

Tiger Bay

Gareth Alun Roberts

What grim ships they were:
an affront of iron barely worthy of the sea;
a crust of oceans and wild latitudes
battered hard against the clanging dock.

The steeping cranes picked at them:
gulls at a carcass; aunties picking at nits
on the heads of urchins in back-alleys
that went late to the dock-side.

The stumbling night was there,
the fumey singing and swinging of knuckles
at insults taut as rigging and tall-masted stories
sailing away and away until morning.

The ships passing
on the muddy tides of remembering.

I was a child when the ships still came;
I sat with my dad on the dockside
beneath that grim and wonderful iron
that had known Dubai, Casablanca, Buenos Aires.

I mouthed their improbable names
and became myself an ocean
of small adventures and wings
for albatross seas and foaming continents.

Their names are gone, the ships sailed away
on roads where no tides follow,
beyond the reefs
and un-navigable seas. But still

the possibility of their names
purl from my mouth
like pier-weeds.