A 2ND BESTIARY

Don't start here! Sample the much shorter folder of creature quatrains, "An Alphabestiary," first.

It's shorter because there's a book out there (available on Amazon or Ping Me) that contains an alphabet x4 of them, together with homemade illustrations and jocularly learned introductions. The "An Alphabestiary" folder is a ten quatrain teaser for it.

But I have written way, way more such animal quatrains than made it into the book. And here quite a lot of them are: "A 2nd Bestiary." They are of variable quality, but these are the ones I haven't erased from my drive. Fair warning: "I like them enough to want to archive them."

Are we clear?

Fair 2nd warning: a review of the book "An Alphabestiary" claimed that however enjoyable it might be for a while, I ran out of steam by the end. Why did I have to go through the alphabet four times?

What the reviewer meant, of course, was that HE ran out of steam. It's a book for browsing, not for reading straight through, you fool! And the poems were not *written* in the alphabetical (x4) order in which they *appear*, so why would the "end" quatrains be the least steamy?

It's fun to let off steam after a silly review. But the "fair warning" needs to be heeded: these animal quatrains are candy. Don't binge, or you'll get sick!

You'll notice that some of these quatrains are missing their trivia intros. I may or may not get round to them.

Featured creatures:

Aphid, Basilisk, Bedbug, Bookworm, Bronco, Cassowary, Chupacabra, Cricket, Dormice, Eagle, Echidna, Faun, Fire Fish, Goblin, Grizzly, Hedgehog, Heron, Impala, Incubus (alternate), Jaguar, Kiwi, Nasokind, Llama, Lobster, Moa, Mummy, Narwhal, OneTwo, Oyster, Oxen, Panda, Phantom, Phoenix, Plankton, Popcorn Monster, Quahog, Quangle Wangle, R… (A Riddle), Rooster, Skull & Skeleton, Sturgeon, Succubus, Tomolin, Troll, Wildebeest, Witch, Wotsicald, Xylofoil, Yahoo, Zorse

A IS FOR APHID

*Aphids are tiny bugs that feed on plant sap. They come in hundreds of species, reproduce with brisk vigor, and have catholic tastes—while each species may have its distinctive preferences, between them they have the whole vegetable kingdom pretty much covered. In the 2ND BESTIARY subset of the BESTIARIES subset of the PARTY PIECES section of this web site, you will find animal quatrains for every taste, presented from A-Z—some comic, some observational, some obscurely informative, some lightly lyrical. You are invited to browse upon them like the Aphids, taste-testing and moving on.*

On Petal Ridge

On Petal Ridge, the Aphids cluster,

Taste-testing leaves… Oh, *these* pass muster!

And this! Those too! What's wheat, what's chaff, it

Barely matters to an Aphid.

(They tend to say "More, please!" Not "Half it.")

B IS FOR BASILISK

*The basilisk, the king of serpents, was a fabulous reptile, born from a cock's egg, who had a gaze so fierce it could glance you to death. His one weakness was the stench of the weasel. Well, if we had a spear handy we might skewer him, but his poison would back-zap up the shaft and wipe out us and the horse we rode in on. The sight, meanwhile, of a cathedral gargoyle, its waterspout mouth spitting out the rain, served to symbolize evil and scare the wavering Christian upright.*

Basilisk Warning

No selfies on the gargoyles, Titus!

No, Basilisks' stone eyes won't smite us,

But *climbing* Basilica Basilisks

Does pose death by dazzle risks.

B IS FOR BEDBUG

*Bedbugs are wingless, smelly, and tiny—maybe a sixth of an inch or so. Tiny until they feed on you, at least, which can fatten them up nicely. While they have no inhibitions about bugging furniture other than beds, they do like beds. A lot. Because, you know, that's where to find* you— *while you're lying about not paying much attention.*

A Noxious Nocturne

This creepy-crawly-smelly-bity

Bedbug wants to share your nightie.

Will you take pity on this Bedbug?
Or will you squeal, and scream, *Drop dead, Bug!*

B IS FOR BOOKWORM

The Bookworm

He likes *old* books—how fine to dine

On molds, and wheat pastes, and ripe spine!

*New* books? Well, new books may *look* nice,

But read the reviews in Books and Booklice!

B IS FOR BRONCO

El Mucho Macho

At rodeos, cowboys bestride

Wild bucking broncs, and ride, ride, ride!

"All hat, no cattle" boys go bonk

As broncos plonk them on their conk.

C IS FOR CASSOWARY

Alberta Tour Group

Our flight to Papua from Grande Prairie's

Packed with Canucks—and Cassowaries!

They've booked a *plan*e home to New Guinea?!

(Well, duh! They're *flightless* birds, you ninny!)

C IS FOR CHUPACABRA

*The chupacabra, meaning goatsucker, is a folklore creature of the shadows, mostly the southern U.S. and Central American shadows, although the putative distribution is wider. Sometimes, as it's been shown, they're just coyotes made funny-looking by the mange. But their appearance varies with the reports, and there may well be other explanations: including that they're blood-sucking creatures of the night. And they're fine with that.*

Goat Sucking

Such flinch, and fear—such jeering jokes—

"Go suck a goat, you spooky hoax!"

Moon-lurking's gross? Goat soup's macabre?

How can that be? sighs Chupacabra.

C IS FOR CRICKET

*A cricket sings with his rubbed wings (only the males sing), and hears with attachments to his legs, affixed below the knees. He's related to the grasshopper, but has an extra set of feelers, at the tip of the abdomen. Remove his article and cricket becomes a sport, long governed by a spirit of fair play. But's that an old tutelary, no longer in the best of health.*

Rules of Cricket, #22

Old Cricket, as a rule, plays fair:

He'll only wake you when you're there.

Rule 1: sleep farther from his thicket.

Rule 2: it's your fault, or it's not Cricket.

D IS FOR DORMICE

There's a dormouse called the glis glis which I was tempted to write about instead. Its common name is the edible dormouse, and the ancient Romans used to dip them in honey and eat them for dessert. Dormice do generally have a lifespan of about five years (if not eaten for dessert, etc), do tend to be nocturnal (also arboreal), do often hibernate for six months or more, but I'm not sure how gently they go into their last goodnight. How many animals that hibernate, especially for so long, must slip away int their sleep, though.

A Brief Meditation on the Half-Life of Dormice

Five years. No days. Then goodnight, dormice.

Six months, all night, they feed, breed more mice.

Six months, all night, all day, they doze.

How gently their long dark darkens, goes.

E IS FOR EAGLE

*Eagles are big, powerful, sharp-eyed birds of prey, traditionally nicknamed the king of the birds. The bald eagle, an American variety, is the symbol of the United States, is featured on the U.S. seal, and can sometimes be seen to fly above our house. My late mother-in-law used to pronounce its name as "iggle," rhyming with "giggle," which I did.*

We Thank You For Your Service

A shrug-winged Eagle, bald as eggs,

Who sleeps rough in the woods and begs,

While not conventionally regal,

Shows quite the common touch, brave Eagle.

E IS FOR ECHIDNA

*Zoological echidnas are spiny anteaters; the mythological original was a cave-dwelling half-woman, half-snake. In my quatrain I've named only some of the notorious monsters Echidna is credited with birthing. She was one prolifically perilous mean mama.*

Mother of Monsters

Echidna, half-woman and half-snake,

Mother of monsters: if you'd baked cake

For your vile kids—Sphinx, Hydra, Cerberus,

Scylla, Chimera—would they still murder us?

F IS FOR FAUN

*It was Stéphane Mallarmé who wrote the great and difficult poem "L'Après-midi d'un faune" which inspired Claude Débussy's music. Either way, it seems to be about a faun—a creature, half-man, half-goat, out of Greek mythology—who wakes from an erotic dream of nymphs, or who wakes and ponders on a morning spent with those nymphs. One nymph is sensual, the other pure, and the faun can't handle either one of them. The faun, like Mallarmé, is confused by all this, but makes of it a beautiful symbolist music.*

L'Après-midi d'un faune

The Faun, that goat spawn of great Pan,

Unsure if he's god, beast, or man,

Has dreams of nymphs (explains Débussy)

Who'll spurn him, dancing a chaste watusi.

F IS FOR FIRE FISH

*The fire fish, or fire goby, is a kind of dartfish of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The biggest of them, at about 3 inches, are too small for eating, but they do swish themselves into difficulties: as aquarium fish, they will sometimes jump right out of the tank. Their fieriness is in their red tail and their yellow crown; the bulk of their body is white.*

Griddle Tune

Fire Fish! Savor the name!

Picture an ocean reef, aflame!

Picture so fresh a fry of fish

It swishes its own self to the dish!

G IS FOR GOBLIN

Cannibalism Rights

Goblin-Gobbling, Goblins say,

is the God-given Goblin Way.

It's only, with a gobbled squawk,

when gobbled, Goblin-Gobblers balk.

*Yes. But the Goblins scoffed when they saw my quatrain. Oh, they understood my intent, to call into question a fundamental human self-interested willful blindness to inconvenient truths; but the piece, for all the superficial accuracy of its description, had little to do with the practical, frank, unflinching God-given Goblin way. So they offered me some additional stanzas:*

But Goblin-Gobbling, Goblins know,

is our God-given way to go:

that bittersweet catch in the throat—

that *squawk's*—a Goblin glory note.

We fart and belch, we shit and piss—

for we are gross, and gross is bliss—

the seasons turn their wheels; God steers

our nows to thens, our theres to heres—

we lick and squeeze, are sucked and nibbled;

for God is rude and God is ribald—

we gobbled, once, and now are gobbled;

for that's the world our God has cobbled—

we fed, who now are served—a dish

more piquant for the swallowed wish

to still be *Goblin*— not yet what

will fill tomorrow's chamber pot.

We know all this. Humans forget.

Or they pretend, and are upset.

It's sweet! We're not offering advice.

We're us; you're you. Cheat. Lie. Be nice.

G IS FOR GRIZZLY

*Grizzlies are more massive than your average bear—less huge than a 1500 lb. Kodiak, but 1000 lbs. of Grizzly is nothing to sneeze at, unless at a safe distance. Like most bears they are North American, not as common but more dangerous than the black bear. They hunt all year round, night and day, in all weathers, no hibernating, to acquire the grizzled look that earns them their name. Bears do strip down in the spring to an underfur—they're more adaptable than this poem suggests—but some days, that grizzly coat still must itch!*

Bear Flash

I can't see how you Grizzlies bear

That thick coat and no underwear.

When it gets hot, or even drizzly,

Dare to bare a bit, you Grizzly!

H IS FOR HEDGEHOG

*Hedgehogs are long extinct in the Americas, but they were a common enough sight around the gardens in England where I grew up—like a scruffy, spiny, scuttling football. They're chiefly nocturnal, so a night owl me might have seen them more—perhaps even a whole array of them (that's their collective name). They're quaintly endearing, other than to badgers, to whom they are prey.*

Hedgehog Crossing

Our cousin Fred finds Hedgehogs dieting

On his lawn. Which is disquieting,

When you're a nudist. Now, when Fred jogs,

It's watch out, toes! And watch out, Hedgehogs!

H IS FOR HERON

*Herons are widely distributed non-swimming water birds. We regularly watch the local herons at work, and have often seen one snag its fish. We have never, however, disputed its catch—a risky ploy, given the ferocity with which it clasps, shakes, and chugs the thing. The smallest heron is the foot-long bittern; the largest the five foot goliath heron. Egrets are a white heron. An old form of "heron" was "heronshaw," which in Hamlet is corrupted to "handsaw"; the prince assures us he can distinguish one from a hawk.*

Heron Fishery

A heron filched your fish? Admire it!

Don't poach it back, like some darn pirate!

It's rarely serendipitous

To have some heron nip at us.

I IS FOR IMPALA

*I used to love to do cryptic crosswords. I guess I never lost that love exactly; they're just not as popular in the States as in the UK, and I stopped doing them. The other kind, however challenging, just don't interest me much. The first two and a half lines here follow the rules of a cryptic crossword clue, breaking down the parts of the whole word and providing other ways to read the sequence of letters I'm PA LA. Etc. Normally you would only do this once, then give a clue to the whole word. I do it three times, then give two whole word definitions (car, antelope). This has very little to do with the animal, of course: a not too large African antelope that can leap enormous distances and grow horns as big of the rest of its body.*

Cryptic Crossword Animal

I'm Pennsylvania, then L.A.

A lap note back. I'm dad, some say,

with the French car. Or nope:

more simply, just an antelope.

I Is For Incubus

*This is a different Incubus quatrain from the one in "An Alphabestiary." I got its list of names by typing "incubus" into Wikipedia. They (and more) are given as regional variants. "Alp" is from German folklore, "boto" from the Amazon basin, Trauco from Chile; "lidérc" is Hungarian, and "mare" Swedish; tokolosh is Zulu and Xhosa, and impundulu is Xhosa;"pori" is from the Assam area of India. Some of these beings resemble incubi (demons who sleep with human women) more than others. The pori sounds more like a succubus. Actually, I'm not sure what any of them sound like! Not speaking these langauges, I can't swear that this quatrain comes close to scanning.*

Exotic Demon Lovers

Incubus types are everywhere!

Alp, boto, Trauco—lidérc—mare;

tokolosh; impundulu; pori:

that old let's blame the devil story.

J IS FOR JAGUAR

*There are a few jaguars still in some southwestern states of the USA, but mostly they're big cats of the South and Central Americas. They vary quite a bit in size, but let's call them the world's third biggest big cat: after the lion and tiger, but before the leopard, whom they most resemble. But a jaguar may have the most powerful bite of any of them. It can climb, crawl, swim, and (so I hear, and am loath to dispute) tell a mean joke. And maybe also appreciate one, given that it's the only North American cat that roars.*

Last Beast Standing

A Jaguar's jokes may not *seem* droll—

He'll never win the phone-in poll.

Yet studio audiences love the Jaguar.

He snarls, and they howl, "What a wag you are!"

K IS FOR KIWI

*Way back when, there were two species of flightless bird in what is now New Zealand. The Moa was much larger than the Kiwi, but it was the Moa, the once so dominant bird, who went extinct centuries ago. Kiwis have survived, although they are still quite vulnerable. Kiwi fruit is doing well, though. It's also called Chinese gooseberry. When I was growing up in London what was all the rage was Polish jokes. No one meant anything by them, of course.*

Kiwi Jokes

In Moa jokes, Kiwis were fruits.

"How gay! He won't say *fart*—he *poots.*

Not *pricks,* or *piss*es. *Weewees!* *Wees!*"

You think their breed's extinct? Oh, please.

L IS FOR LLAMA

*Llamas are humpless South American camels, related to alpacas, but larger. They have been domesticated for haulage—on Andean mountains, they're sure-footed and strong-backed—but they're not always crazy about the job. A displeased llama may lie down on the path, or it may spit stinky saliva in your face, or it may throw up on you. Nor, I'm guessing, do llamas much like being skinned for their hide or eaten. Single l* lamas*, native to the mountains of another continent, enjoy a safer and more elevated social status.*

Llama Karma

When Llamas lose their heads, the beasts

Believe they're reborn Buddhist priests,

And bray, *Me llamo lama,* *farmer!*

Best pray you don't alarm a llama.

L IS FOR LOBSTER

*Lobsters have ten jointed, armored legs, with claws about as long as their body attached to the front pair; and teeth lurking in the claws—blunt crushers in the heavier claw, sharp piercers in the lighter one. If you're having trouble counting the legs, it may be you're including the four antennae, or the two compound eyes, peering out from the tips of stalks. Periodically, lobsters molt, shedding their hard shell for a briefly soft one; it will thicken, though, if the lobster hides itself well enough from you—you who wish to boil it until it blushes red, then eat it.*

Lobster à la Topspin

The Lobster's a fierce tennis freak.

His serve is wild; his net-play weak;

He sprays his volleys like some mobster;

His *lobs*, though! Oh boy, what a Lobster!

N IS FOR NASOKIND

*The German poet Christian Morgenstern (1871-1914) invented the Nasobēm under the influence of English literary nonsense poetry; I studied him in high school, and this creature has remained with me. My quatrain paints the same picture as his original, except that I have tried to visualize and conjure the child ("Kind") whom the* *Nasobēm has in tow.*

The Nasobame of Morgenstern

Das Nasobēm von Morgenstern,

Strides on his noses, towing his bairn.

The stubbier nostrilled Nasokind

Teeters and jounces, sneezing lint.

M IS FOR MOA

*Moas are extinct, and have been for centuries. But they were once the big boss birds of the New Zealand forests (before it became New Zealand): wingless herbivores who strutted their stuff in their, who knows, we think maybe millions. The Maoris settled the islands at around the turn of the 14th century. Within a hundred years the Moas were no Moa.*

So Lawn to the Moa

When Moas ruled the islands' forests

there were no predators. No tourists.

Not even a zookeeper or Noah.

Whose ass is grass *now*? Who's the Mower?

M IS FOR MUMMY

The Mysteries of the Giza Pyramids Food Hall

It's been millennia since their *last* food,

And still not *one* comes by for And *still* their tums won't touch fast food!

Divinities, once mummified,

Don't *care* what's "just so yummy" fried.

N IS FOR NARWHAL

*Narwhals are Arctic whales, famous for their spiral tusks. For centuries these ivory tusks were identified with unicorn horns, and fetched vast sums as magical objects. For over a thousand years the narwhal has been hunted by the Inuit peoples of North America and Greenland; it still is. About every bit of the animal is devoutly consumed. If it escapes the hunters, and doesn't trap itself under polar ice and drown (another common fate) it may live for fifty years or so, its blotchy grey skin, as it ages, turning an ever purer white.*

Arctic Whale Song

They're box-store big—like Narwalmarts!—

Till stripped down to their Narwhal parts:

To meat, skin, blubber, organs, tusks.

Then, no whale's left. Not even husks.

O IS FOR ONETWO

*I've been asked how those who don't exist can become "old." The answer is simple: they have wanted to exist for a longer time than those characterized as "young." Such wanting is, essentially, what defines the OneTwos, and is how they are measured—regrettably, however, nothing can take them more than a couple of steps into the authentic and real.*

The Old OneTwo

Old OneTwo sighs. "If we existed,

We'd dance the two step! Fight two-fisted!

Write code! Rule the music biz!

We're *Want*Tos, though. No OneTwo *Is*."

O IS FOR OYSTER

*Oysters also frequent freshwater or salt water shallows, but they're most abundant in the sea deeps, clinging to rocks and feeding on whatever's pushed their way by the current. Pearls form inside all mollusks—they render parasitic worms less irritating by coating them in nacre—but the finest are said to come from the pearl oysters of the Indian seas.*

Oyster Warning

Oysters sift the ocean's swirls,

Working their stray worms into pearls.

Worms, you'd best not bug an Oyster!

Stay safely outside, where it's moister.

O IS FOR OXEN

*Strictly speaking, oxen are castrated bulls; more loosely, the name applies to any bovine animals. But there's always that whiff of tameness to the word. For instance, while the fierce term "bullseye" suggests a lethally struck target, the gentler "oxeye" is just a daisy.*

Workers' Rights

Beneath your yoke, the Oxen toil

To haul your carts, and till your soil.

Next Labor Day, to thank your Oxen,

*You* pull the cart, and let *them* coxswain.

P IS FOR PANDA

*Giant pandas, who are the pandas of pandas-for-short, are mostly Chinese. They like quiet bamboo forests, when they can get them—not easy, because in China that habitat is shrinking. Anyway, it's a bamboozling addiction, since bamboo's none too nutritious, and a giant panda must binge and binge to earn its descriptor. Eat some chicken with honey, big guy! They're related to raccoons. Western scientists used to think them mythical.*

Panda Tantrum

We're pampered Pandas at the zoo,

And we demand BAMBOO! BAMBOO!

We trust that's what you've planned to hand us?

Come pander to your pampered Pandas!

P IS FOR PHANTOM

How to Tell the Real Ghosts from the Kids Dressed Up for Halloween

Can you tell ghosts from sheets with eye slits?

To prove they're real, not a disguise, let's

Rip kids' sheets off, and unpant 'em!

If nothing's there, *that* one's a phantom.

P IS FOR PHOENIX

*The Phoenix is a one-of-a kind Arabian desert bird, who every half millennium or so feels old and burns himself to death, so as to rise, young and vigorous, from the ashes. The phoenix in this weird conversation quatrain is at the end of a life-cycle, and decides to go through his rebirth publicly, for a good cause. I hear that they sent him a nice thank you note.*

Same New, Same New

I saw him once, you know? The Phoenix?

A fundraiser. White wine and Brie-niks.

Rose from his ashes. Sang some Greek.

I hear you were in Dubai last week?

P IS FOR PLANKTON

*The singular form of "plankton" is plankter, but these singular marine organisms aren't ever singular. They mass together—algae, bacteria, protozoa, minuscule animals—and go with the flow, unable to resist a current. Fish larvae couldn't get by without them. In fact, until they feed and grow a bit, fish larvae* are *them.*

Oversimplify, Oversimplify

The Plankton's goal in life's to float

Serenely down some fish's throat.

For a simpler life, come back as Plankton!

It may prove simpler than you'd banked on.

P IS FOR POPCORN MONSTER

Horror Movie Night

In twenty films, Freddie and Jason

strap their glove and goalie face on, `

to make folks pay! Cheap, shopworn thrills.

But man, fresh-buttered popcorn kills.

Q IS FOR QUAHOG

*The bivalve known as the hard clam, or the hard-shell, or simply the clam, is a different species from the ocean quahog. But it's this one that the coastal clammers clam, and call, in New England especially, "quahog"— the name taught us centuries ago by the Native Americans. Wampum beads come from its shells; tickled taste buds from its raw or its chowdered meat. There are, surely, somewhere, families who spread this meat with jam.*

Clam Jam Jam

Quahogs are these neat, cute clams

My family eats with sweet fruit jams.

At the beach, my piggy pa hogs

All the peach and half the quahogs.

Q IS FOR QUANGLE WANGLE

*A creature of the Edward Lear bestiary, the Quangle Wangle was no Jumbly, or Dong, or Pobble or Owlycat power couple, but he did have that really great hat. And there they and all the rest of the great man's tribe could gather, making their goofy noise, as in these alphabestiaries. My favorite bit of Edward Lear nonsense, though, is his recipe for Gosky Patties: a perfect metaphor for the laborious creation of failed art; still the name I give to my own rejects folder.*

For The Quangle Wangle

For all the weird kids, Mr. Lear,

Whom his vast hat, his great good cheer,

Delighted with your jingle-jangle.

I say, Long live the Quangle Wangle!

R IS FOR… (A RIDDLE)

*He whose name must be guessed is famous via a tale collected by the Brothers Grimm, but its origins date back about four thousand years. The version I remember from my own childhood has the imp stamping the ground with such ferocious anger that he splits open the earth, falls in, and is never seen again. Which must have made for a pretty cool cave to discover, a couple of thousand years or so later. (Ooh, gross! Ooh, pretty!)*

Cave Riddle

Flecked in the walls, some say they glimpse

His rumpled, spilt skin—the mad Imp's

Whose stamped foot forged this cave. They claim

He burst into gold dust… Guess his name.

R IS FOR ROOSTER

*A rooster's a sort of rowdy, macho chicken. He bays at the rising sun, struts about with a comb in his hair (or instead of his hair), and spends all his time in a fowl mood. Roosters bred for fighting are called gamecocks. Cockfighting—where gaudily macho specimens rip the meat and plumage from each other—in some pits, with metal spurs attached to the natural spurs, to up the ante—has been practiced for thousands of years. As cocky and dumb as the creatures are, this tradition may even have been the roosters' idea.*

Hey! Hey! I'm Talking Here

At daybreak, Roosters on the farm

Become a choral snooze alarm—

Except you can't shut off a Rooster.

There's fewer folks who farm than used ta.

S IS FOR SKULL (& FOR SKELETON)

Skull & Skeleton

Alas, poor Yorick. Just a skull, now.

He once had bones. Geez, death's so *dull* now!

But tickle a skeleton where he dangles?

He'll laugh until his whole frame jangles.

S IS FOR STURGEON

*Sturgeons are a large family of fresh and saltwater fish, of Europe and the Americas. There's something almost crocodilian about their long, bony-plated bodies and snout-like jaws. The mouth, though, is small and toothless, and takes in food by sucking. Sturgeons are huge; there's a species of Russian sturgeon than can reach a weight of three thousand pounds. So it's unsurprising that caviar, which consists primarily of sturgeon eggs (or roe, as fish eggs are called), is most famously a Russian dish.*

Sturgeon Prayer

The Sturgeon's twice a gourmet star,

Both full-grown and as caviar.

If I'm reborn as roe of Sturgeon,

Grant me grace, Lord Fish, to burgeon.

 S IS FOR SUCCUBI

 Bad Dream Sex

 Young man, beware of succubi.

 Don't let she-devils pluck you by

 your exposed parts! It's not dream sex

 if it's with demons! Or your ex.

T IS FOR TOMOLIN

*My friend Tom Olinger used to tell his young kids stories about these magical animals. Tom loves the traditional music and folk tales of Ireland, so I spun them into aes sidhe bugs. (The Sidhe or Sith are a supernatural race in Irish mythology.) In Tom's own tales there are two kinds of such beings: the snickeroodle (who are bad) and the pookadoo (good), and they get trapped in the rug patterns if they're seen or touched.*

The Tomolin Ceilidh

The Tomolin are *aes sidhe* bugs

Who mimic the swirl-shapes in your rugs—

Emerging at night, to play and dance,

By the charger light, with your spider plants.

T IS FOR TROLL

Troll in a Halloween Mask

At Halloween, a troll might ask,

"Might I be spookier in a mask?

I'm uglier. I'm hairier.

So why's this orange-haired guy scarier?"

W IS FOR WILDEBEEST

*Wildebeests, or gnus, are large antelopes of the Southern and Central African plains. They have ox-like heads and horns, and horse-like manes and tails. Their shorter name is Hottentot; the longer one comes from the Afrikaans for "wild beast." When I was a little kid living in South Africa, we often ate dried strips of wildebeest meat called "biltong."*

Little Wild Thang Visits the Zoo

These Wildebeests, now tame old gnus,

Preferred, once, wilderness to zoos.

Will I, some day, old Wildebeest,

Be so still, so well-drilled a beast?

W IS FOR WITCH

How to Make Your Halloween Evil Witch More Evil

A pointier chin, a wartier nose,

A throatier cackle, gorier clothes—

They'll all help make a witch still wickeder.

But *not* like jabbing her own broomstick at her.

W IS FOR WOTSICALD

*This creature (I happen to know) is not imaginary. It is only the young who doubt his existence— and even then, only if they lack experience with old people.*

The Wotsicald

I age, I age! Words dart and dim.

Names, even faces! You're *her*? *Him*?!

My jowls bloat; I gawp, go bald.

I'm turning into a Wotsicald!

X IS FOR XYLOFOIL

*The Qwertyuiop (see "An Alphabestiary") came up with this creature. I'm not sure what he was thinking, but that's the subconscious for you.*

The Song of the Xylofoil

The Xylofoil's a rosewood poppet

Whose mouth draws breath when you unstop it.

Plonked on the ribs, he whistles notes

Like trees caught in the crosswinds' throats.

Y IS FOR YAHOO

*In "Gulliver's Travels," the Yahoos are repulsive, contemptible "creatures" (Gulliver thinks of them as animals, although they are recognizably human) who serve a race of noble and intelligent horses, the Houyhnhnms. They are as ignobly covetous as they are filthy, but the satire might seem a bit shaky from the more impoverished side of the class divide.*

A View from the Diamond Mines

Yahoos have a noisome jones

For digging in the mud for stones:

The pretty kind. Who but for beauty,

That tyrant lord, would do such duty?

Z IS FOR ZORSE

*A true fun fact, but I don't think that uncommon: that animals of different species can mate, but only bear young if they do so in the right gender mix. It's also not absolute. A truer last line would be "but she and he don't generally breed a brood." Zorses are usually bred deliberately—they're hardy, useful animals, and zoos breed them too—but not often using zebra mares, who are more valuable as zebra moms. And there aren't many wild horses around in Africa for the wild zebras to disport with. So the gender inequity MAY be largely a case of human socio-zoological engineering! Zorses, or zebra mules, or zebroses, look like horses or like mules, but with stripes. They're infertile. Or so the socio-zoological engineers say.*

Gender Inequity

A he-zebra can woo a horse,

and do the deed, and breed a zorse—

a she-zebra can do the dude,

but she and he won't breed a brood.