



The Snakes of September

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Stanley Kunitz has long been an inveterate gardener. His two-thousand-square-foot plot in Provincetown, Massachusetts, is tiered, every inch filled with a hodgepodge of interesting plants that coexist happily. Kunitz's habit became to work on his garden for at least an hour or two every day in summer. It is not surprising, then, that he produced a body of poems about gardens and nature.

In "The Snakes of September," Kunitz writes about the snakes active in the heat of summer. He is aware of their presence, but they evade capture—not that he wishes to capture them. They hide in bushes and shrubbery, playing their own games with the gardener. The words that Kunitz uses in talking about them are active verbs: "rustling," "outracing," "flashed," "pulsing." As the poem proceeds toward September, however, when the nights are cooler, the snakes, cold-blooded, lose much of their mobility. A change is announced by Kunitz's use of the word "torpor." The two snakes appear through a narrow slit and are seen dangling heads down and intertwined.

The gardener now comes upon them and touches them gently, at which point "At my touch the wild/ braid of creation/ trembles." The last lines of the poem legitimately invite deeper, post-Edenic interpretations, and the final word, "trembles," hints at the very source of creation.

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