

PAST PLUTO

Once upon a time
our grandparents chased off the edges
of maps the same swift lions as Sacagawea,
Polo and Vespucci. They gave the beasts
no refuge

And neither did we. We inherited
an atlas without teeth,
almost complete.

Our ink spilled in neat lines
latticed across hollow continents,
evicting all lions and uncertainty.
Book-binders confined Dr. Livingstone
to footnotes and appendices. His wanderlust
lost allure. We now knew the cubbyholes in which each blade
of grass belonged. The ink dried.
We were never wrong.

Unicorns yielded on every savanna
to the bellows and harrumphs
of ugly, odd-toed ungulates as soon
as surveyors encroached on the blank
spaces of the world. The shady nooks
between mountains blazed
with electricity. The contours
of the ocean floor revealed
themselves to us
like Braille.

Even Apollo's chariot obeyed
our terse command to map the dark
side of the moon.

For a generation we knew nothing new
about geography. The wisest waited
for the slow extinction of surprise. Then out beyond
the orbit of Neptune, for one brisk week
the children who had been yawning
with ennui swooned with the messy pleasure
of rediscovery, finding one last land
where there be lions.

—Eric Pinder