

DWAINE RIEVES

Mississippi

For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror,
which we still are just able to endure.

—Rilke

You were the good doctor.
You listened to problems,
put a stethoscope on the chests.
So frequently, by late day
you thought only
of the river, a bluff where
sky is washed
away. You stand above it
now, the river's broad lip
and on the other side, Louisiana
flat as an open hand.

 You'd heard
the hearts all day. Eyes closed,
an empty river, a swollen stream.

Every squeeze came
bundled below, a chambered
fist, valves locked
so blood could only flow.
The waves raged
before your ears. You knew
what they were
because they kicked up
and peaked on the ribs,
limited by rhythm,
at least it seemed until
you listened so closely
you realized you'd fallen in.

All day you floated,
a low tone shimmering among catfish
bellies, the carcasses of goats.
You saw soggy, irregular
lilies, heard contraltos
in the upper range. The world
quivered like sisters.

You've heard too many problems.
They should not return.
Not to the bluff
of the river's beautiful
muscle, not to the heart
pulling you in.
The sky's incapable.
And so the river takes it.
You close your eyes
and hear the unending
descent, wind
coursing over a heartless
river, the sky
that follows.