

**Terese Coe**

**Ballade for Long-Gone Ladies**

*Adapted from the French of François Villon*

Tell me where, on what seas,  
is beautiful Flora, the Roman?  
Where Archipiades,  
where is Thais, her cousin?  
And the maven of brook and pond,  
where is Echo, whose cheer  
speaks to us from beyond?  
And where are the snows long gone?

Wise Heloise is where?  
For whose love Abelard,  
her hermit monk in prayer,  
wrote letters under guard.  
Tell me, where is the queen  
who sent Buridan to his dawn  
drowning-sack in the Seine?  
And where are the snows long gone?

Blanche, the lily queen,  
whose voice was allure and bliss;  
long-foot Bertha and keen  
Alice, and Beatrice?  
And Joan, the Maid of Lorraine —  
my sovereign Virgin, where?  
Burned for France at Rouen.  
But where are the snows long gone?

This week do not sing the refrain,  
do not ask again in song —  
only one chorus remains:  
where are the snows long gone?

Terese Coe

## **The Labyrinth**

*Translated from the Spanish of Jorge Luis Borges*

Even Zeus could not untangle the stone  
webs that encircle me. I have forgotten  
the men I was before, and dog the hated  
path of monotonous walls that is my fate.  
Vertical galleries that curve in hidden  
circles to the end of years. Towers  
cracked in the usury of the days.  
I have deciphered signs I fear in the faded  
dust. The air has borne a howl  
through the concave evenings,  
or the echo of desolate howling.  
I know that in the shade there is the Other,  
the one whose fate it is to drain the long  
solitudes that weave and then unweave  
this nether world,  
and to long for my blood and to gorge  
on my death. We each seek out the other.  
If only this were the final day of waiting.

**Remorse for Any Death**

*Translated from the Spanish of Jorge Luis Borges*

Free in the end of both remembrance and hope,  
boundless, having transcended, almost the future,  
the dead is not a dead man: he is death.  
Like the God of the mystics, for whom  
we must abandon every theory,  
the dead man, outsider everywhere,  
is naught but the loss and voidness of the world.  
We rob him of everything, we leave him  
not one color, not one syllable: here  
is the courtyard his eyes no longer share,  
there the pavement where once he waited for hope.  
Precisely what we are thinking, he may be thinking;  
like thieves we have stolen away  
the bounty of every night and every day.

Terese Coe

## **The Sea**

*Translated from the Spanish of Jorge Luis Borges*

Long before dream (or terror) had woven mythologies and cosmogonies, long before time was coined in days, the sea, the always sea, was and already had been.

Who is the sea? Who is that violent and primordial being that gnaws at the columns of the earth and is one and any number of seas and chasm and sunlight, cutthroat and wind?

Whoever observes it sees it for the first time, always. With the astonishment left behind by the elemental, the dazzling evenings, the moon,

the cascading sparks of a bonfire. Who is the sea, and who am I? On the day that follows my final torment, I will know.

**Galatea's Daughter**

*The hell his words could wreak*

The way is an enigma  
with precipices where  
she sees the choice of life or death  
observed through fog and air

where pain and blame resemble  
a caravanserai  
across the lands and oceans,  
and every day a lie.

Deriding her and grinning  
he turns her into clay  
with *Either you will bend or break,*  
*or you will lose the way.*

A month, and with his fettling knife,  
a deadly undertow  
drags her hollowness into him —  
and she is free to go.

Terese Coe

## High Falls

*In the photo their eyes were closed, as if  
the pleasure were more than they could bear*

The left brain crosses over  
and sees into the right,  
where intuition's clever  
and dominates the night.

Tomorrow and tomorrow  
reverses like a sling  
and promises an elbow,  
the vestige of a wing.

It seems there was a sorrow.  
It seems there was a slight.  
The trouble is tomorrow  
can blind you with its light.

**A Hemisphere Away**

*for Katy, Susan, Terris, Keith, Richard,  
James, and friends met in Kathmandu*

From Swat to Santa Cruz  
the seekers hit the road  
with half-truths we could live  
and others we'd explode.

From Santa Cruz to Swat  
and halfway back to Rome  
we seldom felt a knot  
from the quondam thing called home.

We gained from what we gave,  
we lost what we disused —  
and slowly we *Let it go*  
from Swat to Santa Cruz.

Some flogged woodblock prints  
or clothing, silver, and jewels,  
knelt with dedications,  
taught English in country schools.

To souk and peak and dive,  
trekking and camping rough,  
we had to adapt to survive.  
But going home was tough.