

## Philip Levine

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### *The Two Tinos*

The river currents were never friendly.  
Even when I was small, a boy no more  
than nine, I remember kids my age  
who dove from the docks only to be  
sucked under by the big freighters.  
I saw one fished out, a fat boy  
from the neighborhood, his shoes  
still tied, his knickers pulled down  
to show the soft, thick legs turned  
a translucent blue. Among the grown-ups  
his mother, eyes tight, shook her head  
slowly side to side without crying.  
This was before the war so it made  
the morning paper with a photograph  
of the wrong boy in suit and tie,  
a classmate also named Tino  
who claimed for days he was back  
from the dead, until Miss Collingswood—  
our homeroom teacher—told him  
it was disrespectful. This Tino,  
the handsome Martino Tarocco,  
had to wait seven more years  
to make the news again and die  
a second time in a Belgian forest  
in the thick of winter without  
a photograph. The casualty list  
continued to an inside page, flanked  
by ads for the holiday specials.  
The river is still there, less forbidding

now spring's come back, and the boats  
no longer go out for Cleveland  
or the pleasure islands—Bob Lo  
and Put-in-Bay—where our parents  
went to drink and dance. The river  
died, maybe only for me and  
the two Tinos. To others, perhaps,  
the river is still fiery and important.  
Why else would they be standing  
here beside me watching the ore boats  
pull the current and snapping photos  
of their kids posed against the mud brown  
water and the ordinary skyline  
of Ontario where the ancient  
breweries contribute their clouds,  
dark, constant, and overbearing,  
plump with indecipherable meanings?