

DRAGONBOAT RIDE

Alone, unpracticed,
I knew better than to board a strange beast
in a strange land. Like an unriden 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,
aiming its head at rumpled sheen and beyond!
To a trough of roaring froth
where its cries of freedom from myth
mingled with battle-thunder of boulders and water.
Shaking with conviction, dipping its fangs in spume,
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 rocks,
it claimed me fully, I, no longer a rueful barnacle
on a foreign monster. I, a pale spike
on its spiny back, a faulty muscle of its wings,
listed in harmony into the next bend
where the river unclenched, sailed shinily erect,
waving at the watching world,
content to chase whatever the secret current chased,
waking the surface with our gilded ribs and tail.