

Boatman, Pass By

If that boatman were to float by
on this river of night
where I lie feigning both sleep
and death,

If he were to lean down
to check for coins to collect,
I'd open one eye and say,
I'm trying to sleep here.

Perhaps he's thinking of all
those other nights I hailed him
like a water taxi, when I prayed:
anywhere but here,

How like me then,
to be early for an appointment
whether in Seattle or Samarra.

But there's one less thing
to worry about —it's too late now
for me to die young.

When it's time he'll circle back
for my body as freight,
my soul for currency.

And then, with his ear against
my cheek as if to ask,
where to?

Like a tourist eager for a place
yet unseen, I'll say,
La Serenissima.

When Language Left Her

When the door between
the worlds stood ajar for her,

she told us, her children,
“I’m not coming back,”

as if we’d be tempted
to look for her in the eyes
of someone yet to be.

When language left her
just before she left,

the door opened wide
at a sign:

all the birds at the window
rose up, away, as one.

A Day at the Museum

Despite blistered heels
in new shoes,
I can't seem to leave this gallery
of sarcophagi.

I limp closer to a glass case
where displayed *en pointe*
a pair of tiny sandals lies
pristine, and I wonder —
never worn?

Parting the stream of visitors
two statues rise monolithic
a man and woman, side by side
an arm circling the other's waist.

Look at them, still standing
never turning back.

Look, I'd say, if you were here
how they've outlasted us.

A Life of Petrarch

The afternoon was hot.
Under the leafy shade
of elm trees in the park,

I looked up from
the biography of a poet
open across my lap.

There he stood, another one,
beside the stone bench
where I sat.

Though I don't recall
what day it was
or what I was wearing,

I haven't forgotten
subsequent evenings
and what he was not wearing.

Since then, I take note
of what interrupts
my reading.

How, often a book's a portent:
every woman he left me for
a Laura,

every life the sign
of an ending to come.

Reading Poetry During a Power Outage

One moment I am standing up in the living room,
the next, fallen down a mine shaft,
blinker by darkness. Slowly, arms windmilling,
I bluff the miles to the kitchen countertop.

After a dark age, my fingers feel for, hold fast
a flashlight I balance on the arm of the sofa.
A book now held open in my hands,
the light falls just so, an illuminated page

Where tracks in parallel lines flare — the tunneling
of one who has gone before. Above. Ahead.
In that blazing reveal, in the contours
of syllables, as another voice calls out,

I begin to feel sure of the way shown
by that light-bearer, word-wielder, deep-delver.
There's no need then to fear the dark
while he, Seamus, is here.