

Ganoga

- 1...the world jewel perfect...
- 2...the swamp will mark, the ooze anoint...
- 3...a muddy slice of Luna upon Terra...
- 4...unexpected blossoms, feathers abloom...
- 5...the night's wild shades of charcoal...
- 6...Autumn reinstates life to the roots...
- 7...treacherous lyrics, perfidious spells...
- 8...daily roustings-about goings-on...
- 9...soft-chanting, exhorting the fiery orb...
- 10...bowing at stems we touch petals...
- 11...more than lavender frogs and twilit swamp...
- 12...pre-native pre-historic utterly ancient...
- 13...everything is different here...

Paleozoic Era

A geological era characterized by the development of fish and sea plants, the first amphibians, land plants, and reptiles, and later by temperature extremes which destroyed many of these. Many fossils were produced at this time along with coal and oil.

Cambrian Age

In geology the most distant period in the Paleozoic Era. Marked by the appearance of the first simple marine animal and plant life.

Devonian Age

A more recent period in the Paleozoic Era. Marked by the dominance of the fish and the appearance of the first amphibians.

PART ONE

*This hour I tell things in confidence;
I might not tell everybody, but I will tell you.*

*If you would understand me, go to the heights or water shore;
The nearest gnat is an explanation, and a drop or motion of waves a key.*

*I will go to the bank by the wood, and become undisguised
and naked;
I am mad for it to be in contact with me.*

*Do you guess I have some intricate purpose?
Well, I have – for the Fourth-month showers have, and the mica on the side of a rock has.*

*These are the thoughts of all [people] in all ages and lands--they are not original with me;
If they are not yours as much as mine, they are nothing, or next to nothing;
If they are not the riddle, and the untying of the riddle, they are nothing;
If they are not just as close as they are distant, they
are nothing.
This is the grass that grows wherever the land is, and
the water is;
This is the common air that bathes the globe.*

– Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*

On Plateau

You can't find me here.

Stand on a nearby ridge, view this whole swampforest and you cannot find me.

Swamp lies on a wooded plateau where I perch at night on the cusp of it all and know that we swamp dwellers are the nearest relatives to stars. Stardust ourselves at the very ends of earth.

Pre-native pre-historic utterly ancient, a fossil re-animated, starlight from beyond the beginning of time, I am the thinking animal of the future past and present always – *Homo Sapiens* – devolving aswamp.

Ganoga – indigenous word.

Susquehannock?

Delaware?

Lenni Lenape?

Iroquois?

The word is Seneca.

Ganoga.

Translation: *water on the mountain*

I dwell high on plateau remote even from the old ones' vanquished villages vanished on ground unsettled by any human ever – Allegheny plateau.

Allegheny from the Allegwi, ancient predecessors. Oldest of the old in this spot of earth, Allegwi. I am not of the Allegwi by direct blood descent though we may all transplant – across space and time, given soil water light warmth – not only weeds, a pejorative term pertaining to many plants of great dignity decency utility. To think otherwise is to not understand the vibrancy of all, the mutability of being.

On a log a rock I ponder with wind water elder trees and the simple plants most of all, leathery green ones, listening to their various musings vernal philosophies frondlike full.

Few humans ever venture into this abandon, quite crabby no river no massive lake no large creek, simply miles of broken swampforest, swamp and forest creek-cut valleys ridges running high an ocean of leaves in the green season uninviting, all-embracing.

I sing the song of swampforest teeming with creatures fermenting and frothing in utter calm.

Even the denizens of the wild do not always sense my presence. I am fond of surprising them drifting silent in canoe, or sitting motionless on fern bank sunning my blood.

Once, a deer sniffed my cap to see if I was of the living. I never ached nor loved so hard as when it flung itself away, poor thing. Bliss, you know, to be taken by the surprise of scraping tongue of deer in your ear.

I envy and adore swamp fish, how they simply outlast ice and cold then laze around in summer water, tepid murk.

Little Darter I call it, the bird that lit on my knee, hopped to the other, then took off for a perch unknown. As if I were a stump bank-stuck solely for the pleasure of Little Darter.

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Stand on a nearby ridge, view this whole swampforest and you cannot find me.

The island-like thicket I inhabit sits dense on peninsula in swamp.

During frequent floods, the bulging pie-shaped house, my yurt, goes turtle, takes a swim nearly, goes island – circular with slanting-out walls cozy as a cabin this rough-plank hut. With front and back stoops submerged, there is no way out, short of climbing in canoe and chopping through barrier limbs of thicket, through hemlocks birches vines bushes ferns – swamp ferns, bent under their own weight while stretching six feet high in living arc. These are the best days – when wilderness is water raw and swollen rising for your throat.

In yurt I live underground as well as above water with sod on the roof as camouflage against whomever – marijuana spy planes, random military helicopters, recreational fliers, depleting ozone.

Survival by camouflage. Weeds reeds grasses around skylight with a one-way tint to kill glare yet absorb all the sun has to offer each day – thus my humble elegant hut squats invisible to sky.

Around the yurt sprawls an impenetrable patch of flora that I carefully cultivate – year-round cover from hikers hunters wardens field scientists. Even few furred critters can navigate their way through floral moat to yurt home, decked out with composting toilet, food cache, toolshed, firewood shelter, elevated from water in summer and ice in winter, buried year-round by blankets

of growth. Evergreens abound.

The woodstove so necessary during the double season of winter scarcely pollutes. The massive chimney sinks solid to bouldered outcropping while Russian flue runs horizontal, accordion-like, before going vertical – trapping nearly all heat in stone and burning wood virtually smokeless. I add fuel only once every three days even in fiercest winter freeze. I wood. I stone. I heat. I burn. I go.

To Ganoga I came with no intention to stay and in Ganoga I remain with no desire to leave.

Old but growing young these first years in swamp, hoping for many more barring catastrophic lightening flood tornado or plain fatal luck.

Upon hearing the first guns of the death seasons I den up deep in yurt thicket womb and respire unto my own beat of heart, phase of moon, coruscant, water thoughts afloat.

I rarely need supplies. Barley and alfalfa for sprouting in glass jars, radish and lettuce for window planting – grains seeds nuts and the treat of dried fruit for hand-mixed muesli – survival dust.

Floral forest and ripe swamp food. I dry and preserve roots shoots berries leaves flowers but not excessively so for then I would be more hunter-gatherer than human. And the thing I intend above all to be human, fully. To be elegant of thumb.

There are those who say the brain the human evolved from the many intricate demands the thumb and fingers made upon the mind and who am I, fin dreamer, to argue? From thumb to brain then language? Does not seem possible on the one fin and yet too possibly so on the other. “Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.” So says the poet of the clear eyes, wise one.

Thumb I am. Fingered fish. Aquatic ape. Thumb as mighty mindless progenitor. Enough to make you tilt your head back off your neck and laugh deep from within degenerating toes.

Winterland

When the winter moon shines bold, I prowls – my favorite time to ski ridgelines high upon blue-black canvas, the best time to meet the hunters – eastern coyotes owls bobcats – who launch from dens nests lairs to stalk prey.

If the moon is full, the sky empty, and snow crisp, the plateau glows hazy like a cloudy summer day, soft and bright even when Luna is not close to whole, so intense is the reflection off snow. The moon stares you in the face and casts razor-sharp shadows, spikes of trees in absence of leafy shade.

This swampscape stark and searchlight brilliant makes me re-examine myself in relation to all the elements of earth. I am all the stars of the sky. I feel what I am – a tree with legs – a pool of thinking water – an upright rock of emotions – humus animated. I am air and wind and earth given new shape.

Not until mid or latter snows do you begin to feel a bit crazy, as darkness wells, coils tight, and heavy night curtains descend in seeming midday. Candles and kerosene help fight off the dark but I prefer black, star-lit, astronomical.

Weeks of cloud cover can drive a lone star dreamer around the bend, any bend will do whether of land or mind. When the moon finally shows and there is a mild winter moment you might find yourself stripped near naked on skis, poling across a frozen lake.

Stop in the middle, stare out at the center of it all, look the moon smack in the eye. You may not be immortal but the closest thing to it. Stars as renewing as any bath. I would not mind dying frozen on purpose, alive with austerity, in delight with desolation, thick in the winter of it all.

When ready to set sail for the stars and kiss this planet good-bye, I plan to go out in the middle of a big freeze, glass smile frozen on lips. I've got it all figured out – wrap my bare flesh body in cold canvas burdened with stones, lie down in the middle of mirrored swamp, distant stars and moon my beacons good-bye hello. Jupiter, Mars, Venus. Goodbye, hello.

Come spring my body may drop to bottom and bones scatter free. Over the years an unsuspecting hiker or fisher may find a tibia or fibula washed ashore,

gnawed on perhaps, and there will be a big to-do. Maybe this bone will help keep alive the mystery of life too easy to ignore even while living daily in its midst.

I do not intend to go soon, however.

Swampforest beckons, an earth of water, an ocean of woods. It gets in the cells of your brain your body allows you to sense why so many people have fought so hard to preserve a way of life close to soil, Terran rhythm, tangled tempo.

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Come winter, land simply dominates. Green life is beaten down and sun leaches force. Pools of water glaze gray and white. Wind whistles bold around bared trees, and land emerges anew, contours plain thrust forth. Like a squirrel on a limb a monk about a monastery I tread upon the ground each day believing I am only as wise as my understanding of that which is fertile and barren in our path, our own Night Way, Beauty Way.

Would that we walked more in beauty like the Navajo – the Diné – the people of the great tradition. If only we knew as they knew, as we and they and all of us might know at our best that we are more than neighborly to earth that we are the living outgrowth of the inanimate, an eruption of planetary viscera, cosmic lava, starlight molded by energy purpose, pressure-packed and planted to be sprung from Terran core to farthest beyond.

Walking upon the land we go, stepping through the geology geography geometry of the mind, treading deep into stratus past neural gaps chasms, wandering in all wealth of weather.

The land is our town our country our people our tribe our clan our love through which we flow like a stream that enters no river no ocean no sea. The land is a stream that begins in swamplands on high and ends in the waterfall of our lives.

Species

After the first few snowfalls you forget there is any other season than winter.

Radish and alfalfa sprouts continue growth in bottles, and stored supplies of nuts grains beans berries bulk ample as ever, but all else is changed. Like my bones the yurt creaks differently in winter complaining deep from center-most fibers as well as along joints and edges. Summer haze and humidity are a distant memory. Air is purified distilled. Driving cold spurs me up and out each morning from bed to floor, from thicket to world.

To confuse any would-be trackers when going out from yurt, I glide in loops on skis through hemlocks that edge the thicket, then venture cross plateau over snow-covered land and ice expanse frozen pools and bogs where whole new views open along ridgelines in absence of leaves, and I absorb the bare horizon, skiing on perfect level, on water turned ice, tracing snow-buried shorelines.

Gliding past drifts, it is easy to imagine the feathery green banks of summer, what they looked like last year, what they may look like the next, extra-lush or normally so, storm-ravaged, or hothouse pure and delicate.

Pushing on, I cruise light along beaver dams, circle lodges, follow ridgelines, cut over and around any new rise, criss-cross the plateau's random ponds and small glacier-gouged lakes, surprising deer and the occasional bobcat, or the prize of all prizes – a great unsuspecting black bear lumbering foggily about, having come up from den to growl scratch and grub or for any odd reason.

I can never tell with bears – they sleep on stars directly, eat cosmic dust for breakfast, breathe galaxies galore with each breath, and yet, to see a bear shuffle about, great edgy sloth of belligerence, you would not know that they know they are the kings of creation.

It is easy to believe I will never be disturbed from this mountaintop swamp, former southern realm of the Iroquois, western realm of the Susquehannock, Lenni Lenape, and still earlier the domain of the Allegwi.

In the moments when I fear discovery I am reminded of the men who felled the early human inhabitants of these lands first and most completely, before felling the trees and the animals, and then the waters they bottled up desecrated, and now even the ozone they threaten to chop out of sky and decapitate Earth.

The reintroduction into these lands of the foremost predators of deer, the wolves and mountain cats, never happened except for a few great cats who sneaked back on their own or held tenaciously on.

As for the other range animals, perhaps a wandering stray elk may wind its lonely way south from northerly haunts following the old imprint, genetic trail – or new dreams and visions.

Not so lucky were the eastern woodlands bison, magnificent creatures larger even than the plains bison, extinct now, the last mother and her calf shot on plateau a couple hundred miles west of yurt thicket during the U.S. Civil war.

The great black bears have never been dislodged – still roaming in bulks approaching nearly half a ton, although even these mountain majesties cannot escape altogether the seasons of exploding steel.

The eastern coyotes remain as well, laughing, trotting, waiting for this harsh human time to pass. They are the crafty ones flitting like birds silent through woods. I've seen two pups grab one another by tail and give manic circular chase – a blur of fur breaking only to pant. Never a misstep. I've seen the sacred.

On high, aswamp.

I see it all the time.

The swamp will mark, the ooze anoint.

Mornings, you wake and wonder – Have I not grown fur and hooves? Paws and claws? Gills fins scales?

Nighttime dreaming of devolution.

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I think of the past inhabitants of these lands, the Iroquois and Susquehannock the Lenni Lenape the tough Muncee clan of the Delaware, people for whom hunting was sacred and communal more than sporting and personal, people who lived astride the river in winter who made summer camp in creek valleys, closer still, yet even then a hardy walk from my high mountain perch. These are the people of whom I beseech belated blessing for my presence on their lands.

Though we are all descended from indigenous peoples we are practically none of us any longer truly native to our homelands. We are foreign even in our birthlands. We must learn to re-inhabit to make our homes worth the dwelling, and we must redress the bleeding wrongs, for we follow in the footsteps of genocide, ethnic cleansing. You would think we could show some respect. Instead we are the inheritors of the great terror and we are the progenitors too for it ongoes. Here and abroad. The American holocaust goes on, and not only is it American. The conquest continues. Nights in meditation on this watery edge feeling aflight in breeze wondering how intricately the indigenous knew this

plateau this planet, how intimately the wilds knew them, musing about how this niche of swamp has changed, and how those struggling against the irresistible white tide must have felt during the moments when forced to flight or “extermination,” in the language of the time.

The ancient sense hangs thick here in the winds above the former trade routes, upon the waters, across the fertile and desolate lands of old.

How many if any bands clans families of Iroquois and Susquehannock ever tried to survive in these depths, on this rocky ebb of plateau? Could they not have tried? Would they ever have made it? Swum miraculous against the conscious unconscious tide of genocide?

I have met individuals of these nations walking out from the past, ghosting from the woods into the sudden mist of our unexpected meeting, free of all history, but we are scarcely able to ponder one another in mute distance, the world hung unspoken between us.

The U.S. military explains in its documents that it names its fearsome helicopter gunships after the indigenous – Apache, Comanche, Kiowa – because of their daunting reputation in battle. This is the legacy that has not died, the system of conquest that makes weapons and instruments of aggression out of the names of the victims of an earlier aggression, this crazed militarized economy that will not repent the ongoing crime of conquering.

The lasting survival of our species, if it is to occur, may be something of a bloody miracle, much diminished by extinction, environmental destruction and human devastation of what order of magnitude we understand too well.

IV. Evolution

In Ganoga by sunbit day and moonbrittle night I dwell deep in the moment on the grand spider-scheme of all. Slop from the seas, jewels from the lagoon, an ancient migration of elements, we are too dimly aware of our early and ongoing evolution, an evolution that too often has become gross mutation, an evolution that has in large part metastasized.

As a species we hope we dwell young, starlit always, but as a human society we have approached the cliff-edge of existence on a global scale. And so it is entirely too possible that as a species we dwell old.

Has the human species has made some progress from those early ghastly days spent floundering upon the primitive shore of human potential? Have we shed some of the crude markings of our harsh origin? Have we climbed up from an inhuman a-human existence, clambered out of the primordial swamp, for we are more than mere leaves fallen from trees, more than crickets pre-programmed to chirp? For certain we are not solely drops of water pulled by gravity frozen by cold, sublimated dissipated evaporated. We are all that we are more. We are human though we arose from the swamps and retain forever some amalgam of our origins – energy from stars, drink and breath from atmosphere, minerals from earth.

We are most of all the thinking creature Homo Sapiens though we remain the earth-plant-animal progeny of the cosmos, marked by a hardwired instinct-driven reptilian core of a brain, a mammalian emotional inner layer, and a computing coiled cerebral sheath.

May even be true.

We are filaments spun of the great vast web of creation – creatures risen and rising from swamp, slipping back, digging forward, and all the while seeking to prove that we did not make a fatal mistake coming up from the oceans and then down from the trees hundreds of millennia ago, part of that incomprehensible advance from cosmic conception – inert dust bolted electric into organic being, then sentience.

Surely we are new creatures of swamp and sea destined to be free, come ashore by way of stars, striving to be more fully human, more alive to others and all, as we may and must be.

PART TWO

There were strange snouts in those waters, strange barbels nuzzling the bottom ooze, and there was time – three hundred million years of it – but mostly, I think, it was the ooze....

On the oily surface of the pond, from time to time, a snout thrust upward, took in air with a queer grunting inspiration, and swirled back to the bottom. The pond was doomed, the water was foul, and the oxygen almost gone, but the creature would not die....

There was dew one dark night and a coolness in the empty stream bed. When the sun rose next morning the pond was an empty place of cracked mud, but the Snout did not lie there. Down stream there were other ponds. The Snout breathed air for a few hours and hobbled slowly along on the stumps of heavy fins. It was an uncanny business if there had been anyone there to see. It was a journey best not observed in daylight, it was something that needed swamps and shadows and the touch of the night dew. It was a monstrous penetration of a forbidden element, and the Snout kept its face from the light....just as well, though the face should not be mocked. In three hundred million years it would be our own.

– Loren Eiseley, *The Immense Journey*