

DEEP IN UNDER, OUT IN AIR

Will Inman

Summer 1938-39, I was fifteen and sixteen,
just before enter Duke autumn of 39,
spent time exploring Burnt Mill Creek,
which divided Forest Hills, an area my busy
father developed for wealthy Wilmingtonians.

I'd take along my butterfly net, shirt hanger
strung round with an old gauze curtain and fixed
to a mop pole.

I caught Tiger, Zebra, Blue,
Greenclouded Swallowtails, yellow sulphurs,
dogfaces, monarch and queen butterflies,
fritillaries, buckeye, red admiral, comma,
and questionmark anglewings, skippers,
red-spotted purples, wood nymphs, hair
streaks.

At the creek, I'd dip into current
or up under the banks, for eels, small cats,
suckers, and in the flow for dace, gambusias,
and even small jack and perch. Once in awhile

I snagged a mud turtle or alligator turtle.
Even then, I knew to look both *under and out*.
Took decades before I learned, frogwise or
with salamanders to crouch water's edge,
half vision under and half outward — without
catching or killing living creatures.

That
world, even September 1939, was so alive and
beautiful. I barely suspected it was already
mine, along with a larger shadow, deep in
under, wanting to surf air — with words.

Took even longer to learn to watch
and longer yet to *know* without needing
to grab on.