



UP THE LILLIWAUP RIVER

From the north Pacific, salmon surge
the fresh brine passage, find
the connecting vein and go there,
gravel and shallow the bed
with their backs, teem the water,
set the dogs crazy, push the stream
higher up its mapled, alluvial
flanks.

Already they fade and loosen, male
and female looking more and more
the same. One lets go the balloon
fist of eggs, one the milt cloud
for cover. In the feebling jostle,
the mate-finding sashays, quicksilver
skins glint-touch shoulders to the waists
of tails, pale underbellies
tendering.

Their treading bank-to bank passion
pulls us. We stand gaping through
disintegrating water, big leaves
floating yellow, pieces of fin,
grey-eyed fish that ground themselves
all the way across. We watch for the less
frequent splashes, the slow tails fraying,
the unraveling mouths sighing water together.
It is the last thing,
any of us wants.

Jane Thielsen