



Casting into Mystery

Robert Reid

Wesley W. Bates, Illustrator

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Casting into Mystery is a collection of poetic essays that explore fly fishing from the perspective of one of its ardent practitioners and advocates.

Robert Reid explores the benefits and literary depictions of the art of fly fishing in his essay collection *Casting into Mystery*.

Reid, a retired journalist, discovered fly fishing late in life. It has since become an endless source of comfort, wonder, and fulfillment for him. He combines that love with his reverence for the written word, resulting in an essay collection that reveals the many joys of the timeless sport, from solitude and camaraderie to physical improvement and mental solace.

Reid describes fly fishing as calming and contemplative, and his essays are much the same. They are organized by season, from the promise of spring to the reading-filled days of winter, then back to spring again. They vary in length and scope, touching on such diverse topics as the history of the sport and its popularity with creative people. They also grapple with arguments made by fly fishing's detractors.

As both an actual angler and an "armchair angler" who collects written works about fishing and waterways, Reid has a unique perspective, and argues that fishing and art are intertwined. His prose is often lyrical; it includes many fishing-themed metaphors. Some of the essays adopt the tone of a literature review, featuring long recitations of books about fly fishing, some of which is more suited to an appendix or bibliography.

The collection is at its best when it focuses on Reid's personal experiences or conclusions, as in "Fishing Dogs & Patient Poppers," and when it illuminates a particular aspect of fly fishing's long history, as in "Women on the Water." Engravings by Wesley W. Bates are included throughout the text; they show birds, fish, flies, and river scenes in gorgeous detail.

As Reid says, there is more to fishing than fish. It may be disappointing to get "skunked" while everyone else catches one fish after another, but there is no winning or losing in fly fishing. The real reward, so far as Reid is concerned, is the complete experience. This fact is emphasized by the essays that do not focus directly on fishing, like the amusing "The Fish that Flew Away," about the thrill of communing with land- and air-based wildlife, and the poignant "*Sláinte!* Ian," an ode to a late friend who loved fly fishing. These essays in particular show why fly fishing has remained so popular among such a wide variety of people for so many years.

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EILEEN GONZALEZ (May 17, 2021)

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