



**After Bewilderment**

Hannah Gregory

*Q – the Quidam, the unknown one – or I, is turning in a circle and keeps passing herself on her way around, her former self, her later self, and the trace of this passage is marked by a rhyme, a coded message for ‘I have been here before, I will return.’*

At the light ecstatic time of year, swallows spiral in the space between hof and sky, their wings attached as brackets against yellow and pink, backlit. Muted in the present wake, washed out with loss. Corkscrews in the rectangular chamber, stirring air.

*You need to dive,  
and then you need to surface*

The unconscious versus  
the heliacal rise of Sirius

For an insomniac I,  
swallows long-settled in some nest,  
this window must be thrown open  
to rain.

The TV tower's red glow  
flashes a patch of cloud amber;  
inverse ambulance lights  
reflect blue off buildings.

The psyche is a weather system.  
The error of pathetic fallacy reads  
emotional turbulence:  
                                  landslides.

Deep missing  
in the stomach's cavity  
in the ground after a storm.

Welcome the deluge at the end of the canicule  
(heatwave, *dies caniculares*, dog days)  
that capsizes mood.

Earlier, soft rain steadily falling outside another open window, sotto voce approximating the mother more than the father, or – the ideal – neither. Surrogate parent or none, a *parent* or *apparent* – there are plusses to being not-real, to just being there.

Quidam: the unknown one, a character unnamed, a placeholder of a person.

I would like to cry, but crying interrupts saying, and the prerogative here is to say. I start to say then stop because I would like to cry.

I say: I think the demand is  
[love].

This demand has taken more than one hundred hours of being in the room to come.

Having spoken the demand, without really making it, for its enunciation comes with a delay, I feel ready to leave, to be let go, and announce this.

How come?  
'Love' – run.

When it's time, the rain is incessant:  
no need to go swimming today.

*The 'there' (of 'you') is both the ocean and the state*

I dreamed the ocean  
– but not before a series of narrow bureaucratic corridors  
I walk down, following, until you disappear.  
Through which door I do not know.  
The longest corridor opens out onto the white-washed roof terrace of a  
Grecian edifice, overlooking sea.  
In the distance, a foreboding fortress.  
I sense you are not in the fortress –

language-container  
save us  
from limitlessness.

I sense you did not go out to sea. I consider climbing down, swimming out  
into slate water, but instead turn back inside,  
beckoning appointments, patrolling officers,  
all these murmurings caught like bees in unwashed hair.


I don't want to drown  
in the mother ocean  
mouth, which suffocates  
as much as soothes.

I don't want to be returned.

Still can't find you.

*all layers of 'I' interchange, revolving in an endless unsettling ...*

I dream the ocean – the bracing ocean of your maternal home. We're  
wading out into the water, silvered light, with you ahead,  
as you would be in waking life, less hesitant than me,  
more tentative behind, turning and wondering  
how wet I should get how wet I should get with you.



*Weathering the losses* means at once  
stepping into pools of grief  
and lifting yourself  
two taut arms  
out again.

Or, to emerge  
like a dog in slow motion  
shaking one's coat dry.

The threshold may not only be between present and regressive selves,  
but between species of feeling.

The unconscious versus  
the cyclic time of us

After the birds dive,  
they ascend.

## Sources

Quidam – Fanny Howe, ‘Bewilderment’ | Diving, submerging, re-emerging – Marion Milner’s description of an ‘oscillation between states’, as told by Jackie Wang in her lecture ‘Oceanic Feeling and Communist Affect’ | The ocean and the state – Jackie Wang | The question of a link between *a parent* and *apparent* – Fred Moten, *All That Beauty* | The revolving ‘I’ – adapted from Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other*, section, ‘Infinite Layers: I am not i can be you and me’ | ‘Weathering the losses’ – Alex Colston, ‘Eros After Covid’ | With thanks to Lizzie Homersham for the compressions and Edwina Attlee for the eye.