

The Great Bear

Ken Meter

Canoeing in the border country,
Each night I perform a ritual to Bear.
Imagining the vastness of his hunger
I coil a rope in careful circles
Wrap it around a rock, tie,
Vault it over a sturdy branch
To hang the food pack far out on a limb
Just out of reach of his claws.

Still, something gnaws at me,
Just as the treetop full of bumblebees
Mars this primeval silence.
Bear keeps himself just out of my sight.
Still, when I gaze up at the night sky
I find him, nose immersed in an anthill of stars,
Upraised tail a map for my journey,
His broad limbs carrying the galaxies.

Gliding past the island by day
I see his crouching form
In the shadows of an uprooted tree.
The mass of roots breathes hot and moist,
Nuzzles the bleeding earth
As if Bear could descend this wound
To hibernate—where all the food
He has ever eaten will be enough.

Ge-be-an-e-quit Lake, Minnesota