



Lake Effect

Sergio Badilla

My Father's Ocean and the Undines

Opacity of mist against the clarity of day and the brigantines
Along the shore the sails of the top-masts rise up
Houses hold their limy white façades
It's distance that diminishes our eye,
that makes the ocean's closeness seem scornful
because Malaysia exists no matter what and Indonesia
out there beyond the waves
and at the end of the world there's a port full of novice mer-
maids
the boundary the horizon enforces in the metal of the astrolabe
as if my father were to leave with his blue uniform water
blue festival blue
and go down the jetty's gangways
Madagascar may be written wrong on the binnacle
the ancient letters of mariners' other alphabet the cause
or because it is one rung below the old rigging
Certainly before the white coral mountains
were everywhere
coral with its chalky places
after an infinity of bilious reef wrecked
like this anchorage of beached vessels

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Harsh sands stripped bare
And nymphs ready to lend their rotundity
to a sailor's tangible lechery
We are from here from these rude bearings
A briny coast south of steep slopes
in the globe's indisputable confines The crew
gets drunk before setting sail
and these cracked boulders raise anchor too in the lunatic's
imagination

The Undines will return once more to show their white
pubis
beneath the weight of strangers
Opacity of mist against the clarity of day and the seagulls
fight with the solar geese the brigantines once more hoist
their riggings
and the limy exterior of the old homes hold on tight to their
perfect white.

—translated from the Spanish by Deborah Moore