

first published in *Rain Magazine*, 2006

Three Graces

You could be sirens, who could know for sure
Entering the sensuous mouth, allured
By hymns of northwest passage, destinies manifest deep
In frontier hearts, that old explorer drumbeat
Clacked against the jetty rock by bones, indigenous, buried, bleached.
Your songs of massacres wake good men from sleep.

You could be the mythical castrating teeth
Jutting out from the gum of water, salt-streaked
And wind-carved, your grin is feared by all
Who cross the bar, their bodies lashed to hulls
Their hatches, decks, and gunwales battened, sails snug
As doubt creeps through clattering jaws like fog.

What would Clark have thought, had the Corps
Of Discovery ventured by sloop? Your dark maw,
Scoped up close, reveals gangly shrubs stuck out from cracks,
Curves slumped, like no goddess would, and a raft
Of wood at the surface, discarded flotsam of shipwrecks.
"Not worth the risk," Clark shakes his head, and turns back.

In the galley, a kerosene lamp smokes the window glass,
Where the captain's counterpart slurs a whisper, "Stay underway, poor sap."
He drinks his whiskey, cleans the chamber of his pistol
Thinking of dead Indians while he sharpens his razor,
He knows, before the shot, no one will hear the final words from Meriweather Lewis:
"Stay underway, these are the three graces of forgiveness, forgiveness, and forgiveness."

Copyright © 2006

Nancy Slavin