

Poetry/Poesía

Wintering Over

When a shadow fell across Tourism's
pamphlets open in front of us,
we looked up from beach towels to find
a grinning kid in swim trunks,
the Caribbean streaming
from the shell he offered. Softly
in patois: for a U.S. dollar
he'd let us take home the reef conch
called Triton's Trumpet, no charge
to remove the animal inside.

That heavy but empty, hand-size
purchase from the sea, mottled brown
zeroing in at one end to an auger
and at the other looking like
the mollusk died making a wisecrack
out of the side of its mouth
for our ears only, we unpacked it
on the sun porch, and a few days
later saw a mantis perched
on the lip of the conch.

She stayed hours blocking the entrance
in that famous attitude of prayer
then disappeared.
Hunting aphids and cutworms,
she must have been carried in with
the harvest of chard or spinach,
riding a leaf's underside,
must have lived among the potted
begonias in our absence.
We put up storm windows
and left Triton's Trumpet there.

Opening the porch this May morning
we remembered the shell, and though
we had watched the diver use
clothes-hanger wire on the builder,
today that house was anything
but empty. Mantises, tiny
exactnesses of their mother, spring
green and with heart-shaped heads,
crowded the polished lavender
of Triton's mouth. We drew nearer
and all the offspring went back
down that coiled throat as if the conch
took a deep breath. What to do with
a trumpetful of predators?

Nothing but place it lightly
in our garden, remembering
a kid who walked grinning from the sea.

Thomas Reiter

Washday, West Indies

She plunges whites and colors
Into a clear pool the rain forest
River makes on its way to salt,
Then kneads the clothes like bread dough—
This young woman who bends to

Her place in the ordinary,
Watching foam billow like cumulus
To the surface. She's
Part of the river in the eye
Of that frigate bird overhead,

Wings like a pterodactyl's,
And a cry that makes a gull
Release the inchling it skimmed
From the river, whereupon
The marauder snaps up that morsel

mid-air, then lands on the roof-tree
of the house this woman's husband
raised: planking from storm-
wracked schooners, tidewrack
scavenings. Late at night after

love-making she can hear the sea
in that wood, but now she's climbing
the current, basket on hip,
placing colors and whites on boulders
to dry in the sun,

workday and Sabbath clothes needing
before dark to be shaken free
of the shapes of lava rock
and picked clean of the mountain's
waterborne seeds.

Thomas Reiter

Similaridad

Del diario vivir son las pasiones,
Similar al oleaje del inmenso mar.
Una vez muy sereno,
Incitando al embrujo
Del más cálido ensueño.
Otras, cuando la tempestad,
En remolino adverso
Toca su mismo seno,
Ruge en sonoro estruendo.
En forma indescriptible,
Azota destruyendo.
Deja tras de su paso,
Un desolado cuadro,
Un angustioso lecho.

Doris N. Martínez

Trinidad - Oval Cricket Ground, Port of Spain

Descendants
of Yorubas
invoke
Shango gods
Taking
practice swings
As sweat
sheens
over dark
muscular arms
while
dusky Pakistanis
and East Indians
off-work shopkeepers
pray to
triple-headed Rama
Both sides
determined
to draw blood
Dressed
in proper attire
as
they methodically
begin
a grudge match
Competing for dreams
of tribal success
savagely begun
through costumed games
Set in motion
by
English governors
who invested
colonial metaphors
of well-played
white lies
which never die.

Zyskandar A. Jaimot