

2.2 Mazagan to Mogador (2010)

Unlike you, Palinurus,
I was not overboard
those three long nights,
not lost and found again,
nor murdered on an alien shore:
I had no Aeneas to
remonstrate against,
no enigma to bequeath
of accident or design.
Nor tossed, as you, between
the clutch of my identity
and the vast unconscious of the sea.

But that same space of time
was also mine: suspense of life –
the cusp between what was, what
might have been, defined
by moonlit board, that gleaming
edge between my own realities.

Unlike you, Palinurus,
I stayed on board: not
prey to all your calculations
as your practised eye surveyed
the guiding stars, horizons, land-marks,
shifting signatures in the bland
unfeatured skies, not eaten
by contempt for his betrayal, by sight
of Dido's pyre (which only he and
you had recognised); not alien, I,
from a city founding's dream, nor yet
consumed by your futility.

I stayed on board, and only knew
that in the middle watch
of those three nights, my
nameless star had shone for me:
stood firm across the mast
from Mazagan to Mogador, she
beckoned, watched, played hide & seek
with me between the angry clouds,
and would not let me go
till safely rendered, as were you, to
the slow majestic dawn.

Essaouira - November 2010.

In his Epilogue to The Unquiet Grave, Cyril Connolly asks 'Who was Palinurus?' and what might have been the reason why Aeneas' helmsman jumped ship, after leaving Carthage and passing between Scylla and Charybdis, to spend three long nights overboard: was it suicide or accident, or was it a planned act of escape and revenge for Aeneas' betrayal of Dido?