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
nimbly 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

**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.