

1998

Poems

Pauline Stainer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi>

Recommended Citation

Stainer, Pauline, Poems, *Kunapipi*, 20(3), 1998.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol20/iss3/36>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:
research-pubs@uow.edu.au

Poems

Abstract

HERMAN MELVILLE JUMPS SHIP, FINDING THE RIGHT BLUE FOR THE WATERFALL, THE STOWAWAYS, ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON DREAMS OF ORKNEY IN SAMOA

Pauline Stainer

HERMAN MELVILLE JUMPS SHIP

They say that blue
 slows the passage of time –
 so what was
 the blue reflex
 when I jumped ship
 at the Marquesas?

How was it I could read
 by the blue light
 from the *noctilucae*
 but not look up at the vanishing ship
 or the natives running like grass
 before the wind?

FINDING THE RIGHT BLUE FOR THE WATERFALL

Hiroshige knew –

so solid a blue
 the Victorian tight-rope walker
 could have walked across
 in the declining sun
 without her white pole gleaming.

It's a metaphysical act,
 intensifying the blue –
 swallows in slow-motion,
 stars perched on the overfall
 without trepidation

as when Orpheus played.

THE STOWAWAYS

They stayed on the ship for years,
never giving an identity,
thriving on a sense of displacement

for what was time
when they went for months
without seeing land or darkness

swinging in their bleached hammocks
between counterweights
of sun and moon?

But in dream
seal-women gave them molluscs
as they disembarked

and when they woke
the luminescence persisted
on their hands and mouths.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON DREAMS OF ORKNEY IN SAMOA

Last night
a wind came over the sea,
keen as a swan's bone,
particular with the dead.

I saw my father
and grandfather, inspecting
the major lighthouses
as the skerries smoked by.

Here, azure orchids burn,
kingfishers refract
the great white light –
but for a moment

I weigh the examined life,
the necessary exile,
against the way light behaves
between islands.