

ROBERT BENSE

River Town Longueurs

Frankie's from Kansas City
Johnny from Joplin
they hook-up on Gravois in St. Louis

*that's fateful Clotho packing it in:
it's not six a.m. but her work is done*

Johnny flashes diamonds and gold
Frankie knows only what her mother said

there's no good to men

*Lachesis darts into 323 S. Grand
to beat the heat: to ravel or unravel . . .*

a woman needs two things
a man has only one to give

*there's a lot to do, she's the first to say
her work is never done*

Johnny likes his honey
there's always enough to go 'round

*well yes and no: there will be no woman
in Leland, that Nellie Bly in Memphis*

a man has only one thing to give

too simple but true
Lachesis says to no one in particular

Frankie sees Johnny has done her wrong
 she says this ain't right to Johnny's .44

has there been some mistake?
this weaver's art is not a science

that Broadway riverboat bar no place to be
 Frankie does a rooty-toot-toot to Johnny

already the choral section rehearses:
implacable Atropos sings with her scissors

Johnny has three holes in him now
 and Frankie's in the jailhouse too

Lachesis knows which skeins color
justice black, white, impartial

half of St. Louis says love's like that

the threesome fold their hands in their laps
waiting to repeat their thankless work

Frankie from Kansas City, Johnny from Joplin
 —this Stetson on the stool? Uh, oh—
 here comes Stagolee, a cruel man.