

ON THE SHORES OF CHARLOTTEVILLE, TOBAGO

Whenever I sit at the sea, I think.
I think about these men who go from pier
On long journeys in the near darkness of morning,
Net and rods are their company.

They travel to places that are a mystery to me.
Over turbulent seas jeweled by surf,
Over foam with a hundred muted memories.

They go. They go as they row without compass, without maps,
Holding the secrets to the passages of great valleys,
Ancient hideaways lost beneath the tides.

When they are in doubt, they gaze upon the skies
For the answers blown from afar by the wind.
Answers written in thousands of broken pieces of clouds.
Answers of when to sail and when to stop.

On clear nights the moon leaves clues.
How it leaves it though is another poem that can only be written
By the rain on a stormy June afternoon.

These beardless men, awake early without plans
For the day as it rises to greet
Them where the sky and the sea
Dance with the shadow of yesterday.

They only have dreams. They only have dreams
About this place of a million quiet songs.
They dream about this war- torn, but benevolent place
That whispers between night and dawn.

On their faces are written a thousand stories and songs.
Stories told to them a thousand times over and over again.
Stories about arduous journeys they took over the years
Perhaps too arduous to repeat to strangers unconcerned
About the sun's cruel paintings on the faces of old fishermen.

Upon their palms are maps.
Great maps drawn by nylon lines and knives.
Great maps perhaps to ocean frontiers
That envelope a bottomless deep.

I think about their life as I sit, guarded
By a rock, placed here a million years before Ulysses
Took his journey across another sea.
I think about their waking. Their sleeping.
Their tedious thoughts as they await fish and crab to pursue bait.
I think about their thoughts as storms sneak upon their fields without end
And waves swell to meet deck on late afternoons.

Perhaps they feel like a fish then, being pulled
By magical currents to an unknown place of untamed
Spirits. How the past returns to hunt imagination
Whilst we wait for calm, for mercy from the heavens.

I am sure the wave and wind tells them stories
About other ships that sunk into oblivion.
Stories of fishermen whose bones still lie
Buried amongst the coral.
Caught in the net of time, their bones are houses for fish.

The waves constantly repeat stories of storms
And war and sunsets and sunrises
And driftwood that made it to the other side of the world
And then returned to the shore from where they were spat.

These weathered branches and trunks return
With much to say about birds and fire and tar
And oil and arse and industry and the scattered pieces of shell lying,
Waiting for another tide to take them where life never did.

I watch these courageous men whose dreams
Never dies and I am moved to shout, thank you fishermen
For the shrimp and fish from a thousand miles.