



The Lions

PETER CAMPION



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PHOENIX **POETS**



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PETER CAMPION is assistant professor of English at Auburn University and editor of *Literary Imagination*. His first book of poems, *Other People*, was published in the Phoenix Poets series by the University of Chicago Press in 2005.

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for Amy and Jack

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ONE

In Early March

It happens in our ignorance.
Fringing the steep calderas and
sinkholes
 the blacktail deer descend.
Trembling. All systems on alert.
White concrete banks of the reservoirs
then corridors of power lines
fall to this circuitry
 this chain
like the channels through silicon.
Though our estrangement from
nature means nothing to them.
And past our mist of sentiment
they also are barest presences.

Ancient and ahistorical with sunlit
mucous dribbling off their snouts

they hold us in their vitreous
unblinking eyes however long.

Then tense. Then pulse out through the air
smelling of buckwheat and water.

Embarcadero

Enormous woman
in her orange blazer

bike messenger
dangling his wire

spare change or
lilies in cellophane:

the entire current holds
its edges even while spilling

into the future
And the exhaust it trails

(newspaper
leer of the President)

seems to fuse with want
with this granular

sunlight on curved skin
gossamer hair

outlandish
turquoise on leopard print

* * *

Bliss and anger fear and
wonder they revolve so fast

there must be
somewhere beyond them

some landscape whose
contours arrive and sharpen

in lucent particular
Only to picture it

pulls up these
streets at evening:

smell of bread or
drizzle on pavement

and billboards for bacon and
cell phones glisten:

beautiful people
bound by the bright clothes

the animal of them
seems about to break from

Bad Reception

It was the average newscast footage.
Out the breech of an M-16, shell casings cut
a golden arc across the picture.

In the background, palm fronds. Maybe some stucco.
The embedded mouth, speaking American.
Then the pixels went fuzzy and

one more image wired up to our kitchen
disappeared. Though the outlines lingered, swelled.
In the office or crossing a jet bridge or

turning from the road to catch the pink
explosions of ice plant. . . . It keeps on circling
back to me: that ragged ballistic spray.

It feels like charging up, getting high:
the images whack through deserts and towns
while the men take fire, and the sheer

velocity of the emotion, thumping
through the bloodstream, feels unstoppable.
Then it grows cold and clear, all that anger

a polluted overspill. The drying basil
and the radio and the evening showers
leaving the eucalyptus liquid with sun.

My entire life in this household with her.
How infinitesimal we are, hidden here
inside the sweep of what we will not stop.

Magnolias

Ambition. Jealousy. Adrenaline.
The fear that loneliness is punishment
and that corrosive feeling draining down
the chest the natural and just result
of failures. . . . What delicious leisure not
to feel it. What sweet reprieve to linger
here with these ovals of purple and flamingo
plumed from the tree or splayed on pavement.
If only for these seconds before returning
to the open air those flowers keep
pushing out of themselves to die inside.

Capitalism

after Jin Eun Young

Darkened arcade
strobed with colors or

a million kilometer tunnel

centipeding

over the ocean floor:

how will I walk through here alone?