

## TRACKING THE ANTELOPE

*Matthew Babcock—Department of English*

Years of eluding  
the slashing wolfpacks  
that roved from  
southwest Canada to Mexico  
from the Miocene Epoch  
to yesterday have given

the American pronghorn antelope  
a trachea as cavernous  
as an African water buffalo's  
and a heart  
that packs as much  
cardiopulmonary punch  
as that of a six-hundred-pound  
gorilla. Thoughts evolve

late Saturday morning  
from biospheric arcana  
to the progress of the bloodline  
as my wife and I watch  
the videotaped ultrasound  
she brought back  
from Barton & Crouch O.B.  
Turns out  
our baby's an inch  
long, already

kicking up its heels like  
a prairie-mad fawn.  
I've heard it said  
the American variety  
has no known cousins,

isn't considered a true  
antelope at all.  
Our helpless progeny  
paws and prances  
on the screen in a wasteland  
of grainy black and white technology,  
and we observe  
like buck and doe,

vigilant ungulates  
communicating mostly  
through silent stares  
and synchronized nods,  
scanning the orange horizon  
for that smoky entourage  
of predators  
that will come carousing  
through the sagebrush  
before day peters out.

The most fleet North American  
mammal alive, the pronghorn  
can turn a blistering  
sixty per  
over short distances,

raises a stiff white rosette  
of specialized rump hairs  
that can flash  
warning sunlight farther  
than any parabolic mirror,  
up to four miles away

in these days of kill  
or be killed  
where hope measures  
an inch long  
between hoof prints  
and blips on the screen

and the bounding blood  
in our veins  
throws us into  
the long strides of survival  
as we escape only to escape again  
toward being counted  
a true one of our species.

## THOUGHTS AT LAMMASTIDE (CLEARING A SPACE)

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Parisian paramedics in a loose squad  
cleared a space in the crowd  
at the bus stop below  
the Rue de l'Odeon  
to try and revive the driver  
of a patisserie delivery van  
the summer I hunted for the house  
where Paine drafted *The Rights of Man*.

Two moons later, I hoist a True Temper  
yard rake borrowed from a neighbor  
over my shoulder at the northwest corner  
of our house, having with matches  
and *Standard Journal* sent acres  
of dyer's woad to the next life, and survey  
the stretch of groomed earth where  
my daughters will invent the things they play.

Above, goldfinches, strafed in sheer gray-white,  
swoop eastward in gallant sorties,  
their signature whoop-de-doo's  
as nimble on the air  
as French vowels,  
so many I can't keep track  
in this harvest that's caught me  
looking forward and back.

Consider: three hundred years  
ago today in Scotland, my corn in arrears,  
I'd have shouldered my scythe  
and taken this official quarter day  
to celebrate Peter sprung from jail  
after he was sent there by Sadducees  
on trumped-up crimes—  
and the cell lock's miracle click and release.

These days with summer on the wane  
I like to think the love between  
my wife and me equals  
the stored fervor in

one hundred Augusts baled  
and set aflame in the fields  
of Fife. With a hand, she approximates  
our girl's place in her womb, tells

me it's mere days until seraph charges  
fling wide the prison bars  
and she arrives, granting us  
broader range to walk around  
in our ever-tightening circle.  
Let it be enough to have August firsts forever.  
Let small daughters laugh and bring  
us nothing but hasty bouquets of wild clover

as smoke from the wildfires in Oregon blurs  
the sun to a flawless disc of crimson flame  
so we feel as if we could clamber  
through the throngs cleared away  
from Solomon's porch to see  
apostolic shadows pass over the lame  
and hope climb the air like gold birds on the wing  
if only to behold some higher thing.