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Hysteresis

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Hysteresis · *George Kalamaras*

A tiger approaches full moonlight
in a river, drinks currents

in slow, even laps, leaps from reeds
the next afternoon, covering a deer

with the buckshot of sudden
and prolonged starlight. A boy

with hypoplasia of the left arm shakes
hands with a wandering sadhu and dreams

of orange silk that night, can hear bones
in his face snap and dress for sleep, his wrist

widen, fingers of his left hand worming
toward moonlight. A fish-seller in Agra

eats carp and has visions of a Chinese
emperor cleaning his nails, a concubine

nourished only on toothpicks
and lentils. The magnetic fields

in the hypsographer's head remain
elevated, even when he no longer examines an atlas

of the Himalayas. Can you really ever return
home? Can you board that plane in Delhi, stop

in London, say, and not carry back mist
on Albert Street as snow to South Bend, Indiana?

Peer out across the river. Ganga unwinds
its rich slow cobra fire for miles, muddy

brown and wide. Feel moonlight in your tongue
when you drink from a tin cup, a deer forming

a new constellation in the night sky. Hear
your limbs shift with the earth's plates

when you sleep, when you shake hands
with the dark robe of a monk

in Kentucky. Turn on a lamp,
analyze star-charts, recall lying down

in a holy man's grass hut in Benares,
his right index finger held inside your navel

for the longest minute of your life. Map the rise
and fall of your breath at sunset

as you measure the pause in each passing
field. See a carp floating gold

over the Himalayas, darkening
wheat, following you home.