

Summer Homes

Up this fork of the San Joaquin,
above that deep narrow canyon,
freights of winter avalanche
pile onto this strip torn from pines.

Too exhausted to continue
I rest in short shade,
so hungry a cup of rice will not do.
I string up fishing gear, start for the river.

A rhythmic chanting stops me,
sounding like an Indian singing,
an old man chanting,
who knows I am here,
who does not care.

Up out of the hollow, no voice.
Back down and it is there.
I listen for thirty minutes,
then enter the shallow of canyon.

The long narrow canyon with its roar.
I could not have heard my mother's cry,
nor my father's curse were he alive with his anger.
Simply the river's rush and roar.

I shake my head, look into currents,
catch fat golden trout.
And when I reemerge
the old guy is still at it.

Yokut families came up here
to summer in luxury on the river.
Hunting sheep, deer, and roots,
children capturing trout in shallows.

Clouds gather, while in the valley
Indians are selling gambling
and buying big new automobiles.
Stray ghosts remain in these crags.