

less wine
less fire
less time.

I'd given the cat
a late snack,
not because
I'm fond of it
but because
that's what my wife
would want me to do

so sometimes
we do things
for reasons
that aren't apparent.

The cat is content now:
a yellow cat
getting old,

while out on the bay
the cherry red eye
of a boat's running light
peers through the dark
of another hour
that's numbered
for both of us.

— Richard M. West

Bainbridge Island WA

THE HISTORY OF BAIT

"Let your bait fall gently upon the water," says Izaak Walton. Your fish should be scarcely aware his environment has altered. What ho? he says, without the slightest sense of danger, turning to get a better look JESUS CHRIST ALMIGHTY A FAT DRAGONFLY GOBBLE-GOBBLE and that's it. You got him.

Early baiters realized quickly the need for finesse. One does not simply plop bait down in front of the baitee. If the bait is delivered aggressively it is less attractive than if it appears passive and defenseless. (cf. The History of Advertising, The History of Education, The History of Sex)

The experienced baiter does not allow his own tastes and

preferences to affect his choice and preparation of the bait. If stink-bait is called for, stink-bait it is. When running a hook through your frog, says Walton, "use him as though you loved him." Humility, unobtrusiveness, and an almost pathological desire to please are characteristic of the successful baiter.

The ethics of baiting has been argued since the beginning of time. Some consider the practice low and degrading, some argue that it is immoral. It does not serve our purpose, in this brief history, to explore such issues. However, we may observe that anything which brings so much pleasure to so many inevitably will be viewed with suspicion.

THOUGHTS ON FLEAS (ADAM HAD 'EM)

Should anyone be so foolish as to doubt the existence of God, he must first examine the tiny world of the flea in all its marvelous complexity. Here, the Creator's Divine Hand has woven the mysterious tapestry so tightly that the Atheist is dumbfounded.

What mortal could have foreseen, in the Universal Plan, the need for a wingless, bloodsucking insect with extraordinary leaping ability? A need that would be shared by every plant and animal on the Earth? The need to be fed upon. So subtle, so pervasive that sometimes we see it as no need at all, but as a hindrance and irritation.

And the variety of our fleas is staggering. In addition to regular fleas, there are flea beetles, flea weevils, and even a fleahopper (kangaroo of the flea world). Some suck blood and some eat plants. And some are plants.

We talk of fleas. When we have a message, we say we want "to put a flea" in someone's ear. We mean to say something to stick in a person's mind. We mean that our words will be like fleas that leap through the air, burrow in the ears, and lay their thought-larvae in the moist brain.

And yet, for all its nuisance, this flea, this bloodsucking parasite, is a vital part of the Universal Plan. With the Almighty's blessing, it eats and sleeps and leaves its children across the face of the Earth. It knows hard times after the cat has been to the vet to be dipped. Or the family has moved away and taken the dog. It has waited patiently alone in the empty house, deep in the carpet with growing desperation until, at last, the warm leg of a realtor passes overhead.

Sometimes, though, there are too many fleas. And then we