

Driftless

The pasture streams are pleasantest to fish,
Between the woodland bluffs a grassy dish
To hold the spring-fed flow in winding banks,
To help the lonely motorist give thanks
For something he cannot quite name aright.
That water never stops. Even at night.

Even years later when the motorist
Is trying to recall the valley mist,
The way it hung in boughs above the stream,
The way the fisherman entered his dream
While he was sleeping in his motel room
And offered him a rainbow trout in bloom.

Through all his time and distance from that place
The single-minded current kept its pace.
And to this day, the cattle drink their fill.
The swallows skim the surface flies at will.
The fisherman is casting in the spray.
The water flows around him endlessly.

Slumber Creek

You seem to be yourself. This seems to be the place.
But when you lift your arm to cast, the pool has changed its face.

You study all the books. You make the maps align.
And still there lie no answers in the creel of your mind.

Some fish cannot be caught. Some streams cannot be found.
They keep lonely coordinates in mist and heather down.

Fly Casting Instructions

The rod goes back
To two o'clock
And sends the fly
Along the sky
Behind your head
Where all things wed
To sorrow's springs
Are hovering
In loops of gold.
You try to hold

This pose until
The line has filled
Its length, and the rod
Has caught a load
Of energy
At once to be
Let loose forward.
This change is hard.

The rod leaps forth
To find true North
At ten o'clock
Where it must stop.
The line goes by
And then the fly
And then the thing
You always bring
With every stroke:
A wish for luck

As if mystique
And not technique
Would guide your flight,
Would keep you right
And any break
Or bald mistake
Or lack of care
Might be repaired
Somehow again
By friendly wind.

You stitch the seam
Of air and stream
Right at the end
And make it land
As softly as
A mayfly does
Whose last day is
His only bliss.

Cursed Creek

Break the forest barrier dense.
Bust through thorns and barbed wire fence.
See the sullen stream flow hence.

The canopy makes day dark.
Hoof prints beat the stream banks stark:
Cattle leave their heavy mark.

No pools in shallow water,
Sandy bottom everywhere,
Slow current moving over

No fish. Fallen trees divide
The creek angrily and guide
The dead drift to either side.

You go deep into this place,
Keep an angler's poker face,
Walk upstream without a trace

And nobody following.
At the end, the falling spring,
The reason for everything.

There is only one way out:
Live as though you are a trout.
Leap the waterfall of doubt.

The Fevering

The rods are mounted
On the wall.
The birds are pointed
Into fall.

The boy has turned
His gaze to books,
Now unconcerned
With flies and hooks.

The seasons move
Both heart and limb
To make us prove
How time is slim.

The window shuts.
The doors all close.
The summer's guts
Have been exposed.

There was that ache
We knew last spring
Caused us to wake
From fevering

And drew us down
To valley's floor
Where we had found
Ourselves before.