

## The Night Boat to Ancona

The red grapes hang heavy  
above the Italian lovers' balcony in Nicopolis\*,  
their dew droplets glisten in the moonlight.  
The heat has quenched itself,  
mellowing in the arms of the night.  
The scent of the night jasmine fused  
with the passion and insomnia  
of the cicadas,  
waking from an eight year slumber,  
too long the wait,  
the air a frenzy of mating calls.

Further up by the Gates at the Acheron river,  
Pluto, silent  
but deadly,  
keeps his cool, waiting...

The midnight boat to Ancona,  
a chandelier all lit up,  
sails by silently,  
gliding on the Ionian sea,  
vanishing into a starry darkness,  
leaving behind a vacuum of night,  
of emptiness.  
A loss.

In the woods the tourists frolic merrily;  
shrieks and the breaking of bottles  
pierce the night,  
punctuating the cicadas' concert.  
A night owl startled flies past  
crying out in a tone  
one might wrongly  
interpret as despair.

Despair, is this what Antony felt here, in the hills of Actium,  
measuring himself against Octavian and Rome?  
Do the hills remember the echoes of his lost battle?  
Do the old olive trees still carry the cry in their rings?  
Do the shells, the pebbles under my feet,  
hide deep inside, the memory  
of Cleopatra's ships leaving him?  
Do the waves bring it ashore,  
whispering it,  
again and again?  
Do they?

And all along, down south in the African heat  
Alexandria –  
implacable,  
an end waiting-  
peering through its windows ,  
nonchalant,  
languid,  
for Antony's return  
and his farewell.

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\*Nicolis - an ancient city, north of Actium, founded by the Roman emperor Augustus (Octavian), in 31 BC, to commemorate his victory, in the battle of Actium, over Mark Antony and Queen Cleopatra of Egypt. The ruins are near Preveza in Western Greece.