



Three Poems

Jim Long

Two ships in search of the real sea

I begin to say
this sea defies description,
is featureless, unknowable, but
of course it doesn't and is not.

See how I describe it. . .
"That broken line of rocks
crosses the gray expanse of water
shore to dock".

Nothing of the breakwater, so soon water-
broken, waves still breaking.
And the garbage scow that rides
the sea's belly with life in its hull
is a trick of the wits.
The sea is not a deep woman--
cannot be kind, or cruel.

The sun is down
and a gold light hangs in the air like smoke.
There it is. Nothing
metaphorical about it.

No need to stand here, all aware
and inarticulate, confronting
the sudden conjunction
of fire and water, earth and air.

*

Still, I would compare
your body to the sea's body--
the sea too moves more ways than one--

as, beneath these surface waves that break and foam,
another surer, deeper current runs.

Out on the water a flat
boat with a glass bottom
slides its secret
window over the sea's heart.
I once peered into that
unfathomable body, and saw nothing
but the glare of my own face in the glass.

And is your body nothing like the sea's body?

On the horizon, far off, two ships go
in search of the real sea.
She moves as your body moves . . . away

and in her wake
dead coral shows white bones in the shorebreak.

Elegy, contra Plato (for V.)

1

Tonight I remember dead beauty's face
The moon falls smiling out of these dense clouds
The moon, at least, is still my companion

Last night I dreamed of a silver-gray moth
with wings of ash that taunted
and eluded me

O Icarus moth
what you are drawn to
is not the flame itself
but the aura of absolute darkness
at the light's edge

But believe me, though the gray trees
may seem to be reaching,
and the mown hedges turn to stone
under their skin of leaves,
there is no dream of perfection among these



O you who celebrate transformation
you must know
that only life can transcend life
The moon resumes her place

And this is my grief,
when the sea's wind comes, shattering mirrors,

to know your heart is in the ground,
while darkness bears the image of your face

2

(in the amphitheater)

At the edge
of this empty stage
what comes back to me
is no longer my own voice,
but this chorus of stone steps repeating "loss"
This is my grief

(Like the full-moon night I rose
at 4 a.m. and went out into the yard
and the bridge over the stream
rumbled too loudly in the brightness

That night I hurried back inside to sleep
because I could not bear to watch
the moon's eclipse,
the dark water running away with its lights--

as if you had gone
with the echo of that voice
and the perfect body you despised
to shine
in a world of irretrievables
I cannot touch, though I try)

At my back the winged garden
still rustles its curtain in evening light

In her cave Tiresias awakens
and her tongue begins to move among the bones

While, in the shadows, a wary creature ducks and weaves,
poking for seeds among the fallen leaves

3

Here, at the light's edge,
this is my consolation--

that somewhere the lotus
flames on a deepening pool

that even from our distance
we can embrace

the night
that welcomes us with kisses and dreams--

where the jewel of absolute darkness shines and shines,
and all the masters of the light go blind

Epiphany (for Z.)

*Who, even if I cried out, would hear me
among the Angelic Orders?
--Rilke, Duino Elegies*

And so he cried – and what sacrifice
of happiness in the human realm
would he not gladly have made
for response to his depth-dark calling?

But, for that poet, who made of his falling
a pretext for further rebirth, O where
was that Angel who, out of the inward storm,
out of the silence, might echo his own heart's cry.
as he stood at the edge of the perilous cliff,
so cut off from the realms of the Invisible –
alone on the cliffs of the heart, bereft?

But to you, O blest – to you



who, in your human need, called out,
whether you knew it or not, to
the Invisible Powers – to you
the answer out of the silence came
when the veil of the temple was rent
and the Archangel stepped down
from behind the stars and spoke love
to your human ear – to you, so blest
by that rare descent.