

Bob Meszaros

On the Anniversary of John Willsher's Death

2016, and the dam is gone.
Again, West River flows unbroken
From Konolds Pond to Long Island Sound.

2016, and the dam is gone.
River herring and American shad
Now ease upstream in spring to lay
their eggs where they began.

Twenty-one years ago, on February 11
1995, before his heart attacked, John Willsher
broke through ice on Lily Pond and dragged alive
two young boys into shore; and then he died.

John Willsher's monument is here,
on Whalley Avenue, on a mound between two green
and pointed yews, his dates of birth and death,
his "selfless act of courage" etched in stone.

2016, and the monument remains,
but the dam is gone and John Willsher's Pond *
has disappeared. Two hundred years of waterwheels,
of red brick factory walls, of thick white winter ice,
of mute swans paired, are gone.

February 11, 2016, across Whalley Avenue
From the Three Judge's Motor Lodge, before
the monument that marks the spot John Willsher died,
on this weekday afternoon, while the commuter traffic
bumps and grinds, like displaced swans
two hookers stand and wait.

**The year following John Willsher's death the governor of the state of Connecticut proclaimed that the pond's name be changed to John Willsher Pond in honor of his "selfless act of courage."*