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Two Mississippi

John Gery

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II

And if the river is a man
rugged and brown, but round and muscular,
who wanders through the wilderness at dusk,
who plucks a fallen branch, then ambles on
between the trees, bowing and rising, who
at coming to a clearing scales a rock,
pausing briefly, rubbing his sides, then hums
and winds around the hills to wander down
into a pine grove on their farther side,
who feeds the beavers, beetles, birds, and bears
thinking him kind, who veers through twilit shadows,
their brilliance like a memory that flashes
and is gone, who tells himself those stories
that echo in the breeze they're carried on,
whose grey eyes pool when he beholds the sun
at last, and at the last who spreads his arms
to seize its light, then turns to go alone
once more in darkness, leaving in his wake
no sign of having been there,

then who are we,
waiting in silence near his path, who strike,
then leave him on the forest floor for dead?
Are we, earth's thieves, so starved that we must bleed
the bled? Can no kind words for us be said?