

**Poems by Rita Tognini**

## Sea Walk

(Green Island, Great Barrier Reef)

*E 'l naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.*

*L'infinito*, Giacomo Leopardi

(i)

beach

boat

pontoon

ladder

sea bed

(ii)

sheathed in black vernix of wetsuit

head belled in glass and plastic dome

hands gloved          feet slippered

I take the first

backward step

down

the ladder

pass through

a vitreous ultramarine swell

descend

rung

by careful

rung

'til the sea licks the bell's bib

gurgles at my neck

and with one gulp

ingests me

(iii)

on ocean floor  
I anchor knees  
deep into sand  
resist the sway  
and swell of currents  
that would lift me away  
as lightly as coral spawn

I kneel to my new element  
defer to its rise and fall  
its restless amnion

(iv)

clutching our scuba-guide's silver bar  
—a lifeline—five sea walkers  
track along the sea bed  
black beings suspended in azure      bubbling CO<sub>2</sub>  
dabbled by the ocean's arterial slosh and slurp

Spanish flag fish flutter stripes as they pass  
perch, yellow-tailed or mauve, swoop for fish food  
spaghetti coral waves  
from sprawling plate coral beds  
and giant clams gape serrated shells

(v)

I watch the others ascend  
push up against the weight of all the ocean  
break through to air

waves of damsel fish  
swerve towards my bell  
lips puckered as if blowing kisses

how sweet this pleasure

how sweet

to drown

in such a sea

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## Visitations

Twice they came, New Year's morning  
forest red-tailed black cockatoos.

First four mature birds  
poised sentinel still  
in the hakea's grey-green foliage  
posed as if for a portrait  
Elvis-crest combed back  
huge hooked beak clamped shut.

Then a flurry of adolescents  
sashayed from branch to branch  
all bravura and quivering tail feathers  
tearing at bivalve nuts  
lacerating the foliage  
quarrelling over leftovers  
scattering husks and twigs.

Black cockatoos  
stop over to refuel

black cockatoos  
take off like Harrier jets

blood-red undercarriages  
between canopy and sky.