

# The Ann Stanford Poetry Prize 2004

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## FIRST PRIZE

### Polaris

Along the wooden tourist bridge  
sockeye salmon thrash their way upriver,  
throwing their sperm to the current  
in tiny white cords, and we snicker  
at the brutishness of it all, the bruised pink males  
looking for love in all the wrong places.

In these protein cords, a burning science,  
a study of motion. Translucent heads shiver  
like their fish-fathers struggling  
against the river's cold form:  
a mirror held to the large and small.  
The inefficient business of male and female  
halves meeting with haphazard purpose.  
Or not meeting, the body whispering desperation  
in its skin. The sun barely sets  
during this season—even midnight  
brings a shallow light—  
and so it is under this eye

that sperm burrow hot  
into a blushing pocket of red roe,  
both glad to be found if only  
for the finding, blooming sometimes  
over and sometimes under and  
sometimes  
only the two electric things pulling  
fruitlessly away from each other

like a poor fisher  
trying to reel in a struggler with a bum hook,  
or the Earth spinning away from its nights,  
or the way we will love each other  
today or the next day or the next.

S U C C A S S U R E