

## THREE POEMS



*Chris Agee*

### SEACAVE

Pure spooky. Unknown nature. A black maw  
In limestone on a headland rounded and greenbearded  
That might have stood in for the Patmos of St Paul

Or conjured Odysseus from deep Aleppo. Even mid-channel  
You could hear the furious sizzle of midsummer crickets  
Droning their hoarse heat-song and timed threnody

To a noon crescendoing. I oared on towards it  
As if towards some new or old narrative. Spotted it  
From on high on the indigo's stone polish

Solder-dropping small isles. Under a white ruff  
Shallows melding greengage and lapis  
Shimmered and dazzled. Soon it heaved up,

A black hole looming like a blank statue's gaze or gash  
On a lip of sea-depth. Inside like Lascaux  
Or a medieval crypt gliding

To the mind's awed intake. Below and unshadowy  
Where the sun's flitter could reach  
The incredible pigments—mauve and maroon

And chartreuse—of barnacle colonies. And above the same  
Vaulted mossgreens and algae. A log and a sheet of plastic  
Suspended in stillness. Slight gurgling of swells

Lapping and echoing. Strange resonant place—  
Preantiquity surely knew it, or its like. Magical cave unconscious  
Meets sheltered Mediterranean glitter. I moored

The canoe in brilliant ledge-shallows, bottom leopard-shadowed

In the sun's diamond wave-net. Water refractions  
Gyrated at the mouth where black urchins spike-dotted

Submarine boulders like Cyclops' wounded eye. The clear  
Depths were pure Calypso, all ink and chalk  
Olive and turquoise. Or at any rate Cousteau. Or maybe Gaia—

Pure science of stone and sea. So I dove and ate cheese and  
grapes  
Bursting warm on the tongue. Lithe fry lolled at the surface  
Like the brown naked body at the fallen cliff lintelled by maquis

I saw swim out like a fish goddess in an amphitheatre.  
Whatever it was or is or will be, all of it,  
Me enthralled these three millennia later.

#### REQUIEM

*"Hitler, c'est moi."*  
—Glücksman

Something had turned me back. Broken stone. Ochre and lime  
Leaves in the pockmark of a mortarsplash. I paused

To marvel at the chaos that composed them  
Impasted in hoarfrost like sperms or dead souls frozen

In the liquid oxygen of time. Then back again  
To the smoothness on a mosque's threshold, a revenant

Drifting on in the first flurries of Friday afternoon,  
Windless and lightweight, sifting down in grey silence,

I walk on past shawled faces in an old Yugoslav café,  
Bread smells and a glimpse of loaves, jars stacked pyramidal

As in Russia, crossing Habsburg tramlines to the market stalls  
Where legs and shoe leather move round the small splash

That, invisible, unsought, I wince at. Walnuts, cabbages, tanger-

ines: Onions, apples, peppers, honeycomb: bowls of cheese,  
sunflower seeds:

Beautiful, spartan Arcimboldo, where Sarajevo snow is falling,  
falling ...  
Is ash falling into the next century.

#### MASS GRAVE, PADALISTA

A tiny mound. Nine fresh graves. For the second time  
In two days in the killing fields  
Inner tears... \*\*\*\*\* ... It was clear

That little Afrim, commemorated on the hill behind,  
Had been buried here. Mother and Father, his six sisters  
In a row narrowing to his five-year-old smallness:

The whole Imeraj clan  
Whose names and ages I had just jotted down  
In sight of their cousins' graves down a grassy knoll—

Tape fluttering, a lone trainer on the rise—  
Still cloying the air with the sickly-sweetish  
Dead-flesh reek

Yesterday's Spanish had unearthed. I am sweating,  
Dust has coated my boots,  
I have followed the others down a highway bend

To this gash of earth on a verge  
Of thorny pasturage, on on from  
The abstract pathos of the wooden sign

Where I felt plunged into  
The inward isobar of a sudden profundity,  
August in Kosova,

This hour's whole archipelago of beauty and terror  
That felt burnt like some high kingdom of the Ur-moment  
Through the ozone of consciousness. Where MUP had  
descended

From the passes to Serbia  
Like mountainous evil in a Finnish epic,  
Where Abraham might have slaughtered his seed,

We stand before the simple fact in  
Silence, eyes meeting, *catastrophe* murmured  
In Albanian. I squat, fingering

The clods as if touching his tragedy,  
Thinking somehow of his boy's perspirant brow,  
How much he was loved,

The unbelievableness of sinking a bullet  
Like a sink-head  
Into the same skull. Rising,

Inner tears, inner tears...  
As if the inner was tearing, listening  
To the crunch, inside, of our steps on the dirt road

Towards the burnt houses and rolling uplands  
Where their lives ended,  
Where high hay is aflush with wildflowers and luminescence,

Where sleepers of shadow dapple the road;  
Picking up, on the way back,  
From the clods, a bit of jumper

Blanched like a dishrags threads; from a thorn  
Near Afrim's mound, a shoelace tied to plastic twine;  
From a few paces, a scrap of sock...