

DRAGON BOAT RIDE

Unpracticed,
I knew better than to board a strange beast
In a strange land. Like an unriden stallion wading,
Wanting only to be rid of me, the creature
Recoiled when unhitched, the red prow reared, bucked,
And spurted forward after the river.
Flaming comb and hackles trailing fragments of sun,
My unbroken mount ignored the clumsy extensions of my arms,
Aimed its reptile head at the curve of rumpled sheen
And beyond! to a trough of froth and roar where its cries
Of freedom from myth mingled with battle-thunder of rocks and water.
It shook with conviction, dipped its fangs
Into spume once tasted, never forgotten, and filled itself
With all the magic it was heir to. Shivering its new song
Into my dead arms and open mouth, swaying me with
How it knew the path around the boulders, it claimed me
Fully, no longer a rigid, rueful barnacle
On a foreign monster.
I, a pale spike on its spiny back, a small muscle of its wings,
Listed in harmony into the next curve where the river unclenched,
Sailed shinily erect onto fast under-running olive silk,
Content to chase whatever the secret current chased,
Waving at the watching world,
Waking the top water with our gilded tail.