

The Koan of Mind Swims the Abyss

The humpback whale,
encountering a school of herring,
dives deep, then swims in a slow circle,
exhaling a cone of bubbles rising
through the water. The herring

see a bubble-net, a barrier
through which they cannot escape.

The whale then rises through the center
of this barrier that is no-barrier,
mouth open and filling with fish.

The octopus has a similar trick,
when threatened by a predator. Darkens
the water

with a jet of ink, turning transparency
into a murky, impenetrable medium.

The impenetrability is an illusion,
of course. The darkness

around the octopus an artificial night;
the herring, not trapped
by bubbles. The sea

of psyche—a trickster.
Humpbacked, hypnotic, ravenous.
A many-limbed beauty. Veils,

thin as light, mercurial as ink.

Appears in CAESURA 2023 Online “Objects in the Mirror” [Frame 21]

The Underworld

There is an old mistrust the mythologist says,
of what lies underground. Graves,

grottos, gremlins of the dark. Old love,
old utopias—everyone has a secret,
knows where bodies are buried. In Paris,

limestone quarried a thousand years before
gave way under the *Rue d'Enfer*, swallowing
streets, houses, people.

After, the cavern was used to bury the dead
till cadavers spilled through the cellar walls
of new houses built above. There is

so much to forget, to remember.

The catacombs—two hundred miles
of tunnels and chambers—are closed to tourists.
But *cataphiles*, lovers of the underworld,
enter through holes in abandoned railway tunnels,
crawl through the maze below the city.
Sometimes lying quiet just beneath the cafés
where tourists sip cappuccinos, bask in rare
Parisian sun. A world beneath a world.

But one can also make a world inside another.

There are sprawling communal chambers
where cataphiles dance to David Bowie.
Or in a Welsh slate quarry, drop their defunct cars
seventy feet into flooded chambers,
party on underground rivers. I'm saying this

because some things are difficult to bury,
despite every effort.

Millennia from now, amid shifting tectonics,
someone will post a warning on the tombs
of radioactive waste left underground by us,
the invisible glow the mere beginning
of uranium's four-billion-year half-life.

Or now in Greenland, where melting ice

reveals hidden canyons, mountains, fjords—
desire's dark landscape waiting
to flood the world.

Appears in CAESURA 2023 PRINT VERSION [pg. 66]