

RACHEL HADAS

Seascape

Two hills waist-deep in water. Are they islands?
This scene yields up a burnished afternoon

gilding rocks and trees that, if you look
a second time, reveal themselves, as do

reflections of light upon the water.
The tapering sliver of the right-hand island

touches its counterpart
as two hands with extended fingers touch

at the moment of farewell.
No boats, no houses, no people.

A pearly mantle of cloud slants up and away.
Because I'm tired, this whole seascape looks wistful.

Its tranquil beauty quietly recalls
what I have lost, which is what I have had:

bustling back and forth, flights, ferry boats,
Peiraeus to Samos and the other islands

dipping themselves waist-deep in the Aegean.
Or maybe they were rooted there and grew,

swaying like underwater plants a strong
hand would be able to grasp and tug and pull

out of the wine-dark sea. Odysseus woke
and looked around. Which strange island was this?

This was one postcard from the basket whose
contents we dipped into every Thursday

evening all semester. The seminar room
had no windows. Each of us looked at

the image we had chosen, then at something
else, something invisible, and wrote.

The Trickle

Certain conversations take no space.
Almost no time, yet each
Comes with its buoyant freight of history.
On the future's threshold
A tiny figure waves. The door swings shut,
But still one sees a slender ray of light.
A crystal trickle
Tumbles down solid rock.

The Spill

Making her way along a cluttered surface,
The maple-golden cat upset a vase.
Water from yesterday's
Birthday roses ran
Down the lid of the desk
Inherited from your father
And leaked inside and dripped
Not only into pigeonholes
But onto cancelled checks;
Into an open box
Of Columbia Music Department stationery;
A jury duty summons; an old will;
An old New Jersey Transit timetable;
Tax records; and a warranty for some
Appliance we no longer own. Glass claws
Gleamed among puddles on the polished floor.
The cat, at a discreet
Distance from the spill,
Circled and sniffed and chose a spot to settle
Into with dignity and dry her paws.

1971; 2008

for Molly Peacock

Sympathy isn't listening to the tale
Only; it is also giving back
In other words what has been handed over,
Returning it with something added, as

Beeswax warm from two palms, from two times many,
Rolled into one long candle and then curled,
Was placed upon the chest of dead Nicolas
And the Ormos women keened all night.

I stood there poised on the threshold,
Half-in, half-out of the room, the ritual,
The rhythm. Even then I understood
We do not have to bear our pain alone.

So, Molly, when last week you said two words –
It's huge – you took my lump of cold hard wax
And before handing it back to me
Warmed it between your palms.

Rachel Hadas is Board of Governors professor of English at the Newark campus of Rutgers University. Her new book of poems, THE ACHE OF APPETITE, is forthcoming later this year from *Copper Beech Press*, and she is currently coediting *THE GREEK POETS: Homer to the PRESENT*, a book of Greek poetry in translation, due out from Norton in December 2009.