Poetry: "Brasilidade"

Elizabeth Moura
Brasilidade
To Vinicius de Moraes

The Beach
The late morning light finally
wakes me: she has gone to walk alone.
I sit in the window frame, eating the last
ripe pear, watching her, below the grasses,
walking across the hard white sand.
A cool ocean breeze — a stiletto in the heat —
stirs her white cotton dress; air
flows over her thighs. She pauses to feel it all.
She once said the coolness makes her dream:
In the sunlight she wears seashells,
one cupping each breast.
Their heaviness makes her body sweat
and her heart pound:
In all her sea dreams
swirling echoes seduce her.
I dream my dream: Licking the pear juices
streaming down my fingers,
Taste air melting in sunlight.
My tongue drips with the heaviness of molten air,
and the startling tang of salt
bursting from broken shells.

Belo Horizonte

I
Space edges the thin blue plane that is sea and sky.
Light - only reflection - layers the dual plane:
the eye stares through blue dust to the straight dark crack
framing the plane’s edge furthest from shore,
a crack like a wall, thick, black with strength and light,
impenetrable. Clouds slide over it.
A breach in the plane, the solid line
is ends of light at last collected.
The naked eye is the plane’s orb, light’s magic ball.
Searching for the sea, for light, for life and peace,
the eye flattens reflections, and combines them:
blue becomes blue sky, blue becomes blue sea
becomes bluer sea, becomes sky blue.

II
At midnight they light fires on the beach.
The wood breaks into salt sparks
and the breeze sucks the ashes into the sea.
Iemanja, debaixo de ceu
Iemanja, por dento mar
Iemanja, o mar tua espada
o mar tua espada
o mar tua espada

In the darkness each dancer is alone,
a swaying believer poised with requests:
to save, to protect, to remember this night.
Iemanja, debaixo de ceu
Iemanja, por dento mar
Iemanja, o mar tua espada
o mar tua espada
o mar tua espada

At dawn they carry baskets of flowers to sea.
The petals are sacrifices
rising and falling on the waves.
Iemanja, debaixo de ceu
Iemanja, por dento mar
Iemanja, o mar tua espada
o mar tua espada
o mar tua espada

In the new light believers gather.
The brilliant buds flow
into the mouth of the goddess.
Iemanja, debaixo de ceu
Iemanja, por dento mar
Iemanja, o mar tua espada
o mar tua espada
o mar tua espada

At noon the beach is deserted.
Black wood crumbles on the sand
and sea foam quivers like clusters of webs.
Iemanja, Iemanja, Iemanja
A pure white shell rolls inside the waves.
It comes to rest on the white-hot shore
round and whole, invisible in the sunlight.
Iemanja, Iemanja, Iemanja

Saudades
Morning continues to triumph
over fragments of shells and stones.
Light crawls across the pools,
the foam, those empty shells
cracked by the ebb.
I sleep in the sea
as in a mother or a lover,
waiting for the moon to pull me
into the clear, cool night.
But the moon leaves me in mist,
neither sea nor sky.
Balanced like the final drop of mist,
my soul trembles, haunted with pleasure.

“Belo Horizonte” means beautiful horizon in Portuguese. It is also the name of a town in Brazil which was planned specifically so that it would face a beautiful view.

“Iemanja” is the goddess of salt water in the Afro-Brazilian cults practiced in Bahia. On February 2, at the festival of the goddess, rafts are put to sea with flowers as a sacrifice. The sacrifices are made to protect those who travel or use the sea, especially the fishermen.

The chant is translated to “Iemanja, under the sky/Iemanja, inside the sea/Iemanja, the waves are your sword/the waves are your sword/the waves are your sword.” Two of the symbols of the goddess are seashells and a sword.

“Saudades” is a Portuguese-Brazilian term defined by Erico Verissimo as “romantic feeling,” and John Dos Passos, quoting from the “Pequeno Dicionario Brasiliero da Lingua Portuguesa,” described it as “the sad and suave remembrance of persons or things distant or gone.”

Elizabeth Moura will receive her B.A. in English from Bridgewater State College in May, 1987. She has been a newspaper correspondent at the Brockton Enterprise for the past two years.