

## THE BOATMAN

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the boatman stood upon the dock  
his gnarled stubby fingers holding lines  
holding the boat to shore for me to step down  
i took no notice of him at first  
i had places deeds worlds  
to go and do and conquer  
and i was filled with the promise of destiny's lavish prize  
my porters placed my luggage on the boat  
nimble navigating the gentle rise swell fall  
as the swift river touched us in its seaward flow  
and i bade these darkfaced hirelings  
with their mysterious smiles and implacable  
imperturbable calm – i bade them leave  
with a fee tucked in their shoes  
the sun beat down and glistened on their backs  
as they ran laughing from the shore up into  
the jungled smoldering deeps  
with handkerchiefs i swept the streaming sweat  
from my furrowed brow and i  
became aware of the boatman beside me  
unwilling my gaze was drawn into his  
and oh curious sensation! i had to struggle  
to remember to tell where he must take me  
lost in those eyes – green, gray, blue, brown,  
who can tell? –  
he smiled kindly at my bewildered effort  
and i felt my mind disembodied  
a spectator unto myself as i tried  
recall the business that had called me  
to cross to that other shore  
and in bewilderment came fear  
“stop looking at me that way”  
i ordered with my most expansive authority  
and i turned thinking an end of this  
this tanbrowned wiry old man's piercing look  
i turned away – until i heard him laughing  
“stop looking at me that way!” he said  
doubling over and holding his protruding ribs

i became suddenly without orientation much  
as mariner might on stormy unfamiliar seas  
when all light is dimmed by raging gusts of fury  
i found myself staring openmouthed at him  
at the spectacle of this age withered man prancing  
upon the dock leaping ropes still in hand his gently piercing  
laughter suddenly became a dance of wildly  
graceful gyrations and his face the glow in his eyes  
lost all touch of age and his skin seemed afire  
waves of pure color shining from him  
and all through i stood transfixed  
for with every barrage of color a wave  
of shuddered emotion fled from me dismay  
grief panic maddening anger shock  
wonder laughter so that when you come yourself  
upon this shore  
there are two now here who dance  
when you tell us  
not to look that way

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\***ROBERT T. McLAUGHLIN**, Ph.D., chairs Rivier College's education division, directs its seven educational leadership programs, is father to three children who, he enjoys telling them, are usually cute and adorable, and, with his wife, provides a home for four border collies, who all are cute and adorable (except, like his children, when they bite or bark). He has founded and chaired the International Society for Technology in Education's interest groups on innovative learning technologies and digital equity, serves on the national commission on technology and the future of teacher education, and is senior fellow for the Stokes Institute for Opportunity in STEM Education.