

Exxon

Patrick Lawler

1990

I pull up to the self service gas pumps,
all the clicking numbers, my windows dirty,
stuck. The gallons flowing, the gas arches
into the tank in a gush.

I look at what comes out of the hose—
diving ducks like black drips. Grebes
and cormorants unravel through the hose.

A warm belly
carries the deaths of Valdez.

In the sweet stink of gas,
55,000 tons of herring, 1 billion salmon staggering.

The sea otters like dirty gym bags.
The reeling whales sucked into the tank.
I must make room

for the corpses of Prince William Sound.
The mouths of fish go by—rockfish and halibut.
Sweet gas. Sweet river.

125 miles of dead birds.
16,000 gallons of meat songs.
Turn fish into fire; turn the living
into distance. Watch how we use
death. Just watch us.

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