

Row or Wade
William Doreski

How can we cross the lake? Row
or wade? Flimsy wooden walkways
stagger across a hundred yards
of shallows, then end staring
into whorls of cruising eels.
It's too deep to wade unless
we splash along the shoreline,
which would take half a day.

You don't mind stripping naked
and dogpaddling to the far shore,
but what will you do for clothes
when you arrive at the landing
where in summer the boats refuel
and boaters eat sandwiches wrapped
in that plastic wrap you hate?
Let's row. Despite the breeze

wilting what's left of the forest,
the lakeshore looks delicious
as it compacts itself for winter.
In a month we could walk across
on ice as thick as a textbook.
But for now, this one-piece
fiberglass rowboat will suffice.
What do you think? Your mind

is an old magazine lounging
in a doctor's waiting room.
Thumbed through once too often,
its pages are limp with ideas
too tired to compel belief.
I can't ask anything of you
but to keep your clothes on
and row with the same effort

you've put into a lifetime
of cheating on your husband,
whose ashes we could scatter
on the lake if no one's looking
Aim the boat at the point where
perspective mates with desire.
Every stroke slices off a bit
of landscape, gnawing away

excess to reveal formations
geology can only imagine.
Doesn't the effort feel good?
Wake me when we get there.
The slather of the lake slopping
at the boat's a soporific
I have to honor for your sake,
subverting us both in a dream.

William Doeski has published three critical studies and several collections of poetry. His work has appeared in many journals. He has taught writing and literature at Emerson, Goddard, Boston University, and Keene State College. His new poetry collection is *A Black River, A Dark Fall*.