

Neruda's Mermaid

by Beate Sigriddaughter

(a companion piece to Pablo Neruda's
Fable of the Mermaid and the Drunks)

No, I am not a mermaid,
and I do have speech
and clothes to cover me.
Other than that, I am
as lost as his mermaid
in a world of men too drunk
with competitive contempt
to notice eyes the color
of distant love. Easier by far
to egg each other on
to blacken me with mockery
and cigarette butts and
whatever else is at hand.
And I know I must leave
through that door somehow
and swim toward the
emptiness that frightens me—
it is so vast—and swim toward
my death that frightens me—
it comes so soon.
The emptiness frightens me
more—I wanted to make
something with my lovely
white arms, but I need them
for swimming away.