ANIMAL COMMUNITY

daylight glue-colored, sleet falling,  
my yellow horse slick with the ball-bearing  
sleet, raising up from his dingy browse  
out of boredom and habit  
to strip bark from the fenced-in trees;  
of February, month of the hard palate,  
the split wood running out,  
worms working in the flour bin.

The lamb, whose time has come, goes off  
in the cab of the dump truck, tied to the seat  
with baling twine, durable enough  
to bear her to the knife and rafter.

O lambs! The whole wolf-world sits down to eat  
and cleans its muzzle after.

## ANIMAL REDEEMERS

### THE SECOND COMING

---

William Butler Yeats

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

## ANIMAL REDEEMERS

SOME BEASTS, Pablo Neruda

---

It was the twilight of the iguana.  
From the rainbow-arch of the battlements,  
his long tongue like a lance  
sank down in green leaves,  
and a swarm of ants, monks with feet chanting, crawled  
off into the jungle,  
the guanaco, thin as oxygen  
in the wide peaks of cloud,  
went along wearing his shoes of gold,  
while the llama opened his honest eyes  
on the breakable neatness  
of a world full of dew.

The monkeys braided a sexual  
thread that went on and on  
along the shores of the dawn,  
demolishing walls of pollen  
and startling the butterflies of Muzo  
into flying violets.

It was the night of the alligators,  
the pure night, crawling  
with snouts emerging from the ooze,  
and out of the sleepy marshes  
the confused noise of scaly plates  
returned to the ground where they began.

The jaguar brushed the leaves  
with a luminous absence,  
the puma runs through the branches  
like a forest fire,  
while the jungle's drunken eyes  
burn from inside him.

The badgers scratch the river's  
feet scenting the nest  
whose throbbing delicacy  
they attack with red teeth,

And deep in the huge waters  
the enormous anaconda lies  
like the circle around the earth  
covered with ceremonies of mud,  
devouring, religious.

—translated by James Wright

## ANIMAL REDEEMERS

### WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE ICE STORM

Jim Heynen

One winter there was a freezing rain. How beautiful! people said when things outside started to shine with ice. But the freezing rain kept coming. Tree branches glistened like glass. Then broke like glass. Ice thickened on the windows until everything outside blurred. farmers moved their livestock into the barns, and most animals were safe. But not the pheasants. Their eyes froze shut.

Some farmers went ice-skating down the gravel roads with clubs to harvest pheasants that sat helplessly in the roadside ditches. The boys went out into the freezing rain to find pheasants too. They saw dark spots along a fence. Pheasants, all right. Five or six of them. The boys slid their feet along slowly, trying not to break the ice that covered the snow. They slid up close to the pheasants . The pheasants pulled their heads down between their wings. They couldn't tell how easy it was to see them huddled there.

The boys stood still in the icy rain. Their breath came out in slow puffs of steam. The pheasants' breath came out in quick little white puffs. One lifted its head and turned it from side to side, but the pheasant was blindfolded with ice and didn't flush.

The boys had not brought clubs, or sacks, or anything but themselves. They stood over the pheasants, turning their own heads, looking at each other, each expecting the other to do something. To pounce on a pheasant, or to yell Bang! Things around them were shining and dripping with icy rain. The barbed-wire fence. The fence posts. The broken stems of grass. Even the grass seeds. The grass seeds looked like little yolks inside gelatin whites. And the pheasants looked like unborn birds glazed in egg white. Ice was hardening on the boys' caps and coats. Soon they would be covered with ice too.

Then one of the boys said, Shh. He was taking off his coat, the thin layer of ice splintering in flakes as he pulled his arms from the sleeves. But the inside of the coat was dry and warm. He covered two of the crouching pheasants with his coat, rounding the back of it over them like a shell. The other boys did the same. They covered all the helpless pheasants. The small gray hens and the larger brown cocks. Now the boys felt the rain soaking through their shirts and freezing. They ran across the slippery fields, unsure of their footing, the ice clinging to their skin as they made their way toward the blurry lights of the house.

## ANIMAL REDEEMERS

### THE FISH

Elizabeth Bishop

I caught a tremendous fish  
and held him beside the boat  
half out of water, with my hook  
fast in a corner of his mouth.  
He didn't fight.  
He hadn't fought at all.  
He hung a grunting weight,  
battered and venerable  
and homely. Here and there  
his brown skin hung in strips  
like ancient wallpaper,  
and its pattern of darker brown  
was like wallpaper:  
shapes like full-blown roses  
stained and lost through age.  
He was speckled with barnacles,  
fine rosettes of lime,  
and infested  
with tiny white sea-lice,  
and underneath two or three  
rags of green weed hung down.  
While his gills were breathing in  
the terrible oxygen  
—the frightening gills,  
fresh and crisp with blood,  
that can cut so badly—  
I thought of the coarse white flesh  
packed in like feathers,  
the big bones and the little bones,  
the dramatic reds and blacks  
of his shiny entrails,  
and the pink swim-bladder  
like a big peony.  
I looked into his eyes  
which were far larger than mine  
but shallower, and yellowed,  
the irises backed and packed  
with tarnished tinfoil  
seen through the lenses

THE FISH (cont.)

## ANIMAL REDEEMERS

of old scratched isinglass.  
They shifted a little, but not  
to return my stare.  
—It was more like the tipping  
of an object toward the light.  
I admired his sullen face,  
the mechanism of his jaw,  
and then I saw  
that from his lower lip  
—if you could call it a lip—  
grim, wet, and weaponlike,  
hung five old pieces of fish-line,  
or four and a wire leader  
with the swivel still attached,  
with all their five big hooks  
grown firmly in his mouth.  
A green line, frayed at the end  
where he broke it, two heavier lines,  
and a fine black thread  
still crimped from the strain and snapped  
when it broke and he got away.  
Like medals with their ribbons  
frayed and wavering,  
a five-haired beard of wisdom  
trailing from his aching jaw.  
I stared and stared  
and victory filled up  
the little rented boat,  
from the pool of bilge  
where oil had spread a rainbow  
around the rusted engine  
to the bailer rusted orange,  
the sun-cracked thwarts,  
the oarlocks on their strings,  
the gunnels—until everything  
was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!  
And I let the fish go.

## ANIMAL REDEEMERS

The Great Blue Heron

---

Michael Kincaid

flaps like a gray ghost  
thru the dusk  
river valley

or like a memory too heavy  
for more  
than dream-flight

dragged at  
by ancient gravity  
held down to this mist  
horizon of his  
genesis

At twilight he appears  
like a silence  
taken flight  
across the screen of silent dusk

his lifting into view  
out of evening stillness  
somehow illicit

as if time  
had cracked open  
and released an insurrection  
out of prehistoric  
mists  
when things with spines  
first took heavily to the air

Coasting down the  
river bottom  
that twilight-colored bird  
grows dim among the shades  
skimming the reed-tops  
and coming to rest in waters beyond  
my sight

where his great wings  
close again like doors  
on the crack  
between the worlds

ANIMAL REDEEMERS

## ANIMAL REDEEMERS

### LEAF DANCE, LIFE DANCE

---

Joe Paddock

Oak leaves, walnut, willow and ash ....  
I rake and haul, heave barrel after barrel  
onto the fenced-in compost heap, till full  
for the tenth time, and I toss my beagle over  
the fence, climb the little ladder and leap after,  
and we dance the pile down.

This is what we live for.  
We stomp and leap and roll,  
and Ring's sometimes almost altogether  
gone, as he sounds after something which stinks  
(dead sparrow or tire-smashed squirrel),  
just the whipping white tip of his tail  
which I sometimes grip till he flounders  
to the surface, his eyes filled  
with immense light. "Down there!  
Down there!" Every writhing nuance  
of his body speaks: "Down there!"

So much life must love death,  
its smell and promise. Up and down!  
Up and down! We leap and roll and dance,  
smashing dead  
leaves down tighter and tighter in the pile.

And even now  
a new dance begins which will flame  
high in spring,  
when I mix in manure and the sun  
leans near, and insects, worms  
and forty billion bacteria to some incredible power  
swarm in this ton of leaves. Up and down!  
Up and down! Leap and dance! Snarl and eat!  
Die in again  
for sheer joy!

## ANIMAL REDEEMERS

### THE MEADOW MOUSE

Theodore Roethke

1

In a shoe box stuffed in an old nylon stocking  
Sleeps the baby mouse I found in the meadow,  
Where he trembled and shook beneath a stick  
Till I caught him up by the tail and brought him in,  
Cradled in my hand,  
A little quaker, the whole body of him trembling,  
His absurd whiskers sticking out like a cartoon-mouse,  
His feet like small leaves,  
Little lizard-feet,  
Whitish and spread wide when he tried to struggle away,  
Wriggling like a miniscule puppy.

Now he's eaten his three kinds of cheese and drunk from his bottle-cap  
watering-trough—  
So much he just lies in one corner,  
His tail curled under him, his belly big  
As his head; his bat-like ears  
Twitching, tilting toward the least sound.

Do I imagine he no longer trembles  
When I come close to him?  
He seems no longer to tremble.

2

But this morning the shoe-box house on the back porch is empty.  
Where has he gone, my meadow mouse,  
My thumb of a child that nuzzled in my palm?—  
To run under the hawk's wing,  
Under the eye of the great owl watching from the elm-tree,  
To live by courtesy of the shrike, the snake, the tom-cat.

I think of the nestling fallen into the deep grass,  
The turtle gasping in the dusty rubble of the highway,  
The paralytic stunned in the tub, and the water rising,—  
All things innocent, hapless, forsaken..

## ANIMAL REDEEMERS

### ISHMAEL IN THE WHITE AGAIN

---

—John Caddy

As snowgrains sift quietly from grey  
overcast which sinks into the ghosts of spruce  
across the white marsh,

As sap turns ice inside the birch and splits  
the trunk and the muffled shot lifts nothing  
from trees or drifts,

the only other sound the creak of boots on snow,  
As nostrils slam white with cold each breath,  
something above me answers it,

A great voice chuckles loud and twice,  
a laugh dark as a dream's hot rag of night  
answers all of it — there,

The raven, huddled guttural and huge  
on the top bone of a tamarack, swings her beak  
above a shaggy throat,

This black and stubborn heat inside the north  
who knows tomorrow or tomorrow will bring tracks,  
and flesh enough at the end of them,

Who croaks and chuckles and steams:  
Rejoice! A furnace is the heart, and red!  
Who gives a damn for white?

## ANIMAL REDEEMERS

### BULLHEADS IN LASALLE CREEK, PASSING STRANGE

John Caddy

Shadows on sand of the creek's bright surface—daze  
flit like old memories through the mind, en-trance  
like same. Cross-current in the shallows, a mother bullhead  
shepherds her school of fry. Say that again.  
A bullhead shepherds her fry. The story is already strange.  
She is barbelled and black, only six inches long.  
Her hundred jet fry wriggle in near unison, mother  
at the center of a sphere, a black vibrant egg just  
out of the egg which moves through water as a whole.

The shadows shift and dance on reedstems,  
on algae streaming from the stems, on caddis worms  
inching their stick homes along, glance  
and are lost on old brown bottom leaves.  
The grooves dug by clamfoot read like blurred runes  
which currents elide just before meaning.  
Shadows fast and slow, utterly clear and opaque.  
Swirls of silt surprise light on its way down,  
make shafts of it, columns, as dust motes in window sun  
make light more real and at the right age, sacramental.

But now these lively dapples through brief lenses.  
From the reedbed glides another globe of fry,  
a centered mother. Here the story passes strange.  
The two spheres meet and diffuse through  
each other, interpenetrating like a living Escher.  
As they slowly pass through, each sphere  
keeps its compass, each infant its distance.  
But the mothers break off, swim to touch barbels, exchange  
what bullheads exchange, find their centers again.  
The mirror passes through itself, current flows through all  
and all keeps its form. Each wriggler in its world  
tosses shadow to the sand, and the whole

## ANIMAL REDEEMERS

casts ellipses on the sand and what we know,  
but we do see this, and are not estranged to find another lie  
in what we learned, but joyed, for what a wild order our eyes  
meet in this creek, and what caring back-fence mothers,  
as the shadows of the spheres mingle with those  
of ripples cast on sand like old half-memories, dancing light  
bounced to our human eyes which know little  
but open at any age, see so much, our eyes that do  
remember light, and do enter when we see it, the dance.