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Rise Forms

fly fishing's literary voice



Rod Crossman "Pumpkinseed"

*Anthony Naples • Dave Motes
Scott Carles • Justin Cober-Lake
Sydney Lea • Cameron Scott
Shawn Pittard • Rod Crossman*

Rise Forms

Premier Edition

I was on the back deck a month or two ago, staring across the valley, enjoying the view of the sun rising above the mountains and thinking about not fishing. About how much fishing I hadn't been doing lately. I could see the mouths of canyons from my favorite local rivers cutting through the Bear River Range, a usually tantalizing 20 minutes' drive away. I thought about the native cutthroat held in the clear headwaters on both rivers. And I didn't care.

In my hands was a book by John Galligan, *The Blood Knot*. I'd been enjoying the exploits of Ned "Dog" Oglivie for a couple of weeks—caught up in Dog's problems and his fishing. It didn't matter so much to me that I hadn't been fishing because I was living vicariously through books. For generations, authors have used the power of the written word to distract and comfort. To engage and provoke.

Fly fishing has a long history, and a long and rich literary history as well. Although it has spanned changes in publishing methods, from illuminated texts to the digital age, what hasn't changed is the passion with which anglers write about their piscatorial pursuits. And because sometimes it's not just about what is said, but rather how it is said, that Rise Forms exists.

Over the years there have been many fly fishing magazines dealing with the gear, mechanics and travel of the sport. More recently there has been a spate of online magazines focusing on fly fishing photography. Even though there are dozens of literary fly fishing books published annually, there aren't many magazines on the market that cater specifically to the reader of fly fishing literature. I find this interesting, and disappointing, that a sport often proclaiming the depth of its literary roots, does not have many choices in the form of magazines or journals.

Our goal is to meet your literary fly fishing needs by publishing in the digital formats that you use. We will continue to work with different formats. Rise Forms will grow and morph as we receive feedback and as our own expectations gel. Although the look may change, our commitment to high quality literature will not.

Scott Carles
Editor-in-chief



Riseforms

by Anthony Naples

Standing on the edge I scan
the seams, the eddies, the riffles,
foam lines, pools and waiting and then—

With a turned fin and silver twist
a riseform appears, and drifts downstream,
the briefest broken gate where two
worlds mingle with shimmer
and sky and the opposite of sky,
and the undignified gulp,
like a stone tossed in the water.

Black sheets of current shrug
as I negotiate the hidden
topography of stones,
move into position, and unroll
a questioning cast.

Anthony Naples lives in Pittsburgh, PA, where he utilizes several degrees in engineering in his work as a stay-at-home dad. While at Penn State he discovered Pennsylvania's rich fly fishing tradition, took up the challenge, and has never looked back. He's recently taken up Tenkara as a new fly fishing challenge. You can read more at castingaround.anthonynaples.com





Trico Take

Rod Crossman

Easy Creek

by Dave Motes

The hydrology consultant left a sheet full of suggestions. Along with advice about erosion points, buffers, and invasive species was this enigmatic item: "Assess large streamside trees."

Cal knew nothing about trees. He could do a little carpentry. He was great at hacking brush and painting things. He had rewired the clubhouse without electrocuting himself. He had even installed a new toilet. But trees were outside, or maybe beside, his pay grade. He was a resident handyman/trout bum, assisted by a juvenile delinquent/assistant trout bum. There was plenty to do just to keep the buildings from falling down; he did not even think about keeping trees from falling down.

Then one hot August night the TV was all weather all the time and four million Minnesotans watched blobs of color superimposed on street maps. Hail flattened corn and soybeans across the southern counties. Twisters ate barns and silos and part of a small town forty miles to the west. In Winona County it rained like a cow pissing on a flat rock and blew hard and sometime in the night a huge maple came down squarely across Yellow Creek.

Bob Kinchley came back in a lather and they went out to look. The creek was dark and high, but even sideways the tree loomed. The root ball arched over the creekbank. Heavy leaves were full and green above, pale silver undersides more visible now, fluttering in the current. Without trying the tree spanned the stream. For forty yards upstream, the riffle was now a sluggish yard-deep run.

"What are we going to do?" Kinchley said breathlessly. Cal admired that imperial 'we'.

"Don't know," Cal said. The tree would have been big on somebody's front lawn. Waist-deep in the club's best nymph water it was gigantic. Since Cal now drew real wages the members had become keen on measurable results. Kinchley looked meaningfully at Cal, then at the tree.

Next day Cal and Jason waded out with the chain saw. Kinchley and some others watched, dressed to fish but there to supervise. The wood was sticky and wet. Cal chewed off a twenty-foot limb and Jason hauled it ashore—that was the plan. Jason was a big kid but the branch mauled him under and cruised downstream unperturbed. They chased and tried to control it with no success. It finally hung up in the riffle at the top of Stack Hole.

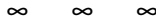
The saw was wet and wouldn't start. Jason was wet and wouldn't start. Fifty big-

ger branches and an eight-foot trunk eighty feet long mocked them. They waded back to the bank and sat sulking like prisoners on a road crew. Kinchley picked up his flyrod and marched tartly upstream, clinking and jingling under everything Orvis sold.

Cal watched the river run. There were changes already. The root ball had settled down into the bank, and the water had worked up to and through it. The leaves jiggled in the current. The pool upstream was calm. A trout rose steadily in the center of it.

“What’s going to happen?” Jason said.

“Haven’t the faintest,” Cal said. “But we’re not messing with it anymore.”



Sunday’s meeting was far too well attended to be coincidence. Cal identified the anti-tree faction by their cohesion and uncharacteristic attention to Robert’s Rules. Somebody had been messing with the phone tree.

“We got to get that thing out of there,” said Andy Olson decisively. Murmurs of assent. Somebody yelled ‘second!’

“I been fishin’ that run for forty years,” said Kinchley, with a reproachful look at Cal.

Cal said nothing. He was a member, but his status was delicate. Unexpected major expenses, such as the removal of a tree the size of the Edmund Fitzgerald, might endanger his wages and rent-free residence.

Consensus was building toward acclamation when Tom Maradonna stood. Maradonna was the club’s elitist Izaak Walton-quoting British chalk-stream snob. His buttery accent made the Minnesotans lock up, but he was respected. “Gentlemen,” he said. “It’s a river. It has its own rules. The fish don’t care. Leave it be.”

The freighted silence that followed was the Midwestern equivalent of an angry roar, but Cal saw a few nods. The old-timers reiterated their arguments, persuaded the fiscal conservatives, flattered the contrarian assholes, and won a motion 16-7 for ‘further study’. What would be studied, or who would do it, was not made plain.



A week later Cal and Jason were digging footers for steps up Camp Hill when Kinchley and Mike Parker showed up with two other men. They stood and looked

at the tree for a while, left, and came back with a gigantic vehicle Jason identified as a heavy-duty boom truck. When presented with automotive problems, Jason was wise; the rest of the time he was 17.

They backed the boom truck downstream along the river bank, destroying buffer plants and carving a huge gouge in the bank. Cal found himself hoping they'd get stuck and have to call a larger truck, and so on.

One of the men waded out and looped a cable around the trunk.

"Naah. No way," said Jason. "No way. They should come up, you know, from downstream, like to turn it with the current. Still I don't think it will move." It was the first decisive unsolicited statement Jason had made in Cal's hearing.

The men ran down hydraulic legs from the side of the truck. The cable came tight, the winch lugged down, the diesel throttled up, and nothing happened. The tree flexed but didn't move as far as Cal could see, and he had a good view. Kinchley and the head tow truck guy shouted at each other and waved their arms. They tinkered with the machinery and tried again. Nothing happened again. The cable had cut so far into the bark of the tree they had to gouge it loose with a screwdriver and a mallet. The truck ground back up to the road, did more damage, and muttered away, leaving Kinchley standing by the water, hands on hips. Uh-oh, Cal thought.

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During the quiet empty week Cal and Jason rented an earth auger from Home Depot in La Crescent and burned two gallons of gas on footings for a riverside deck and the rest of the stairs. Afternoons they fished and continued Jason's unlikely education in the fly rod. They always stopped to look at the big tree. It stayed enormous while the river changed around it. By the end of the week no more flow passed on the cliff side; the river had chosen. A broad new riffle curved around and under the tree top, fanning outward and lengthening. The tree had radically altered a big chunk of the river Cal was supposed to protect. He didn't mind.

∞ ∞ ∞

Friday afternoon Cal bushwacked to the beaverponds and confirmed a rumor: they were full of trout. An Adams got hammered by a five-inch brookie whenever it got through the overhanging aspens. There were no brookies in Yellow Creek. He immediately suspected Tom Maradonna. He was the one who had persuaded their neighbor to the south to keep silt out of the stream even when ethanol was pushing corn to record highs. Bucket biology was a time-honored Minnesota tradition and only slightly illegal. The brookies were easy and fun, and Cal quit

only when he fouled the fly and left it dangling four inches above the water. The gullible little brookies took turns jumping up to whack at it.

That evening Cal walked upstream from the lodge with a beer and watched the big tree. It was getting to be a habit. He was becoming an expert spectator at the reorganization of settled old Yellow Creek.

The branches in the water were now stripped, but those that stood upward remained bright green and alive-looking; one of them was at least 25 feet tall. The curving channel to the bank side had gobbled up most of the beach and exposed a cluster of round glacial boulders. The erosion had erased one side of the parallel divots created by the boom truck, which seemed appropriate. A new bar was growing down the center of the flat downstream. It was not ugly. It was change, and it was permanence.

Now that he knew what to look for, Cal could see great scallops in the creek bank where other trees had been. No trace of the trees themselves. Of course they'd fallen—what else would trees do? Some of the cottonwoods were fifteen feet around. Some day they would fall; all would fall. It was stupid to care.

Cal had a vote. He was a member, obliged to pay dues and assessments for hydrologists or recalcitrant handymen or the attempted reversal of natural forces. But he was also an employee, and a refugee from the world outside of the gate of the Trout Club. He liked the tree, even as it made things shift. He worried about what the club would try to do. The problem had become a question of philosophy, not force.



First week of September Cal walked the river with Carl Showalter, the DNR trout guy. Yellow Creek was all private, but it was also a big tributary, so the DNR cared. Plus Cal bought lunch and then they fished.

At the beaverponds, Showalter raised his eyebrows at the cookie-cutter brookies. "Somebody's been busy. Well, they'll be here for a while, then they won't," he said. "Creek looks good. This is good forage forest, so the beavers will stay, unless you get a sudden influx of timberwolves or Voyageurs. Long as the beavers stay, the brookies stay. Beavers go, dams go. If the dams go, you'll have brookies in your river for a while, couple three generations, then they'll fade away. If they stay up here they'll be fine. Brownies and rainbows won't make a go up this little creek. Not winter-tough enough."

That evening they fished up to the Big Tree.

"Whew, that's a big one," Showalter said.

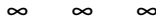
“Any problems from it?” Cal asked.

“Naah. I mean, it will rearrange your channels, you can see that’s happening now. Riffle edges up there, that was good reproduction water for the rainbows. When the tree goes, the riffle will be back. Doesn’t matter. Your reproduction is poor anyhow. For now, these shallows will just move downstream. There’s other spawning gravel for what you’re going to get, which is not much with these genes. This is Minnesota.”

He pointed. “Sediment movement here where the bank is getting cut down, over there—something’s always picking up, laying down. You won’t even notice. Too bad for the shade, but you’ve got tons of shade, you got good pools, springs. It’s not a problem. Just a big splash. Long term you might see a meander left, but we’re talking decades. It’s what rivers do. Fish don’t care.”

“Somebody else said that,” Cal said. “Could we pull it out if we wanted to?”

“Sure, with enough horsepower. Would take some kind of crane, a big one. Would tear up the creekbed pretty bad. And it’d be a hell of a chore. We sure wouldn’t mess with it. I’d say, leave it be. This isn’t a dang golf course.”



Next day Cal and Jason were on the Camp Hill stair again, setting posts and hoe-mixing hand-carried Sakrete in a 5-gallon bucket. Kinchley and Gene Orvig walked up. They wanted to discuss their Plan for That Tree. Part one apparently included a public relations push.

“Why do you fellas think I got any say about it?” Cal said.

“You keep the grounds. People pay attention to you,” Kinchley said.

“Who’s that, again?” Cal asked.

Kinchley blinked. “Well, Tom, and Okash. Couple others.”

“We think it’s important to correct the damage,” Orvig said earnestly.

Jason hummed faintly but kept mixing, head down. Cal wiped his hands on his pants for time to think.

“Well, guys, it was up to me I’d say leave the tree alone. Let things go the way the creek, you know, wants to go.”

Both men shifted, tightened.

“Well, we make plenty of changes in the woods and paths,” Kinchley said. “Look here, you’re pouring footers for steps. That looks kinda permanent. Not exactly natural.”

Cal didn’t have an answer for that.

“Damn fish aren’t natural, either,” Kinchley said. “Rainbows, browns, all imported.” Brookies too, Cal thought.

“I didn’t say I understood it,” Cal said.

Orvig seemed uncomfortable at open debate.

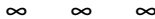
“DNR hydrologist said that too,” Cal pressed on. “Said it’s what creeks do. Won’t hurt the fish. Might help even. Also it’s not going to be easy. You saw. That’s a big tree. And it’s worked in there deep.”

Kinchley looked up the path, smirked dismissively. “Well, you’re pretty young, I guess, to want to keep things the same they’ve always been.” Cal kept his face flat. All paused.

“Well,” Cal said carefully. “I’ll help out with whatever the club decides.” He instantly regretted it. As a group, like all groups, the club was stupid. Cal had not said his mind. Kinchley nodded and walked on before Cal could revise. Crap, he thought, and went back to work.

“The hell you grinning about?” he said to Jason.

“I ain’t grinnin’, boss,” Jason said, grinning.



A typical Trout Club meeting agenda: Hasty minutes, muttered old business, a slide show of somebody’s trip to Alaska, then drinking and lies unless it was nice out, in which case a few people went fishing and the rest drank and told lies. It was a club. Except for a little cautious bitching about finances and upkeep, the rule was No Conflict.

But Cal could see this meeting chalked up on the blackboard like a football play. Everybody was edgy. Kinchley, Orvig, and a bunch of others confabbed conspiratorially, glancing around. They looked like a Politburo photograph Cal had used in a civics report in the tenth grade.

“The tree has destroyed Canada Riffle,” Kinchley began.

Cal had never heard of Canada Riffle. At Trout Club, naming things was an overt claim of authority.

“It’s disrupting spawning water. The property is reverting to an uncontrolled state. Our assessments are rising, but we’re not getting anything for our money. I for one want the river returned to its natural state. We need to move the tree out, restore Canada Riffle, and make a better effort to keep this property up.”

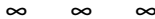
The contradictions didn’t nullify the threat. Cal’s status as live-in trout-bum was now tied to a very big dead tree.

Maradonna had a go at the “that’s what rivers do” argument. Everyone listened politely.

Kinchley was up again. “There’s one person who has insight into what needs to be done. Cal has been working around the place, you all know that. He told me that he would get to work on the tree if the membership wanted. He has experience in stream management—we’ve all seen the work he’s done in the Braids area, and in the paths and bridges and the lodge house here. We’ve got what we need to solve this problem, and I say we get to it.”

Cal was still admiring the dissonance between “an uncontrolled state” and “all the work he’s done” when the vote went 19-9 in favor of removing the tree, details to be provided by Cal, budget undiscussed, supervision by Bob Kinchley, any more new business seeingnone? move toadjourn all in favorsayaye aye opposednay themotioncarries.

Cal went fishing, a gesture nobody noticed. He found a few fish mooching ants and tricos in bank holds near the mouth of the unnamed beaverpond creek. He took a nice brownie after a prolonged and patient stalk-and-drift. It is a fact that a grueling mano-a-fisho duel over a size 20 fly can dramatically improve forgetfulness. Walking back, Cal mulled names for the little creek to inject casually into conversation. This would test his theory about naming things. He did not think about trees.



Jason traded labor for fishing privileges and instruction in the fly rod, a deal he’d made with Cal that spring under the duress of a trespass charge, exhibit A: a grocery bag squirming with freshly bait-caught catch-and-release, flyfish-only trout. Jason’s history and resumé did not promise success, but he had worked hard and applied himself to the flyrod in the evening. Plus he solved the problem of the big tree with one casual remark.

August is tough fishing even on private water, all terrestrials and tiny tricos; Jason took maybe four fish in two weeks. He was determined, but perseverance didn't run in his side of town. As the tree settled in he got better at casting, mending, and drifting but caught few fish. His rod drooped.

So Cal put him on the gullible brookies. Stairs and decks were done, so they spent a day clearing paths to the overgrown ponds and carving space on the banks with a chainsaw, and that evening Jason caught about forty trout. At one point five bulging mosquitoes slurped unslapped on his neck while he caught and released, caught and released.

Walking back, Jason was giddy. "That was cool. It was cool to see them come up and take it. And you wait, just a second, then lift up, you know, not too hard. Wow. That was cool."

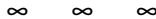
Cal let him natter, lost in a daydream: 15 years old, a summer night on the Dolores way up by the dam, Colorado high desert heat fading to cool. A blizzard of caddis, and the big rainbows rising eagerly, sometimes jumping right out from under the hookset. They were strong, and he was impatient with their long, slashing struggle. He didn't want to fight them, he wanted to fool them. He had cracked the flyrodder's secret: fooling trout isn't hard. When they don't take, it's only detail—wrong fly, bad drift, poor timing. Details you can fix in the next cast. Cal could not remember a fish he caught that day; the trout were a blur in the net. What he did remember: big snouts rising up all around the fly.

Cal came back to something Jason had said. "That would cool them out, make them forget the stupid tree."

"Huh? What?" Cal said.

"Get those stiffs out on them beaverponds. Then maybe they'll quit chapping ass on the big tree in the, up there, you know, in the Canada thing. They need to catch some fish, that's all."

Cal stopped. That, he said to himself, is just the thing.



In March, after two heavy wet snows, a thaw raised the river and moved heavy ice down the Yellow. The miniature glaciation taught Cal a lesson in streamside construction. The small deck below the lodge house was demolished in slow motion, posts and boards scraped out and tumbled in a frozen tangle along the bank, footers uprooted and discarded like big dirty beer cans. The lowest step on the Camp Hill staircase was locked in and dragged into a flat rhombus. Cal knew he was lucky the entire stair hadn't been yanked out like a thread from a sweater.

Next year he'd set a large stone as the first step, and cut each tread loose from the next so higher ice or floods might take only one at a time.

Easy Creek—Cal's name had stuck—ran high and clear. The beavers had some maintenance to do but the dams held. The members would have another season of easy brookies. Leaning on his ski-poles, Cal wondered how they'd rise, another year bigger, another year fewer. According to the sign-in book, members had spent more angler-hours on the club in September and October than they had in decades. Kinchley had 'checked in' with Cal a few times but grand tree-removal projects had somehow never got going.

Cal skied clumsily upriver, sweating in full sun-glare. Spring spoke in dripping trees and settling snow. He was rusty and the snow was deep. It made for hard traveling, but it also made for but full aquifers and happy trout. He cut through the woods to the upper road around Camp Hill to Big Tree Run.

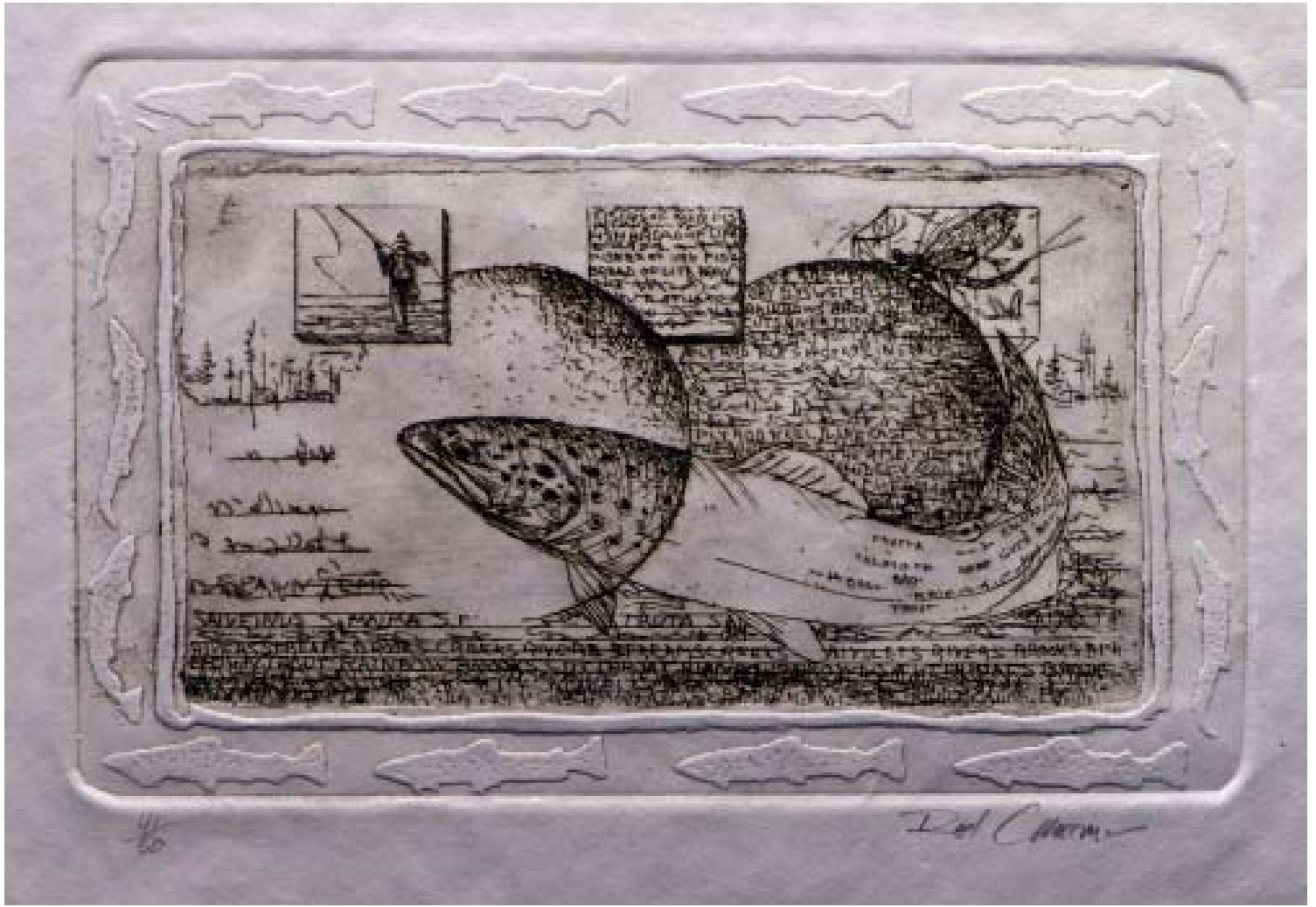
Ice had done what a boom truck and Cal and Jason and a chainsaw and a hundred committees could not: forced change on the big tree. Only two upward limbs remained, blunted and scarred and rotated over downstream. Ground-off branches and trailing shreds of bark proved the slow violence of water and winter. On the clock dial, the tree was 10 minutes earlier than it had been in August, and eight or ten feet downstream. An enormous jumbled press of ice jammed against the main trunk in tectonic disarray. Along the heaviest part of the tree layered stacks of foot-thick plates chewed eagerly at the wood.

Cal watched. Nothing happened. He got cold as the sunshine faded and the light went back to winter. The trees had stopped dripping. Around the tree open water jittered and clicked. Upstream, the ice waited silently.

About the Author

Dave Motes writes, teaches, and fishes in Minnesota. More of his work, including the other Trout Club stories, can be found at www.storyarc.squarespace.com.





Trout Journal

Rod Crossman

Standing in the River

by Shawn Pittard

Wiser people fish from shore, wade
no deeper than their knees,

establish rules against venturing
spring water; deep holes hidden

by the silken fabric of taut surfaces—
lavender and gold this time of day.

Me, I've made such rules and broken
them; drawn by beauty's invitation

into the rush of sound, pulled time
and time again into the liquid sky.

Shawn Pittard is the author of *These Rivers*—a chapbook of poems from Rattlesnake Press. His poems, essays, and book reviews have most-recently appeared in the *Chrysalis Reader*, *In Posse Review*, and the *North American Review*. He co-wrote a screenplay, *Junk Sick*, with his brother, Trent, and writes about his backcountry amblings at *These Rivers*. He divides his time between his home in Sacramento, California and his family's cabin outside Flagstaff, Arizona. Read more of his work at theserivers.blogspot.com





Ascension Bay

Rod Crossman

Savage Gods, Silver Ghosts: In the Wild with Ted Hughes

By Ehor Boyanowsky

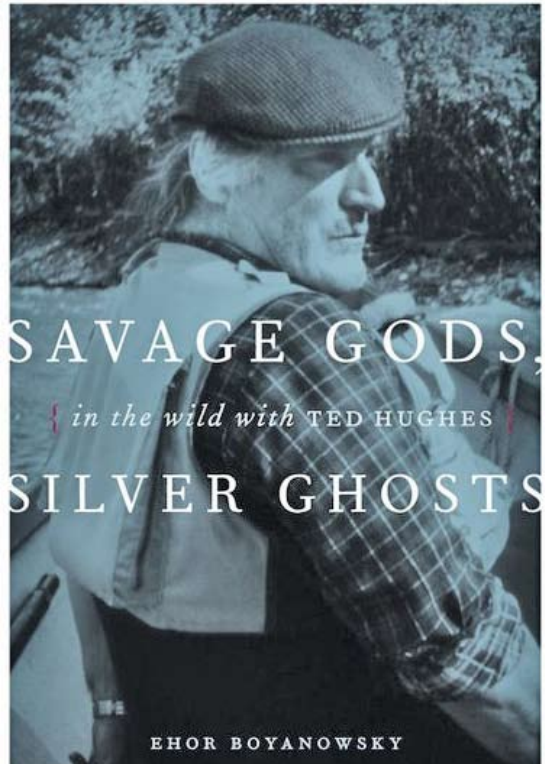
208 pages Douglas & McIntyre 2009

by Justin Cober-Lake

It's not that Ted Hughes is inaccessible; between readily available biographies and penetrable poetry, you can get a sense of what's going on. The part of someone that stays tucked away on favorite rivers remains harder to get to, though. In *Savage Gods, Silver Ghosts: In the Wild with Ted Hughes*, Ehor Boyanowsky reveals that side of the former British Poet Laureate, remembering their friendship not only as anglers together, but also as writers and conservationists.

The two writers (Boyanowsky writes on environmental issues and is an associate professor of criminology at Simon Fraser University) met after the academic sent Hughes some fishing-related poetry. Eventually the two got together and began to fly fish for steelhead on British Columbia's Dean River with a certain amount of regularity.

These excursions make up some of the most compelling sections of the book, not only because of the stories of fish caught and lost,



but because of Boyanowsky's ability to capture the precise feelings of this camp, as well as the culinary qualities, frequently involving valued wine and Hughes's comical newcomer workload. He writes, "Anglers tend to relate best to other anglers who share their values" (50). While he reveals some elitism in his writing—denigrating those who don't share his methods or approach—he speaks an important idea, and it's one that's important in his relationship with Hughes. Throughout the book, we see both men willing to share and help each other in the fishing process, and that attitude carries over to their mutual work on environmental issues, culminating in Hughes's cross-Atlantic efforts to help the Steelhead Society of British Columbia, of which Boyanowsky is one of the key members.

As a fishing memoir, the book moves well, aided in large part by Boyanowsky's strong prose stylings. Given the two men's work in literary pursuit, it necessarily covers some of the writing side of life. During this stretch from the mid-1980s on, Hughes works on a number of projects, fearing his massive prose work on Shakespeare will undo him, and *Birthday Letters* hovers in the background. Hughes discusses his need for isolation when he works, saying that if he doesn't get away from people, "the tendrils reach out and surround you and drag you away... And suddenly you are old and no project is so important anymore" (143).

Hughes remains driven by a creative force that can't be resisted, at least not at great personal risk. At times it seems almost like an entity, like the *duende* that Federico Garcia Lorca describes in a lecture Hughes recommends. It's a primitive drive, the animal presence described early in Hughes's "The Thought-Fox". Speaking to Boyanowsky, partly as an effort to draw him away from "useless, bloodless tasks," Hughes explains that this energy "is a finite reservoir in each person ... and must not be wasted" (145-6). Hughes explains—and we see it play out as his prose writing drains him—that "once I feel it, I struggle until the work is done regardless of how difficult and exhausting it is" (148).

Boyanowsky's strength as a stylist and the interesting expeditions create a captivating book that ends too soon. The book's brevity, however, gives it some cover for its primary weakness, the one-sided view of Hughes that Boyanowsky presents. It's not that we don't see Hughes in different moods, because we see a range of them. It's

also not that we don't see him in a range of settings, because we see him on various continents, at home, in and out of the wild. The problem is that we always see him as Ehor's buddy Ted.

In a short work like this one, and one intentionally focusing on certain aspects, that approach works, but it's hard not to feel a little shortchanged. Hughes, after all, is a figure with a problematic personal history, and while we don't need a Plath-based scandal sheet, the absence of conflict is noticeable. During Boyanowsky's visit to Hughes in the early '90s, Hughes tells the story of a writer whose personal life was wrecked by a "biography by an allegedly friendly writer". Boyanowsky says, "I wonder if it is not intended as a cautionary tale.... He does know I keep a journal and so, I presume, it is a plea to be prudent" (156). Boyanowsky writes as a genuine friend but, even though the memoir was published a decade after Hughes's death, the topics feel deliberately restrained.

Considering Boyanowsky's project here—to reflect on his own experiences with Hughes while exploring a part of the poet's life discussed less often—the approach makes sense. The resulting book isn't encompassing, but it does provide some nice insights for filling out broader picture of Hughes the person and Hughes the writer. The fishing excursions themselves become almost, but not quite, secondary.

Justin Cober-Lake has written primarily on pop culture in both academic and mainstream settings, in places such as Pastemagazine.com, Stylus, and Trouser Press. He was the Interviews Editor at PopMatters for a number of years and remains a staff writer there. He's been fly fishing for close to 20 years but admits his exploits are better examined through the written word than through visual evidence. Find more of his work at anglenook.blogspot.com.





The Bridge

Rod Crossman

A River Doesn't Care

by Cameron Scott

Nate McCain, your Lucky Strikes
and Wild Turkey preceded you—
those Touchet brown trout
between Waitsburg and Dayton,
those hot unchanging September afternoons,
sun burning the left hand side of exposed skin.

After you dropped out of school,
on a day the Touchet was muddy
from upstream bulldozing, I caught
a twenty three inch brown trout
with an orange belly and hooked kype.

How singular in purpose everything was then,
before the slow deep run filled with gravel
and the river shallowed and braided.

A decade of rivers later, the emptiness
of January, fingertips swollen,
six hours have passed and still
the Rio Penasco has not saved me.

Kneeling behind a boulder, I think about
the leak in my apartment ceiling, the septic
system backed up from fall leaves.

Even the water has been quiet, the snow
falling, fish holding in the deepest runs.
There in the current I'm chasing a life
which gets farther and farther away.

Cameron Scott works and lives in the Roaring Fork Valley,
CO, but fishes wherever he can. More of his work can be
found at cameronkellerscott.com





Mayfly Dance *Rod Crossman*



Crappie

Rod Crossman

A few moments with Rod Crossman

"My dad was a hopeless potamophilous. He spent every spare minute, which wasn't much, on the banks of rivers. Dad also loved to visit fish hatcheries, probably because he was so busy taking care of his family he never got to fish much. So he satiated his love of fish by stopping by every fish hatchery we happened to drive by. One of my earliest 'life memories' happened during a visit to one of these hatcheries. I remember narrow walkways between rows of water filled with fish. My awkward five year old body felt a bit dizzy standing at the edge of this other world. But I couldn't resist leaning out over the edge to get a better view. My father didn't notice what was happening; he was lost in

I leaned a bit too far and went in head first, eyes and mouth wide open.

his own fish dreams. So as I leaned out for a better view,

I leaned a bit too far and went in head first, eyes and mouth wide open. Suddenly I was under water getting eyeballed by a school of fish. After they (the fish) realized I wasn't food, they scattered in every direction. Some brushing against me as they flew past. At the point I almost started breathing like a fish, an irresistible tug pulled me back to the world I'd left behind. My dad had grabbed me by the heels and flopped me back on land like a prized trout. I had sucked in so much water, every time I belched the next two days it

smelled like a fish. Ever since, I've felt most at home on this planet when I am near or in trout water."

So shares Rod Crossman with Rise Forms. To get a little more information about him and his work, we asked him a few questions.

Rise Forms - Could you tell us about the piece *Mayfly Dance*?

Rod Crossman - *Mayfly Dance* was one of those ideas that just wouldn't leave me alone. I had actually been thinking about the painting for years before it all came together and I was finally able to put all the pieces together.

It began to take shape in my mind one evening when I was alone, fishing a favorite trout stream. Often, when I'm fishing by myself, I have felt visited by apparitions; an invisible presence. At times this feeling will be so overwhelming, I have to look over my shoulder to see if someone is there. I've often felt these impressions are brief glimpses into the invisible realm. For just a moment, time is suspended, and you get a glimpse of some other reality.

Twilight on a trout stream is the magic time. The gloaming transforms mayflies into fairies, the sounds of the moving water into voices and laughter. The alchemy of those evenings transforms me as well.

RF - We notice that you have multiple styles, from dark and moody, to light and whimsical. Etchings and abstracts. Why the diversity?

RC - Experimenting with a wide range of genres, media, and styles satisfies my curiosity. I'm convinced the more ways you look at something, the better your chances of discovering fresh insights that offer something new. My brush work, color sense, and design concepts are all very similar whether it's an abstract painting or something representational. I'm constantly searching for imagery that doubles as a mirror and a lens for looking at life, revealing those sublime experiences that are unsayable.

I am also interested in asking questions. Beneath the surface of all my paintings are explorations of the things I wonder about. Why is the world the way it is? What is happening to the natural world? What interconnections bind us with all other creatures? What is my role in the world? Working in a variety of subjects and styles forces me outside the boundaries of the language or thinking I'm most comfortable with, encouraging me to a more inclusive view of life.

RF - What roles do the studio and 'on site' play in the creation of your works?

RC - Most of my ideas evolve from the persistent memory of personal experi-

ences. There is a no substitute for being there. A deep knowledge and love of your subject helps one to see the invisible realm that contributes to the essence of the thing you're trying to paint. I love to work on location, producing sketches, preliminaries, notes and ideas I feel are worth remembering. Many of these ideas never make it to the studio easel; the ones that do are the ideas that keep tugging on my spirit, that won't leave me alone. Over time, I gradually become convinced these ideas need to manifest themselves visually. Hopefully they say something meaningful about the human condition.

RF - What do you think of the state of fly fishing art today? Who are some fly fishing artists you admire? Why?

RC - It's difficult for me to separate my feelings about flyfishing art and art in a more general sense. I'm a bit resistant to the idea of labels. It's another of the reasons I

try to blur the lines between categories in my own work. If

Most 'fly fishing art' is so addicted to nostalgia or sentimentality it's vulnerable to irrelevance and commodification.

it's good enough to be called 'art' it shouldn't matter what the art depicts or how it's made. The institutional art world looks at depictions of 'fly fishing' as commercial or illustrative. This disqualifies it from being 'real art' for them. For many, only art that includes a critique of culture or encourages thinking about social justice should be called art. Honestly, most 'fly fishing art' is so addicted to nostalgia or sentimentality it's vulnerable to irrelevance and commodification. When I say this, I'm pointing a finger at myself as well. Art at its best is lifelike not artlike. Lifelike art serves life in ways that artlike art cannot. Allan Kaprow wrote about this distinction in his wonderful book, *Essays On Blurring the Lines Between Art and Life*.

There are important questions affecting us all that need solutions. When art is only entertainment or decoration, it has acquiesced the right to being a part of finding answers to these questions. Creating beauty in some ways does make the world a better place. This may be true, but what is beauty? If pretty is to beauty as happy is to joy or as the temporal is to the eternal then beauty is more than we think it is.

I believe the invention of the camera in many ways destroyed the need for representation painting. Modernism destroyed the belief that realism was art. I'm interested to see what post postmodernism or hypermodernism will mean for representational art. I'm hopeful that the sporting artist of this new century will embrace a more dialectic view of what their art practice might look like. Art projects like Dominique Mazeaud's *The Great Cleansing of the*

Rio Grande or Joseph Beuys *7000 Oaks* offer an alternative kind of art that serves life in meaningful ways. These and other artists, who blur the lines between their life and art, are the artists I'm drawn to.

Three of my favorite books—*The Big Stoney* by Howard T. Walden II, *The Earth is Enough* by Harry Middleton, and the classic *A River Runs Through It* by Norman Maclean—have in common a love of fly fishing and wild water. It's no secret the taming of water through dams, aquifer control, bottling, riparian rights, and global warming threatens all water as well as the creatures who live in it and creatures who are mostly made of it, like us. The art we need now takes on these issues and works to expose both the sacred and the profane parts of life that surround us all. Are we headed to a world where the closet thing our great grandchildren might get to fly fishing for wild fish is some sort of hyperreal simulation you might find in a futuristic trout park or video game?

Rod was born in South Dakota, raised in Upstate New York but his home for the last thirty years has been Marion, Indiana. He makes his living creating paintings, as a professor, and Artist in Residence at Indiana Wesleyan University. Although those vocations are responsible for the majority of his working life, he also: life-guarded; sacked groceries; worked in a factory; worked as a graphic artist; and taught High School Art, Junior High Art and Elementary Art.

He and his wife Mary have raised two boys, an English Pointer, English Setter, two cats and three Labs. His boys Barry and Bryan have forgiven his obsession with fly fishing, which denied them any chance at a normal childhood. Thankfully, they inherited his love of moving water, wilderness and trout, which still gives them a good reason to spend time together.

His work has been exhibited worldwide including the Smithsonian, Chicago Art Institute, Woodson Art Museum, Ward Museum, High Museum and many nationally known galleries. His paintings have been featured in hundreds of books, magazines and journals around the world.

He is interested in moments of “Wonder” and “Awe.” That magical “State of being” that leaves us vulnerable to the idea there is something more important in the universe than ourselves.

See original work and prints for sale at rodcrossman.com.

rod crossman





Striper

Rod Crossman

Brown, Gilbey's, Happy Ending

by Sydney Lea

Like many another hyper-hormonal young man, and in fact like most anglers until too recently, I once yearned to smack big trout over the head on every outing. You released the little ones but kept the brutes, because what peer would credit your conquests on the strength of your lying word alone?

Ego, as will be seen, is this story's antihero.

It was 1970. I'd traveled to the Green River near Cora, Wyoming, precisely to gather some bragging rights, even if all I'd have to display on return would be photographs of some titan stretched alongside my rod. I'd scheduled six days on the water, and almost before I knew it, five had vanished.

I'd caught a fair number of fish in that span, some perhaps in the two-pound range, but none that answered to the fantasies I'd concocted back in New England. On this final day, then, I felt as desperate as determined, though the sense of urgency had very likely been there from the start of the trip. It was and remains a character flaw of mine, never to be quite satisfied. I took some reassurance from Auden's assertion that poems were never finished, only abandoned, still deep inside me I longed to compose an epic. A couple two-pounders had been fine... well, no they hadn't. I was working on piscatorial epic, and four decades ago my visionary Green River brown would bring it to completion.

That final September morning broke into bone-numbing cold; in fact it was snowing—not a lot, but sure-to-God snowing—and the north wind blew hard enough to instantly sweep away blue wings and midges. Like most people who use the long rod, I take my greater pleasure in fishing to a rise; but I've never been some dry fly "purist." Long johns under my waders, a coarse wool sweater under my vest, I set out to swing a streamer or drift a nymph, or rather to throw all manner of each until I'd exhausted my own supply and ardor. Before that point came, I could hope, I'd lay into my monster, preferably a brown, the fish that was, as now, my favorite. Hell, I rationalized, the one I had in mind was likely too big to bother with some piddling number 20 dry anyhow.

The water in my chosen stretch looked placid, but in fact it had the authority of massive, slow-moving things. Elephant. Ox. Freight train. Draft horse. I leaned upstream and tied on some streamer. Careful in my zeal not to give any fly short shrift, I made scores and scores of casts with that fly, every one a loser, as it was with whatever else I had in my wallet: Muddler, Matuka, Ranger, various leech patterns, on and on. I even tossed an Atlantic Salmon fly or two, just to say I'd tried everything.

Nothing doing, so out came the nymph box, or boxes: Prince, Copper John, Coachman, Art Flick's deadly Stone Creeper, and more lethal still, I'd found, a thing that I and the postmaster of Peru, Vermont—the best trout fisherman I knew in those days—had thrown together from remnants one late spring day. We called it the White-Ass Baboon: mallard quill thorax wrapped in nubbled gold wire ahead of roughened snowshoe hare dubbing, no wing. And as I say, every other pattern in my kit.

Nada.

After four hours, I staggered up to the local eatery to get warm and to grab a bite. The counterman suggested what he called an Eye-talian sandwich, its foamy roll sogged with tomato ooze and pepperoni oil. It tasted delicious somehow, even if in my anxiousness to go back wading I all but inhaled the damned thing. I decided to pick up a quart of Gilbey's gin too, for celebration of the big fish I'd be lugging to camp, though I had no way either to cook or freeze it.

Wind and snow had not abated during my mealtime layoff. At one point, having gone back to streamers in the gale, I managed to stick a number 10 hook through my septum. It didn't hurt at first: in fact I imagined I'd snagged some part of my clothing, and only after running my hand up the leader did I find the trouble. There was pain enough, however, when I pushed the barb through and twisted at it with my nippers until metal fatigue supervened and the steel fell apart.

What blood there was from my nose's wound dribbled onto the ratty sweater. It struck me how surprisingly little of it I'd parted with. My principal soreness lay in having lost half an hour of fishing to that crude doctoring.

I ran the alpha to omega of my fly assortment all over again. It seemed impossible that nothing better than 12 inches could be the result of such persistence. Mind you, I had not stood in one place: I'd waded up and down that run for a quarter mile or more in each direction, even venturing into scarily heavy water at the foot of the big pool, where my fly raced through its full swing almost the moment I laid it on the current. I wasn't settling for halfway effort.

Behind the bleakness of the day, I sensed the sun sinking ever more rapidly behind me. Time for something radical. I had just remembered the Battenkill on chilly autumn mornings, when the spawning browns of that blessed era would sometimes whack at a spider if we skittered it over the surface. Nine out of ten times a fish would merely slap near the thing with its tail—and just once: he'd never come again. But every so often, in a flurry of froth, a decent trout would actually gulp the spider and the contest, usually in the brown's favor, was on.

At all events, I lengthened my tippet, tapering it to 6x, blew on my fingertips,

and tied on a cinnamon spider. I flung it onto the river just anyhow, twitched it a few times, and watched as a gigantic head and tail immediately showed behind it. The brown did not, as I'd have predicted, if I predicted anything, slap at the fly; he merely rose in all his pomp, then sank easily back.

My heart sped and lagged in the same moment. There he was, he'd presented himself, but that would be the last I'd see of him if eastern experience were any gauge. Nonetheless, wind behind me, I made a roll cast, flicked the spider back and forth to dry it, and set it down right where I had before.

The brown did not slash at the fly, but sipped it as though it were some tiny emerger. Then, in the manner of real trophy fish, rather than roaring off, he lay low in the streambed and shook his head slowly for what seemed a long time. Next he made a brutal but very short run, gave a few more shakes, swam deliberately upstream.

Then he took off like a freight train.

Oh Lord, let me have him! I prayed.

Every fisherman knows the feeling of mixed excitement and gloom when a truly big fish takes: it's a thrill to have a trophy on your line, but you know it's at least even odds that the trophy will overmatch you. The brown leapt once like a rainbow, skittered a couple of times along the surface like a smallmouth, then tore off in whatever direction he chose, making a series of breathtaking runs, one all the way across that broad reach.

I'm just a drunk. If such an admission seems a non sequitur at this juncture, I mean immediately to suggest its relevance. I mean I'm a chronic drunk, a morning-noon-and night one, but one who, praise God, has been in recovery for some time now. Primary among the tools of such recovery is living life day by day. Practically speaking, this means that even I can get through one 24-hour period without a drink, and if it comes to it, I can make myself go without the drink for an hour, even a minute, then another minute and another.

The compulsion to take alcohol or some substitute into my body left me a considerable while ago, but that doesn't mean I can relax. I was sober quite a long time in my younger years, but I went back to imagining my epic poem, my epic fish, above all my epic tomorrow. I forgot, to use a Zen-like formulation, to be here now...and I got plastered again, staying that way long enough to turn another chunk of my life to a blur.

Even if one big miracle a day—being sober and clean—should be enough to hold me, I must sometimes notice, say, a crab tree dripping exotic, resplendent foliage, which turns out to be a flock of cedar waxwings; or for further

instance the ramshackle structures of the veneer mill in a town just south of me when they are inverted and somehow beautified by the calm water of the small river below; or the way crystals hover before me in the subzero air as I snowshoe through an opening in woods. I don't mind platitude here: these are some things that feed what I now name my soul and they lend it a measure of strength.

Believe me, I could go on, and I will come back. But back now to the Green River brown. Even allowing for the hyperbolizing power of recall, I don't believe in all my life I've been into a trout of such bulk. I certainly hadn't before that day. Of course, I don't fish a tenth as much as I did back when none of five kids had yet been born, back when fishing seemed oddly both to define and validate my very existence during the warmer months. For all that, I have taken my share of fine ones, and although for over a quarter-century I have kept none, I've profoundly savored playing each before release. And—this is the gospel truth—I have all but equally relished fighting fish that in the end broke off or pulled free. To know the fish was there seems wonder enough, and joy.

Nothing remotely like joy, however, played a part in my battle with this particular brown. I chased him up- and downriver. Tippet material not what it is now, when, as my friend Landy Bartlett lately quipped, you can practically tow a Jeep around with 4x, I was careful not to let my quarry get too tight on me.

Please, please, God. I kept at my witless pagan prayer the whole while.

How much time ran by as I matched wits and strength with that brute? I haven't any idea, but a good deal of it, I'd bet. At last, though, he started coming my way. I still let him run when he wanted, but his dashes were becoming shorter, less magisterial.

For purposes of traveling light, I'd brought along one of those nets you can twist until the whole thing fits into a holster on your belt. Holding the rod tip high in my left hand, I pulled the net out, dipped it into the current to open the bag, and gently lifted it under Leviathan...who proved too long and heavy for such a contraption, collapsing the frame so that he could roll again at my feet.

I made four or five further efforts with the flimsy net, then looked downstream to those rips. On the west shore just above them stood a tawny gravel beach, which sloped into the Green at a gentle angle. To haul my trophy onto that dry land seemed my only recourse, risky as it was: if the trout made its way to the white water, the current would steal him.

By now, I was nearly dragging the poor creature, a matter that didn't concern me then. Indeed, I checked behind myself periodically to see if the brown had turned onto its side, so that I could just pinch him aft of the gill plates and carry

him out.

At last I backed a foot or two onto the sand, reeled the butt of my leader through the top guide, lifted—and felt nothing.

I didn't know what to make of this until I looked down and noticed that the trout had drifted offshore, deep enough to cover its dorsal, and was finning in the pebbled shallows. I noticed the little pigtail at my tippet's end, which now trailed useless below me.

I must have tied a bad clinch knot with my impatient, half-frozen fingers. I dropped my rod on the beach, waded out to his lie, and swiped at him like a grizzly bear. A feckless bear at that. I watched the trout angle out and disappear.

What swam to mind instantly was not another brown but that bottle of Gilbey's in my pack. This would become a more and more common response as I went on with my life. Yet even then, had I netted the trout, I'd have toasted my own triumph to the limit and beyond, as surely as I went on to drown my defeat.

I'm almost certain the Wind River Mountains, however cloaked in the mist and snow of storm, provided a sight to make the hike back to my cabin worth the taking. I suppose mule deer and antelope grazed in the meadows at their feet, their breaths visible in the cold when they raised their heads. More than one golden eagle may have been circling above. The sage probably showed the spectral green that would tax a Corot to replicate. But that fogged-glass bottle of gin was the real cynosure of my mind's eye. When I got indoors, its contents disappeared, entirely, much faster than my trout. So did the rest of that day and night.

I woke up next morning to confusion, wondering where in hell I might be and what I'd been doing to get there. I recall becoming slowly aware of Hank Williams's "Your Cheatin' Heart," though in a version performed by someone who was no Hank Williams; I had fallen asleep with the radio on, and all my damp clothing too, including waders. It took a few moments for memory to prevail.

I pinch myself today to remember that in recalling my failure on the Green, I began to think that life had no value to me anymore, that nothing—nothing—could ever again come to good. Insane, naturally, but then addiction and insanity are very close kin: in my crazed view, I had not merely lost the best fish I'd ever had on a line; I'd lost the world.

There is no good reason here to retrace how, with enormous, ongoing help, I rediscovered multiple reasons for living, above all a beloved family that now extends to beloved grandchildren, great nieces and nephews. At that moment by the Green, suffice it to say, I had no way to imagine such a turn, no way

to foresee that I'd thrive not only on the kinships I've cited, but also on what remains of that very day, the one I believed such a debacle.

Thinking back on that encounter, I can, as it turns out, re-envision the glory of the fish's markings, those haloed crimson spots along the underbelly. The trout's deep but streamlined shape. The flakes of snow that hit the surface and vanish immediately, and the poignant beauty in such transience. The glitter of stones on the river-bottom.

And if I lift my eyes to the hills, as I must, after all, have done then too, I still see the whited coulees descending the mountain like angel-pale rivers.

It was my subconscious, of course, or some other ineffable faculty, that stored these lovely gleanings against a time when they could impress themselves properly on my spirit. There they are again at this very moment, bright and compelling enough to be part of a story's happy ending.

Sydney Lea teaches poetry in the Liberal Studies program at Dartmouth College. He has authored 7 poetry books (with two more slated for publication), three books of essays, and one novel and he has edited several anthologies. His work has appeared in many anthologies as well as *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Republic*, and *The New Yorker*. In 1978 he founded *New England Review*, a quarterly literary magazine. More can be found at sydneylea.net.





White Bass

Rod Crossman

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Free Again

Rod Crossman