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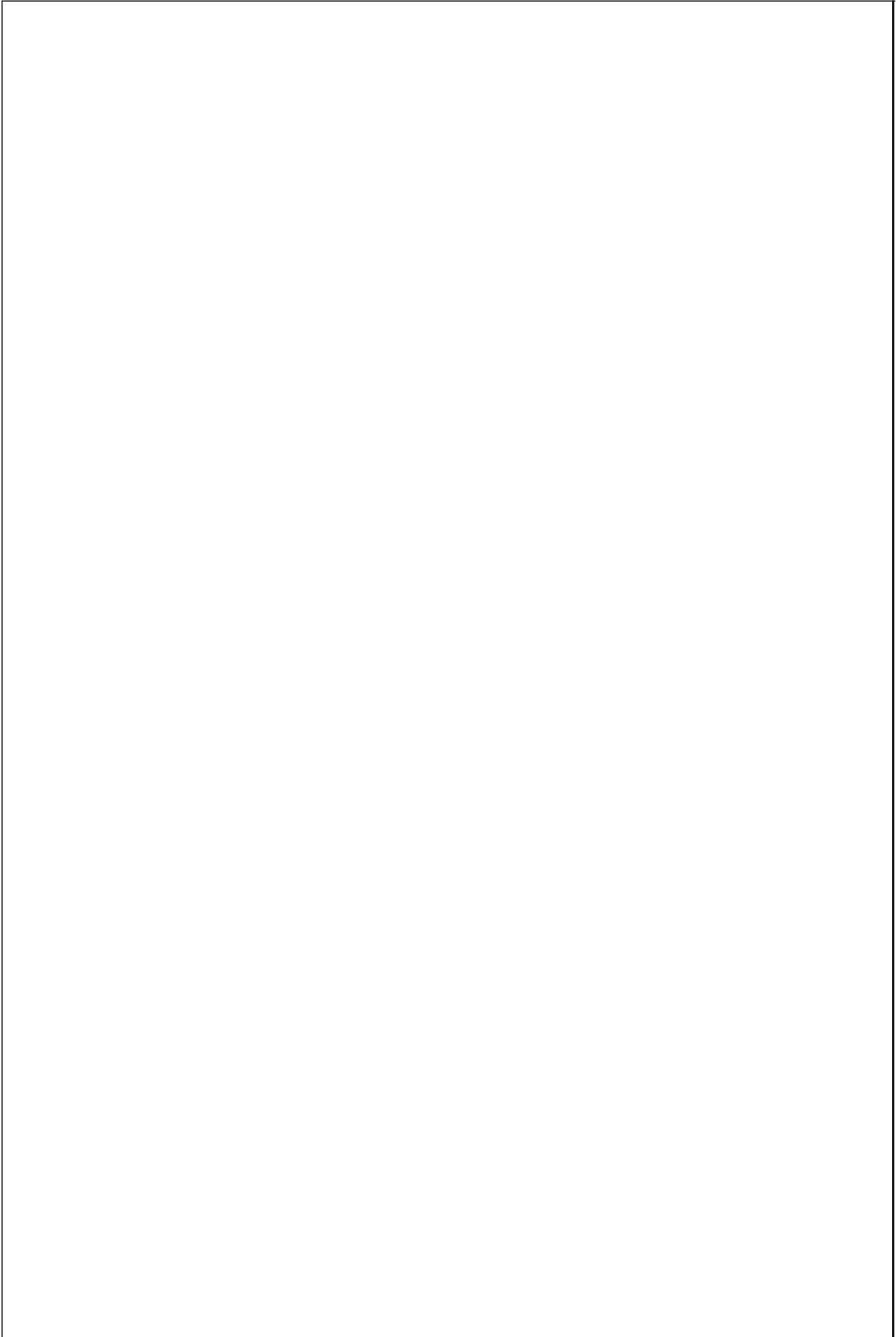
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 *James Wright*

Beautiful Ohio


Those old Winnebago men  
Knew what they were singing.  
All summer long and all alone,  
I had found a way  
To sit on a railroad tie  
Above the sewer main.  
It spilled a shining waterfall out of a pipe  
Somebody had gouged through the slanted earth.  
Sixteen thousand and five hundred more or less people  
In Martins Ferry, my home, my native country,  
Quickened the river  
With the speed of light.  
And the light caught there  
The solid speed of their lives  
In the instant of that waterfall.  
I know what we call it  
Most of the time.  
But I have my own song for it,  
And sometimes, even today,  
I call it beauty.



# Along the Waters





 *Ann E. Michael*

River by River


As we drive through Ohio,  
my son names rivers  
we must cross:  
the St. Joseph, the Tiffin,  
the Bad. He seeks  
for blue lines that move  
without graph-paper  
regularity  
as they intersect  
the interstate.

Maumee. Toussaint,  
which he can't pronounce  
because, he says,  
it looks French. Portage.  
His finger moves  
eastward along the route  
to the Sandusky and  
the Huron, the Vermillion  
and the Black. "You know,"  
he says, "there's a lot  
of rivers here  
I never noticed."

And it is true—  
the road rolls over them.  
Over their serpentine paths,  
a straightaway  
hedged with barriers  
almost manages  
to make rivers  
inconsequential:

green-edged, brown-bodied  
waterways glimpsed  
briefly at 65 miles an hour,  
no more important  
than the ubiquitous  
K-Mart or Sunoco station.

So many times I've  
traveled this road  
with its rivers familiar as  
porch rails or doorknobs:  
after the Rocky, the Cuyahoga,  
the Mahoning. Highway  
at noon adopts a  
watery sheen, a course  
navigable only by illusion;  
we ply our way across Ohio—  
river by river.


 Diane Kendig

### Lake Hope in Early Spring

Three-tenths of a mile straight down,  
a red-faced goose swims in this lake,  
this green horseshoe rung around  
the hill where we camp, a warm-blooded pair,  
our third fingers still vibrating  
with their quoits. We see no other mammal,  
though we arrived in a heat wave  
that should have wakened us all.  
Like medieval pilgrims  
who looked and shouted *mon joi*,  
we two kings of the journey laid claim  
to the view. Startled Appalachia lit up  
in yellows, greens, creams—all lost in snows  
that followed. Now, sharp williwaws play  
through the grounds, singing: by day, like a man  
stroking a saw, wah-wah, or benign ghosts,  
in barbershop croons, then keens;  
by night, like snares left on during a flute solo.  
They rattle the trash bags fringing the barrel lids.

We see birds everywhere: the goose, the hawk  
scrawling its spirals, a crow  
faking hawkhood till it flaps too soon  
and caws, the vesper sparrow  
with its chestnut shoulders, shouldering  
the wind, and a woodpecker, rattling the silence, too.

Nothing can rattle us. We heap fire at the weather,  
read, hike, and shout joy at the vista.  
We're coupled and coupling, two live ringers  
as long as our vision holds out, the hill  
holds up, this lake holds on.

 *Imogene Bolls*

### Crossing Mac-O-Chee Creek

There's always another side  
to an issue or a creek.  
It's getting there that's difficult.  
We saw the fallen trunk that stretched  
almost across, not quite.  
Brambles had piled up at the edge,  
with leaves and dried moss  
where we tilted like cranes  
wing-testing for takeoff,  
or squatted like toads to regain  
our balance. Farther along  
you snapped a dead branch,  
kicking it loose into sudden water  
grabbing it away downstream.  
For awhile we forgot where we were,  
concentrating only on one wedged foot  
after another, the next  
precarious handhold of air,  
debris from high water that sank  
at a touch. Then, mind and body focused,  
sudden as our decision to cross,  
we claimed the farther bank.

 *Rita Dove*

## The Gorge

I

Little Cuyahoga's done up left town.  
No one saw it leaving.  
No one saw it leaving

Though it left a twig or two,  
And a snaky line of rotting  
Fish, a dead man's shoes,

Gnats, scarred pocket-  
Books, a rusted garden nozzle,  
Rats and crows. April

In bone and marrow. Soaked  
With sugary dogwood, the gorge floats  
In the season's morass,

Remembering its walnut, its hickory,  
Its oak, its elm,  
Its sassafras. Ah,

II

April's arthritic magnitude!  
Little Joe ran away  
From the swollen man

On the porch, ran across  
The muck to the railroad track.  
Lost his penny and sat

Right down by the rail,  
There where his father  
Couldn't see him crying.

That's why the express  
Stayed on the track.  
That's why a man

On a porch shouted out  
Because his son forgot  
His glass of iced water. That's

Why they carried little Joe  
Home and why his toe  
Ain't never coming back. Oh

III  
This town reeks mercy.  
This gorge leaves a trail  
Of anecdotes,

The poor man's history.

 Rita Dove

## Wingfoot Lake

(Independence Day, 1964)

On her 36th birthday, Thomas had shown her  
her first swimming pool. It had been  
his favorite color, exactly—just  
so much of it, the swimmers' white arms jutting  
into the chevrons of high society.  
She had rolled up her window  
and told him to drive on, fast.


Now this *act of mercy*: four daughters  
dragging her to their husbands' company picnic,  
white families on one side and them  
on the other, unpacking the same  
squeeze bottles of Heinz, the same  
waxy beef patties and Salem potato chip bags.  
So he was dead for the first time  
on Fourth of July—ten years ago

had been harder, waiting for something to happen,  
and ten years before that, the girls  
like young horses eyeing the track.  
Last August she stood alone for hours  
in front of the T.V. set  
as a crow's wing moved slowly through  
the white streets of government.  
That brave swimming

scared her, like Joanna saying  
*Mother, we're Afro-Americans now!*  
What did she know about Africa?  
Were there lakes like this one  
with a rowboat pushed under the pier?  
Or Thomas' Great Mississippi

with its sullen silks? (There was  
the Nile but the Nile belonged

to God.) Where she came from  
was the past, 12 miles into town  
where nobody had locked their back door,  
and Goodyear hadn't begun to dream of a park  
under the company symbol, a white foot  
sprouting two small wings.

 *Christine Delea*

## Fast Opera

It was as if no instrument other than a dulcimer  
could play in the hills of that river valley,  
and several of my friends began to teach themselves

to play. Nothing else fit as perfectly on the lap  
or in the hands of so many who came to Marietta  
from other places, a city where the Muskingum  
and the Ohio crossed each other in a *T*.

This city had hosted travelers for many years,  
filled its brick streets with small bars to quench

myriad desires. But sound is primal, and that valley  
demanded a noise that would roll and float,  
pushing like a fast opera that sets toes tapping,

crashing into the world like barges on the rivers  
coming from Weirton or Pittsburgh. Summertime:  
dulcimer arias had to compete with cicadas

and paddle boats, the calls of children free  
for a few months. But on early winter mornings,  
when only birds, small animals, and serious

farmers are truly awake, each flitting over  
the thin snow, I would lean out my window  
to see if the creek had frozen or still ran.

Motionless and focused on weeping willows,  
I could hear dulcimer music, melodies plucked  
from hay and hills, notes gliding into the ground

as the barges plodded to bigger places,  
as squirrels found nuts, as my friends joined  
the past and Marietta got lost in the rest of the world.