

Editorial

The Rivers of Africa

As a schoolboy growing up in Lagos, Nigeria, my teachers taught us a song to remind us of the names of the greatest rivers of Africa. I can still hear the tune and the thrill of my imagination at the mighty nature of gushing waters, feeding multitudes of biological diversity, endangering lives, providing electricity, and supporting human populations:

The rivers of Africa?

The rivers of Africa!

Nile

Niger

Benue

Congo

Orange

Limpopo

Zambezi

!

For this special issue on water, I have selected a set of poems writing to celebrate these rivers. Please enjoy these with me:

Along the Nile¹

*We journey up the storied Nile;
The lightsome water seems to smile;
The slow and swarthy boatman sings;
The quaint dahbeyeh spreads her wings;
We catch the breeze and sail away,
Along the dawning of the day,
Along the East, wherein the morn
Of life and truth was gladly born.
We sail along the past, and see
Great Thebes with Karnak at her knee.*

*Along the Nile
To Isis and Osiris rise
The prayers and smoke of sacrifice.*

*'Mid rites of priests and pomp of kings
Again the seated Memnon sings.
We watch the palms along the shore,
And dream of what is here no more.*

*Unchangeable, the gliding Nile,
With glossy windings, mile on mile,
Suggests the asp : in coils compact
It hisses at the cataract.
Thence on again we sail, and strand
Upon the yellow Nubian sand,
And reach that rock-hewn miracle,*

¹ Henry Abbey. 1885. The Poems of Henry Abbey. Cambridge: The Riverside Press.
http://www.archive.org/stream/poemsofhenryabbe00abbeiala/poemsofhenryabbe00abbeiala_djvu.txt Accessed December 2011.

*The temple of Abou-Sambul.
Who cut the stone joy none can tell ;
He did his work, like Nature, well.
At one with Nature, calm and grand,
The faces of Rameses stand.
'T is seemly that the noble mind
Somewhat of permanence may find,
Whereon, with patience, may be wrought
A clear expression of its thought.*

*The artist labors while he may,
But finds at best too brief the day;
And, tho' his works outlast the time
And nation that they make sublime,
He feels and sees that Nature knows
Nothing of time in what she does,
But has a leisure infinite
Wherein to do her work aright.*

*The Nile of virtue overflows
The fruitful lands through which it goes.
It little cares for smile or slight,
But in its deeds takes sole delight.*

The River Niger²

*I flow to the end of your spirit
Hold hands, my children, and I will flow to the ends of the earth,
And the whole world will hear my waters.*

Sunrise in Benue (Eulogy to River Benue)³

*The sun rises in Benue,
With full radiance and brightness
From the north-east of River Benue
Repelling darkness and cloudy mist
That hung over the Benue valley
The sun rises in Benue,
With full radiance and brightness
Kick-starting all activities of daylight
The farmers have gone to the fields
To rid their farms of weeds
Which had, over the years,
Denied their crops of yields.*

*The sun rises in Benue,
With full radiance and brightness
From the north-east of River Benue
And the valley now glows with brilliance,
A lustrous beam that rekindles our hope:
With its streak comes grate tidings for Benue*

² The character named Johnny Walker in the film entitled: *The River Niger*. Directed by Krishna Shah. Platinum Disc Corporation 1976 DVD/VHS. See: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/films.php?id=6938> Accessed December 2011.

³ Iorshagher Ikyereve. 2010. *Sober Reflections*. Central Milton Keynes, United Kingdom: Author House.

I am the Congo River⁴

*I am the rhythms; I am the bright face of the tropical rainforest□
I flow into the sea of togetherness□
My name is the flowing Gold, the flowing spirit:
The Congo River*

*I am like the Amazon□
I am like the Nile, I flow□
Like the Ganges, like the Yangtze□
Like the Mississippi, like Ohio, like the Danube, like the Rhine, like the Don□
I flow into the sea of oneness□
I end in the sea of greatness□
I am the meeting of the life: Chambeshi, Ubangi, Sankuru, Kwango, Fimi, Kwa, Inkisi*

*I come from the highlands and mountains of myth□
I was born after Bumba, the supreme God of creation,□
Created what lives and dies in the world□
Bumba who turned the eastward face of the mountains to westward□
And made my journey like a walk on a carpet□
I come from where the water spirit kuitikuiti reigned and ruled□
Kuitikuiti he who married Mboze she who gave birth□
To Bunzi the goddess of fertility□
I am the son of Chambeshi and Lualaba□
I am he who comes from Lapula from Uele from Sangha□
When I run, I alternate my pace:□
Now a slow pace, now a fast pace, now a slow pace, now a fast pace□ Now zigzag, now a straight surge□ Sometimes
like a sprinter I run□ Sometimes
I jump□ Sometimes I dive from hillsides and cliffs□
And wash my face□ With the white sprays of beauty*

*I run a long distance□ I am a long distance runner□ I am like the Amazon□
My breath is the same: come together, flow together*

*While I run, the foam and ripples of the water is my smile□
The song of the birds□
The whispering of leaves the noise of my fans□
The night stars and the moon and the sky: the spectators watching my pace□
The passing clouds: the guests admiring from the sides*

I sing, yes, I sing:

*“If a dawn of truth meets you□ Like an angle with good news□
If the filtering in of the morning light□
Of the sun through the trees, kisses you□
Or stands and calls you to talk□
That is the time to wake up□
That is the time to greet the drum of hopes□
That is the time to dance to the sounds of early birds of promise□
That is the time to look at the sky’s unveiled face□
That is the time to listen to the echo of liveliness□
That is the time to pick your hoes□
And dig the soil, my children
The rivers that hate to meet remain small rivers□*

⁴ Getachew Robele. 2009. Ethiopia: I am the Congo River. Ethiopian News and Opinion. <http://ecadforum.com/News/2009/10/25/ethiopia-i-am-the-congo-river-poem/>. Accessed December 2011.

*They remain the thinning rivers□
They remain the dying rivers on their way*

*Whilst the face of the hills changes□
Whilst the face of the mountains changes□
The rivers that fail to change their course will cease to exist□
Even the Amazon changed his course□
From the westward to the eastward□
Even the Mississippi changed his course□ From the westward to the eastward□
Even the Nile changed his course
No one's course is a monument□
No one's," I sing*

*I am the rhythms; I am the bright face of the tropical rainforest□
I am the Congo River, that flowing Gold, that flowing spirit□
Son of Chambeshi and Lualaba*

Orange River⁵

*Good heaven
Bad hell
Orange river
Never tell.
Bad lovin'
Good sin
Orange river
Start again.*

Great Grey-Green, Greasy Limpopo River⁶

*So he said good-bye very politely to the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake,
And helped to coil him up on the rock again,
And went on, a little warm, but not at all astonished,
Eating melons, and throwing the rind about, because he could not pick it up,
Till he trod on what he thought was a log of wood
At the very edge of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River,
All set about with fever-trees.*

Zambezi River⁷

*Your greatness
Usually forgotten
Yet you are the source of life
The spice of living.*

*Divorced long ago
For not being clean
The fear of ailments
Yet we have no alternatives
In eras of failed energy
But look to you expectantly.*

⁵ Leon Agnew. 2010. Orange River. <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/orange-river/> Accessed December 2011.

⁶ Rudyard Kipling. 1902. The Elephant's Child. In "Just So Stories." <http://boop.org/jan/justso/elephant.htm> Accessed December 2011.

⁷ Isaac Maliya. 1991. Zambezi River. <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/zambezi-river/> Accessed December 2011.

Your enmity with thirst
Always forgotten
Yet you pipe water
The spice of the city!

Oladele A. Ogunseitan, Ph.D., M.P.H.
Program in Public Health & School of Social Ecology,
University of California, Irvine,
CA 92697, USA.
Editor-in-Chief.