Hudson River Valley Reflections on Place by writers and artists

what a hard time
the Hudson River has had
trying to get to the sea

it seemed easy enough to
rise out of Tear of
the Cloud and tumble
and run in little skips
and jumps draining
a swamp here and
there acquiring
streams....

suddenly
there’s Poughkeepsie
except for its spelling
an ordinary town but
the great heaving
ocean sixty miles away is
determined to reach
that town every day
and twice a day in fact
drowning the Hudson River
in salt and mud
it is the moon’s tidal
power over all the waters
of this earth....

– Grace Paley, from Suddenly There’s
Poughkeepsie, 2007

.... It starts high in the mountains of the north
Crystal clear and icy trickles forth
With just a few floating wrappers of chewing gum
Dropped by some hikers to warn of things to come ....

Out in the ocean they say the water’s clear
But I live right at Beacon here
Half way between the mountains and sea
Tacking to and fro, this thought returns to me

Well it's Sailing up my dirty stream
Still I love it and I'll dream
That some day, though maybe not this year
My Hudson and my country will run clear

– Pete Seeger, from The Hudson River Song,
1969

And the Hudson, it holds the life.
We thought we did it on our own.

The river roads collect the tolls,
For the passage of our souls,
Through silence, over woods,
Through flowers and snow,
And past the George Washington Bridge
Down from the trails of Breakneck Ridge,
The river’s ancient path is sacred and slow.

– Dar Williams, from The Hudson, 2005

I HAVE DREAMED about Mulan [a Chinese goddess, guardian of rivers] twice. In one, she looked forlornly to the churning China Sea.... In another, she was flying like an angel over the serene Hudson River, with a smile on her face and moonlight on her back.... I think the goddess is now guarding the Hudson, so this sacred river will forever run long and free, from the blue sky to the misty sea.

She [my daughter] smiled, thanking me for the story, and waved to a peregrine falcon flying over the Walkway, its shadow long down the river, ancient and sun-dappled. – Da Chen, from A Cautionary Tale, Hudson Valley Magazine, 2010

THE HUDSON, for natural magnificence is unsurpassed. What can be more beautiful than the lake-like expanses of Tapian [sic] and Haverstraw as seen from the rich orchards of the surrounding hills? What can be more imposing than the precipitous Highlands, whose dark foundations have been rent to make a passage for the mighty river? The lofty Catskills stand afar off; [and] recede like steps by which we may ascent to a great temple...The Rhine has its castled crags [but] the Hudson has its wooded mountains...and an unbounded capacity for improvement by art. – Thomas Cole, painter, from a lecture published in Northern Light, 1841

IN TRAVELING DOWN ALONG THE HUDSON RIVER the other day, just after a thunderstorm, the sun came out of the clouds and began to disappear behind the Catskill Mountains. The path of gold upon the river stretched straight across from bank to bank, and the clouds were tinged with soft colors.

God has given us such beautiful countries. The number of places in different parts of the world where I have enjoyed that beauty comes to mind with each such moment as this Hudson River sunset. – Eleanor Roosevelt, from My Day column, August 1944