

When the oil barge and tug were grounded off Moonlight Beach, the officials said there was no leakage. But in Wakefield oil, carried by the gale force winds, clung to storefront windows, windshields and clothes. When they claimed it was under control, the oil, churned by wind and sea, had penetrated the salt ponds, had sullied Block Island, Long Island Sound... The grim biologist is on a beachhead strewn with the dead and dying: lobsters, mollusks star fish, fingerlings and flounder, grebes, and mergansers. In her oily hands she cradles a loon. If he could open his eyes their redness would dazzle you. If he could sound out his plight, the song would haunt you. If it were yesterday, he would have dove deep for you, but today you count and curse the cost of oil.

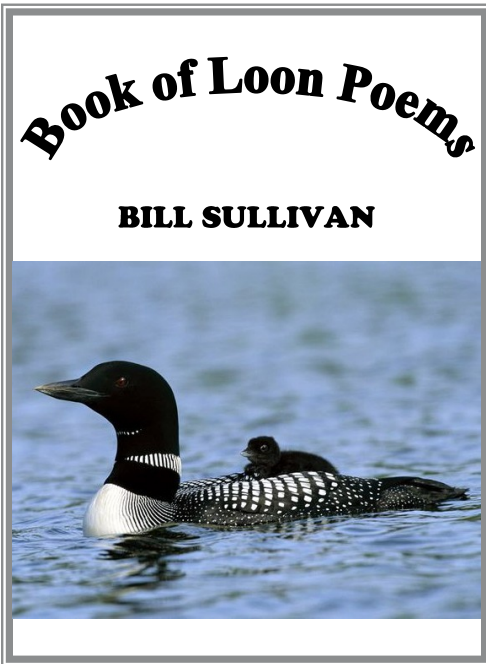
OIL SPILL: RI, 1/19/96.

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 origamipoems@gmail.com

Origami Poetry Project

Book of Loon Poems
Bill Sullivan
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Unlike the townspeople who lined Walden Pond, Henry did not parade to the shoreline, rifle in hand, to blast the loon who arrived with the October colors each year. Perhaps the bird's brash and lively yowl challenged the Concord men who thought the pond was theirs alone. Or was it that old blood lust that required primacy as well as sustenance? Or some unarticulated slight or deep offense? No, Henry was no Ahab armed with a harpoon. But he did take after the loon in his canoe, hoping to peer into its fiery red eyes, hoping to see if he and the visitor were of a pair. But the loon resisted, diving deeper, emerging farther away, laughing like an ancient trickster mocking a mortal's quest as he swam behind heaven's blinding mist.

HENRY AND THE LOON

First, the early browns begin to slowly push the summer greens out of the grasses and reeds that circle the estuary. Then before you can put away your beach gear, the last insect hatch has passed and the swallows and martins have finished their final dance. Days later, you eye the salt ponds, looking for some company, but the showy egrets with their fancy feathers are missing as well fed chick-only an empty nest remains. Yes, the meowing gulls still circle and drop their mollusks onto the pavement, Amusing some ten thousand years later. Did they marvel at the newfound islands, the lake that became the sound, the moraines that are our hills? Did their songs fill that once silent shore?

LOON TIME III

At the overlook of Westerly's Glacier Park I scan the salt ponds, the ocean and the sound. I imagine a world of ice as far as the eye can see. But long before the Laurentide ice Sheet entombed this land, the loons dove and rode the sea just beyond the islands to our south. When the glacier expelled the loons, did they stagger like an Israeli tribe wandering in the desert or suffer like the exiled Africans enslaved on our South County plantations? Or did they just take what came, moved on to outwait the ice, to return with the thaw at the newfound islands, the lake that became the sound, the moraines that are our hills? Did their songs fill that once silent shore?

LOON TIME II

LOON TIME

When earth edges toward the winter solstice and the leveled light lessens, the loons begin to assemble on the gruff north country lakes. As they survey the thickly rimed rocky ridges along the shoreline, feel the first ice crystals clutch their feathers, they sense the old call to vacate their New Hampshire nesting sites and begin their diurnal flight to the open sea. There they will ride the ocean swells; swing on the changing tides; dive, disappear, reappear in the trough of a distant wave; sated, strong - ready to endure stinging sleet, gnawing gales. When winter weakens, they shuck their ashen colors; display bright black-white checkered hues. Soon: the flight north, courting songs loudly yodeled, mates, twigs gathered, chicks.