

# Ode of the Hunter

by Alfred J. Petrowske

This is the forest primeval.\*  
The maple, the birch and the ash tree  
stripped of their leaves, they stand,  
gaunt and gray in the fall time.  
Sheltered by these are the white-tailed deer  
that roam in the forest beneath them,  
following runways of old  
traced out by their multiplied footsteps.

Near to these are the stands of the hunters,  
placed where the deer trails are crossing.  
Scattered about are the stands  
with copious spaces between them;  
constructed of poles are they  
and junk timber brought from far places.  
Made with marvelous craft  
and also with sinister cunning.  
Many equipped with cup holders for coffee,  
and mirrors that look to the rearward.

Late in the fall come the hunters,  
some riding steeds made of iron.  
All are dressed in blaze orange,  
so they do not shoot one another.  
Equipped with strange potions they come,  
with vials of urine odoriferous;  
this to attract antlered buck deer  
intent on the process of mating.  
A grunt call too has the hunter,  
giving sounds that are loud and confusing.

A firearm has the hunter;  
of ultimate power and yardage,  
equipped with a telescope sight  
with precise adjustment of cross hairs.  
He joins with other predators  
intent on pursuing the white tail:  
the wolf and his cousin the coyote,  
the lynx and the bear and the bob cat.

\*from Longfellow's *Evangeline*

Arrayed before these are the white tails  
with assets only defensive.  
Fleet of foot are they  
but still cannot outrun the wolf pack.  
Their ears can be turned for direction  
and are many times sharper than ours.  
They have wonderful sense of smell  
and can detect danger afar off.

Still, the predation has purpose,  
for both the deer and the hunter.  
The hunting is close regulated  
by guardians of resources natural;  
we must only harvest the surplus,  
thus to avoid over crowding,  
with starvation and death in the winter.

Strange are the ways of the forest  
but so is the balance of nature.  
The wolf feels no guilt in killing a white tail  
and might indeed watch it suffer.  
But will proudly take meat to the pups,  
for he loves his offspring supremely.  
(Sometimes forgotten, the doe and the fawn  
also have love for each other.)

The deer falls to the predator  
be it canine or human.  
And soon come lesser species  
to join in the feast together.  
First come the Canada jays  
who may have been watching and waiting.  
They fly away with the scraps  
to hide here and there for the winter.  
Timidly come the chickadees  
and their close relatives the nuthatch.  
It is the fat they are seeking,  
as a buttress against the cold weather.

A contrast to these is the raven,  
large and black and impressive,  
said by many to be  
the smartest bird in the kingdom.  
There may come a fox or a coyote  
to tear at the flesh of the white tail.

Or a white weasel will flit  
in and out of the rib cage.  
The unseen mice of the forest  
will glean their part from the leavings.

Finally sinks the remainder  
to mix with the duff of the forest,  
being reduced to soil  
by the tiny creatures that live there.  
From this soil springs new life  
to complete the cycle of nature.

Long ago has departed the hunter  
bearing his trophy with him.  
Leaving only the gut pile  
and multitudinous tracks on the trails.  
Home to tell of his exploits  
and privation endured in the forest.  
Home to butcher the carcass  
and turn the meat into jerky;  
a process he carefully copied  
from the Sioux and Ojibwa before him.