

The American Political Animal

Which one animates you?
Which do you harbor?
The bald eagle with its intense
vision and predatory eye?
Or Benjamin Franklin's choice,
the wild turkey?

Do you turn to New Hampshire's
rattlesnake, *Don't Tread on Me*?
Or hold within yourself an amorphous
jellyfish, whose dangling tentacles
cause burning, seizure, death?

Each American in landscapes
inland or coastal, urban or rural
has invited one political animal
to take root inside—the bed bug,
the bad-tempered badger,
the porcupine, the hobo spider
spewing poison through mouthparts
shaped like boxing gloves.

Or the honey bee maintaining
its hive. The mother duck.
The beaver, with its dams and lodges.
The surefooted mountain goat. The single
llama in a herd of sheep, taking on
coyotes, protecting the weak.

—Susan Elizabeth Howe