

1-1-2016

El Rio

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Araguz, José Ángel, "El Rio" (2016). *Faculty Publications*. Published Version. Submission 38.
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El Rio

The river, like a dream, keeps changing,
pixelated in a soap opera
that throws love in the water,
lets it float and turn, reflecting
a woman's face, my mother there

chuckling in the dream each time
someone shouts *¡la migra!* explaining
the bogeyman of restaurants
where at a moment's notice
you had to be ready to catch fire,

to drop and roll — keeps changing
across the gleam of sunglasses
and badges where I see myself
reflected in the backseat, a child,
hiding how scared I am

by keeping my eyes wide,
cold waters rising, stinging,
I feel the whole sky could fall in —
keeps changing in the dream,
walking with my mother

down a street she's never been on,
talking of California, how people
have no more luck than frogs
dashing across the interstate,
a river of cars coursing,

leaving people to be dragged off
like driftwood — keeps changing
around my mother's shoulders,
mosquitoes bristling across her neck,
her ponytail black and shining

with sunlight one moment,
with moonlight the next – like a dream,
keeps changing, I feel the waters pull
when storeowners see me and freeze,
become those paintings on the wall

with eyes that follow your every move –
the river, like a dream – the drag
when I'm pulled over and it takes
three cop cars to do it,
my name, coughed in static,

read off my license with the grace
of a beer can crunched underfoot –
the river, like a dream, keeps –
my mother shaking her head,
saying there were no breaks,

no sweeping violins,
no rescuing lover in a jeep –
like a dream – *Cuando viene
la migra, vienen lagrimas,*
she says again,

and wipes what could be light
from her face.