

DRAGONBOAT RIDE

Unpracticed,
 I knew better than to board a strange beast
 in a strange land. Like a wild stallion
 wanting only to be rid of me, the wading creature
 recoiled when unleashed, the red prow reared,
 bucked, and spurted after the river.

Flaming comb and hackles trailing fragments of sun,
 my unbroken mount ignored my clumsy oars,
 aimed its head toward 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.
 Shaking with conviction, dipping its beard
 in spume once tasted, never forgotten,
 it filled itself with all the magic it was heir to.

Shivering its song into my numb arms, swaying me
 with how it knew the path around the boulders,
 it claimed me fully, no longer a rueful barnacle
 on a foreign monster. I, a pale spike
 on its back, a faulty muscle of its wings,
 listed in harmony into the next bend
 where the river unclenched, waving
 at the watching world, content to chase
 whatever the secret current chased,
 waking the surface with our gilded tail.