

*Before Canoes to Memory*

Before canoes to memory  
the water was every I  
lived there to linger the  
tops of firs to wag  
the water's own surface  
drinks a paddle splash  
was summer or a fall  
for raking the grass to  
now and water to plunge  
my quenchless visions to  
people time or a trout  
to jump or crystal  
reflection along the logs  
own bobbing shadow look  
bobolink I don't know  
your name but we share  
this love of fresh water  
and forest fringe the  
air with fire's brief flight

Before canoes to memory  
but privilege permits access  
property contained border  
another bodied water  
tribe of brothers sister  
I am swimming the

liquid archive chutes  
luddite paddles streammouth  
and I wonder what has  
become of our comrades  
whose shape was also water

Before canoes to memory  
where my language leaks  
boats trains beginners  
and life vests valise  
trundled letters knee-high ferns  
sky storms surface  
winds to lift oars to stroke  
mundane magic quiet walks  
the water near witches weathers  
I drift a boat to begin being  
drift a boat to recall reeds  
a little boat is small pleasure  
but I'd give it you the same  
to drift elements without envy  
give it you a little boat  
and the wind we'd share the lake  
or take turns at solitary leisure

Stephen Collis