

Naming the River

Who coined the sovereignty of your name?
A settler, a native? Uncredited - anon.
Who was the first to utter the word
we call you by, that lost someone

whose gaze went tumbling about your tide
to conjure syllables out of the spare
dark motion - *Lagan* - then was done
as if a flare, a phantom there?

Who spread the news, who took the dispatch
from toe-hold by your water's edge
and tagged it tongue to tongue to tongue
from hut to house and glen to sedge?

Before the streets and cathedral spires,
Before the town had even grown,
Before the town to city turned
and muddy lanes to cobblestone,

Before the bridges and the yards
had even fingered down your banks
and fires that turned to smoke were lit
and ships were launched – the grandest sank -

whose was that one irresistible voice
that by some drunken torch or star
looked out and in an instant's urge
said 'Lagan' - this is who you are?

For by this act, the word transmuted
river to fixity, place of mind
that will outrun us, our mere times,
Whatever else we leave behind

By Lagan Watter, *Abhainn an Lagain*,
before us all, it was the same,
before that fable-maker's utterance
river-mouthed you, gave you name.

Neil Young