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## Rousseau's Virgin Forest with Panther

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*Rousseau's Virgin Forest  
with Panther*

Pink hat-sized waterlilies  
steam open through the ferns,  
a brief distraction  
like the flowering cacti  
from the very human

shadow beneath the spotted claws.  
The beast has taken to his hindlegs  
—arrested there—  
the pale, exposed guess  
of his underbelly turned away.  
How taut the clove of his head is,  
tipped back to sense  
what passes.

His shadow pauses with him.  
And all of Paradise  
stirs in a breeze pungent now with sweat.  
Perhaps they see what's coming—

the moon  
wreathed in pliant branches,  
one blood-red round  
burning in the pale blue sky,

a moon so full  
that like love  
it has never been able  
to fail, turn  
brown, or heal-over.