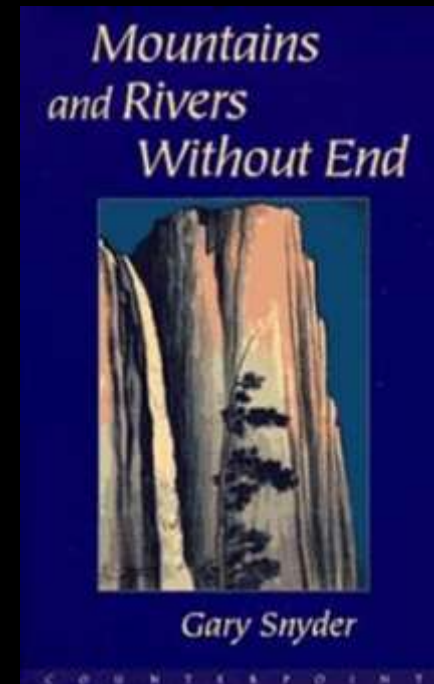
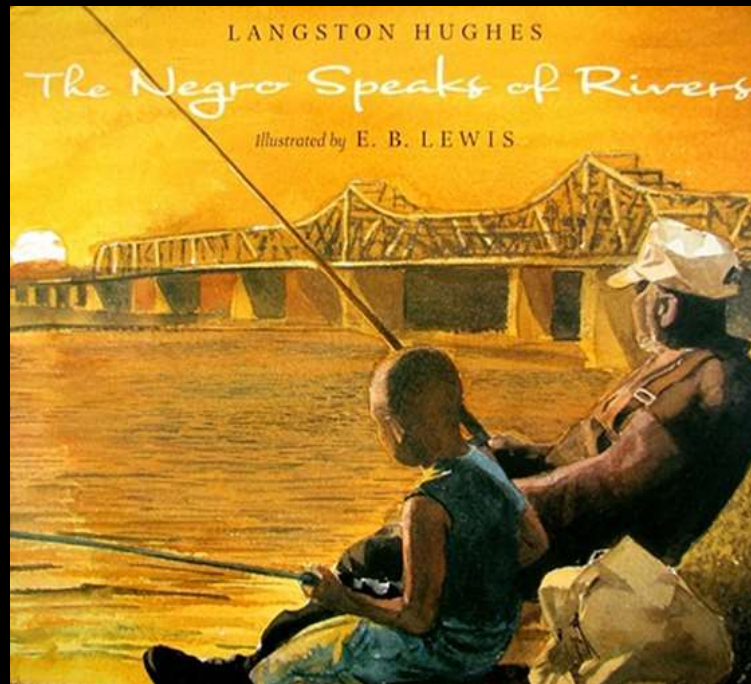
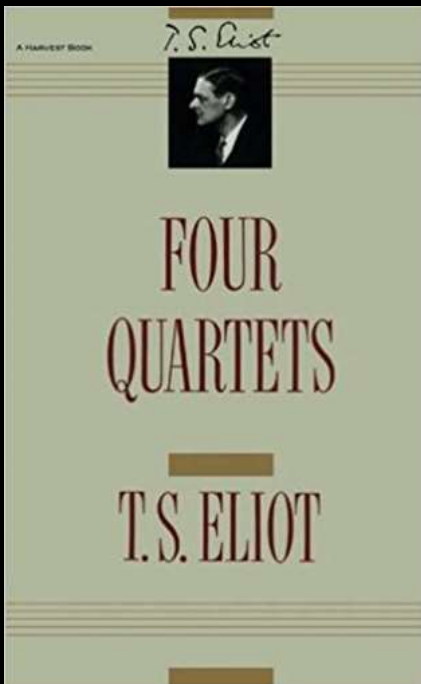




Strong Brown God: The Poetry of Flowing Water

Kevin M. Anderson, Ph.D.

Austin Water – Center for Environmental Research

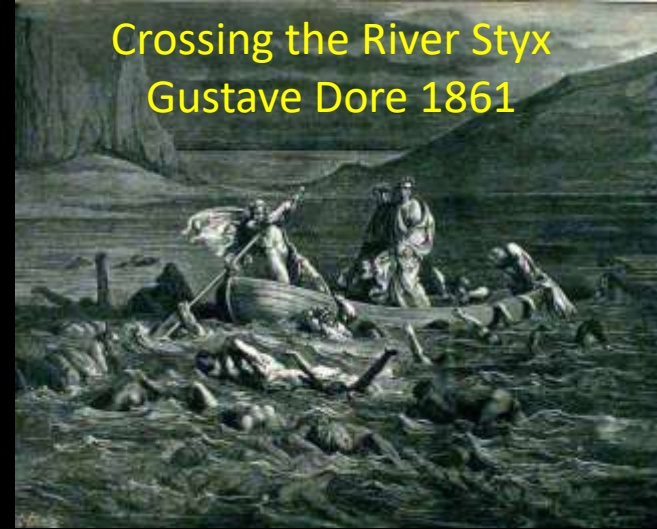
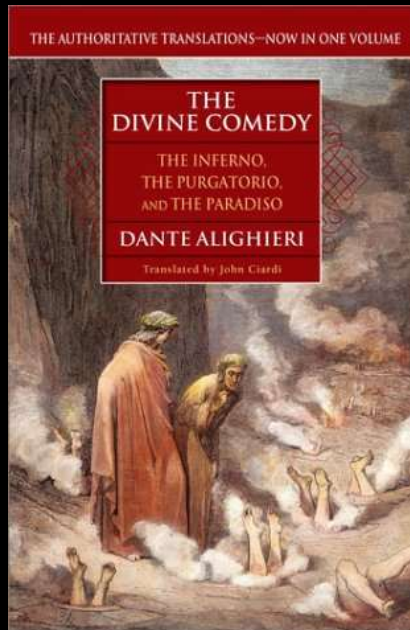


Fluvial Mythology and Rivers: Lethe and Styx

Styx - The Styx (also meaning "hate" and "detestation" adjectival form: Stygian) is a river in Greek mythology that formed the boundary between Earth and the Underworld (often called Hades which is also the name of this domain's ruler). In order to cross the River Styx and reach Hades, a dead person must pay a fee to the ferryman, Charon. If the correct fee is paid, Charon will take the dead across. If the dead cannot afford the fee, however, they will be forced to wander the banks of the River Styx as Wraiths for eternity.

Lethe - In Greek mythology, Lethe was one of the five rivers of Hades. All those who drank from it experienced complete forgetfulness. Lethe was also the name of the Greek spirit of forgetfulness and oblivion.

Both rivers are part of the geography of Dante's *Divine Comedy*



Crossing the Styx - The Myth of Orpheus

Orpheus was a legendary musician, poet, and prophet in ancient Greek religion and myth.

The major stories about him are centered on his ability to charm all living things with his music.

The love and loss of Eurydice and the death of Orpheus involves the passage over and into rivers.

Auguste Rodin
Orpheus & Eurydice (1887)

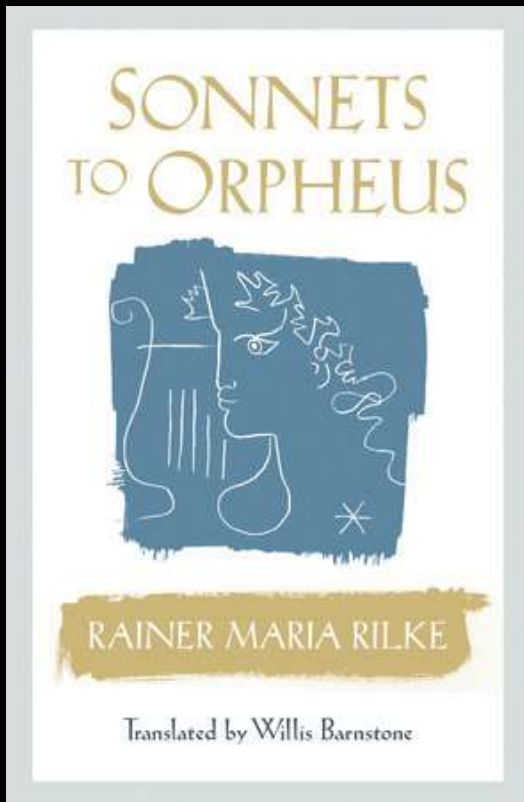


Orpheus
Roman mosaic

“But you, divine one singing on the brink of destruction
while legions of forsaken maenads tore at your flesh;
you vanquished their shrieks with harmony, oh bright one,
while from utter devastation rebounded your song afresh.

And though you fade from earthly sight,
declare to the silent earth: I flow.
To the rushing water say: I am.”

Rainer Maria Rilke 1875–1926
The Sonnets to Orpheus 1922



The Death of Orpheus



John William Waterhouse (1849–1917)

"Nymphs Finding the Head of Orpheus"
1900

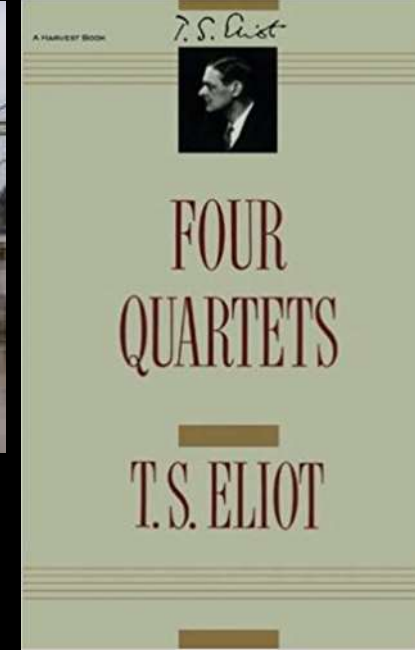
Fluvial Mythology and Poetry

T.S. Eliot 1888-1965

Four Quartets

Water as the eternal agent
of birth and death

“The Dry Salvages”



I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river
Is a strong brown god—sullen, untamed and intractable,
Patient to some degree, at first recognized as a frontier;
Useful, untrustworthy, as a conveyor of commerce;
Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges.
The problem once solved, the brown god is almost forgotten
By the dwellers in cities—ever, however, implacable.
Keeping his seasons and rages, destroyer, reminder
Of what men choose to forget. Unhonored, unpropitiated
By worshippers of the machine, but waiting, watching and waiting.
His rhythm was present in the nursery bedroom,
In the rank ailanthus of the April dooryard,
In the smell of grapes on the autumn table,
And the evening circle in the winter gaslight.

The river is within us...



Fluvial Mythology and Poetry

“The River of Rivers in Connecticut”

There is a great river this side of Stygia
Before one comes to the first black cataracts
And trees that lack the intelligence of trees.

In that river, far this side of Stygia,
The mere flowing of the water is a gayety,
Flashing and flashing in the sun. On its banks,

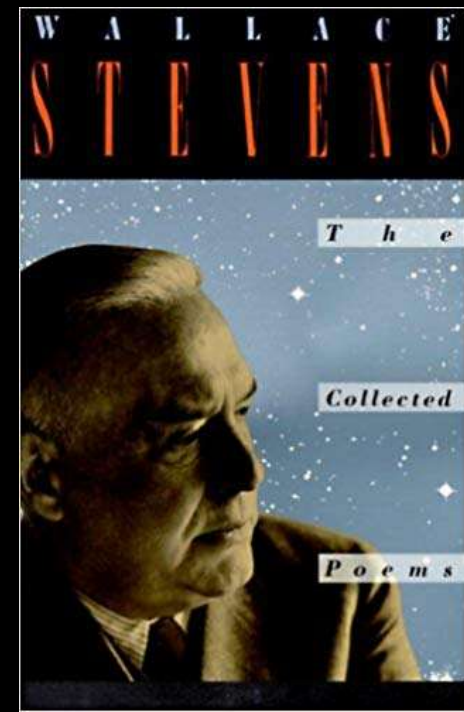
No shadow walks. The river is fateful,
Like the last one. But there is no ferryman.
He could not bend against its propelling force.

It is not to be seen beneath the appearances
That tell of it. The steeple at Farmington
Stands glistening and Haddam shines and sways.

It is the third commonness with light and air,
A curriculum, a vigor, a local abstraction . . .
Call it, one more, a river, an unnamed flowing,
Space-filled, reflecting the seasons, the folk-lore
Of each of the senses; call it, again and again,
The river that flows nowhere, like a sea.



Wallace Stevens 1879-1955

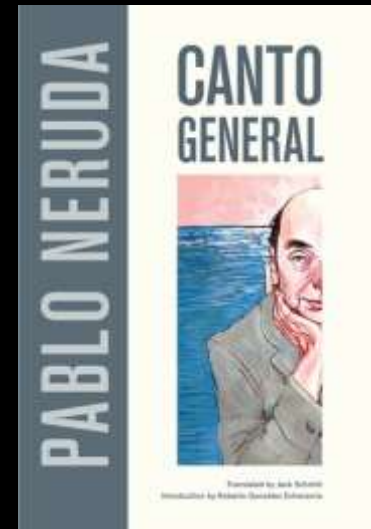


Fluvial Mythology for South America - Pablo Neruda 1904-1973

“The Rivers Come Forth/ The Rivers Emerge” “Los ríos acuden”

Lover of the rivers, assailed
By blue water and transparent drops,
Like a tree of veins your specter
Of a dark goddess biting apples:
And then awakening naked
You were tattooed by the rivers,
And in the wet heights your head
Filled the world with new dew.
Water trembled on your waist,
You are made of springs
And lakes glisten on your forehead.
From your maternal density you drew
The water like vital tears
And dredged the sandy riverbeds
Across the planetary night,
Crossing rough, dilated stone,
Shattering on the way
All the salt of geology,
Cutting forests of compact walls
Dislodging the muscles of quartz.

Amada de los ríos, combatida
por agua azul y gotas transparentes,
como un árbol de venas es tu espectro
de diosa oscura que muerde manzanas:
al despertar desnuda entonces,
eras tatuada por los ríos,
y en la altura mojada tu cabeza
llenaba el mundo con nuevos rocíos.
Te trepidaba el agua en la cintura.
Eras de manantiales construida
y te brillaban lagos en la frente.
De tu espesura madre recogías
el agua como lágrimas vitales,
y arrastrabas los cauces a la arena
a través de la noche planetaria,
cruzando ásperas piedras dilatadas,
rompiendo en el camino
toda la sal de la geología,
cortando bosques de compactos muros,
apartando los músculos del cuarzo.



Fluvial History for North America

"The Negro Speaks of Rivers"

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than
The flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

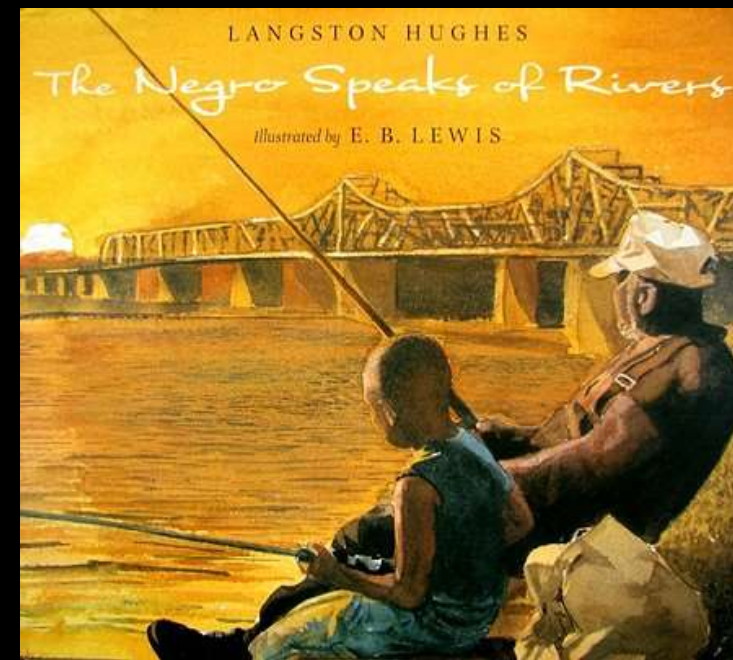
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
Went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its
Muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Langston Hughes 1902-1967

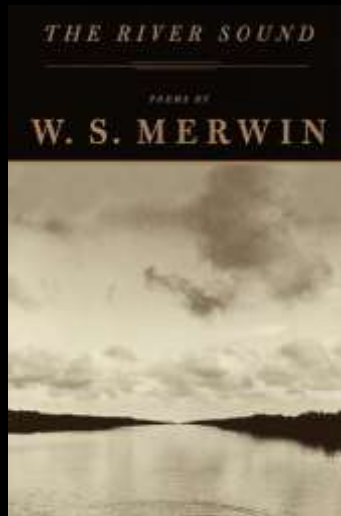


"The Negro Speaks of Rivers" was composed in 1920 on the train to Mexico when Hughes was still in his teens (eighteen to be exact), and published a year later in *Crisis*.

Fluvial History for North America

"Another River"

W. S. Merwin 1927-2019



The friends have gone home far up the valley of that river into whose estuary the man from England sailed in his own age in time to catch sight of the late forests furring in black the remotest edges of the majestic water always it appeared to me that he arrived just as an evening was beginning and toward the end of summer when the converging surface lay as a single vast mirror gazing upward into the pearl light that was already stained with the first saffron of sunset on which the high wavering trails of migrant birds flowed southward as though there were no end to them the wind had dropped and the tide and the current for a moment seemed to hang still in balance and the creaking and knocking of wood stopped all at once and the known voices died away and the smells and rocking and starvation of the voyage had become a sleep behind them as they lay becalmed on the reflection of their Half Moon while the sky blazed and then the tide lifted them up the dark passage they had no name for

Fluvial Language

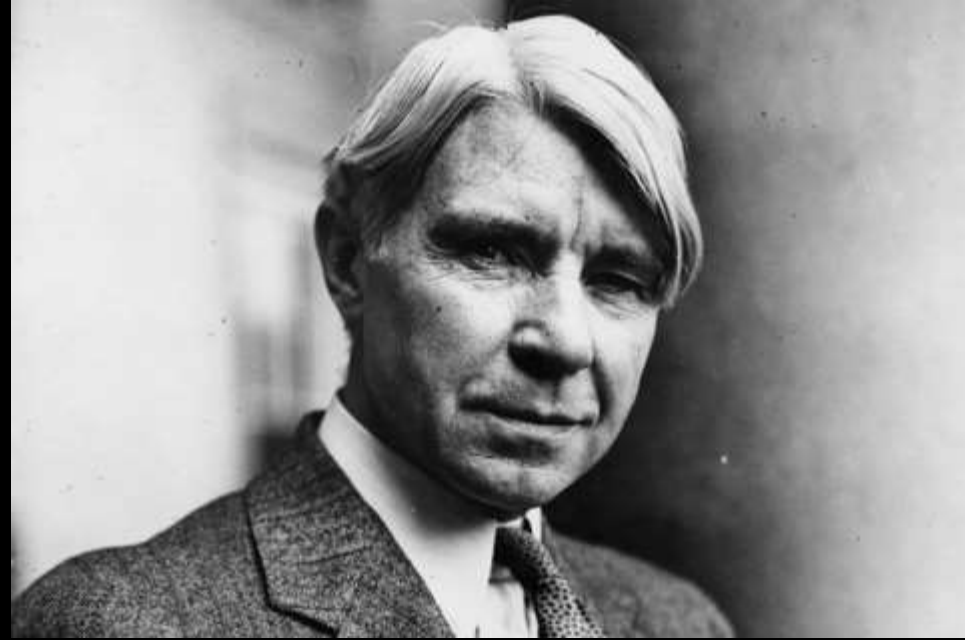
A Linguistic Journey



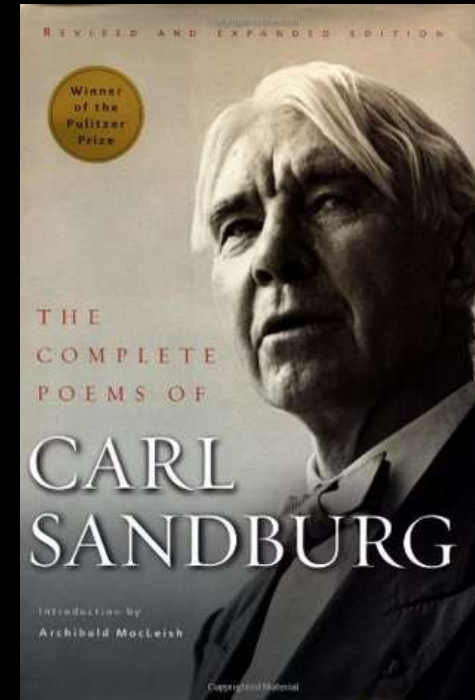
Riverside	Aquifer	Downstream
Riparian	Floodplain	Upstream
Riverine	Erosion	Midstream
Bottomland	Aggrading	Fork
Shoal	Degrading	Hydraulic
Eddy	Downcutting	Terrace
Whirlpool	Reach	Flume
Bar	Channel	Gradient
Rapid	Drainage	Slope
Bank	Watershed	Gravel
Bed	Catchment	Gully
Riffle	Basin	Hydrological
Ripple	Sediment	Hyporheic
Bend	Branch	Thalweg
Pool	Stream	Sweep
Hole	Current	Sinuuous
Bankful	Surface	Tributary
Snag	Submerge	Inflow
Backwater	Depth	Outflow
Alluvial	Sounding	Headwaters
Fan	Groundwater	Mouth
Braid	Surfacewater	Delta
Oxbow	Discharge	Estuary
Meander	Peak Flow	Flood

Fluvial Language “Languages”

There are no handles upon a language
Whereby men take hold of it
And mark it with signs for its remembrance.
It is a river, this language,
Once in a thousand years
Breaking a new course
Changing its way to the ocean.
It is mountain effluvia
Moving to valleys
And from nation to nation
Crossing borders and mixing.
Languages die like rivers.
Words wrapped round your tongue today
And broken to shape of thought
Between your teeth and lips speaking
Now and today
Shall be faded hieroglyphics
Ten thousand years from now.
Sing—and singing—remember
Your song dies and changes
And is not here to-morrow
Any more than the wind
Blowing ten thousand years ago.



Carl Sandburg 1878–1967



Fluvial Landscapes

"River Moons"

The double moon,
one on the high backdrop of the west,
one on the curve of the river face,

The sky moon of fire
and the river moon of water,
I am taking these home in a basket
hung on an elbow,
such a teeny-weeny elbow,
in my head.

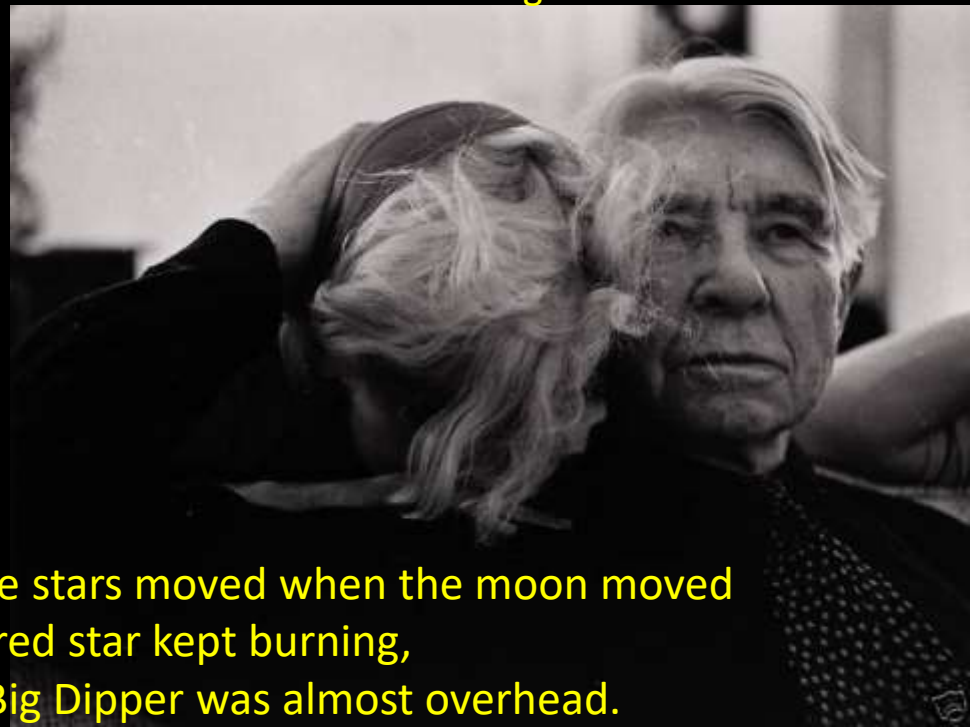
I saw them last night,
a cradle moon, two horns of a moon,
such an early hopeful moon,
such a child's moon
for all young hearts
to make a picture of.

The river - I remember this like a picture -
the river was the upper twist
of a written question mark.

I know now it takes
many many years to write a river,
a twist of water asking a question.



Monroe meets Sandburg - December 1961

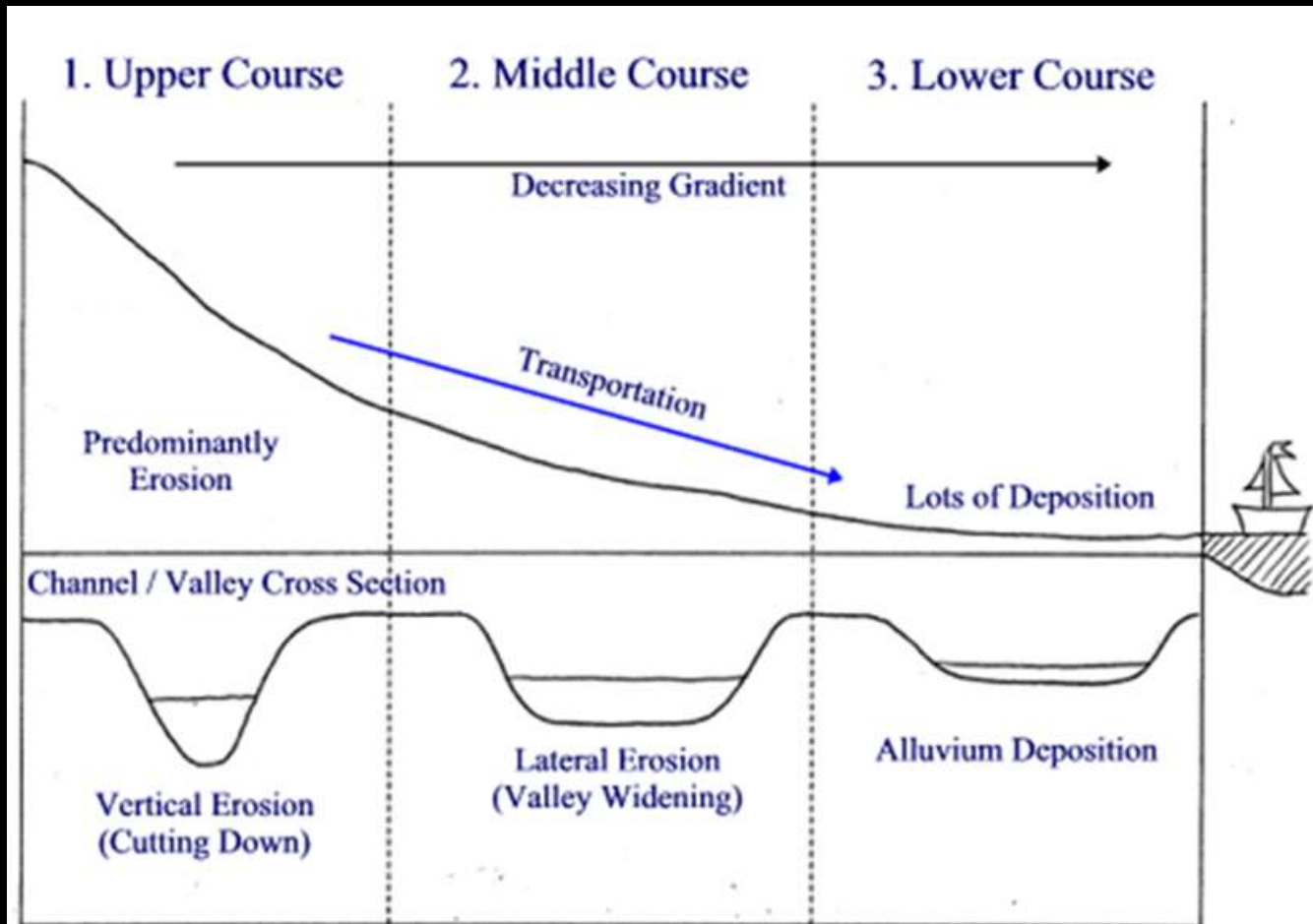


And white stars moved when the moon moved
and one red star kept burning,
and the Big Dipper was almost overhead.

Physical Geography and Poetry

Fluvial Geomorphology

A Fluvial Life



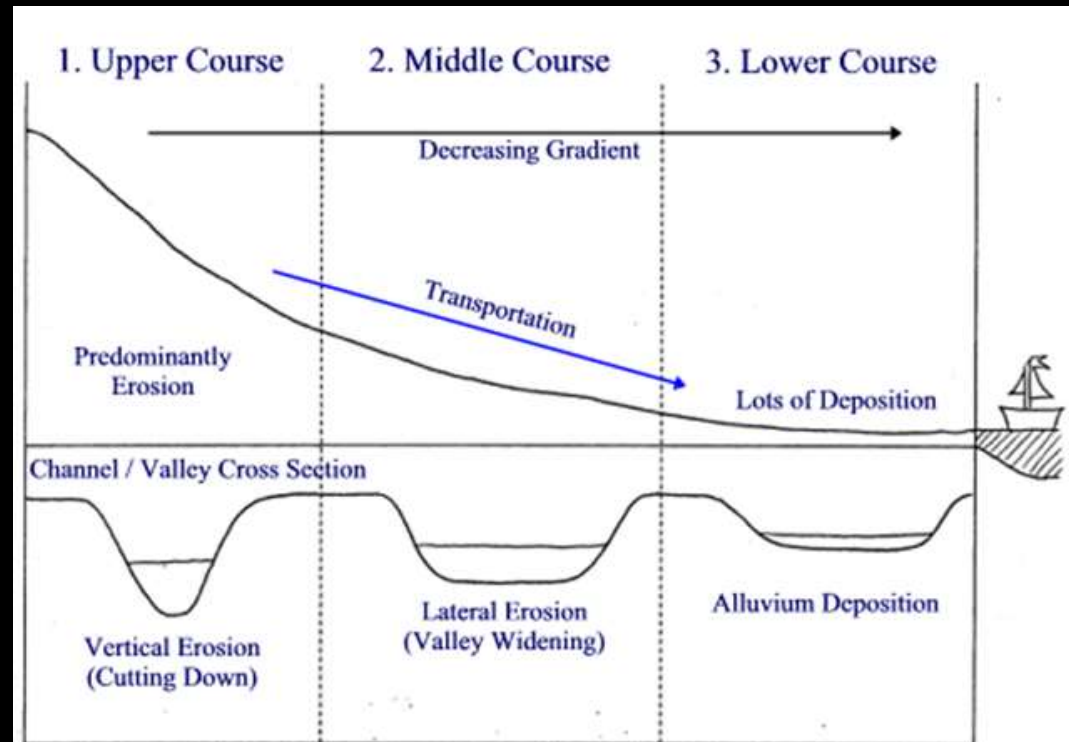
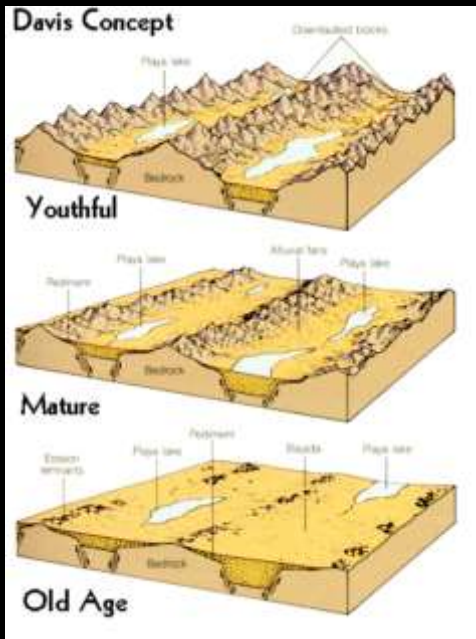
The Life of a River – William Morris Davis 1850-1934

Davis “viewed the river system as having a life of its own.

- Its youthful headwaters are steep and rugged. It rushes toward the sea, eroding bed and bank on its way.
- In its central part, it is mature, winding sedately through wide valleys adjusted to its duty of transporting water and sediment.
- Near its mouth it has reached, in its old age, a nearly level plain through which it wanders in a somewhat aimless course toward final extinction as it joins the ocean that had provided the sustaining waters through its whole life span.”



Luna Leopold “A Reverence for Rivers” 1977


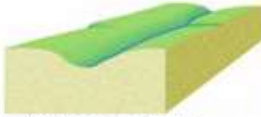
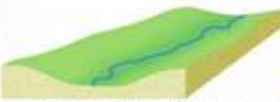



Poetic Fluvial Geomorphology - A Fluvial Life

The Upper Course: steep and rugged

The Middle Course: winding sedately through wide valleys

The Lower Course: a somewhat aimless course toward final extinction

Course Stage	Upper Course Youth Stage	Middle Course Mature Stage	Lower Course Old Age Stage
Slope	<p>Stage</p> <p>Youth (Upper course) Maturity (Middle course) Old age (Lower course)</p> <p>Gradient (or slope) of river flow (long profile)</p>  <p>steep slope gentle slope almost flat</p>		
Main processes	Hydraulic Action Abrasion Erosion	Erosion and Deposition	Deposition
Valley shape	<p>Valley Shape</p>  <p>"V-shaped" valley (narrow floor and steep sides)</p>	 <p>Valley trough (wide floor and fairly gentle sides)</p>	 <p>Plain (flat, low land)</p>
Main features	V-shaped Valleys Interlocking Spurs Waterfalls	Meanders and Ox-Bow lakes	Deltas Levees Flood Plains (and <u>m+ob</u> lakes)

Sinuosity is inversely proportional to slope

The Life of a River and Geology

"If Anything Will Level With You Water Will"

Stream shed out of mountains in a white rust
(such the abomination of height)

Slow then into upland basins or high marsh

And slow drop loose composed figurations
On big river bottoms

Or give the first upward turn from plains:

That's for modern streams: if sediment's
Lithified it

May have to be considered ancient, the result of

A pressing, perhaps lengthy, induration:

Old streams from which the water's
Vanished are interesting, I mean that

Kind of tale,

Water, like spirit, jostling hard stuff around

To make speech into one of its realest expressions:

Water certainly is interesting (as is spirit) and

Small rock, a glacial silt, just as much so:

But most pleasurable (magma & migma) is

Rock itself in a bound slurp or spill

Or overthrust into very recent times:

There waterlike stone, those heated seekings &

Goings, cools to exact concentration, I

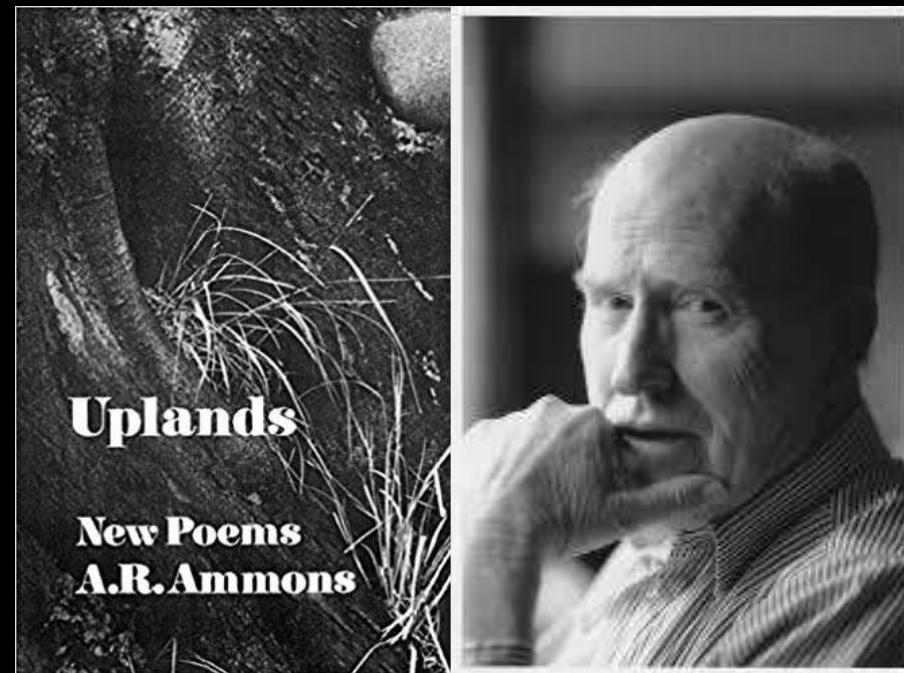
Mean the telling is unmediated:

The present allows the reading of much

Old material: but none of it need be read:

It says itself (and

Said itself) so to speak perfectly in itself.

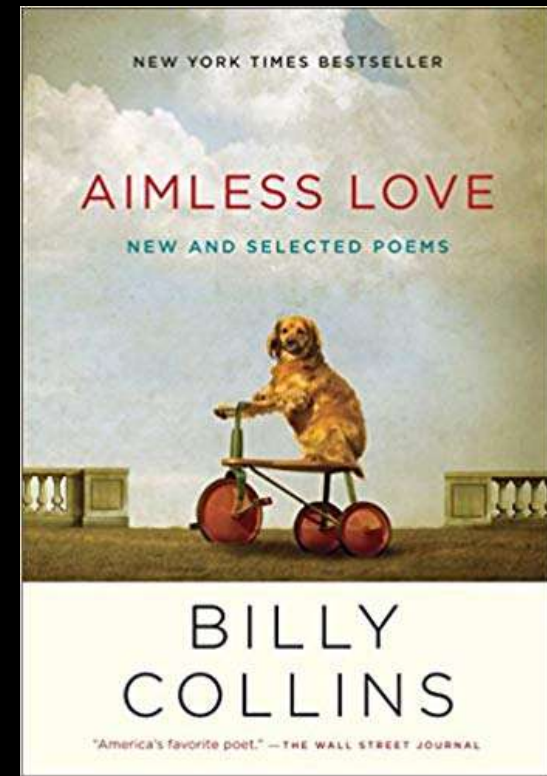


A.R. Ammons 1926-2001

The Life of a River and Hydrology

"Elk River Falls"

is where the Elk River falls
from a rocky and considerable height,
turning pale with trepidation at the lip
(it seemed from where I stood below)
before it is unbuckled from itself
and plummets, shredded, through the air
into the shadows of a frigid pool,
so calm around the edges, a place
for water to recover from the shock
of falling apart and coming back together
before it picks up its song again,
goes sliding around the massive rocks
and past some islands overgrown with weeds
then flattens out and slips around a bend
and continues on its winding course,
according to this camper's guide,
then joins the Clearwater at its northern fork,
which must in time find the sea
where this and every other stream
mistakes the monster for itself,
sings its name one final time
then feels the sudden sting of salt



Billy Collins b. 1941



Human Perception and Fluvial Nature
"Repose of Rivers"

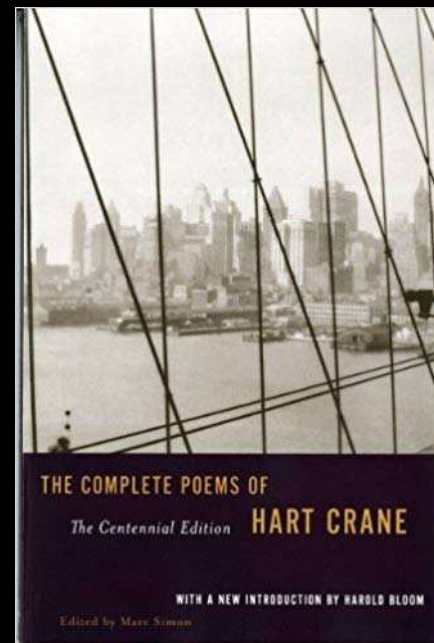
Hart Crane
1899–1932

The willows carried a slow sound,
A sarabande the wind mowed on the mead.
I could never remember
That seething, steady leveling of the marshes
Till age had brought me to the sea.

Flags, weeds. And remembrance of steep alcoves
Where cypresses shared the noon's
Tyranny; they drew me into hades almost.
And mammoth turtles climbing sulphur dreams
Yielded, while sun-silt rippled them
Asunder ...

How much I would have bartered! the black gorge
And all the singular nestings in the hills
Where beavers learn stitch and tooth.
The pond I entered once and quickly fled—
I remember now its singing willow rim.

And finally, in that memory all things nurse;
After the city that I finally passed
With scalding unguents spread and smoking darts
The monsoon cut across the delta
At gulf gates ... There, beyond the dykes



I heard wind flaking sapphire, like this summer,
And willows could not hold more steady sound.

Human Perception and Fluvial Landscapes

“Endless Streams and Mountains”

Clearing the mind and sliding in
to that created space,
a web of waters streaming over rocks,
air misty but not raining,
seeing this land from a boat on a lake
or a broad slow river,
coasting by.

The path comes down along a lowland stream
Slips behind boulders and leafy hardwoods,
Reappears in a pine grove...

Step back and gaze again at the land:
it rises and subsides –

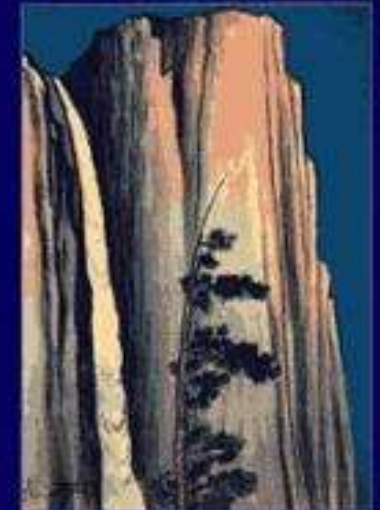
Ravines and cliffs like waves of blowing leaves –
stamp the foot, walk with it, clap! Turn,
the creeks come in, ah!
strained through boulders,
mountains walking on the water,
water ripples every hill.

-- I walk out of the museum – low gray clouds over the lake –
Chill March breeze.



Gary Snyder b. 1930

Mountains and Rivers Without End



Gary Snyder

Old ghost ranges, sunken rivers, come again
stand by the wall and tell their tale.
Walk the path, sit the rains,
Grind the ink, wet the brush, unroll the
broad white space:

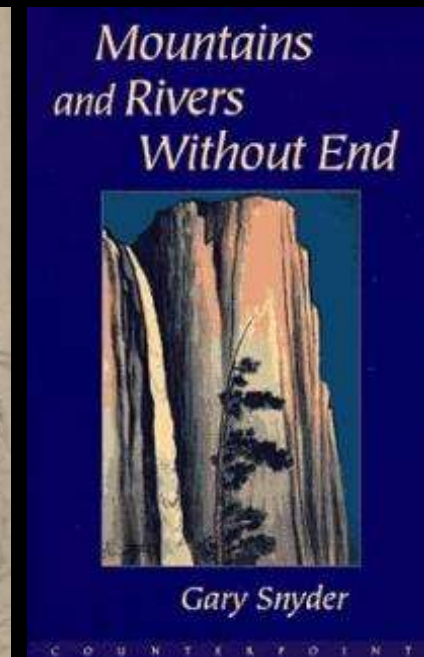
Lead out and tip
The moist black line.

Walking on walking,
under foot earth turns.

Streams and mountains never stay the same.



Gary Snyder b. 1930



1150 AD Chinese hand scroll Ch'i-shan wu-chin "Streams and Mountains Without End"

Fluvial Nature: Humans and Nonhumans

“Raven’s Beak River At the End”

To the boulders
on the gravel in the flowers
At the end of the glacier
two ravens
Sitting on a boulder
carried by the glacier
Left on the gravel
resting in the flowers
At the end of the ice age
show me the way
To a place to sit
in a hollow on a boulder
Looking east, looking south
ear in the river
Running just behind me
nose in the grasses
Vetch roots scooped out
by the bears in the gravels
Looking up the ice slopes
ice plains, rock-fall

Brush-line, dirt-sweeps
on the ancient river
Blue queen floating in
ice lake, ice throne, end of a glacier
Looking north
up the dancing river
Where it turns into a glacier
under stairsteps of ice falls
Green streaks of alder
climb the mountain knuckles
Interlaced with snowfields
foamy water falling
Salmon weaving river
bear flower blue sky singer
As the raven leaves her boulder
flying over flowers
Raven-sitting high spot
eyes on the snowpeaks,
Nose of morning
raindrops in the sunshine



Skin of sunlight
skin of chilly gravel
Mind in the mountains, mind of running water
mind of running rivers,
Mind of sifting
flowers in the gravels,
At the end of the ice age
we are the bears, we are the ravens,
We are the salmon
in the gravel
At the end of an ice age
Growing on the gravels
at the end of a glacier
Flying off alone
flying off alone
flying off alone
Off alone



Fluvial Nature: Humans and Nonhumans

“The Pike”

The river turns,
Leaving a place for the eye to rest,
A furred, a rocky pool,
A bottom of water.

The crabs tilt and eat, leisurely,
And the small fish lie, without shadow, motionless,
Or drift lazily in and out of the weeds.

The bottom-stones shimmer back their irregular striations,
And the half-sunken branch bends away from the gazer's eye.

A scene for the self to abjure!-
And I lean, almost into the water,
My eye always beyond the surface reflection;
I lean, and love these manifold shapes,
Until, out from a dark cove,
From beyond the end of a mossy log,
With one sinuous ripple, then a rush,
A thrashing-up of the whole pool
The pike strikes.



Theodore Roethke 1908-1963



A Fluvial Life

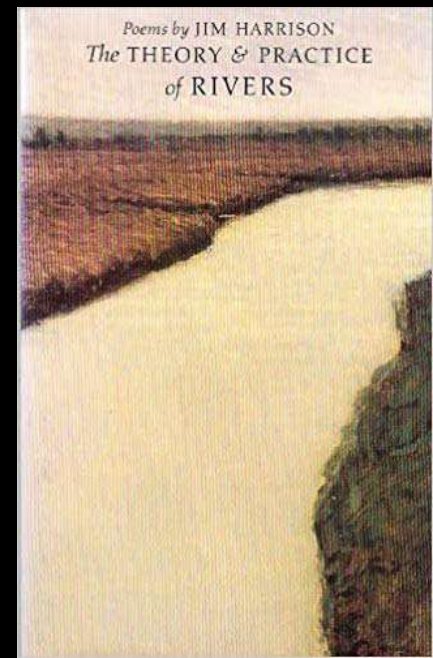
“In a life properly lived, you’re a river.
You touch things lightly or deeply, you
move along because life itself moves
and you can’t stop it.”

“The Theory & Practice of Rivers”

The rivers of my life:
Moving looms of light,
Anchored beneath the log
At night I can see the moon
Up through the water
As shattered milk, the nudge
Of fishes, belly and back
In turn grating against log
And bottom; and letting go, the current
Lifts me up and out
Into the dark, gathering motion,
Drifting into an eddy
With a sideways swirl,
The sandbar cooler than the air:
To speak it clearly,
How the water goes
Is how the earth is shaped.



Jim Harrison
1937-2016

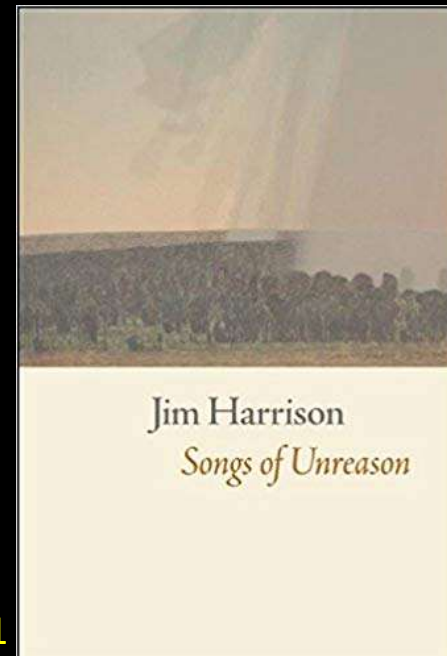
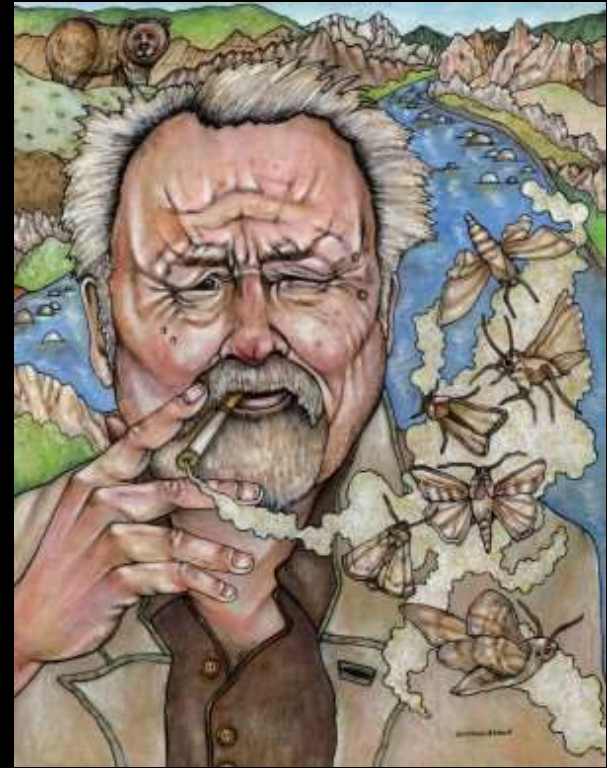


1989

Songs of Unreason - Poems "River I-VII"

Saw a poem float by just beneath
The surface, another corpse of the spirit
We weren't available to retrieve.
It isn't comforting to admit that our days
Are fatal, that the corpse of spirit
Gradually becomes the water and waits
For another, or perhaps you, to return
To where you belong, not in the acting
Of a shaker sprinkling its salt
Everywhere. You have to hold your old
heart lightly as the female river holds
the clouds and trees, its fish
and the moon, so lightly but firmly
enough so that nothing gets away.

– From "River III"



2011

"River V"

Resting in an eddy against dense greenery
So thick you can't see into it but can fathom
Its depth by waning birdcalls, hum of insects.
This morning I learned that we live and die
As children to the core only carrying
As a protective shell a fleshy costume
Made up mostly of old scar tissue
From before we learned how to protect ourselves.
It's hard to imagine that this powerful
River had to begin with a single drop
Far into the mountains, a seep or trickle
From rocks and then the runoff from snowmelt.
Of course watershed means the shedding
Of water, rain, a hundred creeks, a thousand
Small springs. My mind can't quite
Contain this any more than my own inception
In a single sperm joining a single egg
Utterly invisible, hidden in Mother's moist
Dark. Out of almost nothing, for practical
Purposes nothing, then back as ancient
Children to the great nothing again,
The song of man and water moving to the ocean.



Course Stage	Upper Course Youth Stage	Middle Course Mature Stage	Lower Course Old Age Stage
Slope			
Main processes	Hydraulic Action Abrasion Erosion	Erosion and Deposition	Deposition
Valley shape			
Main features	V-shaped Valleys Interlocking Spurs Waterfalls	Meanders and Ox-Bow lakes	Deltas Levees Flood Plains (and <u>m+ob</u> lakes)

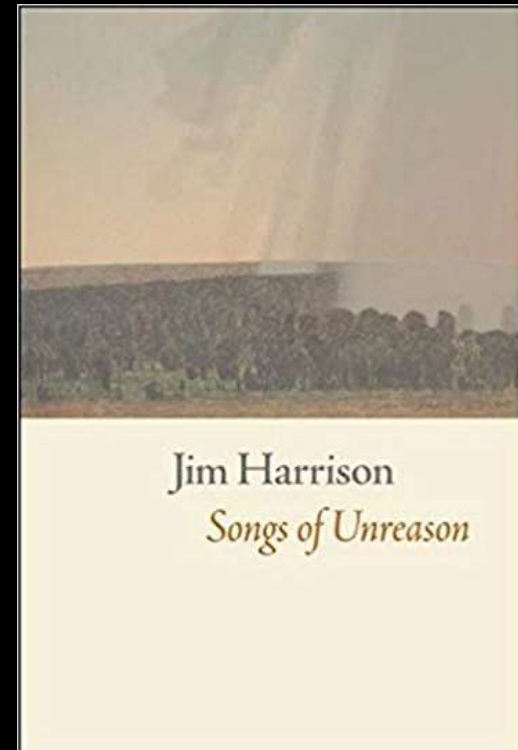
I thought years ago that old Heraclitus was wrong.
You can't step into the same river even once.
The water slips around your foot like liquid time
and you can't dry it off after its passage.
Don't bother taking your watch to the river,
the moving water is a glorious second hand.

- From "River VI"



Of course time is running out. It always
Has been a creek heading east, the freight
Of water with its surprising heaviness
Following the slant of the land, its destiny.
What is lovelier than a creek or riverine thicket?
Say it is an unknown benefactor who gave us
Birds and Mozart, the mystery of trees and water
And all living things borrowing time.
Would I still love the creek if I lasted forever?

- From "Debtors"



A Fluvial Life – A Fluvial Marriage

“West Running Brook”

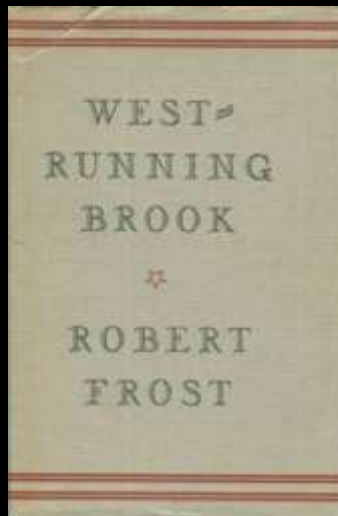
'Fred, where is north?'

'North? North is there, my love.
The brook runs west.'

'West-running Brook then call it.'
(West-Running Brook men call it to this day.)

'What does it think it's doing running west
When all the other country brooks flow east
To reach the ocean? It must be the brook
Can trust itself to go by contraries
The way I can with you -- and you with me --
Because we're -- we're -- I don't know what we are.
What are we?'

'Young or new?'



Elinor Mariam White
1873-1938

Robert Lee Frost
1874-1963

'We must be something.
We've said we two. Let's change that to we three.
As you and I are married to each other,
We'll both be married to the brook. We'll build
Our bridge across it, and the bridge shall be
Our arm thrown over it asleep beside it.
Look, look, it's waving to us with a wave
To let us know it hears me.'

'Why, my dear,
That wave's been standing off this jut of shore --'
(The black stream, catching a sunken rock,
Flung backward on itself in one white wave,
And the white water rode the black forever,
Not gaining but not losing, like a bird
White feathers from the struggle of whose breast
Flecked the dark stream and flecked the darker pool
Below the point, and were at last driven wrinkled
In a white scarf against the far shore alders.)



'That wave's been standing off this jut of shore
Ever since rivers, I was going to say,'
Were made in heaven. It wasn't waved to us.'

'It wasn't, yet it was. If not to you
It was to me -- in an annunciation.'

'Oh, if you take it off to lady-land,
As't were the country of the Amazons
We men must see you to the confines of
And leave you there, ourselves forbid to enter,-
It is your brook! I have no more to say.'

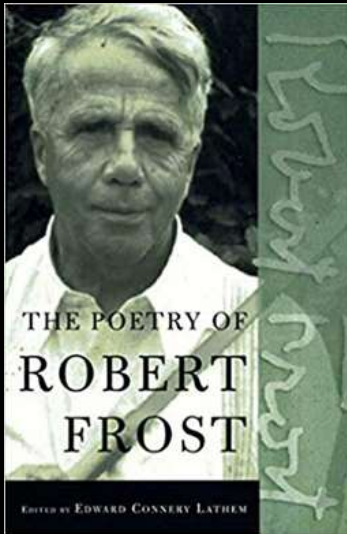


'Yes, you have, too. Go on. You thought of something.'

'Speaking of contraries, see how the brook
In that white wave runs counter to itself.
It is from that in water we were from
Long, long before we were from any creature.
Here we, in our impatience of the steps,
Get back to the beginning of beginnings,
The stream of everything that runs away.
Some say existence like a Pirouet
And Pirouette, forever in one place,
Stands still and dances, but it runs away,
It seriously, sadly, runs away
To fill the abyss' void with emptiness.
It flows beside us in this water brook,
But it flows over us. It flows between us
To separate us for a panic moment.
It flows between us, over us, and with us.
And it is time, strength, tone, light, life and love-
And even substance lapsing unsubstantial;
The universal cataract of death
That spends to nothingness -- and unresisted,
Save by some strange resistance in itself,
Not just a swerving, but a throwing back,
As if regret were in it and were sacred.



It has this throwing backward on itself
So that the fall of most of it is always
Raising a little, sending up a little.
Our life runs down in sending up the clock.
The brook runs down in sending up our life.
The sun runs down in sending up the brook.
And there is something sending up the sun.
It is this backward motion toward the source,
Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,
The tribute of the current to the source.
It is from this in nature we are from.
It is most us.'



'To-day will be the day...You said so.'

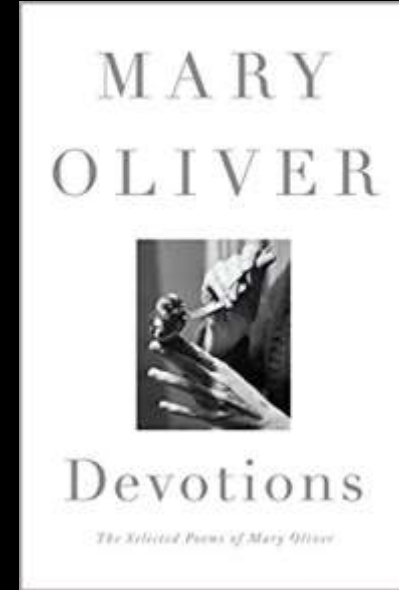
'No, to-day will be the day
You said the brook was called West-running Brook.'

'To-day will be the day of what we both said.'



Fluvial Theology

“At the River Clarion”



I don't know who God is exactly.
But I'll tell you this.

I was sitting in the river named Clarion, on a water splashed stone
and all afternoon I listened to the voices of the river talking.
Whenever the water struck a stone it had something to say,
and the water itself, and even the mosses trailing under the water.
And slowly, very slowly, it became clear to me what they were saying.
Said the river I am part of holiness.

And I too, said the stone.

And I too, whispered the moss beneath the water.

I'd been to the river before, a few times.

Don't blame the river that nothing happened quickly.

You don't hear such voices in an hour or a day.

You don't hear them at all if selfhood has stuffed your ears.

And it's difficult to hear anything anyway,
through all the traffic, the ambition.

Mary Oliver 1935-2019



If God exists he isn't just butter and good luck.
He's also the tick that killed my wonderful dog Luke.
Said the river: imagine everything you can imagine, then keep on going.

Imagine how the lily (who may also be a part of God) would sing to you if it could sing,
if you would pause to hear it.

And how are you so certain anyway that it doesn't sing?

If God exists he isn't just churches and mathematics.
He's the forest, He's the desert.
He's the ice caps, that are dying.
He's the ghetto and the Museum of Fine Arts.

He's van Gogh and Allen Ginsberg and Robert Motherwell.
He's the many desperate hands,
cleaning and preparing their weapons.
He's every one of us, potentially.

The leaf of grass, the genius, the politician, the poet.
And if this is true, isn't it something very important?



I don't know how you get to suspect such an idea.
I only know that the river kept singing.
It wasn't a persuasion, it was all the river's own constant joy
which was better by far than a lecture,
which was comfortable, exciting, unforgettable.

Of course for each of us, there is the daily life.
Let us live it, gesture by gesture.
When we cut the ripe melon, should we not give it thanks?
And should we not thank the knife also?
We do not live in a simple world.

There was someone I loved who grew old and ill
One by one I watched the fires go out.
There was nothing I could do

except to remember
that we receive
then we give back.

Yes, it could be that I am a tiny piece of God,
and each of you too, or at least
of his intention and his hope.
Which is a delight beyond measure.

MARY
OLIVER



Devotions

The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver



My dog Luke lies in a grave in the forest, she is given back.
But the river Clarion still flows from wherever it comes from
to where it has been told to go.
I pray for the desperate earth.
I pray for the desperate world.
I do the little each person can do, it isn't much.
Sometimes the river murmurs, sometimes it raves.



Along its shores were, may I say, very intense cardinal flowers.
And trees, and birds that have wings to uphold them, for heaven's sakes—
the lucky ones: they have such deep natures,
they are so happily obedient.
While I sit here in a house filled with books,
ideas, doubts, hesitations.

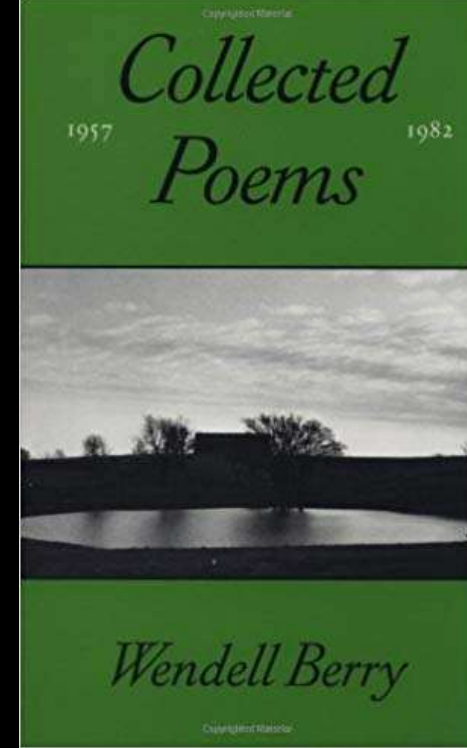
And still, pressed deep into my mind, the river
keeps coming, touching me, passing by on its
long journey, its pale, infallible voice
singing.



The Consolation of Water – Flowing or Still

“The Peace Of Wild Things”

When despair grows in me
and I wake in the middle of the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting for their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.



Wendell Berry b. 1934

