Goolangirie Pelicans I

Jim Puckridge


1
At dawn, the lake is still,
The trees wait on the sun.

Above, the first procession comes
Of fifty or a hundred birds,
Each mesmerized, absorbed,
And following a dreaming trail
We cannot see,
Skeletal serpent
Sliding dunes of air,
White vertebrae as faithful to the spine
As if still sheathed in flesh,
They pass, they pass.

The sun now strikes across the lake,
The trees feed,
Their leaves licking.

2
The sun across our necks
We stoop down dunes
To water white as ice.
Our eyes shrink
And we sink beneath the sun
Under,
Up to our hats.

All around, the dunes pant
Their hot breath
In clouds that bud and blossom
Incandescent, to the sun.
All afternoon the pelicans pass
In grave processions to the south.
   One serpent turns
   And winds a slow coil
   Up a trunk of air.
Others like the veils of Salome
Are wound into the dance,
   And slow as skirts
Swirl high and higher
Up amongst the clouds,
Wings white and dark and white
With each slow turn,
Until they tower in the sky,
   Each bird surrendered
To this convocation of its kind,
A thunderhead of pelicans,
   Medusa,
Swinging slow her snake-entangled hair,
   Ancient, elemental.
Smaller than swallows now
They swarm like motes,
   Bright molecules,
Embedded in the giant helix
   Turning still,
Until some strands, then more and more
Unwind and spread,
   Float free, uncertain,
Then like chromosomes
Are drawn on unseen spindles
   To the south.

Stuck in the lake
Beneath sun-battered hats
   We wait and calculate.

3

Sky and water one skin
The outboard saws the lake in half
And ruptured muscle churns behind.
   We stop.
The white lake quakes around.
   We undulate.

The pelicans ashore are still,
   Secure in multitudes;
In row on row, strange corn -
White stems suspending pods
   Pulsating without wind -
Enormous crop
They cram horizons, seed the lake and sky.

   We float among them,
Count and photograph and sweat.
I grip the outboard throttle
   Like a grenade.