

To the Manatees

Nevada-Jane Arlow

Sirenians, can you tell me where the water flows?
Which way the moon turns its pockmarked face
to drift you across those warm lagoons,
through the brindled fingers of God?
Can you tell me, Sirenians, in this brackish river,
in a land where the glades once were,
if you and I will ever be free?

this land is soft, to remain fit for Disney
it must have tendrils dug into it
constantly keeping the swampy dreamings
at the edge, to the south
i hear you by the power plants
and here, in Canada, by my flashing screen
by my boyfriend and his PC with its worrying screeching—
nevermind, this World is not yours
and I won't consider confusing you any longer—
I am beginning to believe the thing
that is dreaming you
is dreaming of me.

We are kithed by the stony passes of human history
from Andrew Jackson to Mickey Mouse,
how does it feel to swim near Epcot Centre?
I worry about you when I drink my coffee, walk to the
subway, ride
the subway, and just when I sleep; you see I too am a
member

a noisy, contemptible set (as Melville called you)

in my dreams, you and I spoke of many things
of the World We Had and the World To Come
and the many blistered dangers both held for us
and you held me, and we wept, cradled in the uncertain
tide

You were mermaids once, some kind of variation on
human

no longer, some line was transgressed and you become
mere animal

I know what it means, on certain days, to transgress those
lines,

how the human eye contorts to understand your form
how it so often hates if it cannot know

Once, I walked from my house to a coffee shop near my
home

this man, gently greyed by time spoke to me and he said
"Hey Baby-uhuhmmwhatareyou-Sir! nevermind"

I felt like God at Babel and the Cat that gets people's
tongues from time to time

Back to the point, Yes?

One day, the Moon will be off her hinges

one day, the Boats will all sink

one day, all the sea grass will be purple

and on that day we shall still be Free.

I look forward to hearing from you.