

SERIALIZED

(in four parts)

PART ONE

Section One through "Jonah" {page 84 of the published edition}

UPRIVER, BEYOND THE BEND
with
AT ABBY CREEK

poetry

by
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(AT ABBY CREEK was nominated for a Pushcart Award by Rick Bass;
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IN SEARCH OF A GRAND STYLE--

Augustine urges pious teachers to master rhetoric
so God won't receive short shrift because of who
contends for souls; urges edification in a subdued

style, persuasion in a grand style. Is this why
England's blind poet sought to justify the ways
of God in verse? My words lack the eloquence

of Milton, nor am I as ambitious. But ignored
pricks, sharp as rose thorns, now compel time
be spent giving gratis what I received gratis

what I neither sought nor wanted till I understood
it's easier to compute a tithe, to write a check,
to support a work
than to speak unwanted words. Silence is easy
as is remaining the student; yet the hour comes
when it's necessary to joust with giants:
better to try & to fail than to not have tried,
the lesson of the windmills
so I hereby step forward to speak
against the millstones of orthodoxy, knowing

my voice will be a mere sabot kicked between gears
of well-oiled machinery, but its splinters
will prick & fester long after I return to dust

if I find a grand style.

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Section One

dust--

a raven circles life
seeped into loess
that once flew
in a whirlwind
with God

CLIMBING THE HEADLAND

between Gull Point & Eagle Harbor, I see
perched on drooping briars where a rose
bramble narrows the trail, two sparrows,
each with dripping crest, fluffed breast,
spiral their graven tune towards heaven.

Below, gray light, misty, drifts in
quickstepping columns, each battering
the curved bight—a gray sky wedged
between roily horizons, a gray seiner,
dipping, bow disappearing beneath silent

white eruptions, curled spray mast high.
Beyond the plastic boat, mystic Ugak Island
bares its black & gray stone stripes,
forms twin rips that flit across the bay.
Last here a year ago, I remember that hail

hammered our cabin behind the spruce grove.
Pitched lashings of rain stung plywood walls;
the ceiling wept, wet clothes dripped.
I watched rust flakes pop from the drum
stove, red-orange hot; I was guiding two hunters,

both new ministers with congregations
who will hear lessons drawn from the morning
to evening, evenings through mornings that we sat
listening to the hissing lantern burning all day.
Thirty foot combers raced past the gray-faced

cape, past our bight, till the wind laid down
Wednesday evening. The rolling pound of surf,
softening towards dawn though crashing on
the gray sand beach, fanned our hopes of crossing
Ugak before we starred in a Coast Guard rescue.

Three days overdue, we loaded gear and both hunters'
deer into my Zodiac, launched through breakers,
took two curlers over the top—prop touched bottom,
pin sheared, a second try, pushed out farther.
Nine miles of winter brine, the last five through

fog too thick to see island or cape, my hand
locked on the tiller, sitting in water, without

compass or marker—cold-stiff, we crossed, keeping seas to our stern quarter, found the river, and staggered ashore like three Jonas. Now, seas wash

untracked sand, and push against gray & green cliffs broken by a waterfalls' white blaze. If I could I'd stretch tired arms towards the heavens and sail with that gray-winged gull, yes, the one that circles now. We'd glide along the beach, search for clams in the surge, then rise over grassy headlands and the aerie on the Point and the crusty snow on the ridge where the old sow dens. We'd meet saints in the clouds, converse a while, then turn around to begin again work that needs done here on

the mountain I climb.

FROSTED BIRCHES GILL THE MELTING SUN

catching, in swollen twigs, small globes
bright as morning stars—a moose breaks
willows beside icicles hanging

from a shoveled roof, & like a pendulum
hung plumb, the moon appears stopped
over the fog veil that hides

sanded streets still as spider threads.
Two days from full, two days from
Jerusalem, the pale moon heralds

the second Passover here, north of night,
where killing the sacrifice between
the evenings gives us till August

to shed blood. That's not what the Eternal
intended, so the Law must be interpreted
by men. God help us.

after grace--

after dinner we wondered
about wondering
& in soft voice our host—
he said he was a simple farmer
not someone educated like myself—
prayed
to the God he knew
as well as he knew
himself, giving thanks
for our ability
to give thanks
he didn't ask to receive
things or help
even though he could use both
so I listened to his words
with interest
as I imagine they were listened to
wherever they were heard

THAT SNAG—

not much was happening in Alaska
so I loaded my wife & kids
her sewing machine & five chainsaws
into a decade old pickup
& headed down the Highway
to look for a cutting job

stayed with my sister a couple of days
found a job falling for a gypo
a white pine selective cut
near the Divide
all good sticks
two bushel a tree or more

my saws were a little small
my bars a little short
for timber so large
I'd never fallen trees
five, six, seven feet in diameter
but I needed work
so *sure I can do it*
but I must confess
I prayed
before I started
chips flying
skiptooth chain gnawing
centuries of growing—
when Lewis & Clark passed by
these pines were already tall

a week became a month
I still knelt
a moment or two each morning
but I'd become comfortable
tipping over giants
so my concern was where would we spend winter
once snows came; we were then tent camping

the gypo skidded with D-6s
skidded treelength
a faller & a bucket with each Cat
the bucket on the landing
the faller setting chokers
so when I tipped over a pine the Cat couldn't budge

I went to put in a Russian coupling at 66 feet—
for fellows who don't understand
a Russian coupling's where a suspended
log is cut half in-two
then ringed
so it breaks when jerked—
there was twelve feet under this pine
still more than four feet across at 66 feet

I cut
when ringing that pine
a bit too deep
heard the crack
& threw my saw
& it threw me
I landed on my saw dogs
they sorta impaled my left thigh
but what I didn't see was the pine
had snapped off a red fir snag
three feet or so across
the catskiner hollered, *LOOK OUT*
but I couldn't get up
felt like I was being held down
no matter how much I fought

I rolled over
rolled a couple of times
& looked up to see the snag
falling across me—
flat on my back
nowhere to go
I put up my hands as if to catch it

it bounced up maybe twenty feet
fell across me a second time
then took off
hurled out over the canyon
two hundred yards or more
rising & falling
in the same arc
I would've given a broomhandle

I stood
a little blood coming from my thigh
both wrists badly sprained
the catskiner was ashen

looked as if he died
but after a minute
he said
You've got somebody looking out for you.

I wanted to tell all
that had happened to me
wanted to tell of miracles
but the only words
that came were
You're right.

secular—

the leaning sun sends
long shadows
across sumac hunter red—
chokecherries along the railroad
are almost orange—
even aspens are tinged
pink where they mingle
with yellowed cottonwoods—
a hen searches for snowberries
missed by wild turkeys
that passed through
earlier this Sabbath day

home alone, nursing a scalded foot
I listen to radio pleadings
for a secular ministry—
what would a secular ministry preach

a few yellow apples still hang
among yellow leaves
on the seedlings
above the tracks
where a doe & her yearling
hide
from rifles & riflemen
intent upon harvesting
winter meat
& I start a venison stew
while dogs bark
at the mail carrier
honking
for me to sign
for certified letters
for debts I don't remember
for debts I can't pay
despite all the good work
I do

AT A READING LAST NIGHT

I realized I write of phenomena
so what do I make
of snowberries
beside the hen house
sporting new green growth
among falling leaves
or of a chokecherry beside them
now in full bloom
on branches still holding
changed leaves
today, October 25th, 1998

is this bit of spring in autumn
a heavenly sign
ancients might have read
as returned fertility
to a long silent womb
or is something more scientific
happening like global warming
of a ten foot strip
from which I survey
a river vista
of yellow & red leaves
fluttering in an evening breeze

I only report what I see
what it means
is more mysterious

so I break a flowered branch
that will now never set
winter fruit
& give it to a new wife
who prays for one more child
who will be reared by both
father & mother

separation—

to be seen I have to fall
a few trees
here along the road
so with waiting saw
I check a lean
begin the face
feeling in vibrations
the chain pull
life from years
of growing
before my conception

my aim is certain

my bar is too short
to reach across
so I reach behind
her bleeding face
& send a shower
of chips & fines
into her deathbed

in small groans
& squeaks
no louder
than a caught mouse
this pine
tells of her separation

I jump atop her butt
saw in hand
its bar hard before me
& sever limbs
that once caught dew
& snow
spring breezes
& huntingcamp smoke

I lop off her crown
survey my handiwork
conclude I've done
man's work

they don't fit—

Chinese shoes don't fit
but they're all Wal-Mart
stocks in my size
all I can afford

years ago, when I worked
in the pulp mill
I bought only Redwings
even bought a new Ford
every couple of years

didn't have much money
but I had enough

don't know what's happened
I work as hard or harder now
as I did then, work even
longer hours for myself

over qualified is the reason
I'm told I'm not employable
some fellas say that just
means I'm too old

I wish it were that simple—
on my way back from town
I saw a dozen fellas
late teens I'd guess
again hanging in the park

they're there every day
smoking
watching the cars

the President would say
they need educations
so they can get jobs
would ask me
for more tax dollars

but I have a little education
enough to be over qualified
& I'm sure I'm still stronger
than any of those fellas—

I can't even get an interview
so what chance do they have
of ever buying shoes that fit

to an unknown brother—

except by press clippings
I don't know you,
you with a Congressional appointment,
an *honorable* preceding your name

but I talked to your daughter
who doesn't respect you
enough to honor all you say

in an Internet biography I learned
you were an orphan—
guess that is true
but I never thought myself one

was surprized to learn
being an orphan
was something to overcome

maybe that's why our lives have followed
different paths
why you're in the Capitol lobbying
& I'm here on the Clearwater wondering

how to delay bill collectors another week
another day...there doesn't seem work
enough for both of us

that's not true: there's plenty of work
just not enough economy & too many taxes
too much regulation, too much interference
from too far away so by extension

you are part of my problems
for what I need is another timber sale
more logs sawed
more houses started
more money circulated
some of which will be spent
with me & by me—

instead I get more park rangers
monitoring transplanted wolves
spending borrowed dollars
we all need

public enemy #1—

I'm tired of you saying
I'm an environmental enemy
yes, I fall timber
yes, I run cattle
yes, I am guilty of living
off the land
but you are not
beating down my door to hire me
I'm over forty, over fifty
a white male, rural background
I know wood, cows
know a little more
but apparently not enough
to get interviews
so I work wood
nurse cattle
& the day there's no timber
no open range, I'm out of work
so it's in my interest
more than yours
to guarantee growth & regrowth

so get about your business
let me do mine—
take your entrenched attorneys
your motions and memoranda
all on paper from trees I fell
& go home, tend your garden
before you are cuckold
by an old cowpuncher
an old logger
who beds secondgrowth
now that I have logged
the virgin timber

VISION—

was given a journal
a poet thought I ought to read
an article about technical perfection
but no vision in today's poetry.

I read words, but my thoughts
were about planting a high density apple orchard—

the article said if I wanted to get better
wanted to be accepted, I should write about war
should borrow a war if I don't have my own
even gave an example
but my thoughts keep returning
to the problems of growing apples
now that we're not in Eden.

Perhaps some day I'll tackle some big issue
like being a flower & waiting for God
but for now I'm more concerned about moving
five hundred trees I grafted two years ago.

Could I write about being a flower
when we all are
or aren't
grafted to the Vine
& even if we have been grafted
not all grafts take—
I know, I have grafted enough scions:

some never do anything,
some put out buds that wither,
some send up shoots that die—
those are the ones I notice
the ones that require watching.
I don't have to pay attention
to scions that take till it's time to prune.

That seems the problem with poetry: we are watching
those grafts that didn't quite match.
We can ignore for a season
poets firmly grafted
who will, in time, bear fruit.

the rapture—

1.

asked on Christian radio
what will happened
when an airborne pilot
is raptured
an educated chuckle
but no answer
for who wants to blame God
for the deaths of so many
for those who fall
will believe
nothing
forever

2.

is not then their god
a respecter of persons
favoring Jew over Gentile
missionary over heathen

is not then their god
not worthy
of being called Savior

3.

the God I worship
laid before us
in the Holy Days
a plan of salvation
that includes others—
at his return
firstfruits first
as needed laborers
to prepare the way
for everyone else
at the Last Great Day

I didn't learn to love
others to leave them behind—
love doesn't come easy
a great price
has been paid
so that I
will care about those who fall

the Demonstration—

with eyes still red & swollen he said
it shouldn't have happened, his son
hadn't done anything wrong
it wasn't fair
& he blamed God for not caring

I listened unsure of what to say—
too much has been written about when
bad things happen to good people
without me adding to the confusion

when rebellion rattled foundations
a third believed
but others were unsure
so for them a proof was designed

lab animals were needed
to show lives of competition
will prove no life at all
but noone wants manipulated
so the mice were left unfettered
in their round cage

the rebellious were released
to plead their case for six days
but the Sabbath belongs to design
& designer to show all
what love will do

as I watch my student begin to drink
his possessions away, I tell him
to get help...I'd intervene
more forcefully
if professional ethics allowed—
I hurt for him
but my tongue is bound
by decisions made years ago
& I understand better the dilemma
of a designer who has given
freedom from intervention
till we & others know
that without his love
none of us would live

A WORK OF GOD IS RECONCILIATION

a message entrusted to fishermen
& physicians, loggers & farmers,
to families of saints founded in faith
by a radio ministry of reconciliation:

I listened while driving from Salt Lake
to Boise to an energized voice
telling all who would hear to blow dust
off their Bibles—I listened to stay

awake as jackrabbits darted blind
for moonlit sagebrush that stretched
dark across shield volcanoes & stepped
buttes & dry lakebeds where coyotes

hunted & rattlesnakes sought retained
warmth of flat rocks on which Utes
sat while chipping birdpoints as they
waited for widgeons & teal to wing

their way south so winter wickiups
would be filled with child birth
& laughter, not knowing that across
continents & seas a man was crucified

so sins they didn't knowingly commit
would not be remembered by a Creator
they never heard of...I blew dust
off my Bible & found these Utes

were not in an everburning hell but
in dust that then filled this room.

THE PEOPLE THINK

we're not connected
to timber & totems
that maybe we're here
by witchery—
they see our cities
our plaster christs
our clearcuts—
they hear our talk
of justice & judgement
of mercy & money
of grace & greed
but they don't see
don't hear real love—
they see us all the same
sticky white clay
tracked over the land
& they're waiting
for the north wind
& the south wind
& the east wind
& the west wind
to blow our dust away—
we have failed to show
how connected we are
to the One who formed
this land from himself
maybe as a people
we forgot our faith
then our stories
& are now likely to bring
their expected destruction
upon a creation
we should've remembered.

AS AN ARTIST CELEBRATED TONIGHT

I could've claimed the nametag
that would've let me enter free
but I paid my way
into the opening
a Native Arts gallery show

I listened to the flute
ate the chips & tortillas
watched longtime patrons
after reading my name
passby my work
with hardly a glance

in my tattered jacket
mended jeans
I mingled with a judge
& his other
who might have recognized me
in different circumstances

I spoke with other artists
all from somewhere else
each as polite as if I were
a customer

it wasn't till older Nez Perce
filtered away from the flute
that anyone noticed
my little piece of work

they looked at it all around
asked each other
what kind of wood
& I had to say, apple

they took my phone number—
I might be asked
to demonstrate
Native techniques
on the reservation

so all in all, it was
a pleasurable evening
even though those

who invited me
never knew I came

LIBRARY

Book 1.

April lies still on her white skirt,
the morning's warmth a pink tongue curling
around soft purrs. She presses
warm hands against the frosted pane,
says, *He likes your essays, man stuff.*

I'm glad he does.

Wanting to flirt, a schoolboy again
but her husband's friend,

I ask where she's been.

Asia, Africa, South America,

she mentions nations,

most I know, Mexico, Morocco, more,

and in whispered blushes tells of
hitchhiking—

she's more at ease than I who thumbed
through Cascade mountain passes
twenty-four years ago to date
the mother of my daughters.

I scan the alcove:

Bowed heads nod over deeds of long dead kings,
highlighters mark things to be remembered,
a goose is a bird that mates for life.

Her hand starts for mine,

stops. A line divides us. I do

the honorable thing to do--

hands now unable to reach

with innocence: *father, mother, single
parents each...*

neither innocence nor wisdom

makes sense alone at night—

I won't say how little I've traveled nor

how far I want to go.

I won't...oh, yes, I will.

Book 2.

A cougar roams the Blue Mountains—
most say he doesn't exist,
a myth created by shepherders.

I saw him once near Milton-Freewater
eating the entrails of a lamb,
set the dogs on him, ran him from Troy
to Baker, lodgepole thickets,

stone flats, ridges of standing pine,
chased him into the incense cedars
beyond Hell's Canyon; he swam the Snake.
He's a shifty old Tom, deceitful
as dry lightning, appearing white
but black as the hounds that treed
him atop the basalt columns of the Pit.
He looked a god there in the sky
halfway to heaven—I couldn't kill
him across stateline. So he stalks me
now that my thoughts run like rutting bucks,
pawing scrapes, rubbing alders. I know
he's out there...
knowing's not enough. I reach for her hand.

Book 3.

She's not here...shadows lie
across her chair by the window.
I want to throw form away,
be modern, find, hold, lie with her
till words fall like poetry...

*Along the northern sea
where the sun won't set
till August
let us lie
beside
white ribs
out of the wind
and love
love until
the sun sets
again
then we will sleep
like frozen berries
under a quilt
of snow.*

But my heart's tempered tool steel,
no, it's casehardened like the lock
parts I used to file from mild plate
fished from dumpsters, made usable
by quenching in soft lye,
mottled purple & browns
skin deep, burned bruises; lock parts

whose freeplay has limits not checked
with a mike but seen with the eye,
parts lapped till they function
as silk on silk. I'm that gun,
a replica of my own construction,
seven lands, seven grooves, gouged
by a single hook, shimmed with paper.
My center holds a patched ball:
To look down the hole requires faith
no one will pull the trigger.

Book 4.

She's not here—
nowhere, said she was
going to Oregon, maybe she went before
I could say goodbye...
Oregon's where I built rifles.
Along the Siletz River, I trapped beaver
mink & otter, lived like a mountain man
while war in Vietnam called brother
& brother-in-law. The draft wouldn't take me,
said I was too big. They missed a good one:
I was cold then, a killer. Killed the love
of a young wife along with too many deer
& two bear. Now she lives in Oregon,
alone.

*after half
a lifetime
she took off
her wedding ring
filed it & my love
in drawers beside
cancelled cheques
& her teddy
of black lace.
She left frost
& permafrost
bought a garden
of figs & apples
& grape vines
planted primroses
& rhododendrons
offered sanctuary
to other*

women like her—
and waits for God
to approve divorce.
Minister & ministry
listened
to lives in paper letters
posted & read:
We met on a bus, Reno to Portland,
I pointed to paired geese and
we married nine months later.
I worked in a pulp mill,
opened a gun shop, a saw shop,
went fishing and loved her
in black lace. She bore three daughters
who look like me and live with me
and can't imagine their mother
in black lace
Now she waters artichokes & strawberries
plucks weeds & eyebrows—and waits.

Book 5.

I came to Alaska
in '74, didn't work on the pipeline;
she worked seven years for Alyeska,
for her husband, my friend.
I sit in her chair & think of her;
I need a friend, not a mistake—
the touch of her hand still thrills
me...and I remember

*a swan alone on an Arctic lake,
her reflection swimming alongside,
wind-rippled feathers multiplied
like clouds fading as dusk overtook
the long sun—I passed over miles
of muskeg, lilies & black spruce,
searching from a thousand plus
feet for swans, breeding pairs
& singles,
counting & subtracting one
from the other till none
were as lonely as that swan.*

Write me
from Oregon, describe the sweetness

of mowed alfalfa in fields cut
this morning, look in the ditches,
see the yellow blossoms missed
by the sickle & the bluebirds
singing from barbwire perches.
I saw them when hunting arrowheads.
It's spring; tell me if it is.

Book 6.

Evening now, and beyond the plate glass

*pale green & pink bars & veils
pirouette over
frozen ridges & rivers
like love made in lace & masks,
shared times & night dances on beds
of wild roses & rhubarb.
Snow like broken glass
crunches underfoot...
turns & twirls, turns & twirls
of diamonds & thorns,
of figurines on frosting.
We dance alone, boxed in 2/4 time
like chocolate creme swirls
individually wrapped,
two lives, no, four,
in paper letters posted & read.*

students hurry towards parked cars...
I touch the pane where she touched it—
somewhere above the streetlights
Northern Lights crackle,
the moon rises
and God hides
His face. Under the snow,
spiders spin webs like sticky lace
across papery leaves of roses & rhubarb.

Book 7.

"Dad, will you take me to the store?"
my daughter asks. "What are you thinking about?"
"Nothing."
"Then hurry. It may be April, but it's still
too cold to walk."

*You shuddered when Sylvia read "Daddy,"
said you'd seen enough in Pipeline camps,
you wanted poetry to be beautiful
like uplifting sermons that preach but don't.*

*You survived seven years among laborers
& pipefitters, leering grins,
hands eager to paw, women
on the wall. You met the producers,
men who cheat long distance.
I see their hands in your eyes.*

*Walk with me:
See the absent look
in the cloudy eyes of the oily sea
otter, bloated, tumbling in the surf;*

*see the unblinking stare
of the iced halibut dumped in our landfill,
oily gills contaminating their white flesh;*

*see the oiled feathers of hobbling kittiwakes,
barbs clinging to barbs like hair sprayed wet;
look at the shells washed ashore,
oily brown razor clams . . .
those black gooey ones are really white
beneath the oil—look!*

*there under the ruined gillnet, a mink glares,
his eyes black as the unscrubbed rocks.*

*Those are crab eyes,
if you wash off the oil and lacquer
them, they look like tiny pearls.
No one will know how common they are.*

*"Are you coming? I want to go to Foodland—
and park in front, by the Rescue Mission."*

*Brittle men,
stress fractured,
rejected,
welded with nickel rod
like cracked engine blocks
in a wrecking yard—*

*Desotos, Pontiacs, Kaisers,
leaders on the scrap heap
with weeds
holding trunks open;
parts stripped, a wheel here,
a rearend there; a warped head
lying on a front seat,
a missing radiator—*

*In Foodland's parking lot,
I add a quart of oil
to a twenty year
old engine,
still running but needing
constant care.*

Book 8.

The Taurus at the light looks like a sketch
of the wouldbe designer Alan Sax—
he envisioned the future
a year before he put a shotgun
in his mouth; he was twenty-five,
drove a Studebaker Lark
& was faced with his forced
marriage falling apart.
I never met him, but
his sister remains my first love . . .
I wonder how she's doing & why I never said goodbye.

Everyone said it was puppy love, that
it wouldn't last, that I didn't know what love was.
As I think now of the past...everyone was wrong,
most of all me.
She would've waited, but
I was determined to follow her brother's design
without seeing the future as he saw it.

It's too late to say goodbye
or why I disappeared without explanation:
I thought I couldn't wait & I cared too much
for her to mention Alan again.

Many midnights I've turned off Highway 101,
turned onto Port Street & passed the darkened house

where she used to live...I may buy a Taurus,
drive to Oregon & once again drive past where
she lived at Devil's Lake. I won't know
who lives there now, but
there'll be a hound asleep on the porch.

Book 9.

MAY 9th, 1989

Falling snow makes today
as lonely as November.
I came to Alaska on a lark,
fell for the land
& for a gypo who didn't log all winter.

Leaving childhood & keepsakes
she followed me to Kenai,
spent a hard winter in a log cabin,
another in too small a trailer,
another riding the bus in Anchorage,
ten winters altogether,
none easy, but it was
her fortieth birthday that frightened her.

I saw fear in her eyes, heard it
in her voice, felt it in her touch,
now not a touch at all.
She'd never have things
others have
so to the banks of the Willamette,
she returned, a soreback unwilling to die
in this land of wintry birth—
green buds swell birch
branches, hold the snow
& fail to sway
my loneliness...we had no real fights,
have no hard feelings, just frozen dreams
and nothingness.

She strings pole beans in Oregon,
remembering the shabbiness of breakups
past: impassable driveways, planks across
the yard, tracked mud in her house.
I hate breakup, too. Even the white-cold
of January is better than the lying spring.

Book 10.

Headgate open, the flume runs full,
water sold by the acre washes alkali dirt off
a golden medicine crescent, chipped
jasper, the labor of a forgotten Ute.
I see it all, the irrigated sage,
tumbleweeds rolling across plowed fields,
the hunting hawk & fattened calves,
castrated by hormone injection—
my thoughts are many books,
all about love
if I could understand them.

*Dark skies & rain hard as hail drift over
vineyards & orchards & plowed fields, some planted,
some lying fallow, waiting for a farmer
with harrow & drill & tender hands, corn fed
strength & love for the land. And the woman
alone watching the squall from Hood River
wishes the mailman would hurry; she scans
the county road lit by lightning shivers.
The letter she waits for, from a farmer's
son in Fairbanks, left Alaska last week—
the man wrote of Aleutian storms, longliners
& crabbers he'd fished, boats with full bows & sleek
sterns, of breakup & of willawaws, wind spills
like avalanches, uprooting trees on gullied hills.*

Paired geese arrived in Craemer's Field
last night; they flew non-stop from Oregon,
guided by the crescent moon.
And my friend called to say, "You know, she left me."
"Yes, I heard."
"You want to get together for a beer? We can talk
about your essays."

Book 11.

green tamaracks
bow to thunderheads, poplars shimmer,
birches sway, but stubby spruce tips
hang stiff beside drying muskegs where
huckleberries,
cranberries,
mossberries

swell like young breasts—

she surrendered
virginity
on her mother's couch;
I washed blood from cushions,
comforted her, said, *Yes,*
I love you.
I still love her,
but she's ashamed of passion
once felt, love that stained
cushions yellow like needles
of changing tamaracks.

Alone in September, forty,
I stand on the rifle range
among stumps and riddled targets.
It's raining on this shoulder
not across the road
where dust rises
in little whirlwinds.

Book 12.

Circles & cycles erupt like Mt. Redoubt,
ash clouds ground planes across Alaska
& leave stranded lovers separated
for the holidays . . .

Gear down, two F-16's
glide down through fog & ash,
touch down at Fairbanks International—

her flight from Seattle, delayed
by Mt. Redoubt, will be cancelled
at four. I've waited since two. They'll
call, the fellow at the ticket counter
said, *Go home. Forget today. We'll*
fly tomorrow, or next week, who knows.

Flaps down, the drab fighters rumble
past a frightened moose, past rippled
icicles hanging from the wind
sox, past 747's, idle
since Friday's eruption. Still,

I wait in the terminal.

Bristling with machineguns, missiles,
followed by contrails, the fighters
roll through ice fog—disappear. Hell

yes, I'll forgive her. We quarreled,
simple fights, forgotten, that settled
nothing, meant nothing to me. Squalls,

not storms.

The war planes take off again: I hear
their roar, fading now
like memories—

Book 13.

catkins hang
from willows broken by wintering moose.
Found a skeleton, whitened by the long sun,
scattered across the greening thatch,
gnawed by village dogs, each with one blue eye,
one brown. Upstream, among shriveled red berries,
tufts of hollow mane mark chase—and kill.

Lean my gun on a willow & wonder if I, carrying
one blue-eyed gene, one brown, am more than
bleached ribs & disconnected vertebrae.

Square white blossoms of dogberries, like crosses
in a graveyard, shade fractured femurs where grass
crowds moss. Petals of the crosses fall
before autumn turns the willows golden in
the setting sun. Trampled clusters of red
berries bleed like children salted before birth
as children play hide & seek under willows
where I lie.

WENT TO A READING TONIGHT

a local poet with recognition
who in clear voice
read words as smooth
as cast silver
angels
chased & burnished
little mirrors of uncertainty
strung onto a lifelong
chain of doubt—
compared to his
my scribbling
is common cliches.

He said he didn't write
about writing
didn't compare poems
to children sent out to play
to children who grow tall
& strong & have lives
of their own
who must be turned loose
to challenge
a world of uncertainty—

he said he wasn't like Stafford
who wrote with faith
his words would be accepted.
No, he, like Arnold
has been educated
unto unbelief.

CALLED TO TESTIFY

a murder trial
of a fishermen—
he did it
there's no doubt
when & why
were the questions
to be answered

the State sent a ticket
paid for my taxi, my dinner
my room, my breakfast
don't know much it cost us
but my identification
wasn't crucial—
when the first witness
took his oath
he wouldn't say
what he had before
wouldn't admit
to being in a plane
when he should've been
on his setnet site

it was just a little lie
the truth wasn't worth his permit

he was a highliner
well respected
a likeable fellow
but his lie
just a little lie
made the difference
between life & death

so I boarded the evening jet
knowing what I said was not enough

the State offered a deal
manslaughter instead of murder
we were lucky—
he took it
for he probably would've walked

so here I am again testifying

in a matter of life or death
for another fisherman

THE VISIT

she asked if I would mind
a minister visiting her
I was, I admit, surprized
but I had no fear
of cross contamination
so when he came
I went to the shop
where I sold a riflescope
to the only customer I had
all afternoon

I waited an hour
before returning to the house
where Bibles were hastily closed

he seemed a nice enough fellow
his handshake firm
so when he asked
if I could stock a borrowed rifle
(he'd broken its stock over a deer)
I said, *Sure*, but
I wanted the story of how it'd broken:
a bunch of the fellows
had gotten together
a meat-making bee so to speak
had invited him along
had lent him the rifle
had placed him on a stand
where he couldn't fail—
a little buck trotted past
but the rifle wouldn't fire
though he tried & tried again
(it had a broken firing pin)
the buck fled
tried to jump a fence
but got entangled
in barbwire
he knocked it out
cut its throat
& now had meat
to share with me

PERSPECTIVE—

the rip was running rough
but our ice was melting fast
we had to sell this load of halibut
had to cross Akutan Pass
had to reach Unalaska & UniSea
before warm weather stole hard work
but the heavy water beyond Lava Point
caused me to hesitate
should have caused me to turn around—
the seas were building
a storm was brewing
I could feel the quivering
tension in cold Bering water
wind transferred strength
from two hundred miles away

I didn't know much when I set sail
from Homer, my wife for crew—
had learned to read charts
run a compass course
tie knots as a Boy Scout
had learned to fish
to feed myself & my family
had also learned God hates divorce
so to save a marriage
I sold what I knew
bought this boat
& charted a new course

we didn't have much time
to get around Priest Rock
before seas would be too rough
so I headed into the rip—
the rolling rocked us as ripples
became racks of water threefourfive
feet high, rising, falling, jumping
jumping, moving, stretching, jumping—

on our crossing from Homer to Kodiak
even in the Barrens, we had flat seas
although we did see a little rough water
in Shuyak Pass
but nothing like this—
the rip became ridges

six, eight feet high
ridges that seemed too high
too rough for any boat our size
ridges that wrenched rudder
making steering impossible
I was on the throttle, off
on again, trying to keep up
stay ahead, keep our bow
into the next sea—
the ridges steepened
felt like cliffs
that sluffed away under us
letting us fall ten
twelve feet—
twelve became twenty
as the ridges
became spikes
jumping, leaping, straining
timbers & nails—
pitched & dropped & dropped
& dropped again till
I looked at the near shore
maybe a mile away
& wondered if I could walk
that far—

twenty feet become thirty
foot walls, high
as a house, then gone
breaking beneath us
& falling away
only to form again
before our bow could lift—
the forward hatch cover was ripped away
five feet of greenwater
swept over the wheelhouse
filling bilges
backing up scuppers
swamping the aft deck
low in the water, heavy
very heavy, the boat I knew
couldn't take another thirty footer—
I also knew I could walk that mile

but with us heavy
nearly helpless

the next wall was
maybe, ten feet
& the one after that six
hardly rough at all

DOUBLE VOICED—

What is, she asked, double voiced discourse?
I'll give an example, I told my student:
one night, driving across America, somewhere
in Wyoming, I picked up a radio preacher,
a hitchhiker of sorts whose fading signal
gave someone to argue with, someone to break
the monotony of sagebrush & moonlight.

He was telling a story: a young woman
challenged me, said the New Testament
doesn't say anything about Sabbath-keeping.
Shadows & jackrabbits caught in headlights
leaped away as I, fiddling with the dial,
drifted across the centerline, straight
before me as a degree of latitude. He said,

I told her I'll show you the Sabbath
in the New Testament if you'll observe it.
Listening with twinges of interest, I stifled
a yawn. Well, he said, she wouldn't take
my deal, but I'll make that same deal with
any of you. I knew the Scripture he would
reference: at least I thought I did so

I reached for the dial as a coyote,
lit suddenly by headlights, traveling,
ears up, tail drooped, loped diagonally
across the black asphalt. Friends, he said,
I want to offer you a booklet, gratis,
that'll make plain the Sabbath is the test
commandment. I thought I recognized his voice

so this time keeping my Maverik on my side
I found a Canadian station playing country
Music—but after a song, I turned back . . .
he wasn't there. I picked up a little static
& ended up listening to Los Angeles traffic
reports: a stalled car in the northbound lane
at Santa Monica. I really didn't care.

JUST A WOMAN

She's just a woman, he wrote,
explaining why
I wouldn't be seeing
her again. *She's pregnant
& alone. A one night affair.
And now she's ashamed.*

I don't know this man who wrote,
She's just a woman, who took it
upon himself to explain why
my student hasn't been to class.
He identifies himself as a neighbor.
A well educated one: his English skills
are better than I expected
so far from Moscow.

She's just a woman, a phrase
archaic & patriarchal
yet one that echoes
the humanity of the person
the frailty of someone like myself
who, as we all do, comes short
of the glory of God.

She's just a woman both condemns
& protects: he doesn't condone
the affair, nor does he expect
perfection of her. He writes
from duty & friendship
as a father might
as a rabbi would—
if my Russian were better
I'd visit this neighbor.

She's just a woman as Eve was
but it was by Adam
that sin entered the world.

She's just a woman who needs forgiven
& a helping hand, but I still have
a room full of students eager to learn
hopeful of bettering themselves
& lucky so far.

And I am merely a man.

QUITTING CANTON

Decades and villages: British & Yankee missionaries
preached repentance to the yellow heathens, but
few Chinese accepted Christ

till Hong Xiuquau read about Jesus...years earlier,
he, of a royal family, stood in dream
before a great sovereign

where, scolded, he was river washed by an old woman,
given a new heart, a sword, a seal, sweet fruit.
He prayed to this foreign god,

smashed classroom idols, promised he wouldn't worship
evil spirits. Soon thousands of followers,
taught as Paul had Bereans,

knelt before the God of Abraham and kept the Sabbath
holy. Hong banned smoking tobacco, opium;
stopped the binding of women's

feet, polygamy, the slave trade—the year was 1846,
beginning the era of civil war,
the opium wars . . .

maybe they were jealous, the missionaries, the ghosts.
Hong's Taiping movement was certainly
within orthodox Christianity

so was it merely a dispute about which day to worship
the Creator that caused Christian nations
and denominations to spurn

Hong? They sent rifles, cannon, opium to the emperor
till no one stood before ghost soldiers,
not even old women

on yellow river banks.

december sabbath—

sunset was at two—

all day I cut

white spruce and

black; found a moose,

all but its hooves

eaten by wolves.

I worked until

the early Sabbath

stopped my saw. Now

my boots by the door,

my chair near the stove,

I eat dinner

while the red skidder

roots gritty snow.

millennium fever—

he stopped by on his return
from Lewiston where
expecting a meteor shower
he stocked up on rice & beans
so he would escape
a grocery panic
if scanners couldn't scan

he wanted to talk
about the seventh day
& when that day becomes
a millennium of rest
for those who've labored

swimming upriver
has never been easy
there have always been weirs
designed to confuse, dams
designed to stop, gigs & gaffs
designed to impale a simple
design to reproduce

the question posed
was where would saints
spend the Millennium
I argued for here
the meek are to inherit
the earth; Christ returns
here where he's needed;
firstfruits are to meet him
in atmospheric clouds
but a consensus
of Christian scholars
would have saints either
in heaven or heaven bound
where great things await—

across the road a fisherman
ignoring private property signs
stopped, unlimbered his rod
& started over the bank
in search of steelhead
that might have made it through
the maze of downstream obstacles

I should tell him to move his pickup
but his lure will be just another
set of hooks promising great things

US & THEM

1.

Took a graduate course
how to teach literature
that focused on confrontation
a strategy
for including *others*
excluded by some dominant model of truth.
I should, I learned, challenge
cultural & political order
with ideologically subversive
schemes & practices
to destroy & reform.
I am, I'm told, part of a metatext
that must be killed—
for some reason I'm the problem
the cause of injustices
against which confrontation
cultivates anger
& when narrowly focused
anger, I'm told, affects positive change.

There is, I'm told, too much in the canon
about the territorial imperative
or manifest destiny or the westward
expansion of America. But it was my forefathers
who broke bread at that first Thanksgiving
then pushed west into Michigan, then Oregon.
Does that mean there's too much in the canon
about me? There is, I'm told, too much
about various symbolic economies operant
within that territorial imperative, meaning
there's too much about Yankee seamen, Minutemen
farmers, railroad workers, oil field roughnecks
truckers, loggers & fishermen, about what I do
have done, about my father & his father
grandfather, greatgrandfather,
too much of my history. The canon, I'm told,
contains far too much patrilineal genealogy
& Judaeo-Christian theology—
my mother traced her lineage to the preacher
who preached the funeral for Mary, Queen of Scots.
I know for she told me over & over again
so I wouldn't forget family history. She told
of her mother teaching in a one-room schoolhouse;

told of her mother attending, in 1910, art school
in Chicago; told of a great-great grandmother
who couldn't comb her own hair when she came
to America in 1680. As a royal daughter, she'd
always had attendants till she arrived generations
after my mother's father's family arrived
after my father's family arrived. Mom told
stories so I wouldn't forget who I am
how I got to this place at this point in history
how I'm connected to God & this earth.

But I feel the polarized crosshairs of twoism
aimed at my groin. Perhaps this is how
my forefathers felt when they fled Holland
& England, one tide ahead of bishops & queen.
Didn't authorized churches declare
my forefathers *other*
—certainly they did
both on the Continent & in Britain.
So how is it that I, still marginalized
in beliefs & economics, am the oppressor?
How can seamen or farmers or even preachers
oppress generations not then conceived?
How can royal daughters, mothers & grandmothers
oppress granddaughters or great granddaughters?
How can I, a logger, fisherman, riflesmith
now woodcarver & writer, oppress scholars
university faculties & students so far removed
from this timber patch along the Clearwater?
Can the problem be the color of my penis?
Evidently it's not brown enough
for if it were darker
my art would sell better
& for more, or so I was told
by two gallery owners.
My prose would mean more
would be sought by publishers
or so I was told by two agents . . .

we used to read books for what they said.
Even Doctor Johnson thought moral instruction
more important than aesthetics
but paradigm shifts elevated epistemology
myth motifs, language, & imbedded social codes.
Now we read texts for what they mean—
they have become flint flakes

forming & reforming cultural traces
shards void of knowledge
or of wisdom.

2.

Newly married when Watts burned in '65
I didn't understand terms like *us*
or *them*. I read about guns, built guns
repaired them, shot high-power & black powder;
so when, in '68, Detroit, Chicago, Washington
burned, my sympathies were with the cops
who bludgeoned Blacks, SDS activists—I began
to understand us & them. We were the good
guys, the ones with justice on our side.
Rocks & rioting were wrongs that must be
suppressed. We had the right to strike
back hard. After all, doesn't God & Country
require respect for authority—
that's party-line thinking
void of genuine thought
for if the world is split in two
life's decisions are simplified:
Hitler's SS knew what to do with Jews.
No soul-searching was necessary.

Many Norse sagas tell of trying
to hold together a society
slaying itself
when everyone not family was *other*.

Empowerment of the other makes the other us—
victimization requires victims & victimizers
reversible groupings.
A confrontational pedagogy promotes
continuance of this polarized cycle
producing repeating burnings of Los Angeles.

3.

A bunch of us, loggers & shooters
were sitting around a fire
when, summer of '72
someone asked, "What happened to Dave Oleman?"
"He got religion," someone answered.
And Gary Gettman said, "You'll never know who'll fall next."

I knew, I knew I was next—
I didn't want to be religious—
I wasn't looking for God—
my life was going reasonably well.
But I'd read Melville's retelling of Jonah
so I sort of knew what might happen if I fought
that sudden feeling of *you're next*.
It was best, I concluded, to ignore
what might be merely last night's onions.

But nothing went away—
I was challenged on questions
of Natural Law, the Sabbath
Holy Days, subjects unrelated
to the workings of firearms.
Even the simplicity of *Give your heart to the Lord*
became complicated. Linguistics matter
for what are the signifieds
of *give, heart, lord*
although then I didn't have
the language to ask or answer
problematic questions.

When I read the Judaeo-Christian text
I didn't find a polarized moral system
that recognized only saints & the damned.
Rather, I found a deity separating neighbor
from neighbor, prescribing to both
how they should treat the other.
I found a bridge between good & bad
a bridge that defined both
a bridge along which most motives
hover near the middle, ever fearful
of falling...differences
between two parties are either mediated
by agreement or continued through violence.
We must choose between two or three—
confrontation is counterproductive—
it turns what might have been flexible
poles into concrete sculptures, rigid
& not easily eroded by reason.

I, a reluctant inductee, entered
with this deity, a covenant relationship
as did my Dissenter & Separatist forefathers.
Grace was a gift, but Faith, I discovered

was the sieve through which I was strained—
dirt & puffiness, long-carried burdens
& a lot of social junk were screened
out or scraped loose. Others can pass
but only when humble & clean.
But I have no time, no strength
to seek after what others do
for my passage through faith
has been like the looped introduction
to a radio talk show, repetitious
but readily identifiable.

4.

Allusions, says Jakobson, are signs
that produce an imbalance between signifier
& signified, resulting in signified surplus
analogous to overfilling a wine glass
the resulting spill staining the source text
in a disordered or unstructured way.
Perhaps that's what happened to the Bible—
it's been so stained by spills of red wine
it's not the book my forefathers
or their forefathers read
not the text carried
at the funeral of Mary, Queen of Scots.

But source texts are cleansed of alterations
when allusions no longer produce surplus meaning
an antipoetic way of saying
when enough of society no longer knows
Faulkner, Lawrence, Joyce or Eliot
Greek myths & the Bible
will become to another generation
newly discovered texts to be believed
used or rejected. The centuries of questions
of challenges, of apologies, of doubts
that went into our cultural institutions
& the self-images they reflect, a metatext
one-sided & authoritarian, difficult
to kill, will be forgotten for good
or for bad if feminist pedagogy
motivated by political ends
is prosecuted for correcting gender
inequalities. My family, our history
our eradication, that of patriarchal

Western culture, is the aim of feminist
theorists; I am their target, me,
a Sabbath-keeping Christian,
self-employed, struggling
to just get by—perhaps some good
will come from their attack on me;
perhaps they will accomplish
what no Christian theologian
has been able to do:
free the Bible
from myths & ghosts
cultural baggage—

So now when little of Milton & of Melville
is read, are we, through our loss of literacy
preparing ourselves for a tidal wave
of rising morality so that never again will
I scribble,
the President's on TV
this morning
explaining inappropriate contact
pussyfooting around
the question of having sex
but Realtors are coming
to show where we live
so with turkeys loose
& a rooster missing
I can't watch this man
deny, deny, deny . . .

BURIAL—

I stood beside Mom as Dad's vaulted coffin
was lowered into the winter cold grave—
a bright breeze & taps played
over a loudspeaker made my thoughts hard
to hear, but I remember having heard
Dad's soul was in heaven with God—
said in sincere words by ministers & members
of a fire department that couldn't revive Dad
the assurance of heaven, told to comfort
five kids & a distraught widow,
snapped like the flag
that January afternoon:

since fifteen, Dad hadn't attended church
hadn't lived a particularly moral or immoral
life: he was an average guy
who put the war behind him
& worked long hours providing for a young family.

To prove a stepfather wrong about the Sabbath
I searched Scripture when I was thirteen:
I didn't want to attend church;
I wanted to hunt, fish, play ball Saturdays,
wanted to be like Dad.

Between black leather covers, on pages
still crisp, I found Commandments
I didn't want to keep—
also found we are souls, *nephesh*;
we don't have souls. Prove it yourself.

So all but memories of Dad
remain buried in Willamette National
near the flagpole
dead to everything
that's happened these past forty years.

FROM THE MARGINS

1.

Dark forests
blanketed windward slopes
where Lewis & Clark reached
the Pacific. Salish Indians
then inhabiting river bottoms
of this hungry land would have
starved if not for salmon & herring
shellfish & seals. They grew
camas & a little tobacco
burning off an acre or two
of the darkness, but these
ancient forests survived
till a second-generation
of farmers crossed coastal
mountains with their axes & oxen—
they came armed by Congress with a decree
that the darkness belonged to whomever
was able to bring light
to the thin, acidic soil—
they encountered Salish resistance
but their real enemy was the timber
that stopped long shafts of sunlight
needed for browsing or grazing
so every tree felled became a small victory
& when California mills sent log buyers north
complete victory seemed merely a matter of time,
but darkness is also metaphorical: I still find
twenty years after Nixon's reelection
Watergate less troubling than
Georgia Pacific's logging of buffer strips
once the corporation learned
from research they purchased
that these strips provided needed
shade for salmon alvins, premigrants.

2.

When Nixon was swept into office—
his second term—
& GP was logging buffer strips
(C.D. Johnson had left them)
along the Siletz River, I searched
for sound apple trunks, trees
I could fall, plank & later use

for stock blanks. I didn't cut ones
bearing fruit: they lured deer
to orchards, all that remained
of farmsteads where one, two
generations of pioneers had
for a season, wrestled
from the cold rain forest
a few acres of marginal pasture.

3.

I supported Nixon, then
but now when I remember '72
I recall abandoned farmsteads
I visited, particularly
the Van Heinen place. John
the age my dad, then deceased,
would've been, first took me
to see his parents' farm
a dozen years before I returned
looking for stock blanks.
We emerged from second-growth
fir to find, in the distance
a magnificent barn of hewn cedar
beams & hand split shakes
alone on a knoll, a vacant Camelot
expecting knights & ladies-in-waiting.
Unpainted, retaining the deep red-brown
of cedar heartwood, 100 feet long
40 feet wide, the barn once housed
a team of logging horses
blooded mares & gelded stallions
descended from lines bred
to carry knights into battle
at Flanders & along the Rhine—
I heard their shod hooves
as I followed the scraped lane.

4.

The barn was two-&-a-half stories
high with a partial hay loft;
its beams ran its full length & width.
Inside, a few rusting tools
most too worn to salvage
& slick from mildew a leather
horse collar hung over a cross beam.
Milking stanchions of clear

grain cedar split into two-by
& four-by lumber were worn smooth
& low piles of manure still
needed shoveled ...
grass & bracken ferns
clover & alders—the hilltop
meadows were no longer bound
by sagging barbwire clinging
like last year's pole beans
to leaning posts.

The old house where John
& his brothers were born
was across a swale & next
to the orchard: apples, pears
quince—introduced varieties.
And from fresh, deep tracks
I knew many deer were coming
for apples; so while John
bucked a wood log into blocks
I sat in the springhouse
where cream was once kept cool
my rifle across my knees
waiting for evening.
I felt I belonged there.
A few cows & a market for cream
I could milk a few Shorthorns
for needed cash...dairies
no longer buy single cans of cream
& I couldn't have kept the forest pushed back.

5.

I returned to that farmstead my senior year
this time to get the school counselor a deer—
his last chance was the agricultural hunt
either sex within a mile of farm land
farm land defined as ten tilled acres.
Although I knew the place didn't qualify
the counselor didn't or if he did, he wanted
a deer bad enough to ignore the infraction—
he filled his tag
while I picked through rumble—
toppled by the Columbus Day storm
the barn was scattered beams & shingles
dreams strewn through persistent alders
waist high.

From the Columbus Day storm to Nixon's
reelection, ten years passed. I married
fathered three daughters
served as shop steward
in GP's mill in Toledo
& opened my own shop, building
muzzleloading rifles, lock, stock & barrel.
I saw greed link landscapes—
greed of pulp mill foremen
translated into black-liquor spills
those spills draining into the Yaquina
killing oysters, clams, crabs
beginning a spiral of death.
Greed caused me & others
to gaff salmon on spawning beds
until there wasn't a run
in Lincoln County's Bear Creek.
Greed caused neighbors to snipe
trees across sale lines
until whole mountains were mowed.
A little extra production
a few extra fish
a bonus log or two
minor thievery
that seemed not to be theft at all
but like not listing all of your income
something that was expected
something everyone does
something no more wrong
than what presidents were doing.

6.

I wanted to believe in Camelot
even if it was one without people—
I became disillusioned with big
government, with big business
with monomyths & universal goodness.
I turned Republican
when it looked like Kennedy
took our missiles out of Turkey
to get Soviet missiles out of Cuba
when I learned of our reprehensible
conduct at the Bay of Pigs.
Billy Sol Estes
the Gulf of Tonkin

the Plumbers
even my poaching apple trees—
what was & remains most polluted
in America is personal integrity.
We are those pulp mill foremen
who sought a little more production
by crowding precipitators & scrubbers
until both were plugged, spewing
ash & salt from recovery boilers
killing the firs on the hill
there at Toledo.
GP bought the hillside
& fell the snags
so they wouldn't stand as skylined
skeletons pointing bare boughs at the mill.

7.

When cutting stock blanks now twenty years ago,
I found tanzy, a noxious weed, poisonous
to domestic livestock, growing
wherever sunlight shone
their necks softened by rain
their seed-heavy heads bent low.
A decade earlier there hadn't been any—
I would've noticed—
to then have tanzy growing
on your land was illegal
an unendorsed & unenforceable law.
Stump ranchers fought its spread
unchecked in state & federal forests.
All farmers could hope was to keep
its poison out of their calf pastures.

Tanzy even grew in the sagging springhouse
of the Van Heinen place—the main house had
collapsed. Only the orchard remained.
If I hadn't known of the barn
I wouldn't have thought such a building
possible: the tangle of long cedar beams
from trees larger than now exist
was completely overgrown by alders.
I found a rusty shovel, filed short
& a few barn shakes
whether from the roof or the sides
I couldn't tell.
The farm's impact was less

than that of a lightning strike.
But with spreading tanzy
there can be no return
of the previous forest until shade
from second-growth firs & hemlocks
deprives underbrush of sunlight
completing the cycle
begun with the axes & oxen.

WHERE WERE YOU

when the President was shot
thirty years ago
the question of the day
asked by newscasters
commentators, pundits
by JFK specials on every network?

I was in college—
had started Willamette University
that fall, a 16 year old Freshman—
after spending the summer monogramming
hotel linen, I stopped by home
on my way back from Reno . . .
the house was empty
except for two boxes
of my clothes, dank & mildewed.
I didn't know Mom had moved,
had no idea where everyone was—
I took the boxes & caught a ride
to Salem, not a city of peace
but of worry.

November 22, 1963,
began like every other day
since Mom leaned over
my rifle—
they repainted the ceiling
Spackled the hole that sucked
blood & bones through
attic & roof...
I once shot a buck
& another
with that same bullet—
went through the ribs of the first
then through the ham & shoulder of the other
& kept on going through alders & berries
& who knows what else.
It might still be killing
killing, killing—

When I returned from class the dorm
was gathered around the only TV set:
Johnson had already taken the oath
as if he couldn't wait longer for promises

made & broken.
Bobby would get to the bottom of what happened,
but another bullet
left unanswered questions
of currency & conspiracy.

A caisson carrying dreams
closed Camelot for me.
Goldwater's son visited my dorm,
but couldn't convince young socialists
of conservatism's merits.
I wasn't impressed by him
but I wasn't old enough to vote
till Democratic good intentions
quelled riots & fires
with my tax dollars.

Nixon had a plan
& I had a business—
I built guns
that would kill
killed
continued to kill.

a thing borrowed—

for early cells of persecution
nothing nearer than heaven
seemed beyond Roman reach
so a borrowed concept fit
a need for escape
a need that continued
through plagues & trenches
& quiet desperation
that gave rise to teachers
who shackled resurrected guilt
as if it were a thundering tiger
to be brought forth threatening
noble & ignoble when tithes
dipped a little, but a thing
borrowed needs to be returned
& the concept of saints
in heaven has been held
far too long, not that
those who need to escape
will give up their escapism—
am I a heretic for suggesting
we die & remain dead
until resurrected from a memory
to live here where we're needed
then sobeit

RAIN

Across the river nine does, each heavy
with fawn, browse in hard rain & sleet
this last Sunday in February as polished
shoes slosh through puddled parking lots—

raspy voices sing hymns of praise
as rain slides in sheets off metal roofs
& I wrestle with resurrected saints replanting
native marguerite daisies & elderberries

on bruised hillsides where star thistle
has choked out everything except the rain.
Praise echoes through hallways & past
the guest book I might've signed if given

enough time, but groanings of an old spirit
strong as hunger in expecting does, drenched,
probably cold, certainly sensing birth
is near, question leaving behind traditions

ancient as that mail route. I need to post
letters to the swelling flock gathered last,
letters to a brother, to brothers & sisters
of faith—the salve they need is today free

if they'll forget trying to escape the rain.

EARNESTNESS

When Victorians washed God,
he **shrank**,

shrank,

shrank.

They rescued him from their lye
suds, dried him by coal fires,
stuffed him with earnestness,
sewed buttons of respectability
onto his tattered waistcoat,
powdered him with scented talc,
and propped him in the corner.
He smiled at their respectability,
stoked their fires with unearned
coal, fed their steel mills
foreign ore, and called
watchmen out of a disillusioned
wasteland to record their deeds
with horn & ink.

That Lie Job Believed—

in grammar school, between graham crackers
& chocolate milk, my gray-haired teachers
told of the Titan who rolls the rock uphill
with remembered boldness as his heart, still
beating, torn from his chest by vultures
or an eagle, I can't remember which, splatters
fear upon generations since who hesitantly
approached God believing if truly just He
would receive them as near-equals. This
God of Abraham & Isaac remains mysterious
even today when we no longer see religion
as moral obligations but cause of friction
in fractured societies: if once-perfect angels
can't please God, what chance have mortals.

THE TRADEOFF—

all night rain
heard on the tin roof,
a patter broken
by barking
sometime during the dark,
probably a deer,
maybe a bear
coming too close
like the turkeys
called by my turkeys
that nervously
stole up the driveway
to peck pea screenings,
their empty craws
growling
like the dogs
chained to steel posts
who would trade
their full bellies
for freedom to run
& run & run till
hunger catches
their collars
& returns them
to their groveling.

HILLY—

it's too early to know
which of us will outlive
the other—statistically
I'll win
I'd better win—
got him when four weeks old
answered an ad in the paper
they seemed afraid
I wouldn't return
insisted I take him then
so I became mother & siblings
five years ago

until I remarried he slept
on the bed with me
still wants to—
took my side in newlywed tiffs
pissed on her books
each time we squabbled

he caught stray dogs
the years I caught dogs
kept three pit bulls off me
became sort of a legend

when a neighborhood bully
threw a punch
he helped out—
the fellow insists
he's the only reason
I wrestled him down
held him till the sheriff came
perhaps

so he goes where I go
lies beside my feet
even as I scribble this
he probably has another
seven or eight good years
but there'll be a day
when we part company
& as the wise one
once asked
who knows my spirit

will rise
& his will descend
when we both will sleep

DOES IT MATTER?

Feet in air, asleep, Hilly lies trusting
between my feet as I quietly wrestle
with whether it matters to God that
a Christian believes souls slip into heaven—
for two millennia grace & for the saved heaven

have been preached from high pulpits
& on river banks...across the road
the Clearwater runs muddy; steelhead
fishermen sit in cafes drinking coffee—
I stare at this computer screen, my coffee

cup empty. If I move I'll disturb the dog
so I sit here somewhat paralyzed as if
fearful of deconstructing the good work
done by those with a passion for souls—
I don't know that I've a passion for souls

but I, as our Earth wears ever closer
to a promised return, foresee a crisis
of faith for Believers who believe they
have heaven-bound souls when they awake—
errors can be hard to see even when awake

harder to admit when face must be saved.
The cat's in heat: her caterwauling awakens
Hilly who sniffs her after rolling from
between my feet. He's a bit interested—
he's too big to do more than be interested;

nevertheless with arched back he squeezes
her between forelegs, & I, with sharpened
tongue, snap, *Leave her alone!*

THE POULT

1.

Awakened by the harvest moon, the black
hen thrashed in her crate as we sped north
hurrying to get that load of birds
to the Clearwater before dawn—

I feared the hen would crush her poults,
only three now after days of warding off
feral cats. Months ago, she lost her
first clutch to a skunk. An angry

neighbor destroyed her second nest—
used a weed wacker to drive her away.
So wanting to calm frayed instincts
& poults too young to travel alone,

I asked God, there along the Salmon River,
if he could, in this mother's small mind,
quiet the panic. I said it was a small
thing I asked, not something important

like saving the world, or stopping killing
in Africa. I reminded him of how hard
she worked at being a mother, & how he
kept track of feathers on a sparrow,

& how there was nothing I could do to stop
her thrashing, & she, as if blinded by oncoming
headlights, hunkered low as we started up
White Bird hill, where Nez Perce warriors
once stopped the United States.

2.

I released the black hen & her poults
in the barn...she took her babies
up past the spring, through stream & showers.
She'd been separated from the flock long enough

the other hens wouldn't accept her
or her out-of-season hatchlings.
They drove her farther uphill, drove
her away from feed, away from safety.

I found her with a ruffed grouse

under a seedling apple, with one poult,
its down wet, spirit damp. I tried to catch it,
but the hen tried to drive her away—

she came in low, leading with a wing
as a boxer would with his jab.
The poult fled into brambles, & I backed away.
It needed its mother's warmth & she clucked

softly, trying to coax it from the thorns.
And I asked you, God, for its life—
felt a little embarrassed to ask
for so small a thing when there is so much need,

felt a poult hatched so late in the year
never stands much chance of seeing spring.
Let nature take its course,
I tried to tell myself—

but the hen, instincts strong, knew nothing
less than nurture; so with mumbled words
swollen by compassion, I again reminded you
of sparrows & of how we are a little flock,
with some of us beyond long-closed frontiers.

3.

A week went by, then a second. Tiny feathers
sprouted from the shoulders of the poult—
the black hen left the timber, brambles & brush
of the hillside once, sometimes twice a day

to scratch for pea screenings alongside the barn.
When that flock of wild turkeys, its toms
no match for mine (toms gobbled & hens whelped—
for awhile it seemed as if rival high school

gangs were contesting turf), crossed the barnyard,
the poult & black hen were under the gravenstein
in the front yard, far from the carryingson.
Seeing her shepherd her baby, protective,

menacing to friend & foe, I felt pride,
connected; felt as if I were part of their family.
So it hurt when I found the black hen,
just thirty yards above the barnyard,

partially devoured, her flesh gnawed
from her neck & breast. I couldn't identify
the predator that killed her: it had consumed
a fair amount of meat, but its jaws were weak

as it hadn't broken bones, A fox, perhaps.
A large raccoon, more likely. Maybe even a bobcat.
But not a coyote. Whatever it was, it was near
enough the barn to cause concern so I now carry

a rifle just in case it returns, & it will.
Couldn't find the poult.
I suspected the easy meal the poult seemed
attracted the predator's attention, brought mamma

into the fray; suspected the only good thing
about her loss was that I wouldn't have to watch
her mourn her poult. But when I went to feed
the following morning, there was the poult,

trying to be mothered by uninterested pea hens.
The turkey hens drove it away: it wasn't theirs.
Spring poults, nearly as large as their parents,
paid it no attention. I tried to catch it,

but it was too quick. So chilled & I'm sure hungry,
it hid among thorns until I retreated
after scattering a little feed in the brambles.
For two days, I kept my cats away

as I scattered feed, & it hid or ran
with the larger poults. But finally,
I trapped it in the barn; so now penned
with a spring poult for company, it remains

fearful of me even when I bring hardboiled
eggs or apples...but it is alive.

answering the summons—

the dogs barked when the pickup stopped
across the road at five a.m.
they wouldn't stop

a fellow rang the doorbell
now I'm a big guy
rough looking
but I must confess
I didn't much like answering
a knock in the dark

the young man said a retreat
had come apart, that he had
neither jack nor spare
asked if he could use our phone
while keeping hands
inside jacket pockets

if Christ were to knock
how easy would it be
to invite him in when
too much has happened—

before I came here neighbors
just south of Pocatello
were murdered by someone
who exited the freeway
just to shoot someone else

not even in Eden
has this been a safe world
chances have to be taken
so on this rainy cold morning
I invited him
in to use our phone but

I never turned my back to him

SHE KNOCKED—

nursing child bundled against the rain,
seeking help (a little rock in the road
punched through the oil pan of her RAM)
at a seldom-used door, she rang:
I need to call my boyfriend.

I looked at the damage: a crankcase
of oil floated on rivulets of rain—
its sheen flowed across pavement
& gravel & mud & into the Clearwater
swollen & churning...

Can I get some water for the baby,
she asked as if water had a price,
as if her baby were an object—
our water comes from a spring high
on the hill; comes without pump
without permission, without poisons;
comes like belief in God
like believing her son needs
the stability of *till death*
do us part; but she doesn't ask
for the stream, only a small bottleful
so while she waited beside the phone
I talked to an older son who stayed
close to his mother till a kitten purred.

READING AUGUSTINE'S *ON CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE*,

I find Paul & Plato bound together in his words
as if in *things & signs* & rhetoric the Word
that spoke all into existence had neglected

to fully explain so great a matter as the souls
of mortals in heaven or hell—nevermind *the soul*
that sins shall die for this death is merely,

according to Augustine, the absence of God—
I understand why rational men rejected
Christian orthodoxy one, two, three centuries ago.

Even the Preacher three thousand years ago
realized the fate of animals & of humans
is the same: who knows my spirit will rise?
A Greek whose Republic proved unworkable?

Augustine contends all Christians must accept
that neither the soul nor body suffers complete
annihilation—this is what I hear in pulpits

sixteen centuries later, but Peter on Pentecost
assures us that even King David has not ascended
into heaven; for if heaven awaits Christians

there is no need for a Resurrection
at Christ's Second Coming

nor for the meek to rise incorruptible
to inherit this corrupted Earth

to make deserts bloom.

North's Chuckwagon, Spokane, 1983—

hadn't seen my brother for a decade
so when I returned to the Lower 48
for Fall Feast we got together
at North's...daughters, wife,
sister & her boys, Ben & myself
all young enough to take advantage
of *all you can eat*, piled plates
high—all but Ben avoided the prawns
but he thought us legalistic
so as we practiced gluttony
theology was chewed more thoroughly
than the chicken & roast beef—

if we swallowed without chewing
we could keep abreast of subjects
as polished as the restaurant ware
of arguments as thin as the worn forks
of explanations as meager
as the instant potatoes
but when the sin of Satan
popped into the discussion
dessert was momentarily forgotten—

with furled brow & thirty prawns
already taking their revenge
Ben insisted we committed error
in believing we were to be adopted
into the family of God. Satan,
he said, thought he would be god.

Don't remember how I answered Ben
who believes he is (& he might be)
part of the Laodicean church—
the prawns were making an argument
for clean meats—but I missed
saying, Satan wants heaven
as do all those whom he deceives.

I was too stuffed for cake & ice cream
too full to even finish a last piece of chicken
so as we rounded up kids & said our goodbyes
I was thankful to be here on Earth
where work needs done
so all humanity can, if they want

eat too much fried chicken.

GRANDMA WROTE POETRY

rhymed, with twisted syntax
about Easter lilies & a god
she came to know after two
daughters were *in heaven*—
I read a few of her poems—
left me embarrassed to identify
myself as a poet
just as someone witnessing
about *being heaven bound*
leaves me embarrassed
to admit being a Christian

but in this postmodern era
poetry is imbedded codes
you or I think poetic

I heard again last night
what I've heard too many times—
You can't control falling in love—
a cultural lie, destructive

love is a decision
intellectual, yes
emotional, certainly
but it isn't lust or escape
of responsibilities here
where you & I live

Mom splattered herself across the ceiling
when she found herself trapped in marriage—
her sister, after divorce, lived
in her car till committed—
neither died a rhymed death

cold when I awoke this Easter morning, I kindled a fire
that smolders beneath a second armload of wet yew
as the risen sun melts frost white as robes of saints
in heaven if the witness of the old liar
who advocates love as instinct
is believed . . .

SUNDAY SUNRISE—

my turkeys gobble & pea hens holler
& snowstorms quarrel with the calendar
above this river canyon where rain
& radio signals flood spouts & drain
fields. Standing water on new grass
softens an already soggy lawn as crass
commercials, as G. Gordon dubs them, play
on the radio—upriver, rabbits that lay
colored eggs are given to children dressed
in, this year like last, their Easter best.
An explanation of the Cross follows an ad
for a phonic game—we should all be glad
His blood blots out our sins. But how
do three days fit between Friday & now?

WHEN MILTON SOUGHT TO JUSTIFY THE WAYS OF GOD

he stood on his Creator's footstool to search
the heavens for Heaven: he couldn't find it
in the north where he believed it to be,
couldn't find it to the east or to the west,
and to the south he couldn't even find Hell
in Copernicus' solar system, so he used Ptolemaic
astronomy to get God outside of His creation.

Language was his problem, not limited interest
in stars: he had his Adam ask questions that
established what telescopes observe—his concern
was Father & Son & the nature of the Godhead;
he couldn't create a Trinity where none exists.
Today we know more of worm holes than of heaven
or hell: we watch Star Trek, but our language

still limits how we explain a triune God
when every word conveys individualness,
the burden of grammatico-historical exegesis—
rationalism places eternity at the unlocatable end
of a linear time continuum that begins with a bang,
making eternal life exceedingly long & exceedingly
difficult to comprehend when it is nothing more

than existence outside time: the unpoetic
language of quantum physics does easily
what Milton wrestled with when creating Chaos:
we find Heaven in a sixth or a seventh
or some other dimension; we perceive spirit
as energy & elemental force; but we still
are intellectually dishonest in our attempts

to be theologically correct—our Adversary
broadcasts not just in the granny glasses
of acid rock or spiked hair of heavy metal
but also in radio sermons about a Trinity
closed to adoption of sons & daughters
who, like their first-born older brother,
will live outside time at their resurrection.

CARL SAGAN—

in *Reflections on a Grain of Salt*
you find your ideal universe like
the one we inhabit
in which everything's knowable
but not known . . .

I know you through your TV series
heard the best explanation yet
of why evolution is faith
in past & present creations—
all belief is faith . . .

faith proves facts to be factual—
you & I are part of a community
not shared but privileged
readers & writers of text
about grasping truth . . .

truth is elusive, a chameleon
that suns itself on the rough bark
of our shared culture, pruned
& needing pruned, of Greek
& Hebrew roots . . .

rootstock isn't selected for fruit
it bears—with sharp knife & patience
the desired scion is grafted
to wild roots. We both are of
that chosen scion . . .

scions often develop several leaders
each competing with the other.
You shinnied far out
on a twiggy leader that
needs headed . . .

head cuts are to strengthen branches
to turn wouldbe leaders into scaffolding
that'll support more fruit—
so when you awake, I'll be there
to say, *Greetings, Carl Sagan.*

ON THE BAPTISM OF MY SECOND DAUGHTER

I first saw you blue
with zipper tracks attaching
arms & legs. Nine pounds twelve,
fourteen inch head, you
arrived without stitch or tear,
quietly squirming.
Your mother & I watched you
crawl around stacks of blocks,
check their lean, then tip
them over; always cautious,
calculating odds, you were,
you are industriously bold.
We took you fishing
in the Aleutians—you learned
about sea urchins, hair crab,
star fish, and we waited
for you to make sandwiches:
you'd spread mayo or peanut butter
from crust to crust to crust,
experimentally meticulous.
Correspondence study gave
way to school, letters in track,
*performer of the meet, best
of show* for an oil painted
from a slide I took of you
deer hunting, *Trig Star,
outstanding math student.*
Your rewards were rewarded
by an Honors scholarship
to Alaska, where your four point
meant less to you than baptism
and taking the Bread & Wine
at your first Passover.
The world you've joined
and the larger world
that'll think you're odd
but industrious—both
acknowledge you now
as an adult, one able to participate
equally with your mother & me.
She wasn't there to see your baptism,
but I was never more proud of you;
for you're walking in that Way
unmarked by the world.

WEASELS

my daughter & I crossed Ugak
to stay in that cabin behind Gull Point
but when I pushed open the door
I smelled the weasel
before I saw it
on the bunk where I sleep
clicking tiny teeth
feigning attack
hissing
its thrusts those of a striking snake
fearless & fearsome—
it tried to back me out the door
but I pointed my .458 at it
said, *Bang*

it dove for a gnawed hole
& disappeared as if never there

my daughter missed seeing it
but she was well acquainted
with the one across the bay
that did back flips
till some fisherman
tossed it a bullhead
which it dragged to its lair
only to return again
to do more back flips
so she asked, *Was it cute*

cute is not a word I associate with weasels
so tiny but so very feisty—
in a Sabbath sermon
a Kenai minister
recalled a pair of weasels
that once invaded his cabin
even the way he said *weasels*
told of what evil animals
he thought they were

this minister wasn't used to
being defied
& his weasels
stood on his kitchen counter
challenging him

he trapped one
put a .22 bullet through the other
(& through his wife's dishpan)
so he used the pair as examples
of how tenacious sin is
in a Christian's life

I was a little surprized
that sin was so easily dispatched

after dinner my daughter sat on the top bunk
examining fractures in found agates
when the shorttailed weasel
already in its summerbrown phase
stood up
a foot from the stove—
it hissed
dropped down
bounced closer
hissed again

He is cute, my daughter said
swinging her legs off her bunk

the weasel spun
squirted through a hole under the door
with my daughter right behind—
she got a glimpse
of it bounding
over bent roses
thirty yards away
& I wished sin were
so hard to catch

why hell—

The new Chemistry chair, fresh
from California, was grilled
like potluck chicken barbecued
about where she'd attend church.

Her choices were limited: Lutheran
or an Evangelical Free Church—
to not attend would invite the ire
that drove her predecessor to quit.

To subscribe to an Advent
or be seen at Kingdom Hall
would label her a wacko, would
be worse than supporting wolves;

so needing a job & believing
in reconciliation, she questioned
the retiring minister of the Free
Church, asked why he preached

heaven & hell & a single day
of salvation. He agreed
there is no demand a person
accept Christ today

or be forever lost.

*But I'd preach to empty pews
if I didn't preach hell,*
he said, sipping lukewarm tea.

LEGALISM

Bob & I worked with Old Believers,
kept our skidder in their village's boat shop,
visited homes closed to outsiders—
I was falling timber along the outskirts
when Solzhenitsyn came to hear again
Russian spoken in this land of liberty & exile.

We as a nation didn't want to then hear
about ourselves—it was easier to rail
against Communism or the intrusiveness
of Federal bureaucracies than to listen
to a Russian whisper about our moral decay
yet an unseen writer with his inkhorn
will mark those who lament a nation's sins.

Now, a quarter century later, we hear lying
about adultery really isn't lying
but protecting the spouse, an act
of true family values. We mock ourselves.
Perhaps a belt of spiritual legalism
would stay presidential pants.

As I fell stumpy white spruce during the great
dissident's visit, I noticed roadside litter ended
just outside the village, but in the preceding mile
Coke cans, potato chip bags, Twinkle wrappers—
items forbidden by village doctrine,
forbidden to prevent spiritual contamination—

were as many as the mosquitoes: legalism made
cheaters of too many villagers, pious as priests
Sundays, but wearing their fringe & embroidery
as mere identifiers while working in canneries
during the week. But that is what Law does when
not written on hearts.

JUSTICE

there is a longer story
the one I'm hesitant to tell
for if heard askew
it brings an end
to us all
I heard it whispered
you might have too
for it is a story about justice
the overriding concern of a generation
of my generation:
the civil rights movement
Johnson's Great Society
the repeal of Blue Laws
clean air
clean water
clean beaches—
all are calls for justice
but we weren't listening
when the story was told
so our justice is fuzzy logic
concocted by individuals
intent upon imposing their justice
on others
the justice I want
can't be voted into existence
it can only be perceived
in how a people's internal landscape
is reflected in their eternal world

FORMLINE—

1.

asked if all I carved were fish
I answered a simple *no*
& showed a double otter
a crouching bear
to the new minister
who understands fish
as Christian symbols—
but I'm not comfortable
sculpting icons
that might be read as Dagon

reasons I carve mostly halibut
are simple: I like the form
the sense of twisting power
I bring
to a common wood bowl—

I use smooth flowing sides
to tell formline stories
in circles of cycles—

but my art is mainly fish
because I fished
three seasons
laying & picking
three miles of longline
each tide change
so through art
I remain connected
to halibut even now
when I no longer have gaff
in hand

2.

with adze & crooked knife
I reduce trees to figured bowls
sometimes even capturing life
so if one of my sculptures spoke
simple words, naming other works
of my hand, I'd be pleased
would feel pride
you would too

but if my creation pouted & plotted
& proved itself generally disagreeable
I'd probably split it into kindling
certainly would've when younger
but with some maturing
I might listen in amusement
knowing whenever I wished
I could end its contentiousness
so here across unbridgeable dimensions
I flounder like one of my fish
for even simple words
to stutter into stories
for those who would lift the sky

JONAH—

with Bible in hand
the teacher explained great mysteries
I sat curious to hear anew what I knew
from a salmon following a scent
from an alvin wiggling free
from an eel scaling a falls—
in strong warm heartbeats, I felt
the electric pulses of intelligence
when this teacher was himself a student
so when he, his book open to the only proof
said Jonah knew it was fruitless to preach
repentance to Ninevah
I corrected him: *That's not the story.*
Jonah knew the people would repent
if he delivered news of their impending doom
he wanted them dead; he didn't want them saved
it took his death in the belly of that fish
to get him to go there for he knew
God would repent of their destruction
if they would repent of their sins—
there was more I could have said
but I could see
I'd already told more story
than he wanted to hear
I decided to give him a fish
so he would remember
it was from the mouth of a fish
that God sent his reluctant spokesman

