

JOHN PALEN

Biophilia on the Middle Fork

I wade in dappled shallows in new
rubber boots from Farm 'n' Fleet
and learn the names of six species
of native Illinois fresh-water mussels,
one of them on the threatened list:
Rainbow, Three-Ridge, Pocketbook,
Butterfly, Maple Leaf, Heel Splitter,
and before you can say soft-shell
turtle crunching a dragonfly naiad,
I start to work them into a poem,
a kind of Kilroy-Was-Here graffiti
written in water: how Nature and I
have had our problems in the past,
our nasty fights and long silences,
may even have been ready once
to call the whole goddamn thing off,
but we've worked a few things out,
haven't we? At least we're talking?

John Palen's *Open Communion: New and Selected Poems* was published by Mayapple Press in 2005. Since then he has had poetry and short fiction appearing or forthcoming in *Sleet*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Gulf Stream*, *Citron Review*, *Lingerpost*, *Upstreet*, and *Elder Mountain*. He lives in Urbana, Illinois.