

THE VILLAINY OF RAIN
by David Simcox

Once I blamed befouled waters on greedy, uncaring men.
Those that by night secrete the venoms of farm, factory, or clinic
By hidden tubes and plumes into unsuspecting streams.
But who could blame them? After all, the river does not protest its filth,
Except every decade when it regurgitates our potions back upon us.
Its usual complaints: just some mustiness and bilious greens and golds
Its carp and cats still survive the ugliest of brews.
You can even eat them — but only twice a year.
And the really dangerous stuff is headed downstream anyhow.

Harmful? My own family uses tap water to bathe and cook.
But bottled is tastier and better for drinking, you know.
We even get a laugh from the river's plight:
That glass of water drunk in Paducah
Has passed through six people since Pittsburgh.
Years back we would say four people,
But you know how the valley has grown.

We know from Father Adam that a little greed is good for business.
Regs are the enemy of enterprise and growth,
And growth, if an illness, is its own remedy, they say.
But now I'm really confused. Reg-writing buffoons
Now proclaim another unslain demon bars us from clean streams.
Just like bureaucrats! Not enough are the treasures for sewers and treatment.
"Non-point source" is their latest way of staying funded.
Or is it? With each decade we are so many more,
Each one's trailing cloud of detritus swelling and ripening by the year.

Then who's to blame? Why, the rain of course.
Poets not technocrats can best explain its villainy,
How drops from sulfuric skies caress roads, car parks, biocided lawns,
Then by a million gradients bear tiny toxic freights to the land's veins.
Inconsiderate showers on concrete strand and asphalt steppe,
Barred from union with the filtering, cleansing earth,
Merge with the waiting broth of hydrocarbons, dust of rubber and metal,
And the lethal bile and urine of a hundred million automobiles.
Stubs of cigarettes, drinking straws, and greasy paper testaments
To larded empty calories join in the flow,
Finding anchorage in brightly cluttered rivulets and banks.

The entombed soil can give thanks its concrete carapace
Protects it from the uncaring pestilential drops.
But Earth's capillaries and streams have no such shields
Against an infinitude of watery wounds.
Man makes the once sacred river his stygian cloacal sink,
And the rains are his silent handmaidens.

I never thought of rain as paradox before: It poisons as it cleanses.

It escorts our excesses into expiatory servile rivers
Serving our swelling millions as did Aztecatlan's filth-eating gods.
Rain keeps the necrotizing ooze of richness away from our flesh,
At least for those few years until we are a hundred million more.
Then we'll be really angry at the rain.

*—David Simcox is chairman of the Policy Board,
Center for Immigration Studies, Washington, D.C.
He currently resides in Louisville, Kentucky
directing Migration Demographics*