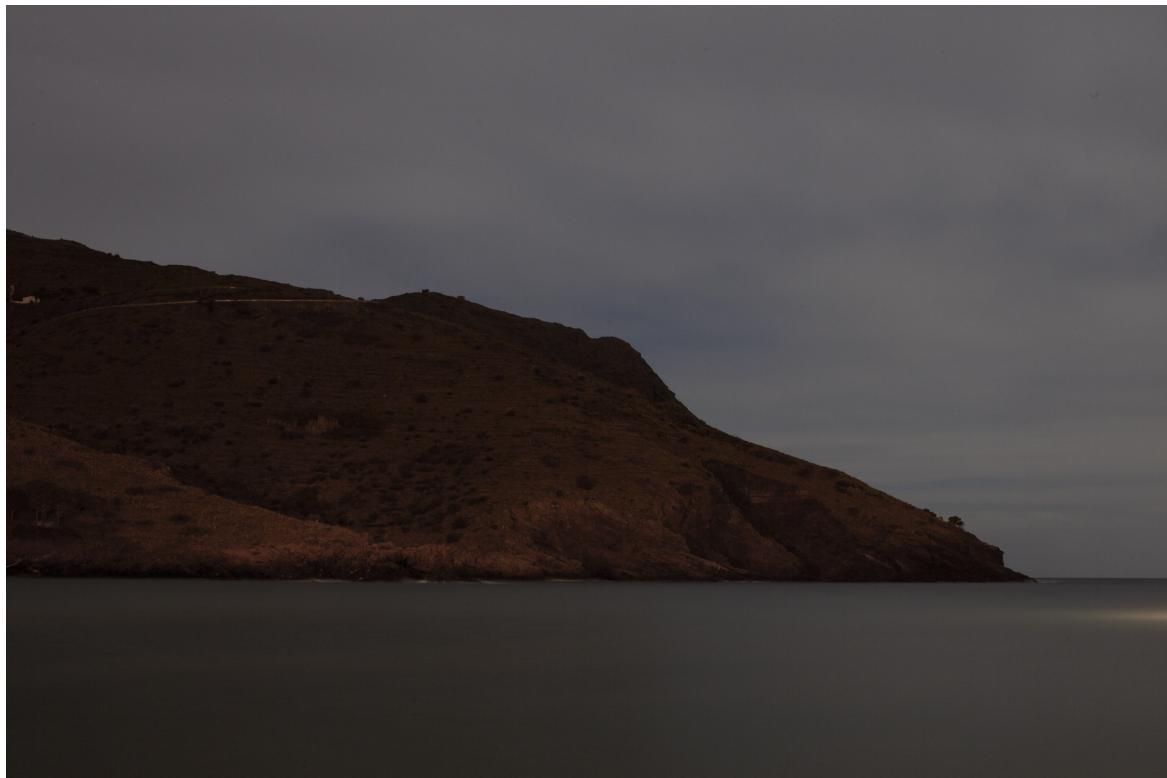


The Origins of a Border

Stone-fruit. Speechless fire.
In an age of ice, Pyrene
was all sweetness and heat,
which Hercules took
for *yes*. After, when she felt
a serpent growing inside
of her, she crawled
to that corset of land
between what is now
France and Spain
to give birth, then grew cold
as she watched the serpent
forge an indifferent curve
in the snow. The mountains
are the blanket with which
Hercules sheltered her corpse.
Once covered, she became
the border itself. This,
as Hercules saw it,
was an act of kindness.

[**Note:** Some scholars claim that word “Pyrenees” comes from the myth of Pyrene, a daughter of Berbryx who was seduced by Hercules.]



Send

It is the driving impulse of a wave, a sudden plunge
one feels when one receives a message, the messenger

himself, the godsend; it is from the Latin *sentire*, to feel,
to be sent mentally, as with a scent of the brackish sea

or the bodies of exhausted men; it is a sentinel, like
a constellation in the black sky; it is to consign

a departed spirit to a place or condition, to deliver a blow,
as when the gods decide whom will be sacrificed,

even when the voyage has already been so desperate
and uncertain; it is to utter a cry or groan, to direct

a thought or look, like thoughts one has when the moon
casts its pale version of light; it can be more of a glance,

quick, abrupt, as when Palinurus, Aeneas' navigator,
most trusted, most wise, he who had charted the water

that curves around Tunis, Italy, and Spain, saw that he
would be sacrificed so that others might live; it is to send

abroad, against, along, back, before, as into the country
of hunger and thirst, no food or drink left for anyone;

it is to be flung out of an already damaged boat,
thrown away; it is to send down, as when the gods

sent Palinurus down into the vale of sleep, so that just
as he rose to struggle against his fate, *sleep flung him*

*headlong into the clear waters, tearing away, as he fell,
the helm and part of the stern, and calling vainly*

on his comrades again and again... Palinurus, doomed
to the bottom of the sea.

[**Note:** the italicized lines come from Frederick Ahl's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* (Oxford University Press, 2008).]



La Jonquera

*We wander
the roof of hell
choosing blossoms.*

—Issa

Once, on a cold afternoon
between seasons, we drove across
the desolate borderland and saw
a small house with *Massage*
flashing in neon across the front,
and a young woman standing
on the edge of the ancient
and lonely road: faded blue jeans,
a too-light jacket, long hair
flying in the hard wind, no bag
or backpack, no earphones,
nothing moving except the tall rushes
that surrounded her, majestic
and ascendant in their wild waving.
The woman wasn't in a hurry;
wasn't looking for a bus, not hitching
a ride. Just standing. A mile later,
another woman, same clothes
and look of disinterest, or perhaps
disregard, then two more
after that, at precise intervals
at the end of the day, on this path
of evasion, with no other sound
but wind and breath.

[Note: La Jonquera—which means “the rushes” in Catalan—is an ancient town on the border between France and Spain. It is currently home to one of the largest brothels in Europe. The majority of its prostitutes have been trafficked from all corners of Africa and Asia, usually against their will. The epigraph is a haiku by Kobayashi Issa, translated into English by Jane Hirschfield, in *Joy: 100 Poems*, edited by Christian Wiman (Yale University Press, 2017).]



Arrival

To arrive is to reach shore,
 to come into port,

to achieve a desired goal,
 from *ripa*, the Latin

for river, riverbank,
 from the same root

for *rive*, or *rift*,
 which points to tearing,

rending, or pulling,
 to rend or lacerate,

to destroy, to tear up
 so as to cancel or annul,

to pull down, up, or out,
 to break the heart

with painful thoughts
 or feelings, to drive

a weapon into a person
 or thing, to split

or cleave, especially
 by means of shock.

The word opens
 what ought to remain closed,

whole, intact; as when,
 after days of climbing

over impossible hills,
 after hauling the suitcase

whose remains
 are now unknown, Benjamin

arrived in Spain, only to be told
 to turn back

to France,

[no stanza break]

to the detention centers

that waited like open mouths
for his return.

