

POEMS BY NEIL ELLMAN

Legend of the Swamp

The legend is still repeated
at campfires and lodges
as told by the fishermen, hunters
and descendants of the natives
who inhabited this abysmal swamp.

It is told that the beast came
not as a monster with reptilian skin,
red eyes and the scent
of a Myakka Skunk
but as an angelic child
born of duckweed and cypress
its hair a flow of cattails
and innocent curls,
its skin as translucent
as a butterfly's wings,
its eyes as clear and pure
as water in a spring.

As it stole among the willows
and Spanish moss
defeating rivals and predators,
it grew stronger, more stealthy
more reclusive
surviving by more than wits alone
becoming darker, more malevolent
more like its enemies than itself
less like the child it was—
it is how the pursued
became the pursuer,
the prey, the predator
and how the panther came to be.

Leda and the Swan

If only Leda had known
she would have worn a chastity belt
but gods are gods
and always have their way.

Cerberus

The Hound of Hades had so many heads
it didn't know which way to turn.
It is said "Two minds are better than one"
but not when there are three.

The Irony of the Alchemists

What kind of world would it be
if alchemists turned everything
on the Periodic Table of Elements
and Linnaean Taxonomy
to gold?

Lead to gold, iron to gold
plutonium, deuterium
even beryllium.

Every cat would have a skin of gold
every elephant a gilded tusk
my woolen suit
the Golden Fleece
my face the mask of Tut.

But what would gold become?
So plentiful
by the Law of Supply and Demand
so cheap the alchemists would
have to change everything back
to what it was meant to be.