**The Negro Speaks of Rivers**

(To W. E. B. DuBois)

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

**Mists over the River**

The river-mirror mirrors the cold sky

through mists that tangle sunlight,

the sunlight of early morning,

in their veils veiling

the dark outlines of the shores. But

the necessity, you say, cries

aloud for the adjusting—greater than

song, greater perhaps than all song

While the song, self committed, the river

a mirror swathed in sunlight,

the river in its own body cries out

also, silently

from its obscuring veils. You

insist on my unqualified endorsement.

Many years, I see, many years

Of reading have not made you wise.

—William Carlos Williams

**Variation on** [**Heraclitus**](http://www.abu.nb.ca/Courses/GrPhil/Heraclitus.htm)

Even the walls are flowing, even the ceiling,

Nor only in terms of physics; the pictures

Bob on each picture rail like floats on a line

While the [books on the shelves keep reeling](http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/24074.html)

Their titles out into space and the carpet

Keeps flying away to Arabia nor can this be where I stood—

Where I shot the rapids I mean—when I signed

On a line that rippled away with a pen that melted

[Nor can this now be the chair—the chairoplane of a chair—](http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/24075.html)

[That I sat in the day that I thought I had made up my mind](http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/24075.html)

And as for that standard lamp it too keeps waltzing away

Down an unbridgeable Ganges where nothing is standard

And lights are but lit to be drowned in honour and spite of some dark

And vanishing goddess. No, whatever you say,

Reappearance presumes disappearance, it may not be nice

Or proper or easily analysed not to be static

But none of your slide snide rules can catch what is sliding so fast

And, all you advisers on this by the time it is that,

I just do not want your advice

Nor need you be troubled to pin me down in my room

Since the room and I will escape for I tell you flat:

[One cannot live in the same room twice.](http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/24078.html)

—Louis MacNeice

**The Charles River (I)**

The sycamores throw shadows on the Charles,

as the fagged insect splinters, drops and joins

the infinite that scatters loosening leaves,

the long-haired escort and his short-skirted girl.

The black stream curves as if it led a lover—

my blood is pounding; in workaday times,

I take cold comfort from its heart elation,

its endless handstand round the single I,

the pumping and thumping of my overfevered wish . . .

For a week my heart has pointed elsewhere:

it brings us here tonight, and ties our hands—

if we leaned forward, and should dip a finger

into this river’s momentary black flow,

infinite small stars would break like fish.

—Robert Lowell

**Along Almost Any River**

It has converted to its own purposes

My loose sense of absence, twisting

With its vapid curvatures the mind’s exclusion

Into awareness of declivities and the waterfowl.

For several hours, therefore, having neither strength

Nor a rival accuracy, I have walked

In reluctant indenture along the bank,

Exercising the faculties in the forms of compassion.

And why should I now, simply out of weakness,

Keep open house to the spurious decision

Of swans and their indifferent currents? To ask

Is not to refute, but a kind of knowledge;

That the struggle will be elsewhere, not fluent, but a locked

And stammering combat between divided geologies.

Here at the source it is the riven fault

That the water will spring from, floating the lucent swans.

—J. H. Prynne