

**River of the Arms of God**

Our first year here we whittled driftwood  
into lamps, carvings of cowboys and saints  
rawhide and crag faced. The Brazos River's  
a flea market of trash and antiques, lost dogs,  
minnow buckets and corks, a convoy of fishing tackle

floating to the Gulf. Upriver,  
children keep tumbling in, not one missing  
since the Smith boy washed up in town  
against the bridge. Moccasins and catfish  
live on silt, and crawdads crawl on water

thick as mud. Dragging a boat washed up  
from miles away, I lash it to a stump  
and take the number. The sheriff will know  
if it's local. Our dogs cock their legs  
as if they own it. They paw the grass

and trot away, enough for dogs to do  
on August mornings, panting near a stream  
this slow. *Rio de los Brazos del Dios*.  
What makes a river ours is more than driftwood  
and fillets we catch with luck.

It's all in the name the Spaniards gave,  
crossing themselves on the plains,  
kneeling by muddy streams which led them  
stumbling in armor on starving horses  
back to their ships and home.

*Walter McDonald*