

Northern River

When summer days grow harsh
my thoughts return to my river,
fed by white mountain springs,
beloved of the shy bird, the bellbird,
whose cry is like falling water.
O nighted with the green vine,
lit with the rock-lilies,
the river speaks in the silence,
and my heart will also be quiet.

Where your valley grows wide in the plains
they have felled the trees, wild river.
Your course they have checked, and altered
your sweet Alcaic metre.
Not the grey kangaroo, deer-eyes, timorous,
will come to your pools at dawn;
but, their tamed and humbled herds
will muddy the watering places.
Passing their roads and cities
you will not escape unsoiled.

But where, grown old and weary,

stagnant among the mangroves,
you hope no longer – there on a sudden
with a shock like joy, beats up
the cold clean pulse of the tide,
the touch of sea in greeting;
the sea that encompasses
all sorrow and delight
and holds the memories
of every stream and river.