

MARGINALIA  
*for a*  
NATURAL  
HISTORY



*poems*



Keith Taylor



Black Lawrence Press



## Contents



Passage to Eden	· 11
In Leech Country	· 12
Running Down from the Hills	· 13
After Goya's Dream	· 14
Pathetic Fallacies, Early May	· 15
Not the Northwest Passage	· 16
At the Two Hearted	· 17
Reading Nabokov	· 18
While We Huddle Inside	· 19
At the Living Creche	· 20
Signs and Wonders	· 21
In a Cabinet of Curiosities	· 22
The Cattle on the Parthenon's South Frieze	· 23
My Daughter's Narcolepsy	· 24
Our Castle and the Wild Dogs	· 25
Canids	· 26
Once, in this Life	· 27
The Last Roost	· 28
A Ruby-throated Hummingbird Triptych	
1. If You Want to Find a Nest	· 29
2. Data from a Late Summer Garden	· 30
3. National Defence	· 31
Mapping the River	
1. A Beginning	· 32
2. Green Light	· 33

3. On the Elimination of Dams	· 34
4. A State-Threatened Species	· 35
5. At the Mouth	· 36
6. Dead Man's Point	· 37
The Uses of Fire	· 38
Hitchhiking and Immortality	· 39
The Criticism of My French Poems	· 40
If You Know That Man	· 41
Our Matinicus Island Seal Bone	· 42
Reading Late	· 43
Spring Ephemerals and the Nature of Metaphor	· 44
Above the Canopy	· 45
Evidence	· 46
Canoeing at Dusk	· 47

*For Jerry Dennis*

## Acknowledgments

Some of these poems first appeared in *The Bear River Review*, *The Collagist*, *The Dunes Review*, *Hanging Loose*, *The MacGuffin*, *The Michigan Poet*, *New Ohio Review*, *Oleander*, and *Third Wednesday*.

The sequence, “Mapping the River,” appeared in a slightly different form in a multi-media presentation created for the Arts on Earth program at the University of Michigan. It was first performed at the Video Studio in the Duderstadt Center in November, 2008.

“The Beginning” and “Green Light” were included in “Watershed,” a short symphonic work by Evan Chambers that was commissioned by The Ann Arbor Symphony, and was first performed by that orchestra at the Michigan Theater in April, 2009.

“Evidence” and “Once, in This Life” were reprinted by Anya Cobler in the Oaken Transformation Sculpture and Poetry Walk.

The author gratefully acknowledges the administrators, staff, faculty, students and researchers at the University of Michigan Biological Station who have generously allowed him to eavesdrop on their conversations for several years now.

A grant from the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching of the Provost’s Office of the University of Michigan helped support this project.

The author continues to appreciate the support and encouragement of Steve Gillis.

## Passage to Eden

*for Pete and Judith Becker*

...

just to let you know that the true gate  
to paradise is on an island  
in a small lake, some far northern place  
protected by seven months of cold  
and ice, then four more of mosquitoes,  
black flies, armies of them. Wolves and bear  
if you're feeling brave. A few of us  
know where it is, but we're not telling.

## In Leech Country

Undulant swimmer, like a blue gem  
reflecting sunlight, the leech snaked up  
below my canvas hightops, stretching  
into air toward what warmth of mine  
it sensed down there in northern water,  
black, un-iced only five months a year.  
My indolent, citified veins must  
smell sweeter than blood of moose or pike.

## Running Down from the Hills

I limped too close to night and too far  
into that dry south CA valley  
and came out on a high sweaty trail  
I didn't know. It took forever  
on bad knees. Fog was blowing in cold  
and I was hobbling down too slowly  
when a mountain lion screamed somewhere  
below me. I moved more quickly then.

## After Goya's Dream

*for Nicholas Delbanco*

Have we become too comfortable  
with those creatures rising from the night,  
half-men flying in from the forest?  
Have we celebrated their weirdness  
and domesticated their terror?  
Did we invent the beneficence  
of owls, desire too desperately  
the protection of the bright-eyed lynx?

## Pathetic Fallacies, Early May

If they could talk, I think the new leaves  
of the Japanese lilac bushes  
by the back window might say they're pleased  
to receive the rain this cold morning—  
there are few things worse than a spring drought,  
for lilacs, anyway—but when drops  
hit a leaf, it springs back, recoiling  
as if slapped often before, afraid.

Not the Northwest Passage  
*for Phil Myers*

...

just the white-footed mouse, delicate  
and doe-eyed, only twenty-five grams  
of unrelenting passion pushing  
north, a few feet each generation,  
through duff on the forest floor, old logs  
or tunnels under deep snow, always  
north, attacking the necessary  
and impenetrable wall of cold?