River of the Arms of God

Our first year here we whittled driftwood into lamps, carvings of cowboys and saints rawhide and crag faced. The Brazos River's a flea market of trash and antiques, lost dogs, minnow buckets and corks, a convoy of fishing tackle floating to the Gulf. Upriver, children keep tumbling in, not one missing since the Smith boy washed up in town against the bridge. Moccasins and catfish live on silt, and crawdads crawl on water thick as mud. Dragging a boat washed up from miles away, I lash it to a stump and take the number. The sheriff will know if it's local. Our dogs cock their legs as if they own it. They paw the grass and trot away, enough for dogs to do on August mornings, panting near a stream this slow. *Rio de los Brazos del Dios.* What makes a river ours is more than driftwood and fillets we catch with luck.

It's all in the name the Spaniards gave, crossing themselves on the plains, kneeling by muddy streams which led them stumbling in armor on starving horses back to their ships and home.

*Walter McDonald*