

SERIALIZED
(UNPUBLISHED)
Part One of Two

LIGHTS IN DEFILES

Poetry

by

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the critic—

over half-frame glasses
the professor said, readers
need a key to understand
your images of rifle & Bible

he said he understood them
but I know he doesn't

section one

change—

what happens if,
the child asked,
when you're baptized
they hold you under
too long?
will you become a fish?

Wrong Side of the Mississippi—

applied for jobs, Maine to Oregon
not one interview, but
both PCC & SIC offered
an English course to teach
this new millennium
if I could be in Kentucky
Southern Illinois
before the new semester began

*yesterday's laundry almost dry
hangs dripping in slant rain*

I loaded texts & clothes, a rifle
& a dog into a high-mileage Mercury—
leaving Idaho where I didn't really want
to be, but was 'cause I owned a house
I drove 26 hours straight
to where I bought five acres
in the Shawnee

*hard rain slowed only long enough
for flash flooding to retreat*

needing a roof, a stool, a shower, I bought
a trailer—two bedrooms & a bath, well used
(five ninety-five delivered,
another hundred for license & title:
I became trailer trash
when I threw a broken washing machine
out the back door)—
setting a power pole with weatherhead
& breaker box cost my last five hundred

*in some distant city a poet drinks
with friends, but here it's raining
& I haven't money to gravel a muddy lane*

I replaced a broken living room window
with sheet steel through which stovepipe
bends upward: the stove I could afford
is too small to hold fire all night
so before dawn I rise to stoke
gray coals with oak & sassafras

*rain slaps the thin skin
separating me from lightning shivers*

the only TV station
preaches Christ to the converted
but not the Christ who said
His soul must die—and was dead

three days & three nights
how long it has rained
without tears becoming roses
along this trail of displacement

*clothes hang over the tub
hopefully they'll dry before I wear them*

in the morning, I'll track mud
into a classroom
where students will struggle
agreement from verbs
well used by poets sleeping off hangovers
in Chicago lofts, warm & dry—
downstate tears don't fall
for gay lovers
but for immortal souls
dead as last spring's flowers
wilted into mud

*creeks swollen by muddy runoff
carry weed seeds across flooded
rows of Roundup Ready beans
newly planted but now needing
an additional spraying
before September combines separate
good seed from chaff*

August 2001—

should be on Kodiak
putting up winter salmon
harvesting early deer
but I'm here in the Shawnee
feeling for swollen ticks
petting three bird dogs
that won't hunt again this year—

with syllabi to write
& written answers to supply
for a newsletter interview—
with estimates to calculate
for a Trail of Tears monument
& a wannigan to build
before frost gilds leaves
I write about snow & sled dogs
remembering as best I can
the slant of the weak sun
as lead dogs lead & wheel dogs pull—

I apply for a January residency
in Sitka
where the last Tlingit hunting dog
was found castrated
the knifework preformed by a vet
from Outside.

A YEAR SINCE I FISHED

here on the American River, my steps
parallel brown bear tracks sharp
in snow draped over brown tussocks
shaped like bears. Curled yellow

leaves, narrow as fangs, cling
to gray willows; pale red hips hang
on rose brambles beside the redblack
carcasses of calico chums. Breaking

water, a bright silver jumps, cartwheels
twice while gulls pace the black gravel
beach—I add a tippet to my leader, knot
on a globug, egg with a flame spot.

Downstream, eagles perched in a cottonwood
watch one gull attack another. Another
silver jumps, jumps again, splashing both
gulls. A pair of mallards sails overhead

seconds after a shotgun blast. Hunters.
Sometimes in the river quiet, I forget
I'm minutes from town, minutes from home
as the placid drift carries my yarn

fly towards the tailout; it looks real.
It might be. A green flash. I'm into
to a big Dolly that wants to slug it out,
strength against strength, felt through

the bent glass, unequal adversaries joined
by an invisible strand...maligned
as egg-suckin', fry-goblin' predators,
Dolly Varden aren't reared in concrete

pens; they aren't culled by hatcherymen.
They're wild & free & survivors, who
have slipped by seals & seiners—
I grab this Dolly by his tail, lift him

from the river. A long brick with metallic
green back & sides, peppered with red dots,
a gray belly singed orange, he's a world
record, really is. I admire him, but

I crush his skull with a stone.

A VIEW CAMERA—

where fishermen cast
flaming orange lures
below the silver bridge
an eight-by-ten negative
might capture a moment
of yellow shimmers
as breeze rustled cottonwoods
lean over the Clearwater
rippled & sparkling
in late October sun
but nothing will ever
again capture passing
steelhead, rainbowed
heavy with spawn

needing a roadmap—

in the late October chill
fishermen bundled in thinsulate
& goretex, rods in hand, stalk
steelhead as they walk
along the highway
troubling my dogs

today they're fishing for real
they can keep hatchery fish
if the sweet river scent
of their ancestors' Clearwater
remains scribed in small memories

but all today's returnees
remember is the diesel fumes
of trucking & being trucked
around dams

saving salmon—

should Lower Snake River dams be breached
the question under discussion
everyone has an opinion
if runs are lost
they can't be replaced
with fish that hatch closer to the sea
but does it matter if we lose a run
or a river as long as we appear to be
protecting predator & prey
with our legal mumbojumbo
& lots of campaign contributions—

river eddies circle around
letting fish rest
before having to again swim hard
against a relentless current
that will sweep them into spindrift
where raccoons gnaw sore flanks
savoring the last morsel of life—

to return a river to what it was
is a task worthy of God:

who will kill the last walleye
of the millions now in the Columbia

who will send terns on to Alaska
& not let them stop for endangered fry

who will truck wheat now barged to seaports
what about the pulp & lumber

who will build the coal-fired power plants
needed to replace the kilowatts we'll lose

who will drill the deep wells
needed to replace lost irrigation

then what will we do with the millions
of tons of silt...saving salmon
sounds so easy
just blow the damn dams
as if it's an either/or choice
as if the salmon had a choice
of whether to spawn again
of course they'd want to if they could.

migration—

when Lewis & Clark asked Lemhi-Shosone
about the great sea, even in Montana
Natives knew it took fifteen days
from the Clearwater to the Pacific
exactly how long it took smolt
to make their downstream migration
till the dam era turned the once mighty
Columbia
into a stepped lake—
now, on the eve of the bicentennial
it takes fifty-five days
for smolts to hitchhike to salt water
but the greater problem might be
the lack of lampreys
that also migrated with salmon & steelhead

eels floated higher
in the water column
& were the favored prey

but no biologist listened
to Native stories
about eels--

instead they relied upon the Great Lakes model
poisoning & trapping eels
till they have about killed Idaho's salmon runs

since few eels now return
to river of the Nez Perce
even the old men
have forgotten
the story
of how Eel
won his teeth
after losing at bones
making all of us the greater losers

"PRIVATE PROPERTY"

slipping past my gate
apparently believing
they were protected
by their Oregon plates
two steelhead fishermen
polarized lenses down
stood beside the sign
& studied the run
looking for fish
that returned
before a gauntlet
of dams & turbines
constricted
the Columbia
the Snake
the North Fork—
I would've asked
if they could read
but not enough fish
get permission to trespass
to wet a line so sure enough
when they saw no shadows
of a returning run
they returned to the highway
& headed farther upstream

THE HATCHERY AT BONNEVILLE

Kings bang bloody snouts against
weir gates that block natal gravel—
spawners not needed,
dipped from pools, stacked like cordwood,
are left in the sun
while their buyer drinks beer
with the driver of a Peterbuilt.

I migrated to the Aleutians
and returned to ram a Peterbuilt
not far from Bonneville—
she was with me, Unalaska
to Sand Point, Mintrofinia,
Chignik, Kodiak, Homer,
then the accident,
ten months in the hospital,
learning to walk again
and walking out
after twenty years,
after the insurance settlement.

Standing by the gate, I bang
my nose against the chain
link...gulls peck at empty
eyesockets, bleeding gills,
mute on dead survivors,
each one of ten thousand
eggs laid
as I too watch their buyer drink beer.

COOK INLET 1987

Early reds are about here a record year the payoff year we'll all get well.

Nets hung skiffs scrubbed winches on boom trucks greased we're ready for the run, I'm on the beach at mile 131 taking pictures of setnetters

the sunset and that tanker ten miles offshore a speck against Mt. Redoubt, the *Glacier Bay* sails north loaded with North Slope crude.

Hours later tide ebbing the tanker dropping anchor reports a jolt a second jolt and trailing oil.

Drifters and setnetters begin calling, "Is that oil in the East Rip? how far south? west? out to Kalgin yet? anyone flown it? it's big you say? bigger that reported? 50,000 gallons? lots more?"

The quiet surf drags tinkling stones down the beach while oil pools into long slicks thick as old cow manure suspends and splits sending offshoots ashore.

Anchorage attorneys direct a cleanup.

Standing among diapered nets I look north, tarry slicks coming coming coming coming, I can almost see them.

Reds school off Kalgin Island sorting themselves by river, millions and more coming. On shore inspectors sniff and taste

testing for oily salmon. The Coast Guard declares the cleanup a failure takes over hiring fishermen to shovel the shit with backhoes and fish scoopers—

Prudhoe Bay crude doesn't float like oranges, it's not broken up by weather and chemicals contaminate salmon.

For 20 years fishermen attended meetings told experts containment booms won't corral oil in the Inlet's rips that skimmers can't pump shit.

Now scared mad they face closures for oily nets oily decks oily holds taint clean fish yet the salmon are coming, they're almost here.

The run hits, 100,000 a day for three days push into the Kenai swarming past setnetters past sonar counters past dipnetters and lazy belugas.

But reds heading for the Susitna the Kenai the Kasilof must pass through oil as children once past through fire, 100,000 pounds are burned tainted with black specks in their gills.

The cleanup ends with most of the oil still out there—perhaps the spill will disappear into the flotsam of scholarly footnotes, oily footprints in forgotten books.

On the beach I now take pictures of gulls while fishermen play volleyball over idle gillnets.

The gulls are dead.

WHEN APRIL RAINS QUIT

I again climb down the falls behind Rapid Inn
where I was once *just another white kid*
& diners watched eels snagged
on rocks yellow with pollen—

I wonder why the cafe closed.
Did truckers quit stopping
when logging shutdown?
Did fishermen stop ordering
when salmon runs failed?
Or did coast-bound traffic become so bad
drivers didn't want to get out of line?

Above me, traffic flows like the river
this Sabbath morning as I stand remembering
that girl I'd liked to have known—

years later, I saw her run across
Highway 101. She wore sealskin boots,
miniskirt & a T-shirt reading,
Support Limited Entry,
and was gone
before I could turn my pickup around.

I wouldn't have known what her T-shirt meant
if I hadn't followed salmon north
when Limited Entry was a ballot issue—
I voted for it.

Doing so meant compromising
free market principles, meant
I couldn't fish salmon
without buying history.

Tumbling over the falls, the high water
boils with emptiness
as I do
the only migrant
to have returned from the Bering Sea.

INHOLDERS

Three shackles of gear and a setnet site,
all you need to go fishing, said the logger
in yellow tinpants. I borrowed (the night

Kennedy was shot in Los Angeles) in spite
of credit rating & no collateral, enough for
three shackles of gear and a setnet site.

Hung the web myself, leadline on my right,
corks to the left; a snap for buoy & anchor.
In yellow tinpants, I borrowed the night,

set anchors for running lines by flashlight
during May's low tides, lowest of the year.
Three shackles of gear on a setnet site—

yesterday a plane stopped, gave me a fortnight
to quit this bight; said it fancy to scare
off yellow tinpants. I borrowed the night,

& bucked tides across the Inlet; I'll fight
like a salmon (presidents & politics change) for
my three shackles of gear and a setnet site,
and the yellow tinpants I borrowed that night.

PASAGSHAK CREEK—

like shimmering tinsel
pinks splash up riffles
into the first shallow pool
pushing a wave like a bore tide
before them—

I've come
like the bear around the bend
to teach my daughter
how to catch salmon
or rather, how to cast
a fly to salmon—

pinks are learner fish:
three, four pounds
determined fighters
strong
but runs are short
leaps telegraphed—
not easily spooked
nor leader shy
they hit green flies
till flies fall apart—

shin deep, two steps wide for me,
the stream's over her knee boots—
she's banned from wearing
her sister's hip waders
she filled them with sand last week
so she climbs onto my back—

pinks bump my legs
two dozen or more
push into the next pool

her rod, a nine weight
nine foot boron—
would've given her a lighter rod
if I had one I disliked more
she's broken five rods in two years
I, one in a lifetime—

clench a green yarn bug
to her leader
flip it twenty feet forward—
before the fly drifts a foot
I, like that bear

biting bellies
eating only roe
leaving on the bank
still flopping pinks
for her cub, set the hook—
the pink shoots upstream
a steam torpedo
thrashing
in the next pool—

how to apply drag puzzles her—
single action reels don't use slip clutches,
fingertips touch rims, feel
the years spent feeding, migrating—

"A good fish," I ask
"Naa, just a moldy humpy."
that returns to the pool
as if challenging
disrespect—
she reels fast
plants her feet
bows her back
doubles stiff boron—
"Don't horse him so."
"But Dad, he'll take my line."
"He won't take it all."
"He might."
I scowl
she eases up—

this pink becomes another
& another & another
each unhooked
in shallows
to be caught
by the bear
her cub too full
to chase off gulls
raven.

ONCORHYNCHUS GORBUSCHA—

humpies lack mystique:
they're not steelhead, Atlantic salmon
kings, cohos, fish bragged about
they're commercial fodder
for seiners
setnetters
a little salmon
determined
since first wiggling
from natal gravel
fry heading to sea—
any flowing water will support a run—
determined
to return despite international quotas
el ninos & leagues of belugas, pengas
seals & sea lions—
determined
to escape seine leads
shackles of crystal web
& tons of cast Pixies—
determined
to reach gravel riffles despite stream flows . . .
I once saw one, blinded by gulls
crossing a damp lawn, following the flow
of a garden hose—
determined
to spawn when
even determination
can't stop
deterioration—
bellies turn white
backs green
flesh softens
then only bears
eagles & cheechakos
prey upon them
although I saw
such fish on ice
in a supermarket meat case
in Pocatello, Idaho.
(and in Paducah, Kentucky)

BARBLESS—

at last night's meeting of discovery
I heard bicentennial expectations
for the Corps of Discovery—
soon millions of RVs will swim Hwy 12

I should prepare now
catch & release tourism
they're calling it
but there were objections
from environmentalists
from folks who like *here* the way it is
from the Nez Perce who didn't know
they needed discovered
& haven't benefited much
from contact

but what kind of weirs
will stop this migration
of these salmon people
all sorebacks
by the time they get here

reenactment—

cruised a little timber today
need a pitch pine for a dugout
what journals say
the Corps of Discovery used
when they camped with Nez Perce
here across from the mouth
of the Northfork

found pines large enough
knots might be a problem
in ones close to the house
& size will be a problem
with me working alone

I'm not as strong as I was
but I should be able to handle
a three by twenty foot log
that'll make a decent size
canoe, one large enough
to run the Clearwater—
too bad the Snake
& the Columbia
are so dammed
the only way
I can paddle to Ft. Clatsop
will be on a boat trailer.

SNOW FLIES—

snow flies are rising
don't know their proper name
only know that their hatch
signals the end of summer

a few yesterday afternoon
more after dark
enough to be swirling
snow like the tiny flakes
of arctic nights

& here they are this morning
blown along with the leaves

hunting this morning—

quiet fog gray & breathless
almost respectful of the bear
drunk from fermented apples
that precedes me from seedling
to seedling—I slip between stems
as I sample fruit from trees
along the bear's backtrail
searching for the one seedling
that might be a patented success
the apple growing forbidden knowledge
but an out-of-sorts wife who thought
I was in the shop working, waited
breakfast
till it was ruined
& now would flay that bear
with a willow switch
if she thought it were me.

ADMIDST LIGHTNING SHIVERS

& slant rain
with two dogs chained
& one cowering
the coyote
stole close
stole the old pea hen
off her nest
her last cry
late as thunder.

designed to deceive—

along the Truckee
where big browns stalk
minnows within city limits
I, to a stout hook
honed sharp
wrap thread & yarn
a tinsel tag
a bit of flashabou
a bucktail wing
& beadchain eyes
it looks real
like Reno after dark

salmonthoughts—

in deep water
i rest tired flesh
i no longer feel
feeling instead
only this need
to arrive
at a freshet
i remember
darkly
darkly
dark . . .

section two

a message sent along the mail route—

at breakfast I almost grasped
why two millennia of saints
have awaited a promised return
with murder in their hearts
for other saints who read text
differently.

bobtailed—

carrying the no-tail gene
the tabby kitten,
her littermates gone,
chases her hindlegs
curlycued as pigs' tails
before batting
drying sassafras
then tumbling over
a briefcase & pulling
herself atop piled books
where her mother sleeps
in sunshine—she wants
to play with her mother
who licks
the rectum that might
cost the kitten her life—

still attached by placenta
a deformed little girl
reaches up
to grasp the finger
of the surgeon
operating
on the fetus
that only asks
for the life
granted to that kitten
by human compassion.

NO RULES

1.

no rules exist
when playing chess
with Satan who employs
a clever ploy, preaching
Christ as ***morethanenough***
fulfilling all needs
of heavenbound saints
while laying on healing
hands, praying forgiveness
& teaching an immortal soul—
his white bishops threaten
ranks & files with silence
if any dare challenge
historical exegesis

2.

you thank the ruler of this world
who said,
"You shall surely not die"
for supplying your needs
for healing your body
for covering your sins—
you believe as Eve must have
that heaven is your home
when Christ promised
the earth to resurrected saints—
*who will you blame
if you fail to have enough?*

3.

a gambit pawn sacrificed
you await
a destination never yours
not seeing the lie
that'll force you
to purchase whiteness
while the earth wobbles
towards a promised return
& the binding of that liar
who plays both sides
of the board
till checkmated
by posted knights
supported
by the king of kings.

CONFORMITY

Fog squats heavy along the Clearwater
as slushy drizzle pushes into our carport
turkeys waiting to roost—
that slush becomes snow
obscuring river & pines as traffic
on Hiway 12 slows: plows & sand trucks
busy on Lolo Pass
leave downriver travelers to struggle
through as best they can.

The minister coming for a visit
a heavy hitter from two hundred miles away
comes for the two who might leave the flock
comes as a mailman delivering good news—
the fellowship, its fruiting leader
girdled by porcupine, has been regrafted
onto roots of evangelical orthodoxy...

seven churches on a mail route,
one
without reproof,
none among the multitude
professing heaven as home—

Will you have problems attending Sundays?

Yes we will
the Sabbath is the seventh day.

What about Christmas?

Yes, we'll have problems inserting Christ
into a celebration of the sun's rebirth.

*What about fellowship with Christians
who believe they're going to heaven?*

Eternal life is the gift of God
no one receives it by fornication
in the backseat of a Chevy—

the first Eve believed the serpent
“You will not surely die”
she ate & died cursed
with desire for her husband & pain
in childbirth;
the second Eve believed the old dragon
“You have an immortal soul”
so she took to herself knowledge
& was cursed with desire for her husband
Christ Jesus
& with pain in childbirth—

the Church will live through the Tribulation
when disciples are born as heirs of God
at Christ's return.

Intelligent men proclaimed heaven
the destiny of the dead
even before Plato's *nous* cooled into *psuche*--
it wasn't to *Theon* that Christian fathers turned
but to this Greek
to find saints in heaven.

The heavy hitter's message is *repent*
& *fear Him who can kill body & soul*
said as if I should tremble
before a terrible troll
able, from under the bridge
of consciousness, to reach
through time to throttle
a simple design to reproduce—
his message delivered to ensure
conformity.

Snow piles up
its windswept whiteness
covering now even the fresh dung
of roosting turkeys, their soft whelps
strewn like dirty laundry
one sock tossed at the cat
one with boots
shirt over a dining room chair
jeans on the bathroom floor—
sure I was taught better
sure I get complaints
but I'm able to live with clutter
till I know company's coming
then I put on the whole armour of God
that protects against doctrines
of demons, "***You shall surely not die***"

I will die as will the heavy hitter
the grave, not heaven, awaits us
the dead know nothing as we decompose
our belief or unbelief consigning us
neither to heaven
nor to an everburning hell
but to a resurrection
at a predestined time—
the heavy hitter protests, *To be absent*
from the body is to be present with the Lord.

But we aren't absent till resurrected—
death doesn't change atoms into energy—
we are earth
of this Earth
& if not resurrected we will remain
soil here where snow falls
on both scholar & skeptic.

The new leaders' pinchhitter struck out
on a winter night when no game
should've been played
but can anyone who doesn't live by Faith
even understand why he was sent?

Today's News—

terrible premise certainly
clones without souls
given as the reason
to resist
stem cell science—
man is tripart
psyche, pneuma, soma
breath, life, flesh—
life is in the blood
so man is breath, blood, bones.
Which will be forgotten?

AN ANNOUNCEMENT

on late night television:
a "World Famous Evangelist"
is coming to a nearby town—
haven't heard him speak
since a fight with his father
separated him from our fellowship
itself reduced
since a deacon rent faith
into linen strips,
each becoming greased
patching around musket balls
aimed at one-time brothers:
civil war is never civil
when possession of tithes
means staying in print—
Christ won't return
till the good news is published
the one who endures will be saved.

But throughout the World
the gospel preached
just believe and you will be saved
is the wide road found by many
narrow is the path
to life:
it doesn't go by Sabbath day
farmers' markets
or garden club tours
or a riverboat casino's picnic
or bass fisherman casting to sulking largemouths.

His voice golden
this World Famous Evangelist
when he was heard coast to coast
greeting friends
described the narrow path
while he stood on that wide road.

CONDEMNING LEGALISM

fiery sermon preached
in Samaria
prohibited Israel
from returning to Jerusalem
commanding instead Feasts
of the seventh month
be celebrated the Eighth—
these ten tribes lost
their identity & their God
in their wars & their migrations—

fiery sermons preached in America
prohibit judaizing—
the Sabbath, changed from the seventh day
to the First Day of a Second Week
becomes remembrance of the Second Covenant—

but those reborn Feasts
of the *lost tribes*
have been mostly forgotten
as has been the Sabbath—
this Sunday I watch weigh-in ceremonies
for a B.A.S.S. tournament
the winner to get a boat & a truck
that'll be sold so he can fish
next Friday, Saturday & Sunday
on another lake in another state.

ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON

in an Anchorage pizza parlor
I sat behind four ministers
who each on TV that morning
had preached love & mercy
but now were haggling
over how to divide the money.

ON THE END TABLE

Kristel's red Persian sleeps among stone chessmen,
salt-still Crusaders—
armored columns
pushed off the stone board at Armageddon.

RESCUED—

Thirteen when I met him
the Adventist minister
at Oceanlake
a big man
taller than my six feet
middleaged stout
without the soft body expected
from men who toil with their minds
he said he'd been an Alaskan
bush pilot
had cracked up four planes
before he changed
vocations—
making polite small talk
I asked what happened
though really wanting to hear
about moose hunting
he said he went prop first
into the mud at Turnagain
the tide was out
but had already turned
making the mud more dangerous
than quicksand
so all he could do was sit
on the tail of the plane
watching the dirty water
bear down on him
he could see rescuers
along the muddy shore
waiting for the dirty water
before they could launch a boat
but shore looked higher
than the tail
the tide would reach him first
he needed rescued
before the dirty water swept
him away
so he prayed
& unlike Hemingway's
trench soldier
he kept his promises to tell
of his salvation

On Keeping Unleavened Bread at
Howard Johnson's, Pocatello, Idaho, 1995—

so many familiar faces
missing this High Sabbath
sing praises in strange houses
as they contend they hold
the faith once delivered
while here, beyond our control,
saws & hammers frame rooms
where guests will never know
these old walls heard midweek
hymns sung...
businessmen are at business
& salesmen are selling
& clerks are clerking
& priests are praying
we will leave
behind our legalism
that convicts them
of not unleavening
their houses of worship.