

SOME KIND OF RELIEF

He sees his mind as a pool so deep
No length of line will reach the bottom.
His thoughts are the rapids emptying out
Below the pool. Gray granite rocks
Make small pockets of dark blue calm
Amid the rush of white water; these
Are his most important thoughts. The stands
Of trees lining the river's edge are his
Head, or the whole world, or anything
That contains. Downriver there is a
Break in the trees – a wide, quiet field
That spreads away back to the road, back
To his car. This will be death, or some
Kind of relief from his long, wet life.

TROUT FISHING IN A PLACE NEARBY

(after Richard Brautigan)

The woman who lives by the lake creates insect imitations that cause even the wariest old trout to strike madly at them, hooking themselves and causing themselves to be caught and eaten. The woman learned this magic from an elderly man, who learned it from his father, who learned it from his uncle, and on and on backwards through time until there is no time, only magic. In the time before there is time, when there is only magic, no one is around. Without time, people cannot exist. Or rather, without people, there is no need for time. This metaphysical conundrum is confusing, and it always has been confusing, despite the million or so efforts to explain it all logically, or spiritually, or some other way.

What is clear is that the woman lives by the lake, and she is ready and willing to pass her lore along to the few individuals patient enough and open-minded enough to accept it for what it is. The magic is pure, but it is not simple. It does not require great skill of any kind. It does require time and attention, and, most importantly, it requires a conscious turning away from what most people think of as truth.

As a last thought, the woman who lives by the lake is mortal. The magic is not. The trout are real, and they can be caught and eaten. Seek out the woman and believe.

CATCH AND RELEASE

I caught a strange and beautiful fish.
It seemed, in fact, more like an idea,
And it made me wonder what I'd seen,
Why there was blood all over my hand.

Back to the lake I released the idea,
And washed the blood off of my hand.
The water was clear and empty of fish.
Only the weeds and rocks could be seen.

It's hard to say just what I've seen
In the act of fishing and the fish.
How small fish-tooth scars on my hand
Can bleed anew and become an idea.

I have held fishes' lives in my hand
And taken them. The rest remains to be seen.
That life has meaning is just an idea
As strange and beautiful as that fish.

BLOOD

Once I caught this fish,
A thirty-inch northern pike,
And ripped my finger open
On one of its teeth.
Bleed? Jesus! Blood
All over everything.

Then I took the fish home
And cut it up
And nailed its toothy skull
To a board.
The flies and
The maggots cleaned it
Down to bone,
And it was ugly,
But it was cool too.

It was like my family.

A PROTESTATION

When one has left, and then another,
Till the number mounts
Into too many to remember,
I find it hard to know who counts.
My great uncle smothered in ether
On the kitchen table for a botched
Circumcision? My father
Crashing to the floor, his heart stopped?
I don't know, really, if any of it
Matters. Do you?
I've stared a couple of times into the pit.
It's just darkness, a heavy dew.

We come and go. I've been here before.
I don't want to talk about it any more.