

Five Poems



Zoë Skoulding

A Maritime Vocabulary

what travessia/trip/travesia/trajet
traverses
the wreck/naufragio/
naufragio/naufrage

of language underwater
glimpsed through bones and rafters

whose is this zone/zona/zone/zona
where I am passenger and cargo

and the anchor is a
weight/peso/peso/poids
and nothing floats freely

not even the cargo of words
while the names of the dead
are still sinking

this self/mesmo/mismo/soi
all at sea/mar/mar/mer
no more than a murmur

in the hold/porão/bodega/cale

there may be dates dental instruments
detergent
drafting paper dyestuff

or solvents spark plugs spectacles
staplers sunflower seeds

that is to say
it's a mixed vessel/navio mixto/
navío mixto/navire mixte
carrying only names

say vessel that is my speech
say mouth
boca/width/anchura/largeur
say open sea

Stellar Bearing Pro Forma

I am south of lyre
I am north of scorpion
I am east of eagle
I am some way west of swan

this is my angle of tilt
how's yours

balancear de una borda a otra to roll
to a tipping point

reach to the brightest star
isolated and little-seen

noting the altered positions

still visible

trazar un rumbo to trace a route
here we go rumbling on

what lies in the water
a sea shaken to its depths

run your finger
up the left-hand edge

identify as/with constellations
in the second you speak a second enters
in the pull and reach
of daily rotation

suppose that lies roughly in line with

a hand searches air

light falls
behind a minute

a rusting winch
a chain dragged over rocks

Voyage

close by is a silver branch
etched with frost I couldn't
tell you where the twigs end
and the white flowers begin

bearing a kind of glitter
baring the edge of blue
pebbles churn underwater
mutating colours of the sea

in yesterday's weather cloud
glistens in ridges of sand
turning on a mussel shell
there in the mist behind the sky

dolphins and porpoises leap
in rings around the island birds
call to the hours there is music
somewhere playing silently

a storm is passing through
eyes far off in the distance
I can't turn into a picture
with receding perspective

there were two blackbirds on the
branch and a single robin now
the robin is gone and a
single blackbird is waiting

If anyone asks

if anyone asks who you are say you are nobody and no
 body is washed up on the shores of this poem and nobody can
 sing when everything conspires to shut you up and the
 song doesn't start anywhere or ever finish the frame collapses
 and this love won't stay out of that one flashed up on a screen
 too fast to read the name filmed with voice-overs or washed
 away sailing the wine-blue to peoples of alien speech
 your words are like the words of what changes in the blood
 eating the flowers made me forget the way home in a
 structure that was just a slow process this was the music my
 mind moved along the info stream assimilating which is not to
 say becoming similar the thread of a life takes form in an eye
 travelling down for surely your words are like an octopus
 dragged with pebbles in its suckers like the wash of the great
 sea like an island on the edge of an island like seafall sucked
 over stones in the grip of the sea I forgot my own name an
 assemblage of cells here the eyes there the oiled skin and
 grey-eyed Athene went away with the likeness of a vulture for
 the dead are very close to the edge of the world translucent
 fish and islands in luminous water in the wake of the ship
 interrupting itself where a passport is a hollow vessel this face
 is like your face you pass with biometric data where all the eyes
 had turned into a single eye and the shutters go down you
 arrive in the likeness of a gannet and the shutters shut against
 you and who put out the giant eye it was nobody my name is
 nobody in the likeness of an owl to allow the bearer to pass
 freely without let or hindrance in the name of every which
 way wind as when an octopus is dragged from its shelter so
 the rocks tore at his skin so the storm that was in my heart
 raged as weather systems whorled like fingerprints what word
 escapes your teeth's barrier when you speak of them coming out
 of the sea encrusted with salt what it means to be leaving
 in the likeness of a cormorant so many leaving in the likeness
 of a seagull so many leaving in the likeness of a heron so
 many leaving in the likeness of an egret so who are you do
 you remember our bed made of a still-rooted olive do you
 remember our bed planed with a brazen adze a place without

right of seizure skin bathed clean of salt and rubbed with oil
such assistance and protection as necessary the singer was blind
and he was nobody they were struggling up the sides of the
ship with ropes and ladders their hands and feet were cut and
slipping these feet are like your feet my heart was a storm in
me as I went and the journeying ways were darkened this
face is like your face and these hands are like your hands

A Presentation on the Current Direction of Travel

we are where we are we are where we are we are where
we are we are where we are we are where we are we are
where we are we are where we are we are where we are
we are where we are we are where we are we are where
we are we are where we are we are where we are we are
where we are we are where we are we are where we are
we are where we are we are where we are we are where
we are we are where we are we are where we are we are
where we are we are where we are we are where we are
we are where we are we are where we are we are where
we are we are where we are we are where we are we are
we are we are where we are we are where we are we are