

Tanzania 1982

Ngorongoro Crater

Basket of the sky
woven of the beaten reeds and brown
sedges,
patterned in malachite, sienna and
opalescent pink,
its edges elaborated with *Euphorbia*,
Commiphora and *Convolvulus*.
Venations of tall rush and dots of brown buffalo
drain toward the slate blue lake,
white fringed and flamingo edged.
Tire tracks, like discarded threads
loop and cross below.

On the crater floor,
in a shallow swell of undulating
stargrass
a lion family,
nine cubs of three ages and two
lionesses,
loll beside the track,
squint away the flies
below hillsides speckled
with wildebeests, zebra, eland, and
gazelle.
Three spotted hyenas amble
towards a big bellied cow.
A steppe eagle guards a calf leg
while crowned cranes dance
beneath the cloud wreathed rim.

Beside Lake Makat
a golden jackal patrols
the feathered tide line
while flamingos, like pink pearls
on display pins
stretch black-paneled wings
numbering thousands.
A sound like swarming bees
permeates the myriad honks and clatters
of sweeping black bills.

Near camp, at Aliotoktok Springs,
small black widowbirds
with flowing tadpole tails
bounce in unison, as if on springs,
for their drab mates
and crane, egret and jacana
stalk the reed fens.

Not far distant
beside the valley wall
north of the fever tree grove
rushes reach to mid-flank
on nine old elephants
who move, with sweeping ivory
at a geological pace.
High rumps toss like grey ships on viridian seas.

On the empty steppe beyond
a lone rhino stands like vulcanized
stone,
thinking Pleistocene thoughts
into the Ngorongoro night.

