

Panthera
Dublin Zoo 1979

Laughably they said
you are a cat but
caged in plain sight
your crow-coloured pelt
tells five-year-old me
you are shadow incarnate.

Steadfast you
pace, posture and rehearse
the hoisting of
carcasses into trees,
refuting the futility
of your instincts
in captivity.

It's true. They have
squeezed your mightiness
into a box. But
ghosts of night forests
cannot be contained.
I believe -
because scrying

in your patient amber
eyes, I decipher you
are more black hole
than substance,
a moveable trap door;

one of a shifting
legion inclined
to swallow a child.