



Wanda's Rivers, Your Rivers

Reading Ann Graham Walker's poem inspired by both Wanda Coleman's American Sonnets and Pierre Joris's Nomadic Poetics, I was reminded of yet another Wanda Coleman poem.

Ann wrote:

2.

My river
funnelled the Paraná and the Uruguay,
muddied the bottle-green Atlantic
flaunting a silver name; El rio de la plata.

My mother's river, the Platte River
its hips wide and shallow: Flowed
deep inland, in a county named for
the buffalos white men exterminated.

Plata. Platte. Silvers each in their own
separate hemisphere.
Right now the two rivers breathe
a twisted equanimity:
climate breakage dissolves
geographic barriers:

Ann is a Canadian, who was born American, and raised in Argentina and Australia by Nebraskan parents. In this series of sonnets see how she notes the symmetry of two "Platte" rivers, adds *nomadicity* to her poem by adding another language (which happens to be her first language, Spanish) and connects to what's happening now by calling Anthropogenic Climate Disorder "climate breakage" in the poem. These are all brilliant

twists a modern day sonnet takes in her hand. Loaded with personal mythology which makes it potent for the poet and her witnesses, like you.

Wanda Coleman is another poet who winds rivers into her poetry. Wanda Coleman is a witness who creates poems that blend her own personal myth with history and a ferocity uniquely hers. See what she does in this first section of her poem Emmett Till, after the 14 year old African-American boy who was murdered in Mississippi in 1955:

EMMETT TILL

1

river jordan run red

rainfall panes the bottom acreage—rain
black earth blacker still

blackness seeps in seeps down
the mortal gravity of hate-inspired poverty
Jim Crow nidus

(nest)

*the alabama the apalachicola the arkansas the aroostook
the altamaha*

killing of 14-year-old
stirs nation. there will be a public wake

works its way underground
scarred landscape veined by rage
sanctified waters flow
go forth

the bighorn the brazos

along roan valley walls blue rapids
wear away rock
flesh current quickly courses thru
the front page news amber fields purple mountains
muddies

*the chattahoochee the cheyenne the chippewa the cimarron
the colorado the columbia the connecticut the cumberland*

waftage

spirit uplifted eyes head heart
imitation of breath chest aheave



Anger remediation is one way a poem can be, in the words of Joris, a “poasis.” A place we can put that righteous anger, when necessary, to transmute it. Getting stuck in it, or only having that inspiration for poetry, is not likely sustainable, but rivers are “the veins of Great Mother Earth... vital fluidity¹” and the body of water in many mythologies across which souls must go to enter the next world.

What rivers are central to your life? Or, what rivers have a huge energetic component for you? How is the Danube surviving Vladimir Putin’s reign of terror? How is ACD affecting rivers like the Mississippi? Could one write a blues about that?

Write a river poem. Include references to mythology or song like Wanda did, or compare the river of your youth to the river of your current life. (No pun intended.) Do you have a relationship with a river? If yes, go to that river and do a ritual. Ask the Goddess of the river to give you inspiration, metaphors for your verse. Get quiet and make it a sacred moment and don’t worry if you get a poem, but bring your pocket journal and note what happens.

The Stuck River was a main character of my first book: *A Time Before Slaughter*, with poems about efforts to divert its course with dynamite and others that refer to indigenous mythology of the region. What do rivers mean to you?



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¹ The Book of Symbols: Reflections on Archetypal Images