

Hydropoetics

The Rewor(l)ding of Rivers



John Charles Ryan

Southern Cross University, Australia

Nulungu Institute, University of Notre Dame, Australia

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Jagir River, Surabaya, Indonesia. June 2020. Photo by JC Ryan.

Overview

- 1. River-Thinking: Ubud's Campuhan**
- 2. Towards a Theory of Hydropoetics**
- 3. Hydropoetics from the Dart (UK) to the Sepik (PNG)**
- 4. Indonesian Hydropoetics**
- 5. Returning to the Campuhan**
- 6. Conclusion and Further Reading**

1. River-Thinking: Ubud's Campuhan



Campuhan, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia. March 2021. Photo by JC Ryan.



Campuhan, Ubud, Bali,
Indonesia. March 2021.
Photo by JC Ryan.



Campuhan, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia. March 2021. Photo by JC Ryan.



Campuhan, Ubud, Bali,
Indonesia. March 2021.
Photo by JC Ryan.

2. Towards a Theory of Hydropoetics



The Citarum River, Bojongsoang, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. Photo credit: *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/nov/02/rotten-river-life-on-one-of-the-worlds-most-polluted-waterways-photo-essay>

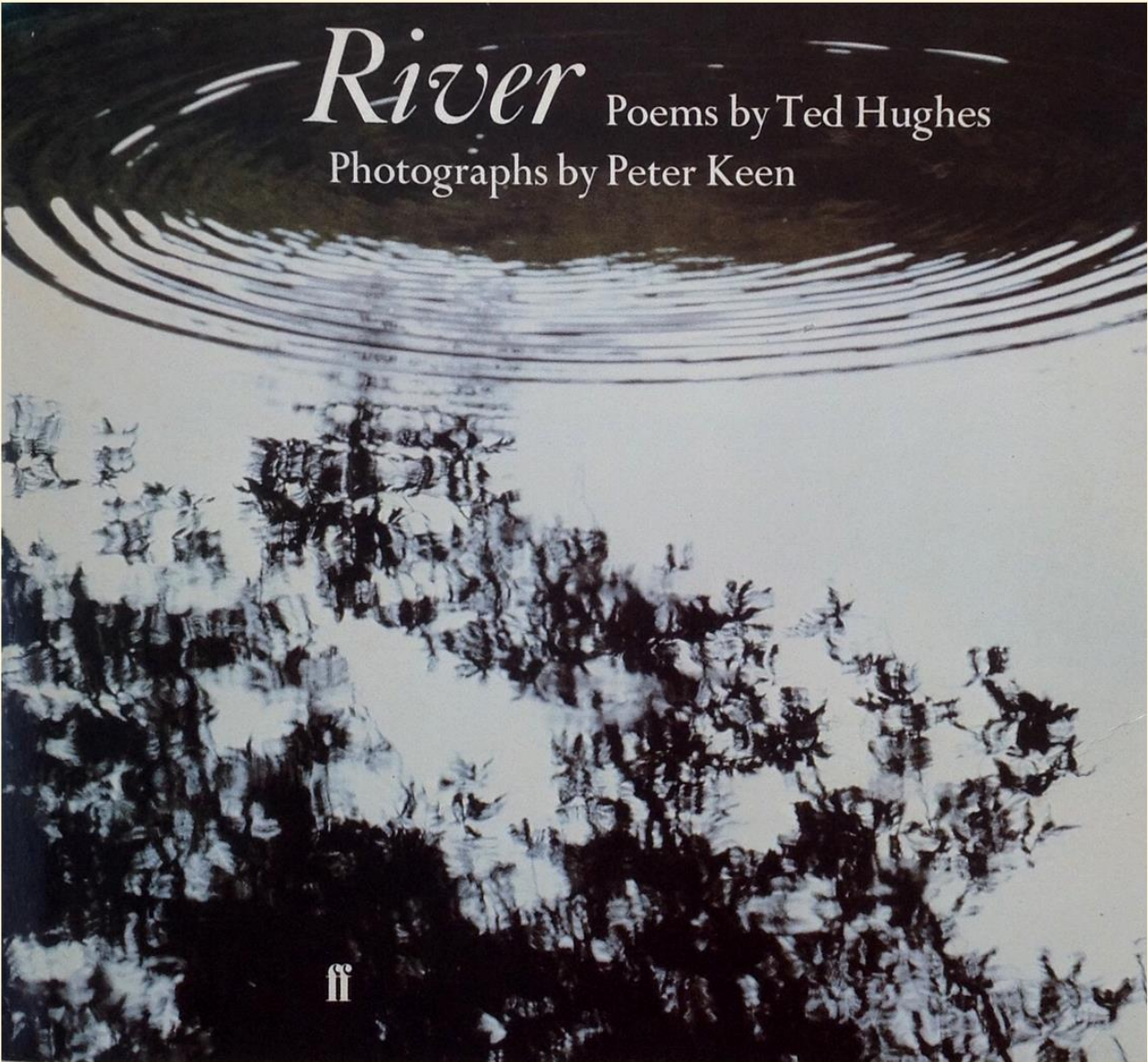


- Rivers “exemplify the complicated and complex dynamics of **human-nature entanglements**” (Kelly, 2018, p. xvi)
- **Hydropoetics** offers a framework for rethinking the value of rivers, articulating the complexities of human-water relations, and confronting river-related issues in the Anthropocene.
- The root, *poiesis*, signifies “bringing forth”—the **lively potential of rivers** to transform, adapt, intermingle, decouple, intensify, and diminish.
- “When working with a river, the first place to start is to talk to it, finding out **who it is** and what it needs to flow” (Brierley, 2020, p. 21)
- “Economic views are too insensitive to be the only criteria for judging the health of the river organism. What is needed is [...] **reverence for rivers**” (Luna Leopold, 1977, p. 430)

3. Hydropoetics from the Dart (UK) to the Sepik (PNG)



A View from Dartmouth Across the River Dart to Kingswear in Devon,UK, and Out to the Mouth of the Dart in the English Channel. Photo credit: Herbythyme (Wikimedia Commons)



River Poems by Ted Hughes
Photographs by Peter Keen

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Ted Hughes' *River*
(1983)

Ted Hughes' "Four March Watercolours" (1983)

Four March Watercolours

1

Earth is just unsettling
Her first faint scents.

My shadow, soft-edged,
On drying, pale sand, among baby nettles,
Where floodwater whorled and sowed it.

The blue

Is a daze of bubbly fire — naked
Ushering and nursing of electricity
With caressings of air. Earth,
Mud-stained, stands in sparkling beggary.

Bergs of old snow-drifts

Still stubborn in shadows.

The river

Acts fishless. It is
Fully occupied with its callisthenics,
Its twistings and self-wrestlings. The pool by the concrete buttress
Has just repaired its intricate engine,
Now revs it full-bore, underground,
Under my footsole. Tries to split the foundations,
Running in, testing and testing.

Spring is over there.

Tits exciting the dour oak. Cows soften their calls
Into the far, crumble-soft calling
Of ewes. The land hangs, tremulous.
It pays full attention to each crow-caw,
Turning full-face to the entering, widening,
Flame-cored, burrowing havoc of a jet. Wild, stumpy daffodils
Shiver under the shock wave.

2

Nearly a warmth
Edging this wind.

A skylark, solitary

Glittering high out
Over the buoyant up-boil — a spice-particle
From the tumbled-out, hump-backed,
Bursting bales of river.

Spring

Just hesitates. She can't quite
Say what she feels yet. She's numb and pale.
But she's here, and looking at everything — first morning
Of real convalescence.

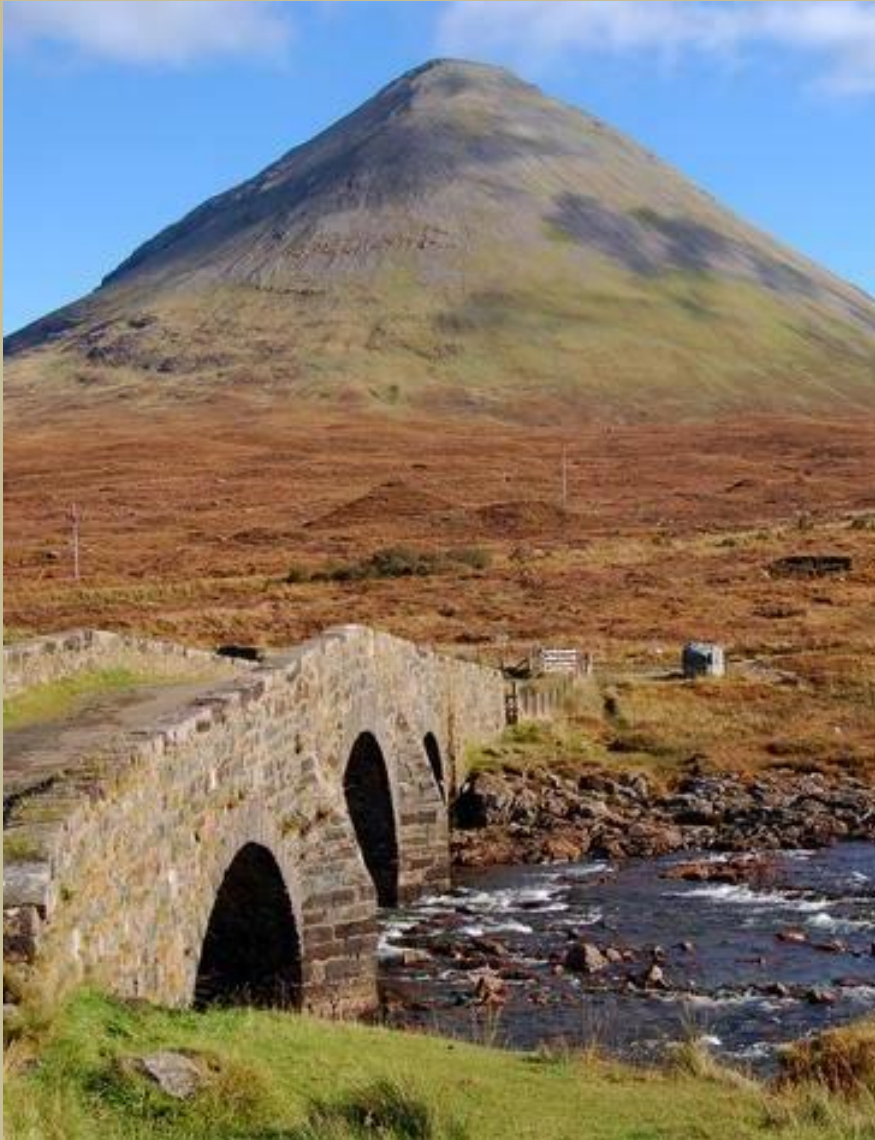
The river's hard at it,

Tries and tries to wash and revive
A bedraggle of dirty bones. Primitive, radical
Engine of earth's renewal. A solution
Of all dead ends — an all-out evacuation
To the sea. All debts
Of wings and fronds, of eyes, nectar, roots, hearts
Returning, cancelled, to solvency —
Back to the sea's big re-think.

While the fieldful of novelty lambs

Suns and sprawls, mid-morning,
High-headed, happy, supposing
Here is a goodness that will stay forever.
A bluetit de-rusts its ratchet. We trees,
We tall ones, sunning, somewhat mutilated,
Inured by one more winter
To this muddy, heedless earth, and to our scaly
Provisional bodies, relax,
Enjoy the fraternity of survival,
Even a hope of new leaf.

Ted Hughes' "Milesian Encounter on the Sligachan" (1983)



I heard this pool whisper a warning.

I tickled its leading edges with temptation.

I stroked its throat with a whisker.

I licked the moulded hollows

Of its collarbones

Where the depth, now underbank opposite,

Pulsed up from contained excitements —

Eerie how you know when it's coming!

So I felt it now, my blood

Prickling and thickening, altering

With an ushering-in of chills, a weird onset

As if mountains were pushing mountains higher

Behind me, to crowd over my shoulder —

Then the pool lifted a travelling bulge

And grabbed the tip of my heart-nerve, and crashed,

Trying to wrench it from me, and again

Lifted a flash of arm for leverage

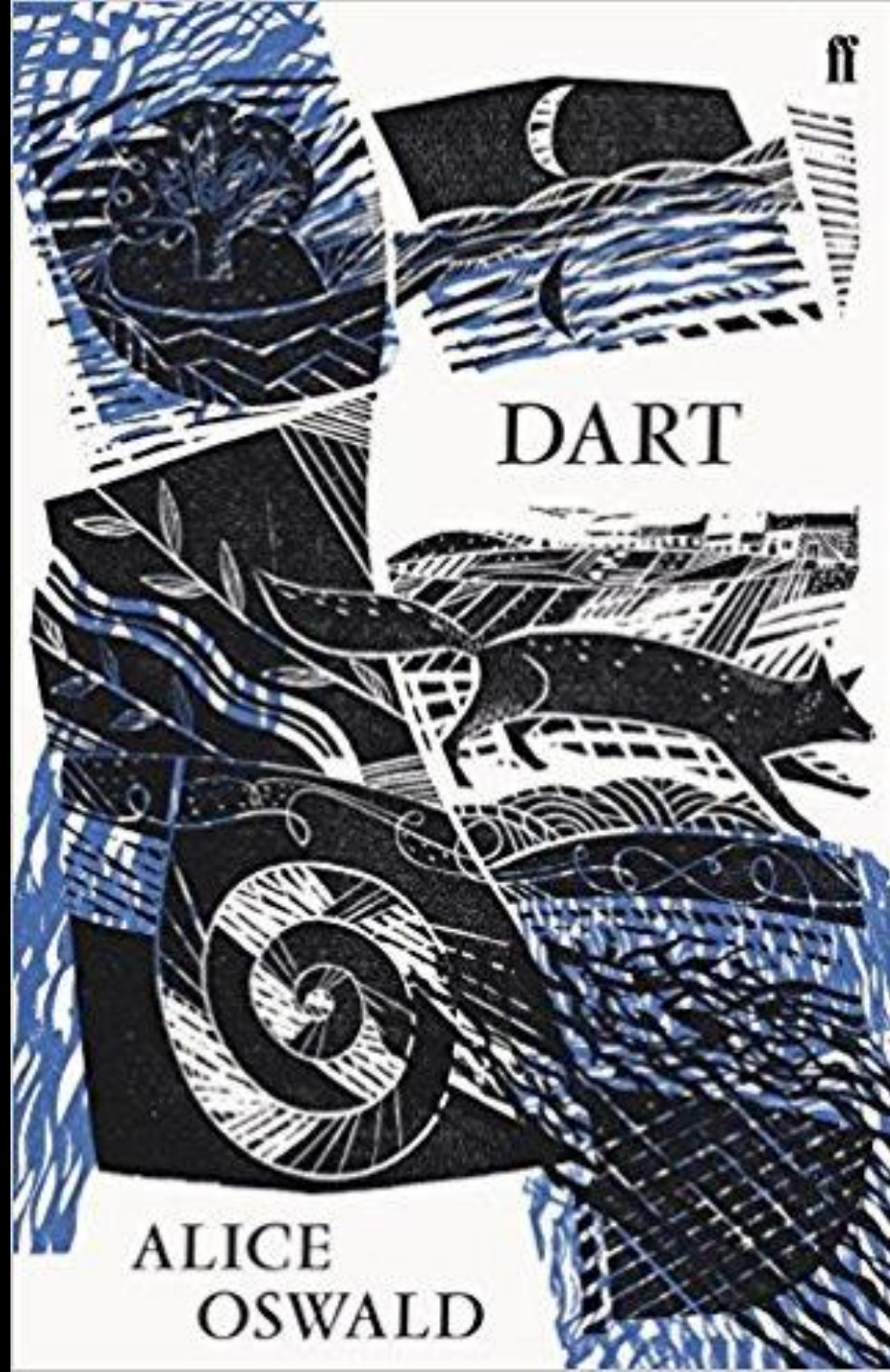
And it was a Gruagach of the Sligachan!

Some Boggart up from a crack in the granite!

A Glaistig out of the skull!

— what was it gave me

Such a supernatural, beautiful fright



Alice Oswald's *Dart*
(2002)

peaks walk

As soon as Dan opens the box quite high again shell
And slowly sink as yellowish mares of iron below the

also Benz sucked away

at the end
the way you

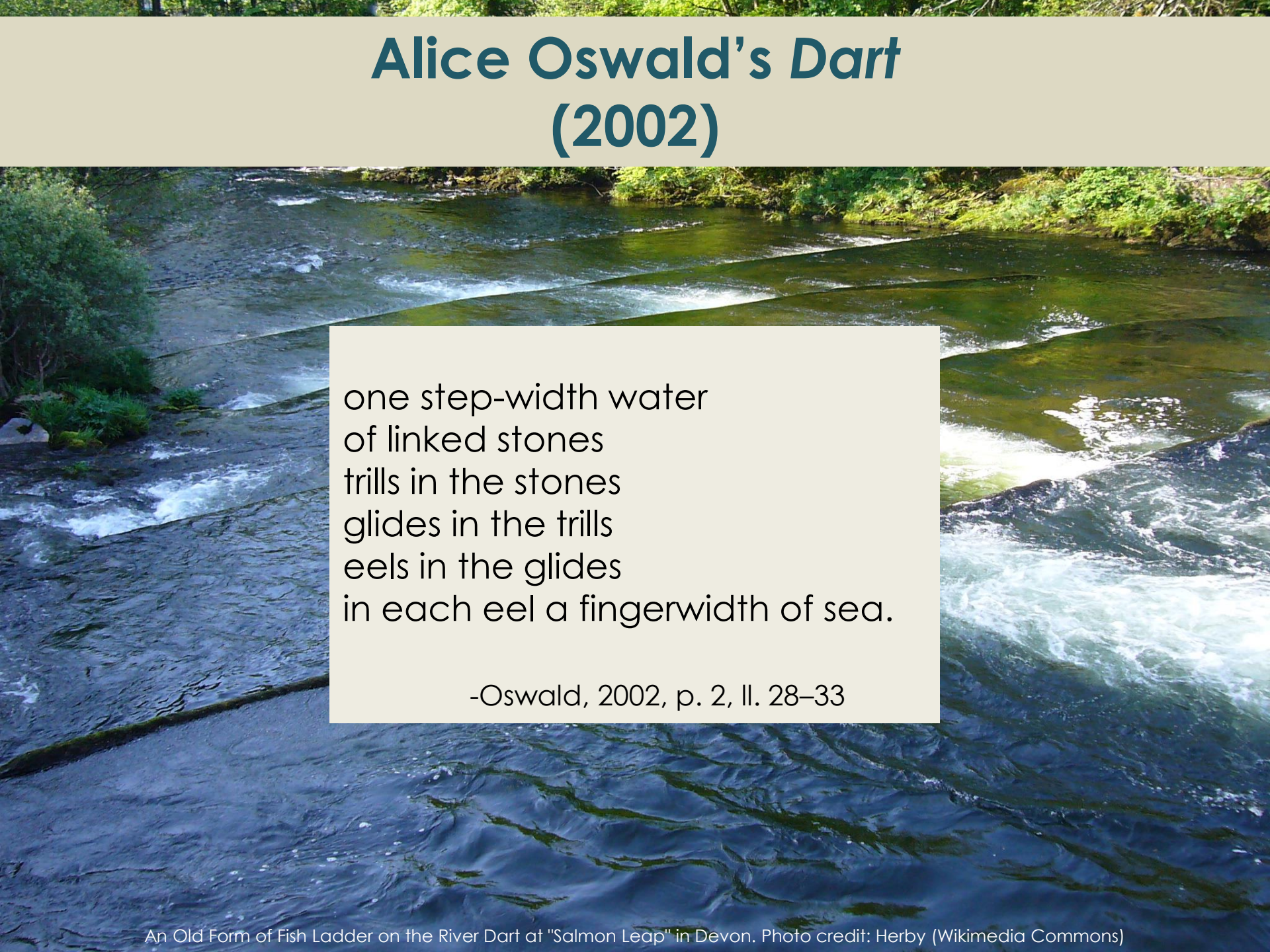
with
Mole in 199

Among other
Six seed-head
in hard ex



Alice Oswald's Dart (2002)

Alice Oswald's *Dart* (2002)



one step-width water
of linked stones
trills in the stones
glides in the trills
eels in the glides
in each eel a fingerwidth of sea.

-Oswald, 2002, p. 2, ll. 28-33

Robert Adamson's "Phasing Out the Mangroves" from *Clean Dark* (1992)

Now it has been drawn up and swamp
will be filled, measurements
have been taken.

[...]

The great hunched mangroves
will no longer tend
the instincts of kingfishers.

-Adamson, 1992, ll. 1-3, 8-10

Steven Edmund Winduo's "Rivers of the Forest" from *Hembemba* (2000)

A young lady passed in rhythmic stride
My young heart on a boat of passion rode
Hooked on the wind of unknown desires.

[...]

Rivers of the forest swell
Swallow peoples of little thoughts
Leave art to speak of endurance in life.

-Winduo, 2000, p. 9, ll. 4–6, 23–25

4. Indonesian Hydropoetics



Lithograph After an Original Painting by A. Salm...The River Solo,
Dated Between 1865 and 1872. Image credit: Abraham Salm (Wikimedia Commons)

Sanusi Pane's "Sawah" and "Sungai" from *Puspa Mega* (1971)



Sungai bersinar, menyilaukan mata
Menyemburkan buih warna pelangi,
Anak mandi bersuka hati,
Berkejar-kejaran, berseru gembira.

The river shines, dazzles eyes
Spitting out a rainbow of froth,
A child bathes in delight,
Chasing, exclaiming joyfully.

-Pane, "Sawah," 1971, ll. 5-8,

BORNEO

SOUTH CHINA SEA

SULU SEA

400 km



CELEBES SEA

Makassar Strait

JAVA SEA

Banjarmasin
Kulin Floating Market

Hidjaz Yamani's "Martapura River" (1957)

Martapura River

The dark brown Martapura River
whispers as it passes the *lanting-lanting*,¹
twisting its way through Banjarmasin, my town,
past the new buildings on its banks.

The river carries life's challenges,
a never-ending stream of humanity.
And there are weary people here
sleeping by the long bridge,
their throats parched with thirst
as they dream of a secure home.

The *dukuh-dukuh*² paddle past,
breasts bobbing under black blouses.
Their faces are covered with silk
but their eyes are wild.

Hundreds of objects disturb the water at my feet.
The bright sunlight burns my eyes.
I hold these sights fondly in my heart
—I want to wander in the market,
bargain with the stall-holders,
share in their generosity.



Afrizal Malna's "mother in river cremation" from *Anxiety Myths* (2013)

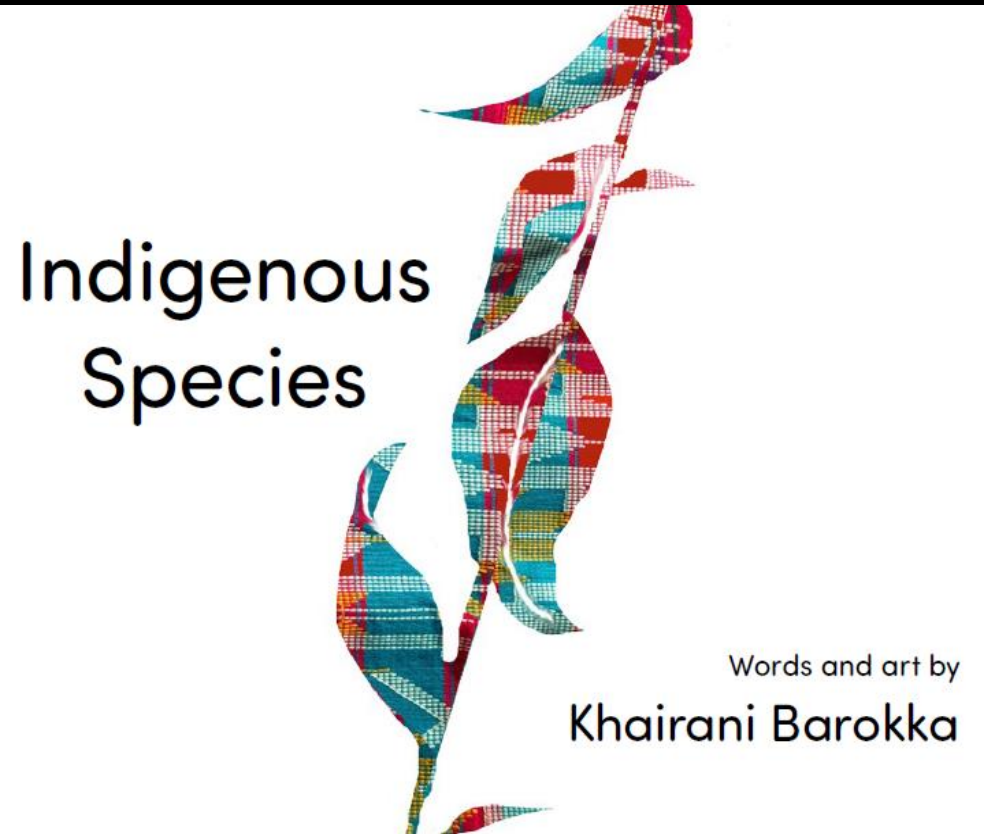
i gather firewood. firewood from trees always receiving prayers, where birds make their nests. i have already cut the pig. its spirit will become my vehicle, when i go later. that tree starts to burn my skin, the smell of leaves, mangoes bitten by squirrels, flammable rubber tree sap. everything i like is burnt, everything i like burns me. everything that grows makes a forest to return to. everything i love is burnt also. and everything i love burns myself.

i start to walk with the smell of burnt rubber, leaving you behind, walking once more to the beginning of all memory. i am becoming fire. i will burn you if you come closer; fire inviting me to walk backwards, thick smoke intent on a long journey. fire feet making the mahabhuta, unseen since the afternoon's fire.

that rubber smelling afternoon, before the sun made night, you brought me the ashes, the remains of my burning corpse to the river, i see your hand. i see silence on your hand as you float those ashes. ashes not seen again, water leaking into the afternoon. floating and i see that river recording your face; i see river stones making your hair's shadow. i walk backwards with water, with the coconut you float into that river.

river knows why every going is a new arrival, water ribbons through my hair.

Khairani Barokka's *Indigenous Species* (2016)



Khairani Barokka's *Indigenous Species* (2016)



A young girl is abducted aboard a boat bound upstream on an Indonesian river, a landscape scarred by pollution and consumerism. But it is also a place from which she herself is indigenous, and if she can root herself back into its landscape and languages, she may yet save herself.

Frenetic neon artwork accompanies poised, rhythmic poetry in this debut from writer, performer and artist Khairani Barokka. *Indigenous Species* is also a bold and necessary experiment in making a sight-impaired-accessible art book: Tilted Axis is producing a separate edition which will feature Braille alongside text for sighted readers, and tactile imagery.



£15 / \$20
9 781811 284048 >
tiltedaxispress.com



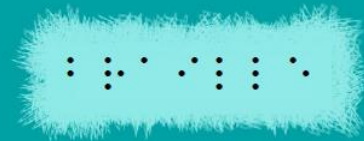
Khairani Barokka's *Indigenous Species* (2016)



When you abduct me down the rotten river,
You make sure to wrap some rope around the hull,
Lest the current gets swept into dreaming,
And the dugout boat loses sight
Of carvings and knives
For the vision of ancestor breath,
Calling us away from great hulks of islands
And into water culled from the saliva of tigers
Whose bloodlines we clotted to death on Java,
Stabbed out of life on Bali.

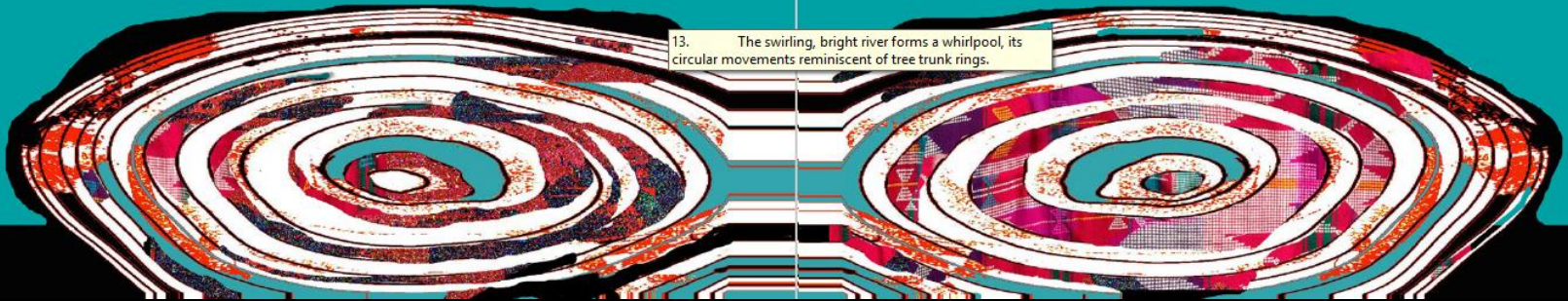


Khairani Barokka's *Indigenous Species* (2016)

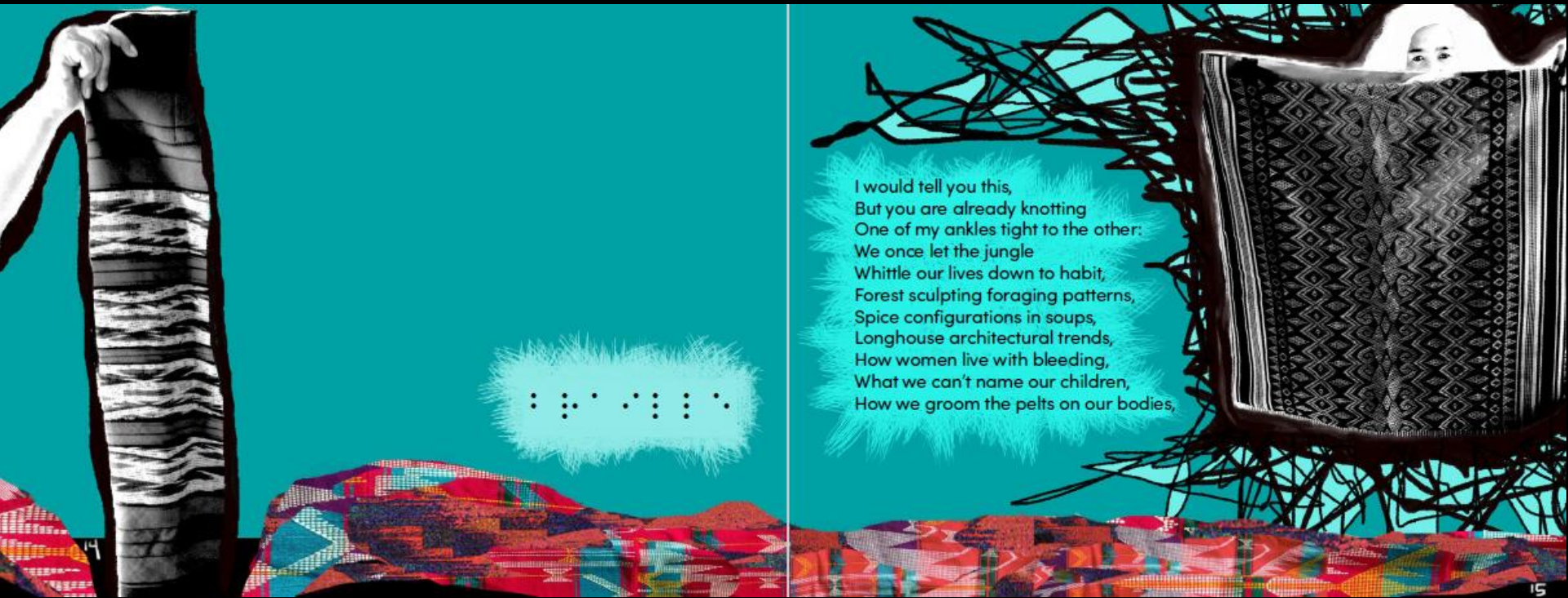


When you wrap chloroform in my mouth,
We are drifting past open sores of forest,
Pestilent red wounds in the trunks
Exposing great-great-grandmotherly rings,
The circumferences it takes for
Rainforest to sprout its many legs of mystery,
The soup of a complex resilience,
Rustbucket water feeding ferocity as green gasps wide
And devours canopy, the crazy lush of it tickling
Away into the ocean.

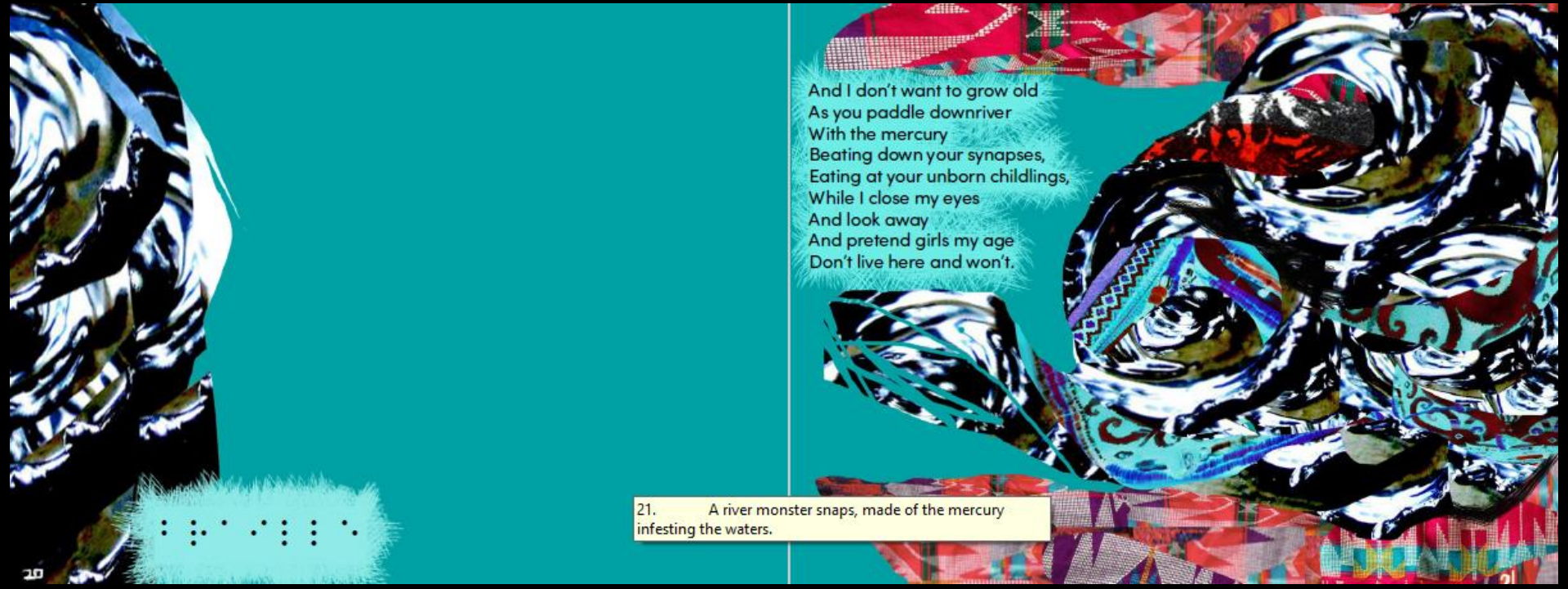
13. The swirling, bright river forms a whirlpool, its circular movements reminiscent of tree trunk rings.



Khairani Barokka's *Indigenous Species* (2016)



Khairani Barokka's *Indigenous Species* (2016)



And I don't want to grow old
As you paddle downriver
With the mercury
Beating down your synapses,
Eating at your unborn childlings,
While I close my eyes
And look away
And pretend girls my age
Don't live here and won't.

21. A river monster snaps, made of the mercury
infesting the waters.

5. Returning to the Campuhan



Campuhan, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia. March 2021. Photo by JC Ryan.



Campuhan River Junction, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia. Photo credit: Wikiwand



Rice Field Irrigated by Traditional Subak System. March 2021. Photo credit: J.C. Ryan.



Polluted Waterbody in Bali. Photo credit: *The Independent*, <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/asia/bali-plastic-pollution-sea-diver-video-indonesia-problem-manta-rays-a8246241.html>

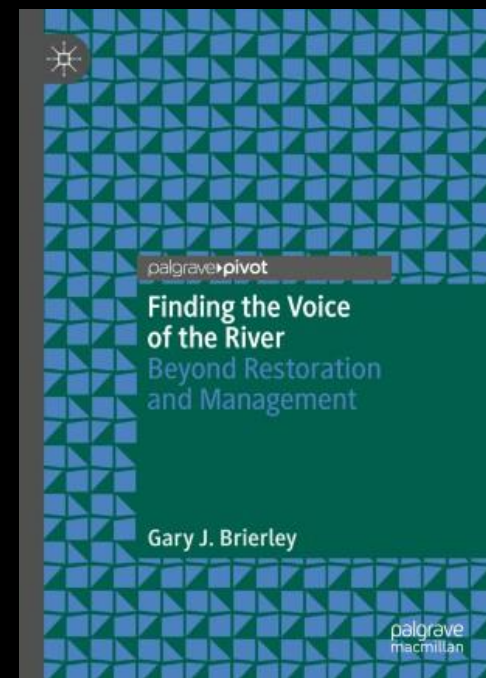
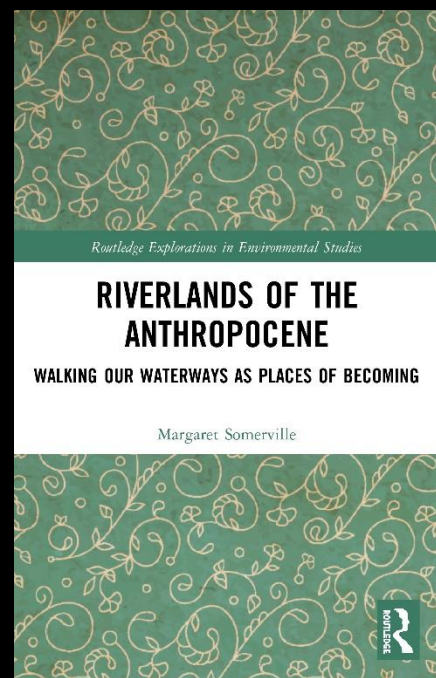
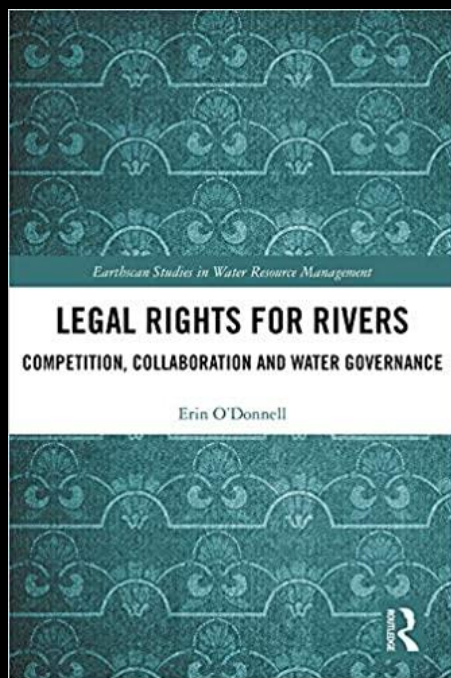
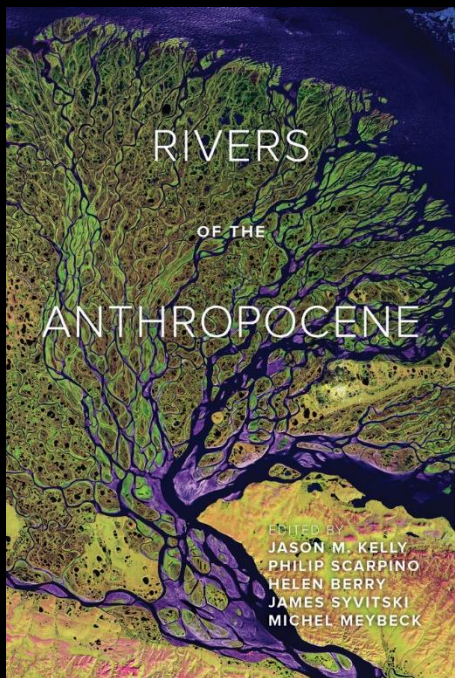
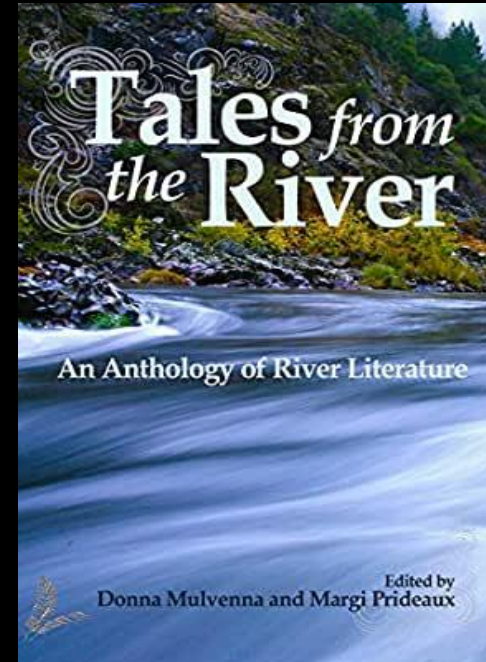
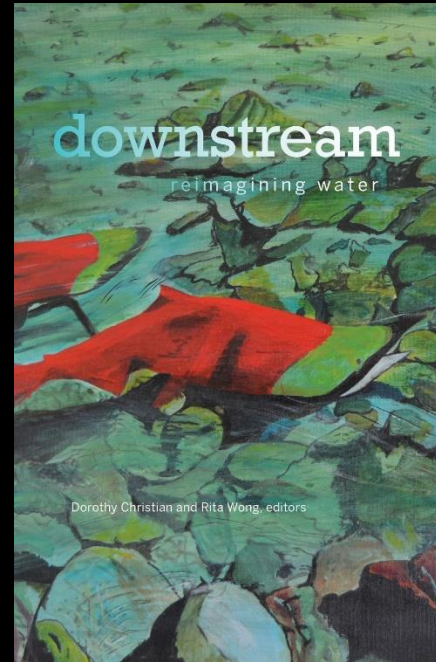
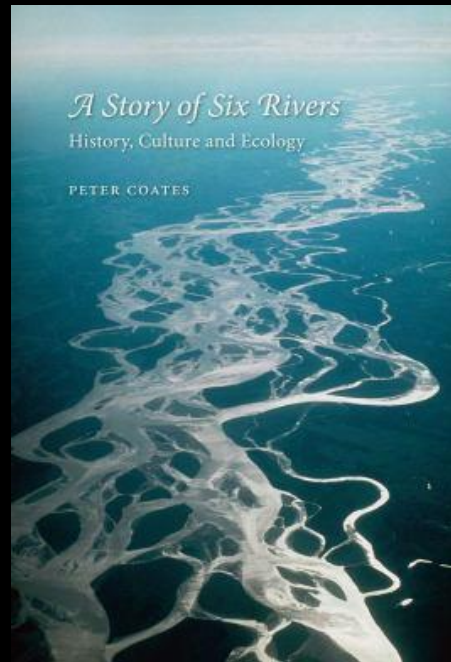
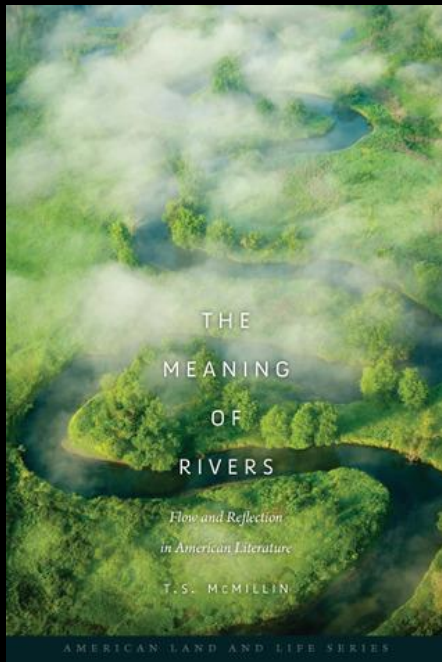


Campuhan River Junction, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia.
March 2021. Photo credit: J. C. Ryan

6. Conclusion and Further Reading



- In the Anthropocene context, river consciousness requires traversing the vast bodily, social, regional, and political scales of ecological crisis.
- “A sense of place cannot be conceived outside of a sense of transnational connectedness” (Heise, 2008, p. 181)
- Hydropoetics is a “recuperative imaginative act” (Hume & Osborne, 2018, p. 10)
- Hydropoetics invigorates new imaginaries of rivers—new wor(l)dings and rewor(l)dings—encouraging openness to the rivers that exist and the rivers that are yet to emerge.





Thanks for listening...



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John Charles Ryan, PhD
Southern Cross University, Australia
john.c.ryan@scu.edu.au



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