

Winter 1994

The Nitrogen Cycle

James Tate

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Tate, James (1994) "The Nitrogen Cycle," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 41 , Article 26.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss41/26>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in CutBank by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

James Tate

The Nitrogen Cycle

Before the break-up of my country
I was content to lie under the kitchen sink
and gnaw on busted pipes.
There was a nest of mice
with whom I could exchange recipes.
When the military planes flew
too low over my house
I would stagger out into the yard
and sprinkle Tabasco sauce
on their dreamy vapor trails.
My head was full of larks
lost in a sing-along.

A Snake person walked out of the forest
and just stared at me.

"O Snake man," I said,
"have you seen my little brother?"

"My name," he finally replied,
"is Mr. Ashby. Please address me
by that name or I will embarrass you
by telling you a beautiful story."

"You'll always be Snake man to me,
inclined though you may be
to tell beautiful stories
behind the guise of a pseudonym,
because that's your nature.

You are a wily apparition, no doubt,
conjured by my own crumbling defenses."

Mr. Ashby cleared his throat and smiled:
"Baby's tears began to flow
from baby's blue eyes.
The baby's slippers
were starting to walk on their own.
It was a false baby
with false baby's breath...."

"That would be my brother," I sighed.
"O thank you, thank you, thank you."