

Salmon

So many thousands of miles they have come
in this last great adventure of returning,
a miracle of navigation to find their home
and there to gather, darting and churning

beneath the one white-blue river where
as dainty fingerlings, they had descended
toward the waiting sea, tiny innocents who dared
to face a hostile world, they could not have comprehended

such grand dimensions, such a vast distance,
or this majestic assemblage, and the invincible urge
to bring forth Life and Death, at first a restless advance
upstream, and then the sudden, mindless surge,

a wave of twenty-pounders, packed flank to flank,
filling the river with pink and gold, a solid mass of fish.
And might we tiptoe on their backs from bank to bank
to dream a dream or make a wish?

Prowling along the rushing shore are the bears
in swirling eddies, an ancient resolve, wild and deep,
they know to watch and wait for this urgent feast, aware
that soon the Arctic night will fall, and they must sleep.

A gravid female is plucked from foam and spray,
ripped apart in a brief, ruinous moment, the egg-sac devoured,
the bloody carcass flicked aside in a casual, careless display,
and three orange specks, shining, splattered on the black, black fur.

What is it that causes such glorious despair
for one unlucky creature that died so close to her destination?
Not that one, but that all had come to die, an infinite purpose shared,
and we are stunned and staggered, and without consolation.

Flight

I tossed a silver pebble toward the sky,
as if to find an exotic answer
to a plain question, how do eagles fly
with such indifference, never stopping where

we might intercept them with our dialogues,
our breathless insights into pitched updrafts
and orographic vectors, waves of fog
that rise and swirl, the sallow, sneering laugh

that shatters our highest expectations
and confounds this meagre understanding
of flight's blue miracles, these orations,
these vibrant heart-songs that ease the handing

over of the stone, lightly caught with firm
surety, flung back to Earth, safely returned.

Sassafras

On the high slope that dips down toward the river
they are congregated, a thick stand of oaks,
humming their plangent oak-songs
in the still, mid-morning air of late summer.

Low on a damp swale the Salix twins
are drooping, shedding their willowy tears,
a probable overreaction to some
unintended slight from the others.

Above them, a row of rusty hemlocks,
their thousands, or millions, of tiny needles
precisely, miraculously matched in form
and color, dark green on top, striped blue below.

And in the steep glade, a single sassafras,
her mitten-leaves, and palmate and tri-lobed,
tinged with a faint September yellow,
an extravagant multiplicity of leaf-shapes

that once produced the pride of uniqueness
but now, in this bright season of waning,
a crisis of identity brings forth
the eternal tree-question, "Who am I?"

Distracted by these contemplations
she muses and frets, an oak leaf is an oak leaf
a poplar a poplar, and had three been one,
might I have found relief from such vexing ambivalence?

Auschwitz

When the trains came in the Jews shuffled down,
sometimes in an orange light from the moon,
sometimes in squalls of snow, wind-swept and blown
across their hollow faces, as they swooned

and faltered, gliding gently toward the showers,
where I dropped in the thin spheres of cyanide,
with no recourse for debate, no power
to oppose, no place to turn or to hide.

I spent Sundays at home in Sienna Street
with Liesl and Katarina, who played
in the park and at the high stalls bought treats
of cherries, chocolate, and lemonade.

I didn't sleep, they never knew, without dreaming
of black smoke rising through the air, and screaming.

A Stable, Telepathic Genius

One quite wonderful thing we learned today
was that Putin smiled on the telephone
when our exalted leader called, just to say
hello, and do you think we could use drones

in North Korea (or Belgium), or some
other country of your choosing, now that
this collusion thing has been excised from
the news. And by the way, F*** those Democrats!

He *is* the smartest, he has the best brain,
we know that, but a smile over the phone,
that's extrasensory, like Houdini's claim,
while strolling idly among the gravestones,

to have communicated with the Dead.
It just shows the high sphere where he operates
with such pure genius, taking on the Fed,
the long lines on Everest, NATO, tax rates,

he can solve any problem, great or small,
and with the shrewdest of Cabinet picks,
he'll figure it all out - tariffs, the Wall,
infrastructure, things only he can fix.

I do admit to some mild reservations.
The Access Hollywood tape, for one thing,
the endless torrent of prevarication,
the blatant mendacities, (the lying).

And yes, his crude, childish inclination
toward ridicule, a hateful way of thinking,
but for his vain, boorish ideations
he's earned a pass. After all, he's our King.

