



Gordon's Quill

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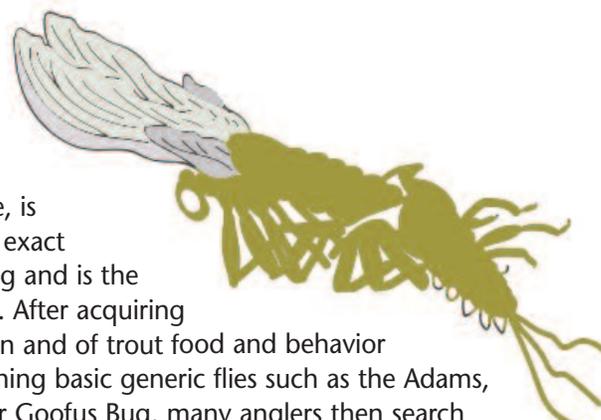
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Advanced Trout-Fishing Thoughts

Larry Solomon

Introduction

Most trout anglers start out with the basics: a properly balanced rod, reel, line, and leader and learning how to cast accurately and make a decent presentation. Presentation, to me, is more important than having the exact imitation of what the fish is eating and is the part of the challenge that I relish. After acquiring a basic knowledge of presentation and of trout food and behavior and perhaps enjoying success fishing basic generic flies such as the Adams, Hair-Wing Coachman, Humpy, or Goofus Bug, many anglers then search for additional knowledge of techniques, fly patterns, and trout behavior to enhance their angling experience and the challenge and enjoyment that fly fishing offers. Over the fifty years that I have enjoyed this sport, I have experienced quite a few learning situations that have added pleasure and insight to my angling. I hope that the series of essays that the *Quill* will publish, starting with the one below, will give you some thoughts in that direction.



The Flo-Merger (Floating Emerger)

While fishing on the Henrys Fork of the Snake in Idaho in the late 1970s during their Green Drake hatch (*Drunella grandis*), I noticed that the rise to the natural was often not what I knew as a normal take on the surface. The rise was there, but the insect really had not shown itself clearly. It appeared that the fish were taking the bugs just in or under the surface. I took a nymph that I had that was about the size of the insect and that was tied on a relatively light-wire hook, dressed it with floatant, and fished it almost dry. The reward was several sizeable fish that took my offering. I subsequently had a similar experience with the Brown Drake hatch (*Ephemera simulans*).

That was the beginning of an awareness that would answer many questions related to rise forms feeding. We know that fish feed mostly under the surface, which is where their food lives. However, much of that food makes its

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President's Message January 2015



In this *Quill*, we will be catching up on key positions that have been filled in making this organization a leader in the area of conservation. Also, very important events and projects from 2014 will be covered.

We have a new *Quill* editor, Bud Bynack, who will introduce himself in this newsletter. We are happy to have enlisted Bud for this job. He is a highly qualified editor on a professional level and a devoted TGF member. I would like to thank Bud for taking on the responsibility of editing the *Quill*.

Steve Lieb has stepped down as our conservation chair after working in this position for many years, and I would like to thank him for the work that he has done. New board member Chuck Neuner has now accepted the position of conservation chair. Chuck is a very knowledgeable person for this job and will bring his many years of experience in conservation work to the organization. Chuck will also introduce himself later in the *Quill*.

TGF was involved with many conservation issues in 2014. They included "fracking," stream improvement on the Musconetcong River and Sands Creek, a culvert replacement on Horse Brook, the protection of the Catskill Park, and the development by Crossroads Ventures, LLC, of Belleayre Mountain. Some of these topics will be covered in this *Quill*.

TGF held its Annual Dinner at the Angler's Club of New York, and it was a great night. Sara Low was the chair for this event, and I want to thank her for her hard work in making it such a great success.

In September, Shannon Brightman arranged our Annual Conservation Fund Dinner at the Rockland House in Roscoe, New York. This event was also a tremendous success. and I want to thank Shannon for running the dinner.

Education is a very important part of what TGF does. Last year, we gave two awards to high school seniors graduating from Livingston Manor High School and Roscoe High School who have the highest averages in science and who are going on to college. We sent students who attend school in New York City to Department of Environmental Conservation camp for a week, and we also awarded a scholarship to a college student.

Finally, we honored Al Butzel for his great work in the field of conservation. Karen Kaplan is the chair of the Founder's Fund Committee, and I want to thank her for all the work she did working with the committee in selecting our scholarship winner and arranging the very successful reception at the Union League Club in New York City.

Bert Darrow, President
Theodore Gordon Flyfishers

Advanced Trout-Fishing Thoughts (continued from page 1)

way to the surface, which is where I like to play the game.

From that time on, I looked at hatches differently, with a thought of what is going



on in the surface film, underneath the surface, and on the way up. I fished the floating nymph with occasional success. This got me thinking of the numerous times when fishing hatches of big flies such as the Eastern Green Drake (*Ephemera guttulata*), Mahogany Dun or White-Gloved Howdy (*Isonychia bicolor*), and Cream Variant (*Ephemera varia*) that I, as well as several of my competent angling companions, had encountered situations where the fish, although obviously feeding, were reluctant to take a traditional high-riding dry fly. I recall specifically several consecutive situations that got me thinking differently. And they all related to the *Isonychia bicolor* hatch within a two-week period around 1980.

My old friend Ernie and I were pretty much stumped during a reasonable hatch on the East Branch of the Delaware, where we presented dry flies to a fair number of rising trout, but caught only two. Five days later, on the Beaverkill, the water was a bit high, and an occasional fish was rising on the surface. I saw several *Isonychia* adults floating down, but did not see any taken. After presenting a dry fly with no results, I fished the mostly floating nymph to a rise and took a decent fifteen-inch brown. Using a ten-cc syringe with a piece of surgical tubing attached to the needle end, I was able to pump the trout gently for a peek at what he had just eaten. Voila! There were two *Isonychia* nymphs, wing cases split, with the wings partially emerged. Those bugs were eaten before they got out of the surface film, but probably just as they got to the surface, where they had hung relatively still and quite vulnerable. The following weekend on the main stem of the Delaware, we had a sparse multihatch situation, but the taking was difficult. Some of the rises were from sizeable fish, but only three fish of twelve to thirteen inches took the several imitations we presented. Again I saw *Isonychias*.

That night, I decided to tie several flies with a new silhouette, based on what I had seen recently, closely matching the body and wing colors, for whatever that's worth. On a 3X-long light-wire hook, I tied the body of the *Isonychia* nymph and formed a little tuft of wing, about half the length of the body, using a clump of dyed deer hair and a few soft legs hanging down. The deer hair was up at a 45-degree angle. I figured that would float the fly, while the nymph body hung down under the water, resembling the nymph that had just swum to the surface and was in the process of emerging. With most of the fly under the surface, it is much more visible to the fish than a dry fly on the top, and very vulnerable (see photos).

You probably can imagine the rest of the story. The following evening, the same hatching scenario developed, but this time, we took about eight fish from thirteen to twenty inches on that fly. I named it the Floating Emerger, or Flo-Merger. It performed as I had hoped.



Since that time, thirty-something years ago, I have tied and fished the Flo-Merger for many of the insects that I imitate. It is not equally productive for every hatch, but is often considerably effective for many of them, especially at the beginning of the hatch. I can tie the fly to float effectively down to size 16. The trick for those small flies is the right kind of deer hair for the wing. Other materials may also do the job. When fished, it is important to dress *only the wing* and only with a *cream* floatant, so that the wing floats, but the body hangs underneath the surface. (Try to use a material for the body that will absorb water and sink, such as wool.) If you use a liquid floatant, the entire fly will absorb it, and it will usually float on its side, defeating the purpose of the fly.

I have had numerous experiences where the Flo-Merger was successful. But the one that stands out, because of the venue and participant, was on the River Avon, in England with the late Dermot Wilson, who was the dean of fly fishing over there and the early advocate of catch-and-release angling in England. He had invited me to fish his club water on the Avon during their Green Drake hatch, which is similar to ours, but much more accommodating, timewise. The adult hatches about noon, and the spinner from a previous hatch falls about two hours or so later. As we started on the river, I mentioned to Dermot that I wanted to try a new fly. When he saw the Flo-Mergers, he commented, "No nymphs. You can fish only a floating fly on these waters." I replied, "It floats on the surface, and I have an idea. When we see a fish rise, you present your dry. If the fish doesn't take it, I will then present the Flo-Merger." Dermot missed the first fish on the dry fly and took the second, but the next three rejected it. The Flo-Merger took two of them. Dermot then gazed around with a look of guilt and asked, in his very proper English accent, "Could I please try one of them? But please don't tell anyone about it." He happily fished it downriver and reported later that he took several fish with it until a big one broke him off. In his wonderful British humor, he suggested that possibly "the fly should not be allowed, as it is dangerous to the fish." Ha! I must add that after several fish, we did pump one and found a partially emerged Green Drake nymph that had recently been eaten.

I have a theory related to the Flo-Merger. I love theories, especially if they turn out to be valid. Remember, nothing works all the time. Mother Nature calls the shots, and she loves to confuse us.

Most of the large nymphs are swimmers and can move rather quickly. These nymphs swimming to the surface stimulate the feeding activity of the trout, and as long as it's fairly light out, the fish can see laterally and will pursue these emerging nymphs. They will take many of them on the way up, but if the water is not too deep, they may not get to the bug until it reaches the surface, at which point it pauses and goes through the hatching process. It is both visible and vulnerable at this time and can be taken easily. This is when the Flo-Merger is at its best. However, as it gets dark, I believe that lateral visibility becomes difficult for the trout. They may not be able to see these nymphs emerging from the bottom and must focus on the surface, where they can more easily see a floating dry fly against the lighter fading sky, and then they will take that more readily. I have had numerous situations on different hatches where the dry was not as effective as the Flo-Merger until it was quite dark, and then the dry got better results. So observe and experiment—then press the "Save" button in the mind for future reference.



Editor's Note

The Return of Gordon's Quill

With this issue, *Gordon's Quill* returns after a hiatus of two years. In an organization such as the Theodore Gordon Flyfishers—indeed, in most associations of anglers, because they are demographically and geographically diverse groups of individuals united by a common interest—the newsletter is a major ingredient in the glue that holds the organization together. TGF has played a major role in conservation and conservation-education efforts in the Northeast and in advocacy for the preservation of the natural resources that not only make our sport possible, but sustain life on the planet. That is why you can expect reports on ongoing efforts in these domains and on new projects, along with notices about the more social activities of the organization and those that involve just plain going fishing.

In addition, since its inception, TGF has been graced by an uncommonly literate and literary membership, from Ed Zern to Nick Lyons and beyond, and I hope we can draw on the talents and skills of you who read this to make it the sort of publication that you also will look forward to reading. I seek to publish more than just meeting notices and reports of activities: essays, book and DVD reviews, photo essays—anything on the many topics that make fly fishing so all-absorbing. I've immodestly started things off with a couple of efforts of my own, and Larry Solomon has contributed what will be the first of a series of articles such as only an experienced angler and writer like him can write. But a newsletter such as this is only as good as its readers—as what its readers make available to each other. So please: send submissions to Bud Bynack, editor@TGF.org or Editor, TGF, PO Box 2345, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163-2345, (914)-961-3521. We plan to publish the *Quill* quarterly from here on out.



Meet Chuck Neuner, *TGF Conservation Committee Chair*

I am an avid fly fisherman, fly tier, and maker of bamboo fly rods, a member of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, past president of the Long Island Fly Tyers, and a frequent guest tyer at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center. I am also a member of Trout Unlimited and past president of the Art Flick Chapter of TU and have initiated and participated in projects including native trout restoration, stream remediation, structural enhancements, and habitat improvement.

I have extensive experience in design and engineering in fields including scientific, medical, pharmaceutical, cosmetic, and consumer products. I am the recipient of many U.S. and foreign patents and the founder and principal of a consultancy specializing in the design and development of product innovations and related intellectual property.



Conservation Fund Benefit Dinner

Shannon Brightman



The 2014 Conservation Fund Dinner was held at the Rockland House in Roscoe, New York, on September 27, 2014. The high point of the evening was the presentation of TGF's Conservation Award to Paul Gallay, president of Riverkeeper, for his work to protect the ecology of the Hudson River and its tributaries and the drinking water supplies of nine million New Yorkers. The event was well attended, and participants in the raffle and silent auction were generous. Special thanks to the many TGF supporters who donated items for the fundraiser.



TGF Celebrates the Fracking Ban

John L. Barone

The year 2014 ended on a high note for conservationists who tirelessly advocated for the ban of fracking over the past decade. Previously, I wrote that New York State was the legal battleground over permitting this highly controversial industrial activity. An example of this is the recent significant Court of Appeals ruling that upheld a municipality's legal authority to pass a local fracking ban. The court relied upon the principle known as "home rule" authority to confirm a municipality's right to ban fracking within its borders by administering zoning or land-use controls. The court's ruling, which was decided in July 2014, paved the way for an eventual statewide ban by adding to the growing portions of the state of New York that were off-limits to fracking at the time. "Hydrofracking," or "fracking," refers to the industrial activity of natural gas development using the technique of high-volume hydraulic fracturing. The proliferation of natural gas development has touched the lives of citizens across the nation, resulting in various studies regarding effects on the environment and human health. Here in New York, the New York State Department of Health was tasked with performing a public health review of fracking. The review, which the agency completed in December 2014, cited risks to public health, and consequently, Governor Cuomo announced the fracking ban.

Concerned that the introduction of fracking would negatively affect the character of the Catskills and fly fishing in our state, TGF joined together with other organizations to advocate for a frack-free New York. As part of its advocacy campaign, TGF identified the unique natural resources, small hamlets, distinctive economic bases, and rural quality of the Catskills that are central elements in shaping the character of this well-recognized fly-fishing region and that needed protection.

New York State's measure against the fossil fuel industry coincides with escalating investments in renewable energy and an overall increase in support for a green economy. The historic fracking ban acts to protect a sound economic base, a sense of community, and the health and welfare of New York's residents, businesses, and of course, the fly-fishing community.



2014 Annual Day Dinner: Tribute to a Quotable Fisherman

Sara Low, 2014 Annual Day Dinner Chair

I would as well be here, beside this pool, right now, as anywhere in the universe. I have thought about such a place without knowing it existed. At times I have wished life as simple as this riverbank—the world a logical structure of bend, current, riffle, and pool, the drama already unfolding on the glassy surface, and me, here on the bank, my ass wet, armed with some simple lovely balanced tools and some knowledge, prepared to become part of it for a few moments.

—Nick Lyons, *Spring Creek*



The sentiment was shared by everyone in attendance at TGF's 2014 Annual Day Dinner: there was nowhere else in the universe beyond the Anglers' Club on March 26 for any in the capacity crowd who became part of a poignant moment in TGF history—a Theodore Gordon Flyfishers tribute to Nick Lyons. The chance to honor a treasured fly-fishing author and publisher caused a stampede of TGF members and friends. With a waiting list that was whittled down by entreaties to the Anglers' Club management, the Annual Day Dinner became a combination of homecoming, celebration, and support.

Dinner guests were treated to spoken tributes to Nick throughout the meal when current and former TGF directors—Jane Timken, David Berman, Joel Filner, Karen Kaplan, and Bert Darrow—read messages sent from well-wishers unable to attend: Joan Wulff, W. D. Wetherell, James Prosek, Tony Bonavist, and Ted Rogowski. The evening's program included personal insights about Nick from his friend, economist Paul Volcker, author and former Lyons Press editor Jay Cassell, *New York Times* columnist and author Peter Kaminsky, and author and documentarian Holly Morris. Moved to speak, guests rose to add their thoughts, including Jane Simoni Clark and longtime TGF member Richard Franklin.

The room hushed when Nick Lyons stepped up to read from one of his own fishing stories, the moment we'd all been waiting for. As he spoke, we were collectively drawn into Lyons's fly-fisher's world of spring creeks, bright rivers, confessions of a fly-fishing addict, and the fish tales that have held us captive for years.

The festivities were capped with a presentation to Nick of a trout-decorated glass tray created for the occasion by TGF director and artist Charles Flickinger.

The energy and support rolled into the silent auction and raffle. It is a TGF tradition that few, if any, go home empty-handed at the end of the night. Thanks to our bighearted donors and openhanded guests, the 2014 Annual Day Dinner was the most successful in recent history, raising more than \$10,000 for the General Fund.

Applause and gratitude are due to the people whose volunteer efforts shaped this event, especially Doug Barone, David Berman, Shannon Brightman, Bert Darrow, Charles Flickinger, Gloria Happersett, John Happersett, and Karen Kaplan.

This was an evening to be remembered: Wednesday, March 26, the night when TGF honored a beloved fly-fishing giant at a venerable club bursting with well-wishers, tributes, generosity, and goodwill.



Stream Restoration on Sands Creek and the Musconetcong

Steve Lieb

Farms, roads, houses, and pastures have altered the landscape throughout the region where we fish. As a result, streams that were once free to meander and reshape their surrounding floodplains are constrained to follow a path for the supposed benefit the human inhabitants. After significant flood events, town planners and state highway agencies again try to lock up the streams in a fruitless attempt to direct the awesome power of flowing water away from their properties. Often these attempts to channelize streams simply make the next flood event worse by increasing the speed of the water. Artificial alterations in the natural architecture of streams also make them less viable habitats for fish to breed, grow, and survive hot and cold weather. Channelized streams with fewer areas of fast and slow water are also less productive for the aquatic insects on which trout feed.

As part of its mission to protect the cold-water fisheries that are so important to our members, TGF has partnered with like-minded organizations to restore some of these streams. TGF has made significant contributions to the efforts of the Friends of the Upper Delaware River (FUDR) to support its restoration of Sands and Cadosia Creeks, important spawning tributaries to the West Branch of the Delaware River. TGF has also assisted Trout Unlimited and the Ernie Schwiebert Chapter of New Jersey TU in its effort to restore a section of the Musconetcong River. Here is a quick summary of these projects.

Sands Creek

Sands Creek flows into the West Branch of the Delaware in Hancock, New York. Nearly seven years ago, the Friends of the Upper Delaware River began a major initiative to restore Sands Creek and nearby Cadosia Creek, which flows into the East Branch of the Delaware at the east end of Hancock. The goal has been to improve these two major spawning tributaries, as well as to connect the stream to remaining portions of its floodplain and help reduce the severity of floods. The first section of Sands Creek that will be addressed is called "Site 5" and extends from the confluence of Dry Brook and Sands Creek downstream about half a mile. One of the benefits of starting at this location is the high level of visibility that the project allows—you can see this stretch of water if you drive along Sands Creek Road about a mile north of Route 17.

Sands Creek runs through a valley that was farmed heavily in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and evidence of a number of "mill ponds" can be found along its reaches. As a result, the stream has moved or has been moved through the years, leaving its original streambed and causing a number of problems that FUDR plans to address.

There are fewer deep pools, undercut banks, and natural stable structure to hold and protect fish in hot weather. The biggest problem, however, is sediment transfer caused by the channelization and straightening of the stream as it cuts deeply into the valley floor, allowing large amounts for sand, gravel, and rubble to move downstream.

This sediment wreaks havoc as it travels during the far too frequent storm events that hit the area and then leaves the all too familiar mound of debris at the creek's

confluence with the West Branch. That is why one priority is to reconnect the stream with its natural flood plain.

FUDR now has a permit that requires one last step prior to implementation, a one-week public comment period with a notice that is printed in the local newspaper. The plan is to begin to restore this half-mile stretch of the stream by adding meanders, removing berms, and installing rock and woody structure to start the process of healing this amazing tributary. The overall big-picture goal is to stabilize the entirety of Sands Creek from the apex to the confluence of the West Branch by reducing sediment transport and managing it in the future.

FUDR sees this as a model project and is very excited that the newly formed Upper Delaware River Tailwaters Coalition is in full support of this effort. The UDRTC is made up of town and county officials from Hancock, Deposit, Colchester, and Tompkins and from Delaware County. They expect to start work in the stream in the spring of 2015.



The Musconetcong River

As part of its Musconetcong Home Rivers Initiative, Trout Unlimited will improve the productivity of a stretch of the Musconetcong River near Point Mountain, in Mansfield Township, New Jersey. This stream has long been a favorite of TGF members in the Garden State, myself included. The restoration site is a one-mile stretch of public-access waters downstream of the Point Mountain Road bridge. TU has partnered with the New Jersey Audubon Society, which owns a section of property adjacent the river. The restoration will include placing boulders and other structures in the stream, as well as reshaping the streambed to provide additional riffles and pools. The work will be directed by Urbani Fisheries out of Bozeman, Montana, and is expected to begin in June 2015 once permitting is complete.



Bert Darrow, president of the Theodore Gordon Flyfishers, with Brian Cowden, Trout Unlimited's home waters coordinator for northwestern New Jersey, at the 2014 Somerset Fly Fishing Show. Bert is presenting Brian with a check for \$12,500 from TGF. Catskill Mountainkeeper executive director Ramsay Adams looks on. TGF's donation will support TU's Musconetcong Restoration Project.

2015 TGF Annual Day Dinner: Save the Date! **Charles Flickinger**

The Theodore Gordon Flyfishers Annual Day Dinner will be held this year on March 11 at the Anglers' Club of New York, 101 Broad Street, in lower Manhattan. Tracy Brown, the northeastern restoration coordinator for Trout Unlimited, will be speaking and showing a slide show on the ongoing Horse Brook Project. Come hear a report on a TGF boots-on-the-ground project that serves as an example of the sorts of action we are taking and that bodes well for more projects and activities in the future.

The annual Members Meeting will begin at 6:00 P.M.; cocktails begin at 5:30 P.M.; and dinner seating will begin at 6:45 P.M. An invitation will arrive in your mailbox. For information, contact events@tgf.org.



2014 Founders Fund Reception

Karen Kaplan

On November 20, 2014, TGF held its annual Founders Fund reception at the Union League Club in New York. At each annual reception, we introduce the year's new Founders Fund Scholar and honor an outstanding leader in conservation who embodies the mission of TGF and who serves as a model for our young emerging scholars. This year, Maija Niemisto is our 2014 Founders Fund Scholar, and Al Butzel was honored for his outstanding dedication to environmental advocacy and litigation.

Ms. Niemisto is currently enrolled in the M.S. program in marine sciences at SUNY Stony Brook's School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences and is dedicated to mastering knowledge in the environmental and conservation sciences. Her graduate research using an echosounder in collaboration with the Hudson River sloop *Clearwater* will directly affect our understanding of the ecosystem dynamics of the historic river. In her remarks to the group, Ms. Niemisto spoke about her work and said that she has chosen to spend her professional career learning and teaching about water: "what lives below the surface of it, what threatens it, and how to protect it."

Al Butzel has practiced law and led advocacy campaigns in New York City since 1965. From 1996 through 2007, he directed the citizen advocacy effort that persuaded the state and city to create and fund the new Hudson River Park, extending from 59th Street to Battery Park on the Lower West Side. Mr. Butzel has handled, among other matters, the landmark Storm King Mountain power plant case and the successful litigation against the Westway megaproject. He is currently working with the Natural Resources Defense Council to protect the Catskill Park and also to stop LG Electronics from constructing a disfiguring tower on top of the Palisades.

The Thursday evening reception was well attended, and strong contributions were made that will go toward increasing the endowment for the Founders Fund Scholarship Program. Given that the event did not occur last year because of the TGF anniversary celebration, we were heartened by the enthusiasm shown for the program after a year away. A contingent from the NRDC attended in support of Al Butzel, and Ramsay Adams, executive director of Catskill Mountainkeeper, who spoke on behalf of his father, John, gave remarks that were very welcome, heartfelt, and funny.

Special thanks must be given to TGF president Bert Darrow for working so hard to gather people to attend. It was needed and much appreciated.



TGF on Facebook

Fletcher Huntley

TGF is ushering in the new year with a new and improved social media platform. Do you want to hear about the latest TGF events? See what's going on in the world of fly fishing? Hear about the conservation initiatives led by TGF members and other environmentalists? See pictures of all your favorite people, trout, and rivers? Then "like" us on Facebook, [facebook.com/theodregordonflyfishers](https://www.facebook.com/theodregordonflyfishers), and stay tuned!



Being There

Bud Bynack

Sometimes, if you want to learn something, you just have to be there. A big part of my life involves books, and judging by the libraries of angling literature that many fly fishers collect, I'm not alone in that. As a former academic now working in scholarly publishing and also editing angling books and periodicals, I've assigned, taught, used, and edited a wide variety of texts in an abiding belief in their usefulness for disseminating knowledge, provoking thought, and changing the way we all act and live. Indeed, I've been accused of approaching the world via my library, and I plead guilty to that. But there are limits to what books can do.

When I first started fly fishing, later in life than most people start, I began by reading all I could about interpreting the water of a trout stream, as well as about flies and entomology, casting, and fly tying. It's not the sort of approach everyone would find useful, but given my temperament and inclinations, it worked.

In a sense, it worked too well. I was living in Oregon at the time, where fly fishing is an important part of the culture. (If I had been in Italy, instead, I might now be editing *Verdi's Pen*, not *Gordon's Quill*.) One of my principal literary mentors was Roderick Haig-Brown, whose *Primer of Fly-Fishing* was by then out of date with regard to advances in rods, lines, leaders, and the like, but whose prose in that book and in his justly famous other works conveyed a clear sense of how to go about the art of angling, especially in the Pacific Northwest. Another was Dave Hughes, whose works took as their starting point the rivers I would actually be fishing, especially the Deschutes.

So when I finally took a deep breath and laid out what seemed like an awful lot of money for a rod, reel, line, and other tackle, I had some idea of what I needed and why. I also had some idea already of what I was being told by the guide and fly-shop employee who sold me my rig and, for a few extra bucks, taught me to cast. (After five sessions on the casting pond, when he pronounced me ready for the river, he tried to get me to pay him less than the \$25.00 we'd agreed on. Some people really are that dedicated to the sport.)

On my first day on the Deschutes, alone and self-conscious, once I finally relaxed, I immediately started catching fish. I was reading the water—often in exactly the same places depicted in Hughes's book on reading the water. I was casting adequately and mending well. I had the right fly (OK, it was a Woolly Bugger, but still . . .). Bingo. "Hey," I thought. "This is *easy*!"

Famous last words.

Apart from the fact that we all have bad days as well as good ones, and apart from the element of luck or chance that is part of all angling, something else was going on. On subsequent outings, I continued to catch fish, but it definitely wasn't easy, and the difficulty (which is of course part of the sport, too, and one of its attractions) focused my attention on what I had been doing—on what had worked, what hadn't, when, and (at least in speculation) why. Soon I was applying what had worked in one situation to another—not just to a situation where it worked again, but also to a situation where it didn't work at all. Eventually I learned from that, but it's the kind of learning that takes time.

It's called experience. In essence, what I had done was occlude the decades and decades of experience that I had first brought to the river from my reading of works by some of the finest fly anglers in the modern world, obscuring it with the meager budget of experience I had accumulated since then. I had appealed from the ages to the hours.

Worse yet, there was no going back. I could reread those texts forever, but I was now in a place where the best I could do was to use them to illuminate my own experience. I now had to figure things out myself the best I could. They had helped me get where I wanted to be, but there I was.

Later, when I started to learn to tie flies, though, things worked out the other way around. That's partly because, long before I started to tie—even before I bought my first fly rod—I had watched and listened in fascination to master tiers demonstrating their art. The Fly-Tying Theater run by Dan Byford and later by Pete Parker in the West Coast's International Sportsman's Exposition shows held me spellbound, and over the years, as I hung out there, I watched, listened to, and talked with, up close and personal, some of the finest tiers in the West, the country, and even the world.

There are things you can read about and understand immediately. Others, as in my experience on the river, you ultimately have to learn for yourself, but you can use books as platforms for that learning. For some things, though, you just have to be there, see how it's done, be told in person how to do it, be assisted and corrected and cajoled into doing it better.

Being me, when I started tying, I bought a book (Randall Kaufmann's *Fly Tyers Nymph Manual*) and worked through it, but I quickly realized that I was finding it useful principally for the fly recipes. I had already been there and done that, when it came to techniques, by being in the living presence of excellent tyers as they practiced and discussed their art. I heard voices in my head as I tied, but I wasn't crazy—I was remembering how those tiers did what I was trying to learn how to do.

At one of these shows, someone asked one of those tiers, Andy Burk, what they could do to become a better tier. Andy thought for a moment and then said, "Tie a fly every day. Even if it's just one." It was the same thing I told my students when I was teaching writing: you have to do it. You do it and then enter into discussions with those who are trying to do the same thing. When it comes to something like fly tying—or writing—a book can't really tell you what experience and dialogue immediately and intuitively can impart as your skills develop.

Long ago, when I was in graduate school, I also took classes in the martial arts—in t'ai chi. The school where I studied had published a book. In it, I read that there are just two principles in t'ai chi: stand up straight and relax. Of course, if you do one, you almost certainly aren't doing the other. (Try it.) Someone has to show you how—and it takes decades of practice to do it well.

That's why shows such as The Fly Fishing Show, The Arts of the Angler show, and the Fly Tyers Rendezvous sponsored by the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild serve a purpose beyond giving attendees an opportunity to spend money at vendors' booths. It's why dedicated anglers with years of on-stream experience nevertheless value guides as teachers and mentors. You're in the presence of people who understand these things better than anyone else you can find and who will assist and correct and cajole you into being a better angler and a better tier. For that, you have to be there.



Use eBay to Benefit TGF Patricia Key

Theodore Gordon Flyfishers is now a listed nonprofit with eBay Giving Works. By selecting TGF as a favorite charity, you can donate a portion of the proceeds of any item you sell directly to the TGF's conservation and education efforts.

Visit <http://givingworks.ebay.com> to select a favorite charity: just type Theodore Gordon Flyfishers in the "Find a Charity" search box. The next time you auction an item on eBay, you'll be given the option to donate all or a portion of your sales proceeds, and your auction listing will be highlighted with a special eBay Giving Works ribbon.

When your listing sells, you'll be credited back a portion of your seller's fees. The donated proceeds will be credited to TGF's PayPal Giving Fund account, and a tax receipt will be issued to you by the PayPal Giving Fund for each completed donation.

For more information about how to use eBay Giving Works, please visit <http://givingworks.ebay.com>.



Profound River

By John Gubbins. Published by Cedar Fort, Inc., 2012; \$15.99 softbound.

An eminent historian of medieval England once was delivering a lecture on the dynastic succession of the Plantagenets when an undergraduate interrupted him. “What I *really* want to know,” the student said, “is what everyday life was like for people during the Middle Ages.” “Have you seen *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*?” the professor asked. “Well, it was just like that.”

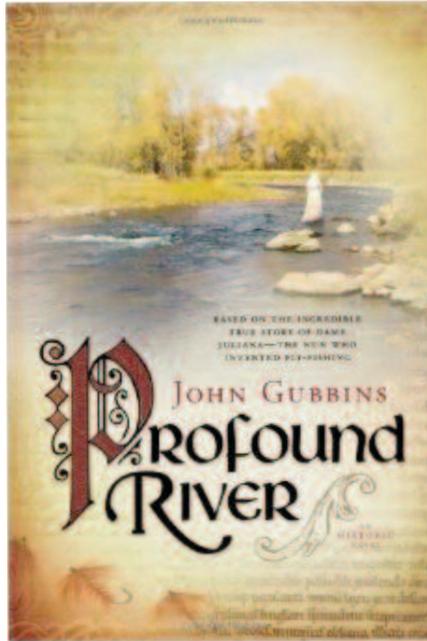
He was referring to the movie’s background of pervasive squalor, ignorance, violence, cruelty, and poverty, not so much to chivalric quests for “a shrubbery—a nice one!” Life was tough back then, even though they presumably rode real horses, instead of prancing around with coconut-shell clip-clops.

The travails of dynastic succession and the everyday life of real people in late medieval England come together in this historical novel about Dame Juliana Berners. A *Treatyse of Fysshynge with an Angle* was the first book on fly fishing published in any language, appearing as part of *The Boke of St. Albans*, a compilation of activities suitable for a gentleman to pursue, in 1496. It is usually said, condescendingly, to be “attributed” to Dame Juliana, a nobly born Englishwoman who became a Benedictine nun and prioress of St. Mary Sopwell Priory in St. Albans. But who was Dame Juliana Berners, and did a woman—a nun, at that—actually write the first book on fly fishing?

John Gubbins answers those questions—twice—in *Profound River*. In an imaginative reconstruction of the inner life of Dame Juliana during a crux in her career as prioress of Sopwell, intercut with flashbacks in memory to her early life, he dramatizes the ways in which, forced by the vicissitudes afflicting a family caught in the machinations that replaced Richard II with Henry IV on the English throne, Juliana Berners finds both refuge and a pragmatic approach to the world in a life of contemplation and engagement with everyday things. Raised in the noble arts of hawking and hunting (she develops a reputation as a falcon whisperer), she seeks solace in the more contemplative sport of fishing, but also in the structure of the Benedictine celebration of the “hours” of the day, in writing, and in bringing aid and compassion to those whose lives are subject both to the arbitrary power of those who rule them and to the depredations of plague, war, and all the other miseries that could afflict the English in a time of more or less constant political upheaval.

In an appendix, Gubbins also presents an essay laying out the research and the historical arguments on which this fictionalized reconstruction is based, arguing against efforts to deny Dame Juliana’s authorship on the basis of ahistorical assumptions about the capacity of women for blood sports and the nature of convent life in the Middle Ages. In addition, there’s an appendix on the way in which the “hours” structured the daily life of a Benedictine convent—not clock hours (clocks were more than rare in medieval Europe), but the eight times during the day when Benedictines praise God by chanting psalms and other prayers. These “hours” and the chanted texts associated with them and with the feast days of particular saints are what Gubbins uses to structure his narrative of the days in 1477 that form a turning point in the life of Juliana Berners and the Sopwell priory. (There’s also a glossary, mostly intended for nonanglers, but helpful in explaining some medieval terms.)

It’s a convincing portrait of Berners—not just as the author of the *Treatyse*, but as a flesh-and-blood human being. Because the records of the Sopwell priory disappeared



Book Review

Bud Bynack

in the chaos after Henry VIII disbanded the monasteries and convents when he defied the pope and embraced the new Protestant reforms, Gubbins relies on more general accounts of what life would have been like for someone such as Dame Juliana during the 1400s. But the book is only in part about the historical setting in which the *Treatyse* was composed. Its real focus is an imaginative reconstruction of the inner life—psychological and spiritual—of Dame Juliana Berners, told in the first person.

Writing a historical novel that centers on the thoughts of its protagonist, as this one does, presents a host of problems, not the least of which is narrating the back story—the historical context—in ways that seem natural, not didactic, and that advance the development of the inner life of the novel's characters. Most Americans can barely distinguish Richard II from Malcolm X and have no sense at all of England's dynastic struggles in the Middle Ages, but despite a couple of clunky passages of exposition in the form of dialogue, Gubbins does a good job of filling in the background without letting it get in the way of the real story here—Dame Juliana's growth and inner life as a person and an angler.

The external facts show that hers was a tough life indeed, nobly born though she may have been. She enters the convent because events foreclose many other possibilities for her, including marriage, her father having been executed for his loyalty to Richard II and the family estates having been confiscated. But as a result of the adversity that she confronts, she develops a strong will and a keen sense for politics, qualities that come to the fore in a conflict with Abbot Wallingford of St. Albans, the bad guy in the novel, who is intent on disbanding the convent and stealing its assets.

Anachronism is also a problem that haunts historical novels intended for the audiences of today. The Dame Juliana who emerges here is a modern woman. She is something of an environmentalist. And although it is her skills in the blood sports that prove decisive for her and her convent as both an angler and a writer, she is aware that her writing on them will be discounted because she is a woman, and she doesn't like it. She declares that "I study fishing because there are no authorities" to whom she must defer. "My books will be based on what I observe . . . what I see, feel, and touch," she says. "I do not wish to fill up the interstices between what the authorities have pronounced."

Berners, as Gubbins depicts her, thus is an empiricist long before the Renaissance and the Enlightenment are supposed to have made the tests of experience the only reliable basis of knowledge. "What makes my *Treatyse* different from every other book about fishing," she says, "is that it is fully proved. . . . Every proposition set down there I tested over many years." And Gubbins dramatizes this process. We see her making experimental discoveries for herself—discovering the possibility of dubbing, figuring out how to imitate specific insects, and discovering dapping.

But representing Berners as a modern empiricist isn't really an anachronism. Empiricism is the habitual attitude of every successful angler, regardless of time and place. Moreover, current scholarship has pretty much undermined the old distinction between the Middle Ages as "the Dark Ages," a time when what passed for inquiry supposedly involved amassing and repeating the dicta of classical authorities, and the "modern" era as a time when an empirical approach to the accumulation of knowledge supposedly began to take over. Indeed, today, scholars who specialize in that time, and especially in the era when Dame Juliana flourished, tend avoid the terms "medieval" and "the Middle Ages" altogether and speak instead of "the early modern period." Virtually everything once attributed to the "modernity" of the Renaissance and after has been shown to have been current in "the Dark Ages," and empiricism—not just limited to prototypical fly fishers—was no exception.

I ended up being asked to review this book because I used to be a professor myself, and "it is a novel with several big old words," my friend Seth Norman claimed in sending it to me. Actually, it's not—*Fysshhyng* in Dame Juliana's title is about it, on that score. John Gubbins has written a modern novel about an early modern woman making her way in a tough world and finding spiritual as well as material sustenance in fishing. And while the *Treatyse* itself is a largely a how-to book, and Gubbins doesn't

slight Dame Juliana's insights into how to construct insect imitations, how fish see them, and how to fish them, *Profound River* is really about the spiritual aspects of fly fishing, "this profound river of affections" that "course through me," as his Dame Juliana puts it. "This river of gladness weds my affections to the demand of my deepest commitments."

The contemplative person seeking peace in a world that is too often a difficult place in which to make a life and the angler who responds to the challenges and wonders of angling are in the end seeking the same thing: "The angler's river reveals many secrets," Dame Juliana reflects on her time fishing the River Ver to feed her convent.

But make no mistake, these lessons are not just about hooks and baits and dubbed flies. Each time I am on her banks, the Ver teaches me hope. Tomorrow's time sits at my cell's threshold, whispering to me as I go forth that today's deeds shape our future. With its endlessly sounding play of water, the Ver forever calls on me to stir the stagnant pools of hope. Few casts bring fish. But I cling to the memories of those casts that do. As I cling to a few memories of trust rewarded. As I cling to a few memories of transfiguring love.

The earliest extant manuscript of *A Treatyse of Fysshynge with an Angle* dates to 1450. Dame Juliana Berners died approximately thirty years later, at the age of around ninety—the date is uncertain. When the *Treatyse* finally was inserted in an edition of *The Boke of St. Albans* by the printer Wynkin de Worde (the best name for a book publisher ever) in 1496, Christopher Columbus was then just back from his second voyage to the New World. The new world in which we live today, however, already had been taking shape in the sensibilities of "medieval" people such as Dame Juliana Berners. We live not just in that world, but in the hope and the sources of hope that she found there.



Time to Renew

Patricia Key

TGF's membership year runs from January 1 to December 31. If your TGF membership expired on December 31, 2014, and you have not already renewed, please renew your membership today. Additionally, if you know someone who is interested in TGF's conservation, environmental, and educational goals, consider giving them a gift membership for the 2015 year. You may also renew on-line at <http://www.theodregordonflyfishers.org>. Your membership card will be mailed in late January.

If you have any questions regarding your membership or renewal, please e-mail me at membership@tgf.org. If you have already renewed, please accept our thanks. Also, please help us stay in touch during the year by notifying us of any changes to your contact information, particularly your e-mail and mailing addresses. We depend upon both to keep you up to date on TGF meetings, volunteer opportunities, and other activities.

TGF appreciates and needs your support to continue its work in this, its fifty-second year, and beyond. Please take the time to renew your membership today.



Calendar

Upcoming Events

The Theodore Gordon Flyfishers Annual Day Dinner. March 11, 2015, at the Anglers' Club of New York, 101 Broad Street. Annual Members Meeting at 6:00 P.M.; cocktails at 5:30 P.M.; dinner seating at 6:45 P.M. For information, contact events@tgf.org.

The Fly Fishing Show, Lancaster. February 28 and March 1, 2015, at the Lancaster County Convention Center, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Saturday, 9:00 A.M. to 5:30 P.M.; Sunday, 9:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.

The Fly Tyers Rendezvous. Sponsored by the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild. New location and date: coincides with the First Cast celebrations at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, 1031 Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, New York, Saturday, April 11, 2015. Rendezvous open from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the museum's Education Building. Free to everyone. Silent auction. Lunch available.