

RIVER MOTHER OF THE ALGONQUIAN

The old shamans tell her

*rippled
that never ran
and in her shallows
red
before.*

Once the river punished them when a band of braves
attacked their foes on the selvedge of her fern,
~~in~~ the fringes of her gentian, ~~and~~ she vowed to turn ~~ed~~
them into turtles for bloodying her light-loving waves,
for disturbing the texture of her wilding spring weaves.
To the next who dared to stain her ancient purity
she promised retribution too grim for any son
to grasp, and all who saw the turtles believed.
No one was tempted to learn what other she conceived.
Assuaged, she went her way in swift ~~ing~~ surety,
offering mallards, trout and birches by the ton.

Indians
She banked the ~~Red Man's~~ treasures and his bones;
his faults all returned to her cool black vaults.
His afterspirit glistened and summered in her stones.
She was provider for his world; he knew he was a guest.
Like liverwort and beaver, his tenure was a plus.
He revered her habits, her spirit and her place
till an alien appeared, hungry for space,
and pushed the native son across her mighty cousin west.

Crow Wing, the shaman, mulled his tribal circumstance;
all living would be different from that hour.
He'd marveled at the settler's goods, watched plows and saws devour
his lands. He hummed himself into a deep medicine trance:
The river's old threat now lay on those who didn't know,
who wouldn't hear. ~~And~~ Crow Wing smiled ~~as he~~ drummed his knee.
But his smile turned to fear as he watched and dreamed.
The river ran thick with slime and foam — a strange unnatural hue;
the shores went dead, sloughed off and streamed
under low-hung cloudstuff, stench and murked,
and people coughed and wept and all were marked
as the waters seeped ~~the walls of~~ their inside rivers
steeping softness and hardness, their walls and shivers.
Fishes and ~~turtles~~ were first to die; for them it was quick.

plants flowers
The vision's reek and wreckage overcame Crow Wing;
he plunged into nothingness and woke up crying
without knowing why, without a clock to tick
at time and wind the turtling years around an atom wick.
For many moons he wandered west still wondering
what he dreamed, and if the white man's boons were all they seemed.