

Don Johnson

Grabbling

Longer than any of us in air  
Or common light could not breathe  
He would stay down, fishing  
By braille in pools darker  
Than skins of old bibles.  
On the green bank, closing  
My eyes, I would dizzy myself  
Holding my breath, trying  
To picture him blind and unhearing  
While he probed under root knob  
And rock. I would come back always  
To the sheen of slow  
Current, and empty boat, birds  
I made call, 'rise up, rise up,'  
Till he boiled up sputtering  
Like a sinner the preacher  
Upstream had lost (it was always  
Sunday). He would toss each  
Fish at his bucket, fling the  
Occasional snake at the bank  
Without speaking,  
Then rest, wide-eyed at the gunwhale.  
I could not know what he did  
When he ducked under, but squinted  
Trying to learn each surface gesture,  
Back-lighted move. And once

I called out to him, "How?" His answer,  
"Get wet boy". He didn't say  
That each time down grows longer,  
Fish or no fish; that rivers  
Everywhere are one, never the same;  
That when you finally let go  
To float up clutching whatever  
You can bring back, worldly light  
Explodes, barbed, uplifting,  
Almost holy.